

The Impact of Term Limits on Michigan's Legislature

Marjorie Sarbaugh-Thompson
Professor of Political Science
and Lyke Thompson

Director of the Center for Urban Studies and Professor of Political Science
Wayne State University

Based on interviews with 460 legislators
during a 14-year study of Michigan's Legislature

Interviews for Seven Legislative Sessions

- **Four House Sessions:**

- One pre-term-limits baseline 1998 (95 of 110 members)
- Three post-term-limits sessions 2000, 2002, 2004 (93, 93, and 89 respondents from the possible 110 members)

- **Three Senate Sessions:**

- One anticipating term limits baseline 1999 (35 of 38 members)
- Two post-term-limits sessions 2003, 2007 (28 and 27 respondents from the possible 38 members)
 - The 2003 post-term-limits Senate was dominated by veterans with decades of experience in the House.
 - Pre-term-limits veterans were gone by 2007.

State Term Limits Provisions & Level of Professionalization

Limit in Years	Consecutive	Lifetime Ban
8 Total	<i>Nebraska (2006)*</i>	
12 Total		<i>Oklahoma (2004/2004)</i>
6 House/8 Senate	Now changed to 16 yrs. total.	→ Arkansas (1998/2000)
	Now changed to 12 yrs. total	→ California (1996/1998) Michigan (1998/2002)
8 House/8 Senate	<i>Arizona (2000/2000)</i> <i>Colorado (1998/1998)</i> <i>Florida (2000/2000)</i> Maine (1996/1996) Montana (2000/2000) <i>Ohio (2000/2000)</i> <i>South Dakota (2000/2000)</i>	Missouri (2002/2002)
12 House/ 12 Senate	Louisiana (2007/2007)	Nevada (2008/2008)

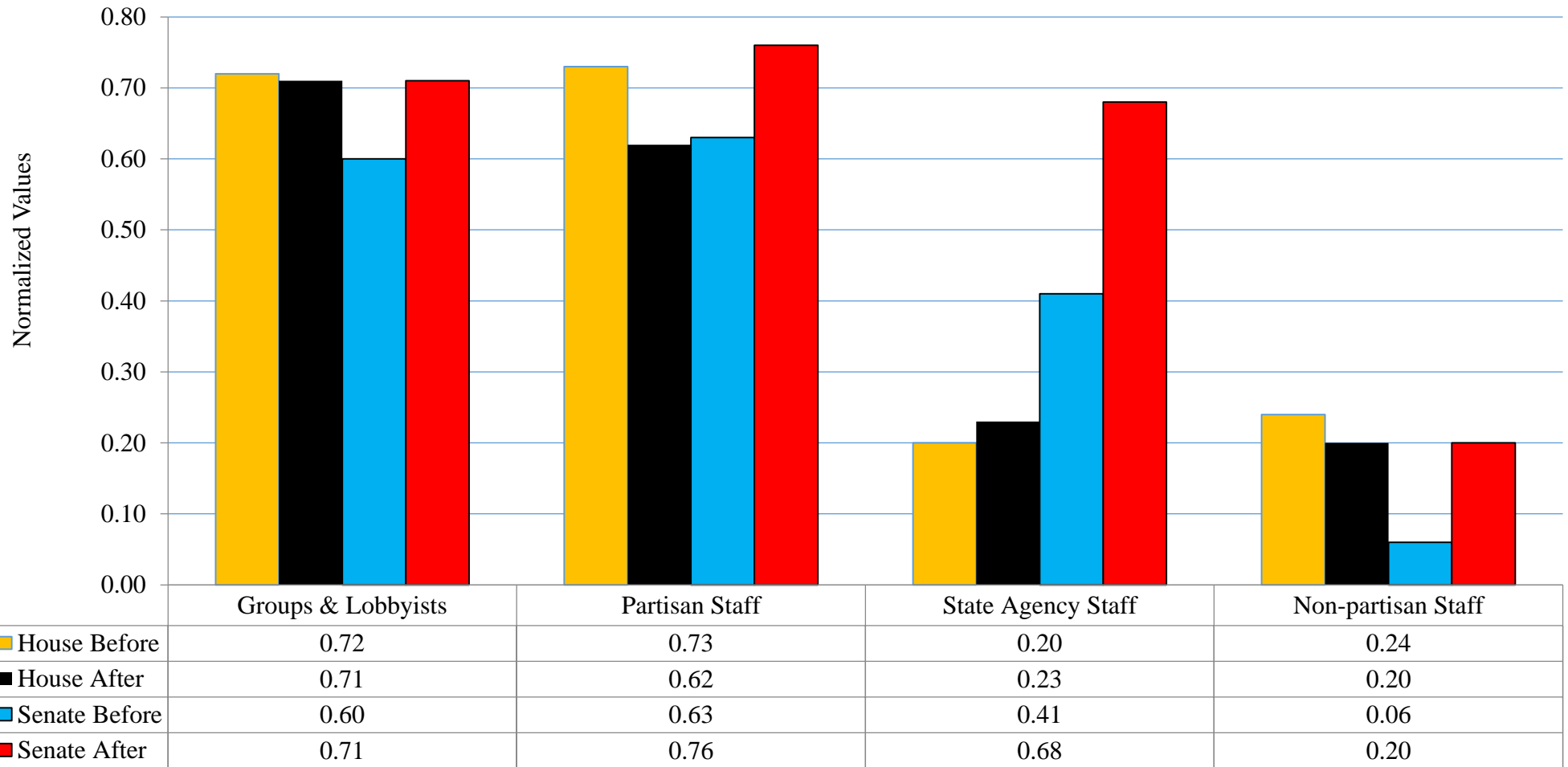
States in bold type have highly professional legislatures, those in italics are moderately professional, and the others are part-time (Squire, 1992)

