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"Should I Stay or Should I Go?" Explaining Political Ambition by Electoral Success in Brazil

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Abstract: Why run for reelection when the logic and incentives of the political system leave no doubt that running for other offices is a better option? This paper focuses on the factors that influence both the choice of career and the electoral success of those who run for reelection and those who attempt to obtain other offices, using Brazil as a case study, a typically fragmented, multiparty environment with a strong executive. We argue that legislators run for reelection because it is the safest bet for them. The probability of winning is higher for those who attempt reelection than for those running for any other office. Because static ambition is conditioned by election results and not by the intrinsic desire to develop a career in the legislative branch, career paths do not necessarily lead to improvements in legislative professionalization and institutionalization. This finding contradicts theories that relate career paths to legislative institutionalization.

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1   Introduction

The discussion about career choices and legislative institutionalization is a central one in the debate about legislative politics. The argument is straightforward: legislators will run for reelection if they profit from being a member of Congress. On the other hand, if legislators are enticed by reelection, they will work to strengthen and professionalize the legislative sector. Hence, career paths and Congress institutionalization are intertwined. We argue that this relationship does not hold universally, however. Under certain conditions, running for reelection is the best option, not because Congress is an institutionalized or professional location to work at, but because it provides the best combination of perks and feasibility of electoral success, with greater emphasis on the latter. Hence, similar to other studies (Swift 1987; Carson and Roberts 2005), we provide evidence that legislative organization and career paths might not be inherently linked.

Consider a scenario in which the legislative branch plays a secondary role in the governing process *vis-à-vis* executive branch dominance. In general, it is the executive branch of government that controls the budgetary process, not the legislative one; decision-making inside Congress is centralized, lying in the hands of a small number of party leaders from the governing coalition, and gate-keeping power is usually exercised by the Speaker of the House, who is also a member of the same coalition. Furthermore, incumbents have amateur staff and limited opportunities to influence the content of laws. In addition, there are enticing executive-branch offices at the state and municipal levels – an object of desire for most politicians. One has to agree that this is not the ideal setting to encourage static ambition, i.e., running for reelection.

In Brazil, and indeed most of Latin America, incumbent federal deputies face scenarios similar to the one described above (Cox and Morgenstern 2002; Ames 2001; Samuels 2003). Yet in Brazil in particular, they predominantly run for reelection. If legislators neither have institutional nor professional motives for reelection, why is static ambition so prevalent in Brazil? We claim that Brazilian federal deputies predominantly run for reelection because it is the safest bet with the highest returns. First, the probability of winning is higher for those who attempt reelection than for those running for any other office. Second, being a federal deputy offers more power and political opportunities than lower-level offices, such as that of a state deputy or mayor of a small city. Therefore, and more importantly for the sake of our argument, career choices cannot be explained solely by the design of the legislative sector. The perks of office and policy influence only partially explain why incumbents attempt reelection, which contradicts Mayhew's classic argument that career ambition molds legislative professionalization.

Instead, career patterns seem to be much more clearly affected by electoral expectations than legislative organization. It is the logic of political survival, of maintaining office, which guides legislators and not one of increasing the power and influence of the legislative branch. In saying that, we neither claim that legislators ignore professional conditions of the legislature nor that their work inside Congress does not affect their choice of political career and their chances of electoral success. However, professional conditions seem to be less relevant than other factors in distinct institutional environments.

This, in fact, is the main theoretical point we contribute to the literature on political careers. Hence, we borrow from the literature on career choice to argue that decisions to run for different offices are guided by calculations about the cost and benefits of the office and that ambitious legislators temper their propensity to run for higher offices by the risk of obtaining them, something that has also been shown to be true in the US and elsewhere (Schlesinger 1976; Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Kiewit and Zeng 1993; Leoni, Pereira, and Rennó 2004).

So far, however, nobody has argued that expectations about winning a particular office predominate over the goal of improving the legislative sector's performance whenever incumbents choose to remain in Congress instead of running for another office outside of the institution. In fact, we – rather contra-intuitively – argue that static ambition (i.e., running for reelection) may trump incentives for further professionalization and empowering of the legislative branch if it is mostly defined as a second-best option for political survival. Using data from the Constitutional Convention that approved the new Brazilian Constitution in 1988, Cunow et al. (2012) have demonstrated that legislators with greater prospects of long careers in Congress were actually less likely to support the strengthening of the legislative branch. Our results confirm these findings in the post-constitutional setting.

