

CANDIDATE QUALITY, ELECTORAL COMPETITION, AND THE INCUMBENCY
ADVANTAGE IN THE U.S. SENATE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jamie L. Carson)

ABSTRACT

A majority of what we know about congressional elections comes exclusively from the study of the House of Representatives. This dissertation seeks to fill a significant hole in that literature by asking important questions about congressional elections in the context of the Senate. Using data from 1914 to 2010, I am able to present patterns and trends over time in the study of Senate elections.

In Chapter 1, I provide a brief overview of the study of Senate elections as well as the central research questions in this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I examine who runs for the Senate. In addition to this question, I examine the suitability of various measures of “candidate quality.” I find that the dichotomous measure of candidate quality, first employed by Jacobson, performs similarly to more complicated scales and ranking procedures typically used in the Senate. In Chapter 3, I address the question of whether or not incumbent Senators are able to ward off quality challengers by amassing a sizeable campaign war chest. I find that, with proper measurement, incumbents are able to prevent the emergence of a quality challenger.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I turn to one of the most studied questions in congressional elections research. The question of why incumbents are reelected at such a high rate has yielded a substantial literature in the House, but little attention in the Senate. Using methods first used in the House, I find evidence of an incumbency advantage in the Senate since the 1950s. In addition, I find that trends in the growth of the incumbency advantage mirror patterns found in the House. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the findings of this dissertation as well as offer suggestions for future research.

INDEX WORDS: Senate, Congressional Elections, Incumbency Advantage, Candidate Quality, War Chests

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DEDICATION

For my boys, Ryan and Noah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For a bill to successfully navigate the legislative process it must have approval from both houses of Congress. As a result, scholars of the legislative process are forced to study both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Yet, scholars who study the equally important question of how congressional elections work, commonly treat the institution as a unicameral legislature. Most of what we know about congressional elections comes from the study of elections to the House of Representatives. In the vast literature on congressional elections, surprisingly little attention has been given to the election of senators. This dissertation seeks to fill that void in the literature by addressing three important questions in the study of electoral politics in the context of the United State Senate.

It is well known that the Founders arrived at the creation of a bicameral legislature as a compromise between the interests of large and small states. Yet beyond the size of the population, the creation of the Senate was also meant to assure those concerned with the diminishing power of state governments in this new Constitution. As originally mandated by the Constitution, Senators were chosen by the state legislatures. In fact, state legislatures even had the ability to “instruct” Senators on how to vote on certain issues (Bybee 1997). These connections between state legislatures and senators were all meant to ensure the protection of states’ rights at the federal level and to serve as a check on the popularly elected House of Representatives. Yet, calls to sever the ties

between state legislatures and senators began soon after the ratification of the Constitution. On February 26, 1826 Congressman Henry Stoops of New York called for a constitutional amendment for the direct election of senators (Abramowitz and Segal 1992). Intermittent calls for a change in the election of senators continued throughout the nineteenth century, yet the proposals were quickly abandoned because they initially stood no chance of passage by two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-fourths of the state legislatures.

However, the progressive movement at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century brought with it the right ingredients for change. Political scandals and a growing awareness of corruption in government spurred the movement. Reformers largely acknowledged that state legislatures were the most corrupt of current institutions. After numerous charges of bribery in Senate elections at the turn of the century, states began to call on Congress to amend the constitution in favor of the direct election of Senators (Abramowitz and Segal 1992). In 1912, Congress passed the constitutional amendment and it was then ratified by the requisite number of states and officially became a part of the Constitution on May 31, 1913. Calls for changes by the states certainly helped to assure the quick passage and ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment. Beginning in 1914, citizens popularly elected their senators for the first time. Although voters have directly elected senators for nearly one hundred years, these elections have received relatively little attention from congressional scholars. This is not to say that they have been completely ignored, but in comparison to the plethora of research on the House, the Senate truly seems to be the “forgotten chamber” as suggested by Hibbing and Alford (1982).

Elections are at the heart of a democratic system of government. In particular, understanding electoral competition speaks to important normative questions of representation and accountability. As a result, scholars have dedicated a great deal of time and effort to the study of congressional elections. However, a significant majority of the congressional elections research focuses solely on the House of Representatives. Scholars have largely excluded the Senate from their analyses of congressional elections. With only approximately thirty-three elections in a given year, Senate elections can present statistical challenges that are easily overcome in the House where there are a much larger number of elections held every two years. Yet, to have a clear understanding of congressional elections, more research is needed into the workings of the upper chamber. In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, this dissertation examines questions of competition, accountability, and representation using data collected on all Senate elections since the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment.

One of the most commonly made observations about the Senate in the existing literature is that elections in the Senate tend to be more competitive than in the House (Hinckley 1980, Abramowitz and Segal 1992, Krasno 1994). The starting point for this argument is typically the reelection rate of incumbent members of each body. In the post-war era, the reelection rate for incumbents in the House of Representatives averages approximately ninety-three percent. In that same time period, the reelection rate for incumbent senators is only seventy-nine percent (Jacobson 2012). Much of the existing research uses this simple fact as a jumping off point and goes on to examine what makes contests for Senate seats so much more competitive.

There are some unique aspects of the Senate that might lead to significant differences between the elections in the two chambers. The constitutional requirements to serve in the Senate vary slightly from the House. Senators must be thirty years old and a U.S. citizen for nine years, while House members need only be twenty-five and a citizen for seven years. Perhaps the most notable difference for those serving in the two houses is the differing term length. Each House member must return to the voters for approval every two years. Senators were initially divided into three classes and every two years only a third of the Senate is up for reelection, providing senators with a six-year term. These six-year terms in office are the longest of any popularly elected national office.

Unlike members of the House who all face a constituency of approximately the same size, senators represent their entire state. As a result, some modern day senators, who represent the smallest states, may have a constituency of less than one million individuals. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a senator that represents the most populous states may face a constituency twenty or thirty times larger. The larger constituency faced by Senate candidates during an election certainly leads to differences in campaigns for the two chambers. Senate elections are considerably more expensive (Jacobson 2013). Candidates are forced to rely more heavily on television advertising and more costly forms of communication with voters. When campaigning through an entire state they can rely less on personal contact and these methods significantly drive up the cost of the campaign and election (Mayhew 1974a, Hernnson 2008).

While structurally the two chambers of congress may be very different, there are many reasons to suspect that elections to both houses function in largely the same way.

First, elections to both the House and Senate occur in the same electoral context. They face the same national conditions in a given election year. The economic conditions that have proven to play such a large predictive role in election outcomes (Jacobson 1989) are the same for a Senate candidate as they are for a candidate in the House. Similarly, presidential approval, an important predictor of national partisan tides, does not vary between House and Senate elections. Recent scholarship has found that Senate elections are susceptible to these national tides (Abramowitz 2002, Erikson 2002). In addition, elections to both chambers occur at the same time. Candidates for both houses find themselves on the same ballots in November. Similarly, both houses of Congress face the same legislative issues. Other than confirmation votes, candidates for the House and Senate deal largely with the same salient issues of the day and are held accountable by the same subset of voters at the polls.

This dissertation seeks to address three questions essential to the study of congressional elections in the context of the Senate. The following chapter will address the critical question of who runs for the Senate. Not all candidates for elective office are created the same. Some individuals are simply stronger candidates than others. While one might expect all Senate candidates to have significant previous political experience, they often do not. In the study of the House of Representatives, scholars have widely accepted that candidate “quality” is best operationalized by determining whether or not an individual has previously held elective office (Jacobson 1989). In the Senate, this measure has been met with skepticism and a variety of alternative rankings have been proposed (see, e.g., Abramowitz 1988, Squire 1989, Lublin 1994, Krasno 1994). Using almost a century’s worth of data on Senate elections, I am able to not just paint a picture

of the most common career paths for Senate candidates, but also to comment on the appropriateness of various measures of candidate quality in the study of Senate elections.

Contrary to what one might expect I find that not all Senate candidates have previous elective experience. In fact, just over half of the challengers to incumbents seeking reelection had previously held an elected office. Of those “quality challengers” the most common position they have held is a seat in the House of Representatives. When comparing various measures of candidate quality I find that all perform similarly. The simple dichotomous measure, commonly used in the House, offers similar results and explanatory power to the more complicated scales and rankings previously used in the Senate literature. In the future, scholars can feel more confident using previously held elected office as a measure of candidate quality in Senate elections.

Next, I turn to an examination of money in Senate elections. Raising large sums of money is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to electoral success. Senate candidates, in particular, must raise increasingly large sums of money. In 2010, the average cost of a Senate race was 7.55 million dollars (Jacobson 2013). Specifically, I examine whether or not incumbent Senators are able to scare away quality challengers by amassing large campaign war chests. In theory, experienced or quality challengers are those who are most strategic about their entry decisions. When considering a run for Senate, those individuals who have previously held elective office may examine the money already raised by a Senate incumbent and feel that the incumbent’s fundraising advantage is insurmountable. In addition, senators have six years in office to raise funds for their reelection bids. Challengers do not begin planning and fundraising this far in advance. As a senator gets closer to an election year they may begin to ramp up their

fundraising efforts. This may be particularly true in the final two years as they seek to ward off any potential challengers. Previous research has found that campaign war chests do not have the ability to preempt a quality challenger from emerging (Goodliffe 2007).

Yet, with proper measurement there may in fact be a scare off effect for campaign war chests. My findings show senators do in fact dramatically increase their fundraising efforts in the next to the last year of their terms. As a result, when properly measured I find that senators are able to frighten away quality challengers by amassing a sizeable campaign war chest. This is an important finding that has broad normative implications for representation in the Senate. As Senate races have become significantly more expensive in recent decades, fewer and fewer candidates have been able to raise enough money to mount a successful challenge against well-funded incumbents.

Finally, I turn to an area of research frequently examined in the House of Representatives: the incumbency advantage. The study of why incumbents are reelected at such dramatically high rates has received constant attention from congressional scholars over the last fifty years. Yet all of this attention has been focused on the House of Representatives with little notice given to Senate incumbents. Part of the reason for this discrepancy lies in the reelection rates in the two chambers. In the House, the reelection rate for incumbent candidates since 1946 has averaged 92 percent. During that same time percent in the Senate, incumbents were successfully reelected 79 percent of the time (Jacobson 2013). Early research in the House of Representatives sought to identify a single cause for the incumbency advantage (see, e.g., Cover and Brumberg 1982, Fiorina 1977, Tufte 1973). Recent research has offered a more nuanced view of the incumbency advantage allowing for multiple explanations for the advantages accruing to

incumbents. Drawing on work from the House, I examine the incumbency advantage in the context of the Senate.

I find strong evidence of an incumbency advantage in the Senate from 1950 onward. In particular I find that the growth in the incumbency advantage is largely due to growth in the overall quality effect. This is defined as the advantage that one party experiences when fielding a quality candidate when the other party does not. Notably, these findings parallel the findings of Cox and Katz (1996) for House of Representatives. While one might expect significant differences in the effects between the two chambers, their resemblance is remarkable. Previous work has suggested that the incumbency advantage in the House is largely due to redistricting efforts (Cox and Katz 2002). These findings cast doubt on that explanation as redistricting is a concept limited to House districts and does not exist in the Senate.

A final contribution of my work is the collection of Senate elections data back to 1914, the first direct election of all United States Senators.¹ In that time nearly 1700 elections to the Senate have occurred. Perhaps one of the reasons that previous work has shied away from the study of the Senate is the statistical challenges presented by only having thirty or so cases to study in a given election year. By amassing nearly a century's worth of data, I am able to offer not only a larger sample size, but also speak to trends and changes in the chamber over time. Increasingly scholars have found that by turning to the study of elections outside the post-war period, we are able to gain additional leverage on important questions that have previously gone unaddressed (see, e.g., Carson, Engstrom, and Roberts 2007).

¹ Prior to the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, some states had already begun to employ the direct election process for choosing senators. However, 1914 marks the first year in which all senators were chosen by voters as opposed to state legislatures.

The concluding chapter offers broader implications for the findings in the preceding three chapters. In particular, I am able to make comparisons across the House and Senate over time. Certainly the two chambers have their differences, but unlike previous research I find that there are more similarities in patterns across the two chambers than previously noted by scholars. At the end of the day, I hope this discussion facilitates even greater interest in research on the Senate across other domains beyond simply how candidates get elected to the upper chamber.

CHAPTER 2

CANDIDATE QUALITY IN U.S. SENATE ELECTIONS

In 1994, Maryland's incumbent Senator, Democrat Paul Sarbanes was challenged in the general election by Bill Brock. Brock had previously held numerous governmental jobs having served as the Secretary of Labor and U.S. Trade Representative in the Reagan administration. Brock had also previously served in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. During his time in Congress, however, he represented the state of Tennessee. Brock resettled in Maryland and worked as consultant in Washington, DC before challenging Sarbanes for the Maryland Senate Seat.

If this same scenario had taken place in a race for a House seat, the majority of scholars would agree that Brock is a quality candidate and should be coded as such using a dichotomous measure, based on whether or not the challenger has ever previously held elected office. However, scholars studying Senate elections would disagree wildly on the way in which to code Brock's candidacy. Since he did not hold an office just before running for the Senate he could be coded as a non-quality challenger for some. This seems counter-intuitive because Brock had already proven he could win a seat in Congress. Yet other scholars (see, e.g., Abramowitz 1988, Lublin 1994) would rank him either a 4 or 3 on a four-point scale of challenger quality. Candidates who had previously held a seat in the House are given a ranking of four and former Senators are given a ranking of three.

Yet still other measures become even more complicated when trying to assessing “quality.” Squire (1989) rank orders previous offices held and then multiplies them by the percentage of the population the office represented. Including this measure of constituency size is meant to serve as a rough measure of the size of the pool of eligible candidates. In the case of Brock, his previous office was not in the state in which he sought elected office in 1994. Finally, yet another measure employed when studying the Senate would give Brock a rank of five on an eight-point scale of challenger quality.

As this example shows, evaluating challenger quality in Senate elections can vary dramatically depending on what measure you choose to employ. In addition, many of these measures are complicated and raise potential coding difficulties in unique situations like the Maryland race in 1994. Similarly, in 1986 a former governor of Massachusetts ran for a Senate seat in New Hampshire. These same concerns would arise when coding that race. However, in the study of the House of Representatives, Jacobson’s (1989) simple dichotomous measure of previous elected experience has become widely accepted and used in research. Employing this measure so frequently used in the House would render the concerns in the Maryland Senate race null and void. Senate scholars have offered few reasons for not employing this simpler measure. With its parsimony and ease of replication, it deserves consideration as a measure of challenger quality when studying elections to the upper chamber of Congress.

Elections at their most basic level offer voters a choice between two candidates. Yet, even casual observers of the political process can readily agree that not all candidates for office are created equal. Some individuals inherently make better candidates than others. Political scientists have rightly dedicated a substantial amount of

time to determining what constitutes a “quality” candidate in congressional elections. Particular attention has been given to those individuals who choose to challenge an incumbent when seeking elected office. The advantages of incumbency have been well documented. Many scholars have sought to understand both when and why a quality challenger chooses to run for Congress. As with most congressional research, more interest has been given to the study of challenger quality in the House of Representatives. However, the challengers in Senate races have not been entirely ignored. The biggest difference between the literatures in the two chambers is the acceptance of a standard measurement in the House of Representatives and several alternative measurements offered in the context of the Senate.

Using data collected on Senate elections from 1914 to 2010 I seek to address two basic, but important questions about candidate quality in Senate elections. First, who runs for the Senate? Where are candidates who seek a seat in the upper chamber of the House most likely to emerge from? Consideration will also be given to those who have previously never held an elected office. The second question to address is how should we measure candidate quality in the Senate? By comparing both the dichotomous measure of candidate quality with several of the various rankings previously proposed by scholars, I will be able to speak to the suitability of each measure.

Oftentimes scholars shy away from studying the Senate because of the limited sample size available. With only an average of 33 races each election cycle, the number of cases available to study can present problems for statistical analyses. Using data on all elections to the Senate since the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment generates a significant sample size. It also allows me to present trends and patterns over time in

candidate emergence. I have collected background information on all candidates for the Senate from nearly the past one hundred years. These data will also allow comparisons among various measures of candidate quality suggested for use in the Senate with the commonly used dichotomous measure of previous political experience most often employed in the House.

