

ON TO BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS: THE BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF  
AMBITION IN THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY

CHERA A. LAFORGE

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Tracy Sulkin, Chair and Director of Research  
Professor William Bernhard  
Assistant Professor Kristina Miler, University of Maryland-College Park  
Professor Jeffery Mondak

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how progressive ambition—or the pursuit of a higher office—affects the behavior of members of the United States House of Representatives. Drawing upon a wide variety of legislative and campaign activities (including roll call votes, introductions and cosponsorships, amendments, and campaign contributions), I examine whether ambitious legislators increase the levels of their activity, modify the content of their agendas, and spend more time and effort fundraising. Overall, I find that the decision to pursue a higher office alters legislative and campaign behavior. Legislators who display progressive ambition shirk their current responsibilities by missing more roll call votes. At the same time, they increase both the number of introductions offered and the number of issues they address as part of their policy agenda. Progressively ambitious legislators also raise and spend more money than others within the House of Representatives. These same legislators also maintain a larger campaign war chest in anticipation of an expensive higher office run. My results show that ambition shapes the representative-constituency relationship and policy-making outputs of Congress.

I also provide multiple measures of ambition—both expressed and nascent—to further our understanding of ambition as a concept. I find ambition is common, but it is not universal. In reality, legislators hold different levels of ambition. Many legislators are happy with the power and prestige afforded to them by their position in the House of Representatives. Some have no interest in running for a higher office if there are costs or risks involved. Others are nascently ambitious, seriously considering another political office, but never running because of the costs and risks involved in the process. Finally, many are expressly ambitious and actively pursue a seat in the Senate, governorship, or presidency.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the process of completing a dissertation, the writer often feels isolated and alone. However, hindsight shows that this is never the case, as a finished dissertation requires the help, support, and encouragement of dozens of people. While I thank only a handful below, please know that there are many others who are not included, but were just as important. Like any good academic, I should acknowledge that any and all errors that follow are the result of the author and not those who helped guide her.

First and foremost, I need to thank Tracy Sulkin for being a terrific mentor, role model, and advisor. It is impossible to put into words the amount of encouragement and support she gave me as I finished my dissertation. If I become even half the academic and educator she is I will consider my career a success. The other members of my dissertation committee also deserve special thanks for a host of different reasons. I do not think I would have made it through graduate school if I had not taken Kris Miler's proseminar my first semester, which inspired my love of Congress and legislative behavior. I also thank her for being a caring and inspiring teacher. I thank Bill Bernhard for being calming and supportive throughout my time at the University of Illinois and Jeff Mondak for providing invaluable advice on how to be an academic.

This dissertation was partially supported by funds from the Dirksen Congressional Center and I thank them for their support. I would also like to thank my research assistant, Bianca Roby, for her hard work and meticulous attention to detail. Her assistance allowed this dissertation to proceed on schedule. Chris Lewis also provided programming assistance during data collection. Portions of this dissertation greatly benefited from the comments and suggestions

provided by MPSA discussants and audience members. In addition, I thank everyone who read drafts and provided comments, especially Kelly Larmour for her editing skill.

It is often said that friends are the family we choose for ourselves and I have an amazing graduate school family. From the first week of graduate school, Andrea Kent was always there to commiserate when things went bad and to celebrate when things went well. A special thanks goes to her husband, Gordon Kent, for putting up with political science talk over the past six years. I would also like to thank Megan Rimmel for being a great proofreader and an even better friend. I apologize to her for any and all grammatical errors that follow. While our friendship started in graduate school, I am positive it won't end there.

Finally, no acknowledgement would be complete without mentioning the love and support of my parents. Growing up, they never said no when I asked for a new book. Thank you for instilling a love of learning in me, I hope to never lose it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Ambition and Politics.....	1
Chapter 2: Identifying and Measuring Ambition.....	16
Chapter 3: Who Are the Nascently Ambitious? .....	39
Chapter 4: Legislative Behavior and Progressive Ambition.....	68
Chapter 5: Campaign Fundraising and Progressive Ambition .....	102
Chapter 6: The Behavioral Consequences of Progressive Ambition.....	134
References.....	144

## Chapter 1: Ambition and Politics

Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), was not born into a political dynasty. The son of railroad employees, Durbin grew up in Illinois's East St. Louis, but left to attend undergraduate and law school in Washington D.C. His brush with the Capitol would translate into early work as a legislative intern for Senator Paul Douglas (D-IL) and later as a staffer for Senator Paul Simon (D-IL). It would not take long for Durbin to tire of the behind the scenes world of politics, however, and he launched a duo of unsuccessful campaigns for state senate (in 1976) and lieutenant governor (in 1978).

His first successful race would begin with the biggest of risks. In 1982, Paul Findley, a Republican, held the 20<sup>th</sup> congressional district in which Durbin lived, and had held it since 1961. Findley had catered strongly to his district's agricultural interests for years, but his popularity and stranglehold on the position was faltering as the district began to change substantially due to population growth and redistricting. Sensing an opportunity, Durbin, a young lawyer, entered the race and beat the popular incumbent by the slimmest of margins.

Durbin's activities once elected to Congress, like Findley's before him, were pitch-perfect for his relatively rural, Southern Illinois district. In his first term, he obtained a position on the Agriculture Committee, which oversees issues important to the district's vast farmland. As he amassed seniority, Durbin moved on to a position on the powerful Appropriations Committee. Again, he chose to focus on the concerns of his constituents by seeking out and obtaining the chairmanship of the Agricultural Appropriations subcommittee. As one of the powerful "College of Cardinals," Durbin worked to obtain funding for research projects in the state capital of Springfield, as well as government contracts for ethanol and soybean producers in downstate Illinois (Barone and Ujifusa 1995, 465). His cultivation of constituent interests and

focus on bringing funds back to the district secured him a safe spot in the House of Representatives for more than ten years. After upsetting Findley in 1982 by less than one percent, he won by margins greater than 22 percent in the next four elections.<sup>1</sup>

However, things began to change at the beginning of the 1990s. Stymied by spending restraints and limitations set up by the Appropriations Committee and Congress as a whole, Durbin could not tackle issues important to both his district and his own political interests. Legislation on rural infrastructure, flood control, and low-cost housing moved to the back burner as Durbin sought to cut government expenditures (Barone and Ujifusa 1995, 465). In addition, Durbin's district was not immune from political forces buoying Republican challengers around the country. Magnifying these national forces was redistricting, which added new and unfamiliar territory to the district in 1992. That year, Durbin's winning margin slipped to 13 percent. It fell again to 9.6 percent in 1994 as the Republicans took back the House with their Contract with America. Durbin faced a difficult choice. He could remain in the House of Representatives as a minority party member, continue to face tough Republican challengers, and see his winning margins dwindle or even evaporate or he, like his famous predecessor from Springfield, Abraham Lincoln, could pursue a more prestigious office.

The road to the Senate or governorship in Illinois would not be an easy one for Durbin. Although he positioned himself well for his rural, downstate district, representing the entirety of Illinois was another proposition entirely. The dividing line in Illinois is generally the I-80 corridor, which runs east to west across the north central portion of the state. The land to the south of I-80 is similar to Durbin's Springfield district—agriculture and other rural interests dominate. Moving north of I-80, however, brings you what locals refer to as Chicagoland, or the

---

<sup>1</sup> This greatly undersells Durbin's success in his district. Although he won by only 22.6 percent in 1984, he went on to win the next three elections by 36.2, 37.8, and 32.4 percent respectively.

dense urban metropolitan area encompassing the city of Chicago and its many suburbs. Here, farming concerns are the last issue on most voters' minds. Durbin's long history of focusing on agriculture may have been well suited for his district, but less so for a statewide race.

Durbin also faced the daunting expense of running a statewide campaign. He had spent \$692,886 in a close race against Republican Bill Owens in 1994, a significant amount, but nothing in comparison to recent Senate races in the state of Illinois. In 1992, Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D) spent more than \$6.6 million in a race against Republican Richard Williamson (who, himself, spent \$2.3 million). Two years prior, in 1990, Democrat Paul Simon spent almost \$8.6 million dollars, and Republican Lynn Martin spent another \$5 million in a race that was not even close.<sup>23</sup> Senate (and gubernatorial) races are usually more expensive than House races for a number of reasons. One, statewide races are more likely to be hard-fought battles between high-quality candidates. Second, candidates need to reach out to substantially more voters, across a greater distance, and often over several high-profile media markets. Illinois races tend to be even more costly as Chicago represents the third largest media market in the United States (Nielsen 2012).

Despite the challenges, Durbin decided to forgo reelection to his Springfield district and threw his hat in the Senate race after incumbent Democrat Paul Simon retired. Simon, for whom Durbin had worked for as a young man, unofficially endorsed his candidacy, but it was far from a sure thing. After a closely contested primary race for both parties, the general election came down to a battle between Durbin and conservative state representative Al Salvi. In the final weeks leading up to Election Day, Durbin pulled ahead of Salvi and went on to win by an impressive, and unexpected, fifteen point margin. He holds the seat to this day.

---

<sup>2</sup> Simon beat Martin by thirty percentage points (65 to 35).

<sup>3</sup> All fundraising data comes from the *Almanac of American Politics (1996 and 1998 editions)*.



## Durbin's Political Ambition

Durbin did not win his race by luck alone. In the term immediately preceding his run for higher office, he made several strategic decisions contributing to his eventual success. First, Durbin devoted substantially less time to agricultural issues; while agricultural introductions made up fourteen percent of his agenda in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, he chose not to introduce a bill on agricultural issues in 104<sup>th</sup> Congress. Instead, he turned his attention to Social Security and welfare, introducing a piece of legislation in each area; both issues were previously untouched by the Illinois Democrat. Even more noticeably, he increased the percentage of his agenda devoted to crime, an issue important to Chicago voters. The attention was not just lip service; he focused on introductions rather than cosponsorships, which send a more obvious signal of support.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, Durbin raised and spent almost five million dollars in the general election.<sup>5</sup> Combined with the endorsement of the exiting Senator Simon, Durbin's win was not luck at all. In fact, it looked more like a well-crafted risk by an incredibly adept, skilled, and strategic politician.<sup>6</sup>

Durbin's story provides evidence of many factors surrounding political careers in Congress. The first is obvious—Durbin was ambitious. Some politicians, whether because of personal ambition or other factors, decide to pursue higher offices. This pursuit of a higher office is considered progressive ambition (Schlesinger 1966), and nowhere is this ambition more apparent than in the House of Representatives, where legislators can eye seats in the Senate, Governor's office, or even the White House. Baker (1989) notes this prevalent ambition in his

---

<sup>4</sup> Although he only introduced one bill on crime in each Congress, the percentage of his agenda pertaining to crime rose from seven percent to eleven percent between the 103<sup>rd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> Congresses. The percentage of bill cosponsorships remained steady at approximately six percent (he cosponsored 13 crime bills in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, and 11 in the 104<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> Durbin raised an additional one million dollars during the primary campaign.

<sup>6</sup> The *Chicago Sun-Times* would refer to Durbin as “affable but shrewd” in their post-election wrap-up (Fornek and Talbott 1996).

examination of the House and Senate stating, “Senators...know, in their heart of hearts, that all House members hankered to be senators” (8). For these legislators, the real goal of seeking a seat in Congress’s lower chamber is to pursue another political office. The House is simply a stepping-stone in which to gain political expertise, network among powerful people, and plan their eventual moves to another position.

However, Durbin’s story also tells more about both the causes and the effects of progressive ambition. For Durbin, a propensity for taking risks may have spurred his interest in running for the higher office. Previous work has found that legislators who have faced a tough contest in the past are more likely to seek out a higher office (Rohde 1979). Durbin certainly had experienced risk when he challenged a long-time incumbent to win his original House seat. Furthermore, Durbin had run for, and lost, political races twice in the past. His willingness to accept risk, as well as a fear of losing his seat, likely propelled him to run. Second, Durbin was facing a district much changed due to redistricting, which increases the rate of progressive ambition because legislators are often forced into races with other sitting legislators or face a district completely unfamiliar to them (Brace 1984; Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Kiewiet and Zeng 1993).

Durbin’s story also shows progressive ambition affects legislative and campaign behavior. While Durbin’s early activity confirmed much of what we know about members of Congress—they take positions on issues important to their districts, they claim credit for the activities they participate in Congress, and they build a name brand to ensure reelection (Mayhew 1974)—his behavior in response to his higher office run was much different. As noted above, Durbin began to shift his attention away from the issues important to his current constituency and towards issues important to voters in the statewide race. Likewise, Durbin

relied on important endorsements and campaign fundraising to ensure that his quest for a higher office was successful.

The goal of my dissertation is to explore whether the differences seen in Durbin's higher office run are part of a larger pattern of behavior by progressively ambitious members of Congress. For instance, do progressively ambitious legislators "act today in terms of the electorate [they] hope to win tomorrow (Schlesinger 1966, 6)" by specifically targeting new demographic groups in the statewide constituency? Do they increase the amount of money they raise and spend? Do they contribute to other members of Congress to gain endorsements and contacts? By answering these questions and examining more than just basic differences between ambitious and non-ambitious legislators, I speak to the representational, policy, and real-world implications of progressive ambition. At the same time, by leveraging an instance where the electoral connection is changing, the dissertation furthers our understanding of how the re-election incentive shifts behavior in Congress.

### **The Causes of Progressive Ambition**

Research on progressive ambition has generally focused on two main questions. The first is why some members of Congress display progressive ambition while others do not, and the second is how this ambition affects their behavior in office. Work on the former often begins with the rational calculations of legislators deciding which office to pursue. Researchers have focused on two sets of variables which may make ambition more likely—the personal characteristics of progressively ambitious legislators (e.g., their seniority and history of risk taking) and district or state-level characteristics, such as constituency congruence and partisan leanings.

Overall, work has found politicians first determine the strategic context before running for higher office. Legislators consider both the costs of running and the cost of losing their positions, as well as the benefits of gaining a new seat. The representative holds a value for his or her current seat as well as a value for life outside of Congress (i.e., if he or she loses). He or she also has an expected value for the higher office position (Francis and Kenny 2000). Building upon these values, as well as the probability of winning a higher office, legislators can make a rational choice about their futures. As evidenced by Durbin's example, legislators only run when the likelihood of winning is high or the cost of losing is low, and are rarely interested in leaving the safety of a seat in a wild gamble for higher office (Black 1972; Rohde 1979). Facing an increasingly tough battle for his House seat, Durbin chose to leave an unsafe seat in his higher office run.

Therefore, those characteristics making electoral success for another seat more likely also make progressive ambition more likely. At the individual level, risk-taking has the strongest correlation with progressive ambition (Rohde 1979). Legislators who have faced competitive battles with a small margin of victory in the past are much more likely to forgo re-election in favor of higher office. Additionally, both very young and very old legislators avoid running for higher office; for the former, too little experience decreases the chances of success while, for the latter, legislators who have served in Congress for years can end their careers with retirement, rather than a risky higher office run (Brace 1984; Maestas *et al* 2006).

The legislator's position within Congress may also contribute to progressive ambition. Minority party members, for instance, not only retire at higher rates, but also pursue higher office more frequently (Gilmour and Rothstein 1993; Schansberg 1994). Here again, the cost of losing a seat as a minority party member is less than losing as a majority party member, which holds the

potential of more policy success and prestigious committee assignments. Women also run at a slightly lower rate than men do, likely because they face higher personal costs such as childcare responsibilities (Fulton *et al* 2006; Maestas *et al* 2006).

District and state level factors are equally important in explaining which members of Congress run for higher office and which do not. Simply put, legislators seek out offices they are more likely to obtain (Schlesinger 1966). For instance, open seats and races where the other party is very weak increase progressive ambition (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993; Rohde 1979). Some districts also serve as feeders to the Senate, especially those with a shared electorate or a district highly congruent with the statewide constituency (Brace 1984). For example, a politician running for higher office in South Dakota, which only has one representative, is going to face no challenge in adapting to a new constituency, compared to a member of the House of Representatives from California whose constituency will increase exponentially and become more heterogeneous. Significant changes to a district also increase the likelihood of seeking higher office (Brace 1984; Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Kiewiet and Zeng 1993).

The structure of the rules governing elections within the state also affect progressive ambition. Most notably, research has found term limits alter the opportunity structure of legislators and increase ambition (Powell 2000). Most proponents of term limits argue their introduction will bring in fresh blood, a focus on issues over re-election, and a return to the citizen legislator. In reality, while term-limited legislators may put issues above personal goals, they find themselves unable to complete these issue goals within their term limits. Therefore, to meet these goals, they seek out other offices at a higher rate than non-term limited legislators (Herrick and Thomas 2005).

## **The Effects of Progressive Ambition**

Thus, we know a great deal about what factors increase the rate of progressive ambition. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the effects of this ambition on legislative behavior. This dearth of knowledge leaves us with an incomplete picture of how ambition may alter the policy-making outputs of the House of Representatives and the representative-constituency relationship. However, there have been a few influential studies. For example, focusing on Senate candidates from 1959 through 1982, Hibbing (1986) found that an ambitious politician juggling current responsibilities and a statewide campaign will miss more votes than his or her colleagues miss. This squares with anecdotal evidence. In 2009, for instance, Representative Gresham Barrett faced a backlash for missing more than one-third of the votes taken during the year while he ran for governor of South Carolina. His spokesperson, Emily Tyner, outlined the inherent difficulty in mounting a higher office campaign. “Serving in Congress while running for governor is a balancing act; he hopes that people will understand that” (Rosen 2009). The idea of a balancing act is a frequent refrain from representatives and journalists alike. In short, when the pressures of the campaign get to be too much, representation in the House of Representatives may suffer. Campaigns take time and effort, so there is a significant portion of the congressional term where a current constituency may not receive the full scope of representation ideally granted to them.

Behavioral changes extend beyond just missed votes, however. Ambitious politicians also shift their ideological positions in the months leading up to Election Day (Hibbing 1986). For example, legislators often move away from the district median and closer to the state median position in their roll call voting to appeal to more voters within the new constituency and to party leaders who may provide campaign support (Carey 1994; Francis et al 1994; Francis and Kenny

1996). More generally, Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) found legislators aiming for higher positions are more likely to “shirk” by deviating from their district’s position on roll-call votes.

### **Unanswered Questions**

These findings suggest ambition may indeed affect legislative behavior. However, questions remain. First, the majority of these studies focus exclusively on roll call voting, while ignoring a host of other equally important activities, such as introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments. Why are these other activities so important? First, roll call votes are necessarily constrained to a dichotomous yes or no vote. They are therefore a blunt measure, and do not allow legislators to shift behavior easily. Introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments, however, give legislators significant leeway in how much they want to participate as well as on what issues to do so (Hall 1996; Schiller 2000). Furthermore, these activities comprise the bulk of a legislator’s agenda and they actively campaign on these activities once running for office. Many use introductions and cosponsorships to follow through on campaign promises (Sulkin 2009; Sulkin 2011), to shore up deficiencies pointed out to them by challengers (Sulkin 2005), and to respond to changes demanded by their constituencies (Harward and Moffett 2010). Legislators could also use these activities to improve their chances of successfully obtaining a higher office.

Second, and most importantly, existing work fails to move beyond *expressed* ambition, and focuses exclusively on legislators who actually appeared on the ballot for a higher office. This leaves out a large number of legislators who seriously consider running for office—changing their behavior and increasing their fundraising—only to decide at the last minute not to run. Here, I draw on the concept of nascent political ambition—“the embryonic or potential interest in office seeking that precedes the actual decision to enter a specific political contest”

(Fox and Lawless 2005, 643). For instance, focusing on expressed ambition alone would neglect a legislator like Representative Tom Davis (R-VA), who wanted to run for Senate in 2008, but had to postpone after two political heavyweights entered the race (Davis is profiled in more detail in Chapter 2).<sup>7</sup> I argue legislators who seriously contemplate a bid for higher office are also progressively ambitious and are equally important to include in my analysis because they too may change their activity. By failing to include the nascently ambitious, we run the risk of understating the impact of ambition on policy activity.

### **Plans for the Dissertation**

Like many scholars of legislative behavior, I begin with Mayhew (1974), who structured his examination of Congress around:

“...a simple abstract assumption about human motivation and then speculate[d] about the consequences of behavior based on that motivation. Specifically, [he conjured] up a vision of United States congressmen as single-minded seekers of reelection, [saw] what kinds of activity that goal implies, and then speculate[d] about how congressmen so motivated are likely to go about building and sustaining legislative institutions and making policy” (5).

However, in this case I begin with a vision of a progressively ambitious member of Congress as a seeker of higher office and set out to uncover what types of activity this goal implies. An ambitious member faces a complex environment. While most members of Congress are “single-minded seekers of reelection,” progressively ambitious members cannot maintain this sole focus on the current district. Instead, in the months, and perhaps even, years prior to a higher office runs, a legislator needs to please two masters—the district holding the keys to his or her current position and the future state or nationwide constituency which has the ability to unlock the new higher office. This dissertation explores how the progressively ambitious legislator strategically prepares for a run for the Senate, governorship, or presidency.

---

<sup>7</sup> Davis’ interest in the position was well-known. He was even featured in a 2006 edition of *Washingtonian* magazine titled “Senator Tom Davis?” (Todd 2006).



I begin in Chapter 2 by defining the types of ambition present in members of Congress. Building upon the work of Joseph Schlesinger (1966), I categorize legislators in one of three ways. A legislator may be discretely ambitious (seeking office for a finite period), statically ambitious (seeking to maintain his current position), or progressively ambitious (seeking a more prestigious higher office). Ambition is more complex than this typology, however. As discussed above and to paint a more complete picture of ambition, I incorporate nascent political ambition-or the “embryonic or potential interest” in a political office. In this chapter, I also detail my data collection to gather this information on expressed and nascent ambition. I find that progressive ambition is not universal to all members of Congress; many display expressed ambition, others nascent, and some remain static for the entirety of their careers.

Building upon my discussion in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 examines the different types of ambition to illustrate how nascently ambitious legislators differ from expressly ambitious legislators. Here, I also examine more on the causes of nascent ambition. Are nascently ambitious legislators less likely to be risk takers? Are their districts different from expressly ambitious legislator’s districts? To answer these questions, I use a combination of in-depth case studies of nascently ambitious legislators and data analysis of their districts, backgrounds, and higher office races. I also examine the handful of members of Congress who displayed both nascent and expressed ambition at different points in their legislative careers.

Chapter 4 examines how expressed and nascent progressive ambition alters the behavior of sitting representatives. I predict a progressively ambitious legislator will change the volume of his or her activity. A member of Congress running for higher office will spend more time back in her state campaigning and, as a result, will miss more roll call votes. However, missed roll call votes may provide fodder for a competitor’s campaign. Any strategic legislator will

seek to minimize the risks involved in running for higher office and maximize the chance she succeeds. In order to counteract the negative press and campaign attention, a progressively ambitious legislator will increase her other public activities, including introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments. Even if a legislator was not faced with negative press attention, total activity may increase as she seeks to expand her policy agenda.

Beyond changes in the volume of legislative activity, a strategic legislator will also alter the *content* of his or her legislative activities. A legislator who runs for higher office faces a unique predicament. Having spent time in the House of Representatives, he or she will have constructed an agenda uniquely situated to the district and current constituency. Unless a legislator represents a state at-large, this agenda is not as well suited to a prospective, statewide constituency. In order to increase his or her electoral chances, he or she will fill any issue-specific holes in the agenda, adapting to better reflect the interests of the state.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the fundraising activity of progressively ambitious legislators. While the average successful House candidate spent just under 1.4 million dollars in 2008, the average winning Senate candidate spent more than six times as much (about 8.5 million dollars) and the average gubernatorial race cost candidates about 6.7 million dollars in total.<sup>8</sup> A legislator wishing to pursue either of these higher offices is going to need to raise substantially more money than before. I anticipate that a progressively ambitious legislator will raise more money in the years preceding his or her higher office run. I also expect that these legislators will begin to spend substantially more money immediately prior to their higher office run in order to match pace with other competitors. This change will also occur in the years preceding his or her

---

<sup>8</sup> Campaign costs for the House and Senate races come from the Center for Responsive Politics (<http://www.opensecrets.org>). Figures for the gubernatorial elections represent data gathered by The Council of State Governments (<http://knowledgecenter.csg.org>).

higher office run as a member of Congress seeks to build a name brand well beyond the confines of the legislator district.

Yet, campaign fundraising is about more than just inputs. Legislators also have the ability to direct campaign resources to other politicians, the party, and political action committees. Extant research has found these intraparty contributions can be a powerful predictor of who receives prime committee and party leadership positions (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007; Heberlig 2003; Heberlig and Larson 2010). These same types of contributions could also aid progressively ambitious legislators, who may be able to use the donations to garner support from fellow legislators. In this chapter, I explore both giving to the party's campaign committee, as well as to individual legislators. Giving to the party could induce more support and campaign resources, while giving to other individuals could lead to important endorsements or joint campaign events. Thus, progressively ambitious legislators could have higher levels of candidate-to-candidate giving.

The final chapter will highlight the representational, policy, and real-world implications of ambition in Congress. In particular, I discuss how a body of ambitious legislators differs from one where a legislator is constrained or discouraged from seeking higher office. Frequently, legislators and government reformers seek to alter the opportunity structure for members of Congress. For instance, reforms meant to increase turnover in the House of Representatives, such as term limits, and in leadership positions, such as the declining importance of seniority, significantly increase progressive ambition by making service in the House less desirable. Although these reforms do not receive the same amount of attention that they once did, several candidates in recent elections hinted at reintroducing the legislation or abiding by self-imposed

term limits. To understand the full repercussions of these changes, we should have a clear picture of how ambition affects behavior within the House of Representatives.

Overall, my dissertation shows that progressive ambition has a substantial effect on legislative behavior. Legislators are strategic and use the tools at their disposal to insure their future electoral success. For progressively ambitious legislators, these tools include their legislative agendas and campaign resources. These shifts have an effect on the policy-making outputs of Congress and on the relationship between the representative and his constituency.

## Chapter 2: Identifying and Measuring Ambition

For most on Capitol Hill, the months and years leading up to the New Hampshire primary and Iowa caucus are filled with speculation about who will enter the presidential fray. Trial balloons and exploratory committees surround the most serious candidates, and non-denials and vague demurrals are the currency of those on the cusp of contention. However, as morning dawned in America in 1984, Mo Udall, the long-serving Democratic representative from Arizona, was unequivocal in his lack of ambition for the highest office in the land. “If nominated, I shall run to Mexico,” he reportedly said. “If elected, I shall fight extradition” (Powell 2009). Udall had no interest in challenging the popular Reagan.

However, viewing his statement without a look at his long career would paint an incomplete picture of Udall’s ambition. In fact, Udall had run for president in the past. In 1976, he had challenged political outsider Jimmy Carter, falling one percentage point short of him in the Wisconsin primary. The loss killed any momentum the campaign had built and Udall eventually dropped out of the race. Thus, Congressman Udall’s lack of interest in the 1984 presidential race was likely a response to his advancing age, faltering health, and a popular incumbent, not a general dearth of ambition.

Few are as straightforward in their lack of interest in higher office as Udall was in 1984. For most politicians, ambition is a nebulous and ever-changing orientation. At one point, sensing a prime opening or a weak incumbent, a legislator may express interest in higher office, only to see the opportunity disappear or his or her interest wane. Others may seek out prime committee or party leadership positions in lieu of a Senate seat, remaining in the House of Representatives but displaying high levels of ambition within the chamber. Still others find the

House to be the ideal place to end their political careers and choose to remain there until retirement or an electoral loss.

The fickle nature of ambition has made its identification and measurement among the most difficult topics to tackle for scholars of congressional careers. What is political ambition? How can political scientists capture the ephemeral nature of ambition without a direct window into the minds of the legislators who may hold it? In this chapter, I first outline the many forms of ambition a legislator may display over the course of his or her congressional career. I then discuss how researchers have previously measured ambition as well as how I choose to measure it for this dissertation. I argue progressive ambition, while common, is not universal. Many members of Congress pursue more prestige in another position; either by actually running for office or by harboring nascent ambition (an interest in moving up which is never realized). A sizable number, however, have no plans to seek higher political office, regardless of the opportunities presented to them.

### **Typology of Ambition**

Researchers studying congressional careers in the United States most often begin with Joseph Schlesinger's typology of political ambition (1966). Schlesinger argued all legislators are ambitious, but their ambition takes one of three forms—discrete, static, or progressive. With discrete ambition, a politician seeks office for a set amount of time or to meet a specific policy goal. Once that time limit is up, or the goal met, he or she voluntarily leaves office. At one time, when serving in Congress lacked prestige and Washington, D.C. remained largely an uninhabited swampland, discrete ambition was much more prevalent. Legislators typically served a short time in office before returning to more lucrative private careers back home. More recently, many of the Republicans elected in 1994 under the “Contract with America” came in with self-

imposed term limits; those who upheld their pledges and left Congress after three to six terms displayed discrete ambition. Another common form of discrete ambition is when a legislator passes away and his or her spouse pledges to serve out the remainder of the term, but does not run again on his or her own. Of the 46 spouses elected or appointed to congressional service, half served one term or less (Office of the Clerk 2007).<sup>9</sup> At the national level, discrete ambition is the rarest of the typology. Most legislators prefer to stay in Congress or pursue a higher office.