These two goals are intertwined in the conventional wisdom about professionalization and career choice (Mayhew 1974; Polsby 1968). We argue that this relation may not actually be true outside of the United States. In fact, studies by Swift (1987) and Carson and Roberts (2005) have questioned whether a relationship might exist between legislative organization and career goals even in the United States. We propose to advance a similar research agenda beyond the case of the United States. Our own view are in line with Morgenstern and Negri (2009), who argue that what the literature on American politics takes for granted, and is therefore a constant (such as the perks that go with legislative offices, and high levels of legislative organization) should, in fact, be addressed as variables in comparative studies.

Hence, predicting the determinants of electoral success is fundamental to define career choices among ambitious politicians (something as yet untested in the literature on this field). One must look beyond the doors of Congress to the electoral setting to understand why most incumbents choose to run for reelection. This pattern may also apply to other Latin American countries, where the legislative branch plays a less predominant role in the policy-making process. A strong correlation between career patterns and legislative organization may exist in the outlying case of the United States and yet be invalid for other presidential regimes, such as those of Latin America. It is not legislative professionalization that leads incumbents to return to Congress, but the security that goes with winning an office there. Reelection rates and legislative professionalization may not be as strongly correlated as theory predicts. This would be a typical example of a theory that is based on a single case: that of the United States, an exception that combines a bipartisan presidential regime with a constitutionally weak executive.[1]

Unlike previous studies that have focused either on federal deputy's reelection bids (Ames 1995a, 1995b; Samuels 2000, 2001; Pereira and Rennó 2003) or on their career paths (Samuels 2003; Leoni, Pereira, and Rennó 2004), we argue that neither phenomenon can be analyzed separately. They are both inexorably linked, because career paths depend on electoral expectations, especially in countries where the incentives to return to office in Congress are slim at best. By focusing on the electoral incentives for career choices, we confront the conventional wisdom that a professional and institutionalized legislature is a major reason why incumbents seek reelection. They may, instead, seek it because it is the best solution for their own political survival.

In this way, we reconcile the apparently contradictory findings that most legislators in Brazil stay in the Chamber of Deputies and run for reelection even though they prefer to run for an office in the executive sector (Samuels 2003). Most Deputies attempt to get reelected not because the legislative branch is an enticing place to work, but because it is the safest bet to survive politically compared to other alternatives. Furthermore, because a majority of legislators keep winning office under the existing rules, they have little incentive to change the system by professionalizing and better institu-

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1   The strong correlation between a high degree of professionalization and a higher rate of reelection could also be interpreted as a consequence of the short duration of a two-year legislative term in the United States. Without any institutional mechanisms capable of increasing legislators' tenure, they would face tremendous electoral risks every two years. Thus, professionalization can be interpreted as an institutional mechanism to make the life of US legislators more stable and predictable.

tionalizing the legislative branch and making it stronger. High reelection rates, in this case, may help to maintain the legislative branch as a reactive player in Brazilian politics, i.e., keep it less professionalized and less efficient than the executive branch when it comes to molding public policies.

We construct our argument in several stages in this paper and then discuss why static ambition prevails in Brazil. Subsequently, we argue that estimations about the probability of electoral victory are central to career choices and propose a model for electoral success. We then present our data and results, and conclude our paper by relating our case study on Brazil to the broader discussion on career paths and legislative organization, particularly with a view to the situation in the United States.

2   Why Are Attempts at Reelection So Prevalent in Brazil?

Wherever legislative seats are regarded as valuable career goods, reelection attempts ought to be high and Congress will be designed in a way that facilitates reelection (Mayhew 1974). On the other hand, if most representatives run for offices outside of Congress, then the legislature will not foster many long legislative careers, and reelection rates should be low. Institutional factors suggest that the latter characterization might be a more accurate description of the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil, yet this does not seem to be the case. In other words, the organizational structure of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies does not entice legislators to seek reelection. In fact, one should imagine that the secondary role that Congress plays in Brazilian politics should cause legislators to look for higher offices (including mayoral positions in appropriate municipalities). As we have said, however, reelection attempts are quite high, with around 70 percent of the incumbents running for reelection – one of the highest rates in any multiparty presidential system. Box 1 (below) illustrates the argument we have developed above, contrasting theoretical expectations and empirical reality in Brazil. The question is: what is the answer to this puzzle?

