

To Stay, To Quit, or To Move Up: Explaining the Growth of Careerism in the House of Representatives, 1878-1940

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Abstract

One of the most frequently noted historical trends in the study of America's institutional development is the steady growth of careerism in Congress. From the 1850s until the end of the century, the percent of members of the House of Representatives entering the chamber for the first time declined from 60 to 24 percent. Numerous explanations have been proposed to account for this trend including historical events, various incumbency-favoring electoral reforms and even the reinforcing effects of a rapidly evolving, member-friendly work environment in the House. This paper reports current research assessing the evidence for these and other explanations on the career choices of House incumbents. The tentative findings suggest a complex choice environment that varied significantly by region, over time, and according to the alternative career move available to the politician.

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To Stay, To Quit, or To Move Up: Explaining the Growth of Careerism in the House of Representatives, 1878-1940

In his “Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives” Nelson W. Polsby (1968) identified increasing careerism as the primary source of both the timing and form of the House’s modernization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From the early 1850s until century’s end the average length of House service more than doubled from less than three to over six years; this change reflects in large part the declining share of members--specifically from 60 to 24 percent--entering the House for the first time. As members came to view House service as a career, they altered the institution’s rules and organization to secure the long-term investments they were now making in that chamber. Members’ seniority in their party caucus strengthened their claims for choice committee assignments. After the 1910 revolt against Speaker Joseph Cannon majority party members’ seniority on their committees conferred a “near” property right to committee and subcommittee chairmanship posts. Moreover, the reforms following the revolt protected them from capricious removals at the hands of the House Speaker. With membership stability, committees cultivated specialization and expertise and, as a consequence, the House became a more effective participant in the separation-of-powers game and a more authoritative source of national policy.

With growing membership stability appearing to drive the House’s turn-of-the-century modernization, students of Congress have, since Polsby’s seminal article, searched far and wide for possible explanations for this era’s rising careerism. They have identified numerous possible causes, ranging from specific historical events – such as the 1896 election’s realignment and redistribution of voters into less competitive congressional districts (Price 1971) – to the secular modernization of American society (Wiebe, 1967). In this paper we shall assess the relative impact

of a number of the leading explanations for congressional career development during this era. Specifically, we examine influences on the career choices of the x,000 politicians who entered the House of Representatives from 1878 through 1926 (We track the later cohorts through the 1940 election). Incumbents' decisions to seek reelection, rather than retire or try for some other office, represent only one of several stages in the recruitment and retention process at which forces lengthening careers might have been at work. But I argue in the next section that it is critical that we understand it since this is the moment when these strategic actors anticipated the next election and more broadly, the implications of their decision for future office holding opportunities. In section II, I present an exploratory additive model of career choice comprised of numerous variables representing different proposed explanations for developing careerism in the House. Recent research also reveals that modern congressional career choices exhibit significant duration dependence in that decisions to retire and move to another office are associated with incumbents' past number of reelection trials. Beginning with the end of Reconstruction and ending with U.S. entry into World War II, I argue that the South represented a qualitatively different kind of political system and career decisions for this region should be analyzed separately and compared with those from the rest of the nation. In section III we test these covariates and state dependency extensively with logit models. The statistical relationships reveal that past and upcoming elections, opportunity for moves to other offices and the House work environment all contributed to incumbents' career decisions. Moreover, the pattern of relationships for the duration dependence terms suggest distinct regional patterns in the timing and sequence of upward mobility that is consistent with the systemic differences in these regions' politics.

I. The Decision to Run for Reelection, Retire or Seek Some Other Office.

As diagrammed in Figure 1 a House member's decision to run for reelection, retire or attempt a move to some other office represents only one in a series of decisions made by candidates, and by

those who nominate and elect them. Success at each stage entails an outcome satisfying certain conditions, some beyond the control of the incumbent trying to navigate through the sequence to a successful reelection. An unfavorable redistricting map, the nomination of an attractive presidential candidate by the opposition party, the losing opponent contests the election result before a House controlled by fellow partisans, the decision of the current senator to seek another term and hundreds of other similar events define the incumbent's choice environment.

Figure 1 here.

At the moment when an incumbent decides what to do in the next reelection cycle, he or she must calculate odds and costs for as many of these uncontrollable determinants of their success. Then as now, after the incumbent decided to run for reelection he or she faced two major hurdles in renomination and reelection; every election cycle finds casualties at both stages among some members who chose to try for another term. Less well appreciated in the literature, career decisions made prior to the reelection juncture might have changed in ways that no longer selected out those incumbents more likely to seek reelection to the House. For one, exits via death, resignation, and successful challenges in contested elections (Polsby 1968) decreased steadily allowing more incumbents to reach the reelection juncture. Other, more subtle and theoretically more interesting processes may have been at work as well. Perhaps competition for nomination tightened late in the nineteenth century, thereby winnowing out less professionally-aspiring incumbents. The historical record offers ample evidence that rotation practices dominated many mid-19th century district nominations. In resolving competing claims for a party's nomination, district conventions would require the candidates receiving the nomination to pledge to vacate the seat after one (as with Abraham Lincoln) or more commonly, two terms.¹ If so, increasing preferences for another term in Congress might reflect more who is making the choice as with features of the current choice environment.

Not only do these events intrude directly upon the success of incumbents trying to advance their careers in the House or beyond, they are insinuated indirectly as strategic actors factor them into their planning. Hence, the decision to seek reelection is probably “the” critical moment in determining an individual politician’s longevity in office, and fully deserves the concerted attention past research has heaped upon it (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; Finnocchiaro and Lin 2001). This last consideration means that these strategic actors’ reelection calculus will incorporate the prospect of defeat in the nomination process and general election. Also, prior choices of these candidates, and those who initially selected them, may enter the reelection calculus in various, subtle ways. Those incumbents who violate rotation contracts risk an increased prospect of defeat in the next election as the injured party faction sits out the election or even supports the other party’s challenger. Or stiff competition for nomination in some districts might select House members for whom the value of continued House service is greater and allowing them to bear higher costs and uncertainty than might their colleagues whose ambition had less to do with their initial selection.

Most research on this era’s growing careerism (Fiorina, Rhode and Wissel 1975; Kernell 1977; Swain 2000) has involved time-series analysis of aggregate trends in congressional reelection and retirement. In searching for systematic sources of career development on incumbents’ reelection decisions I shift the level of analysis down to individual incumbent x who at time t decides to seek reelection, retire or try for another office. To analyze these choices in this way I have collected career data on 3,392 House incumbents who entered the chamber from 1878 through 1926. Cumulatively they confronted 12,775 reelection trials for an average of 3.8 per House member.

II. An Event-History Model of Rising Careerism.

With each reelection decision constituting a separate observation, we need to measure the relevant features of the choice environment at the time of the decision. These features range across

units of aggregation from the national (the Constitution's provision for the election of senators) to state (eg. various states' election laws) to the personal attributes of the incumbent. In addition to the choice environment, we shall also test for duration dependence. Without some explicit measure of the incumbent's past career choices, we are in the effect putting on blinders and ignoring this motivation in personal histories. Perhaps in fact, every choice is a separate event, unrelated to the number of times the incumbent has been reelected.* This, however, is a strong and unnecessary assumption. Below (II.B) we consider a couple of alternative forms of duration dependence by which past career choices may influence the member's current decision.

II.A. The Choice Environment.

