



## Diversity in the Missouri Legislature, 1991 to 2013

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### Talking Points

- This brief examines legislator diversity in Missouri, 1991 to 2013, from roughly 10 years before term limits took effect to roughly 10 years after term limits took effect. It presents data on race, gender and age for the General Assembly as a whole as well as for the two political parties.
- On most measures, there has been little overall change in the number of women and minorities elected to legislative office in Missouri.
- Female representation has fluctuated, rising through the 1990s, declining through the early 2000s and then rising slightly. However, female representation has never been more than 26 percent in the Missouri General Assembly.
- Minority representation in the legislature has been roughly proportional to the state minority population.
- Minority representation in the Democratic Party exceeds the state's minority population. There has not been a minority member of the Republican Party since 2007, and from 1991 to 2005 only three minority members have served in the Party.

### Introduction

This brief examines changes in the composition of the Missouri legislature from 1991 to 2013, specifically focusing on gender, race, and age. This time period includes more than a decade before term limits and almost a decade following the effective date of term limits.<sup>1</sup> We collected legislative characteristics from the *Official Manual of the State of Missouri* and the Missouri House and Senate websites.<sup>2</sup> We examine changes in legislators' gender, race, and age from two levels of analysis. First, we compare changes in legislator demographics between the Missouri

<sup>1</sup> Missouri's legislative term limits took effect in the House in 2003 and in the Senate in 2003 and 2005. The limit on terms was placed on the ballot in 1992 to address what proponents considered to be the disadvantages of legislative incumbency. This constitutional amendment established eight year limits on service in each legislative chamber. See Valentine (2012) for a comprehensive report on term limits in Missouri.

<sup>2</sup> These sources provide legislators' demographic information, including, gender, race, and age. In recent years, an increasing number of legislators have not provided their age. In these cases, information was gathered from other public sources, if available there.

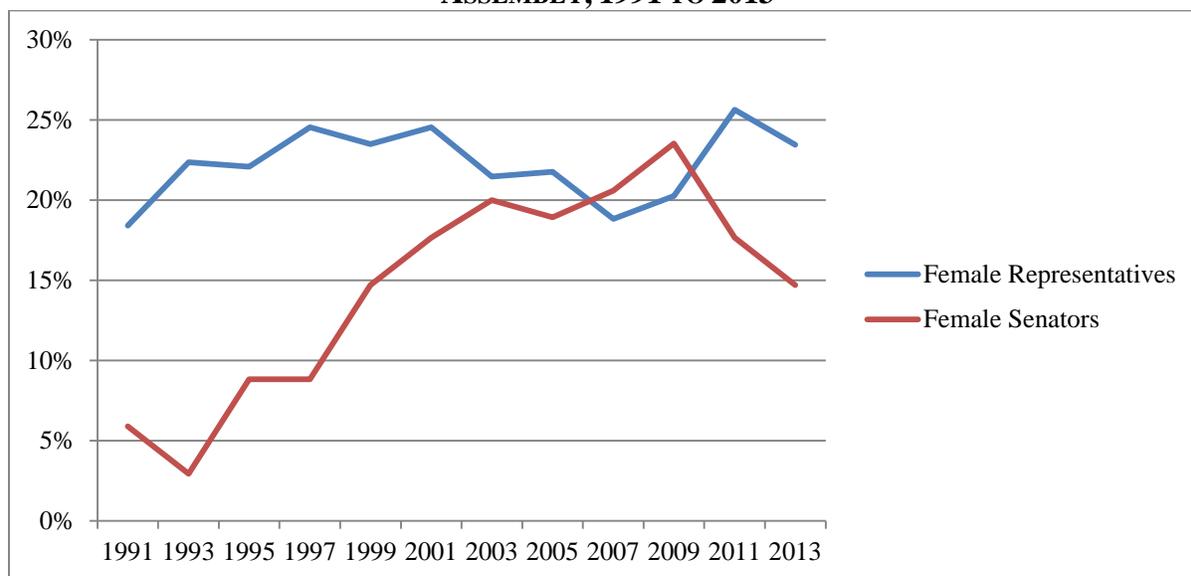
House and Senate. Second, we investigate differences in legislator demographics between political parties.

Proponents of term limits argued that limiting the number of years state legislators could serve in the General Assembly would lead to significant changes in its composition because term limits would create greater legislative turnover, which in turn would lead to changes in the demographics of legislative candidates and legislators coming from groups that were traditionally underrepresented (Kurtz, Cain, & Niemi, 2007, p. 24-25). It is important to note that although it was suggested term limits would impact a wide array of legislative demographics, most research has focused on term limits impact on legislator gender and race, and there is paucity in the literature which reviews the effect of term limits on legislator age. Despite expectations that term limits would increase legislative diversity, research generally indicates that term limits have had little, if any, impact on the composition of state legislatures (Richardson, Valentine, & Stokes, 2005).

