

Progressive Ambition: House to Senate 1992-2002

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Abstract

It is well understood that democratic accountability requires the potential for quality candidates to challenge entrenched incumbents for office. By emerging, quality candidates provide the option for electoral control. Quality candidates are often defined as those with previous office-holding experience. The importance of electoral experience should lead researchers to carefully consider the logic of ambition in politics. However, studies of candidate emergence focus on the office sought as the unit of analysis. In order to consider the role of ambition in emergence, it is necessary to study the entry decision, implying that potential candidates must be the unit of analysis. The difficulty of this approach is the lack of data on the potential candidates who choose not to enter. This problem can be somewhat alleviated by focusing on a sub-set of potential candidates such as members of the U.S. House of Representatives and their decision to run for the Senate.

Ambition theory is explored using insights from the adaptive parties model by likening the opportunity structures faced by progressively ambitious politicians to political landscapes. In this framework, characteristics of the office currently held and potential rivals must be considered and elections function as a selection mechanism. Electorates remove officials that are less fit than their challengers. As a group, incumbents of the House of Representatives are politicians who are electorally fit for their districts, demonstrating this through their repeated reelection. If the political landscapes of their districts happen to be similar to the political landscapes of their state, then these MCs may also be quite fit politically to win the statewide election for the Senate. Certain House members may find that their voting behavior and homestyle which was adapted to the electoral pressures of their district to be useful as a sort of *exaptation* for winning a Senate seat.

Empirical analysis supports the conclusion that members of the House are more likely to run for the Senate when their districts have high congruity to their prospective statewide constituency. Congruity is measured using a similarity metric which compares districts' characteristics to their states. The vulnerability of incumbent senators as the targets of these House challengers requires a measure that examines political behavior in light of the state electorate's preferences. This discord measure is constructed by comparing roll call voting scores to survey measures of state ideology and partisanship.

“The job of a congressman is to become a senator, the job of a senator is to become president. Everyone does what they do for the wrong reasons, but somehow the whole system works.” - Sam Waterson, on *Law & Order* (originally aired 9/24/2003)

1 Introduction

It is customary to begin a study of candidate emergence by appealing to its importance in democratic theory. The usual claim is that accountability through electoral control hinges on the existence of competition for office. The implicit contract between districts and their incumbent representatives can only be enforced through the threat of removal from office in the next election. The credibility of this threat is dependent on the potential for competent challengers. Next, the author laments the difficulty introduced by the selection problem inherent in studying latent challengers. Since we only observe the entrants and not all those politicians who contemplate a campaign we are often hamstrung when trying to study the decision to enter. Yet prime time quips and entrenched insights of political science continue to attach a great deal of importance to the ambition of the politically motivated.

Within the emergence literature, Schlesinger (1966) is simultaneously both revered and ignored for describing an *opportunity structure* in American politics. The combination of motivated politicians with shared beliefs over the relative benefit of each political office transforms a set of offices into a series of offices. The hierarchy of offices becomes an institution for political careers. Plotting moves through the opportunity structure is a strategy to satisfy progressive ambition as politicians may choose a multitude of career paths. Most researchers present a rational choice perspective, where politicians choose the path through the opportunity structure with the highest utility. In dealing with the selection problem, studies of emergence employ the office sought as the unit of analysis. Where Schelsinger elaborated on the path to electoral success as the result of an ambitious climb through lower offices, many researchers focus on the ability of a higher office to attract quality candidates from lower offices (see Jacobson 1989; Squire 1989; Lublin 1994; Carson 2003, 2005). Their studies are therefore limited to examining characteristics of the incumbent and the so-called national tides and local forces.

However, by changing the focus from the striving politician to the sought after electoral office, researchers have given up attempting to predict the challengers for an office and the challenge of grounding Schlesinger's insights in a tighter model. If we would like to study the explicit choice process of potential entrants, I suggest using the behavior of a subpopulation that we can observe, such as members of the U.S. House of Representatives and their choice to run for the Senate. Some researchers employ innovative methods to address the non-observation of potential challengers who never enter a campaign. Stone and Maisel (2003) use an innovative survey design in order to generate a sample of "potential candidates." Of course the same innovations that allow the Stone-Maisel approach to flourish keep it from being extended to a system which we might be able to use for prediction. Since their study is not easily replicated or connectable; privacy concerns do not allow for linking their subjects to the actions they have taken since the survey was administered.

Schlesinger (1966) writes "Representative government, above all, depends on a supply of men so driven; the desire for election and, more important, for reelection becomes the electorate's restraint upon its public officials." To study ambition theory, we need to study the supply of potential challengers, not just the demand for challengers. Schlesinger offered an ambition classification scheme of discrete, static and progressive ambitions; a typology offered for understanding this "supply of men." Schlesinger was trying to explain the behavior of a politician through the office currently held and the constituency an elected official aims to please. Progressive ambition requires that a politician seek to impress the constituency of the targeted future office. Schlesinger examined differences between offices, but the differences within a particular office might hold more or additional insight. The local neighborhood in the opportunity structure that a politician finds herself in is determined by the office that is currently held. But there is variance at this level. Not all constituencies for a particular office will create equal platforms for the next career move. Sticking with the ladder metaphor, we might say that all rungs are not created equal. Preferences for an office may be separated from factors that affect career route choices, such as strategic interaction with other politicians, as well as local conditions and national electoral forces. Members of Congress are not merely the results of a single strategic-interaction, but a complex system of recruitment, selection, and socialization (by parties, elections, and political experiences). Schlesinger's language calls for a complex systems approach. Complexity seems natural because the story is one where

the choices of politicians and even selection (or election) of candidates is based on fitness criteria and not optimality.

Ambition theory is a natural partner with the adaptive parties model (Kollman Miller and Page 1992). It would be difficult to construct the game tree that a politician faces with respect to career path decisions. Researchers faced with environments so inherently uncertain might be better off considering choice problems from the perspective of complex systems (de Marchi 2005). With respect to the progressive ambition of House members, the opportunity structure faced when considering a Senate run is related to the similarity in the political landscapes of the member's current district constituency and the prospective statewide constituency. Through (repeated) reelection to the House, MCs have been selected for high fitness in electability for the specific political landscape of their district. However, districts that are similar to their states have incidentally selected a representative that would also be successful at performing well in the political landscape of the state. Empirical analysis supports the idea that members of the House are more likely to run for the Senate when their districts have high congruity to their prospective statewide constituency.