Literature Review

The quality of the candidates who challenge congressional incumbents has become an important area of research. The publication of the 1978 National Election Studies Data led to an interest in comparison of candidates for both the House and Senate. The survey data showed that incumbents are viewed more favorably than challengers. However there was a real discrepancy in voters' awareness of challengers in Senate and House elections. Senate challengers seemed to be relatively well known by respondents, while House challengers were largely unknown (Abramowitz 1980, Hinckley 1980). Mann and Wolfinger (1980) highlight the difference between recall and recognition. Voters are rarely able to recall the name of incumbents or challengers. But when presented with the names, they typically recognize incumbents from both Houses and only Senate challengers. The only names voters were routinely unable to recognize were those of House challengers. This ability to recognize and judge a candidate based on his or her name more closely resembles the act of voting. This finding led many to conclude that Senate incumbents always face stronger challengers.

Westlye (1983, 1992) highlights the trouble with relying on the NES data from 1978, particularly in the context of the Senate. The survey data relied upon by so many to claim that Senate elections are universally competitive dramatically over sampled

more populous states. Using state-level data, Westlye argues that Senate elections can be classified as either hard-fought or low-key races. He further concludes that Senate challengers are not all well known and there is considerable variation in the salience and intensity of Senate elections.

The contribution of Jacobson and Kernell (1981) raised the importance of considering the quality of congressional challengers in all research. In their investigation of strategic politicians, Jacobson and Kernell find that those who have previously held any elective office are more likely to run for Congress when conditions are favorable. Jacobson (1989) offers similar results with an expanded data set from 1946 to 1986. A quality challenger, defined as someone who has previously held elected office, is more likely to emerge when both national and partisan tides are in her favor and, once in the race, is more likely to win. These experienced candidates are found to do better and receive a greater number of votes than their counterparts that lack previous elective experience. Jacobson relies on a dichotomous measure of challenger quality based on candidates who have previously held any elected office.

The Jacobson measure of challenger quality has become widely accepted in the literature on elections to the House of Representatives. Yet, it is not without its detractors. Some argue that boiling candidate quality down to whether or not a candidate has ever held an elected office excludes too much information. Bond, Covington and Fleisher (1985), for instance, measure candidate quality in two different ways. First, they use the natural log of a candidate's campaign expenditures. Understandably they argue that the ability to raise large sums of money signals a candidate's strength. They also include a rank order of previous offices held. Candidates who had previously served in

the House of Representatives, as state legislators, and those individuals who had previously won more than forty percent of the vote in a House race are coded three. The second ranking goes to those individuals who have held a city or county position, were from a prominent political family or worked in politics. The final ranking is reserved for those candidates with no discernible political experience. Bond, Covington and Fleisher also use a composite measure that combines both political experience and fundraising. Using this measure of candidate quality, they find that the most highly-skilled candidates are most likely to emerge when district-level partisan forces are in their favor.

Jacobson (1989) argues that there are three reasons to favor his simple measure of candidate quality over more complicated scales. First, the measure is “objective and non-circular.” The very clear criteria for being labeled a quality candidate can be easily replicated and are not subject to the individual biases of various researchers. Next he argues that, “the measures very crudity favors the null hypothesis and so offers a tough test” (776). The simple nature of the variable only makes it more difficult to find an effect. Finally, whether or not a candidate has previously held elected office is the most readily accessible information available on most congressional candidates. Background information about candidates dating back to post-WWII period had to be gleaned from newspaper reports or other sources.

Despite the more detailed measures proposed by some, the parsimony and ease of replicating the simple dichotomous measure of previous elected experience have made it the traditional control variable in the study of House elections. However, scholars studying Senate elections have been reluctant to adopt the dichotomous measure of candidate quality. Lublin (1994) argues that previous measures are too subjective and do

not rely on empirical results. Others argue that the Jacobson measure does not capture political skill and attractiveness, the two components of challenger quality (Green and Krasno 1988, Krasno 1994). As an alternative, most opt instead for far more complicated rankings and scaling techniques.

Senate Research

Scholars who study the Senate have been reluctant to accept the measure of challenger quality so commonly used in the study of the House. That is not to say that the dichotomous measure has never been used in the Senate (see, e.g., Carson 2005). Yet, often time Senate scholars offer their own, varying ranking for the quality of challengers in Senate elections.

Squire (1989) offers a less parsimonious measurement of quality in Senate elections. He begins by ranking the office currently held by a candidate: Governors are ranked 6, members of the House 5, statewide officials 4, state legislators 3, local government officials 2 and other political positions are scored 1. This score is then multiplied by the percentage of the state's population the office represents. For example, a governor would be multiplied by 100 percent, while a member of the House's share would vary depending on the size of the state. Because this measure may too harshly penalize legislators from the largest states, the scores of members of Congress are constrained to fall between 300 and 500. Using this measure, Squire finds that the most important predictor of the emergence of a quality challenger is the size of the candidate pool. In this instance, the size of the quality candidate pool is defined as the number of "out party" members who hold the governorship, house seats and statewide partisan

elected offices in a given state. When a quality challenger does emerge, they are able to raise more money than their inexperienced counterparts.

Squire (1992) further refined this measure scoring each challenger's campaign abilities based on published reports about their potential as a campaigner. Using individual-level data from the 1988 NES Senate Elections Study, he found that voters were more likely to have contact with and a more favorable opinion of a higher quality candidate. This is presumably because higher quality candidates are able to capitalize on their current elected position as they seek to reach potential voters.

Lublin (1994) offers an empirically derived scale of challenger quality in his study of Senate elections. He finds that members of the House gain a higher proportion of votes than governors or other statewide officers when running for the Senate. As a result, Lublin ranks members of the House of Representatives the highest on his four-point quality scale. Governors, statewide officials, and former senators are ranked three. Local officials receive two points and state legislators receive just one; any inexperienced challengers are ranked zero. Lublin proposes that voters may believe federal offices require a different skill set than state offices. However, he fails to control for candidate spending in his model predicting the success of Senate candidates, raising statistical concerns about omitted variable bias. Despite this omission, Lublin's measure has gained traction as a measure to be used when studying Senate elections (see, e.g., Goodliffe 2007).

Still a third measure of challenger quality employed in the study of both the House and Senate is offered by Krasno (1994). In a scale first used by Krasno and Green (1988), challengers are awarded a base of four points for having held an elective office.

A candidate who has previously held elective office can then earn an additional four points if he currently holds the office, for the prestige of the office, previous candidacies, and celebrity status. Thus, the highest score any experienced candidate could have on the Krasno and Green scale is eight. Those candidates with no previous elected experience may still earn up to seven points for their celebrity status, professional status, work for a political party, non-elective offices, and previously lost races. As one can imagine, this measure may be quite difficult for others to successfully replicate. Scholars may have differing opinions about awarding a challenger points for “celebrity” or “professional” status. Similarly, scholars may dispute the awarding of points for those who have previously run for and lost a seat in the Senate.

Abramowitz (1988) and Abramowitz and Segal (1995) narrow the definition of a high-quality challenger for Senate races to include only Governors and House members. They also include a separate control for “celebrity” status. In their sample of seven election years, they code six individuals as celebrity challengers. These individuals include two astronauts, a prisoner of war, White House advisor, and a university president who had been involved in a highly publicized confrontation with students. Similarly, Canon (1990) points to the success of a particular breed of challengers with no previously political experience. There are in fact well known “actors, athletes, and astronauts” who have successfully won congressional elections with no previous electoral experience. Canon, studying elections to both the House and Senate, calls for a reexamination of political amateurs, as not all non-quality challengers are created equal. He proposes three types of amateurs: the hopeless amateur, the policy-oriented amateur and the ambitious amateur. Again it would be difficult for other scholars to replicate this

varying scale, yet he does highlight the difficulties with lumping candidates into generic groups for the sake of parsimony.

Each of these three measures lacks the parsimony and consistency of Jacobson's dichotomous measure of candidate quality used in the context of House elections. Additionally, Carson (2005) uses the simple measure to study both the House and Senate successfully. Yet, Senate scholars have never truly embraced the dichotomous measure in their study of elections. Challenger quality is a critical topic in the study of elections. Failing to properly control for the strength of the opponent an incumbent faces can lead to erroneous conclusions about the size of the incumbency advantage or competitiveness of a race. Similarly, improper measurement of challenger quality may inadvertently bias results. Previous work has yet to arrive at a consensus about the proper measurement of challenger quality in Senate elections, which is the focus of the next section.

Candidate Quality: What does it mean?

Inherently we know that not all candidates for elected office are equally suited for the job. Some individuals seem to be natural born politicians. These people are able to speak easily and eloquently to a crowd of potential voters. There are individuals who are able to kiss babies, shake hands, ask for money, and manage a campaign with relative ease. Yet other individuals seem uncomfortable and struggle in the political spotlight. Political scientists recognize these differences, but finding a way to quantify the strength of a challenger is not straightforward. There are three areas that the best candidates for elected office excel in: electioneering, appealing to a constituency, and experience.

Part of the difficulty comes from defining what exactly constitutes a quality challenger. Part of it is certainly some skill at electioneering. Strong candidates must know how to effectively run and manage a political campaign. They must know who to hire to manage the various parts of the process. Yet, simply hiring the right people does not guarantee victory or success. The candidate is typically the head of the campaign. He or she sets the tone and can override the decisions made by paid campaign staff. Even the best campaign staff may not be able to overcome a weak candidate. In addition, electioneering skills include the very important ability to raise money and appropriately manage those campaign contributions.

At the same time, a candidate must have some inherent appeal. The overall “attractiveness” of a candidate is a particularly nebulous concept. The best candidates will appear natural in front of a crowd, be charismatic, and easily speak to various groups. For candidates to be successful they must compel people to choose them when casting a vote. An individual seeking elective office must be able to convey some level of trustworthiness, competence, and an ability to relate to a wide variety of people.

Finally, one could argue that the best challengers have some sort of life experience that will assist them in running for office. This spans beyond the ability to manage a campaign to include knowledge of both policy issues and the political process. The best candidates are able to speak eloquently on a variety of issues and propose ways in which they might enact changes. This could mean that they are highly educated or have some life experience, which provides them with personal knowledge of a particular policy area.

Simply asking whether a candidate has previously held an elective office helps highlight all three of these areas: electioneering, attractiveness, and experience. A candidate who has previously convinced voters to choose him over another candidate has proven experience running a successful campaign, attracting voters, and experience serving in an elected office. Certainly winning a governorship requires a candidate to get more votes than winning election to a city council. However, creating arbitrary rankings of elected offices that attempts to capture this information can be deceptive. In most of the coding schemes used to measure quality in the Senate, members of the House of Representatives are typically ranked higher than a mayor. Yet, in many states the mayors of large cities may be better known than a member of the House.

In addition, capturing an entire political career in any one variable is simply impossible. Researchers are forced to make a variety of judgment calls. Do you include only the office or job held prior to announcing one's candidacy? Squire (1989) codes individuals this way, which excludes many individuals who, because of the staggered elections of various offices, have held high ranking elected office but are not currently serving when they announce their intentions to seek a Senate seat. Many individuals have served as both members of the House and Governors before seeking a Senate seat. For an ambitious politician, there is no single path to climb up the career ladder. In fact, we would expect strategic politicians to run for those seats that they believe they have the greatest chance of winning. This strategic behavior may in some instances lead to a non-traditional career path.

A final concern often raised by researchers is the difficulty in trying to capture fame by employing dichotomous measures of candidate quality. Presumably a famous

candidate does not have to work as hard to raise their profile or name recognition within a state. However, fame in no way guarantees success. These candidates still need to be able to meet the above criteria and demonstrate to voters that they are capable of representing their interests. Appeal as a celebrity may not necessarily translate into votes. These individuals still need to be able to raise money, spend it appropriately, and appeal to voters in the political context.²

Previous Measures

Table 1 summarizes the various measures of candidate quality that have been used in the past to study congressional elections. Again, in studies of the House of Representatives the simple dichotomous measure of whether or not a candidate has previously held elected office has become widely accepted. Bond, Covington and Fleischer (1985) proposed an alternate ranking of previously held offices, yet it has not caught on and become widely used like the Jacobson (1989) measure.

It seems that each scholar who studies Senate elections has proposed his own varied measure of candidate quality. Of the rankings listed in the chart, they all treat those individuals who have never held elected office similarly, ranking them as zero. Both the Abramowitz and Lublin rankings then place state legislators just above those candidates with no elective experience, while Squire moves them higher up the list. There is also substantial variation in the upper end of each scale. Lublin ranks House members the highest, arguing that his empirical analysis found them to be the strongest candidates. Abramowitz and Squire rank governors as the strongest candidates for the

² Just like having large amounts of money to spend on a campaign is no guarantee of electoral success (Steen 2006), being a celebrity does not ensure the path to electoral victory.

Table 1: Previous Measures of Candidate Quality

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
House Measures							
Bond, Covington and Fleisher (1985)		No Political Experience	Elected City or County Office Congressional Aide Prominent Political Family Party Official	State Legislators Former House Members Won more than 40% in a previous House Race			
Jacobson	No Elected Experience	Previously held an elected office					
Senate Measures							
Lublin (1994)	No Elected Experience	State Legislators	Local Officials	Governors Former Senators Statewide Officials	House Member		
Abramowitz (1988)	No Elected Experience	State Legislator Local Office (pop. < 100,000)	House Statewide Office Local Office (pop > 100,000)	Governor			
Squire (1989) ** ranking multiplied by % of population represented	No Office	Other Political Positions	Local Official	State Legislator	Statewide Office	House Member	Governor

Senate, their rationale being that governors have already won a statewide election. One of the difficulties that arise in replicating various scales of candidate quality in the Senate is the exclusion of some elected offices. For example, the Abramowitz ranking does not mention where to place former Senators.

There is one omission from Table 1, as the Krasno and Green measure used to study both the House and Senate does not fit neatly into any ordered categories. Krasno and Green begin by giving a base score of four to any individual who has previously held elected office. Then, in an effort to capture what they term the “attractiveness” of a candidate, each candidate can earn up to four additional points for various reasons. As such, individuals who have never held elected office can earn up to four more points for differing reasons. The Krasno and Green measure attempts to capture a more comprehensive picture of a candidate’s electoral prospects. However, this scale is extraordinarily difficult to replicate and somewhat arbitrary. Researchers may not agree on what constitutes a “celebrity,” one of the factors that gains a candidate an additional point. While replication of this measure may be possible for modern day elections, it becomes increasingly difficult as one goes back further in time.

Most of the measures used to capture candidate quality in the Senate have relied on a relatively short time frame. Lublin uses the most election years in his analysis, including data from 1952 to 1990. Squire uses only four election years and Abramowitz employs data from seven election years. Particularly in the context of the Senate, with only one third of the membership seeking reelection in a given election year, the ability to study many election years is crucial.

Data

To assess the appropriateness of various measures of challenger quality in the context of Senate elections, I collected data on all candidates running for the Senate since the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment. Using these data on all Senate elections from 1914 to 2010 allows me to paint a more complete picture of Senate challengers. During that time period there were 1687 Senate races in total.

Once basic information on the election outcomes was entered from Michael J. Dubin's *United States Congressional Elections, 1788 –1997*, I searched for background information on all Senate candidates and coded this information for both candidates. Table 2 presents the various categories employed to describe a candidate's background. I began by searching the Congressional Biographical Directory.³ Any candidate who has served in the Senate or in the House is listed in this directory. In many instances I am certain that these individuals also held other elected offices prior to serving in the House of Representatives. Based on the earlier discussion, however, I coded their most recent office. Coding an individual's entire political career in various elected offices is beyond the scope of this project since it would not change the criteria by which one would be considered a quality candidate.

If an individual had never served in either the House of Representatives or the Senate then I expanded my search for their previous experience. I relied heavily on archives of both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.⁴ They frequently ran articles about Senate elections in the weeks and months leading up to Election Day that would

³ The Congressional Biographical Directory is managed by the Clerk of the House of Representatives and can be searched online at: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>.

⁴ Online archives of both the New York Times and Washington Post are made available through the ProQuest search engine.

mention in passing some background information about each candidate. I also searched the Political Graveyard website which compiles biographical information about U.S. politicians. This website is run and maintained by Lawrence Kestenbaum and was the source for many individuals who served as state legislators and elected state officials. Finally, if I was unable to find anything using those sources, I turned to an internet wide search using GoogleTM. This would sometimes yield useful information, such as a mailer the state of Oregon sent to all voters with background descriptions of all the candidates running in 1932. On occasion I would find other sources with background information on a Senate candidate. However, if I could not be sure that the source was talking about the correct individual then I left that person uncoded. There are 235 candidates in total that I could not find definitive information about whether or not they had previously held elected office.⁵

With these data collected I was then able to recreate four measures of candidate quality for Senate candidates over the past century. For the purposes of presentation, these variables are named after the scholars who proposed their usage. The Jacobson measure codes any individual who had previously held an elective office one and those who have not, zero. I was also able to recreate the Lublin, Abramowitz, and Squire measures (refer to Table 1 for the specifics of these rankings). In some instances these rankings offer no instructions for how to code particular groups, such as former senators, and as a result they are simply coded as missing data for those rankings.