Since successful politicians must behave as quintessential rational expectations agents, they will strive to incorporate all relevant information into their reelection decision. This exposes the choice to a broad variety of possible influences, spanning the sequence in Figure 1. For purposes of discussion we classify these variables as personal, general election, nomination, the House as a work environment, and opportunities for higher office. Each is summarized in Table 1 and subscripted to identify its level of aggregation, and when not current, superscripted for the relevant time period. For example, $Pres. Vote_s^{t+1}$ refers to the state's vote for the incumbent member's party in the upcoming presidential election where $Margin_d^{t-1}$ states the incumbent's vote in the preceding House election.

Table 1 here.

Personal. Personal reasons undoubtedly play a large role in, perhaps most, career decisions.² For the most part, however, these considerations are private and elude systematic studying, but are also relatively important for explaining advancing careerism. Moreover, while politicians universally invoke "time with the family" and other personal reasons for quitting the House or

* Or alternately, the number of times the decision to run for reelection indicates the incumbents' accumulated positive

foregoing an opportunity for higher office, they are frequently engaging in little more than face saving cover or rationalization for the real reason, the prospect of a tough race, or worse (Jacobson and Kernell 1983).

The one personal variable included here is age.^{*} For the modern era older members are more likely to retire (Kiewiet and Zeng 1993) and less likely to seek higher office. Presumably the rigors of campaigning deters some older incumbents from attempting a move to higher office, while for others, the failure to move merely signifies a standing decision made earlier, to make a House career. The other terms listed under this header in Table 1—Freshman, # of Terms and individual term dummies—are designed to analyze duration dependency in section III.C.

General Election. At any given moment, the main constraint facing an elected officeholder's career planning is the next election. Arguably, the single best predictor of the likelihood of winning the next election is the incumbent's margin of victory in the preceding election (*Margin_d*). Swelling district vote margins at the turn of the century might well explain the rise in the number of incumbents seeking reelection. Growing margins could reflect either an incumbent's increasing advantages in monopolizing campaign resources or a more fundamental alteration of the balance of support between the political parties through a critical realignment. To detect the latter event, I have included *Realign_s^{t+1}*, an index of the degree, if any, to which stable party support shifted in the current election. While this variable measures changes in the electorate, I have added another variable identifying whether the incumbent *changed* electorates. *Redist_s* is a dummy variable registering whether the state engaged in redistricting since the last election.³

Another major source of uncertainty is the upcoming presidential election. Research has shown modern members of the House to be acutely attentive to national elections as they make career

experiences in the institution, reinforcing a preference to stay.

^{*} In the next pass, I plan to add controls for the health and wealth of the member. The first will be measured by time from the current reelection trial to death while the second will draw on occupational information.

choices (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Presumably, the strategic implications of presidential coattails were even more pronounced before ballot reform when candidates were coupled to their presidential standard bearer by consolidated party supplied ballots (Engstrom and Kernell 2003). An upcoming presidential election, $Pelec_n^{t+1}$, represents a source of potential uncertainty that when the political breezes are blowing adversely can disrupt career planning. Assuming competent strategic actors we shall predict that their decisions to stay, to quit or to seek other office would be tied to support for their party's standard bearer, $Pres. Vote_s^{t+1}$, in the state election. With ballot reform occurring in every state from 1889 through 1911, House members after these dates presumably found the externality of presidential coattails less consequential. This allowed them to engage in district service (Katz and Sala 1996; Kernell and McDonald 1999) and in other ways assert control over their reelection prospects. If so, the dummy variable, $Ballot_s$, should record a negative coefficient with retiring just as the presidential election should be positive. Moreover, we should anticipate interaction effects as ballot reform weakens the impact of presidential elections and other sources of uncertainty on career planning.

Nomination. In the 19th century congressional nomination typically occurred in district conventions where county politicians assembled to weigh a variety of considerations beyond the incumbent's desire to remain in office. The following report of one such convention portrays them as sometimes contentious affairs whose outcome lay well beyond the incumbent's control:

In 1886, we went through the very same performance, except that one candidate had died, one had dropped out, and a new one was added. We had two conventions, with an aggregate of over four thousand ballots. Judge Robinson came within one vote of getting the nomination and could not get it, so, to spite his enemy, Norton, he threw his strength to Colonel Hutton and nominated him again. In this way Colonel Hutton, who had no such following as Robinson or Norton, and who spent no money and little time or energy in campaigning, served two terms in Congress (Clark 1920, 166).

A principal concern was a balanced ticket to present parochial voters with an attractive slate and, more importantly, to satisfy the equity claims of politicians from other counties in a district, whose enthusiastic efforts would be required in the general election.

After nominations shifted to primaries during the 1910's and the 1920's, many incumbents generally found better prospects cultivating voters than before satisfying party activists. Democratic House Speaker Champ Clark (1920: 220) summed up the change succinctly, "The primary election method of nominating candidates for membership in the House helps the sitting member retain his seat if he is at all worthy of it." Yet even after primary reforms each election cycle found a dozen or more incumbents failing to clear this career hurdle. Just as turn-of-the-century ballot reforms might have given incumbents greater control over their reelection, so too might nomination reforms several decades later contributed to incumbents' increased willingness to seek reelection.⁴

We shall measure the effects of renomination politics in several ways. First, the dummy variable, *Primary_s*, distinguishes nominations in the pre and post reform eras. Second, I have constructed a dummy variable, *Faction_s**, indicating instances of intraparty conflict (most commonly in the form of bolting) at state party conventions.⁵ In addition to posing a difficult renomination setting, the presence of factions could be ominous for a party's ability to mobilize voters in the general election; both prospects might deter an incumbent from running either for reelection or higher office, particularly in the pre-ballot reform era when the incumbent's fate was tied to that of the party ticket. Unfortunately, we have no systematic record of use of rotation across district-level party conventions. Below I present a procedure for detecting the presence of rotation

* The source for this variable, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, ended publication in 1900 and I am still looking for a substitute to cover the intervening years up to primary reform, when all but a few state conventions ceased making nominations. Presently this variable is coded 0 after 1901, a potentially spurious source of association with trending careers. In the analysis presented below, the presence of Faction did not affect the strengths of other relationships for either retirement or decisions to seek higher office.

based on comparing retirement rates of incumbents in their second reelection trials with those at other stages in their careers.

Institutional Incentives. Polsby (1968, 1969) was among the first to note that reforms strengthening the committee system and reliance on seniority in advancement served the reelection goals of a growing careerist membership. While institutional reforms in the modernization scheme could not have instigated the trend toward careerism, they could have reinforced them. To measure the pull of the House, I have adopted Stewart's rating (1992) of the value of every member's committee position, $Portfolio_h$, for the current Congress.*

With initial committee appointments and numerous other opportunities for influence in the chamber controlled by the member's party leadership and caucus, the greater the member's distance from his party's median on roll call votes, $Party Dist._h$, the less congenial the work environment might have been. If distant members, in fact, found House service less rewarding, then greater shares of distant incumbents might have opted for retirement or run for another office.** Using D-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) I have also located the proximity of the member's voting record in the current Congress against his party's median member. Finally, following research on the modern congressional careers (Gilmour and Rothstein 1993) that finds members of the minority party exhibiting marginally higher retirement rates, I have scored all members according to whether their party controlled the chamber in the current Congress, $Minority_h$, and assuming rational expectations, if the incumbent's party shifts to majority or minority in the next Congress, $\Delta Majority_h$.⁶

* In the next pass, I will score longevity of committee service and membership on one of the leadership committees.

