

Inexperienced lawmakers take over Calif.

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

Like fire clearing an old-growth forest, last week's election elevated a class of freshman lawmakers who will join last cycle's surge of first-term legislators to form one of the least experienced Legislatures in years.

When the 2015-16 Legislature convenes later this year, a majority of lawmakers – 72 out of 120 – will arrive with at most two years of state-level experience. The critical mass of relative newcomers reflects a shift in California's term limit rules with dual consequences: While the incoming class of lawmakers is sparse on state legislative experience, it could also remain largely intact for a decade.

"I think it's probably the most profound change in the Legislature as an institution since term limits passed," said David Leshner, director of government affairs at the Public Policy Institute of California.

Critics of California's term limits have long warned of unintended consequences. Voters hoped to make the Legislature more accountable and to loosen the grip of long-serving politicians. But in the process, skeptics say, voters deprived their representatives of the experience and policy fluency that comes from years steeped in lawmaking.

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