Summary Article: **Term Limits**

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The statutory limits on the number of terms a politician can serve in office. Term limits exist in Latin American countries as well as in Russia. In the United States, a form of term limit existed since the late 17th century. It was called rotation, and it mandated politicians to leave office for a period of time, although they were not barred from returning. The idea was to allow candidates to share in the fruits of power.

Gubernatorial term limits have existed in the United States since 1787. Today, about 40% of the states impose term limits on their respective governors. Executive term limits for the U.S. president have existed since 1951, with the ratification of the Twenty-Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This amendment limits a president's service to 2 four-year terms. Congressional term limits, however, have a much more recent history in both state and federal governments.

Congressional term limits became an important issue during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when grassroots efforts were made to limit the terms of elected officials. However, in *Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton* (1995), the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot impose term limits on federal representatives or senators. The only way to limit congressional terms would be to amend the Constitution. Subsequent to this decision, Congress failed to gain the two-thirds votes needed to pass such a constitutional amendment. And in March 1998, the Court let stand term limits for state lawmakers when it denied certiorari in an appeal to overturn term limits in California. Today, 16 states impose term limits for state legislators. Several states bar politicians for life from returning to the same office once the term has ended. For more information, see *Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton* (1995) in the bibliography.

**See also**

Congress, Legislative Branch, Writ of Certiorari

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