

Rice-run poll: Houstonians favor term limits for elected officials, but willing to modify them

June 28 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- Houstonians support term limits for the city's elected officials, but are willing to change the length of those limits, according to a new poll conducted by Rice University and its Center for Civic Engagement.

More than half of the respondents favored keeping the current limit of three two-year terms for Houston officials. However, after hearing a series of related questions on the effects of term limits, that support dropped to 39 percent. Only a tiny segment of Houstonians (2 percent) favored eliminating term limits altogether.

Following a 1991 referendum, Houston set the lifetime limit of three two-year terms for its elected officials, including the mayor, controller and all the members of city council.

The poll is based on interviews with 501 registered voters in Houston between April 26 and May 3. It has an error rate of plus or minus 4.5 percent. The survey was conducted for the City of Houston Term Limits Review Commission.

After initial questions on their support for term limits, poll respondents were presented with arguments for and against term limits and asked if they agreed or disagreed with each one. For example, 84 percent of Houstonians agreed that "term limits ensure that we'll get new people

with fresh ideas coming into city office." But 61 percent also agreed that "with term limits forcing elected city officials out of office after a maximum of six years, [lobbyists](#) and special interests now have too much power and influence at City Hall."

After answering questions on the strengths and weaknesses of term limits, the proportion of people who favored modifying the limit to two four-year terms rose from 24 percent to 36 percent. "This support for changing term limits prevails in spite of the fact that an overwhelming majority of voters support term limits, and their support of term limits is intense," said Robert Stein, Rice's Lena Gohlman Fox Professor of [Political Science](#), who oversaw the poll.

Provided by Rice University

Citation: Rice-run poll: Houstonians favor term limits for elected officials, but willing to modify them (2010, June 28) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-06-rice-run-poll-houstonians-favor-term.html>

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