### Gender Diversity in the Missouri General Assembly

This section concentrates on changes in legislator demographics by examining the percentages of female legislators, relative to male legislators, in the Missouri House and Senate from 1991 to 2013.

**GRAPH 1: PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013**



\*Term limits first affected the House in 2003 and affected one-half of the Senate in 2003 and the remaining one-half in 2005. There are 163 members of the House and 34 members of the Senate.

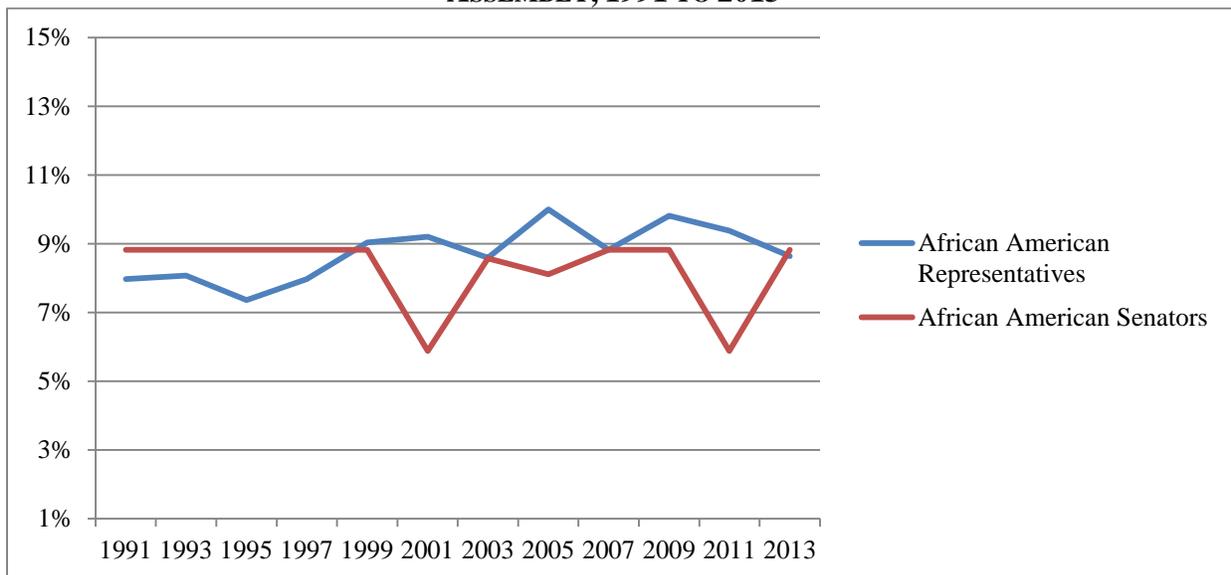
As presented in Graph 1, from 1991 to 2013, the percentage of female legislators in the Missouri House rose from 18 percent in 1991 to 23 percent in 2013; however, a decline occurred between 2003 and 2009, which is a timeframe that coincides with changes due to redistricting, term limits, and the emergence of a Republican majority but the individual effect of these developments, if any, are nearly impossible to separate. There are abrupt year to year

fluctuations in the percentage of female senators due to the small size of the Senate, but the trend has been generally upward, increasing from three percent (one member) in 1991 to a maximum of 24 percent (seven members) in 2009. Note, however, that since peaking in 2009, the percentage of female senators decreased substantially (15 percent (five members) in 2013) but the underlying reasons for this trend are currently difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, term limits may have contributed to the increase in the number of women in the Senate in the early 2000s. Term limits opens up more seats and almost all of the women who were elected to the Senate during this period were members of the House, well positioned to run for the Senate. Nonetheless, this was a continuation of a trend that began in 1997. The increase in the number of women serving in the General Assembly over this 20 year period, modest as it is, suggests that broad social trends are at work, even though term limits may have had a moderate effect on the number of women in both chambers in the early 2000s. The number of female legislators in office from 1991 to 2013 is presented by year in Appendix A.

### Racial Diversity in the Missouri General Assembly<sup>3</sup>

This section focuses on changes in legislator demographics by examining the percentages of African American legislators in the Missouri House and Senate from 1991 to 2013.

**GRAPH 2: PERCENTAGE AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013\***



\*Term limits first affected the House in 2003 and affected one-half of the Senate in 2003 and the remaining one-half in 2005.