The second type of ambition Schlesinger identified was static ambition where a politician remains in office indefinitely, happy with the power the current office offers. Once elected, a statically ambitious member of Congress will pursue activities and help shape the legislature to encourage future electoral success. John Dingell, a Democratic representative from Michigan and the longest serving member of Congress, is a perfect example of a statically ambitious politician. Elected in 1955 to replace his father, Dingell has rarely faced a serious competitor.<sup>10</sup> Upon announcing a run for his thirtieth term in the House in 2011, Dingell made it clear he was happy to remain exactly where he was. “It's the greatest job in the world,” he said (Camia 2011).

Dingell is an example of the classic reelection-seeking legislator about which most work in legislative behavior has focused. This focus is not without basis. Legislators report reelection considerations drive much of their behavior, even when they have not faced a significant electoral challenge in years. As Mayhew (1974) put it,

“Whether they are safe or marginal, cautious or audacious, congressmen must constantly engage in activities related to reelection. There will be differences in emphasis, but all members share the root need to do things—indeed, to do things day in and day out during their terms” (49).

---

<sup>9</sup> Prior to 1976, most congressional spouses returned home after fulfilling the term. Today, more establish careers of their own. Currently, four members of Congress took over after the death of their husbands. Mary Bono Mack (R-CA), Lois Capps (D-CA), Doris Matsui (D-CA), and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) have been reelected on their own right and many have considered political careers beyond the House of Representatives.

<sup>10</sup> In the Democratic off year of 1994, Dingell still beat his opponent by 19 percent, an unheard of margin for the popular incumbent.

What types of “things” do legislators do? Members of Congress focused on reelection vote on bills that produce policy in the best interest of their districts or that their constituents want (which is not always the same thing). They also introduce and cosponsor legislation on issues popular among their constituents, claim credit for distributive policies such as roads and bridges within the district, and advertise their accomplishments to ensure future success. Ultimately, legislators build a name brand that holds electoral value (Mayhew 1974).

Later work built upon Schlesinger’s original typology by further subdividing static ambition. Schlesinger acknowledged that even statically ambitious politicians may not be happy as legislative backbenchers and will pursue party or committee leadership positions within the chamber. Herrick and Moore (1993) argue this career path is a unique form of ambition—one they term *intrainstitutional* ambition. In reality, however, intrainstitutional ambition and static ambition may be nearly interchangeable concepts. Almost no legislator is purely statically ambitious. Most members of Congress will gain seniority and slowly move up the committee or party hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> John Dingell, for instance, is actually intrainstitutionally ambitious. From 1981 until 1995 (when Democrats lost the majority), Dingell served as the powerful chair of the Commerce Committee. Under his leadership, the committee ousted government administrators, oversaw the break-up of AT&T, and passed the Clean Air Act in 1990. Dingell’s co-partisan, Henry Waxman (D-CA), has also been safely ensconced in his current district for decades, yet held the powerful chairmanship of Commerce’s Health and Environment subcommittee between 1978 and 1995. Intrainstitutional ambition also squares with previous research on legislators’ goals. Not only do legislators seek reelection and desire to make good public policy, they seek influence within the chamber (Fenno 1973).

---

<sup>11</sup> Later work by one of the authors acknowledges this fact. Herrick (2001) admits, “because of the seniority rule, members who want to become committee chairs need the same thing static members need—reelection” (470). It is unclear whether this pattern continues to hold given the erosion of the seniority rule, especially in recent years.



Progressive ambition was the last of Schlesinger's typology. Here, a politician attempts to leave his or her current office in hopes of a more prestigious one. There are a number of progressively ambitious career paths—Schlesinger, for instance, focused on state representatives and senators moving to the national level. This dissertation focuses on members of the House of Representatives who choose to run for a spot in the Senate or a governorship, and the few rare instances where representatives make the jump to running for the presidency. Progressive ambition is not rare, but neither is it universal, and it may not be a constant over the course of a career. To give just one example, during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 49 members of the Senate were previously in the House of Representatives (Amer 2008). Additionally, nine of the sitting governors had served there. Overall, progressively ambitious politicians held approximately 39 percent of the 151 available higher office positions.<sup>12</sup>

### **Nascent Ambition**

Of course, legislators may hold an interest in political office, and never fully act upon it. While former representatives held 39 percent of higher office positions in 2008, dozens of other MCs considered running for higher office. Schlesinger's typology can be further developed to incorporate these individuals and the changing nature of ambition. Members of Congress may enter expecting to leave after two or three terms, but find their policy or personal goals are incomplete as the limit nears. Those seemingly happy with remaining in the House of Representatives may see a popular senator or governor retire or exit office unexpectedly and choose to run. In fact, Schlesinger believed ambition was not a constant. He held that legislators could, and did, alter their career paths as new opportunities presented themselves or old opportunities disappeared. "An ambition theory need not assume that office goals are constant in their intensity and direction for the same individual or for different individuals," he wrote. "As a

---

<sup>12</sup> Here, I am including the 100 Senate seats, 50 governorships, and the presidency.

man does or does not progress in his career the possibilities change, and if he is reasonable, so will his ambitions” (Schlesinger 1966, 9).

Additionally, interest in higher office may not even remain constant over the course of a single election. Legislators may take steps to enter a race for a higher office only to be stymied by an unexpectedly tough challenger or a reenergized incumbent. Representative Tom Davis (R-VA) faced two such obstacles during the 2008 election cycle. When Senator John Warner announced his retirement in August of 2007, Davis expressed his interest in the seat. His campaign was over before it even started, however, when two former governors—Republican Jim Gilmore and Democrat Mark Warner—entered the race less than a month after John Warner’s announcement. Faced with beating two heavy hitters within Virginia politics, he chose to defer his ambition. Senatorial and gubernatorial almost-runs (like Davis in 2008) are ambitious, but their ambition is *nascent*. Nascent political ambition is “the embryonic or potential interest in office seeking that precedes the actual decision to enter a specific political contest” (Fox and Lawless 2005, 643). I consider legislators nascently ambitious if they seriously considered running for a higher office, but ultimately did not appear on a ballot on Election Day. This includes legislators who began to run for a higher office, but withdrew before the election would occur.

Why do so many legislators consider pursuing a higher office, only to never formally appear on the ballot? There are several reasons. Many float trial balloons to serve as a threat for other politicians within the state. For instance, in 1999, Jim McDermott (D-WA) briefly flirted with challenging Senator Slade Gorton after Gorton voted against a gun control measure McDermott had supported. McDermott’s threat of challenging Gorton was an inducement to work with the state’s delegation on the legislation. These instances are fairly rare and short-

lived. McDermott, for instance, never took any official steps towards running for office beyond querying his state's delegation on his chances (Connelly 1999).<sup>13</sup> He still represents his Washington district.

Others consider running when rumors emerge that the sitting governor or senator is planning to retire. Legislators often specifically preface their interest in running on the condition that the incumbent does not return. In these cases, a late announcement that the incumbent plans to return to office prevents them from running. Ultimately, most legislators are rational; they do not plan to give up their current seat to challenge a successful or well-liked politician. Most commonly, legislators enter the race for a higher office only to face a challenge from another member of the state's delegation. Members frequently defer their interest in the position if someone else also expresses an interest in running. Robert Andrews' (D-NJ) attempts at higher office have been thwarted for both of these reasons. When Governor Jim McGreevey resigned in 2004, Andrews expressed interest in the position, only to step aside to support the eventual winner, Senator Jon Corzine.<sup>14</sup> Andrews was also stymied by Frank Lautenberg's presence in the Senate for years (Barone and Cohen 2008, 1060).<sup>15</sup>

However, nascent ambition has been largely left out of studies of progressive ambition in the United States Congress. Some researchers studying the presidential campaigns of senators have incorporated "late" aspirants into their examinations. These "late" aspirants entered the primary season far later than more serious contestants, failed to declare their candidacy while refusing to deny their interest in the position, or simply did not pursue the presidency seriously

---

<sup>13</sup> McDermott also underwent open-heart surgery during this period, which sidelined his campaign. His questionable health may have contributed to dropping out of the race.

<sup>14</sup> Andrews had previously lost to McGreevey in the Democratic gubernatorial primaries in 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Lautenberg was originally elected in 1982 and retired in 2000 after serving three terms. His retirement was short lived, however. He returned to the Senate in 2002 after Senator Robert Torricelli withdrew from his attempt at reelection. It would take Andrews years of underlying ambition before he ran against Lautenberg in the 2008 Democratic Senate primary. He lost, but luckily, New Jersey law allowed his name to remain on the ballot for the House, where he continues to serve.

(Van Der Slik and Pernacciaro 1979). Including nascent ambition for senators is more straightforward. For months, the “invisible primary” is rife with news reports of who is in the race and who might be. Following members of the House of Representatives is more difficult as they receive substantially less press coverage and identifying their planned career path is more difficult. Difficult as it might be, identifying potential candidates helps paint a clearer picture of the career trajectories of members of Congress and helps to address the question of whether or not ambition is a universal characteristic of MCs.

### **Measuring Political Ambition**

As evidence by the discussion above, identifying ambition is difficult and properly measuring it is a strongly contested aspect of this body of research. Many careers in the United States have a ladder to the top that is well ordered and clearly delineated; for instance, the middle manager hopes to make it to upper management, and assistant professors hope to gain tenure and become associate and then full professors. However, as Lasswell (1960) notes in his psychological study of political personalities, politicians in the United States hold far more command over when, where, and how to pursue their ambitions, yet much less control over the success of their ambitions.

“In American politics the escalator to the top is not a regimented, orderly lift, but a tangle of ladders, ropes, and runways that attracts people from other activities at various stages of the process, and leads others to a dead end or a blind drop” (303).

Federalism and multiple political offices allow an individual to choose his or her own path. Weak party control and candidate-centered elections means the individual legislator only needs to meet the minimum Constitutional requirements to pursue a political office. Without a window into the mind of a legislator, it is difficult to identify ambition and the course of a legislator’s career. As Prinz (1993) posits in his review of the career paths of politicians, “it may be the case

that like Justice Stewart's observation on pornography, we know a political career (*or in this case, progressive ambition*) when we see it" (13).

For studies of progressive ambition, the main question that arises out of this debate is whether ambition is a behavior, an inherent interest in running for higher office, or some middle ground between the two. If it is a behavior, ambition only occurs when the legislator begins to actively consider or pursue a higher office. Additionally, this behavior is a response to a set of ideal conditions (i.e. an incumbent retires and no one else seeks the seat, term limits force a run for another office, or redistricting eliminates the current district). If it is an innate predisposition, ambition remains a constant over the course of one's career. A legislator enters office knowing she will pursue a better or more prestigious one later. Existing research has responded to this debate in one of three ways. First, some researchers argue ambition is inherent and we should consider all legislators progressively ambitious. Rohde, for instance, argued that "if a member of the House, on his first day of service, were offered a Senate seat or a governorship *without cost or risk*, he would take it" (Rohde 1979, 3). Only "caretakers," such as widowed spouses or political appointees, do not hold progressive ambition.

A second option is to assume ambition lies somewhere between the two extremes. Ambition is more akin to a state of mind and can be measured through surveys or interviews. In this case, ambition is not universal. In her examination of progressive and intrainstitutional ambition in Congress, Herrick (2001) surveyed members of Congress early in their careers to gather self-reported ambition and found some effect of progressive ambition on legislative behavior. However, there are shortcomings of studying ambition in this way. First, it is difficult to gather large-scale surveys of members of Congress.<sup>16</sup> Second, it relies on self-reports of

---

<sup>16</sup> Herrick's sample is very restricted. She surveyed non-incumbent candidates (or challengers) about their plans in office. Approximately half of the winning candidates responded to the survey; however, this amounts to only 89

interest in higher office and requires legislators to be honest and forthright, a requirement that is not always met. As Herrick notes, by the time she ran her analysis, one legislator who had expressed no interest in higher office had already run for one. Legislators can and do change their minds.

A final option is to treat ambition as a behavior or an action, or more accurately, to measure opportunity and not ambition (Hibbing 1986). Again, ambition is not assumed to be universal, but rather reflects both interest and the availability of an office. In this option, a legislator does not spend his time actively considering a higher office run. Instead, if presented with an opportunity to pursue another seat, he does. There are problems with this approach as well. One, it only captures people that actually ran for higher office (mostly those who appeared on a ballot for higher office). Measuring progressive ambition this way underestimates its presence; it neglects those would have run for office had the risks or costs been lower. Second, it may actually test whether members with different legislative styles are more likely to run for higher office, not if members who are interested in higher office behave differently (Herrick 2001). In this dissertation, I attempt to capture both action and state of mind by incorporating both expressed and nascent ambition. Overall, I contend progressive ambition is not an inherent predisposition held by all members of Congress. Many are interested in higher office, while others are not.

### **The Universal Nature of Progressive Ambition?**

As this debate highlights, researchers disagree both about whether ambition is a behavior or a constant, and over whether it is universal or more limited. In fact, progressive ambition is not universal to all members of Congress precisely because any legislator considering running

---

legislators. She does not identify what percentage of that group reported either progressive or intrainstitutional ambition.

for a higher office faces costs and risks. For many, those costs and risks dampen or extinguish progressive ambition. John Dingell (D-MI), the dean of the House of Representatives, has served in Congress for more than five decades, leading the Commerce Committee, and shepherding through legislation on health care reform and environmental protections. In that time, he has never been mentioned as a candidate for higher office. Neither has the longest serving Republican, Bill Young (R-FL), and former chair of the Appropriations Committee, who has represented his Florida district since 1971. Other examples abound. For some legislators, the House is actually the preferred position. In contrast to the Senate, the House of Representatives provides fewer committee responsibilities for its members and has the powerful Constitutional authority to originate spending bills (Baker 1989). Add to that a smaller, more homogeneous constituency with substantially fewer campaign costs and fundraising responsibilities, and the House of Representatives is the ideal pinnacle of many members' careers.

Indeed, some MCs even refuse to give up their leadership posts or amassed seniority when the opportunity to appear; these individuals are even more blatant in their disinterest in higher office. When Al Gore resigned his Senate seat after the 1992 presidential election, several Tennessee legislators lobbied for the vacant position. However, Governor Ned McWherter had his eyes on John Tanner, the Democratic representative from west Tennessee. Tanner was uninterested with the prospect of having to campaign statewide in the future and declined the position (Barone and Ujifusa 1994, 1195). Similarly, when one-term Illinois Republican Senator Peter Fitzgerald decided not to run in 2004, Judy Biggert (R-IL) turned down an uncontested Republican nomination from party leadership, leaving them scrambling for a replacement (Barone and Cohen 2006, 593). Biggert likely thought her limited name

recognition outside of her suburban Chicago district would not have fared well against the young, Democratic rising star, Barack Obama. Although Tanner and Biggert's situations may be rare, they show that not all legislators are interested in pursuing a higher office, all the time. In both cases mentioned above, Tanner and Biggert did face costs. Although both may have obtained the party's nomination, they had to resign their current, comfortable positions to do so—an obvious risk.

The aftermath of Barack Obama's election to the presidency also outlines the costs faced by progressively ambitious legislators. If everyone was progressively ambitious, Obama's resignation from his Senate seat in 2008 should have led to dozens of Illinois politicians jockeying for the position. However, none of the long-standing Democratic politicians (except for Chicago representative Jesse Jackson, Jr.) entered into "negotiations" with then Governor Rod Blagojevich for the seat. The seat eventually went to relative unknown, Roland Burris, who would decline to run for reelection in 2010 after being entwined in Blagojevich's corruption charges. Illinois's situation shows the difficulty in finding an example where a legislator faces no costs or risks in pursuing higher office. Democrats from Illinois may have accurately predicted 2010 would be a difficult election for the party nationwide. Likewise, they may not have wanted to be associated with a governor who was already facing ethical and legal questions, an association that could have doomed future electoral chances. Others may have felt safer seeking reelection to a congressional district they knew and had catered to in the past. The important thing to note is that a legislator must not only be confident he can obtain the position, but he must also be confident he can retain it in the next and future elections.



## **Progressive Ambition and Legislative Behavior**

Where does this leave researchers? How prevalent is progressive ambition? All legislators may have grown up with boy or girlhood dreams of becoming president, but most realize the cost and risk involved with pursuing the position are not worth it. A representative may pass senators in the hallway, work closely with them in conference committees, and actively campaign or fundraise jointly under the party banner. The prestige, publicity, and power may be appealing. However, the additional cost, the increased competitiveness, and higher turnover found in Senate races may not be. It is likely most legislators are interested in a higher office in an abstract way, but are not actively pursuing it.

As Herrick (2001) notes in her examination of self-identified progressively ambitious politicians, the *active* pursuit of an office is an important caveat. A legislator entering the House of Representatives with a strong plan for seeking the Senate or governorship of his home state is going to behave differently in office than one who responds to an ideal opportunity structure or who is appointed to the position upon the resignation of an incumbent. In the latter case, the opportunity presents itself too quickly to make any real change in behavior, activity, or campaigning. In the former, the rational legislator will have only a short time to respond, creating an opportunity to uncover what behaviors a legislator feels will provide him or her with the best chance at gaining the new seat. Holding Herrick's assumption to be true, there will be different patterns of behavior between an average, reelection seeking legislator and one who is actively running for, or considering a run for, higher office.

Responding to this debate is especially important in order to examine the effects of progressive ambition on legislative behavior. If ambition were universal, patterns of behavior would never change, as all legislators would be preparing for the opportunity to run for a higher

office. For instance, if a legislator enters the House of Representatives with the express goal of eventually becoming a senator, he or she will develop an agenda that caters to not only the district, but also the state. A legislator such as Dick Durbin, who is profiled in the opening chapter, will pay attention to the agricultural interests of his downstate Springfield district, but also to the crime, infrastructure, and transportation concerns of a much more diverse and urban potential upstate constituency. If progressive ambition is not a constant within each legislator, however, we should be able to uncover different levels of activity and varying content for individuals running for higher office. Strategic legislators will shift their behavior in response to a specific race, not to their underlying predisposition towards higher office seeking.

### **Identifying Progressive Ambition**

The first step in analyzing ambition is to identify when it occurs. My analyses focus on the 103<sup>rd</sup> through 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses, which includes 1993—2008. Within this time period, both the Republican and Democratic parties benefited from years where nationwide forces aided their party (1994, for instance, ushered in the Republican Revolution; whereas 2006 was seen as a referendum on the Bush presidency and significantly helped the Democratic Party).

Additionally, within that time party control switched hands twice, which brings with it changes in party and committee leadership, as well as rule changes. These changes can make the House of Representatives more or less appealing and may spur ambition for higher office.

During the period of study, 874 individuals served in Congress, many for multiple terms. Of the 874, I identified 141 MCs as having *expressed* progressive ambition. Data on expressed progressive ambition was gathered in multiple ways.<sup>17</sup> First, I identified all members of the House of Representatives, between the 103rd through 110th Congresses (1993-2008), who did

---

<sup>17</sup> Expressed progressive ambition refers to any legislator who appeared on the ballot for a higher office (Senate, Governor, or President). It is not limited to individuals who appeared on a ballot in November, however. It also includes individuals who could have received votes in either a primary or a special election.

not return to the House in the next Congress. I then checked all these individuals using the online Congressional Biographical Directory. The directory generally lists whether a member retired, was a successful candidate for reelection to the chamber, an unsuccessful candidate for reelection to the House, or assumed another office. I coded all members elected to higher office as having expressed progressive ambition. A member may also have appeared on a ballot for higher office, but lost. I checked all additional members who did not return to Congress against newspaper and Internet reports, as well as the *Almanac of American Politics*, to determine the outcome of their congressional careers. This secondary sweep uncovered a number of additional progressively ambitious members who ran unsuccessfully for higher office.

However, focusing only on individuals who did not return to the House of Representatives is incomplete; it leaves out a number of individuals who ran for a higher office without giving up their current seat. In order to identify members of the House who unsuccessfully pursued a higher office, but successfully maintained their position, I examined the profiles in the *Almanac of American Politics* for all legislators in the Congresses under study. This final coding uncovered an additional thirteen members who actively pursued higher office, but lost in their party's primary, these legislators were considered expressly ambitious. In this case, the higher office quest ended early enough for the member to readjust his or her goals and seek reelection to the House of Representatives. Oregon's 1995 special election for an open Senate race is a perfect example of this. Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) both ran to replace retiring Senator Bob Packwood. DeFazio's policies and experiences better appealed to Oregon's Democratic Party activists, but Wyden had more money and more Democratic voters in his Portland district (Glamser and Marshall 1995). Though DeFazio fought

hard, Wyden eventually won the Democratic primary, 50 to 44 percent. DeFazio returned to his district and was reelected in 1996 by a large margin.

Overall, Republicans slightly outpaced Democrats in running for higher office 81 to 60. Of the 141 expressly ambitious members, 90 pursued a seat in the Senate, 44 returned to their state to run for the governorship, and a surprising seven sought the presidency.<sup>18</sup> Only 43 of these members were successful in their higher office run (or approximately 31 percent). An additional 245 members displayed some form of nascent ambition (which is discussed in more detail below), including 140 Republicans and 106 Democrats. Figure 2.1 presents some descriptive statistics broken down by Congress.

### **Identifying Nascent Ambition**

As discussed above, much existing work on progressive ambition fails to move beyond *expressed* ambition, and focuses exclusively on legislators who actually appeared on the ballot for a higher office. This, however, leaves out a large number of legislators who are interested in higher office, begin to run for office, but fail to make it to Election Day. It is important to include nascent ambition in any study. First, although they may have never appeared on the ballot, many actively campaigned for the higher office. Second, including them paints a much clearer picture of a legislator's career path and goals. As discussed above, one enduring debate in the literature is whether ambition is a constant and an inherent predisposition. In fact, uncovering nascent ambition shows that ambition is not black and white. There are significant shades of gray in how a legislator expresses and manifests ambition. Finally, I argue it is not only the legislator's presence on a ballot that induces strategic changes in activity and behavior, it is also the interest in a position, whether realized or not.

---

<sup>18</sup> This includes Robert Dornan (R-CA) in 1996, John Kasich (R-OH) in 2000, Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) in 2004, and Kucinich, Ron Paul (R-TX), and Duncan Hunter (R-CA) in 2008.

Nascent ambition is more difficult to uncover than expressed progressive ambition. To identify these legislators, I coded the *Almanac of American Politics* for each Congress under study to identify any member who had expressed enough interest in running for a higher office that it appeared within the write-up.<sup>19</sup> To ensure their interest was nascent, and not expressed, I then checked if the legislator appeared on a ballot for the higher office. Legislators who had not appeared were coded as *nascently* ambitious.

The decision to make appearing on the ballot a cut-point is partially a result of difficulties in measuring political ambition and partially a response to existing definitions of progressive ambition. There are several points where one could create a cut-point—the point where a formal announcement occurs, the filing deadline for a primary or general election, or the actual election day. While relying on the formal announcement as a cut-point may be more ideal, it is nearly impossible to identify the point at which every legislator declares his or her interest in a higher office without substantial data-mining from local newspaper or other media sources. Furthermore, legislators could rely on different formats to declare they are running for office, some may produce a formal press release, and still others may slowly and quietly begin campaigning with no public declaration. Using the filing deadline could also be problematic as these dates vary wildly from state to state. Some legislators would need to file paperwork months before an election, while others would only need to file within the weeks leading up that date.

Obviously, identifying nascent ambition is a difficult task and, unlike Fox and Lawless (2005), who use survey data to measure nascent ambition, I rely on secondary sources. Often these sources do not paint a clear picture of how developed or concrete the legislator's interest in

---

<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, this was a difficult thing to code and the measure will be noisy. However, it marks a departure from previous work which examines only expressed ambition.

political office is. As such, using elections as a breaking point removes a considerable amount of personal discretion from coding. Furthermore, most of the existing literature considers legislators as progressively ambitious when they appear on the ballot for a higher office. Therefore, this decision is keeping with extant research on the topic. This does create a situation where I code some legislators who have formally declared their interest, as well as filed paperwork for their campaign, as nascently ambitious. Ultimately, this should make it more difficult to find a difference between expressly and nascently ambitious legislators, not between those with static and progressive ambition.

Many of the entries in the *Almanac* rely on interviews with the member where he or she indicated an interest in a position, but others reference insider or party sources. For instance, Glen Browder (D-AL) displayed interest in Howell Heflin's Senate seat in 1998 during media interviews and formed an exploratory committee, both of which were mentioned in his *Almanac* profile. The *Almanac* reports party sources were behind Jo Ann Emerson's brief flirtation with higher office in 2001; Emerson eventually declined to challenge another Missouri congressional widow, Senator Jean Carnahan, in the special election. Other profiles are less specific. Rick Lazio's profile in the 1998 edition, simply said Lazio had "promised to serve no more than six terms in the House, some think he is interested in running for the Senate some day" (Barone and Ujifusa 1998, 975). Idaho Republican representative, Butch Otter, admitted that during his campaign he would rather be governor (he would eventually pursue and obtain that office). I discuss in more detail below how I coded all of the preceding. As expected, including nascent interest greatly increases the number of legislators considered ambitious. Table 2.1 breaks down the level of nascent ambition in the eight Congresses under study. In nearly all instances, nascent progressive ambition outpaces expressed political ambition. For example, in the 106<sup>th</sup>

Congress, 13 members were expressively progressively ambitious (i.e., they actually ran for higher office in the next election) and another 32 were nascently ambitious.

There were two main factors used to identify whether the legislator held any type of nascent ambition. The first was that the legislator had to make some type of proactive move towards running for a higher office. The *Almanac* often mentions a legislator has an ideal district or constituency which would translate well to a higher office and they would make an ideal candidate in the future. Certainly, as research has found, factors such as a high level of district-state congruency induce higher office runs (Brace 1984). A legislator from South Dakota, for instance, faces a much easier path to higher office. The state's House member represents South Dakota at-large, meaning there is no difference in demographics or constituency when moving from the House to the Senate or governorship. In contrast to a legislator from Texas, who has to adjust to campaigning at a larger scale and to representing a more diverse constituency, we would expect South Dakota to have higher rates of progressive ambition. However, these factors do not necessarily mean a legislator will *actively* pursue the higher office. In order to consider a legislator nascently ambitious, he or she must have been mentioned as a candidate for a higher office, formed some type of exploratory committee, or expressed interest in interviews or through other avenues. Additionally, the member was also considered nascently ambitious if she specifically declared she was not running for a higher office. These denials are rare, but are generally a response to previous activity on the part of the legislator.<sup>20</sup> Denials also indicate someone believed the legislator would run.

---

<sup>20</sup> A more recent example of this type of denial occurred in February 2011 when JoAnn Emerson publically announced she would not challenge Claire McCaskill in the 2012 Missouri Senate race. The denial was necessary only because earlier press reports had indicated Emerson was considering a run (Camia 2011).

Second, a legislator's interest needed to be directed at a specific position (or positions) in a specific electoral cycle.<sup>21</sup> Frequently, legislators mention long-held dreams of being a senator or president. Many other members of Congress express the desire to run for a higher office in the future or indicate they are unhappy with the level of prestige or power held by representatives. Although these legislators are expressing some future ambition, they have not made any proactive decision to begin campaigning for a higher office. Only a member of Congress who declared interest in the Senate, governorship, or presidency and had indicated an election year in which they planned to run for that office is included in the analysis.<sup>22</sup>

Undoubtedly, these two conditions exclude some individuals who hold nascent political ambition. However, there are two important points to make. First, examining both expressed and nascent political ambition is the most complete analysis available to date. Second, excluding individuals who do not meet these two conditions should make it more difficult to uncover any differences in my empirical analyses of volume and content of legislative behavior, as well as fundraising activity, because individuals who were ambitious, but did not appear in the sample, would inflate activity for statically ambitious legislators. If I am able to find differences between reelection seeking and higher office seeking legislators, I can be confident progressively ambitious legislators are strategically altering their behavior in response to their ambition.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the types of ambition present in the United States Congress, as well as ways in which extant literature has measured and conceptualized that ambition. In following with Schlesinger's original work, I contend progressive ambition is common, but not

---

<sup>21</sup> There are a few instances where the legislator faces a state with both an open Senate and governorship. In these cases, the Almanac does not discern which position the legislator will pursue—only that they will pursue one of them. In those cases, I have coded the legislator as nascently ambitious.