Other variables included in the analysis of Senate elections from 1914-2010 include the number of congressional districts in a state. This is used as a proxy for state population, which has proven to be an important consideration when studying the Senate

⁵ These cases have been excluded from the current analyses.

(Lee and Oppenheimer 1999). Candidates for the House of Representatives each seek election from roughly the same sized constituency. However, the size of a senators' constituency can vary wildly from the smallest states with population sizes well under one million⁶ to the state of California with a population of over 37 million (U.S. Census 2011).

Controls are included for midterm election years and southern states. Midterm election years historically experience lower turnout. Yet it may be that without the presidential race at the top of the ticket, Senate races are able to draw more attention and money in these years. Controls are included for southern states because during much of the time period, the Democratic Party dominated politics in the South. The nearly exclusive one party control of the region, for a portion of the time studied, could drive results in those states. Two controls are included to measures characteristics of the incumbent Senator. First, tenure in office is included as a control. Some people propose that the longer a senator serves the more vulnerable he becomes as his age becomes an issue. Finally a control for party is included—specifically, whether or not the incumbent is of the same party as the incumbent president.

Findings

The first question to address is who runs for the Senate. For those who have previously held an elected office, by far the most common position that candidates hold prior to seeking election to the Senate, is a seat in the House of Representatives (See

⁶ States with population estimates fewer than one million according to the 2010 census include: Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming.

Table 2: Quality Candidates by Party and Type of Race

		Open Seat Races		Incumbent Contested	
		Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem
	Current Senator			586	619
Federal	Vice President	0	2	0	1
	Former Senator	15	10	17	10
	House	103	103	99	106
State	Governor	47	46	53	40
	Lt. Governor	4	7	15	9
	Secretary of State	1	5	7	4
	State Attorney General	7	8	21	7
	State Auditor/Treasurer	3	3	9	6
	Other State Level Positions	1	4	4	2
State Leg	State Senate	21	19	43	46
	State House	12	23	47	64
Local	Mayor	11	12	26	15
	City Council/Alderman	1	2	12	7
	District Attorney	0	6	1	3
	Elected Judge	2	1	3	3
	Other Local Official	4	2	1	2

Table 2). The second most common political office is governor. However, if we combine the individuals who have served as members of a state house and state senate into one category as state legislators, then their presence in Senate races outnumbers governors. While jumping from a state legislature to the United States Senate may seem like a larger stretch, many state legislators seem willing to try. It is also worth noting how remarkably similar the types of candidates running in both open seat and incumbent-contested races appears to be. One might expect more members of the House and/or Governors to emerge in open seat races. Previous scholarship suggests that these

individuals are the most qualified and strongest candidates likely to emerge in Senate elections.

Next, I turn to examining those inexperienced individuals seeking elective office. Most studies of challenger quality simply lump these individuals together and provide little background information on those individuals who have never before held elective office. Table 3 provides career information on those people who have never before been elected, yet seek a Senate seat broken down by party. For both Republicans and Democrats, the most commonly held position for inexperienced candidates was an attorney. Thirty-one percent of the Democrats and twenty-five percent of the Republicans without elective experience previously worked as an attorney. This finding should come as no surprise as it also the most common profession for individuals entering the political arena. In the 112th Congress, 55 sitting senators held law degrees (Manning 2010). While there is no set career path for an individual hoping to enter the political arena, the legal field is traditionally the most common entry point for individuals considering elective office.

An interesting difference arises between the two parties when one examines the second most popular career. For Republicans, nearly a quarter of those remaining individuals have some business background. Business experience is also the second most common profession for Democrats, but only accounting for thirteen percent. This finding supports the general stereotypes of the two parties, which predicts Republicans are more business-minded. For Democrats, other popular previous experience comes from working in the federal government, academia, and party work. Other common

Republican careers are in academia, agriculture, the medical field, and working for non-profit organizations or interest groups.

Table 3: Non-Quality Candidates by Party and Type of Race

		Open Seat Races		Incumbent Contested	
		Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem
Federal	Appointed Former Senator	1	0	1	1
State	Appointed State Positions	3	0	1	3
Appointed	Appointed Federal Job	2	4	2	11
	Diplomat/Ambassador	3	0	1	3
	Military	0	0	7	4
	US Attorney	0	0	1	2
	Judge (Appointed)	0	1	7	3
	Cabinet Level Position	4	0	2	0
Private Sector	Academic	3	3	11	17
	Agriculture/Farmer	2	0	13	4
	Attorney	24	23	53	56
	Business	17	11	50	23
	Engineer/Science	2	0	2	4
	Entertainment	1	1	3	5
	Finance	2	1	8	3
	Journalism	2	5	2	5
	Law Enforcement	0	0	2	0
	Medical Professional	1	1	9	3
	Party Official	0	6	9	10
	Teacher	0	0	2	5
	Astronaut	0	0	2	0
	Sports (Coach)	1	2	2	0
	Political Activist/Interest Group	5	1	10	5
	Real Estate	0	1	2	2
	First Lady	1	1	1	1
	Minister	1	0	3	1
	Blue Collar	0	0	2	5
	Miscellaneous	2	1	5	4

There is a perception that those individuals who run for the Senate without previously having held elected office are, by and large, celebrity figures already well known among their constituency. This is certainly the case for some ambitious individuals. There were three former first ladies who sought election to the Senate as their first elected office: Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first lady of Michigan and the first lady of Colorado.⁷ Other categories that might point towards a celebrity status include: entertainment, astronaut, sports, and cabinet level positions. There are relatively few candidates in each of these groups, particularly when one considers the time frame being studied. That is not to say that these are the only professions from which a “celebrity” candidate can arise, but it seems unlikely that they make up a majority of the non-quality challengers in Senate races.

Open Seat Races

Additionally, it is worth spending some time examining open seat elections for Senate seats. Open seat races provide some theoretical leverage on the power of incumbency as they allow us to examine how a Senate race would look without the presence of an incumbent in the race. Open seats occur upon the death, retirement or primary loss of an incumbent. From 1914 to 2010, 101 incumbent Senators were defeated in primary elections. Four open seats contests occurred after Alaska (1958) and Hawaii (1959 special election) were granted statehood. The remaining open seat elections occurred because individual senators either chose not to seek reelection or because of the death of a senator. Nowadays, news of a senator’s choice to not seek

⁷ Lenore Romney ran in Michigan in 1970 and Dottie Lamm, the former first lady of Colorado ran for the Senate in 1998. Both women were unsuccessful in their Senate bids.

reelection typically garners significant media attention, illustrating the importance of open seat races for the Senate.⁸

Table 4: Quality Candidates in Open Seat Races

	Number of Races	Percent
Republican Party Quality Advantage	47	15.21
Both Candidates have previously held elected office	171	55.34
Neither Candidate has previously held elected office	11	3.56
Democratic Party Quality Advantage	80	25.89

It should come as no surprise that open seat races are often the most competitive contests (Gaddie and Bullock 2000). Particularly in the context of the Senate, where once elected an individual serves for six years, contests without an incumbent tend to draw high quality candidates. Throughout the nearly century's worth of data, there are only 367 open seat races. This translates to an average of twenty-two percent of the races having no incumbent present in any given election year.

Of those open seat races, only 11 times did both candidates running for the seat have no prior elective office experience (Table 4). In one of those instances, both candidates had extensive political experience as the White House Chief of Staff and the other as Secretary of Labor (North Carolina, 2002). Certainly an open seat contest with two candidates who have never before held elected office is a rare exception. However, we would expect the other races to typically draw two quality challengers. After all, strategic politicians wait until the conditions are optimal to run for a seat (Jacobson and

⁸ For example see: Jonathan Weisman, "Chambliss Announces Retirement From Senate," New York Times, 25 January 2013.

Kernell 1983). Yet, of the remaining races in which quality data could be found for both candidates, we see that only fifty-five percent of the time have both candidates previously held an elected office. The opportunity to run for a Senate seat without facing an entrenched incumbent is not a guarantee that two quality candidates will emerge. The Democratic Party more often had a quality advantage over the Republican Party in these open seat races with only one quality challenger. This is unsurprising given the Democratic Party's dominance of national politics for significant portions of the previous century.

*Incumbent Contested Races*⁹

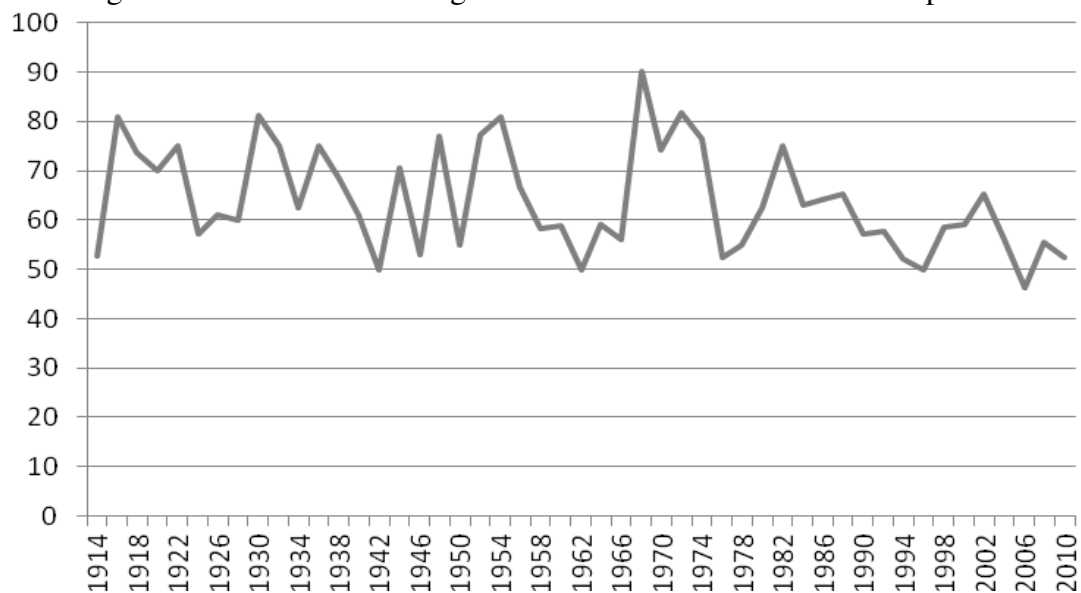
Figure 1 presents the percentage of incumbent contested races with a quality challenger since 1914. Over the entire range of the dataset, 54.3 percent of the candidates challenging an incumbent for office had previously held an elective office themselves. This means that in slightly over half of the races did a quality challenger emerge to take on an incumbent senator. It is also worth noting the considerable volatility in the percentage of quality challengers over time. In some years, the percentage of challengers who have previously held elected office reaches over seventy or eighty percent. Yet in other years the percentage drops to between just thirty and forty percent, reaching an all time low in 1942 of just thirty percent of the candidates challenging incumbent senators having previously held elected office. It is important to keep in mind that because of the relatively small number of elections in a given year, a slight increase or decrease in the number of quality challengers may be magnified in the figure. At best in a given election year there are thirty-three or so seats up for reelection; when uncontested and open seat

⁹ Uncontested races where incumbents run unopposed have been dropped from this portion of the analysis.

races are subtracted to leave only those races with an incumbent seeking reelection in a given year, the effect of a single race may be even greater. As a result, in some cases there are only twenty-four or twenty-five Senate races.

Interestingly the percentage of quality candidates challenging an incumbent is high in the first years following the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment. These were the first years in which all senators were directly elected by voters. Prior to the passage

Figure 1: Percent of Challengers with Previous Elected Office Experience



and ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment, senators were chosen by state legislatures.¹⁰ That process was widely considered to be extremely corrupt (Abramowitz and Segal 1992). It is not surprising that in their first attempts to face the voting public, many experienced politicians sought to challenge incumbents who had originally been chosen for office by state legislatures. While voters may have been familiar with the senators representing their state, voters themselves never had the opportunity to voice approval or disapproval directly.

¹⁰ For more information on Senate elections before adoption of the Seventeenth Amendment, see Schiller (2006).

Comparing Various Measures

Table 5 presents the results of four different OLS models, each estimated using a different measure of candidate quality. The dependent variable is the percentage of the two-party vote for the incumbent Senator. All four models perform very similarly. Understandably, the incumbent senator's share of the two party vote in their previous election is a positive and significant predictor of electoral outcomes. The vote for the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party is also positive and significant. As the number of congressional districts increases, we find a decreasing vote share for the incumbent candidate. This result falls in line with the suggestions of Westlye (1983) and Lee and Oppenheimer (1999) that contests for Senate seats are typically more competitive in larger states. Finally as a control for party, a dummy variable is included to measure the effect on the incumbent's electoral success as a result of being of the same party as the president. The results show that incumbents of the same party as the president fare worse and are at an electoral disadvantage.

The central variables of interest, challenger quality, are always significant regardless of which measure is used and in the expected direction. The coefficient for quality challenger, whether using the simple dichotomous measure or one of the rankings of previous offices, is always negative. This suggests, as one would expect, that the presence of a quality challenger decreases the vote share of an incumbent senator. Nevertheless, the coefficients on the challenger quality variables differ because of the varying scales used. The Jacobson measure is simply a dummy variable, suggesting that the presence of an experienced challenger lowers an incumbent's vote share by 3.2 percent, all else equal. While at the other end of the spectrum, the highest ranking used

Table 5: OLS Model predicting Incumbent's Share of the Two-Party Vote

	Model One	Model Two	Model Three	Model Four
Incumbent Previous Vote	0.3040* (.0404)	0.2903* (.0395)	0.2948* (.0411)	0.3048* (.0414)
Presidential Vote	0.2332* (.0319)	0.2133* (.0316)	0.2268* (.0332)	0.2386* (.0351)
Jacobson	-3.2665* (.6324)			
Lublin		-1.6554* (.1869)		
Abramowitz			-2.4534* (.3214)	
Squire				-0.0108* (.0016)
Number of Congressional Districts	-0.0698* (.0258)	-0.0585* (.0251)	-0.0673* (.0282)	-0.1072* (.0281)
Midterm	-0.4423 (.5699)	-0.2478 (.5566)	0.0973 (.6011)	-0.4815 (.6075)
Tenure	0.0375 (.0449)	0.0102 (.0433)	0.0061 (.0457)	0.0224 (.0469)
South	-0.1592 (.7784)	-0.1266 (.7780)	-0.2098 (.8225)	0.0845 (.8044)
Incumbent of the President's Party	-3.9615* (.6029)	-3.7921* (.5845)	-3.8602* (.6285)	-3.8497* (.6300)
Constant	32.5779* (2.6707)	34.9850* (2.6275)	34.1568* (2.7070)	31.7835* (2.6518)
N	794	784	707	692
R ²	0.2765	0.3175	0.3076	0.3039

*p<0.05

by Squire is a 600 for Governors. The model employing Squire's measure predicts that, all else equal, an incumbent facing a challenger who previously served as governor can expect to lose 6 percentage points.

When we turn to examining the fit of the various measures, we can see that the R-squared values for the four models are all very similar. In this instance, the Lublin ranking performs the best, followed very closely by Abramowitz, Squire, and then the Jacobson measure. Admittedly, the Jacobson measure is a more blunt instrument for evaluating candidate quality. Jacobson (1989) acknowledges that his measure favors the null hypothesis and sets up a more stringent test of the hypothesis that candidate quality can affect election outcomes. That his less-precise measure performs nearly as well as complicated ranking techniques, some of which are derived from empirical analysis, is quite notable.

Table 6 presents the same analysis run on a smaller subset of the data including controls for both incumbent and challenger spending. Unfortunately, candidates for federal office were not required to report their fundraising activities until after the passage of the Federal Elections Campaign Act in 1971. As a result, campaign spending data are only available beginning in 1974. The results displayed in table 6 show the effects of all of the previously discussed variables with the inclusion of incumbent and challenger spending. In each case, campaign spending has a critical effect on election outcomes.