African American representation in the House hardly fluctuated over this 20 year period, remaining near 10 percent. This percentage is only slightly lower than the African American population in the state; 11.7 percent in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Clearly, neither term

<sup>3</sup> The only two racial ethnicities to comprise the Missouri General Assembly have been African American and Caucasian.

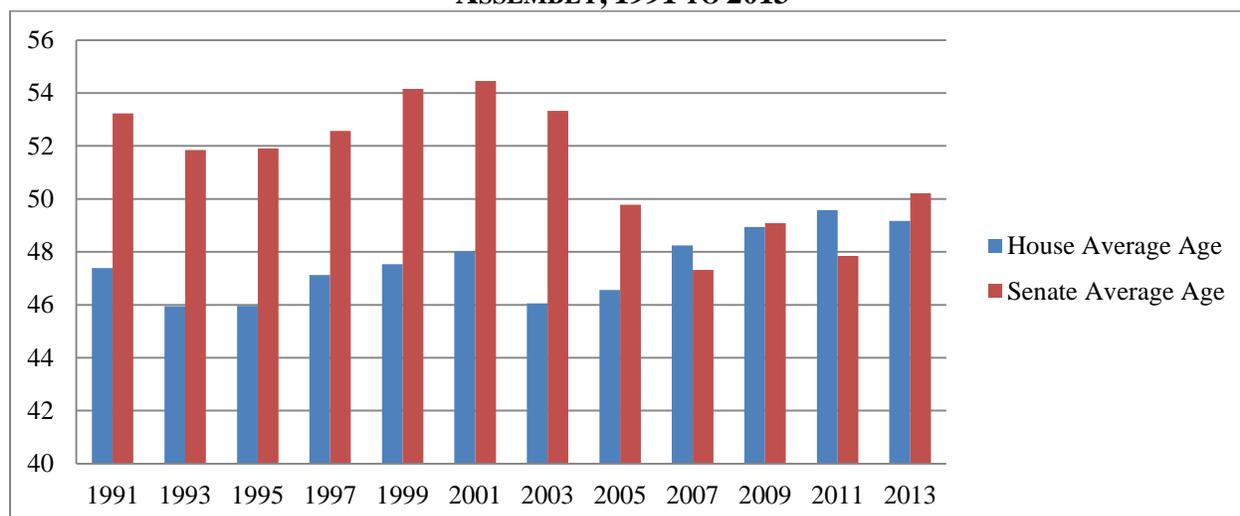
limits nor other trends, such as social change or redistricting, have led to an increase in the number of African Americans in the House.

Racial differences in the Senate have largely mirrored those in the House, with the exception of two years, when African American representation declined. While African American senators have generally approximated 10 percent of the Senate, significant decreases occurred in 2000 and 2010 when the percentage of African American senators dropped to six percent (two members). However, in general, trends in the Senate's racial composition have been very stable.

### Age in the Missouri General Assembly <sup>4</sup>

In this section, we examine change in the average age of members of the House and Senate from 1991 to 2013. Subsequently we look at the distribution of members in three age categories: under 40, 40 to 55, and over 55.

**GRAPH 3: AVERAGE AGE OF LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013\***



\*Term limits first affected the House in 2003 and affected one-half of the Senate in 2003 and the remaining one-half in 2005.

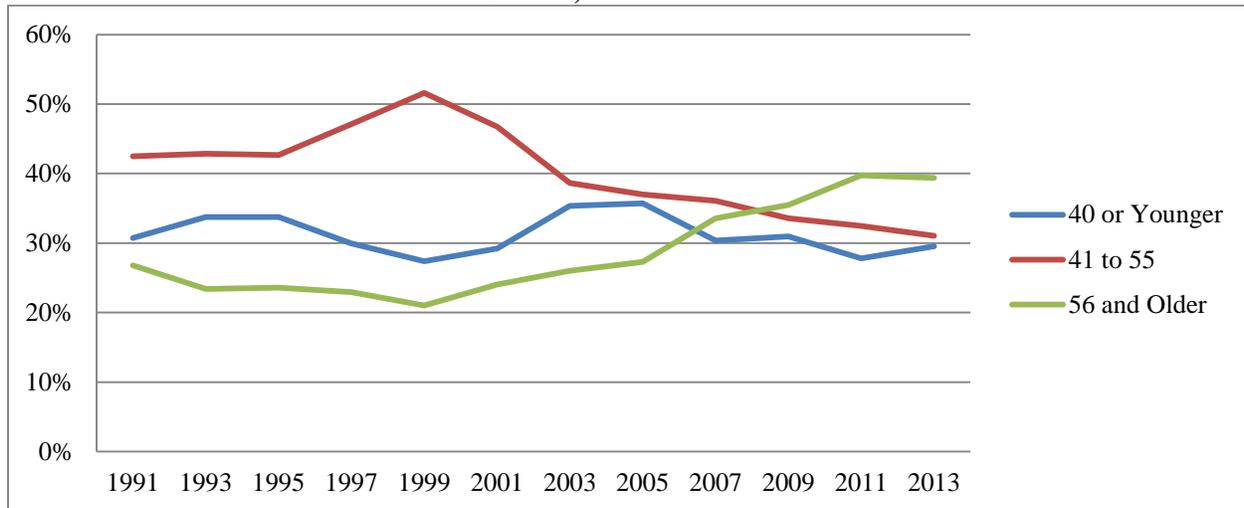
Missouri requires candidates to be at least 24 years of age to serve in the House and at least 30 years of age to serve in the Senate.<sup>5</sup> From 1991 to 2005, the average age of state senators was greater than state representatives. However, by 2007, this age gap between chambers had declined substantially, and for the first time in 16 years, the average age of the House surpassed that of the Senate. Since 2007, disparities in average age among the chambers have remained quite low, as the average age of both the House and Senate has stayed between 47 to 50 years of age. In general, the average age of state senators has declined while the average age of state representatives has increased. Thus, while it is likely that term limits may have led to a Senate