<sup>22</sup> For these individuals, it would be impossible to determine when ambition “ended.” Not including inherently ambitious members undoubtedly underestimates levels of progressive ambition in the sample. Fortunately, these legislators are rare (as measured by the *Almanac of American Politics* data).

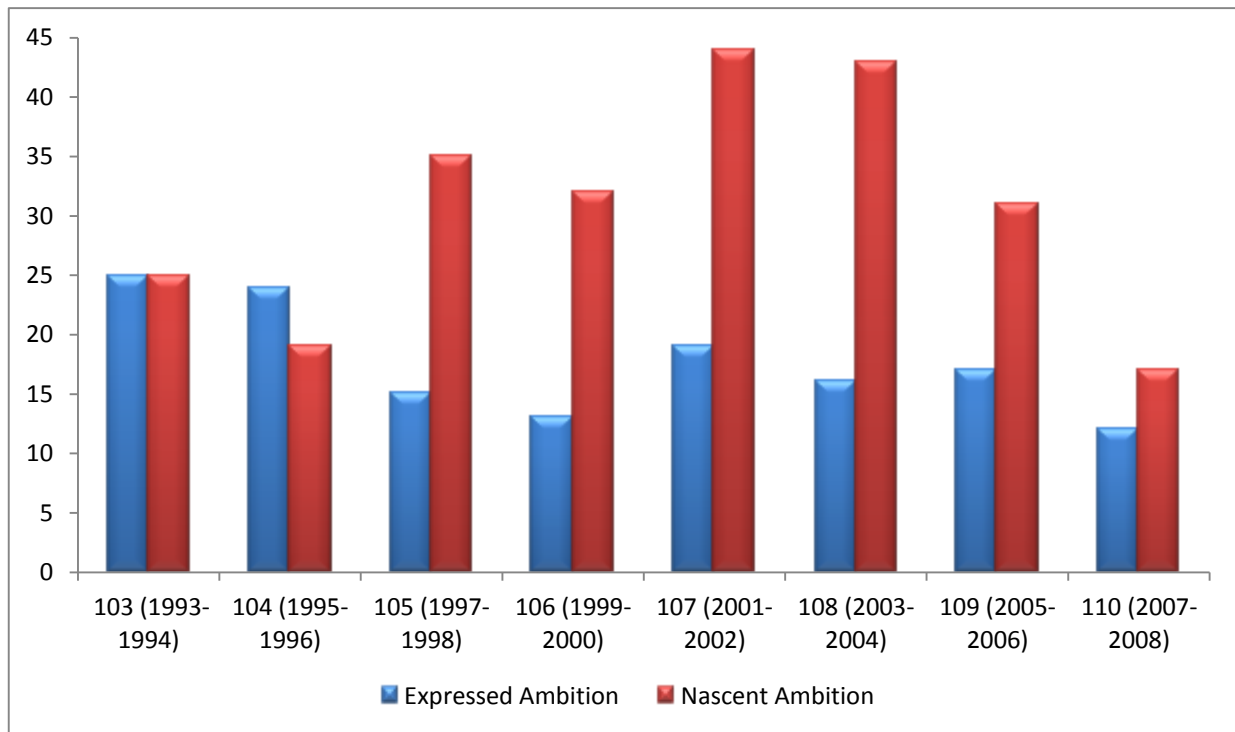


universal. Many legislators have turned down senatorial appointments to remain in their current office; others have made no moves to run during long and successful political careers. In reality, legislators hold different levels of progressive ambition. Some have no interest if costs or risks are involved, others are nascently interested in another political office, and some are actively running for a higher office.

In the next chapter, I build upon the existing literature on the causes of progressive ambition to explore, through a series of in-depth case studies and data analysis of district, state, and individual-level factors, how nascently and expressly ambitious legislators differ. Why do some legislators end up displaying expressed ambition, while others never fulfill their underlying ambition? What makes some legislators display both types of ambition over the course of their careers? Can one predict when a legislator will follow through on his or her interest in a higher office? Building upon these questions, I then explore in later chapters how different career paths manifest themselves differently in legislative and campaign activity.

## Figures and Tables

**Figure 2.1: Progressive Ambition in 103<sup>rd</sup> through 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1993-2008)**



**Table 2.1: Progressive Ambition in 103<sup>rd</sup> through 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1993-2008)**

Congress: Years	Expressed Ambition			
	Senator	Governor	President	Total
<b>103 (1993-1994)</b>	19	6	0	25
<b>104 (1995-1996)</b>	19	4	1	24
<b>105 (1997-1998)</b>	9	6	0	15
<b>106 (1999-2000)</b>	7	5	1	13
<b>107 (2001-2002)</b>	9	9	0	18
<b>108 (2003-2004)</b>	12	2	2	16
<b>109 (2005-2006)</b>	8	9	0	17
<b>110 (2007-2008)</b>	7	2	3	12
<b>Position Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>140</b>
Congress: Years	Nascent Ambition			
	Senator	Governor	President	Total
<b>103 (1993-1994)</b>	16	9	0	25
<b>104 (1995-1996)</b>	17	3	0	20
<b>105 (1997-1998)</b>	27	7	0	34
<b>106 (1999-2000)</b>	27	5	0	32
<b>107 (2001-2002)</b>	27	17	0	44
<b>108 (2003-2004)</b>	35	8	0	43
<b>109 (2005-2006)</b>	20	10	0	30
<b>110 (2007-2008)</b>	15	1	1	17
<b>Position Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>385 (44.2%)</b>			
<p><b>Notes:</b> Data gathered using the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> and the Congressional Biographical Directory. Expressed ambition represents the number of House of Representatives members who appeared on a ballot for higher office, during either the primary or general elections. Nascent ambition represents the number of House of Representatives members who stated an interest in higher office, but did not appear on a ballot.</p>				

### Chapter 3: Who Are the Nascently Ambitious?

Ernie Fletcher's (R-KY) rise to the top of Kentucky's political ladder was largely a slow and steady one. He would spend just two years in the Kentucky legislature before deciding to move on to the House of Representatives. Although he lost in his first attempt, he would try again two years later and win. After five years serving in the House, he decided to challenge for the governorship in 2003. Because Kentucky is one of the few states with off-year gubernatorial elections, he was not required to give up his House seat to run. Despite a toughly contested primary and general election, Fletcher won his first race and was reelected until 2008, at times unopposed. Fletcher's progression up the political ladder was well-ordered and consistent—from the state house, to the House of Representatives, to the governorship. He took well-calculated risks and was successful.

Compare Fletcher to Doug Bereuter (R-NE), who served in the House of Representatives from 1979 through 2004, and in the Nebraska legislature prior to that. Upon his retirement, many were surprised that Bereuter had never run for a higher office, especially given that he frequently won his reelection bids with vote shares above 80 percent. However, Bereuter did have ambition, but his ambition would never show itself on a ballot for another office. In 2000, he decided not to run for the Senate after Bob Kerrey announced his retirement. At the time, he had hoped to become the chair of the International Relations Committee and Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, had given him "every assurance that he possibly could that he wanted me to be the next chairman" (Barone and Cohen 2003, 974). With Hastert's assurances in mind, he would decline the higher office run. The chairmanship went to another legislator. He had considered running two other times prior to 2000, but declined to run then as well. Bereuter's ambition was nascent; while he would have liked to have advanced to the Senate or

governorship, other considerations prevented him from ever appearing on a ballot. His ambition was thwarted by the promise of something better in the House.

Sherrod Brown (D-OH) shares similarities with both of these legislators. A career politician, he was first elected to the state legislature just a year after graduating from college in 1974. After eight years in the Ohio House of Representatives, he moved on to serve as the Secretary of State until 1990. In 1992, he was elected to the House of Representatives in an open race. When John Glenn retired from the Senate prior to the 1996 election, Brown was mentioned as a possible replacement, but he declined to run (Barone and Ujifusa 1997). Brown was mentioned again as a possible statewide candidate in 1998 as he became frustrated with his minority status in the House of Representatives. In 2000, he threatened to run for the governorship if his district was eliminated through redistricting. The incumbent governor, Bob Taft, privately asked state legislators to keep his district intact. Though the district borders would shift, the 13<sup>th</sup> was not eliminated, and Brown remained in the House. It was not until 2006 when he finally launched a statewide race that would stick. That year he beat a host of qualified candidates to become the junior senator from Ohio.

One point that has been discussed in the first two chapters is that there is no such thing as a typical congressional career. Legislators are able to pick and choose what positions they run for and when they run for them. Some decide to remain in an original office permanently, others leave after a short time, and still others run for a higher office. When those legislators do display progressive ambition, there are a variety of paths they can choose to pursue. Like Fletcher, some legislators slowly and steadily climb up the political ladder. Others, like Bereuter, would love to pursue a higher office, but are ultimately prevented from realizing their ambition by a host of factors, some of which are entirely outside of their control. Still some, like Brown, have a

seemingly constant, underlying interest in a higher political office, which appears year and year again, only to be acted upon when a perfect opportunity arises.

As discussed in the previous chapter, we know a lot about the causes of expressed progressive ambition, like that displayed by both Fletcher and Brown. For instance, we know the types of legislators who choose to run for a higher office, the kind of districts in which the ambitious tend to rise, as well as the statewide factors which induce progressive ambition. In the last chapter, I also discussed the myriad reasons legislators consider running for another office, but ultimately choose to remain in the House of Representatives, just as Bereuter had. Many legislators find themselves stymied by another candidate, others are waylaid when the incumbent chooses to run for reelection after all, or they simply consider running as a power play (as Brown did in 2000). However, between these two bodies of research lies an interesting question: who are the nascently progressively ambitious? What are the causes of nascent ambition more generally? What kinds of districts encourage nascent ambition, but not expressed ambition? What types of legislators are more likely to think about running for a higher office but ultimately fail to follow through? Why did Fletcher have such a direct path to a higher office, while Brown and Bereuter would be thwarted time and time again? In this chapter, I explore the nascently ambitious in more detail. By the end of the chapter, I will have provided a more complete picture of nascent progressive ambition through data analysis of individual, district, and state level factors, as well as in-depth case studies of the legislators who hold nascent ambition.

### **Causes of Progressive Ambition**

There are two main levels of factors that can influence the decision calculus of legislators deciding to run for a higher office—individual factors and district and state factors. At the individual level, risk taking, seniority, and gender have all been found to influence the decision

to run for another office. The level of constituency congruency, the size of the congressional delegation, and the cost of running for a higher office all influence legislators at the district and state level. Below, I first turn to these different aspects and explore how expressed and nascent legislators differ. Through the use of real-world examples of nascently and expressly ambitious legislators, I find that there are substantial differences between the two groups. Moving beyond this simple dichotomy, I also find that legislators who display both types of ambition over the course of their careers are different than those with more “pure” ambition. I conclude the chapter with a comprehensive exploration of some of these legislators, showing how strategic factors weigh heavily on their decision.

### **Individual Factors**

The first set of factors influencing the decision to run for a higher office exists at the individual level. Compared to the district or state level factors, legislators have some control over these individual considerations, but not entirely. Some are directly related to the individual legislator and others refer to electoral history. While there are, perhaps, dozens of individual characteristics which may influence the decision to run for a higher office, I focus on only four below—risk aversion, previous vote share, gender, and seniority.

***Risk Aversion:*** The first individual factor that existing studies has found to matter is the relative risk acceptance or aversion of an individual legislator (Brace 1984; Rohde 1979). The reasoning is very straight-forward, running for a higher office is a very big risk—legislator often must give up their existing seat in a gamble for another seat. At times this means challenging an incumbent or facing a fellow candidate with more experience, better fundraising prowess, and a greater chance of winning. However, a legislator who has faced a tough race in the past likely

will not mind facing a tough race in the future. They already know what it is like to face the uncertainty of losing, and they have triumphed over that uncertainty.

However, nascently ambitious legislators are different than expressly ambitious legislators. While they test the waters of running for a higher office, they eventually decide the race is not worth the trouble, or the risk, and withdraw. Could it be that these nascently ambitious legislators are more risk adverse than expressly ambitious legislators? Consider the electoral history of Representative Michael Capuano, who has represented his Boston area district since 1998. Born and bred in Somerville, Massachusetts, he seems a perfect fit for his district. After running for, and largely winning, a variety of local races for positions ranging from alderman to mayor, Capuano was interested in larger things. So when Joe Kennedy decided not to run for reelection in the Eighth District in 1998, Capuano threw his hat into the race. The only competition occurred in the Democratic primary, where fourteen other candidates also entered. However, his strong base of constituents led him to win a plurality of votes, beating the nearest competitor by seven percent. This would be the only competition Capuano would face; he was unopposed in the general election. He has run unopposed for all of his remaining reelection quests to date.

However, Capuano still dreams of bigger and better things. He is a staunch liberal, far to the left of most of the Congressional delegation, and occasionally feels stymied by the bounds of the House of Representatives. For most of his career, he was also frustrated by toiling away as a minority party member. With an underlying ambition for something more prestigious, as well as policy goals that went beyond the borders of his district, Capuano began to consider challenging incumbent Mitt Romney for the governorship in 2006, telling reporters that “I’ve been going through a process for several months. I’m not an idiot. I have to ask myself: Can I



win? Can I raise the money? Do I want the job?” (Mooney 2004). Party leaders were certainly excited about the prospect of the popular, and progressive, politician’s campaign. However, by the start of 2005, he faced tough party competition from Attorney General, Tom Reilly, and Secretary of State, William Galvin. Capuano deferred his ambition. “After much personal deliberation with my family and those closest to me, I have decided that I will not be a candidate for governor,” Capuano said. “As much as I am attracted to the campaign and the possibility of serving the entire Commonwealth, I have decided that my efforts over the next two years are best focused in Washington” (Boston Herald 2005). Massachusetts law would have required Capuano to remove his name from the ballot for his current seat, ensuring that if he failed in a crowded Democratic primary, he would be out of politics entirely (Phillips 2005). Perhaps it was too large a risk for a man who clearly loves being an elected representative.

Compare Capuano’s electoral fortunes to those of Frank Riggs (R-CA), who represented California’s First District. For his first statewide race, Riggs challenged incumbent Democratic representative, Doug Bosco, in 1990. Bosco, who had originally been elected in 1983, was involved in a series of political missteps, including his involvement in the savings and loans crisis, as well as a risky budget vote. Yet, Bosco had incumbency behind him and even his missteps did not make it easy for Riggs to win. He did, however, in one of the largest upsets in the country. Riggs took just over 43 percent of the vote, Bosco 42 percent, and the remaining 15 percent went to third party candidate, Darlene Comingore, who had split Bosco’s Democratic votes.

Reelection was never easy for Riggs. After winning by just one percent in his first election, he was actually defeated by three percent in the next election. Not one to turn down a challenge, or worry about the prospect of a tough election, he came back in 1994 and won by six

percent. His reelection in 1996 would come by seven. With changing district demographics and consistently tough reelection bids, Riggs decided to challenge Barbara Boxer for her Senate seat in 1998. He had almost no name recognition outside of his district and the little he did have was largely negative. Riggs would come in fourth in a crowded Republican primary. He has not successfully returned to politics.

Capuano can be considered risk adverse—he entered politics with little challenge in the general election and continued to breeze through his reelection campaigns. On the other hand, Riggs was a risk taker; his races had always been tough. Are other nascently ambitious legislators just as risk adverse as Capuano was in 2006 or are all politicians who display any ambition risk takers like Riggs? I anticipate nascently ambitious legislators tend to be more risk adverse. To test this assumption, I gathered data on the relative risk taking propensity of legislators. I measured risk taking as the vote share of the legislators' first race.<sup>23</sup> Legislators who had a lower vote share in their first race are considered risk takers; those with higher vote shares are considered risk adverse. The underlying assumption is that a low vote share refers to a tight, toughly contested race, while a high vote share refers to a relatively easy first race. Later races are temporarily disregarded, given the high reelection rates seen among incumbent legislators in the House of Representatives.

Figure 3.1 displays the average first election vote shares for members who displayed nascent ambition, for those who displayed expressed ambition, and for those who displayed both types of ambition over the course of their careers. Nascently ambitious legislators had an average first term vote share of 58.66 percent. Legislators who displayed both nascent and

---

<sup>23</sup> Electoral results come from the Office of the Clerk of the US House of Representative's *Statistics of the Congressional Election*, except for election results from Louisiana. Because of Louisiana's unique electoral rules, those results were gathered from the Louisiana Secretary of State's website at <http://www.sos.la.gov/tabid/68/default.aspx>.

expressed ambition over the course of their careers were slightly lower with a first term vote share of 57.64. Finally, expressly ambitious legislators had the lowest average vote share, winning with just under 56 percent of the overall vote.

Using ANOVA analysis, I find these differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.0176$ ). From a substantive standpoint, this confirms that stories like Michael Capuano's are not uncommon among nascently ambitious legislators. The nascently ambitious tend to enter Congress under slightly easier conditions; they win their first races a lot more handily than legislators who display expressed ambition. They may have challenged weak incumbents, or were the stronger challenger in an open race, but ultimately they were more risk adverse than legislators who came in with lower vote shares.

***Tough Reelection Campaigns:*** Looking at both Riggs and Capuano's stories, however, we see that these legislators also faced very different reelection prospects over the course of their careers. Capuano won handily, repeatedly running unopposed in both primary and general elections. Riggs, on the other hand, sputtered his way through his tenure in the House of Representatives—even losing his first bid for reelection. Stories of tough electoral battles are not uncommon. Jim Ross Lightfoot (R-IA) was elected to the House in 1984 to represent a conservative, and rural, district in southwestern Iowa. His first few reelection campaigns were quite uneventful. In 1986, he was reelected with 59 percent of the vote, two years later he received almost 64 percent of the vote. His elections at the start of the 1990s were just as strong. However, in 1992, his district was changed substantially by redistricting and he won by just two points, capturing just over 50 percent of a three-candidate race. Sensing he could not hold on to his seat, he chose to challenge Senator Tom Harkin. He lost handily.

Compared to Lightfoot, Representative Jerry Moran's (R-KS) career was golden. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1996, he won the general election 73 percent to 24 percent. In the Republican primary, where most Kansas electoral competition occurs, he won with 76 percent of the vote. The 1998 general election saw him winning by 71 percent of the vote and in 2000 by a more modest, but still substantial, 38 percent. With such high winning percentages, perhaps it is no surprise that he only briefly flirted with running for governor in 2002, before deciding to forgo a higher office bid.

Maybe nascently ambitious legislators, like Moran, also face easier reelection bids and, therefore, are less interested in leaving their positions. However, the reality of House elections is that incumbent politicians all tend to have high reelection rates (most often above 90 percent) and many are frequently unopposed. Brace (1984) found that electoral vulnerability had little effect on legislators running for a higher office and, because of the power of the incumbency advantage; I anticipate there will be no difference in the final vote share of legislators who display nascent ambition. To test whether nascently and expressly ambitious legislators differ on their relative electoral safety, I examine the vote share in the last election prior to their potential or actual higher office run.

As displayed in Figure 3.2, there is almost no difference among the three groups. Although nascently ambitious legislators, and those who displayed both types of ambition in their career, see slightly higher vote shares in their final term, these differences are not statistically significant. Nor are they particularly substantively significant, expressly ambitious legislators only see a 0.47 difference in their final vote share. Overall, it appears that the differences among these three groups exist because of risk taking, not because of electoral uncertainty. Nascently ambitious legislators are more likely to have faced an easy first race

compared to expressly ambitious legislators. Because of the relative ease and lack of risk they have had to encounter, the idea of running for a higher office and leaving their current seat is less appealing.

**Gender:** An additional factor that existing research has found to influence the decision to run for a higher office is gender. Overall, female legislators are still significantly underrepresented in American politics and the reason is clear. While female candidates are just as likely to win a political race, they are much less likely to display an underlying interest in running in the first place (Fox and Lawless 2005; Lawless and Fox 2005). This same reticence may be present when deciding whether or not to pursue a higher office. Research at the state level has also found that, because of child rearing and household responsibilities, women tend to run for a higher office at a lower rate (Fulton *et al* 2006).

Other research has found that women are more concerned than men about the strategic considerations that surround a higher office run. They are much more likely to consider the value of the current seat and the value of the higher office, as well as the environment faced within the race (Palmer and Simon 2003). Candice Miller (R-MI) may be a perfect example of assessing strategic considerations. Though Miller had one upset bid under belt, it came in a lower level race for Macomb County treasurer, hardly a race fraught with statewide pressures. Her higher level races were relatively stress-free, including a 1998 reelection race for Secretary of State in which she set a state record for total votes received. When she ran for her seat in the House of Representatives she won by an astonishing 27 point margin, 63 percent to 36 percent, over Macomb County prosecutor, Carl Marlinga. Her reelection races were similarly easy, including a 39 percent win in the 2004 general election.

By the 2006 election cycle, she had widespread name recognition in the state and a district tailor-made to her political interests and positions. She also had the support of President George W. Bush, who would appear with her at campaign events, and who also began to encourage her to challenge junior Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI). Miller apparently thought about the prospect quite extensively and consulted many, including Bush, about the possibility. Eventually, however, she would decline to run, and would decline again two years later. Miller's team was quite clear about why she had deferred her ambition. "She's not driven by blind ambition. She doesn't make rash decisions," Miller spokesman Jamie Roe said. "She has to do what she thinks is best for her, her family and the state" (Halcom 2005). For Miller, the strategic considerations surrounding a run for a higher office made it unappealing to run for the office. In both of those instances, she would have had to challenge an incumbent senator, in a state that often leans Democratic.

A simple examination of the numbers shows those women are much more likely to be nascently ambitious than they are to be expressly ambitious. Table 3.1 provides the breakdown of the types of ambition displayed among both men and women. It is important to note, men greatly outpace women in total ambition displayed, but some of this is a result of the fact that men still make up more than 80 percent of the total legislative body (and often more than that).

However, by comparing within gender, I find nascent ambition is much more prevalent among women. In fact, 71.4 percent of the ambition identified within women is nascent, compared to 49.9 percent for men. As such, women are also much less likely to be classified as only having expressed ambition. Overall, it appears that nascent ambition is more common among women than it is among men. Female legislators are certainly considering running for a

higher office, but they are often declining to launch a full campaign, likely because their own strategic calculations show the risk is simply not worth it.

*Seniority:* One final personal characteristic that may influence progressive ambition is seniority or age (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993; Rohde 1979). The perks of seniority are certainly fading; however, they still exist. Legislators who have been in the House of Representatives for a long time are often in the position to obtain prime committee or subcommittee leadership positions. They may also be more likely to receive favorable assignments on high-profile and sought after committees. The perks of incumbency can only grow stronger as one remains in the House. Name recognition increases and reelection campaigns may become easier. This may have been the case in 2002, when Harold Rogers (R-KY) briefly considered running for a higher office. Rogers, who was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1980, had amassed enough seniority to move up the ranking of his committees. By 2003, he was the fourth ranking Republican on the Appropriations Committee, the chair of the newly formed Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, and had previously been the chairperson of the Transportation Subcommittee. His policy clout was undeniable and those around him had grown to respect the long-serving representative. With an upcoming gubernatorial election, many urged Rogers to run (Barone and Cohen 2003). Other candidates waited to hear if Rogers would run before launching their own campaigns (Chellgren 2003) and Rogers himself acknowledged an interest in the seat. “If I should decide not to run, I will do it in plenty of time for everybody to have a clear shot,” he told reporters in 2002 (Cross 2009). Despite the multiple pressures to run, Rogers would never formally declare for the governorship. He argued he could accomplish more within the House of Representatives.

Not only are there perks of seniority, but there are also personal considerations as well. Seniority generally means a legislator is older. Legislators who are more senior and older are less likely to run for a higher office as they may be closer to retirement. There is little point in seeking another office if one plans on leaving politics within a few years. It is, therefore, much more likely that a young, less senior legislator would choose to abandon the House and run for a higher office. As such, I predict that nascently ambitious legislators will be more senior than expressly ambitious legislators. These legislators will likely consider the possibility of moving beyond the House, but will realize that they would have to forgo other prime opportunities within the chamber, and will abandon their run.

As evidenced in Figure 3.3, there is at least some difference among the three groups. Nascently ambitious legislators have served an average of 7.83 years in the House of Representatives when they consider a higher office run. Legislators who actually run for another office have served almost seven years. Those who display both types of ambition have the lowest average tenure in the House at 6.78 years. However, when analyzing the differences using ANOVA, I find they are not statistically significant, indicating that there is no real difference in the average tenure among the different groups of progressively ambitious legislators.

Above I have simply compared averages among the three groups. However, to test all of these personal characteristics to determine their significance, I generated a variable representing the spectrum of ambition available to legislators. Those who displayed only nascent ambition were coded as 1, those who displayed both types of ambition as 2, and those with only expressed ambition were coded as 3. I then included my measures for risk aversion, previous vote share, gender, and seniority. Because the dependent variable was a categorical measure, I used an



ordered logit model. I also clustered by legislator because some legislators appeared in the sample multiple times.

In keeping with the preliminary analysis above, I expect that risk aversion will have a negative effect. Expressly ambitious legislators will have lower first term vote shares than nascently ambitious legislators. Gender should have a negative effect as well; women should be less likely to express their progressive ambition. The vote share in the previous election should have no significant effect, nor should seniority.

The ordered logit results confirm what I had found in my preliminary analysis above. Those with a high first race vote percentage are much less likely to display expressed political ambition. Figure 3.4 displays the predicted probability of displaying nascent ambition over a variety of first term vote shares. As the first term vote share grows, the probability of displaying nascent ambition, as opposed to expressed ambition, also grows. In calculating predicted probabilities for the gender variable, I find that a woman with an average first term vote share (as well as average last term vote share and seniority) has a predicted probability of displaying nascent ambition of 0.77. The predicted probability of displaying expressed ambition is just 0.10.

Overall, I only find a few significant differences in the personal characteristics of progressively ambitious legislators. Those who consider running for a higher office, but ultimately do not pursue the idea seriously are risk adverse. They enter the House of Representatives under relatively easy terms and are less likely to forgo their seat in a risky attempt at another office. Likewise, women tend to be nascently ambitious, as opposed to expressly ambitious. Existing research has shown that women are much more likely to consider the strategic aspects of a race before deciding to run. As such, nascent ambition may be more

prevalent because they are examining these strategic aspects and ultimately decide that it does not make sense to run. However, both vote share and seniority have no significant effect on nascent ambition.

### **District and State Level Factors**

The second set of factors that may influence the decision to run for a higher office are those at the district or state level. These factors are often outside of the control of an average legislator. Although legislators can choose, to some extent, where they run for office, most decisions are based on residency. Other factors, like the number of districts within the state, the term length for the governor, and the district-state congruency, are up to state law, population trends, and reapportionment. These district and state level factors influence multiple parts of the strategic considerations carried out by the progressively ambitious. Poor state level conditions make the House seat more appealing. Favorable state level conditions can make the statewide more appealing. In general, then, when state level conditions are less favorable to the House member, one would expect nascent ambition to be more common than expressed ambition.

*Single District:* It is, perhaps, not surprising that existing research has found legislators are more likely to run for a higher office when they represent a state at-large (Brace 1984). These legislators have the same constituency whether they are serving in the House, Senate, or Governor's mansion. This congruency may have been the reason that John Thune (R-SD) was so willing to run for the Senate when personally asked by George W. Bush in 2002. Having represented the state at-large, Thune already had a portfolio tailor-made for the Senate. He also had won by large margins in the House, which provided an electoral base he could tap into. While Thune would lose in 2002 by just 524 votes, he would come back to challenge Senator

Tom Daschle (D-SD) in 2004 and win. Overall, in my sample of 385 legislators who displayed ambition, only 19 came from a state with a single district.

As displayed in Table 3.3, the number of legislators from at-large districts is larger than the number who displayed expressed ambition. However, ANOVA analysis confirms this difference is not statistically significant. At least in this case, there is no difference among the three groups of legislators. Legislators are no more, or less, likely to be nascently ambitious when representing a state at-large.

*Delegation Size:* While there was no significant difference in the single district measure, it may be that legislators from larger states are more likely to remain nascently ambitious than they are to become expressly ambitious. For instance, a legislator from the New York City metropolitan area may represent a very diverse constituency, but that constituency is almost exclusively an urban one. If they were to run for a statewide office, they would also need to represent constituents from upstate New York, who may have very different concerns. In the nation's largest congressional delegation, California, balancing one's legislative agenda proves to be incredibly difficult. Elton Gallegly (R-CA), for instance, had supported a host of crackdowns on illegal immigration—including bills to revoke birthright citizenship and education for the children of illegal immigrants. His agenda was well suited for his conservative Simi Valley Congressional district, but not for the state as a whole, which has a large minority population. Furthermore, being recognized in California is not an easy proposition. It is perhaps not surprising that Gallegly would only briefly campaign for the governorship during the recall in 2003, before dropping out, citing a lack of name recognition (Barone and Cohen 2005). Legislators from smaller states may see some difference between the district and state constituency, but this difference is likely much less drastic, which contributes to

higher rates of progressive ambition (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993). This balancing act is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 4.