The candidate emergence literature is limited in its ability to inform the study of entry. Fowler (1993) notes an over-focus on incumbents, this is the result of studying emergence since the models attempt to measure the demand of quality candidates as opposed to investigating a micro-logic of supply. They predict which seats should attract strong challengers based on either national or target seat level factors. Entry models should aspire to predict which candidates will emerge and not merely the occurrence of candidate emergence. Entry has to be studied at the level of the decision maker and the knowledge that goes into that decision. The adaptive parties model creates a useful framework in which to consider quality and knowledge. High quality candidates are often associated with knowledge. Not only does quality increase with the constituency's knowledge of the candidate, but also it increases with the candidate's knowledge of the district. For the progressively ambitious this makes having a congressional district that is congruous to the state as a whole a valuable platform. Similarly, increases in political knowledge explain why candidates can increase their probability of winning a district after they run there repeatedly (Fenno 1978, Rohde 1979). The adaptive parties model makes rigorous a boundedly rational conception of political knowledge

with the idea of a political landscape. Borrowing the idea of the political landscape, empirical support is found to support the idea that as congruity increases between a House member's district and state that House member is more likely to run for the Senate.

1.1 Senate Elections and Emergence

Much of the empirical study of U.S. elections focuses on the House of Representatives. The House is a a more attractive object of study, elections are held for every 435 seats every two years as opposed to only a third of 100 seats up for election every two years. But there are few theories of elections that suggest that contests for the House and Senate are different in kind. Gronke (2000) comparing both types, argues that differences are in magnitude and not in scope. There is no firm theoretical reasoning to suggest that most of our understanding of one type of election should not transfer to the other, particularly with respect to questions of quality, entry, and emergence. However, Squire (1995) suggests that the House and Senate have different dynamics with respect to challenger emergence. Claims to the generalizability of results based on empirical research should probably be met with some skepticism.

Incumbency dominates the study of elections because of the high rates of return enjoyed by members of the U.S. Congress (Jacobson 2001). Incumbents enjoy many great and well-known advantages in congressional elections in the United States; greater name recognition, proven experience and leadership, established records and accomplishments, as well as more tangible resources of office such as the franking privilege and donor lists for fundraising. Despite these strong advantages, incumbents are not unbeatable (this point is so easily forgotten that Rohde 1979 needs to remind the reader) and quality challengers that face incumbents are relatively successful (Jacobson 2001; Lublin 1994). Quality challengers may even force the retirement of some MCs (Carson 2003 and 2005) which justifies the attention given to quality in the study of candidate emergence.

In particular, Jacobson and Kernell (1983) in their seminal study of candidate emergence in congressional elections argue that strong candidates that have a good chance of defeating an incumbent wait until the political environment swings against the incumbent. Most notably, incumbents

will face a strong challenger when the national political environment is unfavorable for the incumbent's party (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Typically, strong challengers are thought to be those candidates who have previously held political office. These previous office holders tend to have more political capital, or assets such as experience running campaigns, elite political connections, more name recognition, proven leadership experience, and a familiarity with the district in which they are running. Jacobson (1989) finds that high-quality candidates are responsive to electoral conditions that favor their party. Jacobson employs several dependent variables including emergence, specifically the probability that a House challenger has had previous electoral officeholding experience. With this research design, one is not able to examine the effects of electoral context or so-called local forces on the entry decisions being made.

Abramowitz (1998) showed that Senate elections are heavily influenced by the characteristics of the contestants, as opposed to merely being functions of the national political climate. His study is useful for bringing measures of state partisanship and ideology along with a measure of ideological distance of the incumbent senator and state to predicting incumbent success. He finds support for the idea that (ideological) fit between a senator and state is useful for explaining electoral outcomes. It holds that this relationship should be useful in predicting the behavior of potential challengers. The analysis over Senate elections from 1920-1994 by Highton (2000) suggests that there is a great deal of variability in the impact of co-variates used to explain electoral outcomes over time. In this paper, the data is not "long" enough to investigate structural changes in the candidate entry decisions or probably be overly concerned with this issue.

Squire (1989) and Lublin (1994) both study candidate emergence for Senate elections. Squire moves away from dichotomous measure by defining a seven-point quality scale which ranks the quality as governors, House members, statewide officials, state legislators, local officials, other political positions and scores at zero those candidates with no political office. He extends this scale by accounting for the percent of the state covered by a legislator's (congressional or state house) district. As Squire hints, this scale is fairly arbitrary (seen with respect to the larger states), but it is an important step in attempting to capture the idea that an elected official's fit with her constituency contains useful political information that can be leveraged when seeking a new office.

Squire finds measure useful in predicting challenger campaign expenditures and electoral success.

Lublin (1994) employs a quality scale similar to Squire's, but his focus is to add variables to measure the effect of local electoral context on results over a long time span (1952-1990). When predicting the emergence of a quality candidate, Lublin predicts challenger quality using only the incumbent senator's previous vote share and state change in per capita income as measures of local forces. This is not satisfactory for several reasons. First, the measure of vote share as proxy for incumbent quality or vulnerability is bound up with many factors relating to the previous election, made plain by Lublin's long list of predictors used in his model predicting incumbent vote share. Vote share is a particularly blunt instrument with which to measure the fit of a Senator to his or her state. Secondly, we would likely expect differential effects with respect to party and the state's economic conditions. As Jacobson (1989) suggests, majority and minority party candidates are not likely to be blamed equally for economic fluctuations. And finally, neither Lublin's quality scale nor his probit estimation give any indication of how he is accounting for Senate elections that attract multiple quality challengers, a flaw that is shared by nearly every study using candidate quality as a dependent variable.