<sup>4</sup> Legislators have become more reluctant to specify their ages but we see no evidence of age bias in the refusals (17 percent could not be properly categorized by age in 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Art. III § 4 Constitution of Missouri & § 21.080, RSMo and Art. III § 6 Constitution of Missouri & § 21.070, RSMo.

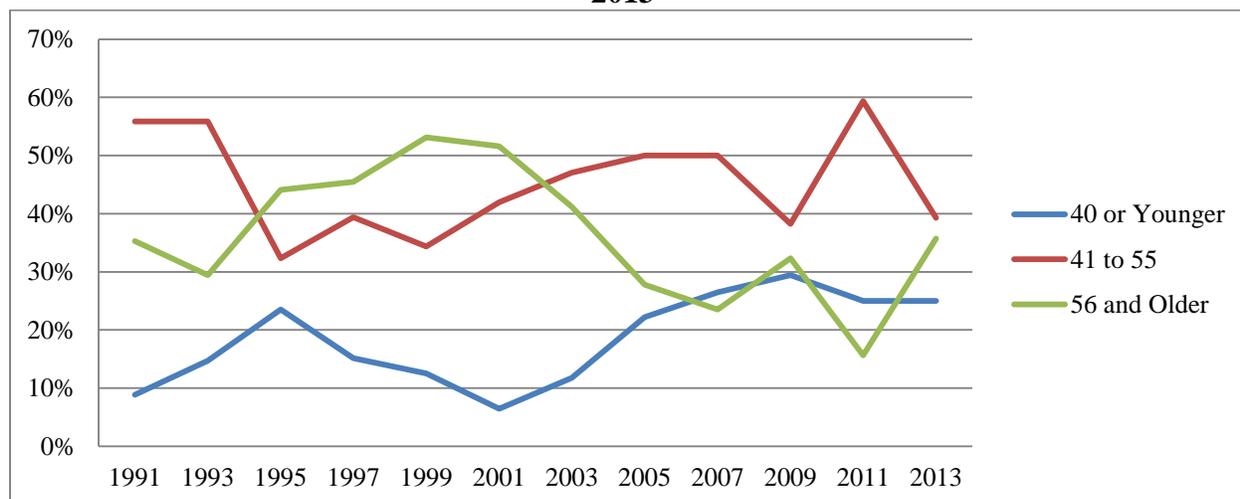
that is comprised of a younger demographic, the same does not hold true for the House. Term limits, of course, opens up Senate seats more regularly and this may provide more opportunities for younger and ambitious members of the House to advance to the Senate.

**GRAPH 4: PERCENTAGE OF LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI HOUSE BY AGE GROUP, 1991 TO 2013\***



\*Term limits first affected the House in 2003 and affected one-half of the Senate in 2003 and the remaining one-half in 2005.

We also examined the age distribution of members to determine whether the averages presented above might have masked changes in the age distribution of members. Graph 4 presents the age distribution for the House, over the 20 year period. The proportion of those of “middle age”, 41 to 55, increased significantly to over 50 percent in the late 1990s, probably a result of members’ choosing to remain in the legislature until removed by term limits. But note the change in distribution beginning in 2001, just before term limits became effective and continuing through the present. Since 2001, the proportion of members who are 41 to 55 has decreased while the proportion of those who are 56 or older has grown. The decline in the 41 to 55 age group may represent the effects of removing “career politicians”, a goal of term limits advocates. During the same time period, the percentage of representatives falling into the 56 and older age group increased and by 2009 these representatives comprised the largest age group. This trend hints that term limits has made legislative service more attractive as a second career while increasing the opportunity for serving.