Existing research by Rohde (1979) finds that the effect of delegation size declines as number of districts within a state grows larger. As such, he and Kiewiet and Zeng (1993) recommend using the log of the state size when examining its effect on progressive ambition. In keeping with this previous work, I calculated the log of delegation size and provide the average size, by type of ambition displayed, in Figure 3.5 above. Those legislators who displayed only expressed ambition did come from much smaller states (in terms of delegation size), than legislators who displayed only nascent ambition, and the difference among the three groups is statistically significant. Interestingly, legislators who displayed both types of ambition over the course of their careers came from states with a larger delegation size than the other two groups. Perhaps, these legislators must closely examine the other strategic considerations outside of state size before they find the perfect opportunity to run for a higher office.

***Demographic Differences:*** A corresponding factor to delegation size and at-large districts is the level of district and state congruency. Legislators may be more likely to run for a higher political office if there is little change in the constituency between the two. Legislators with districts that closely mirror the state as a whole would not need to change their policy priorities to be successful. To determine whether legislators only run when there is a high level of district congruency, I compared district and state level Census records on a host of demographic categories.

Table 3.4 includes the average demographic difference among each of the three groups. Overall, legislators are running or considering running in districts that see some demographic differences from the overall state. There is significant variation, however, in the size of these

differences. Demographics like the percent of senior citizens or children are rather small. The percent with a college education or the percent white see much bigger differences between the two constituencies. Due to the number of available demographic categories, I test whether any of these demographic differences are statistically significant below.

As with the individual factors above, I developed an ordered logit model to test whether the district and state factors significantly influence the decision to move from nascent to expressed ambition. Again, my primary dependent variable is a three category measure of progressive ambition. Legislators who are nascently ambitious are coded as a 1, those who displayed both types of ambition are coded as a 2, and those legislators with the most intense progressive ambition, expressed ambition, are coded as a 3. As predicted from the preliminary analysis above, I anticipate that a legislator from a single district is no more or less likely to appear on a ballot for a higher office. Legislators who come from large states, with many others in their congressional delegation, however, will be more likely to remain nascently ambitious, rather than expressly ambitious. Because of the large number of demographic categories, I do not maintain individual predictions.

The results from Table 3.5 confirm, again, that there are differences among the three groups of progressively ambitious legislators. First, the size of the state does have the expected effect. As a state grows larger, legislators are less likely to appear in the expressed ambition category. As predicted, there is no significant relationship between ambition and at-large representation. A handful of the demographic categories also influence whether a legislator becomes expressly ambitious—all of these demographic coefficients are in the positive direction, indicating that, as the size of the demographic difference grows, so does the likelihood the legislator will become progressively ambitious.

## Who Displays Both?

In the pages above, I have profiled a handful of legislators who displayed both nascent and expressed ambition over the course of their careers. Of the 385 observations in my data set, 29 legislators displayed both types of ambition at one point in their careers.<sup>24</sup> How do these legislators differ from those who only displayed a single type of ambition? To explore the unique nature of these legislators, I profile a handful in in-depth case studies below. As I have showed above, these legislators, at times, differed from legislators with a “pure” type of ambition. However, if a common pattern exists, it is that these legislators are more strategic. They often consider running in races which would be difficult to win, but actually run when the conditions improve. The two most common conditions avoided by these members are the presence of incumbents and negative state and national forces. Although they are not always successful when they eventually express their ambition, the environment is more conducive to success.

**State and National Forces:** Tom Allen (D-ME) had to wait for nationwide forces to buoy his chances in a higher office race. Although he strongly considered running for the Senate against Susan Collins (R-ME) in 2002, Maine had voted Republican in the 2000 presidential elections and Collins was able to align herself with the still-popular President George W. Bush. Allen, who was among the most liberal members of the House, would have had difficulty appealing to the moderate, and independent, voters in Maine. Collins would go on to win that race with more than 58 percent of the vote against challenger Chellie Pingree.

However, by 2008, things had radically changed. Bush was now a wildly unpopular lame-duck president who most Republican incumbents were running against. The national

---

<sup>24</sup> In the following chapters, these legislators are categorized as either nascent or expressed, depending on the type of ambition they displayed at the time.

forces which had helped Republicans in 2002 now threatened to sweep in Democratic politicians on Barack Obama's coattails. With the strategic context more in his favor, Allen would run against Collins. Although he was unsuccessful, it was largely a result of his campaign's decision to focus on the Iraq War, and not Collins' ties to the Bush administration (Barone and Cohen 2009).<sup>25</sup> Allen's best chance of capturing one of Maine's Senate seats was certainly 2008, when Maine residents would cast nearly 58 percent of their votes for Obama, compared to the 49 percent that Gore carried in 2000. Allen displayed nascent ambition in 2002 because national and state conditions were not favorable for a Democrat to capture the seat. He displayed expressed ambition in 2008 because he should have been able to remain competitive with the incumbent Collins.

**Open Seats:** Others wait until an incumbent senator or governor has retired, which leaves an open seat. This was the case for Dick Zimmer (R-NJ), who was elected to the House of Representatives in 1990, after serving in the New Jersey state legislature. Zimmer had made it known that he was considering challenging incumbent Frank Lautenberg in 1994, but the race would have been a difficult one, as Lautenberg was safely ensconced as the junior senator from the state.<sup>26</sup> Two years later, Zimmer announced that he would run for the Senate seat occupied by Bill Bradley. However, Bradley had faced increasingly difficult reelection bids and it was no surprise that he retired from his seat shortly after Zimmer's announcement. Although he had entered the race before the incumbent was gone, an astute observer (like Zimmer) would have seen Bradley's retirement coming (Levy 1996). Zimmer would end up in one of the most vitriolic races of the 1996 cycle against Democrat Bob Torricelli. He would lose 53 percent to 45 percent.

---

<sup>25</sup> The campaign would eventually shift away from the Iraq War, but it would be too late to make a difference.

<sup>26</sup> As you may recall from an earlier chapter, Lautenberg had also prevented Robert Andrews from realizing his progressive ambition.

Mark Udall (D-CO) also waited for an open seat, and an open competition, before he expressed his progressive ambition. In 2004, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell retired and Udall indicated he would run for the seat, but his interest would last for only 24 hours. By the next day, Attorney General Ken Salazar had announced his interest in the seat, and Udall would step aside and endorse the campaign. Although the seat was open, the competition was not. Luckily, Udall did not have to wait long before being able to act on his ambition. In 2007, Senator Wayne Allard announced he would not run for reelection. Udall declared he would run for the seat, filed his paperwork, vowed to out raise any of his competitors, and never looked back (Paulson 2007). He would go on to win 53 to 43 percent.

Often times, it is a combination of these two factors that works to prevent and later energize ambition. Bob Clement (D-TN) had long held an interest in bigger and better things. A decade before he would become a member of the House of Representatives, Clement ran for the Tennessee governorship in 1978, but was unsuccessful (Rawlins 1988). It would not be until 1988 that he was successful in obtaining an elected position as the representative from the Fifth District of Tennessee. In 1994, he strongly considered running for the governorship of Tennessee, but state level forces would allow Republicans to gain all the statewide offices that year (Barone and Ujifusa 1995). He briefly flirted with running in 1998, but declined. In 2001, it appeared he would again only hint at his interest in running, before withdrawing from the Senate race. However, as Clement was set to withdraw, incumbent Fred Thompson (R-TN) announced that he would not run for reelection. When no serious Democratic competition entered the race, Clement announced he would remain in the race (Sharp 2002). He would lose to Republican Lamar Alexander by ten points. Clement had remained nascently ambitious in his



career because of state-level forces which favored Republicans. He would become expressly ambitious because of the retirement of a popular incumbent.

As displayed in the case studies above, these legislators seem to be holding off on running for a higher office until they are presented with a better opportunity, or a time when the strategic environment is better suited for a higher office run. In fact, it may be that they are correct in their strategic evaluation. Legislators who display both nascent and expressed ambition see a success rate of just over 33 percent; legislators who only display expressed ambition win their higher office race approximately 30 percent of the time. Although both groups lose more often than they win, the first group is slightly more successful.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the results in this chapter show that, on some factors, the nascently ambitious and the expressly ambitious are different. Nascently ambitious legislators tend to have entered political office with an easier race. They have much higher winning percentage in their first election. They may remain nascently ambitious because it is difficult to give up a seat to run for another political office, which is a very large risk, when they have never faced a risk in the past.

Women are also more likely to be nascently ambitious as opposed to expressly ambitious. Previous research has found that female legislators, while equally successful when they decide to run for a higher office, are less likely to display ambition in the first place. This same calculation may be occurring within female legislators already elected to political office. Other research has shown that women are much more attune to the strategic considerations surrounding a higher office run—the cost of giving up their current seat, the benefits of obtaining a higher one, and the possibility of having to leave politics completely. Female legislators are more likely to examine

these strategic considerations, weigh them carefully, and then decide the risk of a higher office run is not worth it.

Nascently ambitious legislators are also more likely to come from states with large congressional delegations. Stated alternatively, the nascently ambitious are more likely to come from large, populous, and often very heterogeneous states. Previous research on progressive ambition has shown legislators from these types of states are less likely to run for a higher office because the level of district and state congruency is lower. There are also more potential quality challengers available for a legislator to face in the higher office race. Certainly, these same considerations influence the decision of whether or not to appear on a ballot. One of the many reasons that a legislator will consider running for a higher office, but ultimately not express their ambition, is because another challenger enters the race. If there are more potential challengers within the state, this becomes more likely.

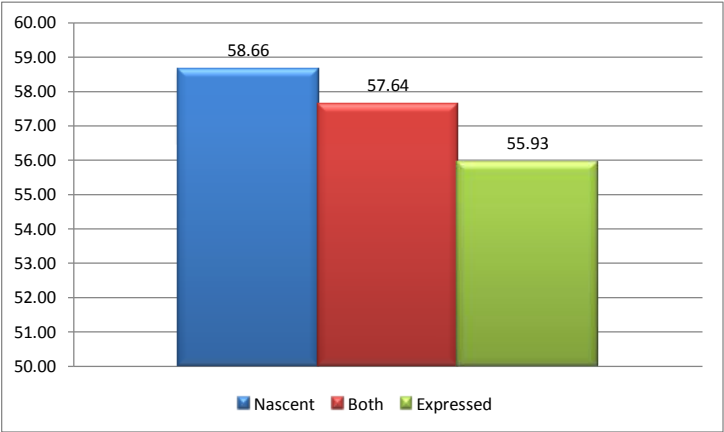
Finally, a host of demographic factors actually have an unintended effect. As the difference between the state and district grows, legislators within my sample are more likely to display expressed ambition. Of course, these results are tempered by the size of the coefficients, the average size of the difference in the demographics, and by the fact that expressly ambitious legislators are less likely to come from large states where the greatest differences would occur.

This chapter has shown that the nascently ambitious differ from the expressly ambitious on several key factors. As such, it is important to include nascently ambitious legislators in any evaluation of the behavioral consequences of progressive ambition. As I move through the rest of the dissertation, I will highlight how these legislators also differ when it comes to both their legislative and campaign activity. In the next chapter, I explore whether ambitious legislators shirk their responsibilities to their current constituency in favor of campaigning to new voters.

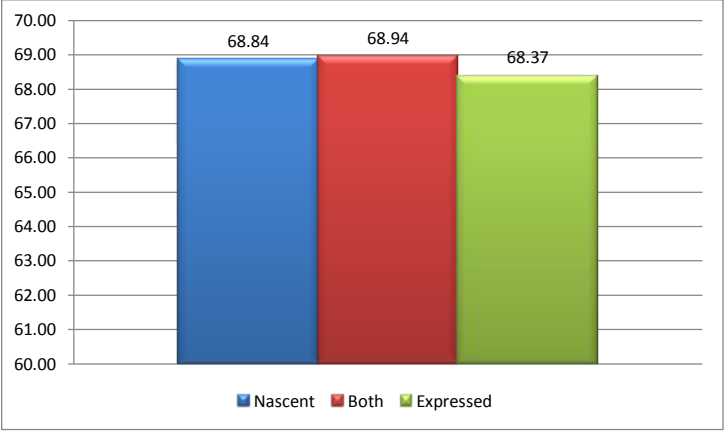
Furthermore, I determine if the type of legislation introduced changes and if those differences are a direct result of changes in the legislator's constituency.

**Figures and Tables**

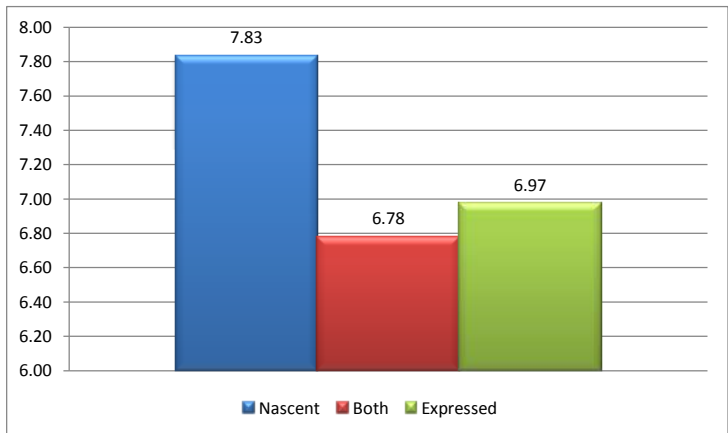
**Figure 3.1: Average First Term Vote Share**



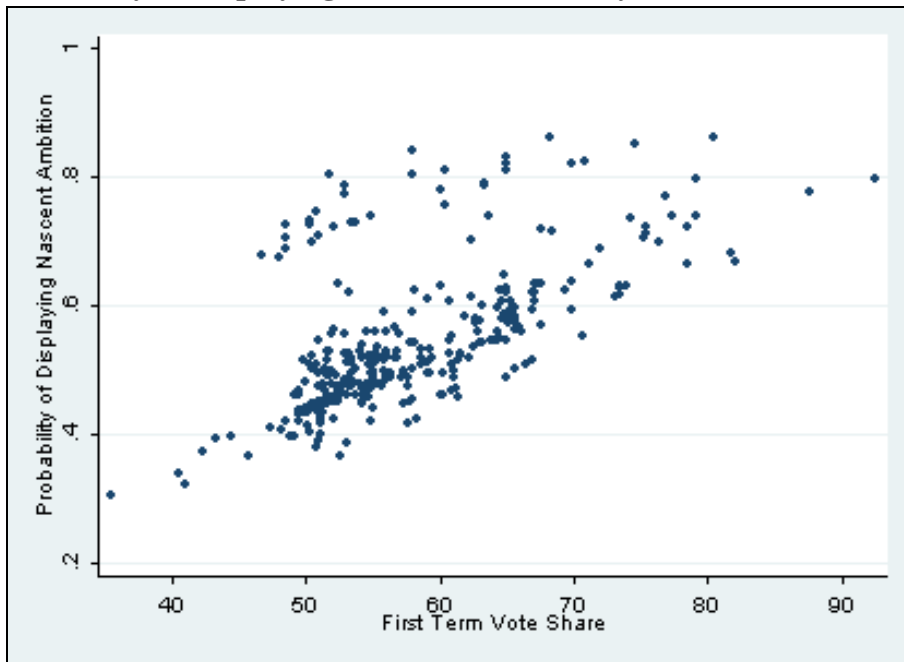
**Figure 3.2: Final Term Vote Share**



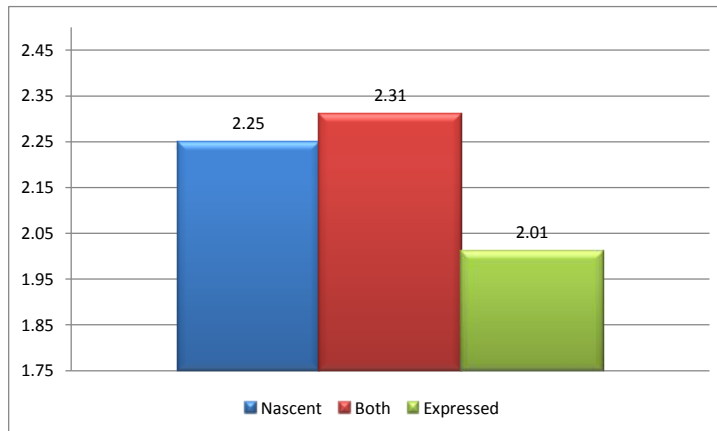
**Figure 3.3: Years in Office When Considering Ambition**



**Figure 3.4: Probability of Displaying Nascent Ambition by First Term Vote Share**



**Figure 3.5: Average Delegation Size and Progressive Ambition**



**Table 3.1: Type of Ambition Displayed by Gender**

	Nascent Only	Both	Expressed Only
<b>Men</b>	171	100	72
<b>Women</b>	30	10	2

**Table 3.2: Personal Factors and Progressive Ambition**

Variable	Coefficients
<b>First Term Vote Share</b>	-0.04** (0.03)
<b>Last Term Vote Share</b>	0.01 (0.01)
<b>Gender</b>	-1.13** (0.52)
<b>Seniority</b>	-0.03 (0.03)

**Note:** The dependent variable is a categorization of the type of ambition displayed. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.  
n = 324, data was clustered by legislator (250 unique clusters).  
\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 3.3: At-Large Districts and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Nascent Only</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Expressed Only</b>
<b>Multiple Districts</b>	189	70	107
<b>At-Large District</b>	12	4	3

**Table 3.4: Demographic Differences for Progressively Ambitious Members**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Nascent</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Expressed</b>
<b>% Below Poverty</b>	1.14%	1.55%	1.59%
<b>% Rural</b>	1.66%	4.53%	2.37%
<b>% White Collar</b>	-1.87%	-1.50%	0.20%
<b>% Blue Collar</b>	0.30%	0.81%	-0.38%
<b>% In Service</b>	-2.54%	-1.51%	-0.71%
<b>Military Bases</b>	0.61	0.64	0.55
<b>% White</b>	4.05%	5.12%	3.03%
<b>% Black</b>	0.23%	1.06%	1.61%
<b>% Asian</b>	-0.90%	-0.65%	-0.27%
<b>% Latino</b>	-0.91%	-2.20	-0.94%
<b>Median Income</b>	-\$9,004.83	-\$10,217.38	-\$9,819.35
<b>% Senior Citizen</b>	0.20%	0.93%	0.26%
<b>% Children</b>	0.12%	-0.04%	0.53%
<b>% w/ College Education</b>	9.85%	10.90%	15.36%

**Table 3.5: District and State Factors and Progressive Ambition**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficients</b>
<b>Single District</b>	-1.20 (0.76)
<b>Delegation Size (Logged)</b>	-0.46** (0.21)
<b>% Below Poverty</b>	0.01 (0.06)
<b>% Rural</b>	0.05*** (0.01)
<b>% White Collar</b>	0.04** (0.02)
<b>% Blue Collar</b>	-0.06 (0.04)
<b>% In Service</b>	0.03 (0.02)
<b>Military Bases</b>	0.15 (0.28)
<b>% White</b>	0.06 (0.05)
<b>% Black</b>	0.10** (0.05)
<b>% Asian</b>	0.23*** (0.09)
<b>% Latino</b>	0.10* (0.05)
<b>Median Income</b>	0.001 (0.00)
<b>% Senior Citizen</b>	0.11* (0.06)
<b>% Children</b>	0.19** (0.08)
<b>% w/ College Education</b>	0.01 (0.02)
<p><b>Note:</b> The dependent variable is a categorization of the type of ambition displayed. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.  <math>r^2 = 0.0753</math>; <math>n = 385</math>, data was clustered by legislator (287 unique clusters).            *** <math>p &lt; 0.01</math>; ** <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>; * <math>p &lt; 0.10</math></p>	



## Chapter 4: Legislative Behavior and Progressive Ambition

Perhaps one of the biggest complaints members of the House of Representatives have about their positions is the non-stop requirements of campaigning. Unlike senators, who go up for reelection every six years, or presidents, who need only worry about a single reelection campaign after four years, members of the House of Representatives must seek to hold their seat every two years. Many legislators spend their first year in office adjusting to life as a congressperson and their second year in office running for re-election—a balancing act between legislating and campaigning at its simplest. This constant campaign is one of the many reasons members of the House of Representatives choose to pursue a different office. However, once a member of the House decides to run for a higher office, the balance between campaigning and governing is even more difficult.

Why is the balance more challenging? There are two main reasons—the increased demands of campaigning statewide and a significant change in the legislator’s potential constituency. First, there is the issue of travel. When running for reelection to the House, a legislator needs to travel frequently back to the district, but the travel is often restricted to a smaller geographic region. When deciding to pursue a higher office, members of the House of Representatives must now campaign in the entire state. Instead of simply canvassing their district, they now must canvas statewide. Statewide and nationwide campaigns might also be harder fought and require the legislator to spend more effort actively campaigning. As such, the time spent campaigning may significantly increase and time spent on the Hill may significantly decrease. As a result, members of Congress running for another office will likely participate at different rates in normal activities of Congress, potentially changing the amount they sponsor and cosponsor, as well as the number of votes they cast.

Second, members of the House of Representatives represent a district more homogeneous and compact than the entire state (the constituency of both the senator and governor). As such, legislators are better able to understand the public opinion and preferences of their constituencies. While some legislators represent districts with disparate and heterogeneous voters, most do not. In fact, legislative redistricting often creates districts tailor-made for the incumbent. Furthermore, those legislators most often live, or have lived, in the district they represent for some time. As a resident of their district, they have an “ear to the ground” and understand their needs more clearly. As a legislator’s constituency expands, so does the number of issues he or she must address. Legislators running for a higher office must now cater to a constituency much different than the current one and must begin to address the issues the new constituency prefers.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, progressively ambitious members of Congress may not only change the volume, but also the content, of their activity.

Why would a legislator make these changes? Ambition theory is largely built on the assumption legislators are rational actors. When a member of the House of Representatives decides to run for a higher office, he or she first considers the context of the race. As Fowler (1993) notes, legislators “do not hanker after offices they cannot hope to attain, and they minimize their uncertainty and maximize their chances of success by following clear cut and predictable patterns of advancement” (8). Likewise, legislators who are running for office will behave strategically within office to ensure success. While their past patterns of behavior may have contributed to their past success, it does not guarantee future success. As such, legislators will change their behavior to increase the likelihood of winning the higher office.

---

<sup>27</sup> This is true even if a legislator has a fairly heterogeneous and diverse district. It is unlikely that the same interests present in the district will be mirrored at the state level. All legislators who plan to run for a higher office have to appeal to two constituencies.

This chapter explores how strategic legislators respond to a run for higher office. First, I continue the discussion of progressive ambition and legislative behavior I began in the first chapter. While we know comparatively little about how the decision to run for higher office affects behavior while still in the House of Representatives, there is some research which can provide guidance in predicting how and why behavior may change. Next, I test if progressively ambitious legislators alter the volume of their activity, either by increasing or by decreasing the total amount of legislation on which they are active. Finally, I examine whether the changes legislators make in terms of volume are actually strategic decisions to cater to new constituencies within the state.

### **Progressive Ambition and Legislative Behavior**

As discussed in earlier chapters, we know a lot about what factors increase the rate of progressive ambition. Legislators closely consider the context in which they will run for higher office. Legislators only run when the chances of success are high, or the benefits of keeping their seat are low. However, focusing only on the causes of progressive ambition often neglects its effects on Congress and its policymaking outputs. Do legislators running for office change their voting behavior, their activity on the floor of the House, and their attendance in the lead up to their higher office election? All of these questions have important implications on the quality of representation constituents receive from their legislator. When legislators alter their legislative activity, they may be neglecting the interests of their current constituency. When voting behavior shifts, so does the policy-making outputs of Congress. And when legislators miss votes, they miss out on the ability to influence and shape public policy for the entire nation.

To explore the effect of progressive ambition, we can turn to several categories of activities available to members of Congress—roll call voting, public activities (such as floor

speeches and other public addresses), and the legislative agenda (including introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments). As mentioned above, while there is limited research on the effects of progressive ambition on legislative behavior, there is a small body of literature on each type of activity which can help shape the hypotheses that follow.

### **Roll Call Voting**

The first activity available to progressively ambitious legislators is roll call voting. Roll call votes are an essential component of any legislator's agenda and campaign portfolio. Roll call votes are highly public, allowing the legislator to take an obvious stand on issues important to voters within their district. Because this activity is visible, legislators often campaign on those votes (or, at times, are forced to defend them). Existing research has also found the voting record of members of Congress has a significant effect on electoral fortunes. For instance, a senator 15 points away from the party median (measured by ADA scores) has only a 0.214 probability of winning re-election. If the same senator was only 5 points away from the party median, the chance of electoral success rises to 0.947 (Francis and Kenny 2000). Given these findings, it makes sense for a legislator interested in running for a higher office to consider moving towards the party median in response to a higher office run.

And evidence does exist that progressively ambitious members of Congress shift their roll call voting patterns in the years prior to their higher office runs. Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) found legislators aiming for higher positions are more likely to "shirk" by deviating from their district's position on roll-call votes, by as much as 44 percent compared to continuing members of the House of Representatives.<sup>28</sup> Ambitious legislators most often move away from

---

<sup>28</sup> The authors have a broad definition of shirking as any "legislative behavior that differs from what would be observed given perfect monitoring and effective punishment by constituents" (316). In this case, the authors are using a modified first-dimension W-NOMINATE score to measure ideological change in response to the higher office run.

the district median and closer to the state, or alternatively, the party, median position (Carey 1994). The causal direction is not entirely clear; however, as Francis *et al* (1994) find, legislators within five points of their state's party position on the ADA scale are more likely to run for higher office than those 10 to 15 points away.<sup>29</sup> This body of literature also provides strong normative reasons for why we should study the position-shifting present in ambitious members of Congress. Legislators are much more likely to move from the center to the outer fringes of their party than from the outer fringes to the center (Francis and Kenny 1996). In instances where the district is more moderate than the state, ambition may contribute to greater party polarization and make compromise more difficult within the chamber.<sup>30</sup>

We can also turn to the body of research on the presidential aspirations of senators. As Polsby noted, presidential aspirations “play a significant part in guiding behavior in the Senate” (1989, 789). The balancing act for senators seeking the presidency is similar, but not identical, to the one faced by ambitious members of the House. Here, senators must cater to the statewide constituency, as well as voters countrywide, and the national party organization, which has the potential to reward loyal members with more campaign support. Treul (2009) finds ambitious senators are significantly more loyal to their party, and successful aspirants (those who gain their party's nomination) are even more so. Other work finds Democratic presidential aspirants move towards the liberal wings of their party in response to their higher office run (Van Der Slik and Pernacciaro 1979). This provides evidence members of Congress (albeit senators) are considering the context in which they run for higher office and are acting strategically in response to the higher office.

---

<sup>29</sup> It may be legislators who are considering running for a higher office choose to move closer to the state median. Alternatively, legislators already near the state median may choose to run for higher office given success is more likely.

<sup>30</sup> It is especially important to consider Francis and Kenny (1996) find behavioral changes beginning up to thirteen years prior to the higher office run. Changes in behavior due to ambition are not short-term, or fleeting, and can have long-term effects on the policy outputs of Congress.

While legislators may shift the content and ideology of their roll call votes, it is not the only change ambitious legislators may make. Research on roll call voting has found the stresses of running for higher office lead many legislators to miss votes on the House floor. For example, using data on Senate candidates, Hibbing (1986) found an ambitious politician juggling current responsibilities and a statewide campaign will miss more votes than his or her colleagues miss. Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) also find abstention rates for progressively ambitious legislators increase by 15 percentage points. These missed votes may become fodder for challengers running against an ambitious member of Congress. In short, when the pressures of the campaign get to be too much, representation in the House of Representatives may suffer. I anticipate all progressively ambitious legislators will abstain from more roll call votes in the final term before running for a higher office.

### **Public Activities**

Roll call voting is not the only activity available to members. Ambitious legislators may also use floor speeches, press releases, and interviews to take positions on issues important to their future constituencies. These activities are largely symbolic, but have the potential to reach a wide variety of voters. Each member, not the leadership or party, decides whether to accept a media interview, speak on the House floor, or draft a press release. As such, they may be an excellent resource for members of Congress looking to appeal to different groups in their new statewide constituency and to build expertise or a reputation on an issue. Existing research has found legislators use these public activities to appeal to voters. Examining progressively ambitious legislators in the House, researchers have found ambition leads legislators to be more active on the floor, specifically offering more speeches, except in the Congress immediately preceding their higher office run (Victor 2004; Victor and Smith 2004; Victor 2005). In that

prior term, legislators are more focused on campaigning, and appealing to new voters, so their activity wanes.