** I also tested the member's Nominate score with the chamber median. This "distance" measure performed poorly compared to party distance. In the next pass, I will construct a third distance measure, Speaker distance, with the expectation that it should be stronger in the pre-reform Congress. And instead of using absolute scores for the party and chamber distance measures, I'll locate members' roll call voting with relation to both medians.

Opportunities. By the late 1870s the opportunity structure of elective offices had, by and large, assumed its modern pyramidal form. Unlike the antebellum era, for example, almost no one left the House voluntarily to seek a position in the state legislature. Ambitious House members usually coveted the Senate and the governorship, hence the dummy variables, *Senelec_s* and *Govelec_s*, signifying elections occurring for those offices in year t .⁷ The resourcefulness of a current House seat as a base for a statewide race should be directly proportionate with the share of the state's electorate in the district (Rohde 1979, Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997). To gauge this, *Size_s*, simply scores the number of congressional districts apportioned to the state at the time of the election. With passage of the 17th amendment in 1913, election of senators shifted from the state legislature to the state's electorate. Presumably, this change – indicated with the dummy variable *Direct_n* – advantaged all elective officeholders, especially those members of the House whose districts represented a sizable share of the statewide vote. Finally, the costs and risk of an attempt to move to another office might be offset by support from the administration and assurance of a job were the attempt to fail. Throughout the 1876-1940 era the president enjoyed ample perquisites in the form of appointive offices (judgeships and cabinet and subcabinet posts in both Washington and the states).⁸ The dummy variable, *Admin_n*, identifies those choice settings when a safety net is in place – that is, the incumbent's party controls the current administration.

II.B. The South and Non-South As Dissimilar Political Systems.

On a number of these variables we can anticipate large differences between the South and non-South during this era. As white southern Democrats constructed Jim Crow and successfully disenfranchised black, universally Republican voters, the Democratic party throughout the South asserted hegemonic control during the 1880s over nearly all of the region's congressional districts. Outside of the South, party competition would not decline sharply until after the 1896 realignment,

when that year's presidential election redistributed voter loyalties in a large number of safe Republican and a smaller number of safe Democratic districts.

This regional difference in the timing and distribution of electoral safety suggests a couple of possible outcomes relevant to our inquiry. First, if the relationships hypothesized above are accurate, electoral safety probably gave southern politicians a head start on career development. Thirty-two year veteran of the House and Senate during this era, Ohio Republican John Sherman (1895, 102) thought so: "...political leaders from the south were, as a rule, men of greater experience, were longer retained in service of their constituents and held higher public positions than their associates from the north." The southern advantage shows up modestly in regional differences in retention rates (Figure 2.A). The differences reflect the combination of greater shares of southerners running for reelection (Figure 2.B) and among those running, a larger percent winning (Figure 2.C). The South's advantage in career development would have been more pronounced had not greater shares moved to the Senate than did their non southern colleagues (Figure 2.D).

Figure 2 here.

The second implication of sharp regional differences is methodological. With incumbents from the South skewed at the high end of important covariates of career choices, one cannot determine whether significant coefficients accurately represent the marginal effects of competition or merely index these regions differential exit rates. The event history literature well recognizes such heterogeneity to be a serious source of misspecification (Heckman 1981). To avoid this problem, I separate the analysis by region.⁹

Table 2 provides mean scores on those variables that contain a trend component during the 1878-1940 period. In addition to ballot and primary reforms, both of which are hypothesized to advantage an incumbent's reelection prospects, we find that margins grew – dramatically, in the

South – redistricting declined and committee rankings increased as mobility across committees became increasingly asymmetric. Moreover the institutional incentives and opportunities shifted much more dramatically from one period to the next for southern politicians according to the fortunes of the national Democratic party. The mean scores in Table 2 reveal ample sources for trending careers in the incumbent’s choice environment.

Table 2 here.

II.C. Duration Dependence.

For over a half century labor mobility research has wrestled with a conundrum. No matter how exhaustively researchers incorporate the relevant attributes of the individual actor, the labor market or the current economy into their statistical models they chronically over predict the volume of mobility. Whatever the state – unemployment, current social class, occupation, etc. – people are more stable than these first-order Markhov models claim that they should be. This has led to a number of solutions. The one tested here involves relaxing the first-order Markhov assumption to allow for duration dependence. This led to Blumen, Kagan and McCarthy’s (1955) famous fix, called the Mover-Stayer model, which partitioned actors into “movers” or “stayers” categories according to their observed mobility behavior. Those who did not move from one state to the next over some number of trials were assigned to an absorbing state of “stayers” and removed from the analysis.¹⁰ Specifically, *ceteris paribus*, the longer actors are in some state the more likely they are to remain in it.

Research into political mobility has only recently broached the issue of duration dependence. Arguably, a political career is fundamentally different from that of other professions in that remaining in place entails high transaction costs (i.e. winning reelection). Unlike most professions, elections routinely expose the actor’s career choice to forces beyond his or her control. A souring economy, a factional fight within the party, the sudden emergence of a superstar athlete or military

hero as an opponent enter the incumbent's career calculus and promote a transition out of office. In labor market biased toward transitions, politicians might be reasonably expected to act like first order Markhov agents. In his classic article on the politician's career calculus, Gordon Black (1972, 145) assumes so: "... the officeholder responds primarily to the immediate forces in his political environment rather than to factors that occur in the more distant past of the political actor. The average politician can hardly afford to develop elaborate plans concerning his political life. Rather, he probably tends to make decisions of the basis of the costs, benefits, and probabilities that operate at the time of his decision." Controlling for covariates a tenth term incumbent, for instance, is neither more nor less likely to retire than is the freshman member of the House. Assuming a first-order Markhov model, Kiewiet and Zeng (1993; also Glasgow 2000) do a reasonable job explaining the stay, retire and move up choices of modern House members. In a first-order Markhov model, the constant term states a constant rate of transitions from incumbency to some destination state (i.e. retirement or candidacy for another office). More recently, others (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; Finnocchario and Lin 2000) have introduced "length of service" and dummy variables scored for each previous term of office (Allison 1984; Beck, Katz and Tucker 1998) and turned up statistically significant forms of duration dependence.

As the history of modeling labor mobility reminds us, duration dependence models compensate for the failure of more substantive variables to explain stability. They describe those mobility patterns that elude theory and measurement and as such, can be useful diagnostics for identifying areas of ignorance in our understanding of career choice. In this analysis, we include duration dependent terms largely as a matter of prudence and without strong expectations about their strength or form or variations across regions and electoral regimes (eg. pre and post ballot reform).

