

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0261-3794(18)30097-0

DOI: [10.1016/j.electstud.2018.08.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.08.013)

Reference: JELS 1966

To appear in: *Electoral Studies*

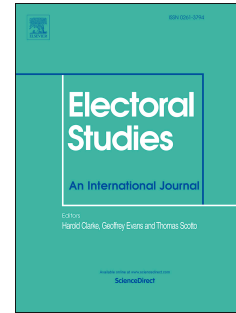
Received Date: 21 February 2018

Revised Date: 21 June 2018

Accepted Date: 29 August 2018

Please cite this article as: Fahey, K., Demonstrating the (in) effectiveness of electoral reforms, *Electoral Studies* (2018), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.08.013>.

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Demonstrating the (In)Effectiveness of Electoral Reforms

Kevin Fahey^{*†}

September 8, 2018

Abstract

Have electoral reforms to reduce the incumbency advantage worked as intended? I articulate a theory wherein reforms may contribute to a weakening incumbency advantage, or may counterintuitively weaken challengers by changing party incentives. Combining causal inference techniques on a set of 70,000 U.S. state legislative elections, I estimate changes to the annual incumbency effect after the implementation of two popular reforms, term limits and staffing cuts. This test arbitrates between two competing expectations of how reforms should change the incumbency effect. My findings show that the reforms did not work as intended. The incumbency effect grew faster in term-limited states than in states without term limits, while staff cuts failed to slow the growth of the incumbency effect. I conclude that party incentives ought to be considered when citizens engage in future policy reforms regarding the incumbency advantage.

Keywords: Incumbency Advantage, Candidate Entry, Electoral Reforms

Word Count: 10467

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[†]I would like to thank Carol Weissert, Robert Jackson, Quintin Beazer, Holger Kern, Doug Ahler, Charles Barrilleaux, James Battista, Rob Carroll, Amanda Driscoll, Jason Gainous, Brad Gomez, Matt Hauenstein, Douglas Johnson, Justin Kirkland, Rene Lindstaedt, Gary Moncrief, Matthew Pietryka, Christopher Reenock, Zach Warner, two anonymous reviewers, and the *Electoral Studies* editorial staff for their feedback on this paper; all remaining errors and omissions are my own.

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