The most recent research to feature challenger quality as a dependent variable is provocative work that tries to seamlessly combine game theory and empirical analysis Carson (2003, 2005). Carson, concerned with misspecification as a result of the interaction between potential challengers and incumbents' retirement decisions employs the strategic estimation recommended by Signorino and Yilmaz (1999). Carson models simple sequential entry/retirement games in which the incumbent chooses to run for reelection or retire and then the challengers chooses to enter the contest or to stay out of the election. Using the strategic estimation, Carson is able to estimate the relative weights of components of the utility function that enter into each politician's strategic calculus.

But Carson's theoretical problems begin with the sequencing of the game and therefore his estimation. One problem of game theory is its requirement that the available options of agents in a model be limited. The model is forced to treat entry/retirement sequencing as an either-or proposition when in fact the sequencing of entry has no rules in the real world. Furthermore, the derived statistical estimator comes from the game form. By fitting data to his model he is

implicitly making claims about a data generating process which does not exist, but he can not test the appropriateness of the game (or the estimator) itself; only the co-variates he is including in his model. In a larger sense Carson has truly mis-modeled the problem at hand. The approach outlined by his game and Signorino and Yilmaz (1999) is to model TWO decision makers and their interaction. But with the data employed, Carson only models an interaction of the incumbent office holder and the pool of potential previous office holders. This dependent variable is recorded as an event if any “quality politician” enters the race. Similarly to the work by Squire and Lublin there is no explanation to what happens if multiple high quality candidates enter the election, nor is there any discussion about the implications of reifying the candidate pool to be a decision maker for his model.

In his data analysis Carson employs fairly standard measures. However he does try to account for incumbent behavior and district preferences using the normal vote for the district and NOMINATE scores for the incumbent. Carson does not interact these proxies which might be a way to link the behavior of the incumbent to the district for a measure of discord. Likewise the characteristics of the district are rarely considered in any statistical formulation (beyond measures of previous voting in various settings). Nor are we given any sense of the fragility of the QRE based estimation technique. Though the theoretical motivation for the model is game theoretic, the true core is an empirical emergence model. Due to their very research design, emergence studies are only able to cope with challenger quality using a binary indicator or an arbitrary scale. They can not give us insight into ambition theory.

1.2 Models of Entry and Retirement

Actual models of entry, as opposed to emergence, have received notable treatments from theoretical perspectives. Black (1972) uses a decision theoretic model to consider progressive ambition. He models an investment in the office currently held, what Schlesinger termed the “base office.” Every successive victory enhances the politician’s investment in politics and thus reduces the cost of running for the next highest office. Similarly, Banks and Kiewiet (1989) employ a game theoretic model of candidate entry to explain why high-quality challengers may delay their campaigns. A

known date is set for the incumbent's retirement which creates a dominant strategy for candidates. In their model, the incumbent does not move strategically, leading to perfect information for challengers about the timing of the open-seat. This gives the model a decidedly decision theoretic flavor. Oddly, there is no game theoretic model which is neatly tied to the dominant model of electoral competition, the spatial model (Downs 1957). One answer might be the lack of equilibria in spatial games with three candidates. Another reason might be due to the difficulty in modeling primaries as part of the entry game (see Aranson and Ordeshook 1972).

Empirical work on entry should begin with a discussion of Rohde (1979) which has largely inspired the current endeavor. Rohde examines House members from 1954-1974 and their choices to run for the Senate or governor's office. He argues that by fixing on a particular class of office-holders in House members, we can focus on the structural differences between them. Rohde develops a concept of risk-acceptance in progressive ambition and shows that House members who started their careers by entering a tough campaign (either against an incumbent or in a district favoring the rival party) are more likely to seek higher office. This adds an important dimension of career path to studies of entry. Brace (1984) extends Rohde's model with a probit analysis creating a dependent variable out of running for reelection to the House or choosing to run for higher office (collapsing the categories of running for Senate and governor). Brace utilizes a measure of constituency overlap which he measures from $1/statesize$. He attempts to capture the vulnerability of the senator by including margin of victory as a predictor and a dummy variable indicating if the senator is a freshman. Francis (1993) studies the entry of state representatives into contests for the state Senate. He shows that the success of state representatives in Senate elections is largely due to their selectivity in choosing which races to enter. Since he is working at the state level he is unable to include many co-variates to explain this behavior.

Coates and Munger (1995) and Kiewiet and Zeng (1993) both offer more general studies of House members' careers. Coates and Munger employ a multinomial Logit model to predict whether an MCs term ends in retirement, defeat, reelection or seeking a higher office. They are interested in studying the possibility that a member loses their seat and the relationship of previous vote share to current outcomes. They find that the most vulnerable incumbents are retiring instead of losing.

They employ a large number of personal characteristic variables for House members, but do not focus on the question of progressive ambition and the structural features of entering a campaign for higher office. Kiewiet and Zeng are concerned with such issues and employ a nested Logit design in order to simultaneously model the choices of retirement, reelection and seeking higher office (collapsing senator and governor, excluding the presidency and vice-presidency). Kiewiet and Zeng attempt to measure the relative ideology of House members (but not in relation to constituents) and they do the usual thing to capture the difficulty of state wide elections for an MC by including a measure of state size as a predictor. They rely on previous margin to account for the fit between an MC and their district. They also do not model the vulnerability of the higher office incumbents and therefore their attractiveness as targets goes unmodeled save for existence of an open seat dummies.

1.3 A Word on District Heterogeneity

The adaptive parties model implies that a complex issue space leads to an incumbency advantage. However, empirical work by Koetzle (1998) suggests opposite results. Koetzle finds that an increase in constituent diversity leads to an increase in competitiveness. Headway could be made criticizing the operationalization of complexity (diversity) and competitiveness, but a more important realization may be that incumbent success may have a non-monotonic relationship with complexity since very simple districts are likely to be highly partisan districts in the US case. The puzzle of the competing claims can be explained by the fact that Koetzle's (and other researchers) so-called heterogeneous districts, are not necessarily very complicated politically. Consider the example of diversity with respect to race. As a district increases in its percentage of African-American voters it will become more diverse, but since African-Americans vote overwhelmingly Democratic such a demographic construction will not create a very complicated political landscape. In this study we are more concerned with the homogeneity between a district and a state and not the complexity or heterogeneity of a district itself.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections: section two is a brief theoretical discussion about the combination of ambition theory with insights from complexity and compu-

tational models of politics; section three describes the data and measures; section four contains a regression analysis of the data; and section five offers remarks about the implications of the study for current and future research.