There are a few notable changes to the results following the inclusion of spending data. The number of congressional districts is no longer a significant predictor of election outcomes. Understandably contests in larger, more populous states are often

Table 6: Expanded OLS Model predicting Incumbent's Share of the Two-Party Vote with Spending

	Model One	Model Two	Model Three	Model Four
Incumbent Previous Vote	0.1926* (.0402)	0.1874* (.0401)	0.1954* (.0405)	0.1834* (.0401)
Presidential Vote	0.1213* (.0371)	0.1151* (.0360)	0.1235* (.0390)	0.1339* (.0411)
Jacobson	-2.1017* (.6601)			
Lublin		-1.0913* (.2100)		
Abramowitz			-1.6658* (.3726)	
Squire				-0.0072* (.0019)
Number of Congressional Districts	0.0438 (.0312)	0.0422 (.0318)	0.0359 (.0359)	0.0310 (.0328)
Midterm	-0.1507 (.6116)	-0.1479 (.6057)	0.2549 (.6557)	-0.3519 (.6679)
Tenure	-0.0092 (.0438)	-0.0184 (.0429)	-0.0219 (.0441)	0.0033 (.0449)
South	-2.1566* (.7903)	-2.0155* (.7961)	-2.0853* (.8541)	-2.2094* (.8157)
Incumbent of the President's Party	-3.1132* (.6539)	-3.0379* (.6473)	-2.9341* (.7051)	-3.3624* (.7132)
Incumbent Spending (ln)	1.2247* (.4068)	1.2563* (.4002)	1.0896* (.4113)	1.0660* (.4406)
Challenger Spending (ln)	-2.8176* (.2254)	-2.6574* (.2320)	-2.6570* (.2338)	-2.7556* (.2384)
Constant	64.4075* (5.4663)	62.8993* (5.3939)	64.3168* (5.5983)	65.4078* (5.9430)
N	448	441	399	389
R ²	0.5152	0.5309	0.5235	0.5336

more expensive for a variety of reasons. The inclusion of spending data makes the measure of state population no longer significant. In addition, the control variable for the South is significant and negative across all four models. An incumbent's previous vote margin and the presidential vote in a state both remain important predictors of an incumbent's chances for reelection.

Again the variables of interest are the four different measures of candidate quality. All remain significant and negative with the inclusion of candidate spending. As expected, the size of the coefficients decrease with the inclusion of the controls for both incumbent and challenger spending. The predictive power of the model increases dramatically when controls for spending are added. Whereas the R-squared statistics in the first analysis averages 0.3014, with the inclusion of spending, the average jumps to 0.5258. In addition, the difference between the smallest and largest R-squared values narrows in table 6.

Ultimately, these results suggest that the more complicated measures of candidate quality offer little additional information or explanatory power. Based on the findings reported here, previous scholars' concern over the adoption of the dichotomous measure seems unfounded. This comes as no surprise as the varying measures of candidate quality are highly correlated. In particular, the Jacobson measure is correlated with both the Abramowitz and Lublin rankings at .85. The additional classifications offer little in the way of additional explanatory power. To be clear, I am not arguing that the Jacobson measure is a superior statistical measure. Instead, I argue that the modest gains that can be made from using more complicated measures are not worth the additional time needed to collect the data or the difficulty associated with replicating such measures.

Conclusions

The prevailing thought among scholars of the Senate has been that Senate contests and candidates are “almost always high profile” (Squire 1995, 897). Certainly, on average, Senate contests are more competitive than House races. There are fewer uncontested races in the Senate and the proportion of challengers without previous elected experience is lower, yet they are not *always* or *almost always* competitive.

So, who runs for the Senate? The most common candidates for Senate seats are members of the House of Representatives. These progressively ambitious individuals work their way up the ladder for career politicians and frequently seek out a seat in the upper chamber of Congress. Following House members, the most common group to run for the Senate are state legislators. These individuals seek to make a large career jump moving from representing a small proportion of their state to the national spotlight. Governors, who seem a natural fit for a Senate run, having already won a statewide election, run on occasion but not in large numbers each election cycle as one might initially expect.

Of those individuals who have never held elective office, the most common profession is attorney. Republican candidates are more likely to have a background in business than their counterparts in the Democratic Party. While there are certainly some high-profile candidates who run without having previously held elected office, these individuals do not make up a majority of the pool of non-quality challengers. Of those Senate challengers whose background information was found, sixty-three percent had previously held an elected office. This value is clearly a conservative estimate. If we assume that those individuals for whom no previous experience could be located had

never before held elected office, then the percentage of incumbents who face a challenger with previous elected experience falls to 51 percent.

Understanding and quantifying candidate quality is a critical task for scholars of congressional elections. We know that candidates who have previously held elected office stand a better chance of defeating an incumbent, especially as Senate races become more attractive and competitive over time. Senate scholars have proposed their own varied measures for assessing candidate quality. Although some measures are based on empirical analyses, others are based on a subjective ranking of the offices that best qualify an individual to seek a seat in the Senate. The findings here suggest that the four measures of candidate quality that are considered provide very similar results.

The more complex measures of candidate quality perform only marginally better than the simple dichotomous measure. The reliability of the Jacobson measure is certainly higher than the alternatives proposed by other scholars of the Senate. Researchers employing the simple dichotomous measure of candidate quality need only to ascertain whether or not an individual has ever previously held an elective office—not whether they currently hold that office, or the size of the constituency served by that office, or all the offices ever held by an individual. The parsimony of the Jacobson measure dramatically increases its reliability.

One of the difficulties in studying the Senate is the relatively small number of cases each election year. The easiest way to overcome this problem is to employ a longer timeframe as I have attempted to do in this analysis. As one goes back further in the historical record, the more difficult collection of candidate quality data becomes. The simplicity of the dichotomous measure is certainly the ease of replication. Measures such

as Krasno and Green's eight-point scale are nearly impossible to recreate relying on data from the early twentieth century. An additional and important advantage of the dichotomous measure of candidate quality is the ability to make cross-chamber comparisons. Since the dichotomous measure has become widely accepted in the study of the House of Representatives, we should consider adopting it in work on the Senate as well for all the reasons outlined above.

CHAPTER 3

WAR CHESTS, QUALITY CHALLENGERS, AND U.S. SENATE ELECTIONS

Conventional wisdom and sound reasoning would suggest that Senate races are almost always highly contested, competitive elections. Because Senate elections occur less frequently, there is a larger pool of potential candidates, and the position is more prestigious, one would expect a highly-qualified challenger to almost always emerge to oppose an incumbent senator. However, from 1978 to 2008, only fifty-seven percent of the incumbent senators seeking reelection were challenged by an individual who had previously held any elected office. This finding suggests that senators have found ways to ward off qualified challengers and protect their seat in the upper chamber. One theory, offered by scholars of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, is that incumbents are able to build up substantial campaign war chests that scare off potential challengers. As the cost of mounting a credible campaign rises each year, challengers are frightened away by an incumbent's sizeable fundraising advantage. War chests are yet another disadvantage challengers face when they enter a race against an incumbent member of Congress.

Previous research has offered mixed findings about the deterrent effects of campaign war chests. In addition to these conflicting findings, scholars have been unable to reach a consensus about the proper measurement of both campaign war chests and what constitutes a "quality" challenger. As with much of the congressional research, a majority of the war chest research has focused exclusively on the House of

Representatives. A few studies have examined the deterrent effects of campaign war chests in the Senate and found that they have no effect on the emergence of a quality challenger. However, these studies employ problematic measures of both war chests and challenger quality. The ensuing analysis will investigate the deterrent effects of campaign war chests in races for the United States Senate from 1980 to 2008. With their six-year terms, senators have more time to cultivate a sizeable fundraising advantage before a challenger enters the race. By utilizing more precise measures of campaign war chests and challenger quality, I find that incumbent senators can effectively ward off experienced, quality challengers with preemptive fundraising.

Previous Research

Campaign Fundraising in the Senate

In 2010, the average Senate campaign cost 7.55 million dollars, with sixty-eight percent of those contributions coming from individual donors, while PACs and the candidates themselves each contributing another thirteen percent (Jacobson 2013). If we assume that a candidate must be able to raise at least this average amount to be competitive and that they have five years to raise this sum, then a senator must be able to raise \$4,350 a day. This amount translates into over \$30,000 a week to raise just the average amount contributed to a Senate race. An additional concern for both incumbents and challengers is the ever increasing costs of all congressional campaigns. Scholars routinely demonstrate the rapid rise in the costs of both House and Senate campaigns (Abramowitz 1989; Jacobson 2013). The costs of congressional campaigns from 1974 to

1998 were found to have doubled, even when one accounts for inflation (Davidson and Oleszek 2002).

Why are Senate races so expensive? In many states, senators are required to reach a much larger constituency than candidates for the House of Representatives, both geographically and in terms of population. As a result, they are unable to rely primarily on mailings, yard signs, and radio advertisements. Candidates for the Senate must depend on more expensive forms of media to reach the voters. On average, one-third of a Senate candidate's campaign expenditures go toward television advertising. To wage a high-tech campaign, these candidates build much more professional campaign organizations than their counterparts in the House. Senate candidates typically maintain much larger paid staffs and employ high profile political consultants (Herrnson 2008).

The Competitive Nature of Senate Races

As mentioned previously, one would expect Senate races to be universally competitive. In fact, previous research has found support for this argument. Relying heavily on a 1978 Center for Political Studies National Election Survey, many scholars have argued that voters are more aware of Senate challengers than their counterparts in the House. This 1978 study was some of the first explicit polling on House and Senate campaigns. Over ninety percent of voters were able to both recognize and rate their current representatives in the House and Senate. However, Senate challengers were recognized and rated by 86 percent of the respondents. House challengers were much worse off, with a mere 44 percent both recognized and rated by voters (Abramowitz

1980; Mann and Wolfinger 1980). These dramatically different findings led scholars to conclude that Senate races are generally more competitive.

Westlye (1983) raises concern about the survey technique used in the 1978 NES study. In particular, he argues that large states were over sampled. Obtaining an appropriate sample for Senate elections is difficult and data suggest that Senate races are more competitive in larger states. As a result, surveying individuals in larger states leads to a skewed view of the competitive nature of all Senate races. Westlye instead maintains a distinction should be used between “hard fought” and “low key” Senate contests. From 1972 to 1980, a mere 59 percent of the races were classified as “hard fought.”

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, quality challengers do not always emerge to challenge an incumbent senator. That naturally leads to the question, what keeps qualified challengers away from challenging incumbent senators? The large amount of fundraising necessary to mount a successful challenge seems to be a likely deterrent. Specifically, the large sums raised early by senators to fill their war chests may in fact raise the cost of becoming a candidate for office.

Campaign War Chests

Anecdotal evidence from senators suggests that they are forced to spend a substantial portion of their time raising funds. Many complain that they are pushed to always be raising money while others report leaving the Capitol in between votes to make phone calls soliciting campaign contributions (Lee and Oppenheimer 1999, 114). Members of Congress regularly complain that raising money is “the most unpleasant part of a campaign” (Jacobson 2013, 66). No one enjoys constantly asking others for money,

yet it is a required task of candidates for elected office. Senator John Glenn is reported to have said he'd "rather wrestle a gorilla than ask anybody for another fifty cents" after serving in the Senate for twenty-four years (Davidson and Oleszek 2002, 73). If senators detest raising money for their reelection bids, why do they spend time raising money early in their terms? Certainly senators must believe that their war chests have some deterrent effects on potential challengers. Nevertheless, the current literature offers mixed findings about whether members of Congress are able to preempt a challenger through early fundraising.

Several scholars have found support for the deterrent effects of campaign war chests in their studies of the U.S. House. Box-Steffensmeier (1996) uses a dynamic duration model to determine the influence that campaign war chests have on the entry of potential challengers. Her findings suggest that a large war chest is unable to ward off a challenge altogether, but war chests do diminish the chances that a quality challenger will emerge. Similarly, Goidel and Gross (1994) found that as campaign war chests increase, the chances of a quality challenger emerging decrease. Studying the 1988 elections, Hersch and McDougall (1994) have found that campaign war chests measured one year prior to the election have a strong deterrent effect. This study showed that war chests are able to deter any challenger, and when a challenger does emerge, an experienced challenger is less likely when an incumbent holds a large war chest. Expanding the war chests research outside of the federal government, Hogan (2001) finds support for the deterrent effects of war chests in state legislative elections. Using data from eight states, Hogan finds that war chests can deter challengers; however, states with highly professionalized legislatures are less likely to see these effects.

Alternatively many argue that war chests have no effect on challenger emergence. Krasno and Green (1988) test three factors in elections to the House, which could influence the emergence of a quality challenger: local conditions, national tides, and preemptive spending. They also employ a complicated measure of challenger quality which ranges from zero to eight and awards points on the scale based on previous offices held, elections a candidate may have run in, and celebrity status. They find support for local conditions and national tides affecting candidate quality but not campaign war chests.

Several scholars have measured campaign war chests as the amount of cash on hand at the end of an election as the candidate's war chest for the next election season (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Goodliffe 2001). Measuring war chests as the election nears could present problems of endogeneity as those candidates who fear a strong challenger are the most likely to build up a substantial war chest. Yet in an effort to eliminate the potential endogeneity, scholars have placed strict limitations on the definition of a campaign war chest. Most potential challengers are not deciding whether to run in the days immediately following an election. In addition, many incumbents have no remaining cash on hand at the end of an election cycle. This does not mean that they are unable to build up a substantial war chest once in office. In a study of House elections from 1978 to 1988, over one quarter of incumbents had less than \$20,000 cash on hand in the January following an election (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000). It is unlikely that a quarter of House incumbents would have so little money in their war chests prior to the filing deadline for potential challengers. Despite these concerns, several studies rely on cash-on-hand following an election to test for the effects of

campaign war chests. These studies find that war chests are unable to deter challengers from entering a campaign for the House of Representatives (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Goodliffe 2001).

Two scholars have undertaken the study of war chests in Senate campaigns. Squire (1991) studied the effects of campaign war chests in Senate elections from 1979-1980 and 1987-1988. Those factors that proved to be the best predictors of a large campaign war chest were a large pool of high profile potential challengers and states with large populations. Squire then created a 600-point scale of challenger quality. Using this scale, campaign war chests were not a statistically significant predictor of challenger quality. Again, only the pool of high-profile potential challengers and the state's population had an effect on the quality of the challenger a Senate incumbent faced.

Building on the work of Squire, Goodliffe (2007) again tests the success of incumbent senators in scaring off quality challengers with preemptory fundraising. Goodliffe employs a measure of challenger quality offered by Lublin (1994), which used empirical analysis to predict the value of holding different positions when running for the Senate. This measure ranks members of the House as the highest quality challenger followed by Governors and other statewide officials, local officials, and then state legislators. From a theoretical perspective, this ranking of quality seems problematic. A governor has already won a statewide election, whereas in most states, members of the House have only been elected by a small proportion of the population. It seems that governors, who have already won election with the same constituency a senator faces, should rank higher than members of the House. In addition, the empirical analysis that Lublin used to derive this measure is problematic in that it does not include any measure

of campaign spending in its prediction of electoral success. Goodliffe also measures campaign war chests, twenty-two months prior to Election Day. This measure may also be problematic, because challengers do not declare that they are running until the election year. As a result, Goodliffe's measure may not be the most appropriate measure of campaign war chests. Ultimately, based on his measures of candidate quality and war chests, Goodliffe also finds no relationship between campaign war chests and challenger quality.

Of the little work done in the Senate, varying measures of challenger quality have been used to test the effectiveness of campaign war chests. The next section will explore the measurement of challenger quality addressing problems with each type of measure and how the debate over challenger quality in the Senate has progressed.

*Measuring Challenger Quality*¹¹

Not all candidates for elected office are created equal. Many scholars agree that the measure of a quality challenger is the summation of a candidate's attractiveness and political experience (Krasno and Green 1988; Krasno 1994; Squire 1995). While political experience can be easily measured, quantifying attractiveness is a much more difficult task. Yet, the ability to identify quality challengers is critical. Strong challengers act strategically and enter races when they believe they have the best chance of winning. "Strong challengers do not emerge randomly; their occurrence varies with the prospect of victory" (Jacobson 1989, 775).