III. Data and Analysis.

To investigate rising careerism in the choices of incumbents to stay, quit or try for another office, I have coded the career decisions of the 3392 members of the Houses who entered the chamber from 1878 until 1926. In order to minimize the problems censoring poses for inferences I have tracked their careers until they exit or in the case of the later cohorts until 1940, fourteen years after the last cohort entered Congress. Less than one percent of career choices were censored in this way.*

In that incumbent's confronted three alternatives (or "competing hazards" in the event history vernacular) – reelection, retirement or a move to another office – I initially estimated a multinomial logit model with retiring and moving indexed against the probability of running for reelection. The appropriateness of this procedure depends on the independence of the probabilities for each choice from the alternatives that are available to the actor. Kiewiet and Zeng (1993) and Glasgow (2000) present evidence that this independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumption is violated in modern congressional career choices. Testing a variety of specifications, including those reported in Tables 2 and 3, I found no evidence of IIA violations in the North and inconsistent evidence for some equations in for the South.¹¹ Given this, multinomial estimation appears acceptable. In order to take full advantage of those variables relevant to career choice but not the other, I have divided the analysis into two pairs of alternatives and estimated their covariates with the standard binary logit model.**

The literature suggests that preferences for these alternatives changed over time according to the different structural alterations of the choice environment. For retirements, ballot reform might

* In constructing the data set, I anticipated enlisting a Cox proportional hazard model. Subsequently, in switching to a logit analysis, I could have included entering members up to 1940 without encountering right hand censoring problems. In the next pass I will fill in the data in this way and extend the time frame through the 1942 election.

** Given IIA, the relationships for the paired logits should give identical results to that pairing within the multinomial model (Alvarez 1998).

have been the watershed event (Katz and Sala 1996) that altered the strategic response to anticipated electoral breezes. When tied to the party ticket, politicians had little recourse than retire; with ballot reform they could compete directly for votes based on their record for constituent service.¹²

Decisions to move to another office were principally targeted to the Senate. After passage of the 17th amendment in 1913, the election arena shifted from the state legislatures, controlled by other, self-interested politicians, a majority of whom might have been members of the other party, to the electorate, a portion of whom had elected the representative. Given this, the direct election reform might have influenced attempted moves to other office both directly and in altering the way other covariates were weighted in the choice calculus.

III.A. Opting To Retire.*

The relationships in Table 3 reveal both significant similarities and differences in the career calculus across regions. Unsurprisingly, neither region's incumbents were impervious to the ravages of age, but their march to retirement was slowed by increased probability of returning as they accumulate terms of service. The sizable linear term for the South is offset by mostly significant positive dummy variables for the different terms of service that were included in that equation, which we shall exam carefully below (IIIC). Freshman members, whatever their age, were significantly less likely to opt for early retirement, especially those from the South.** Other similarities can be found in *Margin* of victory in the district in the previous election; those who narrowly won the last election were understandably more inclined to retire.¹³ Lastly, incumbents from both regions, and especially the South, timed their retirement decisions according to their party's control of the White House, perhaps to take advantage of access to federal patronage.

* I appreciate that it is impossible to give much substantive interpretation to these nonlinear estimates but will resist the temptation to convert all of them to predicted probabilities in the present pass. The equations will change in ways identified throughout the paper.

** This introduces the prospect of time dependent duration variables. Although I there are only two variables (Age and Portfolio) that might interact with the linear or dummy measures of length, I will test for this in the next pass.

Table 3 here.

The regional differences are extensive and taken together portray retirement decisions following different criteria across regions in ways that are consistent with the more competitive and uncertain elections across the nonsouthern states. These politicians responded both to next presidential election as an event fraught with risk and specifically, in anticipation of their state's vote for their party's presidential candidate. Similarly, they "correctly" anticipated potentially more powerful and enduring party realignments in their districts. These relationships reveal the efforts of acutely strategic actors to read the future.

Signs of strategic behavior appear as well in their response to the House as a work environment. Unlike modern career choices (Cox and Morgenstern 1993) being a member of the majority or minority party (*Minority*) did not much matter – nor did interacting this term with ballot reform strengthen the relationship for either period – but change in majority status ($\Delta Majority_h$) as a result of the next election did matter. Moreover, those "northern" members who were more distant from their party's median member in the current Congress were more inclined to drop out. Southerners, on the other hand, appeared indifferent to changes in party control, as they planned career moves.* (Surprisingly, the investment value of a member's committee assignments, *Portfolio*, is unrelated to career choices for either region's incumbents.)¹⁴ Taken together, these relationships convey a portrait of highly strategic behavior driving politics in one region but not the other.

Other, more structural and less conspicuously strategic regional differences include a significant *Primary* term for the non-South but not the South. (We return to this below (III.C.) in uncovering evidence of rotation in nonsouthern retirements.) Moreover, those nonsouthern

members from more populous states were somewhat more likely to retire, perhaps reflecting the office holding opportunities beyond the Hill for these politicians from urbanized states.^{**} Southern members may have needed to be less strategic, but the relationships in Table 3 does not indicate that once elected, they were constrained only by actuarial tables. Redistricting moved them into retirement systematically, unlike their northern colleagues. Although without careful inspection of the redistricting events over these six plus decades one cannot be certain what how the politics of redistricting differs between these regions, the fact that the South invariably pitted Democrats against one another suggests the possibility that redistricting necessitated by a census-mandated seat loss led to coordinated moves in which one member retired and possibly compensated with another office. Finally, for reasons that remain unclear, state-level factional conflict appears to be a large source of retirements in the South but not beyond. Certainly, factional cleavages drove so much of Key's (1948) story of this one-party region, but understanding how and why intraparty conflict disrupted careers awaits additional investigation.^{***}

Although ample work remains in identifying sources of retirement and specifying better the contingent character of the choice environment, it is useful to assess how well this “first cut,” additive model performs in accounting for the declining retirement trends displayed in Figure 2.C. To test this I have set all of the variables in the equations (Table 3) at their regional averages for each year and calculated the probability of retirement. As displayed in Figure 3 (the solid line represents these predicted aggregate values) the simple, additive model performs fairly well in capturing the actual retirement trends for these regions. The predicted retirement rates for the

* As noted earlier, I will be returning to this, paying close attention to regional differences in members' distance from chamber as well as party medians.

** This will be checked out with the career data set (ICPSR # 7803) which includes summary information on members' subsequent office holding experiences.

*** Bear in mind that my information about factional conflict presently ends in 1901; from that point on, including two decades before primary reform, district conventions continued to nominate candidates.

South, however, fail to fully capture the downward slope – understating them early in our series and overstating them at the end.

Figure 3 here

III.B. Moving to Another Office.

Compared to retirement choices, the decision to forego a reelection bid in order to seek another office appears to be driven by opportunity. In both regions, the presence of a Senate seat up for reelection, which occurred in two of every three elections, is the critical ingredient triggering a career move. In the South the probability of an incumbent opting for a career move increased sharply when a Senate seat came up for renewal; for incumbents across the rest of the country the increased likelihood was a much more modest. This incentive appears to have been unrelated to the change in mode of election beginning in 1914; direct election and its interaction with presidential elections (and other interactions not shown) fail to uncover any effects on politicians' career responses to Senate opportunities. This relationship is not repeated for gubernatorial elections, *Govelec*. In many states these offices were elected in off-year elections and did not require the candidate surrender the House seat.* Outside the South the likelihood of seeking another office is inversely related to the share of the statewide constituency, *Size*, the member represents. Finally, career moves in both regions were timed to correspond to the member's party control of the White House. In addition to providing a safety net, a federal patronage presence in the state might provide an added incentive for House members to attempt career moves under favorable party administrations.

Table 4 here.

* Note that I have not referred to vacancies. I am still cleaning data identifying party control of the Senate and governor seats up for election and whether the incumbents in these offices are vacating the seat or seeking reelection. This is a tricky exercise for indirect election to the Senate, since candidates were nominated, in some cases unwittingly, by state legislators.