Ambitious legislators also display different patterns of legislative specialization and generalization. Over the course of their careers, progressively ambitious legislators tend to cover significantly fewer topics in their floor remarks. When they are actively campaigning for a higher office, however, these legislators address significantly more issues (Victor 2011). These results provide additional evidence that progressive ambition induces behavioral changes. Specifically, progressively ambitious legislators are attempting to appeal to additional voters by covering more varied public policy issues. Below, I test whether progressively ambitious legislators tackle more issues as part of their agenda. I anticipate legislators will become more generalized as they move towards a run for higher office, in an attempt to appeal to more voters within the state (or country).

### **Legislative Agendas**

The final extant body of literature focuses on the effect of ambition on a legislator's policy agenda. The benefits of examining agenda activities—including introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments—are manifold. Like roll call voting and floor speeches, one's legislative agenda is public and concrete. It is easy for a campaigning legislator to show his support for an issue by pointing to the numerous bills he introduced or cosponsored while in office. Legislators often tout their agendas on websites, in newsletters, and during campaign stops (Swers 2002). They may be less likely to do so with roll call votes. Why? First, roll call votes are a dichotomous yes or no vote and a blunt measure of a legislator's preferences (Sulkin 2005). Furthermore, a host of issues beyond constituency interests, including the party or even

other legislators, affects roll call voting decisions (Kingdon 1989). Legislators may have to defend votes in the campaign, rather than highlight them.

Introductions also give legislators significant leeway in how much they want to participate, as well as on what issues to do so (Hall 1996; Schiller 2000). Introductions build a record on public policy, and appease voters, interest groups, and others. Like introductions, cosponsorships also allow legislators to vary the intensity of support for an issue and, electorally, give legislators an opportunity for position taking and advertising (Swers 2002). Legislators can also use the agenda for a host of policy and electoral goals. Most importantly, many members of Congress use these tools to respond to the demands of their constituencies (Harward and Moffett 2010). Introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments may also be useful tools for campaigning members of Congress. As I discussed in the first chapter, existing research shows many legislators use their agenda to follow through on campaign promises (Sulkin 2009; Sulkin 2011) and to fill deficiencies pointed out by challengers (Sulkin 2005). Because legislators control how much to participate and on what issues to do so, they do not need to rely on party leaders to take an issue to the floor for a roll call vote.

Political scientists have occasionally examined the legislative agendas of progressively ambitious politicians, often with inconsistent or inconclusive results. In examining the first two terms of a progressively ambitious legislator's career, Herrick and Moore (1993) found members are significantly more active in introducing legislation—in fact, those members “are almost as active in their first two terms as more senior members and are well above their counterparts with intrainstitutional and static ambition” (772). Herrick (2001), however, finds legislators who self-identify as having progressive ambition are slightly more active, but not significantly so from static legislators.



There are several reasons why extant research on ambition's effect on legislative agendas has been inconclusive. First, researchers have chosen to measure ambition in different ways. Herrick (2001) examines only a small subset of legislators who reported an interest in running for higher office in her survey, which likely led to the weak, and insignificant, results she found.<sup>31</sup> Herrick and Moore (1993) examine those legislators who actually ran for higher office, neglecting those who may have an interest in higher office, but have not identified the best time to run. My research, as discussed in the second chapter, attempts to move toward a more complete definition of ambition, by including both expressed and nascent ambition.

Second, existing research has chosen to focus on different periods within the legislator's career. Again, Herrick and Moore (1993) focus on the first two years of a progressively ambitious legislator's career. Others, like Victor (2011), choose to focus on the terms directly preceding the higher office run. I choose to examine the most recent terms as well, but I also measure lagged participation to determine whether progressively ambitious legislators are more or less productive over the course of their House careers. Legislators will increase the number of introductions and cosponsorships they offer as a potential way to counteract the negative press associated with an increase in missed votes. Progressively ambitious legislators could also use these activities to cater to new constituencies within the state by offering issue-specific introductions on topics important to potential voters

### **Changing Patterns of Behavior**

As discussed in the introduction, ambition theory is built upon the assumption that legislators are strategic and rational. As such, legislators who desire to move on to a more prestigious position will do everything in their power to be successful in their quest. Whether legislators are aiming for a position within the Senate or in the Governor's mansion, the context

---

<sup>31</sup> Herrick's sample includes legislators who would eventually run for a higher office, and some who would not.

in which they behave has changed. Thus, strategic, goal-oriented legislators realize they need to alter their behavior in order to be successful in the new situation. The patterns that worked for them in the past may not be suited to the position to which they aspire. What type of changes are legislators likely to undertake? I expect progressively ambitious legislators in their final term in the House of Representatives (i.e., right before their run or *potential* run) will be more active on both introductions and cosponsorships, but will miss more roll call votes and amend less legislation than statically ambitious legislators. Additionally, I argue progressively ambitious legislators will also be more active in introducing and cosponsoring legislation in the years prior to the higher office run.

Why would activity levels change for progressively ambitious politicians? The reasons are twofold. Previous work has argued that progressively ambitious legislators will seek to be policy specialists in the terms leading up to their higher office run to gain media attention on issues important to their constituency (Herrick & Moore 1993; Victor 2011). However, as the campaign nears, the context the legislator faces changes; he or she will need to address more issues as their constituency becomes larger and more diverse. For instance, a legislator from rural, downstate Illinois who focused primarily on agriculture issues would have deficiencies when addressing the issues of Chicagoland voters. Second, increased activity will allow legislators to appear as active and productive members of the House of Representatives. A strategic legislator can leverage the increase in activity to counteract negative press associated with increased absences on the Hill.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Legislators could, of course, shift their focus from one issue to another without changing their overall rates of activity. However, it is important to note these legislators still need to appeal to their current constituency, which demands or is interested in certain activities. If the legislator described above was to ignore agricultural issues in favor of urban issues, he may face a backlash. As pointed out in chapter 2, some legislators are unsuccessful in the primaries and choose to return to the House. Any strategic legislator would ensure both constituencies are catered to, even if only marginally.

Whether or not the same pattern holds for amendments is another question, however. Amendments, like roll call votes, require the legislators to be present at a very specific time in the law-making process and are more likely to be influenced by the need to campaign back in the state. Introductions and cosponsorships, however, are more flexible, allowing the legislator to increase the behavior when convenient. Therefore, offering amendments may be more difficult for a legislator who is actively campaigning back in their home state. As such, increasing the number of amendments offered requires a commitment by the legislator to be active and participatory in the entire lawmaking process. Existing research has already found progressively ambitious legislators miss more votes (Hibbing 1986; Rothenberg and Sanders 2000) and it is reasonable to assume legislators may also offer fewer amendments due to their newly increased campaign responsibilities. As such, while I predict introductions and cosponsorships will increase, I predict the number of amendments will decrease.

### **Volume of Activity and Levels of Participation**

As displayed in Table 4.1, there was significant variation in how often legislators participated. Overall, between 1993 and 2009, legislators introduced 44,870 pieces of legislation and cosponsored legislation 787,184 times. Individual members of Congress introduced between zero and 119 pieces of legislation and they cosponsored between zero and 929. Amendments were a far rarer occurrence, with 7,683 offered between the 103rd and 110th Congresses. Again, the range of amendment activity was wide, with many legislators offering no amendments to a high of 60. On average, legislators introduced approximately 13 pieces of legislation, cosponsored an additional 223 pieces, and offered two amendments per Congress.

To test whether progressively ambitious legislators had different levels of activity, I ran a series of models in which the dependent variable was the percentage of roll call votes missed, the

total number of introductions made, the total number of cosponsorships made, or the total number of amendments offered in the course of a Congress. In line with previous research, I expect progressive ambition to increase the total percentage of roll votes missed. I expect ambition to have a positive and significant relationship on the remaining legislative activity measures, except for amendments, as legislators seek to gain attention, counteract shirking in other areas, and to build a campaign agenda.

To ensure other factors are not driving the results, I control for several characteristics that influence legislative productivity and activity. Most importantly, I control for another career decision, retirement, which researchers have found contributes to more shirking and less activity (Herrick, Moore, and Hibbing 1994).<sup>33</sup> I also control for whether the member was a party leader, as a party leader's additional responsibilities may lead to a decline in other activities.<sup>34</sup> I include a control for party, though I have no strong expectation on the direction of the relationship. On the other hand, senior members should introduce more legislation, as they have a better understanding of the workings of the House and will be more active. I also expect members in the majority to have more active legislative agendas, as they seek to control the policy-making outputs of the chamber. Members who only served a partial term should participate substantially less, as they simply had less chance to be active.

Underlying the remaining analyses is the idea that legislators need to counteract potential negative press associated with missed votes and absences from the House floor. As described in the introduction, legislators who miss votes become fodder for journalists and other candidates. Claims about shirking and poor representation are common when a legislator runs for a higher

---

<sup>33</sup> I considered a legislator retired if they voluntarily left the House of Representatives, as opposed to losing in either a primary or general election. Retirements were verified in both the Congressional Biographical Directory and the *Almanac of American Politics*.

<sup>34</sup> Party leaders are those who held positions including Speaker of the House, majority and minority leaders, and party whips.

office. The assumption is that progressively ambitious legislators are more focused on campaigning for a higher office and less concerned about the needs of their current constituency. However, it is necessary to first test whether progressively ambitious legislators actually do miss more votes when they are running for a higher office. Table 4.2 provides the results of an OLS regression model with the percentage of roll call votes missed as the primary dependent variable. Column I's measure of ambition includes anyone who held either expressed or nascent political ambition. Column II examines only those legislators with expressed ambition, and Column III, only those legislators with nascent ambition. Many members of Congress appear in the sample multiple times, so I also cluster by legislator. Although not shown below, I also control for each congress to account for any year-to-year variation.

It is clear from the results; progressively ambitious legislators miss a significantly higher percent of all roll call votes than statically ambitious legislators. However, upon closer examination, this is being driven entirely by expressly ambitious legislators. Perhaps not surprising, appearing on the ballot, and, in turn, actively campaigning for a higher office draws the legislator from Washington, D.C. and the responsibilities of their current job. These legislators miss an additional six percent of all roll call votes.

Having shown, quite clearly, that progressively ambitious legislators miss more votes, we can now turn to whether these legislators use other tools at their disposal to counteract possible negative press. The first legislative activity I examine is introductions. Table 4.3 examines the effect of a host of factors on the total number of introductions offered in a single congress. Again, I test any type of ambition first, but also examine how both expressed and nascent ambition influence the total number of introductions offered. Because the primary dependent

variable is a count of the total number of introductions offered, I use negative binomial regression.

Turning to Column I, we see progressive ambition is associated with an increase in the amount of legislation introduced. Although the coefficient is small, it is important to note, on average, legislators introduced approximately 13 pieces of legislation per two-year period. Even a small increase in the number of bills introduced has a statistically and substantively significant effect on the legislative agenda. These findings also hold when I examine expressed and nascent progressive ambition separately.

However, by examining the ambition coefficients, I find legislators who appeared on a ballot for higher office drive most of the increase in activity. A legislator who displayed expressed progressive ambition increased his or her activity significantly more than a legislator who only considered a run for a higher office. When, or why, there is a difference between the two groups is unclear. There could be three factors at work. First, legislators who run for higher office may increase their activity over a longer period. Most obviously, a legislator displaying expressed progressive ambition is campaigning for the higher office until Election Day, while an individual with nascent ambition drops out of the race well before then. Second, those legislators who actually appear on a ballot for higher office may simply be more active during the course of their careers, which ultimately contributes to their decision to run. I examine this claim later in the chapter. Finally, ambition may matter, but it matters more when the ambition is expressed, rather than just nascent. In general, however, and as predicted earlier, legislators running, or considering a run for, higher office introduce more legislation than their statically ambitious counterparts, lending preliminary support to the idea legislators are acting strategically.

However, both nascently and expressly ambitious legislators see an increase in activity. This is especially interesting for the nascently ambitious, because they do not miss significantly more roll call votes. This finding raises the question whether the purpose of increased activity is to combat negative attention from missed votes or to appeal to a new constituency. To determine if there is a correlation between missed votes and the total number of introductions offered, I ran another model with the percentage of missed votes as my primary dependent variable. My primary independent variable was the total number of introductions offered per Congress. I also controlled for the same factors described above. Because I am only interested in whether there is a correlation between missed votes and introductions among the progressively ambitious, I restricted the sample to those legislators who displayed any type of ambition.

Table 4.4 displays the results from this model. I find that, among progressively ambitious legislators, as the percentage of missed votes increases, there is no corresponding increase in the total number of introductions offered. Legislators are not using their increased legislative activity to counteract the increase in missed votes. They are likely using to appeal to a new constituency, and to address issues that were neglected in their agendas.

I also predicted progressively ambitious legislators would increase the number of cosponsorships they offered. Table 4.5 tests this hypothesis. Again, Column I's measure of ambition includes anyone who ran, or thought about, running for higher office. Column II and Column III examine expressed and nascent ambition separately. The results do not confirm my hypothesis about cosponsorships. Both types of progressive ambition fail to significantly influence the number of bills cosponsored.

Although the findings concerning cosponsorships go against the predicted pattern, the differences found between the two legislative activities may still show legislators are strategic.

Originally, I had anticipated that progressively ambitious legislators would use these “easier” activities to also supplement their legislative agendas. After all, cosponsorships require little effort on the part of the legislator—they simply need to sign on in support of the bill after it’s already been drafted. However, introductions are a high-cost, and high profile, activity. Unlike cosponsorships, legislators draft and have control over the content of the bill. Additionally, sponsors may be more likely to receive the attention and recognition for any success the bill sees and can actively claim credit for the outcome. Cosponsorships, however, take comparatively less time and are a weaker signal of commitment to a position or an issue. Legislators face a serious constraint on their time, which can lead to shirking on roll call votes. In order to make the most out of the limited time available, legislators will seek out activities that provide the most bang for their legislative buck. Additionally, cosponsorship decisions in many offices are staff-driven, with the individual legislator signing off on bills staffers identify for them (Swers 2002). Given the different benefits received from cosponsoring legislation, it is perhaps not surprising no significant differences exist.

Finally, I turn to amendments, which I predict would decrease as a legislator found the pressures of campaigning for the higher office to be too much. Again, I examined the different types of ambition separately and as a single measure. As a reminder, compared to introductions and cosponsorships, legislators choose to participate in amendments at a much lower rate. Turning to Table 4.6, I find, like cosponsorships, there is not a significant relationship between the number of amendments and progressive ambition. In fact, unlike the other activities, few characteristics significantly contribute to change in the number of amendments offered. Perhaps, not surprisingly, members who serve only a partial term offer significantly fewer amendments, as do members of the majority party. This second finding may show amendments are a tool of



those who lack formalized power, rather than a tool for those seeking electoral gains. Seniority also contributes to an increase in amendments, indicating a level of familiarity with the law-making process younger members may not have developed.

Overall, I find progressively ambitious legislators do behave differently than other re-election oriented legislators in the term immediately preceding their higher office run. They miss more votes than other legislators, presumably because they are actively campaigning back within their state. Behavioral changes are limited to increasing the number of introductions offered, however. The first result is not surprising—progressively ambitious legislators seem to reserve the largest increase in activity for the most high profile activity, one that could reap potential electoral gains. Cosponsorships may be neglected because they are a low-cost, low-reward proposition. Amendments are likewise ignored because they require a legislator to be present for a final roll call or debate on a bill.<sup>35</sup>

However, one could argue progressively ambitious legislators are simply more active over the course of their careers. Indeed, I posited this might contribute to the different pattern I found between expressly and nascently ambitious legislators above. Again, legislators may enter the House of Representatives knowing they will run for a higher office when an opportunity presents itself and increase their activity over the course of their entire careers. To test whether this is the case, I ran a series of models with the number of introductions in previous years as the main dependent variable. Figure 4.1 shows the coefficients from these models, representing the total number of introductions offered in each congress prior to the legislator's run for a higher office. Many legislators do not remain in the House of Representatives for the entire time, so the

---

<sup>35</sup> The possibility exists that legislators are ignoring something easy, because they have already demonstrated responsiveness on these types of issues earlier in their career. I examined lagged activity on both cosponsorships and amendments and found no consistent differences in activity over the course of a legislator's career. Amendments briefly increased in the third term prior to a higher office run, but the increase did not last.

total number of legislators I evaluated six congresses prior is much smaller than the number I evaluated in the congress prior to a higher office run.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, looking backwards in a progressively ambitious legislator's career I find the number of bills introduced remains significantly higher for three terms prior to their higher office run. It is not until the fourth term, or more than eight years prior to a higher office run, the differences fail to be significantly different. It appears that legislators are strategically preparing for a campaign for higher office well before their campaign commences. Those legislators who eventually display expressed progressive ambition are different from legislators who only considered a higher office run; both groups have higher levels of activity, but expressly ambitious legislators trump nascently ambitious legislators. Whether it is because nascently ambitious legislators are intrinsically less ambitious, or find themselves residing in states with fewer opportunities, is another question.

### **Responding to Demographic Changes**

Having identified that progressively ambitious members of Congress introduce more legislation in the years preceding their higher office run, I now turn to an examination of the content of the behavioral change. Are legislators simply introducing more legislation on the issues they have always covered, or are they strategically increase their agenda to cover new areas and issues in an attempt to overcoming weaknesses that could doom a higher office run? To test this, all legislative behavior discussed above was coded using a categorization adapted from Adler and Wilkerson's 'Congressional Bills Project' and originally used in the study of promise-keeping (Sulkin and Swigger 2008; Sulkin 2009; Sulkin 2011). There are 19 total

---

<sup>36</sup> In the analysis of expressed ambition alone, for instance, the total number of observations in the congress prior to a higher office run is 3536, but drops down to 602 by six congresses prior.

categories including areas such as agriculture, defense, education, and welfare.<sup>37</sup> Using these groupings, I created a total agenda size for each legislator, which is simply a count of the number of areas in which a member of Congress sponsored legislation. These agenda sizes ranged from zero to 17. On average, however, legislators had an agenda size of approximately six, indicating they introduced legislation in six distinct issues areas.

Legislators with smaller agenda sizes are legislative specialists, as they focus primarily on a narrow set of issues.<sup>38</sup> Those with large agendas are legislative generalists, spreading their time and efforts out over a diverse set of issues. In general, the House of Representatives supports a pattern of legislative specialization, since there are 435 members to cover all legislative issues, as opposed to the Senate in which only 100 members cover the same set of issues. Previous work on progressive ambition would indicate legislators interested in pursuing a higher office would have even more focused agendas in order to gain media attention and experience (Herrick and Moore 1993; Victor 2011). However, the focus will dwindle as the higher office campaign nears given the need to campaign and actively pursue the office.

I posit progressively ambitious legislators will actually have less specialized agendas both in the congress in which they are campaigning, as well as the years prior to the higher office run. A member of Congress interested in running for the governorship or Senate will have to cater to a large and more heterogeneous constituency if elected. Therefore, progressively ambitious legislators will focus on issues of interest to new constituents and areas of the state. In particular, they will increase their levels of activity on issues that are most important to their future constituencies, but that they have not been active on in the past. These behavioral changes

---

<sup>37</sup> The complete list of issue areas includes: agriculture, budget, campaign finance and government reform, crime, children's issues, defense, immigration, and foreign policy, education, environment and public lands, health care, jobs and infrastructure, Medicare, consumer issues, moral issues, civil rights, social security, taxes, welfare, government operations, and corporate regulation.

<sup>38</sup> It may also be that legislators with smaller agenda sizes introduce less legislation. I have controlled for total introductions offered in the subsequent analyses.

will allow legislators to build a record on which to campaign, impress their future constituency, and provide a head start on developing a legislative agenda in their new position. Additionally, an increase in activity in new issues areas may also increase fundraising from related interest groups and PACs throughout the state (Rocco and Gordon 2010).

To test whether progressively ambitious legislators had a larger agenda size, I again ran a series of models in which the dependent variable was total agenda size for each legislator. I controlled for the same factors as above, including retirement, leadership, partial term service, seniority, party, and majority status, as well as the total number of introductions offered. As discussed above, on average, legislators have an agenda size of approximately six issues. If we assume the average member of the House of Representatives is a legislative specialist, an agenda size larger than the average could display a member's desire to become a legislative generalist.

As seen in Table 4.7, progressively ambitious legislators have a significantly larger agenda size, whether or not they appeared on a ballot for higher office and this result holds even when controlling for the total number of introductions offered. Again, we see most of the increase found in Column I is being driven by the expressly ambitious legislators. Rather than maintaining specialized and narrow agendas, they move towards becoming policy generalists, a behavior that is consistent with their desired positions. These results also show that policy specialization dwindles in the term prior to the campaign, a finding that confirms extant literature on behavior changes in progressively ambitious politicians (Victor 2011). Looking backwards, however, I find that policy generalization lasts slightly longer than Victor's original results. In my sample, legislators displaying any type of ambitious behavior have larger agenda sizes (0.09,  $p < 0.01$ ) two terms prior to the higher office run, but not any further.

Why are progressively ambitious legislators tackling more issues areas? I argue that legislators are being responsive to differences in their district and statewide constituencies. Returning to the example above, a legislator who represents a district in downstate Illinois may be active on agriculture issues. However, if that same legislator desired a spot in the Senate, their new constituency would include the urban, and more diverse, voters of the Chicagoland area. No longer would agriculture be the primary interest of their constituency. Instead, issues like crime and infrastructure could also be important. In order to cater to those new voters in the campaign, legislators begin to introduce more legislation on issues important to the statewide constituency, while still maintaining an active agenda on issues important to their current constituency. Existing research has found that “when members perceive that a bill is directly relevant to the district they represent, they are more likely to become actively involved, and once involved, more likely to invest significant amounts of their time, energy, and staff effort in the legislative action” (Hall 1996, 3-4). While this indicates legislators will pay more attention to the issues of one’s current district, it is not a stretch to assume a legislator would also pay attention to one’s future constituents.

To test this hypothesis, I gathered US Census data for both Congressional districts and states to determine the level of similarity between the two. I predict that legislators are forward thinking and strategic and will look towards areas where there is little congruence to find new voters and issues to tackle. One finding of the existing literature on progressive ambition, however, is that district congruence increases progressive ambition (Brace 1984). It may be that legislators only run for a higher office when there a few or no differences between the current congressional district and the prospective statewide constituency. However, even small changes

in a legislator's constituency, like those that arise due to redistricting, can have a significant effect on behavior (Hayes, Hibbing, and Sulkin 2010).

And as evidenced in the prior chapter, it is not true that members of Congress only display progressive ambition when their state shows a high level of congruence with their current district. In fact, there is substantial variation between progressively ambitious legislator's districts and their potential statewide constituency. For instance, on median income, at least one progressively ambitious legislator ran from a district that had a median income \$41,500 lower than the state. Even more surprisingly, in the period under study, only four of the 135 members that ran from higher office came from single district states. On average, progressively ambitious legislators come from states with approximately twelve Congressional districts. Therefore, there is "room" for a legislator to appeal to different demographic groups in the period leading up to a higher office run.

To determine whether constituency differences lead to changes in issue specific behavior, I have matched the demographic characteristics from above with the previously discussed issue categories, using the patterns found in Hayes *et al* (2010) as a point of departure. Table 4.8 outlines these matches, as well as the projected direction and effect on behavior. For instance, I expect that a legislator moving from a district with a low median income to a state with a higher median income will be more active on budget and tax legislation, reflecting the different issue priorities their new constituency would hold. Likewise, the difference in the percentage of children in one's new constituency will influence children's issues such as child support, adoption policies, and childcare and family leave, as well as education. All patterns are expected to be positive. Why is this? I anticipate, even if a legislator sees a decline in a certain demographic characteristic, he or she will not decrease their activity in response. To neglect

one's current constituency so blatantly would likely be damaging to their electoral chances in the House of Representatives.

To test responsiveness to new constituencies I calculated a raw count of legislation introduced in each issue area. I then conducted analyses for only expressly ambitious legislators to compare how responsive these legislators were to demographic characteristics of the state.<sup>39</sup> My primary independent variable was any difference in the respective demographic characteristic. I also controlled for the same factors as the models above, as well as the congressional delegation size. I anticipate responsiveness will be strongest for progressively ambitious legislators. Statically ambitious legislators will have less incentive to respond to a statewide constituency, instead focusing on voters within their district.

Table 4.9 provides the results for progressively ambitious politicians. I posited legislators would respond to demographic changes between the district and state, cater to new voters, and shore up deficiencies in one's legislative portfolio. In fact, the opposite is true. Progressively ambitious politicians, in general, are not responding to the differences in demographics I have examined, at least not in the way I predicted. For instance, a progressively ambitious legislator running in a state which is more rural than his district will actually introduce fewer bills on agriculture. The same findings arise when examining median income, which has the opposite effect on both budget and tax bills. Children's issue introductions are likewise affected. Progressively ambitious legislators have a higher than average number of introductions, but they are not focused on specific demographic characteristics.

Overall, these findings confirm that progressive ambition influences the volume and content of activity. The difference in legislative activity, specifically introductions, which I

---

<sup>39</sup> I choose to examine only expressly ambitious legislators because they were found to be driving most of the behavioral differences in the original introductions analysis.

uncovered earlier in this chapter, reflects a broader agenda size, which, in turn, echoes a larger number of issues tackled by the legislator. However, the increase in the number of issues tackled by members is not directed at specific demographic groups within the state. Why could this be? The first is the number of introductions per issue area is very low. On most issue areas, legislators introduced no legislation. Therefore, finding a change in the number of introductions is extremely difficult. Second, I only examined a subset of all legislation available to legislators. It may be legislators are responding to different issues than those examined above.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, progressively ambitious legislators may only be focusing on a subset of demographic changes, particularly those important to the state.

Existing research may hold this final point to be the most important. Progressively ambitious legislators are strategic and, as such, must respond to the issues most important to their campaign. Additionally, however, they must operate within the context they are given. For senators, especially, this means choosing issues on which they can gain a foothold if they are elected to the Senate. Schiller (2000) finds that senators within the same state carve out issue portfolios, which are distinct and separate from one another. It may be progressively ambitious legislators respond to constituency differences, but within the issue portfolio held (or abandoned) by the senator he or she is challenging or replacing. If progressively ambitious legislators were only focusing on “open” issues, it would be difficult to find any significant changes in the data. With more nuanced data, a complete set of existing senator issue portfolios, and more complete information about the issues most important within each state, it may be possible to discern what strategic changes are being made by progressively ambitious legislators.

---

<sup>40</sup> I only included demographic areas where the US Census had clearly reported how the measure was calculated. For instance, I was unable to use any demographic and issue areas influenced by the percentage of the area composed of blue collar workers because the US Census does not clearly define how they measure this concept. For the issue areas I analyzed the *Almanac of American Politics* had maintained data across my entire period of study, ensuring I used comparable demographic measures across time.



## Discussion

I began with the assumption many legislators are ambitious—they desire to move on to a more prestigious position—and their ambition influences their activity in office. I also assumed that these ambitious legislators were strategic and goal-oriented. In order to be successful in their higher office run, they would realize that the patterns that worked for them in the past might not be suited to the position to which they aspire. As such, I predicted legislators would increase their activity levels and modify the content of their agendas to cater to a new constituency.

Overall, I found mixed evidence of the implications of progressive ambition on legislative activity. First, legislators had different levels of participation in anticipation of a run for the senate, governorship, or the presidency. Specifically, progressively ambitious legislators miss more roll call votes than others within the chamber. Despite the fact that they were more frequently absent, these legislators introduced more legislation. However, they did not cosponsor more legislation, nor were they more likely to have higher rates of amendment participation. This could be a strategic decision. Introductions are a high-profile legislative activity and it is easier for legislators to claim credit for any benefits they produce. Cosponsorships, on the other hand, receive less attention and would do less to counteract the negative attention that may arise due to missed votes and shirking.

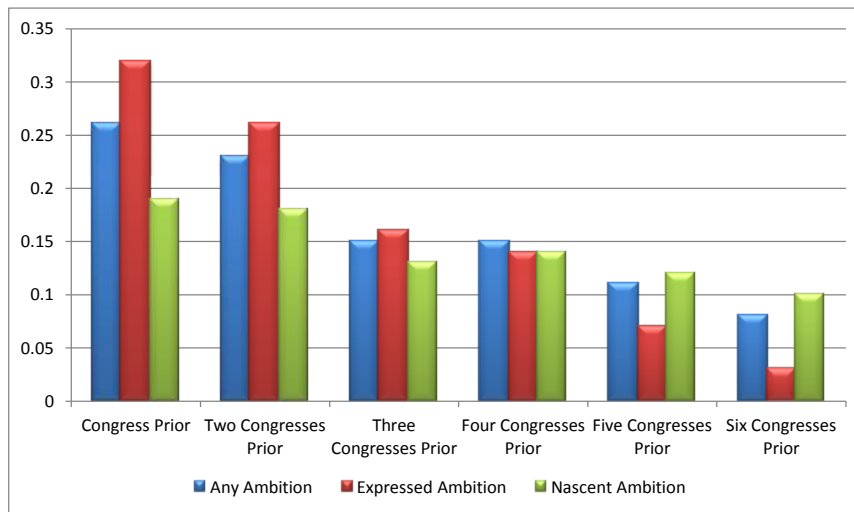
Additionally, legislators are not simply doing more of what they have always done; instead, they are addressing more issues. Specifically, progressively ambitious legislators have larger, more diverse, issue agendas. Again, this shows ambitious legislators are acting strategically. They are moving from being legislative specialists, a behavior more common to the House of Representatives, to being legislative generalists, a behavior more common to the Senate and certainly to the governorship.

