

keeping than everyone else. The divorce statistics amply show how willing millions of people are to break what may well be the most solemn vows they will ever make.

Pragmatists hold that promises should be broken if the outcome of keeping them would, on balance, be worse. And what is politics but a pragmatic undertaking, in which outcomes count for more than purity of intention or consistency? But voters tend to forget that.

Promises serve a function beyond the mere harvesting of votes. “Making political promises in liberal democracies helps to provide governments with authority to act. Perceptions that promises are routinely broken—however inaccurate—diminish governmental authority.”

But political promises may not be broken as often as we think. A 1963 study of those made in 10 federal elections in Australia found that to be the case. It’s the ones that are not ful-

filled, particularly those made in extravagant language, that feed “the public misperception that breaking political promises is routine.” Remember “read my lips”?

Some promises go unfulfilled because of obstacles beyond the politician’s control, such as gridlock or interest-group opposition. Some are deliberately broken because circumstances change—the money dries up or a disaster occurs.

Of course, some promises are broken because they’re “unachievable, irresponsible, or overly optimistic.” Prime Minister Bob Hawke of Australia was returned to office in 1987 after pledging that he would eliminate child poverty in three years. Politicians shouldn’t make such impossible promises, Lovell says. But there’s a corollary: Citizens shouldn’t ask of politics more than it can provide. No one is promising that citizens will lower their expectations anytime soon.

Churn, Baby, Churn!

“Time, Term Limits, and Turnover: Trends in Membership Stability in U.S. State Legislatures” by Gary F. Moncrief, Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell, in *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (Aug. 2004), Comparative Legislative Research Center, 334 Schaeffer Hall, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1409.

More than a decade after the first term limits were imposed on state legislators, the results of the new policy are appearing, and they’re encouraging to its supporters. The turnover rate among legislators had been dropping, but term limit legislation has halt-

ed, and possibly reversed, that trend.

During the 1930s, more than half of all state legislators, on average, were replaced after every election. By the 1980s, that figure had dropped below a quarter: 24 percent in the lower houses and 22 percent in the upper houses, note po-

EXCERPT

The Last Voter

Due to earlier reforms and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, registration laws are more uniform and registration costs are lower than at any point since registration requirements became widely adopted. There is now little room for enhancing turnout further by making registration easier. . . . [C]ontinued nonvoting by substantial numbers of citizens suggests that for many people, voting remains an activity from which there is virtually no gratification—instrumental, expressive, or otherwise. Consequently, for those whose goal is a democracy where most people engage in the fundamental act of political participation, a pessimistic conclusion cannot be avoided.

—Benjamin Highton, a political scientist at the University of California at Davis, in *Perspectives on Politics* (Sept. 2004).

litical scientists Moncrief, of Boise State University, and Niemi and Powell, both of the University of Rochester.

Starting in 1990, with Colorado, California, and Oklahoma, critics of the status quo in state government managed to impose term limits in 21 states. Legislators were restricted to terms of between six and 12 continuous years in one chamber. In three states, courts overturned the limits; in two, legislatures repealed them; in five, the laws haven't been in effect long enough to have had a significant impact. That leaves 11 term-limited states driving the trend.

While the long decline in legislative turnover continued into the 1990s in states without term limits, the turnover rate rose in the handful of term-limited states. Nearly 31 percent of lower-house legislators in those states were newcomers during the 1990s, compared with 25 percent during the 1980s.

In the upper houses, turnover increased from 21 percent to 26 percent.

As Moncrief, Niemi, and Powell note, the rise in turnover rates wasn't as predictable as it seems. Term limit laws might, for example, have discouraged individuals from challenging incumbents, and thereby actually *decreased* turnover.

Political scientists were right to predict that term limits would encourage more lower-house members to seek election to their state's upper chamber. In states with term limits of six to eight years, about a quarter of the senators in 2002 were graduates of the lower house, compared with 10 percent in 1994.

Still to be answered, the authors note, is the key question about term limits: Does the frequent infusion of new blood improve the performance of legislatures more than the continual loss of legislative experience hurts it?

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Psychology of Homeland Defense

"The Neglected Home Front" by Stephen E. Flynn, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 2004), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021; "Leap Before You Look: The Failure of Homeland Security" by Benjamin Friedman, in *Breakthroughs* (Spring 2004), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Security Studies Program, 292 Main St. (E38-600), Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

There's an unusual element in the growing debate over homeland security. In addition to arguments over policy, politics, and dollars, the debate now includes serious disagreements over how to adjust the national psyche to the threat of terrorism.

One view is advanced by Flynn, a senior fellow in national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, who charges that the Bush administration is wrongly preoccupied with striking terrorist havens abroad while spending too little on homeland security and neglecting the "systematic engagement of civil society and the private sector" in the effort.

The terrorists' real target, Flynn argues, is not any particular locale but public confidence in the "vital systems" that underpin American society. But U.S. "transportation, energy, information, financial, chemical, food, and logistical networks" remain, for the most part, virtually unprotected. While the Pentagon will spend \$7.6 billion to improve security at military bases this year, the Department of Homeland Security

will spend only \$2.6 billion to protect America's vast economic infrastructure.

A sound defense requires something like what's been done with air safety. Why does the public continue to fly even after horrifying airline crashes? Because people are confident that government and industry will do their utmost to incorporate lessons learned and guarantee future safety, according to Flynn. Americans must feel the same confidence in the wake of any terrorist attack.

That means abandoning the Bush administration's reliance on the private sector to improve security at chemical plants and other potential targets. Corporations are unlikely to act unless the government requires their competitors to make similar investments. Likewise, says Flynn, the population must be mobilized. But after "a rocky start that generated a run on plastic sheeting and duct tape," civil defense efforts have fizzled.

A diametrically opposed view comes from Friedman, a graduate student at the Massa-