Recall in Figure 2.D. we found low levels of attempted career moves throughout the era for politicians from both regions. These rates are matched with the aggregate predicted attempts to other offices generated from the equations in Table 4 and plotted in Figure 3. In only two election years were more than four percent of nonsouthern career choices predicted to favor a move to another office. Yet even these relationships appear to overpredict mobility in both regions for the 1930s. Just as we found with retirements for the South, our current model fails to capture fully the trend toward reelection.

III.C. Patterns of Duration Dependence.*

Beyond the rotation bias against a second reelection in those districts where it was practiced the literature on career development offers little insight as to whether or how politicians' past reelection choices might intrude on their current calculations. Careers lengthened, to be sure, but the null hypothesis that this strictly reflects the configuration of the contemporaneous choice environment might also be correct. Following results based on modern career choices (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; Finnocchario and Lin 2001), I tested several different specifications of duration effects, including cubic splines, linear, dummy variables before settling on a combination of linear term (*# of Terms*) and individual term dummies (including *Freshman*) for retirements and more regionally customized combination for move attempts. The values of the first reelection trial and the linear trend are reported in Tables 3 and 4; the dummy terms are not reported but their conditional probabilities (combined with a linear term for northern reelection decisions) are plotted in Figure 4.¹⁵

Figure 4 here.

* In next pass I will test more rigorously evidence of duration dependence in the different electoral regimes introduced by ballot reform and direct election for retirements and move to other offices, respectively.

According to the significance of individual duration estimates and the overall performance of the equations, retirement decisions in both appear to have reflected a modest degree of duration dependence. As shown in Figure 4, however, these effects are not dramatic. If one were to eliminate the spurt in retirements for second term nonsouthern incumbents, both regions would show little trending or other systematic pattern. Although we have no direct observation of various districts' rotation practices, the higher withdrawal rates for the second reelection trial look suspiciously like rotation's effects. Consistent with this conclusion is the failure of the pattern to reappear in the South where the pressures of competitive elections required accommodation of the different county interests at district nominating conventions.¹⁶

Other than fewer freshmen running for other office, none of the specifications turned up significant (or improved the equation's explanatory power net degrees of freedom) duration terms. The baseline likelihood of making a move was about 5 percent regardless of where a member stood in his career. Thus, the aggregate patterns of nonsouthern mobility displayed in Figure 3.C appear to have been wholly the product of contemporaneous electoral forces and available opportunities. The South was different. Here, controlling for current conditions, the typical member graduated to the Senate or governorship (or some other office) as if he were advancing up an organization (say, the House's committee system) as vacancies arose. The strong *Senelec* coefficient in Table 4 identifies the triggering mechanism described more completely by the duration terms in Figure 4B. This pronounced pattern is consistent with the history of the region and the evidence presented in Tables 3 and 4 of weak competition and little need or evidence of highly strategic behavior. A member was elected to the House and stayed there until he decided to leave or was shoved out by redistricting or intraparty conflict or, as we see now, graduated to some other office. Conversely, this era's nonsouthern House incumbents faced a more competitive setting fraught with uncertainty and requiring a nimble response to the circumstances of the current election cycle. Many of these

members attempted to move to other offices as well but did so by dint of strategic acumen in recognizing when to act and when to keep their heads down.

IV. Conclusion

While these early results can only be suggestive, they lend consistent support for a several basic conclusions about career development within the House. First, the South is different, which is unsurprising given its distinctive politics coming out of 1876 and the Democratic party's domination of state government and elections throughout the era. In tracing career development as a proximate cause of the House's turn-of-the-century modernization, it is important to distinguish the regions' career trajectories with incumbents from the South, just as John Sherman suspected, somewhat ahead of their colleagues from more competitive states. Second, while reforms – principally, ballot and primary reform and direct election of Senators – matter in that most are accompanied by significant intercept shifts, the evidence thus far is thin in supporting the stronger proposition that these reforms fundamentally altered how House members viewed elections and other features of the choice environment. Third, while trends in retirements and attempted moves head in the same direction across regions, they do so as a function of different combinations of covariates. This is not overly surprising, but it does caution against simple summary statements of the historical and electoral dynamics that underwrote the emergence of a careerist House membership during this era. Instead, the simple, compelling trend first noted by Polsby four decades ago appears here to be the sum of a complex array of forces spanning time, regions and institutions.

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Figure 1
The House Career as a Sequence of Discrete Steps

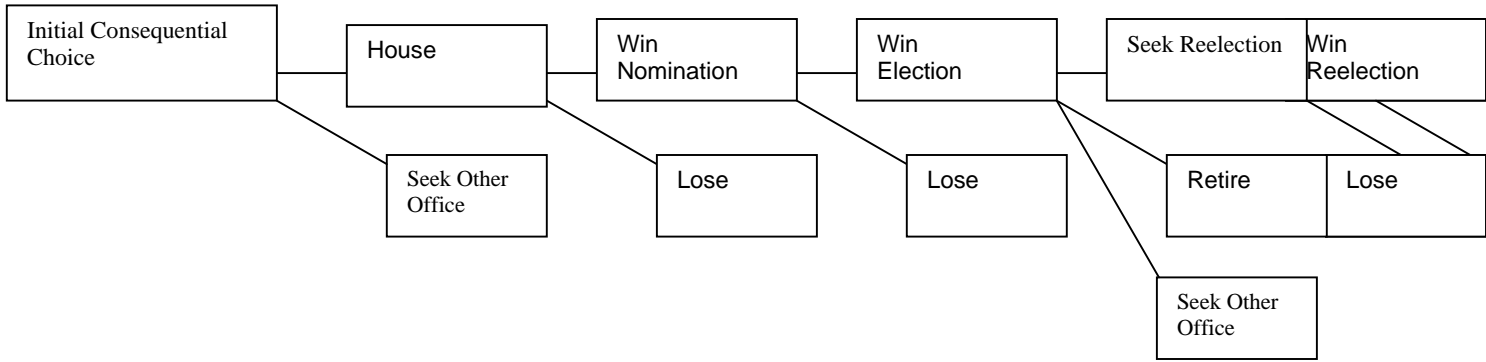


Table 1
Covariates of House Career Decisions

Member characteristics.

Age_p	Incumbent's age at time of election.
$Freshman_p$	Scored 1 if current election cycle represents incumbent's first reelection.
$\# \text{ of Terms}_p$	Number of consecutive terms of House service at time of election.

General Election.

$Margin_d^{t-1}$	Incumbent's margin of victory in preceding House election.
$Realign_d^{t+1}$	Dummy variable identifying whether significant party realignment occurred in district during current election. Source: Nardulli (1995).
$Ballot_s$	Dummy variable demarking date state adopted some version of the Australian ballot reform. Source: Engstrom and Kernell (2003).
$Redist_s$	Dummy variable identifying those states that redistricted House seats within two years of the current congressional election.
$Pelec_n^{t+1}$	Dummy variable presidential from midterm elections.
$Pres. Vote_s^{t+1}$	Statewide vote for the House member's presidential candidate.

Nomination.

$Primary_s$	Dummy variable demarking date state mandated primary elections for party nominations for House elections. Source: Engstrom and Kernell (2003).
$Faction_s$	Dummy variable identifying reports in <i>Appleton's Cyclopaedia</i> of conflict within the state's party convention during election years 1876 through 1901. No reports available after 1901 with all subsequent years scored 0. Source: Bensel (2000).

Institutional Incentives.