However, one area where legislators were found to not display strategic behavior was in addressing the issues important to their new constituency. In fact, statically ambitious legislators were more likely to cater to their state's interests than progressively ambitious politicians were. Although this preliminary analysis did not find widespread results, it is still likely progressively ambitious politicians are attempting to cater to their new constituency in some way. It may be that a more nuanced analysis is necessary to understand how and why legislators are altering their behavior.

The underlying theme of this chapter is that progressively ambitious legislators change their patterns of behavior in a strategic move to improve their electoral chances. Specifically, they must introduce more legislation to appeal to new voters. I also find that progressively ambitious legislators are not present in Washington, D.C. for a number of roll call votes; rather they are home in their district or state actively campaigning for the higher office. In the next chapter, I test whether this assumption is accurate by examining the fundraising activity of these members. Do progressively ambitious legislators raise substantially more money than statically ambitious members? Do they spend even more? If there are differences between the two groups, when do these differences first appear? Finally, I also explore if progressively ambitious legislators use campaign donations to build support networks among sitting members of Congress.

## Figures and Tables

**Figure 4.1: Total Introductions Over Time**



**Table 4.1: Participation Rates**

	Total (in All Congresses)	Minimum (by Legislator)	Maximum (by Legislator)	Average (by Legislator)
<b>Missed Vote Percent</b>	--	0	100	4.5%
<b>Introductions</b>	44,870	0	119	13
<b>Cosponsorships</b>	787,184	0	929	223
<b>Amendments</b>	7,683	0	60	2

**Table 4.2: Missed Votes and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	2.26*** (0.38)	6.37*** (0.80)	-0.36 (0.25)
<b>Retiring</b>	3.92*** (0.68)	4.02*** (0.68)	3.76*** (0.68)
<b>Leader</b>	-0.79 (0.54)	-0.87 (0.55)	-0.98* (0.54)
<b>Partial Term</b>	9.04*** (1.85)	8.84*** (1.86)	9.02*** (1.85)
<b>Seniority</b>	0.13*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.40 (0.31)	0.43 (0.31)	0.31 (0.31)
<b>In Majority</b>	-0.64*** (0.24)	-0.61** (0.24)	-0.68*** (0.25)
<b>Constant</b>	0.07 (6.73)	-1.44 (6.70)	2.14 (6.75)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the percentage of roll call votes missed by the legislator. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

n = 3536, data was clustered by legislator (874 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 4.3: Introductions and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	0.26*** (0.04)	0.32*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.05)
<b>Retiring</b>	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.17*** (0.06)	-0.18*** (0.06)
<b>Leader</b>	-0.60*** (0.10)	-0.62*** (0.10)	-0.61*** (0.10)
<b>Partial Term</b>	-0.69*** (0.11)	-0.69*** (0.11)	-0.68*** (0.11)
<b>Seniority</b>	0.03*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.003)	0.03*** (0.003)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.03 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
<b>In Majority</b>	0.25*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.03)
<b>Constant</b>	-11.89*** (3.85)	-11.51*** (3.79)	-11.74*** (3.84)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total count of introductions and data is assumed to have a negative binomial distribution. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

n = 3536, data was clustered by legislator (874 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 4.4: Missed Votes and Total Introductions**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Total Introductions</b>	0.01 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.02)
<b>Retiring</b>	-0.06 (2.53)	--	4.32*** (1.54)
<b>Leader</b>	7.40** (3.07)	-3.17 (6.31)	--
<b>Partial Term</b>	3.81 (2.71)	1.66 (3.69)	2.98 (2.92)
<b>Seniority</b>	0.24 (0.16)	0.61 (0.33)	0.07* (0.04)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.32 (0.78)	-0.27 (1.36)	1.04 (0.70)
<b>In Majority</b>	-0.75 (0.75)	-1.93 (1.40)	0.14 (0.67)
<b>Constant</b>	-15.60 (24.17)	-32.65 (46.72)	-22.07 (23.11)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the percentage of roll call votes missed by the legislator. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Sample is restricted to legislators with progressive ambition.

n = 384, data was clustered by legislator (135 expressed, 182 nascent).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 4.5: Cosponsorships and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	0.0003 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)
<b>Retired</b>	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)
<b>Leader</b>	-0.32** (0.14)	-0.32** (0.14)	-0.32** (0.14)
<b>Partial Term</b>	-0.71*** (0.07)	-0.70*** (0.07)	-0.70*** (0.07)
<b>Seniority</b>	-0.005** (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.32*** (0.03)	0.32*** (0.03)	0.32*** (0.03)
<b>In Majority</b>	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)
<b>Constant</b>	-13.40*** (2.09)	-13.34*** (2.08)	-13.46*** (2.08)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total count of cosponsorships and data is assumed to have a negative binomial distribution. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

n = 3536, data was clustered by legislator (874 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 4.6: Amendments and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	0.11 (0.08)	0.08 (0.11)	0.12 (0.09)
<b>Retired</b>	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.11 (0.16)	-0.10 (0.16)
<b>Leader</b>	-0.53 (0.33)	-0.54 (0.33)	-0.53 (0.33)
<b>Partial Term</b>	-0.77*** (0.24)	-0.77*** (0.24)	-0.77*** (0.24)
<b>Seniority</b>	0.02*** (0.004)	0.02*** (0.005)	0.02*** (0.005)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.10)
<b>In Majority</b>	-0.23*** (0.06)	-0.23*** (0.06)	-0.23*** (0.06)
<b>Constant</b>	4.95 (8.12)	4.99 (8.08)	5.03 (8.12)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total count of amendments and data is assumed to have a negative binomial distribution. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

n = 3536, data was clustered by legislator (874 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10



**Table 4.7: Total Agenda Size and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Column I Any Ambition</b>	<b>Column II Expressed Ambition</b>	<b>Column III Nascent Ambition</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	0.08*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.04)	0.06** (0.02)
<b>Retired</b>	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)
<b>Leader</b>	-0.10 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.07)
<b>Partial Term</b>	-0.36*** (0.06)	-0.37*** (0.06)	-0.36*** (0.06)
<b>Seniority</b>	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.001 (0.02)	0.00003 (0.02)	-0.0006 (0.02)
<b>In Majority</b>	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
<b>Total Intros</b>	0.02*** (0.003)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)
<b>Constant</b>	-5.56* (2.93)	-5.37** (2.74)	-5.50** (2.72)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total count of issue areas the legislator addressed and data is assumed to have a negative binomial distribution. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

n = 3536, data was clustered by legislator (874 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 4.8: Issue Categories and Demographic Characteristics**

Issue Category	Demographic Category
Agriculture	% Rural (+)
Budget	Median Income (+)
Children’s Issues	% Kids (+)
Education	% Kids (+)
Social Security	% Seniors (+)
Taxes	Median Income (+)

**Table 4.9: Issue Attention and Progressive Ambition**

Issue Category	Progressive Ambition	Static or Discrete Ambition
Agriculture (% Rural)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Budget (Median Income)	-0.00003* (0.000001)	-0.00002*** (0.000008)
Children’s Issues (% Kids)	-0.21** (0.10)	0.06 (0.05)
Education (% Kids)	-0.002 (0.05)	-0.07*** (0.02)
Social Security (% Senior)	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.06* (0.04)
Taxes (Median Income)	-0.00002** (0.00001)	-0.00001 (0.000007)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total count of introductions offered which cover the relevant and data is assumed to have a negative binomial distribution. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

## Chapter 5: Campaign Fundraising and Progressive Ambition

With a personal wealth estimated at more than 50 million dollars, Michael Huffington (R-CA) did not have to fundraise in the same way most House challengers have to. Instead, in 1992, he sunk a total of three million dollars of his own money into the Republican primary to unseat incumbent, Robert Lagomarsino (R-CA). He added another five million dollars of spending from his campaign treasury to win the general election. With his considerable wealth, Huffington blanketed local television with advertisements to build a name brand and attack his opponents. His free-spending nature contributed to the most expensive campaign of the electoral cycle.

Charles “Chuck” Schumer (D-NY), on the other hand, had not amassed a personal fortune to fund his personal ambitions, but raised substantial amounts throughout his career nonetheless. Elected to the House in 1980 after serving in the New York Assembly for six years, Schumer was convinced his Brooklyn district would be redistricted away as the state was set to lose two congressional seats during the 1982 election cycle. With the possibility of an incumbent versus incumbent race just two years after gaining the seat, he immediately began raising more than a million dollars for his reelection. His district’s lines remained largely intact, however, but Schumer did not stop fundraising. By the next redistricting cycle in the early 1990s, he had built a campaign treasury of more than two million dollars. He spent only a portion of his reserves (little more than \$387,000) to hold the seat in 1992.

Richard Burr (R-NC), first elected as part of the Republican Revolution in 1994, never held the kind of electoral fear Schumer did. Safely ensconced in North Carolina’s Fifth District, Burr faced little completion from the Democratic Party, who admitted it was not worth the money to field a competitor. In his first race, he was actually outspent. Two years later, he spent

under \$700,000 to solidify his seat. In 1998, his total spending fell by more than \$100,000. By 2000, he was spending well under \$500,000 to capture 93 percent of the vote. With little pressure from challengers, Burr did not need to raise or spend a lot of money to hold his seat.

The legislators profiled above all held very different views on fundraising. Huffington would use his personal fortune to fund his political career; Schumer was a relentless fundraising machine; and Richard Burr faced a series of low cost, and barely contested, races with little need to raise substantial sums. These three legislators are a microcosm of the differing views on fundraising present in the House of Representatives—some legislators raise a lot of money, some legislators raise only enough to fund their reelection.

Yet, despite their disparate fundraising profiles in the House, all three men held one common characteristic—progressive ambition. Huffington would run and lose a California Senate race in 1994; Schumer would successfully capture one of New York’s Senate seats in 1998; and Richard Burr beat businessman and former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles to become the junior senator from North Carolina in 2004. And when ambition manifested itself, each would also go above and beyond their previous fundraising totals to launch their campaigns. Burr, who was the lowest spender of those profiled above, would record the fourth most expensive Senate campaign in 2004, spending \$12.7 million dollars. Most of his spending was in the final eight weeks of the campaign. Schumer would challenge incumbent senator, Alfonse D’Amato. Though he had five million dollars in his campaign treasury at the time, Schumer would end up spending \$16,671,877 to beat the sitting senator.<sup>41</sup> Huffington would push Dianne Feinstein to the brink of losing in the 1994 election, spending almost 30 million dollars along the way, more than twice what the incumbent had. All three legislators

---

<sup>41</sup> In comparison to D’Amato’s spending, Schumer was practically frugal. The Republican spent more than \$24 million in a losing battle.

would focus substantial amounts of their time raising money for their higher office run. Even Huffington, who had immense personal wealth, was not immune from this requirement.

This chapter explores whether the behavior of the three legislators profiled above is common to all progressively ambitious members. Little attention has been paid to how running for another office may influence campaign fundraising. Members of Congress considering a run for higher office face a substantially more expensive race than ever before. While the average successful House candidate spent just under 1.4 million dollars in 2008, the average winning Senate candidate spent more than six times as much (about 9.7 million dollars) and the average gubernatorial race cost candidates about 6.7 million dollars in total.<sup>42</sup> Presidential campaigns are no longer million dollar events, but rather billion dollar events. A legislator wishing to pursue any of these higher offices is going to need to raise substantially more money than ever before.

Below, I examine how progressively ambitious politicians approach the task of raising money for a higher office run. Specifically, I explore whether progressively ambitious politicians increase the amount of money they raise and spend and identify when this increase begins. I first begin with a discussion of the rising cost of political campaigns and the stark differences that exist among House, Senate, gubernatorial, and presidential races. I then provide evidence that the fundraising patterns of progressively ambitious legislators are substantively different than statically ambitious legislators in the term in which they are campaigning, but also long before appearing on a ballot for a higher office. Finally, I explore how ambitious legislators may use excess campaign contributions to build support among other legislators through candidate giving.

---

<sup>42</sup> Campaign costs for the House and Senate races come from the Center for Responsive Politics (<http://www.opensecrets.org>). Figures for the gubernatorial elections are based upon data gathered by The Council of State Governments (<http://knowledgecenter.csg.org>).

## The Cost of Campaigning

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the many, and most common, complaints of politicians is the constant need to campaign and raise money. This is especially prevalent among members of the House of Representatives, who are faced with running for reelection every two years. With these continuous complaints in mind, it may not be a surprise the cost of running for a political office in the United States is exceedingly high. Even more so, the cost of pursuing a seat in the Senate, the governorship, and especially the presidency are exponentially higher than the cost of running for the House of Representatives. Figure 5.1 shows the different amounts of money raised by House and Senate candidates since 2000. During this period, the average Senate candidate raised more than four times the amount the average House candidate did.<sup>43</sup>

The amount spent in each type of race also varies. As shown in Figure 5.2, since 1990, the average Senate or gubernatorial candidate spent more than six and half times the amount the average House candidate did. It is also interesting to note the average amount spent by candidates is often outpaced by the average amount raised. This could indicate one of two things. First, some Senate and gubernatorial campaigns may run a deficit, with candidates having a negative balance and debt at the end of the campaign. Alternatively, candidates seeking a position in the Senate or Governor's mansion may have a healthy campaign war chest going into the race. If this is the case, it will be important to examine the fundraising activity of progressively ambitious politicians in the term preceding their higher office run, but also in the congresses prior to the race.

The data presented above does not include presidential races, primarily because few members of the House of Representatives jump directly from the lower chamber to the White House. However, in 2008, Barack Obama raised 745 million dollars and spent 730 million

---

<sup>43</sup> Data on the campaign fundraising for gubernatorial candidates is not readily available.

dollars. McCain had a substantially lower haul, but still raised \$368 million and spent \$333 million. While the 2008 presidential election was record setting in terms of campaign fundraising, it is not uncommon for presidential candidates to raise hundreds of millions of dollars during the campaign. In 2004, Bush raised more than \$367 million, while Kerry raised approximately \$328 million (Center for Responsive Politics). Substantially increasing the amount raised is even more important for a progressively ambitious House member seeking the presidency.

Why are these races so expensive? There are a number of reasons one can identify. First, state and nationwide races are more likely to be hard-fought battles between high-quality candidates. Unlike House races, which are frequently uncontested, Senate, gubernatorial, and presidential races recruit better-known, more experienced, candidates who bring with them the necessary skills to fundraise successfully. Presidential candidates must also meet the expectations game during the invisible primary, which includes keeping fundraising pace with the frontrunners. As such, these races may be much more competitive and each contestant must work hard to match the others donations.

Second, candidates need to reach out to substantially more voters, across a greater distance, and over several high-profile media markets. Most incumbents maintain at least some television presence; however advertising is far less common for members of the House of Representatives. It is a virtual requirement for anyone running for a higher office. Likewise, while members are campaigning for the House of Representatives, they are generally within a more compact legislative district. This compactness substantially cuts down on the amount of travel required during the campaign. With the expense of campaign advertising and travel, it is clear statewide and nationwide races will be much more expensive.

Moreover, it is difficult to thrive in these races without investing money. In order to be successful in their higher office run, most candidates will do whatever is within their power to secure more votes. Raising additional funds is one of the many options available to them. At the House level, Jacobson (1978, 1990) argues that incumbent spending has little effect on the overall vote share, but challenger spending tends to increase vote shares dramatically. Green and Krasno (1988, 1990), on the other hand, found Jacobson's models to be incorrectly specified. Once the correct model was used, and the influence of challenger quality was added to the mix, both incumbent and challenger spending had a substantial direct effect on the vote. While the benefits of incumbent campaign spending remain contested, the effect of challenger spending has not. Senate challengers who spent the most saw increases in positive evaluations, support, and votes (Goldstein and Freedman 2000; Jacobson 2006). Research has also found challenger spending to have an effect in gubernatorial primaries (Bardwell 2003) and general elections (Bardwell 2005; Partin 2002).

Perhaps, most importantly, increased campaign fundraising and, in turn, expenditures can lead to increased name recognition through additional advertising or campaign events. Incumbent senators, for instance, are able to use their time in office to blanket the state with positive information about their accomplishments and the benefits they have brought back to the area, leading to a high level of name recognition. Because name recognition is often low among House members, building a reputation and persona statewide is essential. As Jacobson (2006) notes, “one reason for believing that campaign spending matters more to challengers than to incumbents is that challengers have no hope of winning unless they can reduce the initial advantage in familiarity among voters normally enjoyed by incumbents” (206). In his analysis, name recognition was 18 percentage points higher for Senate challengers who spent the most. It



is clear, legislators seeking a higher office should be raising substantially more money. I now turn to whether this is the case.

### **Campaign Receipts**

There are many components to campaign fundraising. Candidates receive funds from individuals, political action groups, parties, other candidates, or loans from their own private wealth. Candidates also disburse money on direct campaign expenses, such as advertising, travel, and staff. Furthermore, candidates have the option to redistribute excess campaign contributions to other candidates or the party's campaign committees. While these components are all important, the first step in any political campaign is to raise money, regardless of its source. Because of the many factors described above, I anticipate that progressively ambitious legislators will raise significantly more money than statically ambitious legislators as they are campaigning for a higher office. This may not be particularly noteworthy, however. As such, I also anticipate that the increase in fundraising will begin years prior to the higher office run. As noted above, many candidates spend more in a single election than they raised in the same cycle—meaning some legislators likely maintain a healthy campaign war chest going into the race.

To test my first set of hypotheses, I examine Federal Election Commission data on the total campaign receipts per individual candidate, which is my primary dependent variable. There was substantial variation in the total amount legislators raised for their campaigns. At the low end, a handful of legislators raised well under \$10,000 to fund their races, including Danny Davis (D-IL), who raised less than \$7,000 in the 2004 election cycle. At the high end, Vern Buchanan, a Republican representative from Florida, raised \$8,123,186 during the 2006 election cycle. During the period under study, legislators raised, on average, \$868,895 per election cycle.

My primary independent variables are the two measures of progressive ambition, expressed and nascent ambition. As I did in the previous chapter, I first run my model to uncover the effect of any type of ambition. I then examine the two types of ambition separately to see if and how expressed and nascent ambition manifest differently.

I also control for a variety of other factors, both at the individual and the district level. Most importantly, I control for the cost of advertising within a district. Legislators do not face an even playing field when it comes to the cost of a political campaign. For instance, a member of Congress representing the New York City area is likely to raise substantially more money than a legislator representing rural Indiana. While the actual geographic area represented by the New York politician may be smaller, he or she faces the daunting expense of advertising in one of the most expensive media markets in the country. To control for the cost of the “average” political campaign, I gathered data on the top ten local television markets in the United States.<sup>44</sup> These data represent the number of homes with a television within a designated market area (or DMA). The larger the number of homes reached in a designated market area, the more expensive it is to purchase advertising, which would cause the cost of a campaign (which includes televised campaign advertising) to also rise.

Although Nielsen maintains information on the exact geographical boundaries within each DMA, they do not provide this information to the public. However, Congressional Quarterly provides a breakdown of the major commercial television stations within each congressional district and the corresponding origin city. I matched the information from CQ’s

---

<sup>44</sup> The top 10 media markets as of 2008-2009 were New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, Boston, Atlanta, Washington, DC, and Houston. Nielsen does not provide archived data on local television markets without a licensing fee. Therefore, I use the 2008-2009 rankings for all years in the sample. Populations have certainly changed between 1992 and 2008. However, population shifts in the United States have generally reflected a movement from Rust Belt cities in the Midwest to the Sunbelt and southern states. Only two Midwestern cities, Detroit and Cleveland, appeared in the top twenty media markets in the 2008-2009. Detroit’s population woes started long before 1992 and Cleveland had 500,000 fewer television households than the tenth largest media market, Houston, less than the total population of Cleveland.

*Congressional Districts in the 1990s* and *Congressional Districts in the 2000s* with Nielsen's DMA information.<sup>45</sup> By controlling for media markets, I can eliminate any noise caused by legislators raising substantial amounts of money, not to launch a bid for a higher office, but to advertise within their own costly district.

At the individual level, I also control for retirement, which should have a significant negative effect on both campaign spending and receipts. After the expiration of the golden parachute clause of the Federal Election Campaign Act, which prohibited converting remaining campaign funds for personal use, retiring legislators have had little incentive to continue timely fundraising activities (Groseclose and Krehbiel 1994). I also control for party leaders, who may see an increase in donations by access-seeking individuals. In addition to the above factors, I also anticipate being more senior and in the majority party to increase the overall amount raised. Likewise, having a close race in the prior election could motivate a legislator to build a sufficient war chest to prevent against future electoral attacks, so I control for the legislator's past winning percentage.

Finally, I also include a control for legislators who represent their states at-large, as well as an interaction term for ambitious legislators running within these states. Progressively ambitious politicians in these districts face the same constituency whether running for the House or the Senate. Because they have the same constituency, these legislators may not have to raise substantially more. However, it is also possible the increased competitiveness of statewide campaigns could lead to an increase in fundraising. Overall, it is unclear whether single district legislators will need to increase their fundraising in the same way a legislator from a larger and more populous state would.

---

<sup>45</sup> Many districts receive broadcasts from several different media markets. I considered a district to be part of one of these media markets if at least 20 percent of the residents received service from one of its stations.

My first hypothesis states that progressively ambitious legislators will raise substantially more money than statically ambitious legislators (or those who remain in the House of Representatives). To test this hypothesis, I ran a regression model with the total amount raised, per individual legislator, during the election cycle as my dependent variable. As mentioned above, my primary independent variable is a measure for any ambitious behavior displayed during that election cycle. I also control for the factors described above. In addition, because legislators appear in multiple contests within my dataset, I cluster by legislator. I also control for Congress in the model to account for any year-to-year variation, though I do not present the results below. Therefore, my first model tests whether an individual legislator raised substantially more money in the term in which they ran for, or considered running for, a higher office.

Model I of Table 5.1 reports the results for legislators displaying any type of ambition, either expressed or nascent. The results show progressively ambitious legislators raise substantially more money than other legislators in the campaign cycle immediately preceding their higher office run. In fact, they raise \$219,054 more and this result holds when I control for the cost of a “normal” race. Only progressively ambitious legislators who represent a single district state raise less money. It appears the cost of campaigning for the Senate or governorship in these states may be similar to campaigning for a seat in the lower chamber. House members with leadership positions also raise more; in fact, their fundraising increases greatly outpace progressively ambitious legislators.

I anticipate expressly ambitious legislators are driving most of the difference in money raised, however. Model II examines the two types of ambition separately to determine if this is true. The results show expressly ambitious legislators, or those who appeared on the actual

ballot for a higher office, do raise more than nascently ambitious legislators. Those who appeared on a ballot for higher office raise more than \$356,541 in the term immediately preceding the election. Those who only thought about running for a higher office raise a more modest \$146,943. However, both groups raise significantly more than legislators who seek reelection to the House of Representatives. Two factors may be at play in these results. First, legislators who actually appear on a ballot for higher office compete in a different way; their campaigns are longer and likely harder fought than a legislator who drops out of a race early. Second, expressly ambitious legislators may be different; they may have always raised more money. I return to this second factor below.

As I discussed above, there is also the question of when the increase in fundraising first occurs. Legislators seeking a higher office may continuously raise more money in order to be competitive. In order to determine if progressively ambitious legislators raise more money over the course of their careers, I created a set of lagged variables reaching back more than fourteen years prior to their higher office run. I anticipate that the total number of campaign dollars raised will be significantly higher among the progressively ambitious in the terms prior to their higher office run. Figure 5.3 above outlines the fundraising history of progressively ambitious legislators and Table 5.2 below reports the coefficients for the fundraising variable over time. Each line represents the relevant coefficients from models using lagged campaign receipts as my primary dependent variable.

Of course, it is important to note many progressively ambitious legislators do not remain in the House of Representatives for the length of time displayed above. However, for those who had a long tenure in the House, fundraising changes occurred as far as seven terms prior to the

higher office run.<sup>46</sup> Put another way, a legislator with any type of progressive ambition raises more funds than statically ambitious legislators for fourteen years prior to their higher office run.<sup>47</sup> Again, most of this change is being driven by legislators with expressed progressive ambition. They maintain higher campaign receipts in every election cycle, except for six terms prior to the higher office run. Nascently ambitious legislators raise more money only through the third term prior to a potential higher office run. After that point, the difference between nascently ambitious legislators and others disappears. Over the course of the entire period, their campaign receipts are also lower than expressly ambitious legislators, indicating there is some difference between these two groups of individuals.

I find progressively ambitious legislators raise more money per election cycle than statically ambitious legislators. As I noted above, it may be these legislators always maintain a high, relatively consistent pattern of fundraising because they hold an underlying desire to move up. If this case, I should not find any substantial percentage increase in fundraising by progressively ambitious legislators in the term prior to their higher office run. To test this, I calculated the percentage change in total campaign receipts between election cycles. Because progressively ambitious legislators have higher campaign receipts over the course of their careers, I do not anticipate the process of campaigning for the higher office will lead to a substantial percentage change in fundraising.

Examining the results from Model 1 in Table 5.3, I find progressively ambitious legislators do not see a statistically significant increase in their total fundraising totals between the election cycle in which they run for a higher office and the one immediately preceding it.

---

<sup>46</sup> The difference in fundraising totals is not statistically significant in the sixth term prior to a higher office run, but it returns to significance seven terms prior.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, I may be underestimating my results as those measured as statically ambitious could potentially run in the future.

Despite the anecdotal evidence I presented in the opening of this chapter, legislators planning a higher office run do not ratchet up their fundraising activity prior to running for a higher office. Instead, they seem to maintain a consistently higher level of fundraising over the course of their careers. In fact, no group sees a percentage change in my model, indicating past fundraising performance is a very good predictor of current and future fundraising performance. When I examine the two types of ambition separately, I find the same pattern—there is no significant differences among expressly, nascently, and statically ambitious legislators.

One interesting question I do not examine in this dissertation is where these fundraising increases come from. I have established progressively ambitious legislators raise more money than statically ambitious legislators do, but do legislators seeking a statewide race begin to expand their fundraising networks outside the district and even the state to attract new supporters? Or do they have a more difficult time obtaining out-of-district funds because of the unknown nature of their race? Existing research has shown many House members receive a majority of their funds from out-of-district donors (Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008). However, most donations are from wealthy and educated donors who seek to influence the overall party fortunes in the House by contributing to competitive races. Progressively ambitious politicians may see different patterns because of the risk involved in their race. Future research could tap into the FEC disclosure reports to determine the geographic source of campaign donations.

### **Campaign Disbursements**

While campaign receipts are the first, and perhaps most important, step in launching a bid for a higher office, they are not the only component of campaign finance. Campaign disbursements are also important. Campaigns cost a lot of money. From travel, to staff, to

advertising, and campaign events, legislators seeking a higher office need to ramp up their total campaign spending to compete. And, as noted above, the amount of spending by challengers in congressional campaigns also contributes to better name recognition, higher vote shares, and more success. Any strategic, progressively ambitious legislator is going to spend additional money if it means a better chance of winning their higher office race.

As such, the second set of hypotheses I put forward examine the campaign spending of ambitious legislators. I anticipate ambitious legislators will also spend more money in the term immediately preceding their higher office run, although I do not believe this increase will occur in the years prior. To test this hypothesis, I ran a model with the total amount spent as my dependent variable and a measure for any ambitious behavior as my independent variable, controlling for the same factors as my first models. Similar to above, Model I of Table 5.4 reports the results for legislators displaying any type of ambition, either expressed or nascent.

Like campaign receipts above, I find a strong relationship between progressive ambition and higher campaign disbursements. Looking at the coefficients from Model 1 in Table 5.4, I find progressively ambitious legislators spend \$123,731.50 more than statically ambitious legislators, unless they reside in a state with a single district. The only other factor that increases campaign disbursements significantly is leadership. In fact, leaders have substantially higher campaign disbursements than any other group in my model. It may be surprising to see this increase in disbursements. Few leaders are significantly challenged in their reelection quests—most come from safe districts and have served for years or even decades. It seems unlikely that leadership would need to spend to hold their seats. And, in fact, they are likely not using campaign disbursements for this purpose. Rather, these legislators are likely redistributing



excess campaign contributions to unsafe or marginal members within their caucus. This candidate-to-candidate giving is examined in more detail below.