**GRAPH 5: PERCENTAGES OF LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI SENATE BY AGE GROUP, 1991 TO 2013\***

\*Term limits affected one-half of the Senate in 2003 and one-half in 2005.

The changes in the percentages of age groups in the Senate have been far more dramatic than those in the House, in part because of the smaller number of members. Two trends are evident. First, the proportion of the oldest cohort (over 55) is highest in the period immediately before term limits took effect. This may reflect a choice among sitting senators to run for office one last time before they were removed by term limits. The second trend is for members in the post-term limits era to be somewhat younger; a trend that mirrors the average age data presented in Graph 3.

Trends from both chambers suggest that term limits may have affected the age of those elected to the legislature by altering the opportunities for election. In the House, the proportion of those 56 and older has increased and in the Senate, the proportion of those under the age of 40 has increased dramatically. These developments, especially the election of younger members of the Senate, are a significant departure from pre-term limits trends.

### Diversity Comparison between Parties<sup>6</sup>

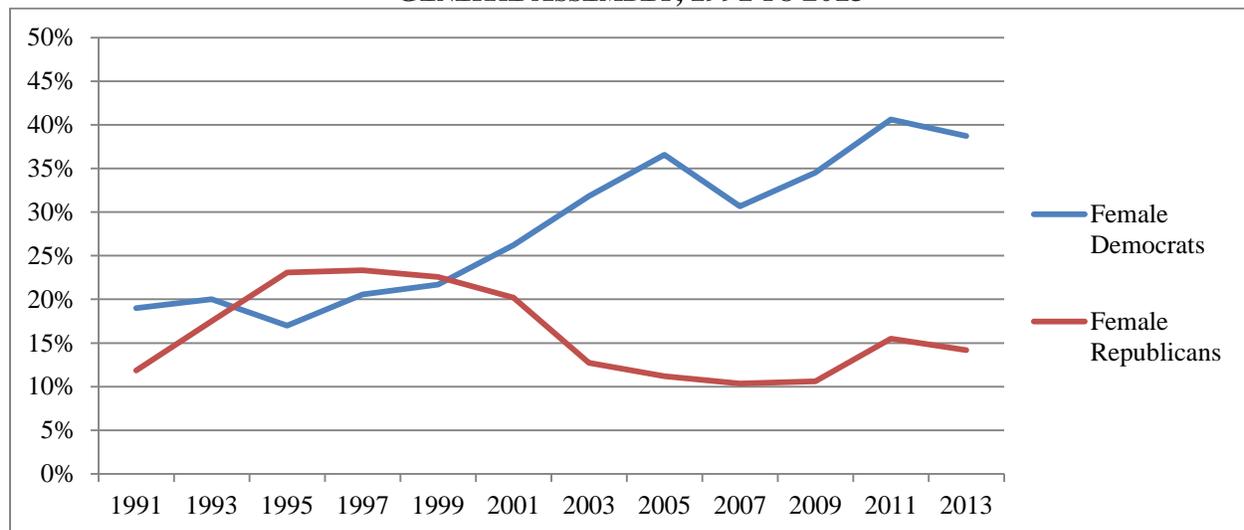
This section examines changes in demographics among political parties in the Missouri legislature. First, we compare the percentage of female legislators, in the Democratic and Republican parties from 1991 to 2013. Then, we examine the percentage of African American legislators in the Democratic and Republican parties from 1991 to 2013. Finally, we examine differences in the age of Republican and Democratic legislators from 1991 to 2013. In order to do so, we compare the average age and three age groups of Republicans and Democrats in the Missouri General Assembly, just as we did above.

<sup>6</sup> Only the Democratic and Republican parties are discussed in this section because there have only been two total independent legislators in the General Assembly since 1991.

### ***Gender and Party in the Legislature***

The data presented below are within-party comparisons. The percentage of female Democrats, for example, is their proportion of all Democrats, not of the legislature as a whole. The percentage of Democrats who are women has increased significantly since 1991. Although there was a moderate decline in 1995, 2007, and 2013, the percentage of female Democrats has increased from 19 percent in 1991 to 39 percent in 2013 (a change of approximately 114 percent).