Box 1: Brazil's Puzzling Political Incentives to Seek Reelection

Prediction According to the Literature	
Institutional Feature	Electoral Outcome
High professional and institutional legislative environment	Strong incentive to attempt reelection
Low professional and institutional legislative environment	Weak incentive to attempt reelection
Brazilian Congress	
Low professional and institutional legislative environment	Strong incentive to attempt reelection

Source: Authors' own compilation.

One possible answer to the conundrum corresponds to a well-known fact in the literature on career choice: Brazilian incumbents, like incumbents in the United States and in many other democratic systems, run for a higher office less often because they are averse to risk. Incumbents therefore run for the office with the best combination of low electoral risk and high payoffs in terms of perks of office: "The decision to run results primarily from a matching of individual ambition and the context of the opportunities available to the potential candidate" (Kazee 1994). Consistent with this literature, we also assume that politicians would always pursue higher offices if no risks were present.

In Brazil, this clearly means running for executive-level offices at the federal or state level and in larger municipalities – i.e., those with greater political resources, powers, and budgets – and in the Senate, where politicians have longer tenure, power, prestige, and greater perks. All of these choices will be made at a certain cost, however: there are different levels of risk to bear. Our claim, following the literature on career choice (Rohde 1979; Squire 1988; Swift 1987; Kiewiet and Zeng 1993; Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Hibbings 1999; Santos 1999; Patzelt 1999; Kernell 2003; Samuels 2003; Leoni, Pereira, and Rennó 2004; Carson 2005), is that the expected probability of victory is a central determinant of political ambition. Unlike this literature, however, we claim that incumbents run for reelection despite the lack of incentives within Congress in terms of professionalization and influence over policy-making. We argue that federal deputies in Brazil run for reelection because it is the safest bet and not because of any special interest they have in their country's legislative sector. The likelihood of winning is greater for those who attempt reelection than for those running for other offices. This seems to be the answer to our puzzle.

Empirically, we argue that the best way of understanding career choice is to compare the expected probabilities of victory for different offices. Modeling electoral success therefore becomes an integral part of the study

of career considerations, something that has not been done in the cited literature. In order to understand why candidates choose a certain office, it is necessary to know which factors increase the predictability of the outcome of elections to different offices. To estimate the predictability of an outcome, it is mandatory to model electoral success and estimate the probability of victory for the different offices, controlling for federal deputies' individual traits in the process. That is, we need to estimate what the difference would be in the likelihood of victory for a federal deputy when running for various offices.

With this purpose in mind, we have interwoven two strands of literature that do not intersect as often as they should: research on career choice and research on reelection success (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Jacobsen 1983; Stein and Bickers 1994; Ames 1995a, 1995b; Bickers and Stein 1996; Samuels 2001, 2002; Pereira and Rennó 2003; Carson and Roberts 2005). We applied our theoretical model in an attempt to explain the puzzle we had identified, where the vast majority of incumbents run for reelection in spite of contradictory institutional, political, and professional incentives. In our conclusion, our analysis will offer some insights about the theoretical relationship between career choices in the organization of legislatures in light of the Brazilian experience.

3   Elements of Career Considerations

All discussions about incumbents' career choices are based on a very simple model that can be summarized by the following equation:

$$U_{(O)} = P_{(O)} B_{(O)} - C$$

The expected utility $U_{(O)}$ of running for a specific office is a function of the probability of winning office $P_{(O)}$ weighted by the benefits of the office $B_{(O)}$, discounting the costs (C) of running.[2] The most difficult element to estimate, both for the incumbents themselves and for political analysts, is the probability of victory. The benefits are somewhat fixed and are represented by job-related perks and influence over policy-making. Costs can be measured in terms of campaign expenditures, candidates' personal energy and willingness to get involved in the campaign, and the reputational costs of losing an election. What defines the probability of winning office, however, is more complex; to explain career choices, one must inevitably model the determinants of reelection success.