As seen in Model II, expressly ambitious legislators are still driving most of the fundraising changes and spend significantly more. Expressly ambitious legislators spend more than \$234,000, compared to just under \$66,000 for nascently ambitious legislators. Again, I find there is a difference between those legislators who actually appear on a ballot and those legislators who simply consider a run for a higher office. In this case, the result is not surprising, expressly ambitious legislators will continue to spend money throughout the entire campaign cycle, nascently ambitious legislators will not. They spend less because they campaign less.

As mentioned above, I did not anticipate progressively ambitious legislators would spend higher amounts of money over the course of their career. Figure 5.4 confirms the opposite is actually true. Legislators who displayed any type of ambition saw significantly higher spending over the course of their careers. When I examine the two types of ambition separately, I find this is especially true among expressly ambitious legislators who have significantly higher disbursements than nascently ambitious legislators.<sup>48</sup> Nascently ambitious legislators also maintain higher levels of spending; however, the difference in spending disappears four terms prior to their higher office run, which is much earlier than expressly ambitious legislators. When I examined the percentage change in total campaign disbursements, I find there is no significant relationship between spending change and progressive ambition. Like campaign receipts, past campaign spending seems to be a good predictor of current and future campaign spending.

---

<sup>48</sup> The only period where expressly ambitious legislators do not see significant differences in total disbursements is the congress six terms prior to the higher office run.

## **Campaign War Chests**

The findings above show that progressively ambitious legislators tend to have higher campaign receipts over the course of their careers and they tend to spend more of that money. However, if you examine the average campaign fundraising data presented at the beginning of the chapter, as well as the models above, in more detail an interesting finding arises. Legislators tend to raise substantially more money than they spend. As such, legislators must be building a campaign “war chest” in anticipation of running for a higher office or to give to the party or other members of Congress. These “war chests” are simply extra campaign funds held over from previous electoral cycles, which can be spent when needed. To test whether this is the case, I examined the beginning cash of legislators. If progressively ambitious legislators are maintaining a war chest (like Charles Schumer did in one of the opening anecdotes), they should have significantly more cash on hand at the beginning of the electoral cycle in which they run. Like the models before, I control for the legislator’s media market, as well as personal characteristics such as retirement, leadership, seniority, majority status, and previous vote share. I also control for district and state level factors, including states with a single legislative district, as well as the congress. Except for previous vote share, I anticipate the remainder of the variables to have a similar effect as above. Previous vote share, however, should have a positive effect; the higher the previous vote share, the more money remaining in a legislator’s war chest. Legislators who had a low previous vote share likely faced a more difficult race and could have spent more as a result.

In fact, progressively ambitious legislators do have a significant war chest going into their final term in the House of Representatives. Legislators who display any type of ambition enter the final campaign cycle with \$80,057.30 more on hand. Legislators from pricey media

markets, as well as those who have spent more time in office, also have significantly larger campaign treasuries. Previous vote share had no significant effect. When I examine the types of ambition separately, I find that both groups have more cash on hand at the start of their potential final term in office. Expressly ambitious legislators hold \$87,578 more while nascently ambitious legislators hold \$76,147 more. While legislators are not increasing the total percent of campaign funds they raise between their final two congresses, they do have some money saved away for a potential higher office run.

### **Distributing Campaign Donations**

Unfortunately, I do not possess detailed information on exactly what legislators are using their campaign disbursements for, but there are a few plausible explanations for why legislators spend more. Progressively ambitious members of the House of Representatives may continuously be seeking out ways to build name recognition across the state, especially if they hold an underlying desire to run for a higher office. By maintaining a more active profile, they could stave off some of the extra work required in the final campaign cycle. Therefore, their average level of spending may be much higher.

Another reason legislators may spend more over the course of their careers is because they are using their excess campaign contributions strategically. As I mentioned above, campaign fundraising is about more than just inputs. Legislators have the ability to direct excess campaign resources to other politicians, the party, and political action committees. Extant research has found these intraparty contributions can be a powerful predictor of who receives prime committee and party leadership positions (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007; Heberlig 2003; Heberlig and Larson 2010). These same types of contributions could also aid progressively

ambitious legislators, who may be able to use the donations to garner support from fellow legislators.

There are two primary ways legislators may redistribute funds strategically. One, they may make contributions to the party's congressional campaign committees. These committees work to redistribute funds to members of the party's caucus for electoral purposes. Progressively ambitious legislators could use these contributions to ensure party leaders provide their support in the higher office run. This could be especially important if a legislator knew he was facing primary competition. Even without this extra type of competition, having additional support from high-profile members of Congress could be essential in winning. I anticipate legislators will use any tool at their disposal to increase their chances at success, and this includes giving to the party's campaign committee.

The second way legislators may use campaign contributions is by redistributing excess funds to other legislators' campaigns. This may be a much better use of funds for the progressively ambitious. These "gifts" could induce fellow legislators to provide helpful endorsements or to hold joint campaign events. Thus, I expect progressively ambitious legislators to have higher candidate-to-candidate giving in the term immediately preceding their higher office run.

To determine whether progressively ambitious legislators are using campaign disbursements for strategic reasons, I examine the total amount given by the legislator to other individuals within Congress or to the party. Due to data availability, I restrict this analysis to the 108<sup>th</sup> through 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses. During that time, 477 different legislators served in Congress. Of those members, a total of 135 displayed progressive ambition—45 of those were expressly ambitious and an additional 90 were nascently ambitious. On average, legislators gave

\$86,760.26 to their respective party's campaign committee. There was a significant range in giving, some legislators opted to not send any money to the party, and at least one legislator gave \$2,000,000. Members of Congress redistributed an additional \$70,379.97, on average, to their fellow legislators. All legislators gave away at least some funds (the lowest amount, \$200). Republican minority whip, Eric Cantor, gave away the highest amount, a total of \$1,258,542, during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The first model I test is whether progressively ambitious legislators contribute more to the party's congressional campaign committee. As I stated above, I hypothesize that progressively ambitious legislators will use this form of strategic redistribution because it could have a direct positive effect on their success. As with previous models, I first test whether any type of ambition has an effect and then turn to examining the different types of ambition separately. I include all controls, except for media market and single districts, from above. I anticipate retiring legislators will contribute more funds to the campaign committee because they will not need to spend on their own race. Leaders should contribute substantially more because it is in their best interest to maintain their party's strength; I believe a similar pattern would occur for legislators in the majority. Because seniority is often associated with moving up the ladder within the House of Representatives, I anticipate a positive relationship with committee giving. Finally previous vote share should have a positive effect as well. Legislators who had an easy previous race may have excess campaign funds to redistribute to those in need. I also control for total receipts, as legislators who raise a lot of money are also likely to have excess funds to give away. I also control for congress.

Overall, I find that progressive ambition does not have the expected effect on the amount given by legislators to the party's campaign committee; in fact, there is no significant

relationship between campaign committee giving and progressive ambition. Only leaders, more senior members, and those in the majority contribute at higher rates. Perhaps this is not surprising. Legislators who give to the campaign committees may find more support from party leaders. However, this is less important to a legislator seeking a spot in the Senate, governor's mansion, or the White House. It is, however, important for a member whose leadership position depends on the continued success of the party, and for legislators who derive extra power from being in the majority. With limited campaign funds, progressively ambitious legislators may be choosing how to spend very carefully, focusing on investments with the highest rate of return.

One such investment of excess campaign contributions is to redistribute to other members within the party. This is a much more logical use of campaign contributions for progressively ambitious members. Here, these excess gifts can be used as inducement to provide an important endorsement or attend joint campaign events on behalf of the progressively ambitious legislator. As such, I anticipate progressive ambition will have a strong positive effect on the total amount of money redistributed to other legislators.

Again, my hypothesis does not hold. In fact, progressively ambitious legislators give substantially less money to other members of Congress. Legislators who display any type of ambition give \$22,765.79 less than statically ambitious legislators. This difference is driven by the expressly ambitious, who decrease their candidate-to-candidate giving by \$45,648.82. Again, leaders and more senior members are more likely to contribute to others within chamber. So do those who had an easy previous race, likely because they had excess funds available to redistribute. Perhaps legislators interested in a higher office have little interest in cultivating relationships within the House of Representatives, especially because they hope to remain there

for only a short time. It seems like the increased campaign expenditures found in early models are being driven by the campaign's own expenditures, such as increased travel and advertising.

Perhaps there is another story at work. Legislators running for a higher office may need as much of their campaign funds as possible during their final electoral cycle. Therefore, it may be that legislators are not using strategic giving in their final terms, but rather that this type of giving drops precipitously as the higher office run nears. To test whether this is the case, I calculated the percentage change in party committee and candidate-to-candidate giving over the course of the final terms in office—including the percentage change between the final term prior to running for a higher office and two terms immediately preceding it. When examining those results, I find that progressively ambitious legislators actually see a negative percentage change in party campaign committee giving. From the third term prior to their higher office run to the term which immediately precedes the run, progressively ambitious legislators decrease their committee giving by 172 percent ( $p < 0.02$ ). This change is actually being driven by the nascently ambitious. Looking even more closely, I find that the change is primarily occurring between the second and third term prior to a higher office run. Isolating just that period shows a decrease in committee giving by 157 percent ( $p < 0.013$ ), with expressly ambitious legislators decreasing giving by 157.54 percent ( $p < 0.078$ ) and nascently ambitious legislators by 157.45 percent ( $p < 0.023$ ).

A similar pattern holds for candidate-to-candidate giving. While there is not a significant relationship between any type of ambition and the percentage change in candidate-to-candidate giving, there is a difference when examining only expressed ambition. The expressly ambitious decrease their total candidate-to-candidate giving almost 530 percent between their final two terms in office ( $p < 0.035$ ). Nascently ambitious legislators also see a decrease in this type of

strategic giving; however, it occurs between the third term prior to a potential run and the final term prior to a possible higher office run. In that time period, they decrease their candidate-to-candidate by 196 percent ( $p < 0.016$ ). Legislators are acting strategically, just not in the way that I had originally predicted. Instead, they find themselves in a higher office run, or strongly considering one, and realize that any extra campaign funds should be devoted to the campaign. As such, they decrease both party campaign committee and candidate-to-candidate giving.

## **Discussion**

Overall, these results show progressively ambitious legislators raise and spend more funds, but the amount varies by the type of ambition displayed. These same legislators also go into their final election cycle with more cash on hand. Overall, the results mirror research on high quality candidates and campaign fundraising. Quality candidates have been found to have more success in raising campaign funds in House races (Biersack, Herrnson, and Wilcox 1993; Krasno, Green, and Cowden 1994), gubernatorial primaries (Bardwell 2002), and Senate races (Squire 1989). While challenger quality is often synonymous with previous political experience it is not always so, and the type of previous political experience is not defined. Here, I find presidential, senate, and gubernatorial challengers with experience in the House of Representatives raise substantial amounts of money.

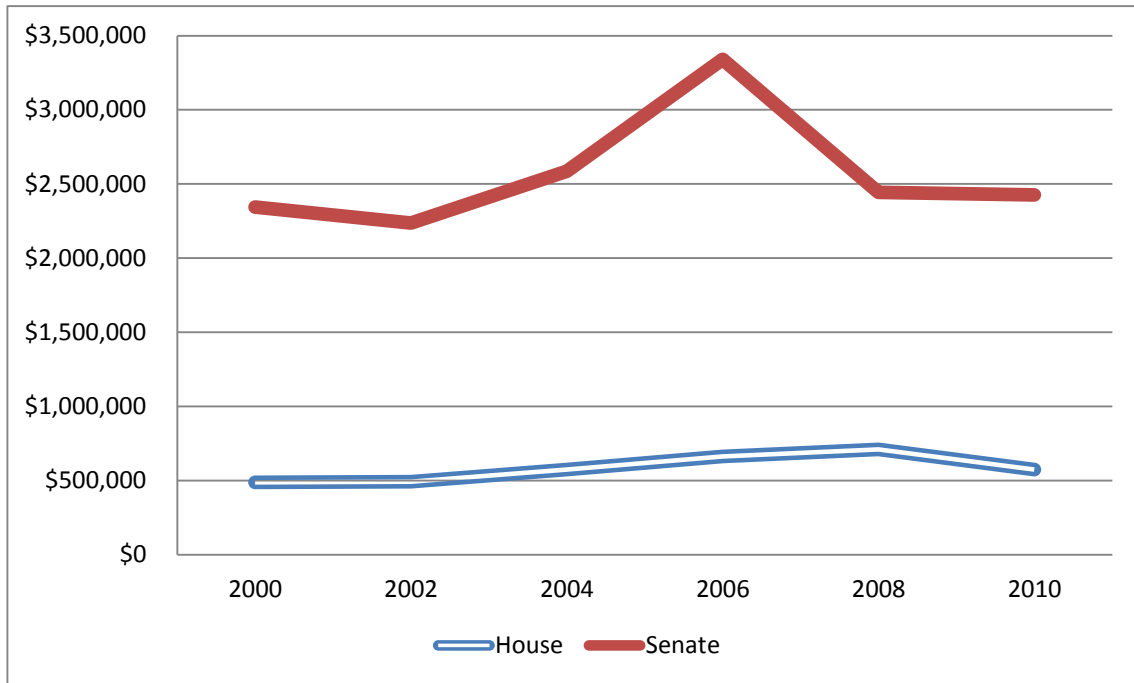
Ultimately, this avenue of research is a story about the quality of representation received by voters within a House member's district. According to the results of this chapter, progressively ambitious legislators raise substantially more funds than static members of the House do. Whether these legislators are raising funds through direct mailing appeals or frequent fundraising events, they are taking time out of their schedules in order to do so. Furthermore, the change in fundraising activity is not a short-term event. Progressively ambitious legislators



begin to raise additional funds well before they run for a higher office. Raising money takes time, often a lot of it, and legislators only have a finite period of time available to them. When they spend additional time raising money, they must spend less doing other things. As such, members of the House of Representatives who spend more time actively raising money may spend less time working on legislation, attending votes, or participating in constituency service. Representation for the current constituency suffers as they pursue a contest to represent others. In the final chapter, I turn to the representational and policy effects of progressive ambition. The previous chapters have shown that progressive ambition affects both legislative and campaign activity. With these findings in mind, should we be encouraging or discouraging progressive ambition?

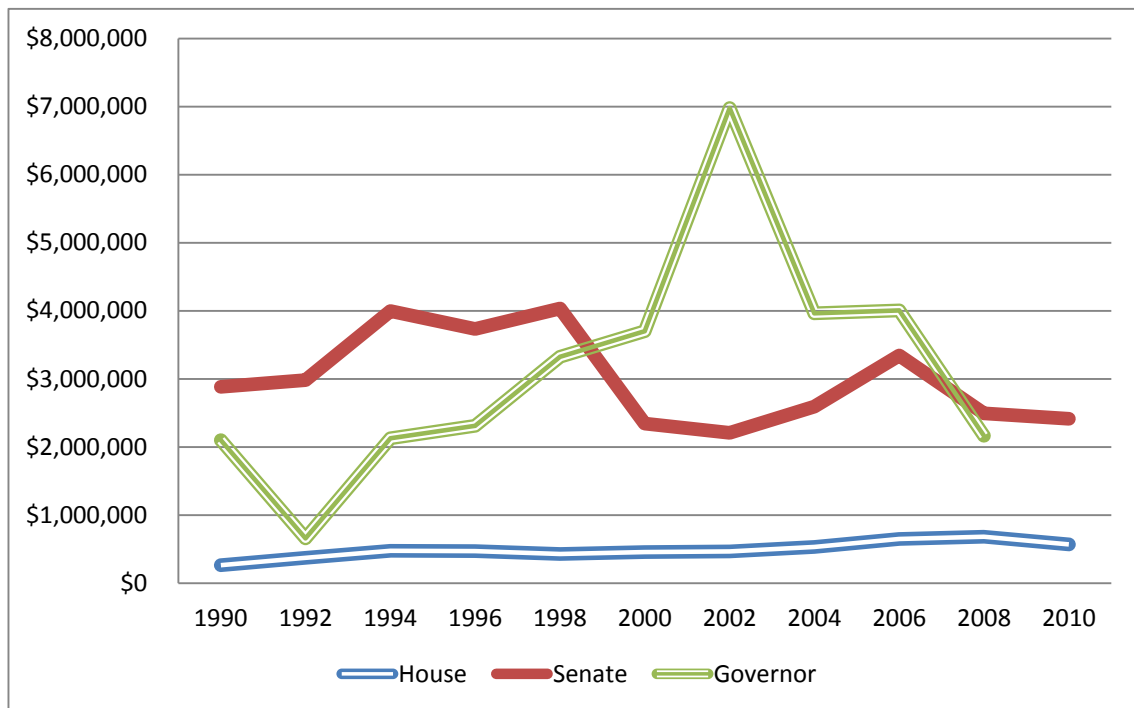
**Figures and Tables**

**Figure 5.1: Average Amount Raised by House and Senate Candidates: 2000-2010**



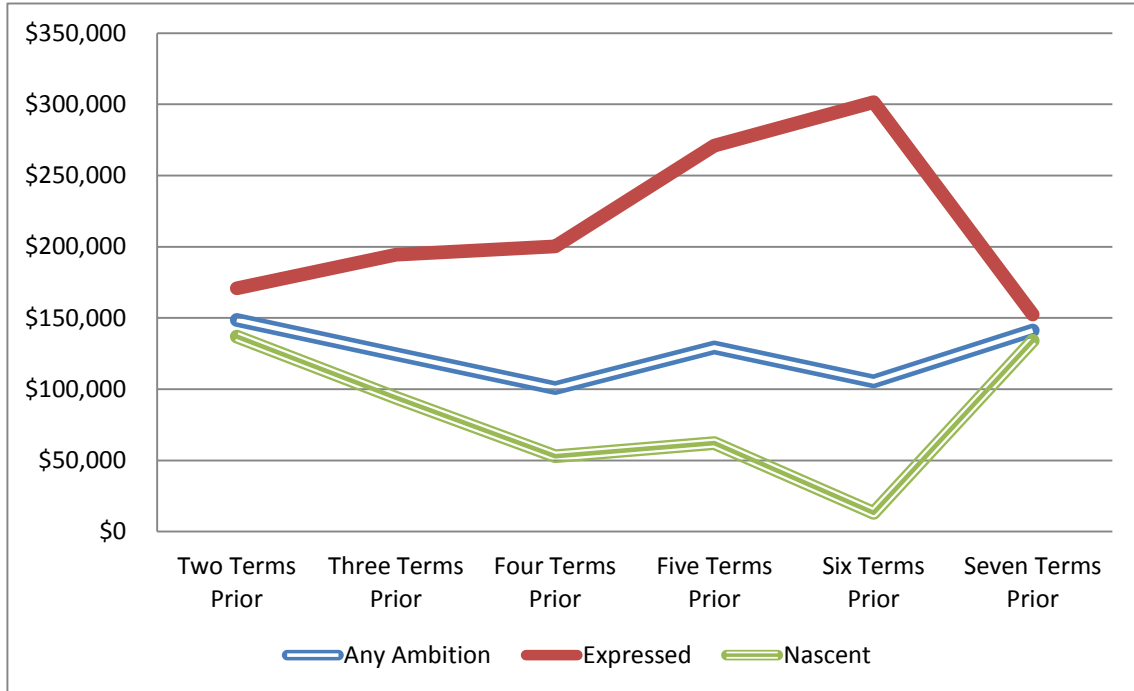
**Note:** Data retrieved from the Center for Responsive Politics, <http://www.opensecrets.org>

**Figure 5.2: Average Amount Spent by House and Senate Candidates: 1990-2010**



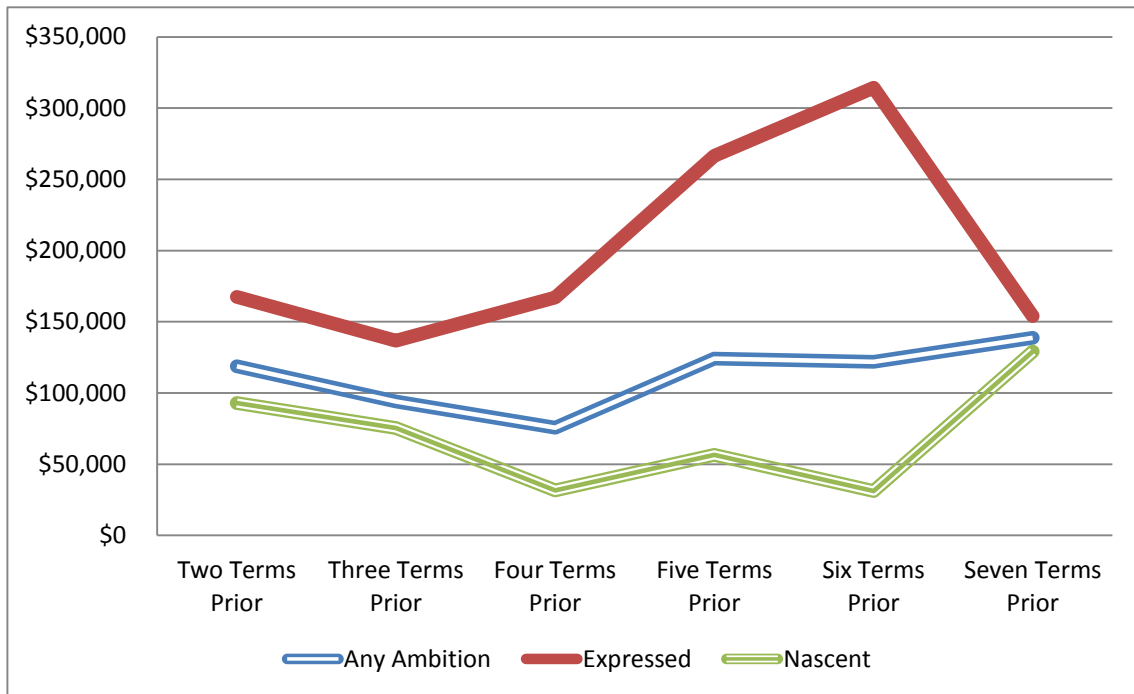
**Note:** House and Senate data retrieved from the Center for Responsive Politics, <http://www.opensecrets.org>. Data on gubernatorial races is from Jensen and Beyle (2009).

**Figure 5.3: Progressive Ambition and Campaign Receipts Over Time**



**Note:** Numbers represent the coefficients from regression analysis using lagged dependent variables.

**Figure 5.4: Progressive Ambition and Campaign Disbursements Over Time**



**Note:** Numbers represent the coefficients from regression analysis using lagged dependent variables.

**Table 5.1: Total Campaign Dollars Raised and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	\$219,054.10*** (39918.10)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	\$356,541*** (82955.55)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	\$146,943.40*** (38569.35)
<b>Top Ten Media Market</b>	\$64,998.38 (40922.97)	\$66,545.65 (40865.81)
<b>Retiring</b>	\$98,406.62 (74857.56)	\$101,405.70 (74774)
<b>Leader</b>	\$915,943.40*** (240114.40)	\$913,196.10*** (240074.20)
<b>Seniority</b>	-\$1,118.91 (3052.75)	-\$1,111.96 (3048.58)
<b>In Majority</b>	\$25,361.20 (28768.81)	\$25,140.64 (28795.10)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	-\$4,582.06 (2935.96)	-\$4,596.05 (2945.13)
<b>Single District</b>	\$244,435.40 (165773.10)	\$244,529.30 (166052.60)
<b>Single District x Ambition</b>	-\$377,486.70** (176565.70)	<b>Express</b> -\$534,875.40** (232295.10)
		<b>Nascent</b> -\$296,144.80* (172111)
<b>Constant</b>	-\$11,405,840*** (740027.80)	-\$11,474,530*** (739143.50)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount raised in the campaign cycle. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.1954$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.1983$   
n = 2656, data was clustered by legislator (684 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 5.2: Total Campaign Dollars Raised Over Time and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Any Ambition</b>	<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	<b>Expressed Ambition</b>
<b>Term Preceding Run</b>	\$219,054.10*** (39918.10)	\$356,541*** (82955.55)	\$146,943.40*** (38569.35)
<b>Two Terms Prior</b>	\$148,684.70*** (32592.26)	\$170,939.30*** (60678.35)	\$136,878.90*** (36447.10)
<b>Three Terms Prior</b>	\$124,488.30*** (35804.59)	\$194,356.20** (82342.45)	\$94,012.72*** (34582.06)
<b>Four Terms Prior</b>	\$100,780.40*** (35520.20)	\$200,211.40** (79605.83)	\$52,851.67 (33046.47)
<b>Five Terms Prior</b>	\$129,344.90*** (43650.03)	\$270,941.90*** (94039.34)	\$62,257.38 (43187.34)
<b>Six Terms Prior</b>	\$105,451.50 (74580.24)	\$301,545.30 (194684.80)	\$13,224.89 (48894.66)
<b>Seven Terms Prior</b>	\$141,155.70** (58333.05)	\$152,454.60** (62676.65)	\$134,000.10 (83711.76)
<p><b>Note:</b> Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount raised in the relevant campaign cycle. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.</p> <p>*** p&lt;0.01; ** p&lt;0.05; * p&lt;0.10</p>			

**Table 5.3: Percentage Increase in Campaign Receipts and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	233.81% (349.38)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	849.63% (989.68)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	-93.84% (73.40)
<b>Top Ten Media Market</b>	-105.54% (116.51)	-99.71% (115.07)
<b>Retiring</b>	-180.94% (187.33)	-167.76% (190.01)
<b>Leader</b>	-118.01% (97.83)	135.40% (59.36)
<b>Seniority</b>	4.41% (7.42)	4.50% (7.41)
<b>In Majority</b>	200.98% (169.93)	199.62% (169.39)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	-0.91% (1.52)	-0.98% (1.50)
<b>Single District</b>	-185.36% (152.07)	-185.23% (152.10)
<b>Single District x Ambition</b>	-126.96% (365.15)	<b>Express</b> -954.56% (1017.26)
		<b>Nascent</b> 294.76% (222.70)
<b>Constant</b>	10,995.24% (10455.34)	10,695.73% (10524.16)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total percentage change in campaign receipts from the last election to the next, most recent. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.0039$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.0053$   
n = 2616, data was clustered by legislator (680 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 5.4: Total Campaign Dollars Spent and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	\$123,731.50*** (36794.65)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	\$234,602.60*** (73235.33)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	\$65,594.10* (39488.61)
<b>Top Ten Media Market</b>	\$41,453.44 (39865.40)	\$42,737.44 (39831.18)
<b>Retiring</b>	\$132,062.80 (83403.14)	\$134,497.40 (83340.82)
<b>Leader</b>	\$946,387.40*** (236066.60)	\$944,168.20*** (236150.80)
<b>Seniority</b>	\$384.27 (2913.75)	\$387.83 (2910.70)
<b>In Majority</b>	\$8,085.65 (27741.28)	\$7,920.92 (27771.12)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	-\$4,673.06 (2987.23)	-\$4,658.01 (2995.30)
<b>Single District</b>	\$195,326.30 (133943.80)	\$195,421.40 (134176.50)
<b>Single District x Ambition</b>	-\$300,653.10** (149661.10)	<b>Express</b> -\$386,073.80** (174180.30)
		<b>Nascent</b> -\$252,963.50 (159039.20)
<b>Constant</b>	-\$11,141,980*** (787665.30)	-\$11,201,260*** (788954.10)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount raised in the campaign cycle. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.1817$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.1836$   
n = 2656, data was clustered by legislator (684 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 5.5: Cash on Hand and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	\$80,057.30*** (21462.70)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	\$87,577.81** (40539.74)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	\$76,147.13*** (21061.00)
<b>Top Ten Media Market</b>	\$74,966.21*** (28505.89)	\$75,142.21** (28490.07)
<b>Retiring</b>	-\$10,348.48 (42108.40)	-\$10,143.83 (42103.88)
<b>Leader</b>	-\$37,678.90 (61540.82)	-\$37,838.67 (61585.45)
<b>Seniority</b>	\$11,010.44*** (1850.58)	\$11,005.67*** (1851.16)
<b>In Majority</b>	\$21,958.60 (16943.93)	\$21,979.62 (16969.86)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	\$970.82 (701.57)	\$968.39 (700.39)
<b>Single District</b>	\$57,736.36 (85346.77)	\$57,790.47 (85373.96)
<b>Single District x Ambition</b>	-\$63,848.40 (69374.79)	<b>Express</b> \$32,092.07 (107045.70)
		<b>Nascent</b> -\$104,508.30* (60754.26)
<b>Constant</b>	-\$4,132,435*** (418537.70)	-\$4,146,004*** (417353.90)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount raised in the campaign cycle. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.1547$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.1548$   
n = 2656, data was clustered by legislator (684 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10



**Table 5.6: Campaign Committee Giving and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	-\$3,343.96 (7895.69)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	-\$13,578.35 (15939.92)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	\$1,675.35 (8594.99)
<b>Retiring</b>	\$1,428.65 (25595.17)	\$925.96 (25589.47)
<b>Leader</b>	\$182,319.40*** (35859.93)	\$182,056.60*** (35817.98)
<b>Seniority</b>	\$3,895.94*** (697.05)	\$3,894.49*** (697.96)
<b>In Majority</b>	\$34,648.26*** (6779.38)	\$34,668.24*** (6782.18)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	\$1,064.27*** (263.26)	\$1,076.29*** (262.95)
<b>Total Receipts</b>	\$0.03*** (0.01)	\$0.03*** (0.01)
<b>Constant</b>	-\$4,234,161*** (502864.70)	-\$4,241,887*** (506892.60)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount given to the party's campaign committee. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.2689$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.2692$   
n = 1157, data was clustered by legislator (474 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

**Table 5.7: Candidate-to-Candidate Giving and Progressive Ambition**

	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>
<b>Any Ambition</b>	-\$22,765.79** (8906.87)	--
<b>Expressed Ambition</b>	--	-\$45,648.82*** (13930.53)
<b>Nascent Ambition</b>	--	-\$12,266.83 (9888.05)
<b>Retiring</b>	\$34,906.84 (25363.90)	\$33,721.31 (25334.58)
<b>Leader</b>	\$387,741.20*** (81673.27)	\$387,042.20*** (81651.25)
<b>Seniority</b>	\$3,003.12*** (919.06)	\$2,997.98*** (918.79)
<b>In Majority</b>	-\$3,140.27 (6243.28)	-\$3,051.78 (6259.44)
<b>Previous Vote Share</b>	\$1,215.67*** (345.50)	\$1,242.26*** (348.49)
<b>Total Receipts</b>	\$0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
<b>Constant</b>	-\$269,355.10 (469512.90)	-\$288,830.60 (470456.70)

**Note:** Each dependent variable represents the total dollar amount raised in the campaign cycle. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Data was clustered by legislator.