Years in parentheses indicate date of impact in the House then the Senate. * Nebraska has a unicameral legislature.

Unfulfilled Promises of Term Limits

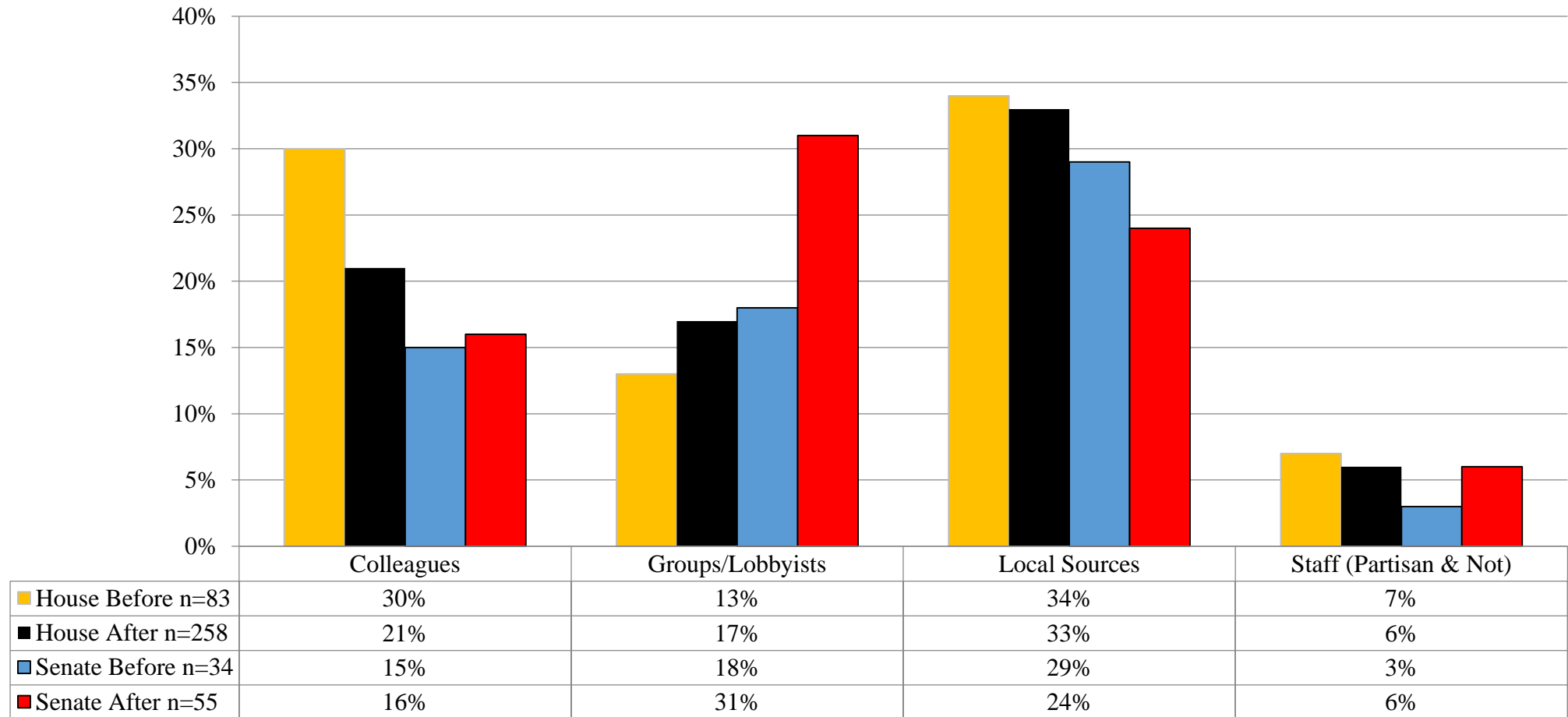
- A major selling point for term limits was that it would sever cozy ties with lobbyists and Lansing insiders.
 - ❖ We found that term limits altered the people consulted during committee deliberations and during floor votes.
 - ❖ So, who is consulted when legislators face a tough floor vote or a difficult committee decision after term limits?
- Local officials are the losers.
- Interest groups are the winners, especially in the Senate.
- Staff also gain in the Senate.