2 Theory

It is hard to think of elites competing in elections without the Downsian spatial model (1957). The Kollman, Miller and Page (1992) adaptive parties model separates itself from the canonical spatial model by explicitly modeling a multidimensional policy space within which boundedly rational parties are not perfectly informed with respect to the policy preferences of voters. Voters (district preferences) and the rival party form a political landscape, which is a complex problem space. Parties are modeled as search algorithms. The search algorithms are motivated as polling the electorate. Kollman, Miller and Page (1992) find relative stability with party competition pulled toward ideologically central platforms. While KMP model a single district, congressional elections feature a network of neighboring districts with the districts nested in the larger “Senate districts” that are states. Work by de Marchi (1999) with boundedly rational voters and Laver (2005) with multi-party competition have shown the extendibility of the adaptive parties model as a theoretical platform.

The complexities and dynamics of entry from multiple offices allow new insights. Progressive ambition drives politicians toward higher office suggesting that career paths are chosen in order to maximize the ability to win more than the one election for a specific office. Politicians gain experience running political campaigns, learn the norms of electoral office, forge important bonds and relationships, and begin to understand the “district” while being institutionalized into political parties. Since districts for lower office (tend to be) nested in districts for upper office, the progressively ambitious politician will choose to run in the lower office district that will maximize her chances for success at the higher office. If we assume stickiness in candidate spatial locations over electoral cycles, district heterogeneity implies that some lower office districts will be more valuable (and perhaps more costly or harder to attain) than others for the pursuit of the higher

office. Candidates will include this calculation in their efforts to pursue political capital for higher office. This framework leads to two main hypotheses.

I assume that members of Congress are boundedly rational and hypothesize that there are certain districts, which based on their characteristics, make for better launching pads for a long and successful career in electoral politics. I will investigate districts that are more likely to act as *feeder districts* based on their high congruity with the state they are nested in. This is important because representatives from these districts may be able to simultaneously represent their current district and compile a voting record that will appeal to the sought after future district of the state. One way of thinking about feeder districts is that they have a better political landscape mapping to the higher district (adaptive parties in the context of the opportunity structure). Candidate emergence becomes a result of the political landscape. The existence of feeder districts could be evidence of the behavior of rational actors, but it could also be the result of a sort of Alchian (1950) selection process where all elected officials merely appear as if they act rationally by emerging from feeder districts and justify our use of rational choice models without actually satisfying the high bar of rationality. However, studying the choice of entry and not *ex post* success allows a handle on the linkage between choice and selection (as promised by Holland and Miller 1991). In a sense we are investigating the ratio of *bounded* to *rational*.

Zaller (1998) echos these ideas by investigating the concept of electoral selection as an explanation for the incumbency advantage. Zaller uses an analogy of the history of prize fighting and a simple computational model to illustrate the fact that observations of incumbency advantage might simply be explained by the fact the incumbents are better politicians than those they defeat. The mere fact that they are winners conveys something about their electoral quality. With this perspective the incumbents observed are quite fit with respect to the districts that they are competing in. The election becomes a selection mechanism, removing from office those that are less fit than their challengers. This concept directly informs the present study. Members of Congress are politicians who are quite fit for their districts. If the political landscapes of their districts happen to be similar to the political landscapes of their state, then by a sort of historical accident these politicians will also be quite fit politically to win statewide election. This is a sort of *exaptation* (Gould and Vrba

1982) which is held in contrast to an adaptation. An exaptation occurs when a characteristic is made fit under one selection mechanism (i.e., the congressional district) and then found useful for some other purpose (i.e., winning the statewide election for the Senate seat).

3 Data and Measurement

We examine the period from 1992-2002. This is a sample of 6 elections and 840 Representatives who are eligible for the Senate (age thirty and a Senate seat currently up for election) and seeking (re-)election to Congress. Only 41 of those members decided to challenge for the Senate. For this dataset MCs of the same party as their Senate incumbent are coded as ineligible to run for the Senate. In addition, a number of special elections are dropped¹. We collect data to examine the relationship between an MC's district and state political landscapes, if the incumbent senator is running for reelection, and several other variables measuring the personal characteristics of the MC. The paucity of MCs choosing to run for the Senate and our subsequent decision to construct a parsimonious model of entry is discussed in the next section. All statistical analysis was performed with Stata 8.2.

The feeder district hypothesis can be studied by examining the entry and success of U.S. Representatives running for the Senate. By utilizing Scott Adler's congressional district data, a measure of the characteristic difference between a congressional district and the "state district" (meaning the district for the U.S. Senate) that it is nested in has been constructed. With the assumption that this measure of dis/similarity of characteristics is a proxy for the dis/similarity of a adaptive parties political landscape with the conjecture that an MC in a district that is a close match for the entire state will be more likely to run for U.S. Senate and more likely to win, *ceteris paribus*. In this way, feeder districts are used to explore the role of complexity.

The measure of similarity between a district and its state is termed *congruity*. Congruity is built from 28 variables in the Congressional District Data File (Adler 2003)². These variables

¹The special Senate elections not included in the analysis are California 1992, Oklahoma 1994, and Kansas 1996. Both California elections in 1992 are omitted due to the oddness created by Pete Wilson's Senate retirement and the existence of two simultaneous Senate elections.

describe a variety of demographic, economic and geographic characteristics of each district. We sum the differences between a district and its state, first putting each characteristic on the same scale by standardizing each characteristic within state. The congruity measure is built from all 435 House districts, not just those districts in the subsequent analysis.