$Minority_h$	Dummy variable identifying members of a political party (minor or major) that did not elect the Speaker.
$\Delta Majority_h$	Dummy variable scored 1 if member's minority party assumed majority control of the House in next election and -1 if a member's party loses majority control. Minor party members and no change in majority status scored as 0.
$Portfolio_h$	Hierarchical ranking of member's committee assignment. Source: Stewart (1992)

Party Dist_h Absolute difference between incumbent's and his party's median NOMINATE score on roll call votes during the current Congress. Source: Poole and Rosenthal (1985, 1997).

Opportunities.

Direct_n Dummy variable indicating direct popular election of senators beginning in 1913.

Senelec_s Dummy variable indicating that the office term one of the state's senators expired that year.

Govelec_s Dummy variable indicating that governor election that year.

Size_s Number of congressional seats allocated to the state from the most recent census.

Admin_n Scored 1 or -1 according to congruence of administration party with incumbent's party. Scored 0 for members of minor parties.

Table 2
Institutional and Electoral Covariates of Career Choice

Non-South

	<i>Member Characteristics</i>			<i>General Election</i>			<i>Nomination</i>		<i>Institutional Incentives</i>			<i>Opportunities</i>	
	Age _p	Freshman _p	Pres. Vote _s ²	Redist _s	Margin _d	Ballot _s	Primary _s	Faction _s ¹	Minority _h	ΔMajority _h	Portfolio _h	Party Dist _h	Size _s
1877-1880	48.96	0.47	51.38	0.27	12.99	0	0	0.00	0.49	0.03	0.78	0.08	16.55
1897-1900	48.95	0.36	52.83	0.20	15.77	0.95	0.01	0	0.23	0	0.84	0.09	17.08
1917-1920	51.57	0.29	56.20	0.04	24.06	.997	0.97	–	0.33	-0.09	0.87	0.12	19.03
1937-1940	51.89	0.29	51.59	0	20.02	.997	0.97	–	0.36	0	1.54	0.10	19.86
Overall	50.54	0.34	52.82	0.11	18.83	0.79	0.56	0.00	0.35	-0.02	1.04	0.10	18.33

South

	<i>Member Characteristics</i>			<i>General Election</i>			<i>Nomination</i>		<i>Institutional Incentives</i>			<i>Opportunities</i>	
	Age _p	Freshman _p	Pres. Vote _s ²	Redist _s	Margin _d	Ballot _s	Primary _s	Faction _s ¹	Minority _h	ΔMajority _h	Portfolio _h	Party Dist _h	Size _s
1877-1880	48.48	0.37	59.12	0.16	29.54	0	0	0.07	0.32	0.05	0.82	0.11	7.65
1897-1900	46.77	0.31	64.47	0.22	43.64	0.56	0.03	0.01	0.85	0	0.85	0.10	9.45
1917-1920	50.40	0.23	65.14	0.06	70.57	1	1	–	0.65	0.28	0.95	0.14	10.73
1937-1940	51.22	0.21	80.74	0.02	83.37	1	1	–	0.02	0	1.59	0.07	10.95
Overall	49.34	0.27	70.89	0.11	59.12	0.69	0.56	0.02	0.46	0.09	1.08	0.10	9.85

¹ This variable is not scored during the latter two periods.

² Means are scored only during presidential election years.