Some Source of Information Consulted During Committee Deliberations

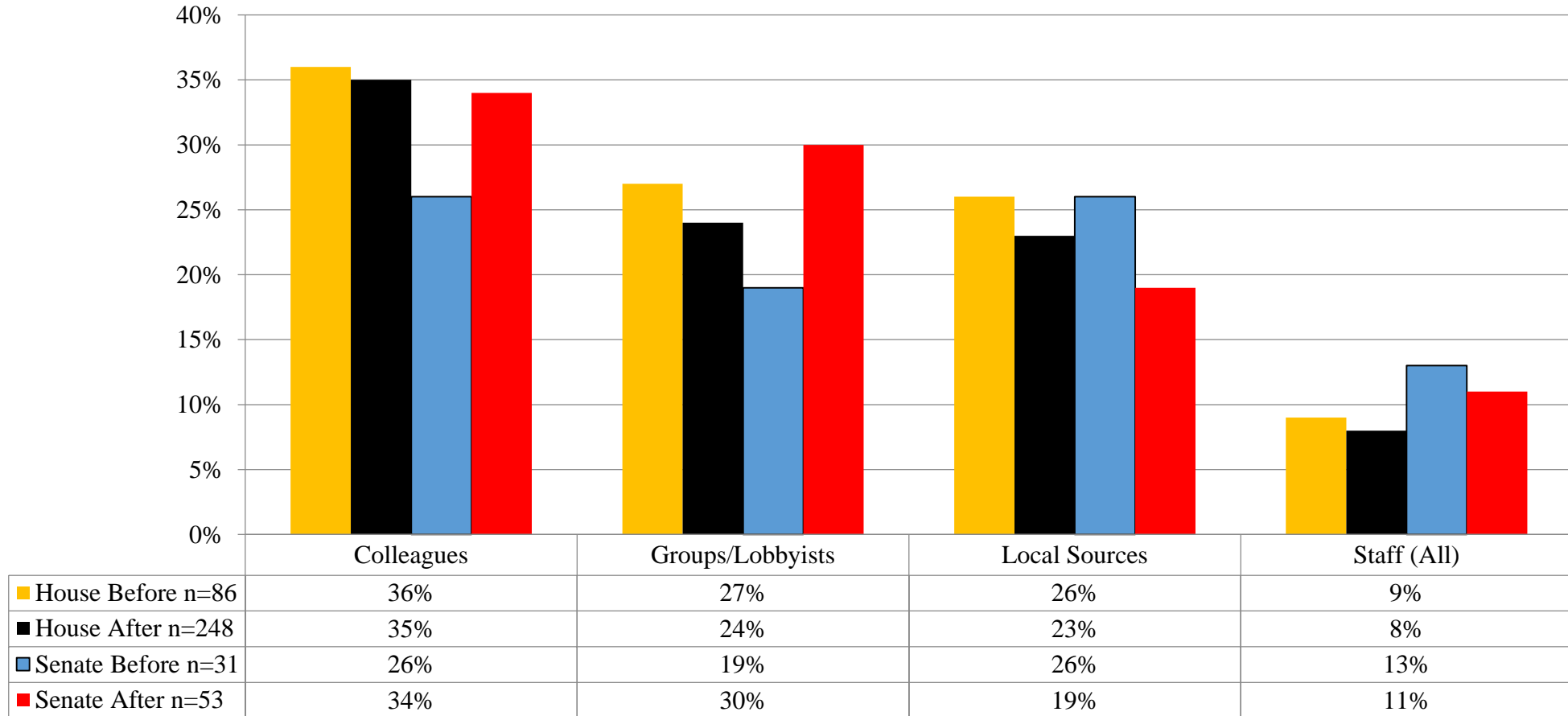


Floor Vote on Schools of Choice

Most Important Sources Before and After Term Limits



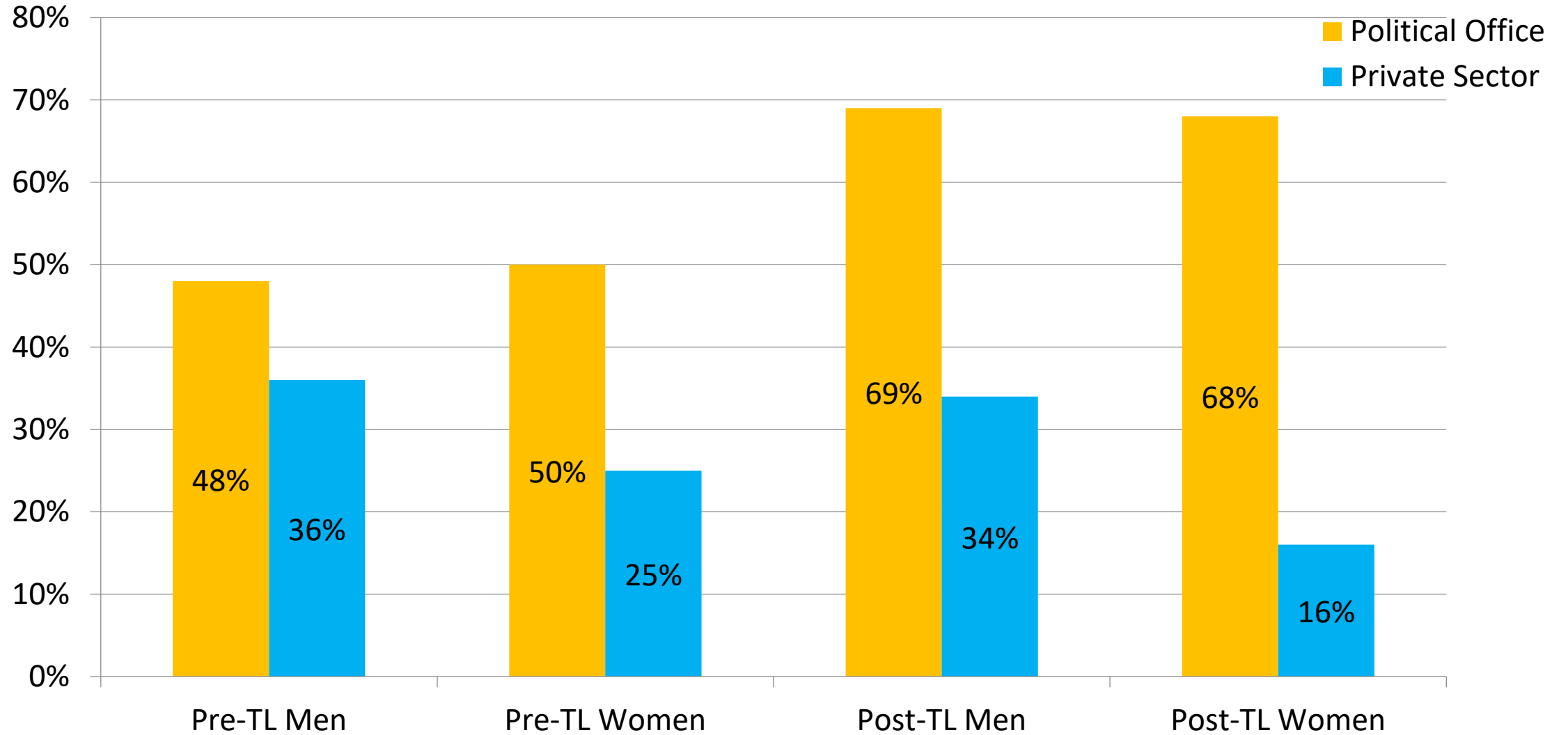
Floor Vote Licensing and Regulating Health Care Professionals Most Important Source Before and After Term Limits



Another Major Promise of Term Limits

- Citizen legislators rather than reelection seeking politicians
 - ❖ We asked legislators what they planned to do after their tenure in office was exhausted
 - ✓ We discovered that even during their first term in office they have plans to run for another political position.
 - ✓ Representatives often plan to run for the Senate.
 - ✓ Both Representatives and Senators wanted to run for Congress, for mayor of a big city, for judicial positions, for other statewide offices like governor, attorney general, and secretary of state.
- After term limits, Michigan's legislators are more, not less, politically ambitious.