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2   We replicate this equation from Samuels (2003). It is actually a reduced form of the equation found in Leoni, Pereira, and Rennó (2004) and Kiewiet and Zeng (1993).

On the other hand, we argue that the benefits and costs of running for the different offices are fixed in Brazil and are quite predictable. The benefits of office refer to the perquisites attached to holding a specific electoral post; in Brazil, executive-level offices at any level of the federation offer the highest benefits. Senatorial offices have major perks in the form of higher staff funding and longer terms in office.[3] Therefore, the benefits associated with these posts will always be an incentive to run for higher offices.[4]

The costs of running are also more predictable than the probability of victory. Races for a position as governor or senator are, on average, more expensive than races for a federal deputy's office. Our own data indicates that campaign expenditures for higher offices are about five times greater than running for reelection. Keeping everything else constant, when it comes to campaign costs, incumbents would therefore be more inclined to attempt reelection. For our argument, however, what really matters is that incumbents have a very good idea of what each different race costs.[5]

On the other hand, the likelihood of winning in the different races is much harder to predict than the benefits and costs of running. It could be argued that the probability of winning a higher office should be smaller than when seeking a lower office. One simple reason for this is that senatorial, mayoral, and gubernatorial elections are ruled by plurality and majority systems and that the costs of running are higher. The number of offices available is lower when running for higher office. In races for the office of a federal or state deputy, ruled by open-list proportional representation and at-large districts with high magnitude, the number of slots available is much higher. However, the relationship between the number of seats available and the probability of electoral success is far from perfect. Even if the correlation is strong, the difference in the probabilities of victory for the different

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3   All of these offices provide higher pay-offs than running for reelection in the Lower House. For a ranking of offices in Brazil, see Samuels (2003).

4   Incumbents may also run for a particular office because of partisan pressures or to increase their own visibility. This would be an indirect benefit of running for office, and it is hardly measurable. In Brazil, this used to be particularly true in the case of left-wing political parties when they were in the opposition. These parties tended to appoint their better-known incumbents – and better-qualified legislators most of the time – to executive posts even if they had minimal chances of victory. Although this strategy increases the chance of the party holding an executive post, it automatically reduces the degree of seniority of the legislature's representation and also decreases the incentives for professionalization in the legislature.

5   The costs of running for office also refer to the reputational costs associated with losing an election and the cost of being excluded from the perks of a desired office. Only campaign finance is measurable; the other costs are subjective in nature, which renders them hard to operationalize.

offices is not predefined and is subject to interference by several variables. The comparison between the probabilities of victory for different offices can vary more widely from election to election and from district to district than any of the other components in the classic equation about career considerations.

The estimation of the likelihood of victory for each distinct office is therefore of fundamental importance when it comes to making viable career choices. Since the probability of victory is itself a function of several distinct variables, it requires modeling. This is the main reason why the study of electoral success can contribute to analyses of career choices. After all, studies of electoral success focus on identifying the factors that influence the probability of victory for a specific office. In our view, because it is the hardest to predict and the factor with most variance across career choices in Brazil, the probability of victory is a central explanation of the puzzle that gave rise to this study. Our main hypothesis is the following: incumbents run for reelection because the probability of winning it is higher than running for any other office.

4   A Model of Electoral Success

A model of electoral success will permit us to test the main hypothesis of this study: the probability of victory for those who attempt reelection is much higher than the probability of victory for incumbents who seek offices outside the Chamber. Incumbents who decide to run for office – regardless of the nature of the position – believe that different factors, including their performance in office and their political capital indicated by prior patterns of electoral outcomes, will affect their electoral success in the present. As Mayhew (1974) has claimed, however, they do not know exactly what factors will assure their victory in the upcoming elections. For this reason, they diversify their portfolio of electoral strategies. Any model of electoral success ought to include variables related to the various dimensions of legislators' attempts to survive politically. To test these assumptions, our model uses three classes of variables: 1) electoral factors; 2) aspects related to the incumbent's power within political parties and the Chamber of Deputies; and 3) the legislator's performance within the Chamber of Deputies.