Some scholars attempt to capture both the attractiveness and experience of quality challengers in a single additive measure. Krasno and Green (1988) award a base value of

¹¹ What follows in this section, is a condensed version of the discussion in Chapter Two.

four points to individuals who have held elected office. These experienced challengers can then gain additional points based on prestige, celebrity and whether or not they currently hold office. Challengers with no elective experience can still earn up to seven points (just one less than the most accomplished experienced challenger). Others have attempted to rank offices and then reward those politicians with the largest constituencies (Squire 1992). An additional problem arises with Squire's model. He only measures the office currently held by an individual. There are many instances when an experienced challenger has finished a term in an elected office and then waited for a few years before running for a Senate seat. In 2008, Mark Warner the previous governor of Virginia, would not have been considered a quality challenger using Squire's measure, because his term as governor expired two years prior to the Senate election.

Jacobson and Kernell (1981) and Jacobson (1989) propose a simple dichotomous variable to measure challenger quality. Those who have previously held any elected office are coded as 1, while those with no previous elective experience are coded as 0. Obviously this measure is not perfect and loses some of the nuance that can be captured in more complicated measures. In particular it leaves no room to account for those individuals whose celebrity status may give them an electoral advantage. Athletes and astronauts would be coded as a non-quality challenger under Jacobson's dichotomous measure (Cannon 1990, Squire 1995). Some may worry that this measure only captures the political experience portion of challenger quality, neglecting the importance of the attractiveness of a candidate. But, those individuals who have won election before also have some inherent level of attractiveness as a candidate. Despite these concerns, there are several advantages to Jacobson's measure. The simple dichotomous variable can be

easily replicated and does not require individuals to make subjective coding decision. Also, “the measure’s very crudity favors the null hypothesis” and thus provides a stringent test (Jacobson 1989, 776).

Senate research has yet to arrive at a consensus measure of candidate quality. Much of the research on the House of Representatives relies on Jacobson’s dichotomous measure. Scholars who study the Senate have been hesitant to use the measure when studying the upper chamber (Squire 1989, Lublin 1994; Krasno 1994; Goodliffe 2007; but see Carson 2005). However, they have also been unable to offer convincing statistical evidence that the dummy variable measure does not work as effectively in Senate elections.

Theory and Hypotheses

Little previous research has examined patterns in fundraising throughout a senator’s six-year term. As a result, it is difficult to determine the appropriate time to measure the size of a senator’s war chest. Challengers typically do not have to declare their intentions to challenge an incumbent until the spring before Election Day. Previous studies of the Senate have measured campaign war chests 22 months before the election (Squire 1991; Goodliffe 2007). Many incumbent senators may not actively engage in fundraising efforts until the final two years of their term. However, they could still amass a considerable war chest in that time. Thus, when challengers consider whether or not to declare themselves a candidate, information on the incumbent’s cash on hand is readily available from the Federal Elections Commission.

Table 7: Timeline of Senator McConnell's Fundraising Efforts

December 31, 2006	• Sen. McConnell Reports \$2.7 million cash-on-hand • Goodliffe and Squire's 22-month measure
January - November	• Sen. McConnell continues raising money
November 7, 2007	• Earliest date a candidate could file to challenge Sen. McConnell
December 31, 2007	• Sen. McConnell reports \$7.31 million cash-on-hand • Proposed measure
January 29, 2008	• Last day to file as a potential candidate • Bruce Lunsford, files paperwork as a challenger

Table 7 offers an example—Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky ran for re-election in 2008. Using Goodliffe and Squire's measure of his war chest 22 months prior to the election, FEC records show that Sen. McConnell had \$2,709,606 cash on hand (FEC 2008). This is the amount reported to the FEC on December 31, 2006. However, the earliest a candidate could file to compete in the primaries in Kentucky was November 7, 2007. The filing deadline was January 29, 2008 (Kentucky Secretary of State 2007). If a candidate waited until January to file, they would be able to examine Senator McConnell's year-end report for 2007. On December 31, 2007 Senator McConnell reported \$7,317,138 cash on hand, an increase of almost five million dollars in the incumbent's campaign war chest (FEC 2008). Senator McConnell's challenger following the primary in the Democratic Party was Bruce Lunsford, who did not declare for the race until January 29, 2008. Table 7, presents a timeline for Senator McConnell's fundraising efforts and the filing deadlines for potential challengers in the Kentucky Senate race.

Although the anecdote above represents only one Senate race, its implications for past measures of campaign war chests are highly problematic. This chapter attempts to use the most appropriate measure of campaign war chests possible. It seems likely that the cash on hand just prior to the filing deadline for challengers to run for office is a more appropriate measure of the size of campaign war chests. Drawing upon the strategic politicians literature, quality challengers are unlikely to run when they believe they will be severely disadvantaged by the incumbent senator's early fundraising efforts. When measured correctly, I expect campaign war chests to have a deterrent effect on the emergence of quality challengers in Senate elections.

Data and Methods

Data on campaign fundraising was obtained from the Federal Elections Commission (FEC). Any candidate who collects more than \$5,000 is required to report their campaign receipts to the FEC. Senate candidates are required to report their receipts on a quarterly basis in April, July, October, and December. Senators must continually report any earnings even when their reelection campaigns are years away. All amounts used in this analysis are normalized in 2008 dollar values. The unit of analysis for this study will include all incumbent senators seeking reelection from 1980 to 2010.¹²

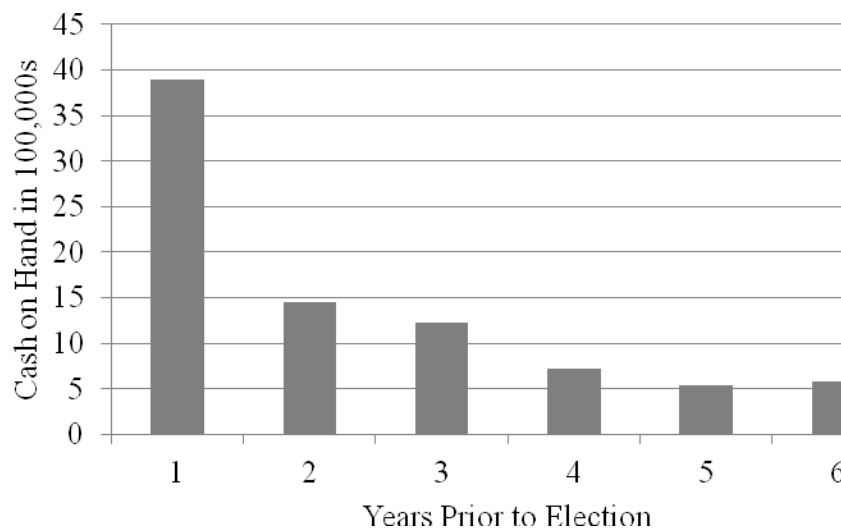
First, I perform an exploratory analysis of campaign fundraising across an incumbent senator's six-year term. The amount of cash-on-hand a senator reports to the FEC each year will help to paint a picture of the average incumbent's fundraising habits. Cash-on-hand is the most appropriate measure of war chests because it captures the

¹² Data from 2000 to 2010 is readily available online at www.FEC.gov. Data from 1980 to 2000 had to be requested from the Federal Election Commissions archives.

amount of money at an incumbent's disposal to spend on the reelection campaign. Defining campaign war chests by total receipts or expenditures may not be as appropriate, because "expenditures may reflect trouble that the incumbent is trying to repair" (Box-Steffenmeier 1996, 356).

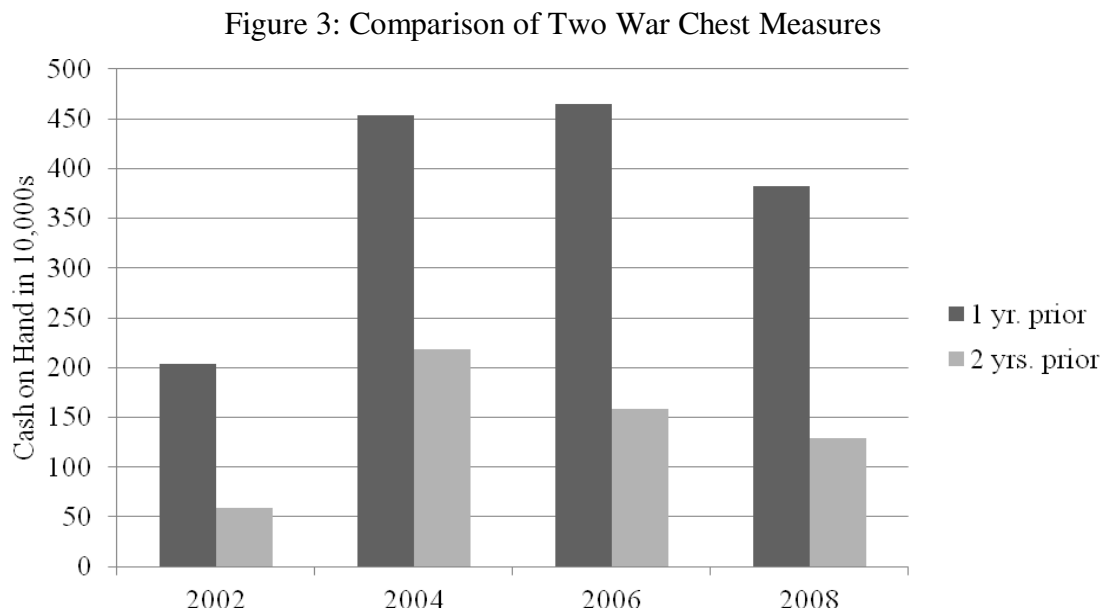
Figure 2 shows the average amount raised by a senator prior to their reelection campaign. This preliminary analysis allows a clearer picture of fundraising efforts throughout a senator's term in office. The amount at the far right of the figure represents the amount of cash-on-hand a senator has just after they have been elected. For example, for a senator elected in 2000, this would be the average amount reported to the FEC in December of 2000. Using Goodliffe's measure, this senator's war chest would then be

Figure 2: Senate War Chests Averages over a Six Year Term (2000-2008)



measured two years prior to their reelection at the end of 2004. Figure Two presents compelling evidence that this is an inappropriate time to measure war chests. Senators seem to ratchet up their fundraising efforts in the two years prior to reelection and by one year prior to Election Day, their average amount of cash-on-hand is \$2.4 million dollars.

Figure 3 presents the difference between previous measures and the measure of war chest used in this analysis for the four most recent election cycles in the data. If senators truly wait until two years prior to their reelection to begin actively fundraising, then previous measures of campaign war chests have grossly underestimated the amount of cash-on-hand most senators have at the time a challenger decides to run. These findings suggest that the anecdote about Sen. McConnell's fundraising is an appropriate illustration of the campaign fundraising efforts of most senators.



Armed with a more appropriate measure of the average senator's campaign fundraising, I then move to a logistic regression analysis of the emergence of quality challengers in Senate races. The dependent variable is *experienced challenger emergence*. Following Jacobson (1989) a simple dichotomous variable is used. Those who have held any elective office are coded as one and those with no elective experience

are coded as zero. In the current sample, 226 of the 401 challengers have previous elective experience. The remaining 175 are non-quality challengers. Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, a logit analysis will be performed. The main independent variable is the incumbent senator's *war chest*. War chests are measured just prior to when potential challengers would formally declare their candidacy for the Senate seat. This is the amount of cash-on-hand reported by a senator in his year-end report to the FEC, the year prior to his reelection campaign. For example, the war chest for a senator running for reelection in 2008 would be found on their year-end report submitted to the FEC on December 31, 2007. If war chests are able to deter quality challengers, we would expect this coefficient to be both significant and negative.

A variety of other independent variables will be included to control for relevant factors that could influence a quality challenger's decision whether or not to run. As a measure of state population, the *number of congressional districts* of each state will be included as a control variable. More populous states have a larger pool of potential high profile challengers (Squire 1991). As a result it is more likely that a quality challenger would emerge from these large states. Previously scholars have used the number of congressional districts in a state as a measure of population (Goodliffe 2007). Senators from larger states have been found to begin their fundraising much earlier in their terms. Four years into their terms, senators from the three most populous states have been found to have already raised forty percent of their total amount of funds raised (Lee and Oppenheimer 1999, 111). In addition, *previous incumbent vote margin* will be included in an effort to measure incumbent vulnerability. Those incumbents who only won by a small margin in their previous election are likely perceived as more vulnerable. As a

result, we would expect strategic politicians to target these races because they believe their chances of winning to be the greatest when the incumbent is weak.

We know that partisan tides can have an impact on electoral outcomes. Strategic politicians would be likely to wait until the partisan tides are in their favor. First, the *vote share of the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party* is included as a measure of the partisan leanings in a state. One would imagine that a quality Democratic challenger is unlikely to emerge to challenge a Republican incumbent in a state President Bush won with seventy percent of the vote. Next, a dummy variable for *party* is included in the model and is coded one for Republicans and zero for Democrats. This is simply a control variable as there is no reason to suspect that one party is more likely to field quality challengers than the other in Senate races. Additionally a simple dummy variable for *midterm elections* is included. Senate races receive more coverage in non-presidential years. As a result, there may be more money available for both incumbent and challengers without a presidential race overshadowing other elections. More quality challengers may choose to run in midterm election years.

Results and Analysis

Table 8 presents the results from the logit analysis. The key variable of interest, campaign war chests, is in fact statistically significant and in the expected direction. This finding suggests that as a senator's campaign war chest increases, the less likely he is to be challenged by a quality opponent. This finding is contrary to previous work on preemptory fundraising in the Senate (Goodliffe 2007; Squire 1991). Politicians frequently state that they despise fundraising, yet senators are active in their fundraising

Table 8: The Emergence of a Quality Challenger

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
War Chest (\$100,000)	-0.0104** (0.0043)
Number of Congressional Districts	0.0457** (0.0162)
Incumbent Previous Vote Margin	-0.0587** (0.0125)
Vote Share of the Presidential Candidate of the Incumbent's Party	-0.0248** (0.0123)
Republican	0.3156 (0.2259)
Midterm	-0.3566* (0.2055)
Constant	4.9505** (1.0289)
N	407
Pseudo-R ²	0.0917
Log-Likelihood	-255.011
Number of Clusters	204

Coefficients are maximum likelihood estimates, Robust
Standard Errors are clustered on individual senators

**p<0.05

* p<0.10

efforts throughout their term in office. These results suggest that their early efforts are not done in vain and in fact have the desired effect of warding off a quality challenger.

The number of congressional districts in a state proves to be a strong predictor of the emergence of a quality challenger. Larger states have a larger eligibility pool of qualified candidates. As a result, an incumbent senator from a large state stands a much greater chance of facing a quality opponent each election. A senator's previous vote is a significant predictor of the emergence of a quality challenger. Although the election was

six years ago, a senator is less likely to face a quality challenger as his vote share in the previous electoral contest rises. As expected, challengers likely weigh the success of defeating an incumbent using their previous vote share as a measure of vulnerability. In addition, the vote share received by the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party also has a significant effect on the emergence of a quality challenger. Previous research suggests that quality challengers are strategic in their decisions about emerging as a candidate. The data in this study support that finding, suggesting that a quality challenger is unlikely to emerge the higher the state's vote in the previous election for the presidential candidate of the same party as the incumbent senator. For example, President Bush received seventy-three percent of the vote in the state of Utah in the 2004 election. In the 2006 election, Senator Orrin Hatch, a Republican, was not challenged by a quality challenger.

The variable for party suggests that Republican incumbents are more likely to face a quality challenger. However, the coefficient fails to reach the desired level of statistical significance. Similarly, midterm elections seem to have no statistically significant effect on the emergence of a quality challenger. This is unsurprising as Senate elections are rarer in nature as compared to House races. Thus when the proper situation presents itself, a qualified challenger will emerge regardless of the election timing.

As with any study of campaign fundraising or spending in congressional elections, there are questions of endogeneity with the measurement of campaign war chests. Although the measure employed in the previous model is still months before any challenger must officially file paperwork as a candidate for the Senate, they may make their intention to run known in advance of the filing deadline. As a result, an incumbent

may be aware that a quality challenger is planning to run and thus, ratchet up his fundraising efforts. To account for any potential endogeneity, I also ran model using instrumental variables to measure an incumbent's war chest.

First, I predicted war chest values using both state population and a lagged value of campaign war chests. The size of a state's population has proven to be a significant predictor of the size of an incumbent's war chest (Squire 1991). I also include a lagged measure of campaign war chests, measured 22 months prior to Election Day. This is the same measure previously used by Goodliffe (2007). Goodliffe finds that 22 months prior to Election Day is early enough alleviate any concerns about potential endogeneity. I then used these predicted values for campaign war chests and rerun the model presented earlier. Unfortunately, the lagged measure of campaign war chests is only available from the Federal Election Commission from 2000 to 2010, so the sample size is reduced.