Political Ambition



Impacts of Michigan's Term Limits

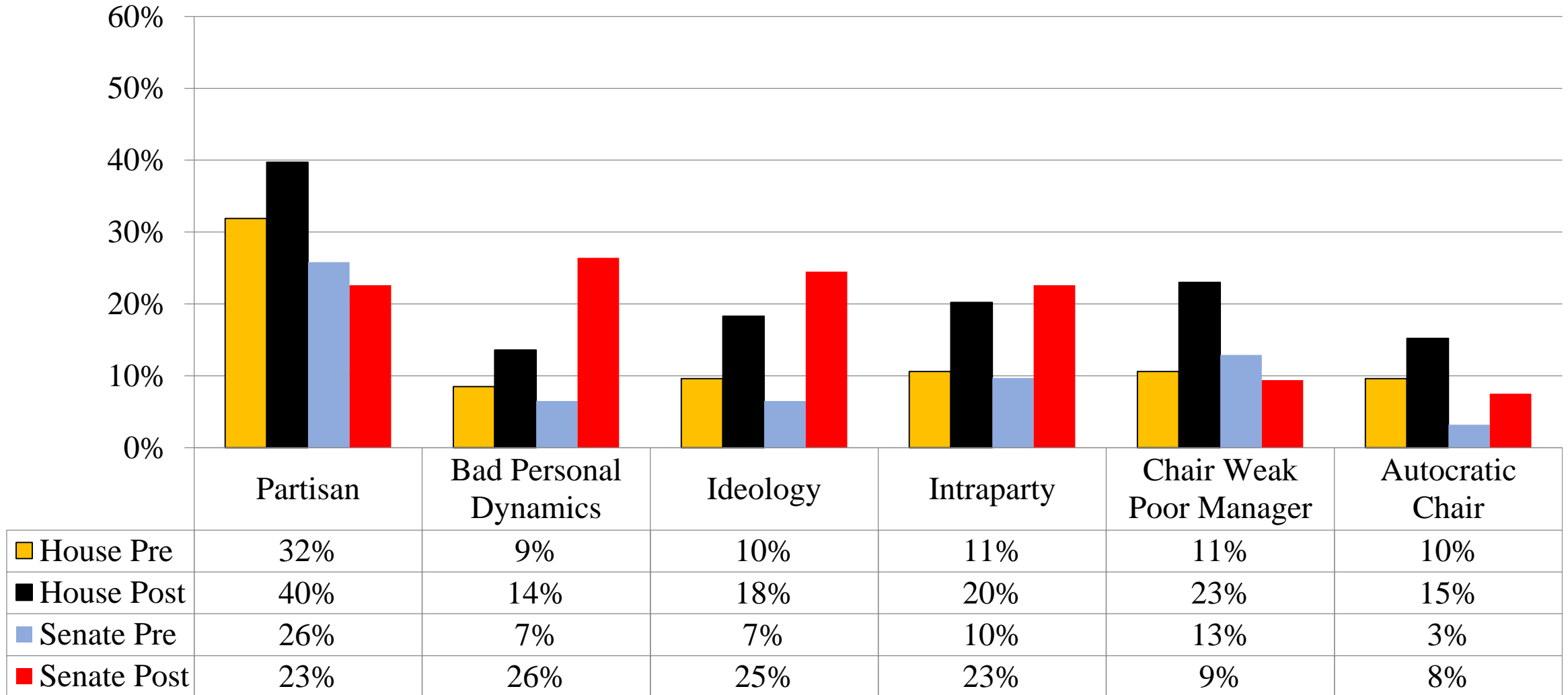
Chamber leaders and committee chairs lack experience

- ❖ Before term limits, a Committee Chair typically served for years in the chamber and on the committee before leading it.
- ❖ After term limits first-term legislators chair committees.
- ❖ House speakers have two or at most four years of experience.