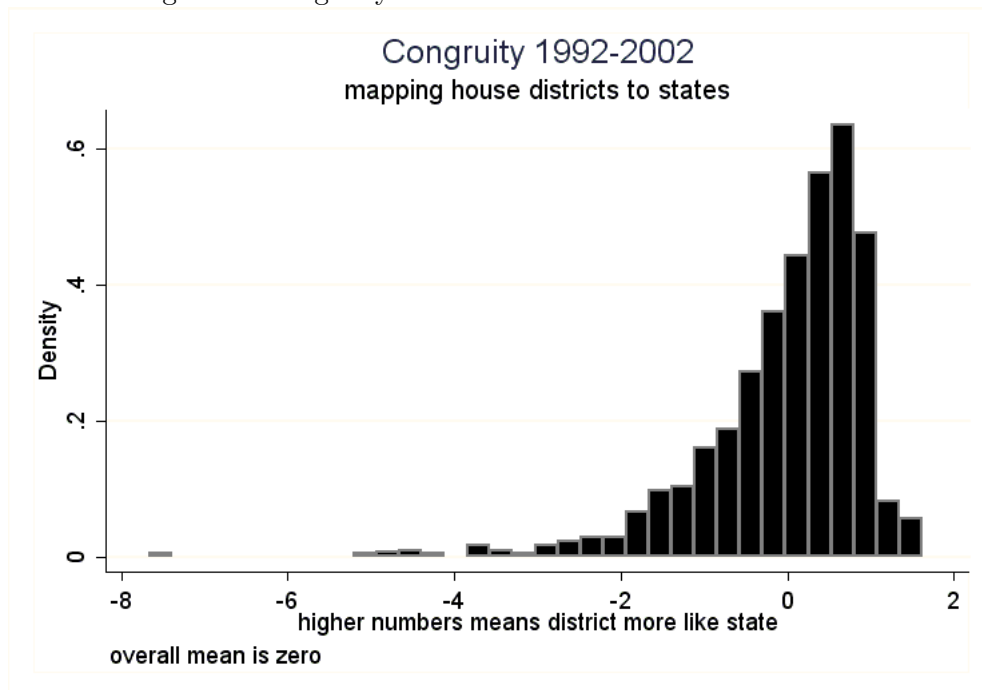
$$\text{raw congruity score} = - \sum_I \left(\frac{x_i - \bar{x}_i}{\sigma_i} \right)^2 \quad \forall \text{ districts} \quad (1)$$

Where x_i is a district characteristic, \bar{x}_i is the mean characteristic score for a district's state and σ_i the state's standard deviation for characteristic i . For demographic characteristics we use percentages (e.g., the percent of the districts population that is black). After computing the raw score it is standardized, creating a measure that is mean 0 and standard deviation 1 for all districts in the time frame under-study. The measure increases in congruity so that high scores indicate a high level of similarity between a district and its state.

Congruity, while not a perfect measure has a number of advantages as a measure of the similarity between a district and its state. Chiefly, it is interpretable as a score even if the political significance is non-obvious. Most studies employing district characteristics have attempted to find the relationship between those characteristics and electoral returns (see Gronke 2000). Obviously, any measure of district-state similarity has an upper-bound since there are states which only have one congressional district. The upper-bound for congruity is a score of 1.621. Looking at figure 1, it is clear that there is no similar lower-bound. Alternatives like similarity in presidential (or other state-wide) elections would be confounding the similarity of the political landscapes with the residue of the strategy and context of that election. One potentially large drawback to the use of

²The variables used include the number of African-Americans, Number of blue collar workers, district contains one of the fifty largest cities, district adjacent to coast line, number of people enrolled in public schools, number of foreign born citizens, acres of land owned by the federal government, square miles in the district, district population by square mile, population of district, population living in rural farm areas, population living in urban areas, number of people age 65 and over, bank assets, number of military institutions in the district, number of major military institutions, military population, district contains a nuclear power plant, number of people unemployed, number of people in construction industry, number of people employed as farmers, number of people employed in manufacturing, number of people employed in wholesale or retail trade, number of people employed in finance, insurance and real estate, number of government (federal, state, and local) employees, number of veterans, size of the civilian labor force, number of people working in transportation and public utility industries, and the district's median income. Adler's data was extended from 1998 to 2002 by employing data from the 2000 Census with the help of John Aldrich, Michael Brady and Brendan Nyhan.

Figure 1: Congruity as a function of census characteristics



census characteristics is the necessity to use the same demographic measurements for a ten-year period (and there is no easy way to interpolate the inter-censile period, but see Aldrich, de Marchi and Rohde 2005). In previous studies, researchers have often tried to capture this concept by using state size (measured by number of congressional districts, see Rohde 1979), we collect this data as well.

To measure the fit between a senator and the state-wide constituency a measure is developed to account for (mis-)matchedness which is termed discord. Roll call voting behavior measured by DW-NOMINATE (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) is compared to a state’s political preferences. Discord for senator k is constructed to be

$$discord_k = (\epsilon_{1k})^2 + \omega(\epsilon_{2k})^2 \tag{2}$$

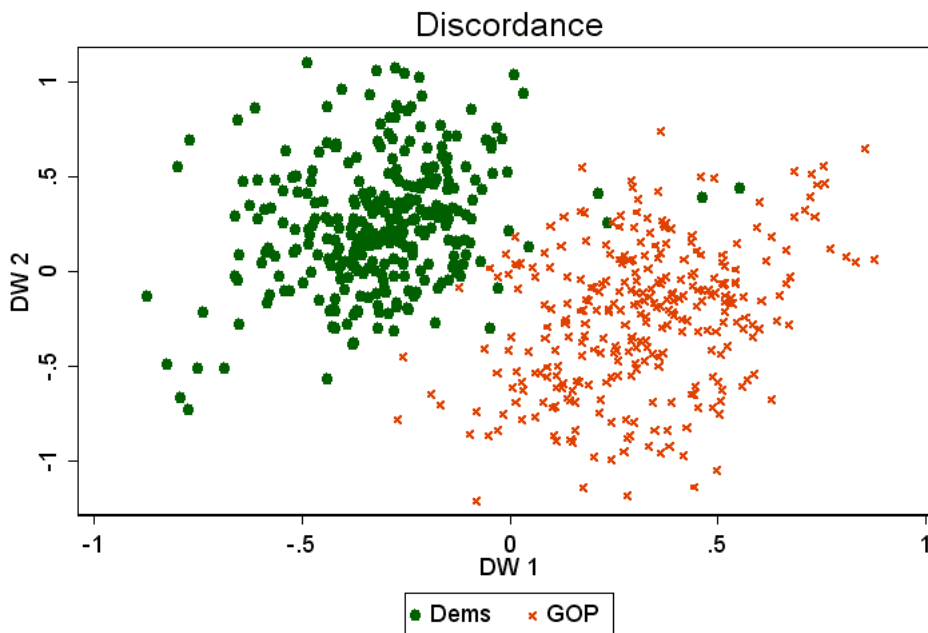
where the ϵ ’s are residuals from two regressions which predict each dimension of DW-NOMINATE from the (updated) Wright, Erikson and McIver (1985) partisanship and ideology measures (and