The electoral dimension is modeled using several variables and will serve to test the hypothesis that the incumbent's electoral capital – his/her patterns of vote distribution in the election – are more important than performance in office to assure success in the election. First, the total amount of votes in the previous election is included as the main indicator of the incumbent's political capital. We hypothesize that this variable should have a

positive impact on electoral success, since it is expected that the larger the amount of votes obtained in the previous election, the safer the incumbent will be in the next election. In fact, we will argue later that the political capital the incumbent has is the main factor here, directly affecting not just the probability of victory, but also the person's choice of career. Incumbents will decide to run for a higher office based on how safe they feel electorally and not on how visible they are in Congress.

The incumbents' patterns of geographical vote distribution should also affect their electoral success (Ames 1995a, 1995b). The concentration is measured by the percentage of the total votes a candidate receives in the municipality where he or she received most of his/her votes. We expect that the concentration of votes would make legislators electorally vulnerable, especially in very competitive municipalities. We have also included a measure of electoral competition at the district level in our model, indicated by the number of candidates per seat in the district. The hypothesis here is that the more competitive the district, the harder it will be to get elected. Moreover, the more a candidate concentrates his/her votes on a single municipality, the less likely that person is to win overall, because this indicates greater dependency on a single locality. Campaign expenditures also affect electoral success in Brazil (Samuels 2002). Hence, this variable is a component of both the cost of running for office and a determinant of how successful the election bid is. It also molds the probability of electoral victory. We tested this hypothesis using each candidate's declared campaign expenditure.

A second set of variables is related to the performance of incumbents within parties and the legislative branch. First, we measured the incumbent's position within the hierarchy of the party. This variable is a dummy, with the value of "1" indicating that the incumbent is a party leader and "0" otherwise. Party leaders are more visible actors within and outside Congress, so we expect being a party leader will pay off in elections. We also included a variable indicating whether the incumbent was a member of the directing table of the Chamber of Deputies. As these federal deputies control many resources inside the Chamber, they should also be more likely to win elections.

Finally, we controlled for the performance of the incumbent inside the Chamber. We included a measure of seniority, indicated by the number of terms the incumbent had prior to the current one; the number of projects in which the incumbent was a rapporteur; and the number of legislative projects (*projetos de lei*) initiated by the incumbent that were approved by the floor. We expected these variables to have only a limited impact on incumbents' electoral luck, since the monitoring costs for voters are very high. Still, they ought to be included in the model because active participation in

Congress increases incumbents' access to resources and also their proximity to other important political actors in the executive branch, campaign financers, activists, and lobbyists (Hall 1996).

We also tested for the impact of individual budgetary amendments on electoral success. Most incumbents distribute amendments throughout their home states. However, presenting the amendment does not assure appropriation. Because of the contingent nature of the Brazilian budget, which just authorizes expenditure, but does not force the executive to comply with congressional decisions, the executive branch gives the final word for the appropriation of amendments. Hence, our model included the mean percentage of the total value of amendments presented by the federal deputy that were appropriated by the executive branch, benefitting the entire district for the four-year term. Our expectation was that having a higher percentage of the statewide amendments executed would have a positive impact on electoral success.[6]

5   Data and Results

To test these hypotheses, we relied on a unique dataset of incumbents' electoral and legislative performances in the last four consecutive legislative elections in Brazil: 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010. Our data set includes all federal deputies, main office holders (*titulares*), and substitutes (*suplentes*) that held office from the 50th to 53rd Legislature.[7] So, in addition to the model specified above, we added three controls to the equation. First, we included a dummy variable identifying the main office holders. Second, we included

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6   The debate about the electoral impact of amendments on elections to the Chamber of Deputies includes three main positions: individual budgetary amendments – a surrogate for pork-barrel politics – positively affects reelection bids (Ames 1995; Pereira and Rennó 2003); budgetary amendments have no effect on reelection success (Figueiredo and Limongi 2007; Mesquita 2009); and budgetary amendments have an indirect effect on elections, by only affecting campaign finance donors' propensity to support candidates (Samuels 2002). Our results show that budgetary amendments are very important in assuring electoral success for federal deputies who decide to run for an office.