The results of the second stage of this process, employing the predicted values for campaign war chests, are presented in Table 9. The coefficient on the instrumental variable is again negative and significant, suggesting that as an incumbent's war chest grows, the likelihood that he will face a quality challenger decreases. Even with this robustness check for potential endogeneity, we still see a significant effect for campaign war chests, which strongly supports the earlier findings.

Table 9: The Emergence of a Quality Challenger Using Predicted Values of Campaign War Chests 2000-2010

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
War Chest (\$100,000) Predicted Values	-0.0312** (.0122)
Number of Congressional Districts	0.0911** (.0328)
Incumbent Previous Vote Margin	-0.0126 (.02248)
Vote Share of the Presidential Candidate of the Incumbent's Party	-0.0412** (.0212)
Republican	0.2406 (.3732)
Midterm	-0.6139 (.3615)
Constant	3.3366** (1.6092)
N	152
Pseudo-R ²	0.1159
Log-Likelihood	-92.206
Number of Clusters	104

Coefficients are maximum likelihood estimates, Robust
Standard Errors are clustered on individual senators

**p<0.05

* p<0.10

Discussion

The findings of the current study are in direct opposition to previous studies of campaign war chests in the Senate (Goodliffe 2007; Squire 1991). Previous studies have employed a measure of campaign war chests that assess a senator's cash-on-hand twenty-two months prior to Election Day. A descriptive analysis of the fundraising habits of

senators across their six-year terms suggests that this twenty-two month measure is inappropriate. It seems that senators are just beginning to actively fundraise at twenty-two months. In addition, challengers typically are not required to file paperwork declaring themselves a candidate until spring, and sometimes as late as June or July, of the election year. As a result, a more appropriate measure of campaign war chests was employed in this analysis. Measuring a senator's war chest as the amount of cash on hand reported on his year-end report in the year prior to their re-election bid revealed that war chests are able to deter quality challengers.

Although senators' fundraising efforts increase exponentially in the final two years prior of a campaign, they are constantly raising money. If war chests truly did not matter, as other scholars have suggested, then it would seem that senators are wasting their time early in their terms raising money. Clearly senators believe that amassing a large war chest can make a difference. Very rarely do senators run unopposed in their quest for re-election. However, the findings presented here suggest that they may be able to ward off quality challengers by amassing a significant war chest. Perhaps one of the policy implications of this finding is that challengers should be allowed to declare and begin raising money for a Senate campaign earlier in the process. However, this may not lead more quality challengers to contest Senate elections. Instead, incumbent senators would most likely increase their fundraising efforts earlier in their term as opposed to waiting until the final two years.

Conclusions

In much of the congressional literature, when authors refer to Congress they actually mean the House of Representatives. The structural differences between the two chambers can result in differing outcomes, yet scholars have largely neglected the study of the upper chamber. The limited Senate research has led some to incorrectly conclude that all Senate contests are universally competitive. In reality, a substantial proportion of Senate races do not attract quality challengers. How are incumbent senators able to ward off potentially experienced candidates? Previous research has found that war chests do not deter quality challengers. However these studies have incorrectly measured both war chests and challenger quality. I find that as the size of a senator's war chest increases, the probability that he will be challenged by a quality opponent decreases. These findings suggest that a senator's early fundraising efforts are not in vain. A non-quality challenger has never before won elected office, making their chances of defeating an incumbent senator with a wealth of campaign experience extremely difficult. These results show that in fact senators are able to ward off quality challengers as the size of their war chest increases. Thus, a sizeable war chest is one of the tools incumbent senators use as an electoral advantage.

Ultimately, I find that quality challengers may be frightened away by a large campaign war chest. Senators seem to intensify their fundraising efforts in the year prior to the filing deadline for potential candidates. These results suggest that it is rational for members of Congress, particularly the Senate, to spend valuable time raising money early in their terms. The deterrent effect of large campaign war chests also contributes to our understanding of the lack of quality challengers in Senate elections. As mentioned

earlier, we would expect Senate races to be universally competitive. From 1980 to 2008, forty-four percent of incumbent senators seeking reelection did not face a challenger with any previous elected experience. This surprising statistic can be partially explained by the hesitancy of quality challengers to emerge when the incumbent has already amassed a seemingly insurmountable fundraising advantage.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATING THE INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE IN THE U.S. SENATE

The incumbency advantage is one of the most studied phenomena in the field of congressional elections. For half a century political scientists have sought to understand why incumbents are consistently reelected at such a high rate. Despite the copious amounts of research there are still many unanswered questions and areas to consider in the study of the incumbency advantage. In particular, the Senate has received far less attention than the House when studying the advantages of incumbents seeking reelection. Part of the reason for the disproportionate amount of research across chambers is the size of the incumbency advantage. From 1946 to 2006, incumbents were reelected at a rate of 92.4 percent in the House. Over that same time period, incumbent senators averaged a reelection rate of 79.2 percent (Jacobson 2013). In spite of the lower Senate average, that still means that nearly four out of every five senators who seek reelection win.

Studies of the incumbency advantage raise important normative concerns for students of electoral politics. The ability to hold elected officials accountable through regular elections is an essential tenet of a democratic society. Concerns are often expressed that the high reelection rate of incumbents signals a problem with the current accountability mechanism. If an incumbent is assured reelection he may not strive to appropriately represent the wishes of his constituency (Krasno 1994). These concerns are particularly troublesome in the context of the Senate. Once elected, a senator does not have to seek approval from the voters for six more years. As such, elections—our most

important tool to provide accountability in a democratic system—need to be better understood in the context of the Senate.

This chapter presents a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the incumbency advantage in the Senate, a task that has previously not been undertaken. By using data from 1914 to the present, I am able to examine all direct elections to the Senate and follow trends and shifts in the incumbency advantage over time. In particular, I seek to answer two important questions. First, is there a distinct incumbency advantage in elections to the U.S. Senate? Second, assuming an incumbency advantage exists, is it similar to patterns and trends we see in the House of Representatives? Identifying similarities and differences across the two chambers can provide important insights about the causes and growth of the incumbency advantage.

Literature Review

As with most of the research on congressional elections, the existing literature on the incumbency advantage centers largely on the study of the House of Representatives. What follows is a literature review of the pertinent literature on the incumbency advantage. I will then highlight the existing work on elections and the incumbency advantage in the Senate.

Erikson (1971) first noted a significant increase in the incumbency advantage from 1950 to 1966 in elections to the House of Representatives. Mayhew (1974b) followed by highlighting the vanishing number of incumbents elected by a small margin. The distribution of party votes for president in each congressional district remained constant over time, but in races with an incumbent running a distinct lack of competition

emerged. Incumbents were becoming safer, winning by larger and larger margins. Mayhew posited a variety of explanations for the rise in the incumbency advantage. Congress is uniquely designed to benefit the reelection goals of incumbents. Mayhew suggested that perhaps incumbents were suddenly more successful in their use of the tools provided by the office and thus incumbents had begun to win by larger margins. Moreover, he suggested that the redistricting process may have led to fewer marginal incumbents as districts are often drawn to diminish competition. Each of these suggested causes has been investigated by various congressional scholars.

Alford and Hibbing (1981) argued that incumbency cannot be treated as a dichotomous variable. A congressman who has served his district for thirty years faces a very different election than a first term congressman seeking reelection for the first time. They found that an incumbent increases his vote margin with each election. Alford and Hibbing argue that first-term incumbents are not solely responsible for the incumbency advantage that emerged in the 1960s.

Not all scholars readily agreed that the incumbency advantage had dramatically increased in the latter half of the twentieth century. Jacobson (1987) argues that incumbents are no safer now than they were in the 1950s. The probability of an incumbent candidate losing has not diminished. He finds that even though incumbents now win by larger margins, the probability of losing has remained constant. Measures used by various scholars to measure marginality or vulnerability are arbitrary cut points. Instead, Jacobson argues that, “incumbents run harder just to stay in the same place”. Bauer and Hibbing (1989) question Jacobson’s measures and argue in favor of an increased incumbency advantage. They find that the inclusion of the 1974 election skews

the results. Because of the Watergate scandal previous vote margin was not a good predictor of success in 1974, thus making that year an outlier in the data.

A final argument worth noting suggests that the incumbency advantage is merely a statistical artifact. Stonecash (2008) finds that the exclusion of uncontested races from the analysis of the incumbency advantage has severely biased our understanding of the benefits of incumbency. Many scholars have omitted these uncontested races for fear that they would bias the results (see, e.g., see Jacobson 1993). Stonecash proposed that the increase in the incumbency advantage so frequently observed in the 1960s is actually due to a decrease in the number of uncontested races. As opposed to running uncontested, many members of the House won by large margins. While an interesting and provocative point, it seems somewhat unlikely that scholars will discount the existence of an incumbency advantage entirely.

Causes of the Incumbency Advantage

In his seminal work, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Mayhew argues that Congress is designed ideally to benefit each member's electoral concerns. In fact he suggests that "if a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members' electoral needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists" (81). The structure and resources available to members of Congress work to aid individuals in their continuing quest for reelection. Mayhew suggested that three of the tools available to incumbents may be responsible for the rise in the incumbency advantage. These suggestions seem to

have driven a significant amount of research into the incumbency advantage as scholars sought to pinpoint a single cause.

One of the first tools outlined by Mayhew is the unique ability afforded to incumbents to advertise themselves. An incumbent is able to use his time in office to increase his name recognition and establish a “brand name” for himself. Voters may know very little about candidates when they step into the voting booth to cast their ballots. An incumbent wants voters to be able to recognize his name on the ballot and hopefully have some sort of positive association. Constituents have been found to be able to identify the name of their member of Congress, yet they struggle to identify the name of the challenger (Mann and Wolfinger 1980). Taking this idea a step further, Cover and Brumberg (1982) essentially perform an experiment to assess the electoral consequences of incumbent actions. They were able to manipulate the mailing of an Infant Care Manual to new parents. Those who received the manual along with a note congratulating the new parents from the member of Congress had increased recognition of the incumbent. In addition, the new parents had more positive feelings towards the incumbent. Although these effects faded with time, the experiment demonstrates the unique ability of incumbents to reach out to voters. Other research examining the effect of the franking privilege found a positive relationship between the amount of money a legislator spends on constituent services such as newspapers and postcards and the corresponding electoral success (Cox and Morgenstern 1993, 1995).

Another potential advantage afforded an incumbent by his office is the ability to take credit for certain beneficial actions. For example, an incumbent seeking reelection is certain to highlight any construction projects or grant money that he secured for the

district. Credit-claiming provides an incumbent with an advantage over a challenger by highlighting the work he has already done for the district. Fiorina (1977) suggests that the growth over time in the federal bureaucracy has allowed incumbents copious opportunities to take credit for helping constituents. The dramatic increase in the federal bureaucracy caused constituents to increasingly rely on members of Congress for help navigating the red tape. Fiorina offers case studies of incumbents who have developed “home styles” focused on constituency service. In addition, those incumbents who are viewed as most vulnerable have been found to seek new awards of grant monies for their home districts (Bickers and Stein 1994).

A final tool suggested by Mayhew is an incumbent’s ability to take positions. Unlike credit-claiming, position-taking requires no benefit or action. In many instances, incumbents find it is most important to simply take a stand that most voters would agree with. The increasing use of scientific polling has allowed incumbents to better tailor their stances on issues to the desires of constituents. Miller and Stokes (1963) found that incumbents base their positions on key issues not only on their own beliefs but also on their perceptions of constituent beliefs. More recently, Prior (2006) argues that the growth in the incumbency advantage can be traced to the growth in television. As incumbents are able to receive more positive news coverage and reach constituents through television, they simply need to take the proper positions to assist in their reelection efforts.

A final cause of the incumbency advantage, suggested by Mayhew and studied by others, is redistricting. Newly drawn districts have been found to benefit incumbents; however, the effects of redistricting on the incumbency advantage fade after the initial

election year following the process (Tufte 1973). Certainly redistricting is not a cause of an incumbency advantage in the Senate, where there are no district boundaries to adjust every ten years.

Redistricting has allowed for unique quasi-experimental designs in the study of the incumbency advantage. Ansolobehere, Snyder and Stewart (2000) compare election results in portions of a district previous represented by an incumbent legislator to new portions added to the district as a result of the redistricting process. They are able to conclude that incumbents enjoy a significant personal vote, cultivated as a byproduct of the relationship an incumbent can develop with his constituents. Indeed, they argue that this personal vote comprises a sizeable portion of the electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbents. Desposato and Petrocik (2003) also find support for the personal vote benefiting incumbents in their study of the effects of redistricting.

More recently, scholars have begun taking a more comprehensive approach to studying the incumbency advantage. Gelman and King (1990) find that previous estimators of the incumbency advantage tend to be biased. In particular, they find fault with the sophomore surge and retirement slump measurements used to discuss the incumbency advantage. Gelman and King propose their own measure of the incumbency advantage that, they propose, eliminates the bias inherent in previous work. Drawing on this work, Cox and Katz (1996) offer one of the most comprehensive analyses of the incumbency advantage to date. They propose that the incumbency advantage consists of both direct effects conferred by the office and indirect effects. Using data on House elections from 1948 to 1990 they find that the growth in the incumbency advantage since the 1960s is largely due to changes in the quality of candidates challenging the incumbent

party for a seat. In their follow-up work, Cox and Katz (2002) argue that much of the incumbency advantage accruing to legislators in the House is a function of how congressional districts are drawn.

Senate Research

The amount of research dealing with Senate elections pales in comparison to the copious amounts of scholarship about elections to the House of Representatives. Yet, the Senate has not been entirely ignored. What follows is a brief review of the existing work on Senate elections that addresses the existence of an incumbency advantage for sitting Senators.

Much of the existing work on Senate elections indirectly addresses the incumbency advantage by asking why Senate elections are more competitive than House elections. Abramowitz and Segal (1992) provide a thorough investigation of voters in Senate elections, the primary process, election outcomes, and money in Senate races. Repeatedly their findings point to the importance of the challenger in Senate elections. The prestige of the Senate draws more skilled politicians to challenge incumbents. Not only are those with political experience drawn to campaign for Senate, but also many with “celebrity” status. These individuals, notably identified by Cannon (1990) as “actors, athletes, and astronauts,” have one important characteristic in common with experienced politicians: the ability to raise the large sums of money necessary to mount a credible campaign. Similarly, Krasno (1994) finds that senators are more likely to lose than their counterparts in the House because of the quality of challengers faced by Senate incumbents. He finds that voters rate House and Senate incumbents equally, but Senate

challengers are much more well-known than challengers for seats in the House of Representatives.

Lee and Oppenheimer (1999) examine the incumbency advantage in the Senate and its connection to state population size. Their work focuses on the unequal representation created by the apportionment of two senators to each state regardless of size. They propose two different hypotheses to explain how state population could influence incumbent election rates. First, they propose that senators in states with smaller populations are better able to serve the needs of their constituents through casework and personal contact. Alternatively, they suggest that perhaps smaller states are more homogeneous and, as a result, their elections are less competitive. Diversity could be the factor driving competition. Testing these two theories on data from all Senate elections since 1914, they find that state population has a strong negative effect on vote margin in both incumbent-contests and open-seat races. As a result, they conclude:

“Senators in less populous states do not win reelection by larger margins than senators in more populous states because they enjoy an enhanced level of incumbency advantage. Instead, state population shapes the outcomes of all Senate elections, regardless of whether an incumbent is running” (96).

In a similar vein, Adams and Squire (1997) find that high-quality challengers are more likely to emerge not when the incumbent appears vulnerable, but instead from states with a large pool of quality challengers.