Figure 2
Regional Trends in House Careerism, 1870s-1930s

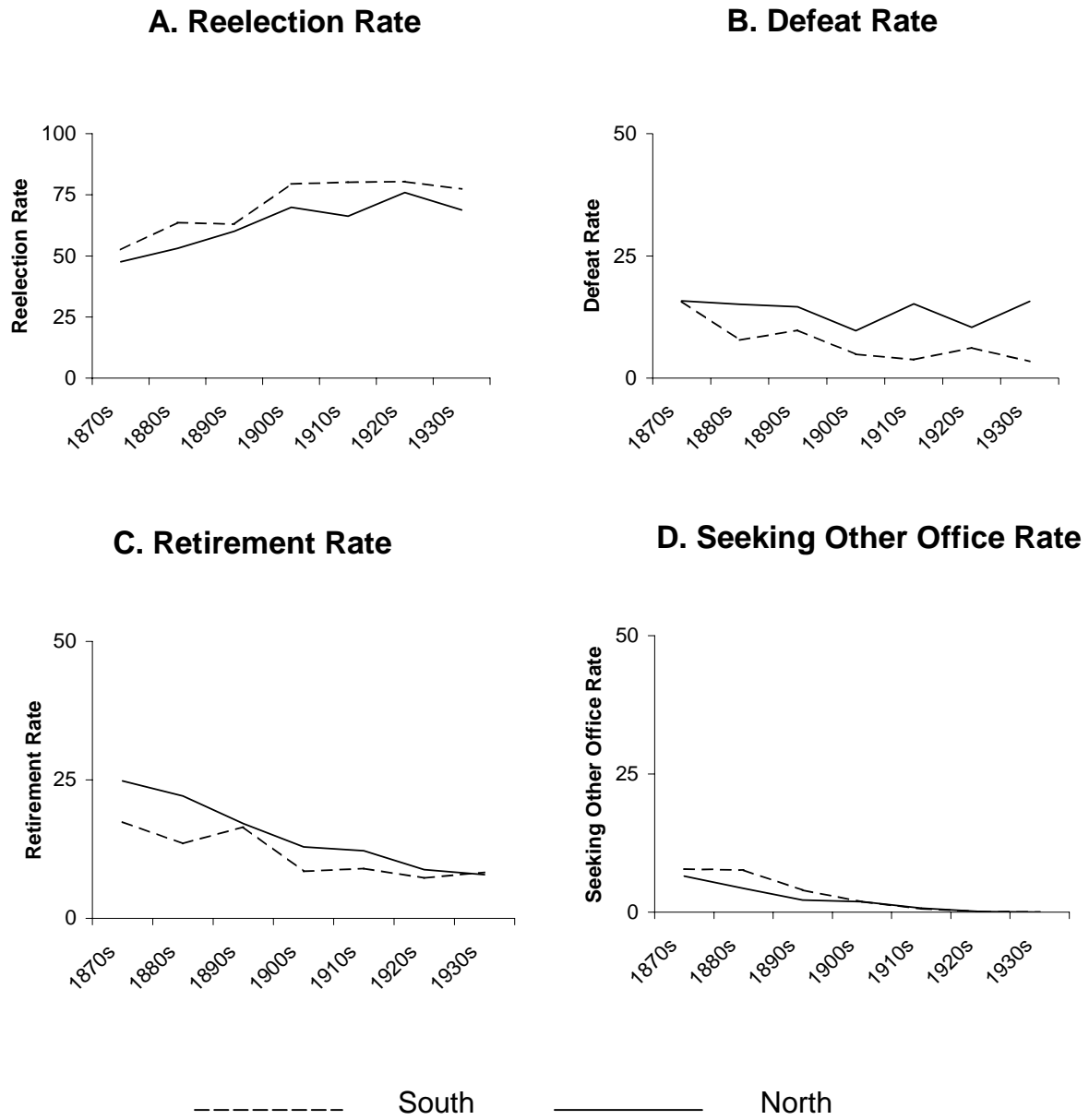


Table 3
The Decision to Run vs. to Retire from the House

	Non-South		South ¹	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Member Characteristics</i>				
Age _p	0.02***	0.00	0.03***	0.01
Freshman _p	-0.79***	0.11	-16.39**	7.26
# of Terms _p	-0.12***	0.03	-1.42**	0.71
<i>General Election</i>				
Margin _d	-0.02***	0.00	-0.01***	0.00
Realign _d	-0.53*	0.32	-1.13	1.39
Ballot _s	-0.43***	0.11	-0.75***	0.26
Redist _s	0.10	0.12	0.59**	0.25
Pelec _n	0.66**	0.33	-0.27	0.59
Pres. Vote _s	-0.02**	0.01	0.01	0.01
<i>Nomination</i>				
Primary _s	-0.71***	0.10	0.07	0.28
Faction _s	0.61	0.43	1.11***	0.36
<i>Institutional Incentives</i>				
Minority _h	0.02	0.11	-0.16	0.23
ΔMajority _h	-0.28***	0.09	0.11	0.20
Portfolio _h	-0.05	0.05	-0.19	0.12
Party Dist _h	2.07***	0.38	0.54	0.85
<i>Opportunities</i>				
Size _s	0.02***	0.00	-0.04	0.03
Admin _n	0.09**	0.05	.28**	0.10
Constant	-2.01***	0.25	14.93*	7.98
# of Obs.	6618		2280	
Log Likelihood	-2166.06		-545.39	

¹ Equation includes nine reelection terms in addition to freshmen. These coefficients are reported in Figure 4.

* denotes significance at .10 level
 ** denotes significance at .05 level
 *** denotes significance at .01 level

Table 4
The Decision to Run for Higher Office vs. to Retire from the House

	Non-South		South ₁	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Member Characteristics</i>				
Age _p	-0.04***	0.01	-0.05**	0.02
Freshman _p	-0.76***	0.24	-2.78**	1.32
<i>General Election</i>				
Margin _d	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Realign _d	0.02	0.71	-1.19	2.03
Redist _s	0.29	0.29	1.14**	0.48
Pelec _n	1.14	1.43	1.42	2.13
Pres. Vote _s	-0.03	0.03	-0.02	0.03
<i>Nomination</i>				
Faction _s	0.84	0.91	0.98	0.82
<i>Institutional Incentives</i>				
Minority _h	0.02	0.25	0.26	0.47
Δ Majority _h	-0.09	0.22	0.04	0.42
Portfolio _h	0.05	0.06	-0.28	0.26
Party Dist _h	2.35***	0.82	2.71	1.80
<i>Opportunities</i>				
Direct _n	0.37	0.26	-0.83	0.58
Direct Pelec _n	-1.57	1.59	0.97	2.51
Direct Pres. Vote	0.02	0.03	-0.00	0.04
Senelec _s	0.78***	0.23	1.80***	0.55
Govelec _s	0.27	0.21	0.22	0.38
Size _s	-0.04***	0.01	-0.05	0.05
Admin _n	0.20*	0.10	0.43**	0.21
Constant	-2.24***	0.60	-1.86	2.06
# of Obs.	5988		2150	
Log Likelihood	-570.47		-175.58	

[†] Equation includes nine reelection terms in addition to freshmen. These coefficients are reported in Figure 4.