7   We believe it is important to include all politicians who held office in the Chamber, because if we included only *titulares*, we would arbitrarily exclude *suplentes* who held office for long periods of time from the population. In 1998, our sample included 488 *titulares* and 120 *suplentes*. In 2002, there were 496 main office holders and 124 substitutes. In 2006, there were 511 deputies that became *titulares*, because some were *efetivados*, and 116 *suplentes*. We also dropped the cases of incumbents who were forced to either step down from office because of scandals or who were expelled from the Chamber, as well as any incumbents who passed away.

dummies for the years of 2002, 2006, and 2010, adding fixed effects for each election.[8] Third, we controlled for the incumbent's age. We squared this variable to capture a concave effect of age, which should have a positive effect up to a certain threshold and then slope down.

Our claim is that incumbents predominantly run for reelection, even in face of incentives contrary to static ambition, because it offers the best combination of low electoral risk (with some benefits in the form of perks of office) and political power. Incumbents choose to run for reelection because this choice of career has the highest victory rate of all their possible career options. Table 1 shows the rate of victory for each type of career ambition in the four elections and the percentage of incumbents who attempted to get elected to each office in parenthesis; "regressive ambition" indicates running for the office of state deputy, "static ambition" indicates running for reelection to the Chamber of Deputies, and "progressive ambition" indicates running for the Senate, State Governor, Vice-Governor, Vice-President, or President. This is the simplest way of showing that incumbents who run for reelection have a much higher success rate than those who run for any other office.

Table 1: Federal Deputies' Career Choice and Electoral Success: Brazil, 1998–2010 (N = 2,460)

Form of Ambition	1998 Election		2002 Election	
	Choice (%)	Success (%)	Choice (%)	Success (%)
Retirement	90 (14.8)	–	82 (13.23)	–
Regressive ambition	22 (3.62)	11 (50)	25 (4.03)	10 (40)
Static ambition	478 (75.33)	297 (64.85)	452 (72.9)	296 (65.49)
Progressive ambition	38 (6.25)	10 (26.32)	61 (9.84)	15 (24.59)
Form of Ambition	2006 Election		2010 Election	
	Choice (%)	Success (%)	Choice (%)	Success (%)
Retirement	124 (19.75)	–	76 (12.58)	–
Regressive ambition	21(3.34)	8 (38.10)	16 (2.65)	5 (31.25)
Static ambition	457 (72.77)	278 (60.83)	448 (74.17)	297 (66.29)
Progressive ambition	26 (4.14)	8 (30.77)	64 (10.6)	23 (35.94)

Source: Authors' own compilation.

It is clear that running for reelection ("static ambition") was the preferred option for the majority of incumbents and was the safest bet, i.e., the one

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8   In 1998, all federal deputies had the birthright (*candidato nato rule*) for nomination to run for reelection, if they so wished. This rule was no longer in place in the 2002 and 2006 elections, so we controlled for this change by including the dummy variables for the different elections.

with the highest rate of electoral success. About two-thirds of those who attempt reelection are successful in their bid, and approx. 70 percent of all incumbents usually run for reelection. This was even true in the 2006 elections, in which many federal deputies were involved in huge corruption scandals that rocked Brazil's political system. The reelection rates in 2006 were slightly lower than in previous years, however. Rennó (2008) has shown that the reelection rate of federal deputies involved in scandals was much lower, therefore bringing down the overall count of successful incumbents.

The second-safest bet was to run for office as a state deputy, a form of "regressive ambition." It is interesting to note that running for election as a state deputy ought to have a higher probability of victory, given that there are always more offices available in such races and the electoral district is identical to that of races for the post of a federal deputy. Empirically, however, this is not the case, which indicates that the relationship between the number of offices and probability of victory is only weakly correlated. The other options – running for vice-president, president, vice-governor, governor, and senator, all of which are considered forms of progressive ambition – had much lower success rates.

Looking only at the percentage of victory is identical to analyzing a naive model, one in which the personal characteristics of each incumbent and the effects of such variables on the probability of victory are ignored. This leads us to the second form of evaluating the likelihood of victory, namely, by modeling electoral success.