Westlye (1992) argues that the advantage enjoyed by incumbent senators must be considered “within the context of campaign intensity” (11). He rightfully acknowledges that not all Senate elections are fiercely contested campaigns. As a result, Westlye categorizes races as either hard-fought or low-key contests. Races are classified using

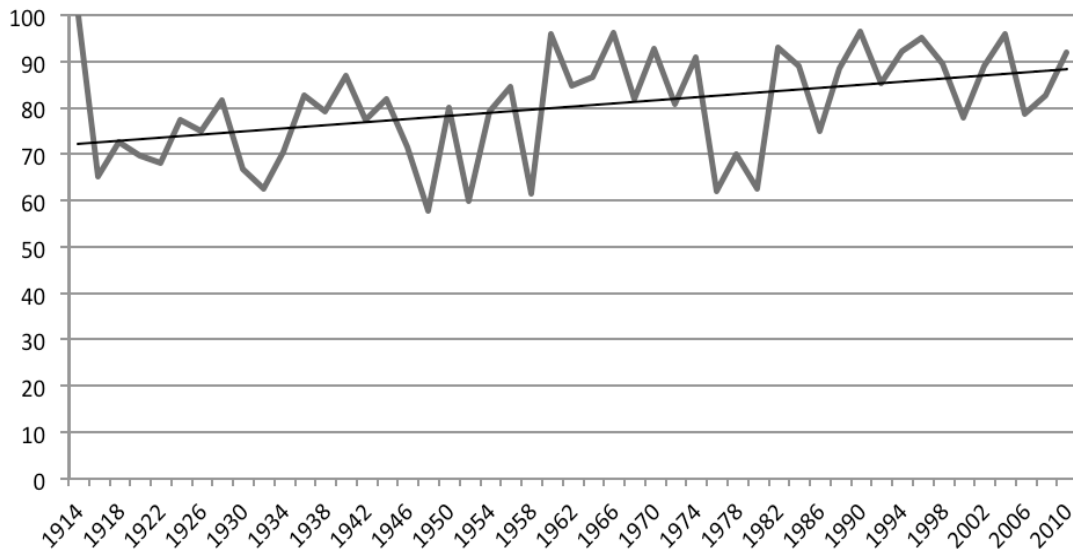
Congressional Quarterly's pre-election day reporting. As a result, Westlye's measure subsumes the traditional measures used to study elections such as candidate quality, campaign, expenditures, and prior margin of victory.

Finally, Highton (2000) offers one of the most comprehensive studies to date of the incumbency advantage in the Senate. He examines the incumbency advantage, state partisan tides, and national trends and their effect on Senate elections from the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to 1994. He finds that the effect of incumbency on Senate elections has not been constant over time. In fact, the incumbency advantage has steadily grown since the end of the Second World War. While these contributions to our understanding of the incumbency advantage in the Senate are useful, research has not progressed as much as the study of the same phenomena in the House. In an effort to present a more comprehensive view of the incumbency advantage in the Senate, what follows is a systematic analysis of the incumbency advantage from the advent of direct elections in 1914 to the present.

Theoretical Considerations

Incumbent senators enjoy a healthy advantage over challengers. Although the reelection rate is not as large as in the House, from 1914 to 2010 incumbent Senators seeking reelection won at a rate of 80.3 percent. Figure 4 displays the percent of incumbents seeking reelection who won over time. In 1914, each of the 21 incumbent Senators who sought reelection won. The lowest reelection rate came in 1948 when only 58 percent of the incumbent senators seeking reelection were successful. The figure seems to show a slight increase over time in the reelection rate of senators, yet there is

Figure 4: Reelection Rate of Incumbent Senators



significant variability with each election year. Part of the cause for this may be the small number of Senate elections each year. In some years the number of incumbents running for reelection is less than twenty. On average, there are only 25 incumbents running in a given election year. Other senators may choose to retire or seek another office. With so few incumbents running in a given election year, the reelection rate is subject to more dramatic swings. If just one or two races change then the reelection rate can change dramatically, unlike in the House of Representatives where the outcome of a few races has a much smaller impact on the reelection rate of incumbents.

Some unique aspects of the Senate may lead to difference in the incumbency advantage. For example, the six-year terms of senators allow them a much longer time to build up a positive evaluation in the minds of voters. Incumbents can use six years to take advantage of the many perks of elected office. Those additional four years in office, when compared to members of the House may lead to a much larger direct effect of incumbency. Incumbents are able to use the franking privilege, constituency casework, a

large professional staff, and many other benefits over the course of their term to build up a sizeable advantage over any challenger.

Senators may not be as effective as their counterparts in scaring away the competition for a variety of reasons. The size of a Senator's constituency may be many times larger than a typical House district providing for a much larger pool of qualified candidates. Yet, Westlye (1983, 1992) argues that Senate contests are not universally competitive. In a surprising number of races a quality candidate fails to emerge. Because a Senate seat only comes up for election once every six years we would expect both parties to field strong candidates with previous elected experience, however this is often not the case. In over forty percent of the Senate elections for which candidate quality data was collected at least one of the candidates had no previous experience in elected office. As a result of this lack of competition, Senate elections may be more like House elections than many observers previously assumed.

To measure the incumbency advantage, I draw heavily on the technique first employed by Cox and Katz (1996). This methodology has also been successfully used to measure the incumbency advantage in late-nineteenth century House elections (Carson, Engstrom, and Roberts 2007). Cox and Katz propose that the incumbency advantage is the summation of both a direct and indirect effect of holding office. The direct effect is the resources available only to an incumbent that are electorally valuable. Tools such as the franking privilege, professional staff, and paid travel all would be included in the direct effect of incumbency. As Mayhew (1974b) suggests, members of Congress have designed an institution to help them achieve the proximate goal of all elected officials, to be reelected. The indirect effect is the product of two forces: a quality effect and a scare-

off effect. The quality effect is a less tangible advantage that incumbents experience as campaigners who have previously won elected office. Incumbent senators presumably have some indefinable qualities that have proven useful in previous electoral contests. Specifically the quality effect measures the differential between the incumbent candidate and challengers in electoral experience. The scare-off effect is what it sounds like, the ability of an incumbent, or the incumbent's party, to scare off experienced challengers.

$$\text{Incumbency Advantage} = \text{Direct Effect} + (\text{Quality Effect} * \text{Scare Off Effect})$$

By employing the same measures of the incumbency advantage as previously used in the House, I will be able to make cross-chamber comparisons of the direct, indirect, and total effects of incumbency.

Data and Methods

To present a more comprehensive view of the incumbency advantage, I collected data on all direct elections to the Senate. Following the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1914, senators were elected by the general population, as opposed to the state legislatures that previously controlled the process. Candidate names, parties, and vote totals were all collected from Michael Dubin's *United State Congressional Elections, 1788 – 1997: The Official Results*. Data on candidate quality was collected using internet searches of the *Congressional Biographical Directory*, Historical Records of the *New York Times* and other web resources such as the Political Graveyard.¹³ A comprehensive dataset of this nature has not previously been used to study the Senate.

To capture the direct and indirect effects of incumbency I employ the two-equation model used by Cox and Katz. Model one regresses the Democratic share of the

¹³ <http://www.politicalgraveyard.com/>

two party vote (DTP_{it}) on the lagged Democratic vote (DTP_{it-1}), the Democratic quality advantage at time t and $t-1$ (DQA_{it} , DQA_{it-1}), whether or not an incumbent was running at time t and $t-1$ (I_{it} , I_{it-1}), the party controlling the seat at t and $t-1$ (P_{it} , P_{it-1}).

$$DTP_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 DTP_{it-1} + \beta_2 DQA_{it} + \beta_3 DQA_{it-1} + \beta_4 I_{it} + \beta_5 I_{it-1} + \beta_6 P_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

To measure the DQA, a tricohtomous measure is used. The variable is coded -1 if the Republican is a quality candidate and the challenger is not, 0 if both candidates are either quality candidate or non-quality candidates and +1 if the Democratic candidate is a quality candidate and the Republican candidate is not. In all of these instances an incumbent senator is coded as a quality candidate. The quality of other candidates is determined using Jacobson's dichotomous determination of previous elected experience. Other more complex measures of candidate quality have typically been used to study the Senate (for examples see Squire 1989, Lublin 1994, Krasno 1994). These Senate specific measures typically involve a subjective ranking of offices previously held by a candidate. One of many concerns with these measures is the conflicting ranking many Senate candidates may have. Often times a Senate candidate may have served in many offices before running for the Senate. These measures are all difficult to replicate and prevent comparisons across the two chambers. However, the simple nature of the Jacobson measure provides the most parsimonious measurement of candidate quality. While certainly a blunt measure, the Jacobson measure has been used extensively in the study of the incumbency advantage (Cox and Katz 1994, Carson, Engstrom and Roberts 2007) and has also been used successfully in the context of the Senate (Carson 2005).

Incumbency (I) is coded +1 for Democratic Incumbents, 0 if no incumbent is present in the race and -1 for Republican Incumbents. The party controlling the seat (P) is coded +1 if the seat was previously controlled by a Democrat and -1 for a Republican. Again, the lagged values of both of these variables are included in the model.

In this first model, the coefficient (β_4) measuring the effect on an incumbent's presence in the race serves as our measure of the direct effect of incumbency. Holding all other variables constant, this represents the impact of having an incumbent running for reelection as opposed to an open seat. The quality effect is captured by the coefficient (β_2) on the Democratic Quality Advantage variable. Again this coefficient demonstrates the advantage accrued to a Democratic candidate when they have an advantage in quality over their opponent.

To capture the scare off effect, a separate equation is used. In this model the DQA is regressed on a lagged measure of DQA at t-1, the previous Democratic vote share, the party controlling the seat, the presence of an incumbent at time t and t-1. The scare off effect is captured by the coefficient (β_3) measuring the effect of having an incumbent in the race. Holding all else constant, this coefficient tells us the impact of having an incumbent in the race on the emergence of a quality challenger.

$$DQA_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 DTP_{it-1} + \beta_2 DQA_{it-1} + \beta_3 I_{it} + \beta_5 I_{it-1} + \beta_6 P_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

Both models are calculated using Ordinary Least Squares regression. Cox and Katz run the model separately for each year. However, using Senate data would mean that at best there would only be 33 or so cases in a given regression. As a result, I

calculate the model by decades.¹⁴ Uncontested elections have been excluded from the data. The models are dependent upon the presence of a challenger. While the ability to scare off any and all competition is certainly a form of the incumbency advantage, for the purposes of this analysis those elections have been excluded.¹⁵ Although data was collected on all directly elected Senators, results are presented only from 1920 forward. The reason for excluding 1914, 1916 and 1918 is that in those years the incumbent senators were seeking election from the general public for the first time. Prior to those elections these individuals' electoral fates were determined by state legislatures. Data were collected on these first three years of direct elections so that the appropriate lagged values would be available the first time incumbent senators sought reelection through direct election.

In addition, I include the Cox and Katz models run with data from the House of Representatives for comparisons sake. Following the example set by Cox and Katz (1996), I exclude those years immediately following redistricting. The years immediately following redistricting are uniquely affected by the redrawing of district lines. New district lines obviously change the electoral landscape of a district, forcing incumbents to face new voters for the first time and in some instances drawing two incumbents into the same district. As a result, the first election year following the decennial redistricting is often excluded from analyses of congressional elections.

¹⁴ I also ran the models using three year increments so that each class of the Senate was elected once. It did not substantively change the results. For ease of presentation and interpretation I present the results by decade.

¹⁵ There were 123 uncontested elections for the Senate from 1914 to 2010. All of these cases have been excluded from the current analyses. Cox and Katz (1996) also exclude uncontested races in their analysis of the House.

Results

The empirical findings for Senate elections are displayed in Table 10. What is presented in this table are the coefficient values for the direct, quality, and scare-off effects from the various regressions run for each decade. The first column presents the estimates for the direct effect of incumbency over time. Following that are estimates of the quality effect and scare-off effect in each decade. The indirect effect is then calculated by multiplying the quality and scare-off effects together. The fifth column shows the total effect of incumbency adding both the indirect and direct effect. Finally, the sixth column displays the indirect effect as a percentage of the total effect of incumbency.

We can see that from 1950 onward estimates of the direct effect are always significant and positive (Figure 5). The direct effect of incumbency, again, represents the tangible benefits afforded to current office holders that aid them in seeking reelection.

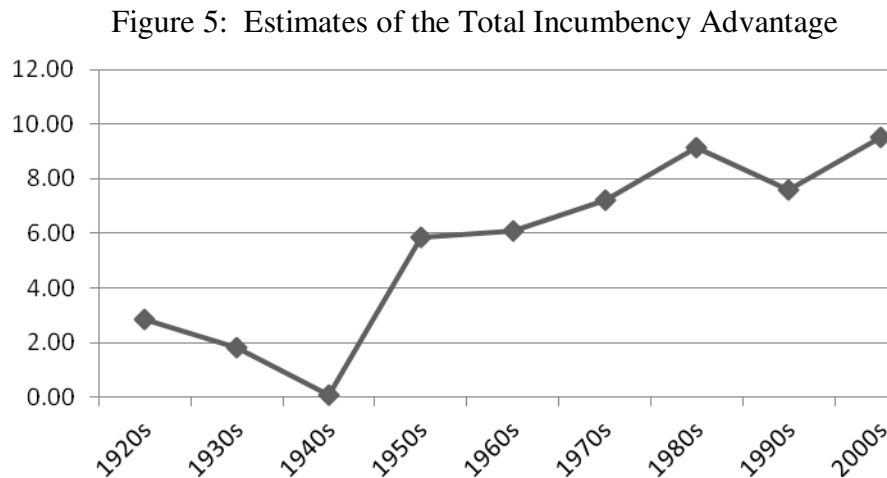


Table 10: The Effects of Incumbency in the U.S. Senate: 1920 – 2010

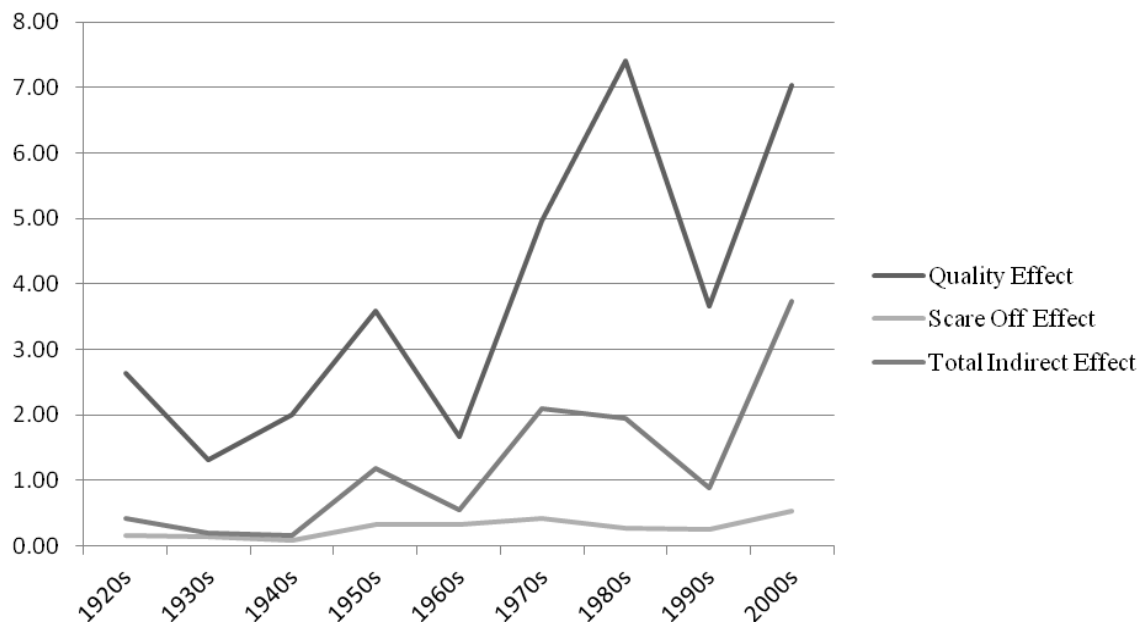
Years	Direct Effect	Quality Effect	Scare Off Effect	Total Indirect Effect	TOTAL EFFECT	Indirect as % of Total
1920s	2.4209 (2.8064)	2.6280 (2.0360)	0.1615 (0.1785)	0.424	2.8453	14.92
1930s	1.6089 (2.4424)	1.3152 (1.6555)	0.1467 (0.1364)	0.193	1.8018	10.71
1940s	-0.0623 (1.7992)	1.9954 (1.6119)	0.0758 (0.1260)	0.151	0.0890	
1950s	4.6600 (1.8340)	3.5913 (1.6378)	0.3294 (0.1168)	1.183	5.8430	20.25
1960s	5.5548 (1.5393)	1.6703 (1.2479)	0.3278 (0.1178)	0.548	6.1023	8.97
1970s	5.1320 (2.2186)	4.9640 (2.0245)	0.4226 (0.1081)	2.098	7.2298	29.02
1980s	7.1807 (1.8274)	7.4113 (1.4709)	0.2640 (0.1403)	1.957	9.1373	21.41
1990s	6.7083 (1.7152)	3.6607 (1.3198)	0.2438 (0.1078)	0.892	7.6008	11.74
2000s	5.7854 (1.9165)	7.0405 (1.3459)	0.5310 (0.0998)	3.739	9.5239	39.25

** Bolded values are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level
Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors

These tools, such as franked mail, professional staff, and paid travel have changed very little in the past fifty years. As a result, it is unsurprising that the direct effect has not changed dramatically. There are of course fluctuations in the value of the direct effect, with its impact on the incumbency advantage peaking in the 1980s. Cox and Katz (1996) argue that a substantial increase in the resources of the office would result not just in the growth of the direct effect, but also in an increase in the scare off effect.