Effects on Committee Dynamics

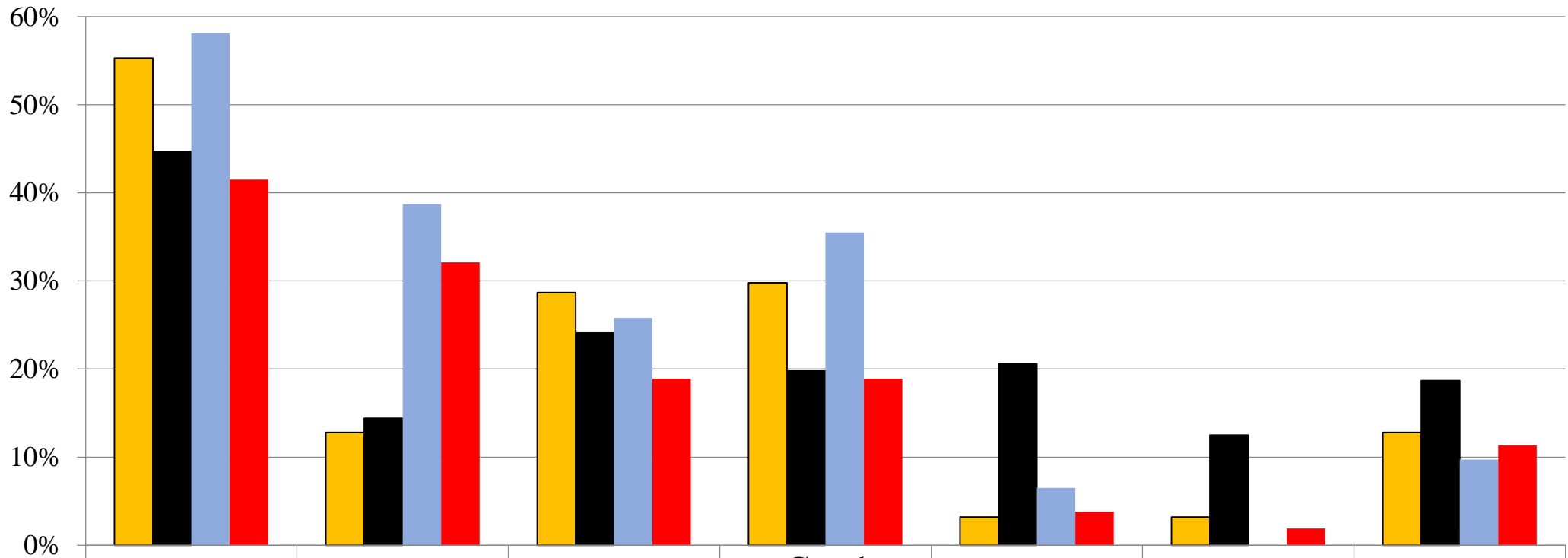
- ❖ Conflict in committees increased.
- ❖ Leaders and others usurp chairs' prerogatives.
- ❖ Autocratic leadership style/coercion/bad personal dynamics are more common.

Reasons for Committee Conflict



Proportion of respondents making this sort of comment – open-ended questions.

Managing Conflict in Committees



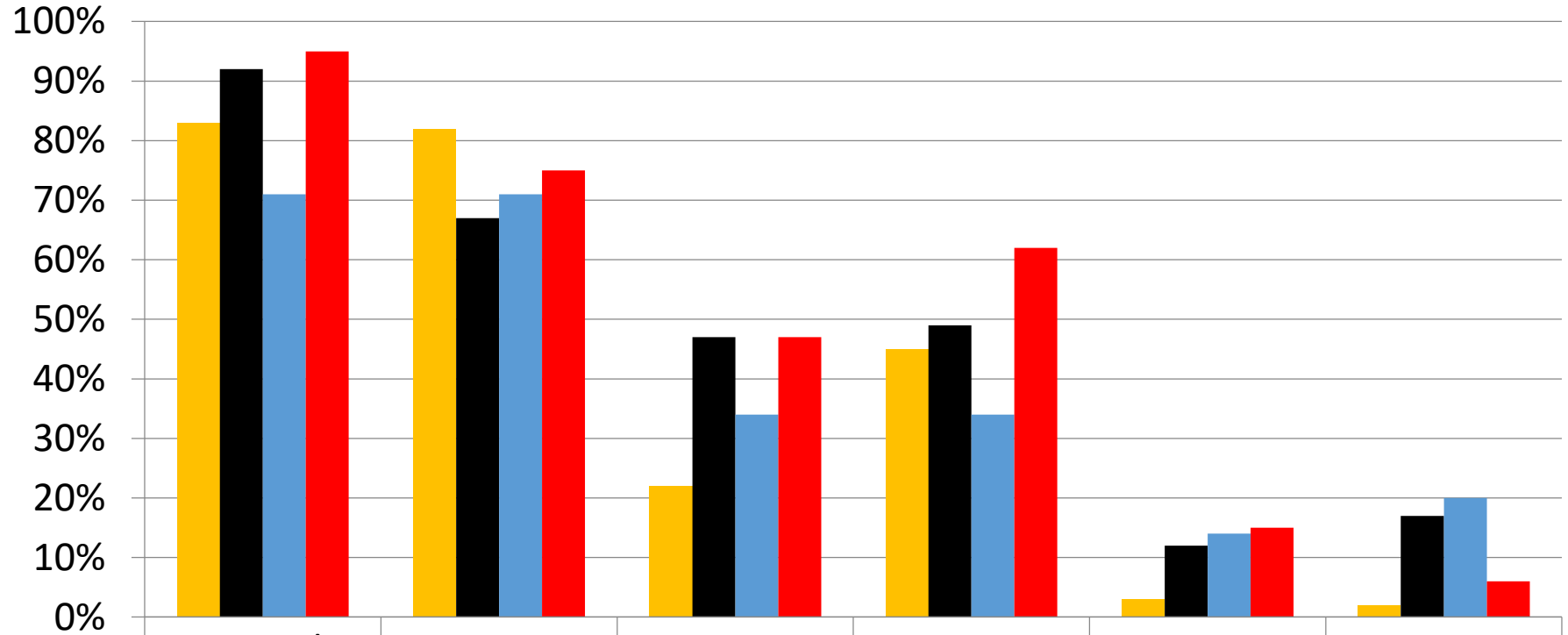
	Negotiate	Allows Voice	Advance Work	Good Personal Dynamics	Information is Limited	Time is Rationed	Leaders Intervene
■ House Pre	55%	13%	29%	30%	3%	3%	13%
■ House Post	45%	14%	24%	20%	21%	13%	19%
■ Senate Pre	58%	39%	26%	36%	7%	0%	10%
■ Senate Post	42%	32%	19%	19%	4%	2%	11%