the squares and cross-product). These partisanship and ideology measures are derived from the CBS News/*New York Times* annual state level polls. Weighting the second dimension is done such that $\omega = .375$ (see Poole 2004). This measure is similar to the one used by Theriault (1998) in his study of MC retirement. Theriault predicts vote rating scores from the Conservative Coalition with the vote for Bush in the 1992 presidential election in each MC's district and then uses the residuals from this regression as a measure of "district incompatibility." Figure 2 reveals the aggregate pattern of the relationship between senators and their states.

Scholars of recent American politics will quickly recognize a familiar pattern amongst the scatter plot of the residuals. The errors from the discord or compatibility regression are graphed by party. For Democrats, negative residuals from the regression predicting the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE implies that they are voting more liberally than their constituents would prefer. Since a negative residual results from a predicted estimate DW-NOMINATE that is greater than the realized value and the fact that in the modern era DW-NOMINATE scale negative values are associated with liberal voting records. The scale of the second dimension works in the opposite direction where positive residuals imply an overly liberal voting record. As one would expect, the discord scores are highly correlated with the underlying DW-NOMINATE scores. The advantage to using discord is that it incorporates information about the relationship between senator and constituency. Alternatives to this measure would include using the absolute value of DW-NOMINATE or the euclidian distance between the party center and senator (Carson 2005). But these measures do not attempt to directly include the electorate. A second reasonable alternative that would measure the fit of a senator's electoral relationship to his district more directly would be to use their vote share in the previous election. Vote share is the summary statistic that drives the KMP model and electoral selection more generally. However, vote share is confounded with a number of determinants that are unrelated to the present study, including the quality of the last challenger, or the previous economic conditions. etc. Furthermore, there are 6 years between Senate elections, making any data about the relationship between senator and district fairly stale compared to the discord measure which is re-calculated for every electoral cycle.

The personal characteristics of the House members useful for present analysis include the

Figure 2: Discord of senators and their states



member’s age, length of their House tenure (measured in years), and a measure of their political aversion to risk taking. For the risk-taking measure I employ a similar device to Rohde (1979) and record whether or a not a member’s first successful campaign for the House was against an incumbent. The expectation is that a MC who aggressively challenged an incumbent to gain a House seat might be more aggressive in risking their (relatively) safe House seat and seeking election to the Senate. With the age and tenure variables we suspect that as MCs age they will become less interested in seeking a seat in the Senate. With respect to House tenure, we suspect a non-monotonic relation. There is some amount of time a MC needs to serve in office in order to establish a reputation with both voters and political elites. However after several successful re-elections, decreasing returns to this political knowledge likely sets in. Of course, some members will be constrained by popular incumbents and will choose to delay (or forgo) Senate campaigns. Age and tenure are moderately correlated with each other, but that does not prove to be a problem in the regression analysis.

Before engaging in regression analysis, it is useful to compare the two groups of MCs (Senate runners and eligible non-runners) presented in Table 1.

Table 1: **Means of Variables:** House Members 1992-2002

Chose to Run for Senate?	No	Yes	P-Value
Congruity	-.023	.491	0.001
State Size	18.653	11.488	0.001
Age	54.328	49.366	0.001
Tenure	10.294	8.561	0.078 ¹
Incumbent	.628	.366	0.001
Discord	.189	.205	0.491
Risk	.227	.341	0.089
Observations	799	41	

Includes all House members running for Congress eligible to run for a Senate seat and excluding members of the same party of the incumbent.

P-values from two-tailed T-tests on the difference in means for the two groups (n.b. ¹ Using one-tailed test).

Using T-tests to compare the means of members who chose to enter a Senate campaign and those who opted for a reelection contest, I find a substantial difference in the means of two groups across nearly all of the variables in the study. On average, MCs who ran for the Senate came from districts that were more like their states, they come from smaller states, they are younger, they have served fewer years in office, they are more likely to face an open Senate seat and they were more likely to have challenged an incumbent in their first victorious House campaign. A one-tailed test revealed significant difference between the groups with respect to tenure. This is likely due to the existence of the non-monotonic relationship discussed previously. Even more problematic seems to be the group difference with respect to discord. Here MCs who run for the Senate face only a slightly more discordant incumbent (on average) and the difference is not significant. However, this can be easily explained. The effect of mis-matchedness of a senator-state on MC Senate entry is highly dependent on the electoral status of the senator. Most crucially, if the senator is campaigning for re-election high discord suggests vulnerability which should attract the strategic House candidate. However, for those MCs considering a seat vacated by an out-going senator low discord might signal the opposite information. Examining the difference in the means with the extra layer of the incumbent senator seeking reelection reveals that this variable also exhibits significant differences in the means of the groups MCs.