Where we see a definite upward trend is in the indirect effect of incumbency. Both the quality effect and scare-off effect are significant in most decades since the 1950s. The product of these two coefficients provides the estimate for the total indirect effect. Here we see consistent growth. The indirect effect has risen since an incumbency advantage emerged clearly in the 1950s. Figure 6 shows the scare off effect remains relatively flat since the beginning of the direct election of senators. As a result, the rise in the overall indirect effect derives almost exclusively from growth in the quality effect. The quality effect has more than doubled since the 1920s.

Figure 6: The Scare Off, Quality and Total Indirect Effect in the Senate



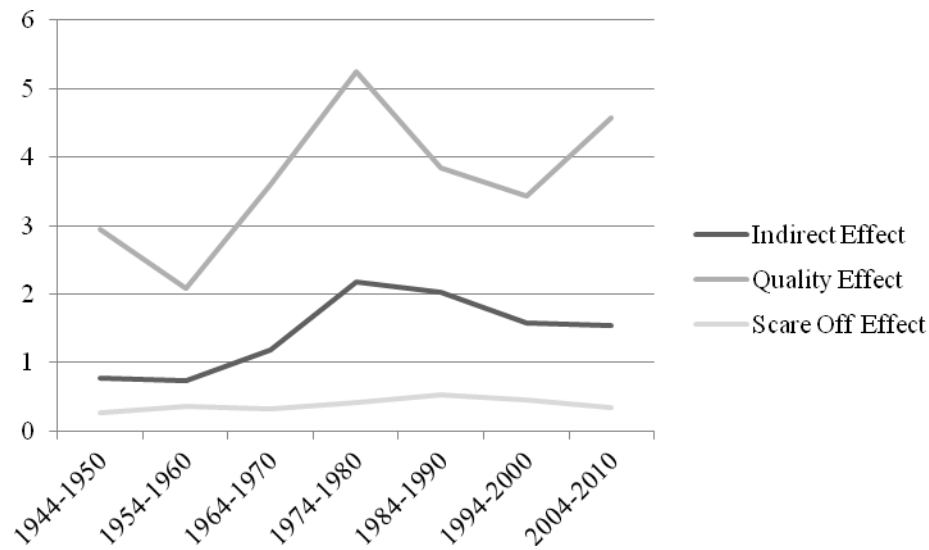
What is most striking about these findings is the remarkable parallels to figures for the House of Representatives. In particular, Cox and Katz' findings for the House of Representatives from 1948 to 1990 are dramatically similar to the data presented here for Senate elections. In the interest of comparing results across the two chambers, Table 11 presents the results for the House of Representatives with the data clustered by decades, similar to the data in the Senate. Again we see the strong emergence of an incumbency advantage in the 1950s. A significant portion of that growth stems from the growth in the indirect effect, just as the results in the Senate also showed.

Table 11: The Effects of Incumbency in the House of Representatives: 1946-2010

Years	Direct Effect	Quality Effect	Scare Off Effect	Total Indirect Effect	TOTAL EFFECT	Indirect as % of Total
1944-1950	-0.7565 (1.5040)	2.9452 (.5676)	0.2619 (.1060)	0.7713	0.0148	
1954-1960	2.6749 (.7253)	2.0925 (.3694)	0.3545 (.0865)	0.7418	3.4167	21.7108
1964-1970	6.8556 (.9415)	3.5971 (.4512)	0.3279 (.0787)	1.1795	8.0351	14.6792
1974-1980	5.7239 (.9742)	5.2557 (.9742)	0.4154 (.0589)	2.1832	7.9071	27.6108
1984-1990	8.5309 (.9784)	3.8394 (.5861)	0.5299 (.0718)	2.0345	10.5654	19.2562
1994-2000	6.4251 (.8064)	3.4327 (.4714)	0.4598 (.0611)	1.5784	8.0034	19.7209
2004-2010	5.2076 (.9171)	4.5801 (.5171)	0.3362 (.0664)	1.5398	6.7474	22.8209

** Bolded values are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level
Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors

Figure 7: The Scare Off, Quality and Total Indirect Effects in the House



The similarities between the two houses are even more when one looks at figure 7 which present the Scare Off, Quality and Total Indirect effect in the House of Representatives. Again we see a relatively flat scare off effect, with most of the growth in the indirect effect stemming from growth in the quality effect. Although there is some variation in the time period for observations in the House and Senate, we still see the quality effect peak in the 1980s followed by a slight decline and then increase in the most recent decade.

Ultimately, we can conclude that there is, in fact, an incumbency advantage in the Senate. There are certainly important differences between the two houses of Congress. The longer terms in the Senate can certainly impact the legislative activities of members of the Senate. The prestige of a Senate seat may influence who decides to run for the upper chamber. The varying population sizes represented by members of the Senate have

very important impact on the institution. Despite these differences, the resemblance in the incumbency advantage between the two chambers is undeniable.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results presented here offer an important contribution to the study of the incumbency advantage in Congress. I find evidence of a strong incumbency advantage in the Senate. While the subject has received considerable attention in the House, there has never before been a systematic study of the incumbency advantage in the Senate. Using a new dataset that includes all direct elections to the Senate I find that there is a significant advantage for incumbent senators seeking reelection. In addition, I find that the incumbency advantage in the Senate very closely resembles that of the House of Representatives. More specifically, growth in the incumbency advantage since 1950 stems largely from growth in the quality effect for incumbents in both Houses of Congress. This quality effect is the advantage one party enjoys when they have an advantage in candidate experience.

Because the results are so similar between the two chambers of Congress, the findings reported here cast serious doubt on those who suggest that the incumbency advantage stems largely from redistricting. Many have argued that the incumbency advantage in the House is due to the careful drawing of congressional districts to favor incumbents. However, because no redistricting occurs in the Senate, we can rule it out as a potential explanation for the incumbency advantage. This similarity to the finding in the House of Representatives leads to one of the most important contributions of this work. The existence of a strong incumbency advantage in the Senate calls into question

the finding of Cox and Katz (2002) that the rise in the incumbency advantage over the latter half of the twentieth century is largely a product of redistricting.

Eliminating redistricting as a potential cause of the incumbency advantage in Congress is an important first step in helping us better understand this phenomenon. Nevertheless, this still leaves us wondering what specific factors are in fact contributing to the incumbency advantage in both the House and Senate. As Prior (2006) suggests, perhaps the arrival of television in the 1960s as a tool for incumbent candidates to use in their reelection efforts could be an important factor in contributing to this advantage. Alternatively, various institutional changes such as ballot reform (see Roberts 2009) may be an important contributing factor in the growth of the incumbency advantage in both the House and Senate. Clearly, more work is required to further understand this important topic in the context of congressional elections.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The study of elections is critical in any democratic system. Since Mayhew (1974a) offered the observation that members of Congress are “single minded seekers of reelection,” the study of congressional elections has flourished. Mayhew argues that the proximate goal of all legislators is simply to get reelected. Scholars have examined both incumbents’ actions and the institutional design of Congress as it benefits this goal. Yet most of the congressional elections literature to date has had a single-minded focus on the House of Representatives. As a result, questions of representation, accountability, and competition have received far less attention with respect to the Senate.

At the heart of a democratic system of government is the ability for voters to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions through free, regular elections. Voters choose agents to act on their behalf when making decisions in Congress. Following the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, this responsibility for choosing Senators shifted from state legislatures to the voters of each state. Elections provide a mechanism for voters to express their dissatisfaction if a senator is not performing as they wish. Yet, often voters are not given two equal options when they enter the voting booth—after all, not all candidates for office are created equal. Some individuals are inherently more skilled at the campaigning and electioneering process than are their opponents.

An issue that underlies the questions addressed throughout this dissertation is whether or not incumbents win reelection because they are beloved by voters or because

voters are not offered a suitable alternative at the polls. This question has been asked repeatedly by students of congressional elections as they wrestle with the same issues.

For example, Krasno (1994) stated:

Elections are supposed to be the means by which the public exercises control over its government. If elections are competitive this system works well. People are faced with viable options and make their choices. But if the deck is somehow stacked so that one candidate is virtually guaranteed victory, then public accountability is undermined (5).

As such, the underlying question is whether or not incumbents win because voters are happy with the status quo or because incumbents have been able to use the benefits of their office in such a way as to prevent any real competition.

We know that incumbent senators are not as safe as members of the House. Since the end of World War II, House members are regularly reelected at a rate of over ninety percent while the reelection rate for senators hovers just below eighty percent. Yet, all else equal, an individual would certainly rather run for the Senate as an incumbent than as a challenger or in an open seat contest. In addition, these reelection rates can be deceiving as a change in a single Senate race can have a significant impact on the calculation since it is based on percentages of a relatively small legislative body.

Both conventional wisdom and previous research would have you believe that Senate elections are very different than House elections. Senators have six years before returning to voters for approval. This length of time in office may work to their advantage or disadvantage. It may be that senators are able to use their longer terms to work towards policy goals without the worry of reelection right around the corner. They may also be able to use this extra time before facing reelection to further entrench themselves in the office. Alternatively, these longer terms may ensure that when a Senate

election does happen it rarely goes unnoticed and uncontested. In essence, because of the rarity of Senate elections, they are more likely to be competitive.

Yet, there are many reasons to believe that House and Senate elections function in largely the same way. One of the contributions of this dissertation is to point out the similarities between elections to the two houses of Congress. Despite their differences, elections to both chambers face the same contextual factors. The state of the economy and national political tides, for instance, are the same for candidates for either chamber. As such, we should not be surprised to find that many of the same factors that influence House elections also have a corresponding effect in Senate races.

Summary of Findings

Chapter two used data from 1914 to 2010 to examine who exactly runs for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Contrary to what some might expect I find that a significant number of candidates for the Senate have never before held an elective office. Of those candidates without previous elective experience, they most commonly come from the legal field. Republicans were more likely to field businessmen as candidates than the Democrats were. Experienced candidates were most likely to be members of the House of Representatives before deciding to run for a Senate seat. This is unsurprising as moving from the House to the Senate seems to be a natural progression for ambitious politicians (Rohde 1979). In many instances, achieving a seat in the Senate may be the pinnacle of a political career. Governors and state legislators were the next most likely to run for a Senate seat.

I then turned to an examination of various measures of candidate quality in the Senate. Previous work has sought to rank order the offices previously held by an individual. By comparing the measures created by Abramowitz (1988), Squire (1989) and Lublin (1994) to the dichotomous measure developed by Jacobson and most frequently used in the House, I was able to show that all the measures yield substantively the same results. There is little additional explanatory power gained by employing one of the more complicated rankings. In fact, once additional controls are added for incumbent and challenger spending, the differences between the measures narrow even further. To be clear, my intention is not to create yet another measure of candidate quality but instead to address the suitability of the simple dichotomous measure in the context of analyses of the Senate. My results suggest that going forward, Senate scholars should feel comfortable coding candidate quality by simply asking whether or not an individual has previously held any elective office.

Chapter three examines whether or not incumbents are able to ward off these quality challengers, who have previously held elective office, by amassing a sizeable campaign war chest. Incumbent senators begin raising money soon after they are elected, yet they do not truly intensify their fundraising efforts until the final two years of their term. Previous research has measured campaign war chests two years prior to Election Day. However in this next to last year of a term, senators dramatically increase their fundraising. Armed with this measurement of campaign war chests, I find that incumbent's are able to frighten away quality challengers if they amass a significant war chest. These results challenge previous research (see, e.g., Goodliffe 2007), which argues that warchests do not deter experienced challengers in the context of Senate races. These

findings also support the idea that quality challengers are strategic politicians who carefully consider their chances of winning a race before entering a race.

Chapter four tackles one of the most investigated areas of research in the House of Representatives: the incumbency advantage. Employing a technique first used in the House (Cox and Katz 1996), I investigate both a direct and indirect effect of incumbency with respect to Senate elections. The direct effect is made up of those tangible benefits accrued by incumbents as a result of holding office. Paid travel, office staff and the franking privilege are all examples of the direct effect of incumbency. Beyond those benefits, the indirect effect of incumbency is the product of both a quality effect and a scare off effect. The quality effect is the advantage that one party enjoys by fielding a quality candidate when the opposing party is unable to field a quality candidate. The scare off effect is the advantage of not having an experienced opponent.

Using this model I find strong support for the existence of an incumbency advantage in the Senate from the 1950s onward. When broken down into the various effects, I find that the growth in the incumbency advantage is due largely to growth in the quality effect over the last half century. These results are startlingly similar to the patterns that exist in the House of Representatives. In both chambers we see a stagnant scare off effect, modest growth in the direct effect, and significant growth in the quality effect. Previously work had concluded that the growth in the incumbency advantage in the House of Representatives was due in large part to changes stemming from redistricting (Cox and Katz 2002). Yet, in the Senate, where redistricting never occurs, we see almost the exact same patterns and trends. The findings in chapter four call into question the idea that the incumbency advantage is due to the strategic drawing of

congressional districts. These findings also highlight the importance of exploring trends across both chambers of Congress.

Taken together, these three chapters represent an important first step in filling a significant void in the congressional elections literature by examining important questions about the electoral process for U.S. Senators. I have found that measures of candidate quality commonly used in the House are suitable for the study of challengers in the Senate. Using this same measure of candidate quality, I have found that incumbents are able to scare off these quality challengers by amassing a large war chest. Building on these findings, I investigate the incumbency advantage in the Senate. I find strong support for an incumbency advantage, something previously scholarship had yet to identify in the context of elections to the upper chamber.

Directions for Future Research

This work represents an important first step towards a more complete understanding of elections to the U.S. Senate. However, it is also just that, a *first* step. There are still many questions well studied with respect to the House of Representatives that deserve further attention in the context of the Senate. In particular, I hope to use the dataset that I have already collected and continue to address questions about senatorial elections using nearly a century's worth of data.

There are still many questions yet to be asked about money in elections. The average cost for Senate elections increases constantly. How is that money being spent by challengers and incumbents alike? Little research examines the allocation of campaign spending in the upper chamber. Is the money spent on advertising or hiring experienced

campaign operatives? Are candidates efficient in the use of their campaign funds? How much bang do they get for their buck?

Building on the findings presented here, I would also like to investigate more direct causes for the incumbency advantage. What caused the incumbency advantage to emerge in the Senate in the 1950s? Why has it grown since that time? Possible explanations include the rise of television as a medium for advertising accomplishments during a Senate term or the rise of candidate-centered elections. It could also be that changes to elections, such as a change in balloting procedures, led to an increased incumbency advantage. A final suggestion is that changes in populations for states over the last fifty years have contributed to an increasing incumbency advantage. As individuals have become more mobile, they may have migrated to areas where their partisan preferences are in greater alignment with a majority of the population.

Much of the existing congressional research fails to acknowledge the two-step electoral process candidates face, by excluding any information about primary elections. In the future, I would like to examine Senate primary elections, with particular attention given to those instances in which an incumbent is challenged in the primary. In light of the increasing polarization of Congress, and the Senate in particular, it would be especially useful to determine whether, and to what extent, primary elections have contributed to this increasing pattern of polarization. Along those same lines I am interested in the retirement decisions of incumbent candidates, especially as it relates to member replacement with more ideologically extreme members.

Finally, although I have argued frequently here for more research into Senate elections, more effort must be made to study both chambers of Congress. Truly I believe

that more time and attention must be given to making comparisons across chambers where possible. As my findings on the incumbency advantage demonstrate, we can eliminate certain causes, such as redistricting, when attention is given to the Senate as well as the House. Certainly there are important differences in both running for and serving in the Senate as opposed to the House. As Hinckley (1980) suggested, “arguments about Congress, like bills, must negotiate two chambers successfully” (442). For Congress to pass any legislation, both the House and Senate must sign off on the bill under consideration. As a result, it is of critical importance for scholars to understand how individuals are elected to both chambers.

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