Term Limits Impacts on Leadership

With inexperienced committee chairs (after term limits):

1. Legislators complain that chamber leaders and **committee chairs are autocratic, and they report more conflict in committees.**
2. Legislators **rely on committee chairs less** for information about a difficult issue.
3. **Legislators say that leaders usurp the power** of committee chairs if chairs do not comply with their wishes. Also **money has a bigger impact** on who becomes the chair.
4. Even with single party control, inexperienced leaders have a **harder time negotiating** with the other chamber and with the executive branch.

Sources of Chamber Leader Influence



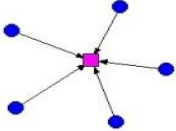
	Formal Role	Expertise	Persuasion	Personality	Reward	Coercion
House Pre	83%	82%	22%	45%	3%	2%
House Post	92%	67%	47%	49%	12%	17%
Senate Pre	71%	71%	34%	34%	14%	20%
Senate Post	95%	75%	47%	62%	15%	6%

Impacts of Michigan's Term Limits

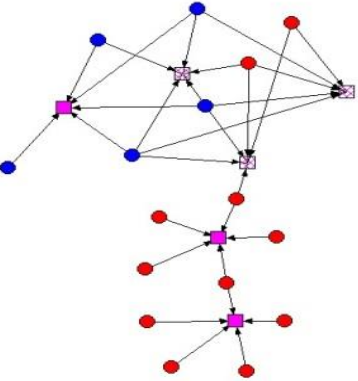
- Relationships take time to develop, but term limits truncate time.
 - Less time spent building coalitions across party lines.
 - Relationships between legislature and governor decline.
 - Relationships between the two chambers decline.
 - Friendship networks in the house look very different.
 - ❖ Groups of friends are rare and occur only within the same political party.
 - ❖ Friendship groups before term limits reflected power.
 - ❖ Friendship groups after term limits are mutual aid clusters.

House Friendship Networks

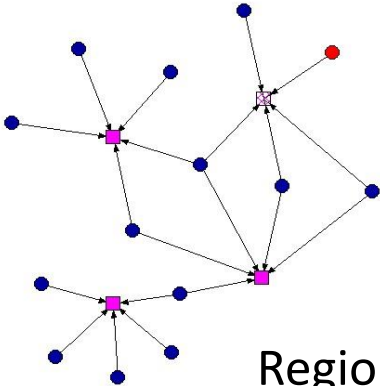
Friends 1997 House



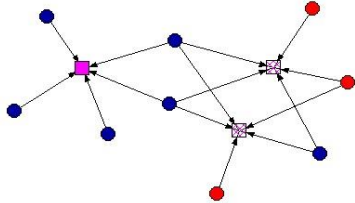
Powerbrokers



Friends 1999 House

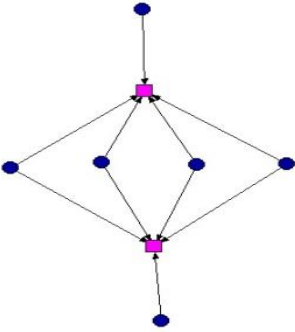
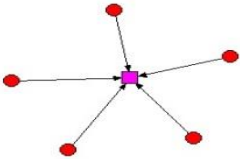