4 Analysis

Before engaging in multivariate regression analysis, we can employ an outcome plot (see figure 3). An outcome plot is used to explore the two measures of political landscape similarity, congruity and state size and their effect on the choice to run for the Senate. Even though state size has been suggested as a substitute for measuring district to state similarity in the past, the correlation between congruity and state size is fairly low ($r = -.122$). From the scatter plot we can easily see that nearly all of the MCs who choose to run for the Senate serve in districts that exhibit a higher than average congruity with their state. This holds independent of the size of the state. Perhaps the most striking feature of the graph is the placement of the representatives from California who chose to run for the Senate partially because of the state's right most position on the state size spectrum, but also because of the persistence of the congruity claim in the most populous state. California representatives Barbara Boxer's Marin County district and Michael Huffington's Santa Barbara based-district were both above average on the congruity measure.³ Tom Campbell's Silicon Valley area district, while below the national (by a third of a standard deviation), is just slightly below the mean congruity for all California districts.

A logit regression is used since the dependent variable is a binary outcome, run for reelection in the House OR run for the Senate. Congruity, state size, age, tenure, discord, incumbent (a dummy variable indicating whether or not the current senator is seeking reelection), and the risk variable are included as predictors. Even though there are 840 observations there are only 41 *events* (MCs who run for the Senate) recorded on the dependent variable. Since the data could be perfectly classified with 41 parameters, the need for a parsimonious model is fairly high when working with this data set. For this reason we also estimate a rare events Logit model as well (Tomz, King and Zeng 2003). At just under 5% events, the dependent variable may be considered a borderline rare events problem (King and Zeng 2001). The estimated coefficients (presented in Table 2) are extremely similar for both regressions so we proceed with a discussion of the standard logit results.

All of the coefficients have the anticipated sign. The standard errors were estimated to be small

³Boxer is excluded from the regression analysis due to the double seat problem.

Figure 3: Running for the Senate, congruity, and state size

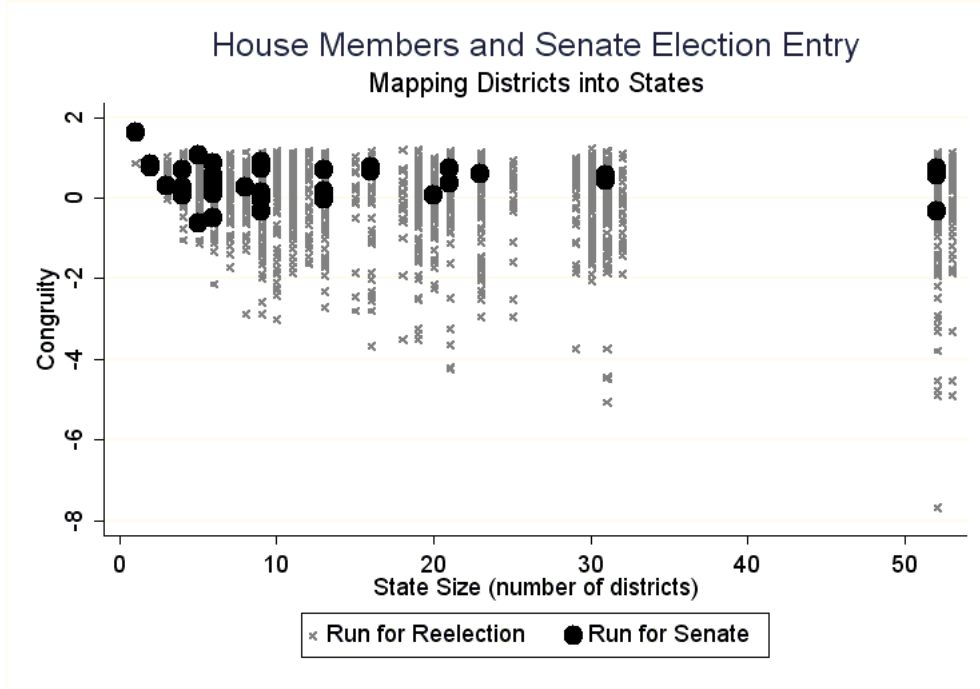
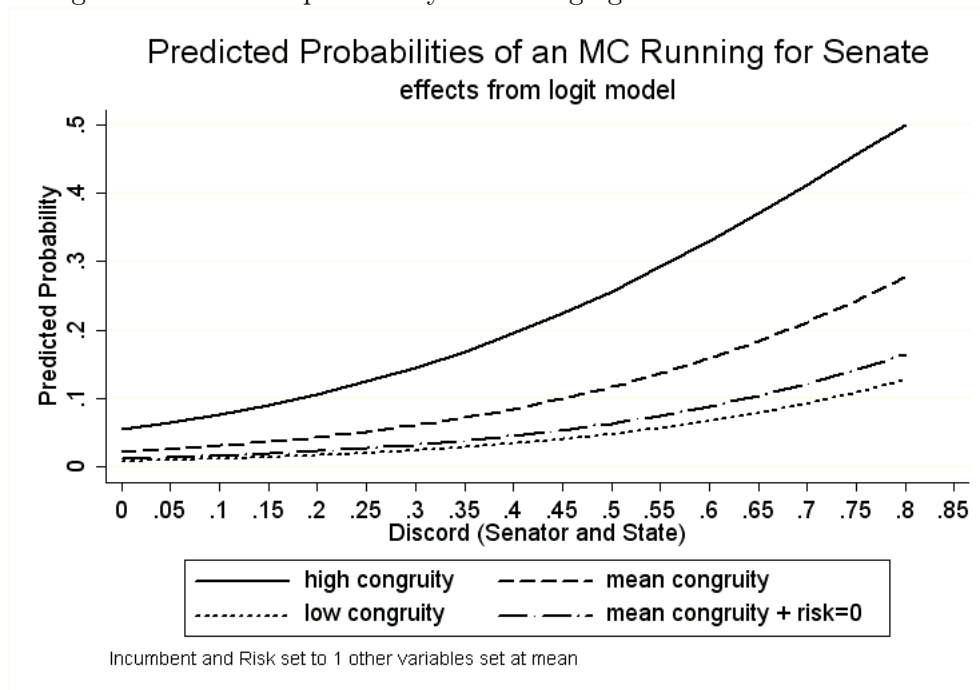


Table 2: **Logit Regressions:** House Members Entering Senate Elections (Yes=1 and No=0)