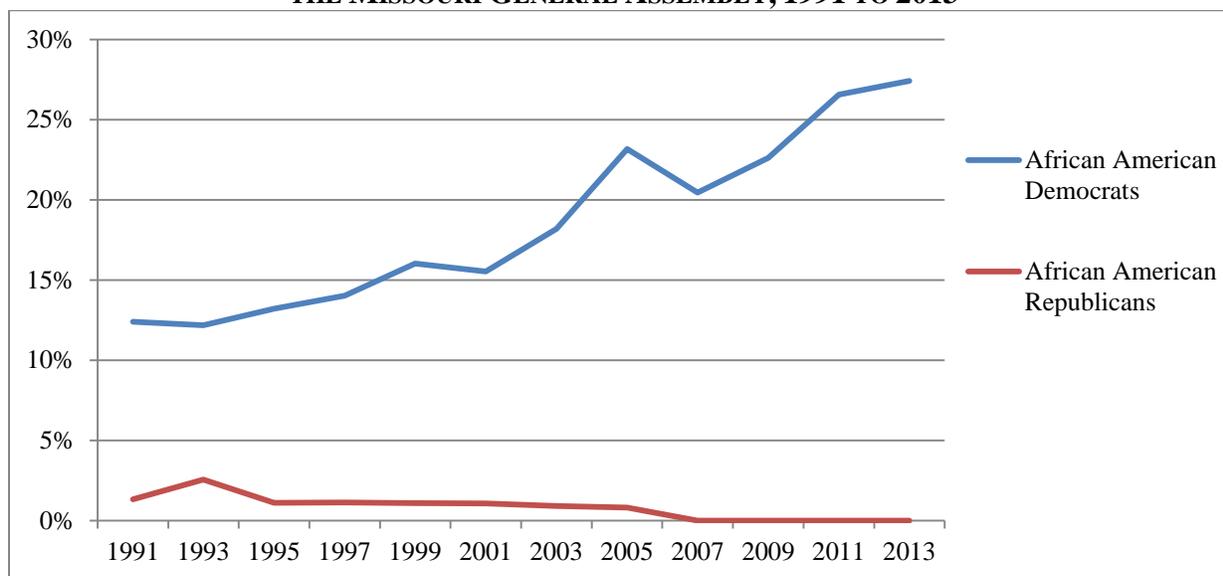
**GRAPH 6: PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013**



Women are less well represented among Republican legislators, although they constituted 23 percent of all Republicans in the mid-to-late 1990s. The proportion of women Republicans was quite low through most of the first decade of this century but began to increase in 2011. We have no data to suggest why there was a significant decline for a few years but these years coincided with the effective date of term limits, redistricting, and the emergence of the Republican Party as the dominant party in the General Assembly.

## *Race and Party in the Legislature<sup>7</sup>*

**GRAPH 7: PERCENTAGES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013**



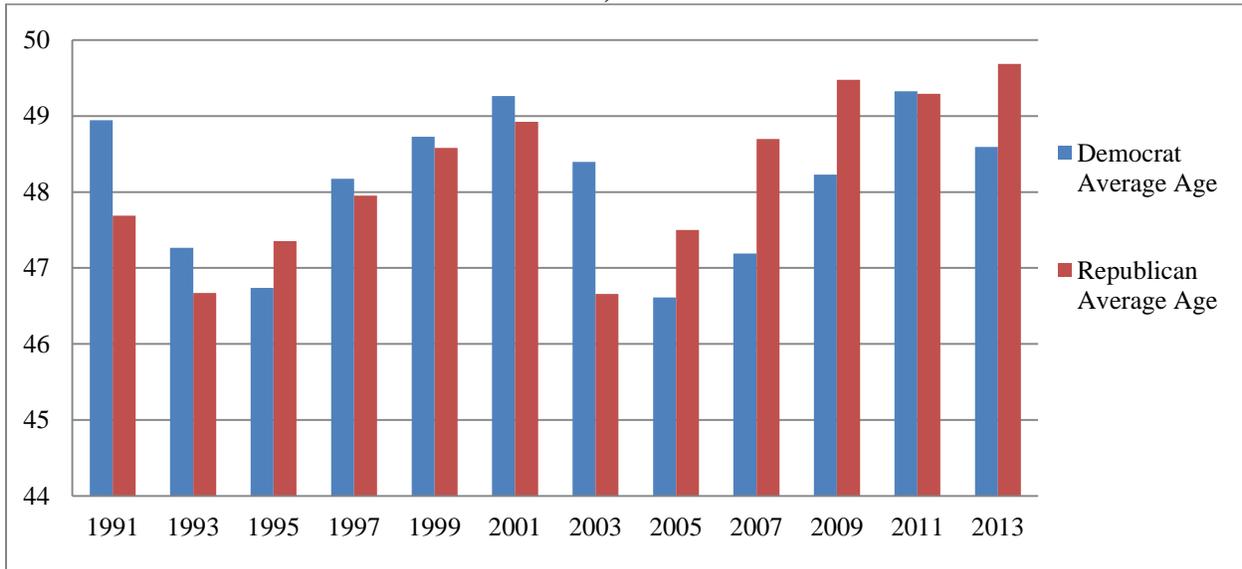
On the whole, the percentage of African American Democrats has increased significantly. Graph 7 shows that in 1991, 12 percent of Democrats were African Americans, but by 2013, this percentage had more than doubled to 27.42 percent (a 15.02 percent increase). Conversely, the percentage of African American Republicans has remained extremely low. It has not exceeded two percent, or one member, since 1993, and there are no African American Republicans currently serving in the Missouri legislature.