Regional Ties



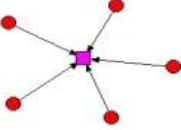
Friends 2001 House

Tea and Sympathy



Friends 2003 House

Tea – No sympathy



Blue dots for Democrats
 Red dots for Republicans
 Fuschia Squares for Partisan Hubs
 Crosshatched Squared for Bipartisan Hubs

Network Relationships

- **Friendship:**

- In Michigan we found fewer clusters of friends who can make deals and more clusters of the disenfranchised and ostracized.
 - ❖ This has decreased the time legislators spend working across party lines to build bipartisan coalitions to pass legislation.

- **Influence:**

- In Michigan, we found less informal influence (people who hold no formal role) and more influence for legislators who hold a formal role (speakers, etc.)

- **Information Flows:**

- In Michigan, we found information networks that were easily controlled by one or a few actors and vulnerable to becoming decoupled.

Priority Legislators Place on Tasks Before and After Term Limits by Chamber

House Before Term Limits		House After Term Limits		Senate Before Term Limits		Senate After Term Limits	
Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.
<i>High Priority Tasks</i>							
1 Talk to Voters	0.65	1 Talk to Voters	0.78	1 Attend District Events	0.68	1 Help Voters	0.59
2 Help Voters	0.48	2 Attend District	0.62	2 Help Voters	0.53	2 <i>Talk to Voters</i>	0.57
3 Attend District	0.46	3 Help Voters	0.56			3 Attend District Events	0.48
<i>Moderate Priority Tasks</i>							
4 Study Proposed Laws	0.15	4 Get Money for District	0.20	3 Develop New Laws	0.39	4 Study Proposed Laws	0.22
		5 Study Proposed Laws	0.17	4 Get Money for District	0.38	5 Get Money for District	0.16
				5 <i>Talk to Voters</i>	0.33		
				6 Study Proposed Laws	0.12		
<i>Average Priority Tasks</i>							
5 Get Money for District	0.07	6 Own Party Coalitions	-0.07	7 Bipartisan Coalitions	0.03	6 Develop New Laws	0.01
6 Bipartisan Coalitions	-0.06						
7 Own Party Coalitions	-0.06						
<i>Low Priority Tasks</i>							
8 Develop New Laws	-0.13	7 Develop New Laws	-0.18	8 Own Party Coalitions	-0.39	7 Own Party Coalitions	-0.23
		8 Bipartisan Coalitions	-0.31			8 Bipartisan Coalitions	-0.35
		9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.35				
<i>Avoided Tasks</i>							
9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.41	10 Fundraising	-0.65	9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.62	9 Fundraising	-0.45
10 Monitor Agencies	-0.52	11 Monitor Agencies	-0.79	10 Fundraising	-0.72	10 Attend Lansing	-0.47
11 Fundraising	-0.60			11 Monitor Agencies	-0.73	11 Monitor Agencies	-0.55

Number of Respondents: House Before Limits 89 to 91; After 240 to 256 and Senate Before Limits 31 to 33; After 52 to 54

Bold type denotes statistically significant change in the differenced measure of legislators' activities

More Impacts of Michigan's Term Limits

- Time spent monitoring state agencies declined in the House.
 - ❖ There is not much political payoff through monitoring for politically ambitious legislators looking for their next job.
 - ❖ It takes a lot of substantive knowledge about a specific state agency and its programs to monitor agencies.
 - ❖ It takes contacts and ties within the agency to know what to ask about.

Ways to Mitigate the Effects of Term Limits

- **A Ballot Proposal**

- ❖ Lengthen term limits to limit total time in either chamber.
 - ✓ Let Michigan's legislators serve all fourteen years in one chamber rather than 6 years in the lower chamber and 8 years in the upper chamber.
 - This doesn't divide nicely into four-year Senate terms, so . . .
 - ✓ In California, the ballot proposal provided for 12 years total in either chamber.
 - ✓ In Arkansas, the ballot proposal provided for 16 years in either chamber.

Ways Mitigate the Effects of Term Limits

- Build relationships among legislators across party lines.
 - ❖ A role for interest groups and lobbyists:
 - ✓ Organize events—retreats, lunches, sponsor amateur sports teams
 - ❖ A role for chamber leaders and non-partisan staff:
 - ✓ Road trips to inspect state infrastructure, facilities, and programs