Variable	Logit Coefficient	Standard Error	Clustered Std. Err.	Rare Event Logit Coef.	Robust Std. Err.
Congruity	0.962	0.307	0.232	0.920	0.223
State Size	-0.049	0.019	0.025	-0.046	0.026
Age	-0.064	0.024	0.022	-0.061	0.020
Tenure	0.415	0.134	0.126	0.374	0.132
Tenure squared	-0.018	0.006	0.007	-0.016	0.007
Incumbent	-2.454	0.662	0.586	-2.345	0.609
Discord × Incumbent	6.237	2.657	2.043	5.984	2.19
Discord	-2.691	1.698	1.252	-2.320	1.309
Risk	0.662	0.366	0.353	0.660	0.359
Intercept	0.033	1.295	1.199	-0.006	1.068
Number of observations	840			840	
Log likelihood	-130.72			.	
Pseudo R^2	0.202			.	
Area under the ROC Curve	0.8354			0.8364	

Figure 4: Predicted probability of running against an incumbent senator



enough to suggest significance at the conventional level with the exception of the discord variable (which has a p-value just above 0.13). Regardless, if we calculate robust standard errors, clustered for year and state all of the co-variates achieve conventional significance. There are probably uncaptured partisan effects with discord that should be explored when more data is obtained. For instance, an outgoing senator with low discord might suggest a tempting target for a co-partisan, while a retiree with high discord might be reacting in anticipation of a rival partisan challenge.

Splitting the sample (by partisanship) and adding dummy variables (for year) is probably best left for footnote-level exploration, but there appear to be no significant partisan differences on the political landscape variables and the year dummies are not significant which is suggestive that there was no macro-political phenomena affecting the progressive ambition of House members throughout the time period under study. The decision for House members might be quite different than those local and state previous office holders who choose to run for the House so this is not necessarily evidence contradicting Jacobson (1989). Since the dependent variable is already selecting on MCs who are running for some type of Washington office, this likely also selects for members who are not so vulnerable to swings in national tides with respect to their campaign decisions.

The predicted probabilities from the logit are graphed in figure 4. We examine the case of a House member considering a campaign against an incumbent senator. On the x-axis is the range of the observed values of discord, the variable which measures the fit of a senator and a state based on the senator's voting record and state partisanship and state ideology both based on polling data. Across this range the predicted probabilities of running for the Senate are graphed at mean, low and high levels of congruity (where low and high are $-\sigma$, $+\sigma$). The risk variable is held at 1, so we examine the case when the MC won election to the House over an incumbent. The age, tenure, and state size variables are held at their mean values. Recall congruity is a proxy for similarity in the political landscapes of a district and state. The model output reveals positive relationships for both congruity and discord (since it is being interacted with an incumbent challenge). The estimated prediction suggests that House members are more likely to run for the Senate when their district constituencies are more like their prospective state constituencies and when the incumbent senator votes more extremely than the senator's state would like.

Interpreting the predicted probabilities takes more care with the borderline rare event data. Although the predicted probabilities are quite small, they are clearly distinct for the two groups. The mean predicted probability of those who run for reelection is .043 while the mean predicted probability for those who run for the Senate is .165. Using a T-test, these means are significantly different from each other. Examining the Logit model's ability to discriminate between cases, the area under the ROC curve which is .835 suggesting moderate to good discrimination. The MCs for whom the model mis-predicts a House reelection campaign tend to be from the biggest states and choose to face-off against an incumbent. Such over-prediction with respect to state size is not so prevalent. This might suggest that there is a non-monotonic relationship with respect to state size since big states still demand challengers for state wide office even if House members running for state wide office are disadvantaged with respect to their small state colleagues.

One of the stated goals of this paper was to develop a model that would aid in predicting which members of Congress choose to run for the Senate. One flaw of the current model is that it selects on members who are choosing to run for either the House or the Senate (ignoring retirees). Ideally, a model that aims to predict career moves needs to account for retirement (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993)

and alternate office goals (such as the governor's mansion; see Coates and Munger 1995). Another concern for the present analysis is the likely non-independence of House members from the same state considering a Senate run. One frequent suggestion for this problem would be a fixed-effects model. With the low number of observations in the current data set that would most likely over-fit the data. The current work suggests that using more predictors which describe the characteristics of the MC and state (or incumbent) in question would likely be useful in more successfully predicting Senate challengers. It is trite, but clear that the present analysis would surely be improved with more data. Furthermore, that would wash-out variables of interest such as discord and the effect of incumbent retirement. However, researchers are never going to observe the inner-workings of the ambitious politician, and we will likely have to content ourselves with extremely low predicted probabilities and therefore a blunt instrument with which to estimate the future career paths of politicians.

5 Concluding Remarks

Most studies of candidate entry focus on national political conditions as the major determinant of a potential challenger's decision to run. However, little research has been directed at understanding the entry of decision which candidates make in order to amass the political capital necessary to successfully contest an election. The major problem with studying entry is the enduring truth that researchers are unable to collect data on the population of potential candidates. One solution has been to employ techniques to identify and survey potential challengers who did not run (such as in the Candidate Emergence Study of Stone, Maisel and Maestas 2004). Another way of avoiding the issues of external validity that might be attached to such survey designs is to limit the scope of the analysis from all potential challengers to a defined group. In this study, I used members of the House of Representatives as such a sample of potential challengers.

If we hope to understand the ebb and flow of politics we need dynamic micro-models of politicians. Ambition theory can be extended to help us develop such a model which might help us understand how politicians act collectively in order to achieve policy and private goals, amidst

opportunities, shifting conditions and factions. Moving beyond cohesive parties requires greater understanding of where elected officials come from. This makes the study of electoral entry central.

In order to further understand ambition theory and the its effect on entry in elections, we must better understand candidate quality. Empirical models of emergence tend to define quality as opposed to measuring it. This paper has focused on a single, theoretically-informed aspect of quality, positioning on a political landscape, or more precisely the similarity in the political landscape of the congressional district that a politician has already been found fit for and a prospective state landscape. I find suggestive evidence that similarity based on demographic, geographic, and economic factors is useful in House members assessments of their prospects to win a Senate seat.

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