## *Age and Party in the Legislature*

The average age of both Republicans and Democrats in the Missouri legislature has not changed significantly. As shown in Graph 8, the average age of Democrats in the General Assembly has remained quite constant, with a minimum value of 46.6 in 2005 and a maximum value of 49.3 in 2011. Likewise, the average age of Republicans in the General Assembly has remained constant, with a minimum value of 46.6 in 2003 and a maximum value of 49.4 in 2009. However, the data reveals a decline in the average age of members of both parties in 1992 and 1994 and the same in 2003 and 2005. These may reflect members' responses to redistricting which took effect in 1992 and 2002 as well as term limits which took effect in the latter year. But note the opposite result for Republicans in 2012, following another redistricting year. The average age of Republicans is higher after the 2012 election than it has been throughout the 20 years examined here.

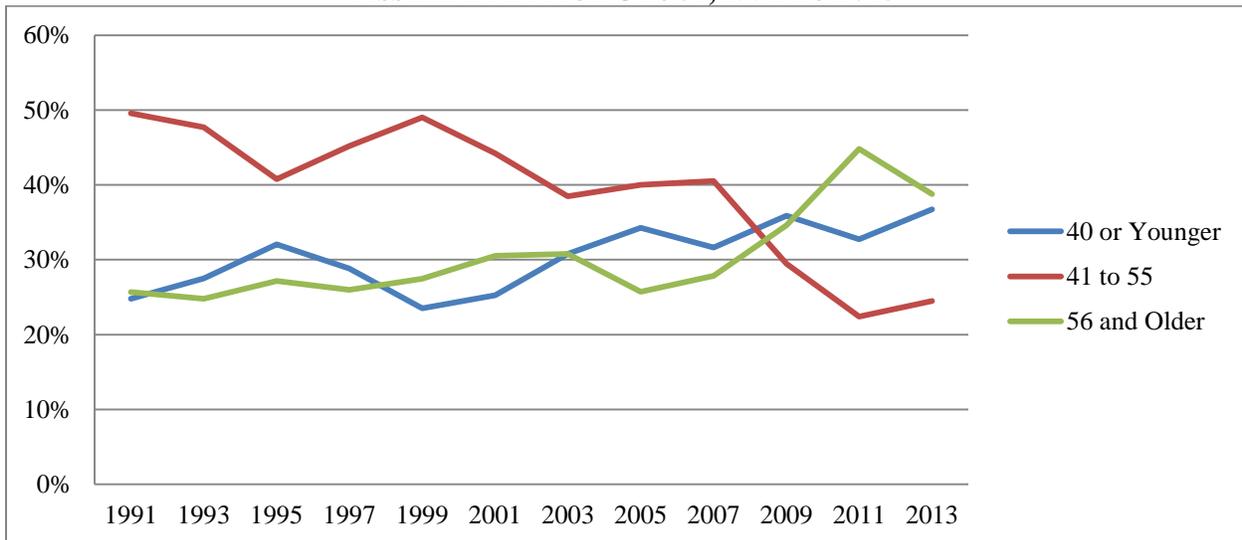
<sup>7</sup> African American and Caucasian are the only two racial groups represented in the General Assembly during this period