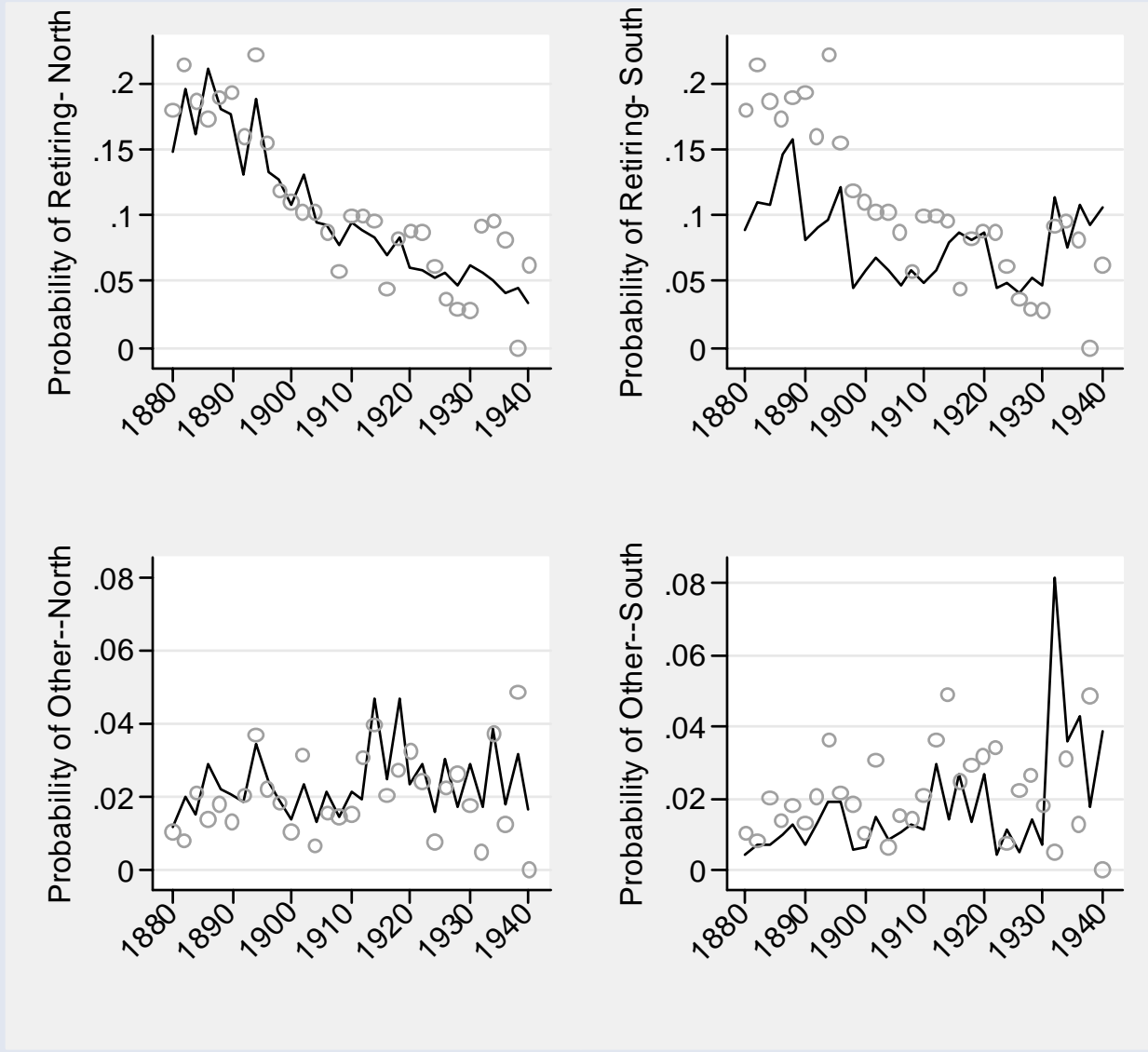
* denotes significance at .10 level

** denotes significance at .05 level

*** denotes significance at .01 level

Figure 3

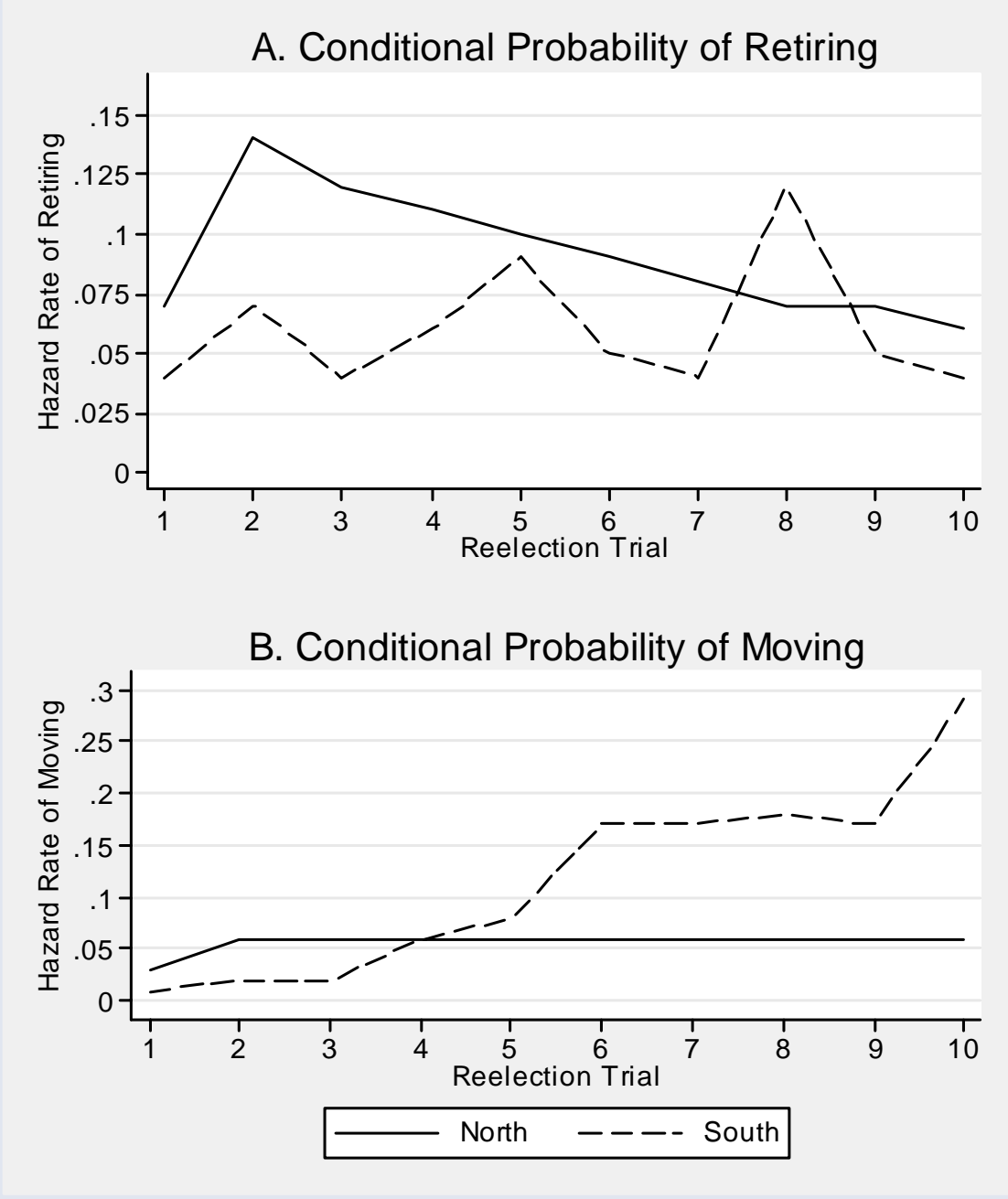
Predicted Rates of Departure from House*



*Predicted values (lines) based on estimates in Tables 3 and 4.

Figure 4

Duration Dependence of House Careers By Region*



*Rates based on estimates in Tables 3 and 4.

Endnotes

¹ To continue the story of Missouri’s “fighting ninth” district, they eventually resolved their destructive internal squabbles by formulating two-term rotation contracts: passage 2 here from p. 675.

² The following memoir rumination by George Robertson is typical: passage A attached. be sure to add source to references.

³ We also tested whether the thrust of redistricting favored the incumbent’s party by indexing the party controlling the state legislature and governorship (where effective vetoes were available). This refinement offered no improvement over the simple dummy variable.

⁴ Dallinger (1903) noted, “the nomination of a congressional candidate is often determined in advance by a private agreement that the incumbent, after one or more terms of service, shall retire and aid the nomination of his principal rival in a former convention.”

⁵ These instances are reported in Bensel (2000; Table 5.5) who coded annual issues of *Appleton’s Encyclopedia* from 1877 through 1900.

⁶ Change from minority to majority status scored 1, the reverse movement –1, and no change, 0.

⁷ Unfortunately, the McKibben data set (ICPSR # 7803) which serves as the basis for most historical research in House careers does not distinguish office targets for attempted career moves. Undoubtedly, some members opted out to run for other statewide offices (and even the presidency and vice presidency).

⁸ Henry Jones Ford (1898: 136-137) noted that patronage through “executive favors” which was “more potent then than now” promoted coordination of candidacies.

⁹ One alternative might be to interact suspect terms with a dummy variable separating southern career choices from those occurring throughout the rest of the country. But there are so many suspect variables – including the role of ballot and primary reforms, the scores of southern Democrats on our committee and party distance indicators and the duration dependence terms presented below – and little assurance that these fully tap the regional differences of the relative features of the choice environment generating selective exits.

¹⁰ Across dozens of studies that embraced this solution, limiting analysis to those who had demonstrated a propensity to move typically failed to account for the level of observed stability (White 1970).

¹¹ Two standard tests were employed, Hausman (Hausman and McFadden 1984) and Small-Hsiao. The latter in two of six different specifications listed the probability of independence at .09.

¹² The availability of the Senate vacancy, for example, has apparently (given the IIA test results) little bearing on the decision to retire versus run for reelection. For evidence of strategic candidate behavior during the prereform era, see Carson, Jenkins, Rohde and Souva. (2001).

¹³ I interacted this term with ballot reform on the suspicion that it might be stronger when incumbents bore greater personal responsibility for their success. But differences (not shown) in the pre and post reform effects of district *Margin* turned up trivial and statistically insignificant. (I will be revisiting this issue with a more complex configuration of the choice environment that better reflects intuition about the status of incumbents as party candidates in the pre and post reform eras.)

¹⁴ In some specifications interacting *Portfolio* value with Ballot reform generated significant relationships for the pre reform era in non-southern retirement decisions. This runs counter to expectations and deserves further investigation.

¹⁵ Three different duration specifications were applied to are reported in Figure 4: linear trend and individual term dummies for the first ten reelection trials for northern retirement and southern mobility decisions, term dummies alone for southern retirement decisions, and a constant term with first-year reelection trial dummy for northern mobility choices. All of the models were based on the likelihood ratio test with the full array of covariates reported in Tables 3 and 4.

¹⁶ Struble's (1979, p. 664) explanation of 19th century congressional election dynamics makes sense: "Had the custom of nomination rotation not existed, competition would have placed the expediency from the state and local parties' perspective on renomination incumbents as the stronger candidates. The spoils principle shifted the locus of expediency to withdrawals, so as to spread the payoffs as widely as possible. This intraparty motive was intensified by interparty competition. Since competition called for party discipline, which required more attention to the rotations payroll, competition and the nomination rotation were causally interrelated."