Model 1:  $r^2 = 0.3651$ ; Model 2:  $r^2 = 0.3662$   
n = 1078, data was clustered by legislator (461 unique clusters).

\*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10

## **Chapter 6: The Behavioral Consequences of Progressive Ambition**

I began this dissertation with the story of Dick Durbin, the senior senator from the state of Illinois. When Durbin decided to run for the Senate in 1996, he altered his behavior in several ways to be successful. In the term immediately preceding his run for higher office he devoted substantially less time to agricultural issues and more time to Social Security, welfare, and crime. He also raised and spent almost five million dollars in the general election, with an additional one million dollars raised and spent during the primary election. All of these behavioral changes were strategic. He addressed new issues because a statewide constituency would be interested in them. He raised and spent more money because the cost of running for the Senate is substantially more expensive than running for a House seat.

The story of Dick Durbin's journey to the Senate is typical of a progressively ambitious career. While there are many paths to a higher office and individual legislators have substantial control of when, where, and how to pursue that office, there are several factors influencing success. And, as I have written before, progressively ambitious legislators are inherently strategic. They have already obtained a position with a high level of respect, adequate pay, and substantial political power. When they consider running for a higher office, most will have to forgo that current seat in a risky attempt to obtain it. As such, someone like Durbin acted in his best interest by shifting the amount and type of legislation he addressed and by substantially increasing the amount of money he raised.

### **Behavioral and Campaign Changes**

Durbin was not alone in this strategic change in behavior. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that progressively ambitious legislators begin to shirk their legislative responsibilities in the term immediately preceding their higher office runs, missing substantially more roll call votes than

legislators not running for another office. At the same time, these progressively ambitious legislators begin to increase the total number of introductions they offer. Superficially, one could view this increase as a way to counteract possible negative attention because of their shirking. However, there is no link between the percentage of roll call votes missed and the total number of introductions offered. Instead, these legislators increase their introductions because they are tackling more issue areas than before. As such, progressively ambitious legislators also increase the size of their agendas.

They do not change a host of other behaviors, however. I found no increase in the number of cosponsorships or amendments offered by the progressively ambitious. Instead, they seem to focus on the most high-profile activity (introductions) available to them. This is likely because legislators are able to campaign more strongly on their introductions, and they can more easily claim credit for any benefits arising from those introductions. More importantly, while the number of introductions and the total agenda size of progressively ambitious legislators increases, I was not able to find a direct link to the demographic changes between the district and the statewide constituency.

Progressively ambitious legislators also differ when it comes to campaign activity and fundraising. I find both nascently and expressly ambitious legislators raise substantially more money in their final term in office.<sup>49</sup> This is, perhaps, not surprising, as the cost of running for the presidency, governorship, or Senate is substantially higher than running for a seat in the House of Representatives. However, it is also interesting to note the difference in total receipts occurs in the terms prior to a higher office run as well—progressively ambitious legislators raise more money over the course of their careers. I also find these legislators maintain a larger

---

<sup>49</sup> Or, for nascently ambitious legislators, the term in which they consider running for a higher office.

campaign war chest than others, indicating they are banking funds in anticipation of a higher office run.

Progressively ambitious legislators also spend more money in the term immediately preceding their higher office runs. Again, these legislators must work to appeal to more voters, across a greater geographical distance, which creates a more expensive race. Yet, these legislators do not increase their strategic giving by contributing to the party's campaign committees or other legislators. In fact, those contributions significantly decrease over the three terms prior to a higher office run. Because a legislator choosing to run for a higher office needs to increase his or her expenditures on staff, television advertisements, and travel, he or she chooses to keep any additional funds for their own campaigns rather than donating the money elsewhere.

### **The Nature of Progressive Ambition**

This dissertation has also contributed to our understanding of the nature of progressive ambition. Existing research has debated whether progressive ambition is universal, a state of mind, or simply an observable behavior. When measuring ambition, some have assumed all legislators would run for a higher office if given the chance and others have taken a more moderate tone. I find ambition is a much more complex concept. Some legislators are interested in a higher office and will pursue that office regardless of the context. Others are much more strategic. They hold an underlying interest in running for higher office, but only choose to act on that interest when the strategic environment gives them the best chance for success. Still others choose to remain in the House of Representatives, even when a perfect opportunity arises. This includes legislators who decline being appointed to a higher office. Moreover, some legislators may hold all of these characteristics over the course of their career—seemingly happy as a static

member of the House in one congress, hinting at their interest in a higher office in another, and running for and succeeding in obtaining the governorship or a Senate seat in still another.

Ambition, therefore, can be both a state of mind and an observable behavior, depending on the individual legislator and the period under examination.

Additionally, I find nascent progressive ambition is common among members of the House of Representatives. Some legislators strongly consider running for a higher office, but ultimately choose to remain in the House of Representatives. There are many reasons for this. Some only consider running as a power play, hoping to use the threat of a challenge to induce cooperation on policy issues or prevent redistricting from eliminating their positions. Some legislators consider running for a higher office, only to see the incumbent decide not to retire. If the incumbent does retire, he or she may find an open seat swamped by other contenders and chose to wait for a better opportunity to run.

Whatever the reason preventing the actual run for a higher office, the nascently ambitious also change their legislative behavior. They, too, increase the total number of introductions offered and alter their legislative agendas in anticipation of a higher office run. They also both raise and spend more money in the years leading up to a potential higher office run. Previous research examining the effects of progressive ambition has found only mixed or weak results. Part of this may be the result of failing to include those legislators who considered running for a higher office but never appeared on the ballot.

### **Why It Matters**

It is clear progressively ambitious legislators change their behavior in response to their interest in a higher office. Why does this matter? Some changes have direct and obvious effects on representation. When legislators miss more roll call votes, for instance, this affects the

quality of representation received by constituents in the legislators' district. Constituents could find their policy wishes unfulfilled at one of the most key points in the law-making process. Moreover, the actual policy outputs of Congress could be influenced by this legislative shirking. Although many votes are not close, there is a possibility that a progressively ambitious legislator could miss a key vote. Other legislative behaviors also change in response to progressive ambition. Ambitious legislators offer more introductions and their agenda size grows. While most introductions will never become law, they do influence the bills available to leadership, which could influence Congress's overall policy agenda.

Further research is needed to find out if the increase in introductions is simply "cheap talk." If statically ambitious legislators introduce fewer pieces of legislation but are more committed to ushering the bill through committee and to the floor, we would want to encourage static ambition. On the other hand, if progressively ambitious legislators introduce more legislation and maintain a hit rate on passage of the legislation on par with other members of the House, then there should be no normative concern with encouraging progressive ambition. However, given the increase in missed votes and the fact progressively ambitious legislators increase neither their cosponsorships nor amendments offered in compensation, it seems unlikely the progressively ambitious legislators increase their introductions offered as anything other than campaign fodder.

In examining the fundraising data more closely, I also find another negative implication of progressive ambition. As the total amount raised by progressively ambitious legislators increased, so did the total percent of roll call votes missed. Legislators running for a higher office spend time away from Capitol Hill and their responsibilities and more time raising money.

If progressive ambition were to become more prevalent in the House of Representatives, we would likely see an increase in the total number of roll call votes missed.

How can progressive ambition be encouraged or discouraged? Legislators are strategic, especially progressively ambitious legislators. They constantly consider the benefits of their current position, the worth of a potential higher office, and the cost of running for either. To encourage or discourage ambition it is necessary to alter the value of either the House seat or one of the higher offices. There are two major ways this could be done. The first is to alter the benefits of static ambition. One such benefit is that of seniority, which is used to determine the relative position a legislator holds in committees and party leadership. Stripping the value of seniority could lead to fewer legislators displaying intrainstitutional ambition and more legislators displaying progressive ambition. If remaining in the House of Representatives would not lead to a better position within the party hierarchy, the value of the House seat slips and a higher office may become more appealing.

Term limits also force legislators to consider progressive ambition more seriously. Although debates over implementing term limits for members of Congress are no longer as popular as they once were, calls for limiting service in the House of Representatives are still present. With approval for Congress at an all time low, groups such as U.S. Term Limits and Our Generation are reinvigorating their calls for limits on congressional service and asking legislators to sign pledges to voluntarily restrict their time in office (Pope 2012). Polls as recent as 2010 report nearly 80 percent of voters would support such measures (Pershing 2011), and in June of 2012, Texas Lieutenant Governor, and failed Senate candidate, David Dewhurst, called for a constitutional amendment limiting senators to two terms and House members to six terms (Messamore 2012). The reasoning is clear. Limiting the service of House and Senate members



would encourage open seat races, bring in fresh blood to the chamber, and bring about a return to the citizen legislator. However, the unintended consequence of term limits is an increase in the overall level of progressive ambition (Herrick and Thomas 2005). As legislators find themselves forced out of their current seats, they realize they want to remain in politics and seek out another office.

Because reforms like weakening seniority and implementing term limits still receive attention, it is important to note that there are unintended consequences to those proposals, including inducing more progressive ambition. And, as shown in this dissertation, progressive ambition alters the legislative and campaign behavior of members of Congress. While there may be positive implications of progressive ambition, there are also negative effects. Legislative shirking increases and the importance of money and campaign fundraising grows.

### **Future Research**

There are several extensions of the research in this dissertation that should be pursued. First, in Chapter 4, I found little effect of demographic differences on legislative activity. During the time period under consideration, legislators did not seem to respond to differences between one's district and state constituency. Legislators are assumed to be strategic, and it is surprising that they would not alter their agendas to fit the needs of their new constituencies. However, it may be legislators are operating in a much more complex environment than I have assumed. For one, legislators running for the Senate must avoid tackling issues the other member of the state's delegation is known for (Schiller 2002). If the senior senator is an expert on Social Security issues, it would be of little benefit to trespass on that issue, even if the percentage of senior citizens is much larger in the state as a whole.

Legislators must also operate within the larger electoral environment. Issues may be more or less prevalent on the national stage, which could shape a legislator's campaign agenda. For instance, in 2006, a progressively ambitious legislator would have been hard pressed not to address military issues and the Iraq War, even if it was not demographically important to the state. More nuanced analysis could explore what causes legislators to choose the issues on which they campaign, especially given my finding that the size of the legislative agenda does increase in the final term before a higher office run.

In terms of campaign activity, there are two main avenues of research that can be pursued. The first is how legislators are spending their money. I find strategic giving to the party's campaign committee and to other legislators drops off precipitously in the years prior to a higher office run. The alternative to this strategic giving is that legislators are spending the increased campaign receipts on campaign advertisements, travel, and staff. If, for instance, the bulk of new spending is going to television or other campaign advertisements, we may actually find a benefit of progressive ambition. As the amount spent on advertising increases, voters may become more informed about the campaign. If the nascently ambitious also increase their spending on these types of advertisements, we may find a spillover with name recognition and awareness of the House race also increasing (because these legislators ultimately decline to run for the higher office and return to their original seats). Because knowledge about House races tends to be low, encouraging progressive ambition could have a positive effect.

As discussed in Chapter 5, exploring the sources of campaign funds is also important. Existing research has found House members receive a substantial amount of their money from outside of the district, as wealthy donors hope to influence the overall balance of power within Congress (Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008). Do progressively ambitious legislators

receive an even higher percentage of their funds from outside of the district as these wealthy donors also hope to shape the upper chamber or the state government? Or, do they receive comparatively less as these politically astute donors do not want to make a risky investment? If progressively ambitious legislators do receive substantial funds from outside of the district, are they directly campaigning, holding events, or fundraising to obtain them? If this is the case, encouraging progressive ambition could lead to even more shirking among members of the House of Representatives.

Additionally, as I have shown, ambition is complex. In this dissertation, I chose not to examine or include legislators who displayed intrainstitutional ambition. This includes legislators who work to obtain more power and prestige within the chamber. They may seek out positions within the committee leadership or seek to move up the party hierarchy. These legislators may also be shifting their behavior in several of the areas I have examined in the preceding chapters. The intrainstitutionally ambitious may alter their legislative behavior in an effort to appease party leaders or to build reputations on an issue important to their committee assignments. They, too, may fundraise more. In fact, these legislators likely would find the strategic giving described in Chapter 5 (including giving to the party's campaign committee and other legislators) to be even more important. Future work should better identify ambition among all members of Congress to fully understand how congressional career decisions affect legislative and campaign activity.

Overall, however, I find progressive ambition does have an effect on the legislative and campaign activity of members of Congress. As such, it is important to study both the causes and effects of progressive ambition to understand how congressional career decisions can alter Congress and its policy-making outputs. Furthermore, any future work should include those

legislators who hold nascent progressive ambition, as they change their behavior in response to an interest in higher office, even if it is never actualized.

## References

- Amer, Mildred. Congressional Research Service. Library of Congress. 2008. "Membership of the 110th Congress: A Profile." Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress.
- Baker, Ross K. 1989. *House and Senate*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Bardwell, Kedron. 2002. "Money and Challenger Emergence in Gubernatorial Primaries." *Political Research Quarterly* 55(3): 653-668.
- Bardwell, Kedron. 2003. "Not All Money is Equal: The Differential Effect of Spending by Incumbents and Challengers in Gubernatorial Primaries." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 3(3): 294-308.
- Bardwell, Kedron. 2005. "Reevaluating Spending in Gubernatorial Races: Job Approval as a Baseline for Spending Effects." *Political Research Quarterly* 58(1): 97-105.
- Barone, Michael and Grant Ujifusa. 1993. *The Almanac of American Politics 1994*. Washington, D.C.: National Journal, Inc.
- Barone, Michael and Grant Ujifusa. 1995. *The Almanac of American Politics 1996*. Washington, D.C.: National Journal, Inc.
- Barone, Michael and Grant Ujifusa. 1997. *The Almanac of American Politics 1998*. Washington, D.C.: National Journal, Inc.
- Barone, Michael and Richard E. Cohen. 2005. *The Almanac of American Politics 2006*. Washington, D.C.: National Journal, Inc.
- Barone, Michael and Richard E. Cohen. 2007. *The Almanac of American Politics 2008*. Washington, D.C.: National Journal, Inc.
- Biersack, Robert, Paul S. Herrnson, and Clyde Wilcox. 1993. "Seeds for Success: Early Money in Congressional Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 18(4): 535-551.
- Black, Gordon S. 1972. "A Theory of Political Ambition: Career Choices and the Role of Structural Incentives." *American Political Science Review* 66(1): 144-159.
- Boston Herald*. 2005. "Capuano (D) Says He Won't Be Running for Governor in 2006 (MA)." January 7.
- Brace, Paul. 1984. "Progressive Ambition in the House: A Probabilistic Approach." *Journal of Politics* 46(2): 556-571.
- Camia, Catalina. 2011. "Rep. John Dingell to Run for 30<sup>th</sup> Term." *USA Today*, January 21.

- . 2011. "GOP Rep. Emerson Won't Run for Senate in 2012." *USA Today*, February 22.
- Carey, John. 1994. "Political Shirking and the Last Term Problem: Evidence for a Party-Administered Pension System." *Public Choice* 81: 1-22.
- Chellgren, Mark R. 2002. "Jackson Aims For Governor." *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 6.
- Connelly, Joel. 1999. "McDermott Getting More Serious about Challenging Gorton 'He wants to run, no doubt about it...'" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 25.
- Cross, Al. 2009. "2001: Steve Nunn Considers Run for Governor." *The Courier-Journal*, September 11.
- Eggler, Bruce. 2007. "Jefferson Has Flown High and Could Fall Low." *The Times-Picayune*, June 10. [http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/06/rep\\_william\\_jefferson\\_has\\_flow.html](http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/06/rep_william_jefferson_has_flow.html) (July 20, 2011).
- Election Statistics, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives. 2012. "Statistics of the Congressional Election." [http://clerk.house.gov/member\\_info/electionInfo/index.aspx](http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.aspx) (July 2, 2012).
- Fenno, Richard F. 1973. *Congressmen in Committees*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Fornek, Scott and Basil Talbott. 1996. "A Big Win for Durbin: Salvi's Missteps, Gun Control Issue Pay Off for Dem." *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 6.
- Fowler, Linda L. 1993. *Candidates, Congress, and the American Democracy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Fox, Richard L. and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2005. "To Run or Not to Run for Office: Explaining Nascent Political Ambition." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 642-659.
- Francis, Wayne L. and Lawrence W. Kenny. 1996. "Position Shifting in Pursuit of Higher Office." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(3): 768-786.
- Francis, Wayne L. and Lawrence W. Kenny. 2000. *Up the Political Ladder: Career Paths in U.S. Politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Francis, Wayne L, Lawrence W. Kenny, Rebecca B. Morton, and Amy B. Schmidt. 1994. "Retrospective Voting and Political Mobility." *American Journal of Political Science* 38(4): 999-1024.

- Fulton, Sarah, Cherie Maestas, L. Sandy Maisel, and Walter J. Stone. 2006. "The Sense of a Woman: Gender and Congressional Ambition." *Political Research Quarterly* 59(2): 235-248.
- Louisiana Secretary of State. 2012. "Geaux Vote." <http://staticresults.sos.la.gov/> (July 2, 2012).
- Gilmour, John B. and Paul Rothstein. 1993. "Early Republican Retirement: A Cause of Democratic Dominance in the House of Representatives." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 18(3): 345-365.
- Gimpel, James G., Frances E. Lee, and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz. 2008. "The Check is in the Mail: Interdistrict Funding Flows in Congressional Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(2): 373-394.
- Goldstein, Ken and Paul Freedman. 2000. "New Evidence for New Arguments: Money and Advertising in the 1996 Senate Elections." *Journal of Politics* 62(4): 1087-1108.
- Green, Donald P. and Jonathan S. Krasno. 1988. "Salvation for the Spendthrift Incumbent: Reestimating the Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 32(4): 884-907.
- Green, Donald P. and Jonathan S. Krasno. 1990. "Rebuttal to Jacobson's 'New Evidence for Old Arguments'." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(2): 363-372.
- Groseclose, Timothy and Keith Krehbiel. 1994. "Golden Parachutes, Rubber Checks, and Strategic Retirements from the 102<sup>nd</sup> House." *American Journal of Political Science* 38(1): 75-99.
- Halcom, Chad. 2005. "Candice Miller Considers Bid to Unseat Sen. Stabenow." *Macomb Daily* January 8.
- Hall, Richard L. 1996. *Participation in Congress*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hall, Richard L. and Robert P. Van Houweling. 1995. "Avarice and Ambition in Congress: Representatives' Decisions to Run or Retire from the U.S. House." *American Political Science Review* 89(1): 121-136.
- Harward, Brian M. and Kenneth W. Moffett. 2010. "The Calculus of Cosponsorship in the U.S. Senate." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 35(1): 117-143.
- Hasecke, Edward B. and Jason D. Mycoff. 2007. "Party Loyalty and Legislative Success." *Political Research Quarterly* 60(4): 607-617.

- Hayes, Matthew, Matthew V. Hibbing, and Tracy Sulkin. 2010. "Redistricting, Responsiveness, and Issue Attention." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 35(1): 91-116.
- Heberlig, Eric S. 2003. "Congressional Parties, Fundraising, and Committee Ambition." *Political Research Quarterly* 56(2): 151-161.
- Heberlig, Eric S. and Bruce A. Larson. 2010. "Congressional Parties and the Mobilization of Leadership PAC Contributions." *Party Politics* 16(4): 451-475.
- Herrick, Rebekah. 2001. "The Effects of Political Ambition on Legislative Behavior: A Replication." *The Social Science Journal* 38(3): 469-474.
- Herrick, Rebekah and Michael K. Moore. 1993. "Political Ambition's Effect on Legislative Behavior: Schlesinger's Typology Reconsidered and Revised." *Journal of Politics* 55(3): 765-776.
- Herrick, Rebekah, Michael K. Moore, and John R. Hibbing. 1994. "Unfastening the Electoral Connection: The Behavior of U.S. Representatives when Reelection is No Longer a Factor." *Journal of Politics* 56(1): 214-227.
- Herrick, Rebekah and Sue Thomas. 2005. "Do Term Limits Make a Difference? Ambition and Motivations among U.S. State Legislators." *American Politics Research* 33(5): 726-747.
- Hibbing, John R. 1986. "Ambition in the House: Behavioral Consequences of Higher Office Goals Among U.S. Representatives." *American Journal of Political Science* 30(3): 651-665.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1978. "The Effects of Campaign Spending in Congressional Elections." *American Political Science Review* 72(2): 469-491.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1990. "The Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections: New Evidence for Old Arguments." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(2): 363-372.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2006. "Campaigning Spending Effects in U.S. Senate Elections: Evidence from the National Annenberg Election Survey." *Electoral Studies* 25: 195-226.
- Jensen, Jennifer M. and Thad Beyle. 2003. "Of Footnotes, Missing Data, and Lessons for 50-State Data Collection: The Gubernatorial Campaign Finance Project, 1977-2001." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 3:203-214.
- Jensen, Jennifer M. and Thad Beyle. 2009. "The Gubernatorial Campaign Finance Database." <http://www.unc.edu/~beyle/guber.html> (April 3, 2012).
- Kiewiet, D. Roderick and Langche Zeng. 1993. "An Analysis of Congressional Career Decisions, 1947-1986." *American Political Science Review* 87(4): 928-941.



- Kingdon, John W. 1989. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Krasno, Jonathan S., Donald P. Green, and Jonathan A. Cowden. 1994. "The Dynamics of Campaign Fundraising in House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 56(2): 460-474.
- Lasswell, Harold D. 1960. *Psychopathology and Politics: A New Edition*. New York: Viking Press.
- Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard L. Fox. 2005. *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, Clifford J. 1995. "Bradley Says He Won't Seek 4<sup>th</sup> Term." *The New York Times*, August 17.
- Maestas, Cherie D., Sarah Fulton, L. Sandy Maisel, and Walter J. Stone. 2006. "When to Risk It? Institutions, Ambitions, and the Decision to Run in the U.S. House." *American Political Science Review* 100(2): 195-208.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Messamore, Andrew. 2012. "Dewhurst Proposes Congressional Term Limits." *Houston Chronicle*, June 21. <http://blog.chron.com/texaspolitics/2012/06/dewhurst-proposes-congressional-term-limits/>
- Mooney, Brian C. 2004. "'City Guy' Weighs State Run." *The Boston Globe*, December 26.
- The Nielsen Company. 2012. "Local Television Market Universe Estimates: Comparisons of 2010-11 and 2011-12 Market Ranks." <http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/public%20factsheets/tv/nielsen-2012-local-DMA-TV-penetration.pdf> (November 18, 2011).
- Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk. 2007. "Women in Congress, 1917-2006." <http://womenincongress.house.gov/historical-essays/essay.html?intID=1&intSectionID=3> (July 15 2011).
- Palmer, Barbara and Dennis Simon. 2003. "Political Ambition and Women in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1916-2000." *Political Research Quarterly* 56(2): 127-138.
- Partin, Randall W. 2002. "Assessing the Impact of Campaign Spending in Governors' Races." *Political Research Quarterly* 55(1): 213-233.

- Paulson, Steven K. 2007. "Mark Udall Files for Colorado Senate Race." *Albuquerque Journal*, April 17.
- Pershing, Ben. 2011. "Even For the Tea Party, Term-Limits Issue Has Fallen by the Wayside." *The New York Times*, September 19.
- Phillips, Frank. 2005. "Capuano Won't Run for Governor, Raising Questions on Party Unity." *The Boston Globe*, January 8.
- Polsby, Nelson W. 1989. "Tracking Changes in the U.S. Senate." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22(4): 789-793.
- Pope, Charles. 2012. "Term Limit Campaigns Grow as Anger at Congress Hits Historic Highs." *The Oregonian*, July 10.
- Powell, Michael. 2009. "The Wits of Washington, Amateur Variety." *The New York Times*, April 18.
- Powell, Richard J. 2000. "The Impact of Term Limits on the Candidacy Decisions of State Legislators in U.S. House Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25(4): 645-661.
- Prinz, Timothy S. 1993. "The Career Paths of Elected Politicians: A Review and Prospectus." In *Ambition & Beyond: Career Paths of American Politicians*, ed. Shirley Williams and Edward I. Lascher, Jr. Berkley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies Press.
- Rawlins, Bill. 1988. "Democrat Bob Clement Wins Elections to Congress." *Associated Press*, January 20.
- Rocco, Michael S. and Stacy B. Gordon. 2010. "The Position-Taking Value of Bill Sponsorship in Congress." *Political Researcher Quarterly* 63(2): 387-397.
- Rohde, David W. 1979. "Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives." *American Journal of Political Science* 23(1): 1-26.
- Rosen, James. 2009. "South Carolina's Barrett leads House in Missed Votes." *Miami Herald*, December 16.
- Rothenberg, Lawrence S. and Mitchell S. Sanders. 2000. "Severing the Electoral Connection: Shirking in the Contemporary Congress." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2): 310-319.

- Schansberg, D. Eric. 1994. "Moving out of the House: An Analysis of Congressional Quits." *Economic Inquiry* 32(3): 445-456.
- Schiller, Wendy J. 2000. *Partners and Rivals: Representation in U.S. Senate Delegations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schlesinger, Joseph A. 1966. *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*. Rand McNally.
- Schouten, Fredreka. 2009. "13 House Members Seek Higher Office." *USA Today*, May 3.
- Sharp, Tom. 2002. "Bob Clement Announces Run for U.S. Senate." *Southeast Missourian*, March 18.
- Squire, Peverill. 1989. "Challengers in U.S. Senate Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14(4): 534-547.
- Sulkin, Tracy. 2005. *Issue Politics in Congress*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- 2009. "Campaign Appeals and Legislative Action." *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 1093-1108.
- 2011. *The Legislative Legacy of Congressional Campaigns*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Swers, Michele L. 2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Todd, Chuck. 2006. "Senator Tom Davis?" *The Washingtonian*, April 1.
- Treul, Sarah. 2009. "Ambition and Party Loyalty in the U.S. Senate." *American Politics Research* 37(3): 449-464.
- Van Der Slik, Jack R. and Samuel J. Pernacciaro. 1979. "Office Ambitions and Voting Behavior in the U.S. Senate: A Longitudinal Study." *American Politics Quarterly* 7(2): 198-224.
- Victor, Jennifer Nicoll. 2004. "Constituents Abandoned? The Behavioral Consequences of Progressive Ambition in the U.S. House of Representatives." Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- 2005. "Hey, Congressman, Want a Promotion? Getting Busy in the House." Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

-----, 2011. "Legislating Versus Campaigning: The Legislative Behavior of Higher Office-Seekers." *American Politics Research* 20(10): 1-29.

Victor, Jennifer Nicoll and Steven S. Smith. 2004. "Does Ambition Matter? The Behavioral Differences of Higher-Office Seekers Versus Congressional Contents." Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

Williams, Shirley and Edward I. Lascher, Jr., eds. 1993. *Ambition & Beyond: Career Paths of American Politicians*. Berkley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies Press.