**GRAPH 8: AVERAGE AGE OF DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013**

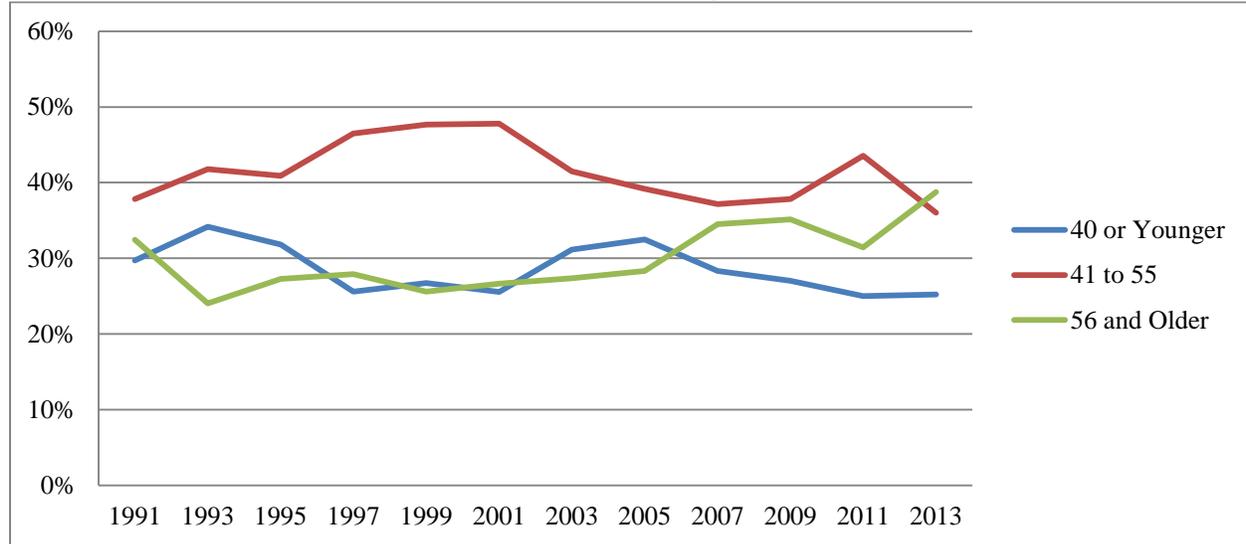


We look at the age distribution of Democratic and Republican members in Graph 9 and Graph 10. In Graph 9, we see that Democrats ages 41 to 55 represented the largest age group in the Missouri legislature through 2007. However, by 2009 the percentage of Democrats falling into this age group dropped precipitously, while at the same time, the percentage of Democrats 56 years and older climbed dramatically. It should be noted that until 2007, the percentages of Democrats ages 40 and younger and Democrats 56 and older remained quite similar, fluctuating around 24 to 30 percent but both age groups are fluctuating upward, although there was a sharp decline in the percentage of Democrats age 56 and older in 2013. The overall trend, then, is for Democratic members to be either younger or older than were members of their party in the 1990s.

**GRAPH 9: PERCENTAGE OF DEMOCRATS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY AGE GROUP, 1991 TO 2013**



**GRAPH 10: PERCENTAGE OF REPUBLICANS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY AGE GROUP, 1991 TO 2013**



The age distribution of Republicans, as shown in Graph 10, has not fluctuated as much as it has for Democrats. While the percentage of Republicans falling into the 41 to 55 age group has varied over the past two decades, it has remained the largest age group, with the exception of 2013. As with Democrats, we see an increase in the proportion of those over 55 following term limits.

## Discussion

This brief examined change in the gender, race, and age of Missouri legislators, 1991 to 2013, covering the period just before and just after term limits took effect in the State. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that despite the passage of term limits, the composition of the Missouri legislature has not changed substantially over the past two decades. Although the percentages of women and African American legislators have increased, these two groups have been and continue to be underrepresented. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of both women and African Americans serving in the Missouri legislature are lower than those for the total Missouri population; yet the under-representation of women is higher than it is for African Americans.

**TABLE 1: MISSOURI CHAMBER COMPARISON, 2013**

	Missouri General Assembly	Missouri Population <sup>8</sup>
Female	21.94%	51.00%
African American	8.67%	11.70%
Age	48.20	37.90

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b; Missouri House of Representatives, n.d.; Missouri Senate, n.d.

Although the average age of state legislators has been fairly stable, the proportion of both older and younger members has increased at the expense of those of middle age. This may be an unintended and indirect consequence of term limits. If term limits removes “career politicians”, we would expect to see the impact in the mid-career age group; people who might have been inclined to pursue a political career in an earlier era, may be more inclined to stick with their non-legislative career. Conversely, a shortened legislative career may be more attractive to those just beginning their careers and those nearing the end of their career.

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<sup>8</sup> Missouri population data come from the U.S. Census Bureau. The most recent data available for gender and race is from 2011. The most recent data for age is from 2010 and is reported as a median, rather than a mean.

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## APPENDIX A

### NUMBER OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS IN THE MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1991 TO 2013\*

Year	House Number	Senate Number
1991	30	2
1993	36	1
1995	36	3
1997	40	3
1999	39	5
2001	40	6
2003	35	7
2005	37	7
2007	32	7
2009	33	8
2011	41	6
2013	38	5

\*There are 163 members of the House and 34 Members of the Senate