Table 2 reports the change in the probability of electoral victory for an infinitesimal change in each independent, continuous variable and the discrete change in the probability for dummy variables. The dependent variable in both models is a dummy, therefore we used maximum likelihood estimation. The model includes all the factors that explain electoral success mentioned in the previous section of this article plus another very important variable: "ambition", indicating which office the incumbent ran for. This is the variable described in table 1, indicating regressive, static, and progressive ambition. We will use this variable later to simulate the differences in probabilities of victory when moving from regressive to static and to progressive ambition, which is why we tested model 1 with it as a single variable with an ordinal scale. This variable is therefore the main test of our hypothesis; the probability of victory for those running for reelection ought to be the highest.

The second model (see table 2 below) treats the ambition variable differently by including it as a series of dummy variables excluding static ambi-

tion.[9] That way, we can contrast the likelihood of winning an election if the incumbent decides to run for a lower or higher office as opposed to running for reelection.

Table 2: Probit Regression Coefficients, with Robust Standard Errors and Clustering by Federal Deputy, to Explain Electoral Success: Brazil, 50th, 51st, 52nd, and 53rd Legislatures

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Ambition/career choice	-0.51	
	(0.15)**	
Dummy for regressive ambition		0.14
		(0.28)
Dummy for progressive ambition		-0.74
		(0.19)**
Titular in the current legislature	2.31	2.26
	(0.11)**	(0.10)**
Campaign expenditures measured in reais (BRL) in the current election	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)**	(0.00)**
Number of votes in the previous election	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)**	(0.00)**
Percentage of votes received in the municipality in which the federal deputy received more votes	-0.17	-0.18
	(0.13)	(0.13)
Number of terms in office	0.02	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Position in the directing table of the Chamber of Deputies	0.08	0.08
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Dummy indicating if federal deputy holds an official leadership position in his/her party	0.12	0.11
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Number of projects approved	-0.13	-0.12
	(0.06)*	(0.06)*
Percentage of roll call votes that the deputy voted following the indication of the government leader	-0.51	-0.51
	(0.11)**	(0.11)**
Mean percentage of amount of money allocated through budgetary amendments executed	1.45	1.44
	(0.17)**	(0.18)**
Age at the election	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)

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9   We are grateful for an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Age squared	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Percentage of days the deputy held office: total days effectively in office	-0.95	-0.96
	(0.21)**	(0.21)**
Constant	1.15	0.23
	(0.80)	(0.77)
N	1,876	1,876
Pseudo R-squared	0.35	0.35

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

We found that some variables had the expected effect on electoral success, thus confirming our hypothesis. The variable that indicates career ambition had the expected negative effect. Since it has an ordinal scale, moving from regressive to static and to progressive ambition, our theory expected that the likelihood of victory would decrease as a candidate attempted to get elected to a higher office. In other words, running for reelection provides a higher probability of electoral survival than running for a higher office, but a lower probability than running for a lower office. In model 2, we explored these relations in a non-linear way, evaluating the effect of each career choice on electoral success separately and in contrast with static ambition. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between static and regressive ambition as far as a candidate's electoral success is concerned. However, those who run for a higher office are less likely to win than those who run for reelection.

Other variables in both models are also relevant and present very similar results in the analysis. Being a main office holder in the current legislature, campaign expenditures in the current election, votes in prior elections, and the mean percentage of budgetary amendments executed in the electoral district all had the positive effects on electoral success that were expected. The number of bills proposed and approved, voting with the government in roll call votes, and the percentage of days spent in Congress all had statistically significant effects, but ones contrary to expectations, reducing the likelihood of electoral success instead of increasing it.

Our main goal was to use the above model to control for the impact of incumbents' individual attributes on their election success and to estimate the improvement in the overall predicted probability of victory when contrasting running for the different offices. We can simulate the likelihood of the incumbent winning elections for different offices, with identical traits in all the independent variables being kept at their mean value. To do so, we used the Clarify commands in Stata 10 to estimate the first differences in the

"ambition" variable, indicating how a change from static to progressive ambition results in changes in the probability of winning (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).[10]

We found that an incumbent was 19 percent more likely to win an election if he or she decided to run for reelection instead of running for a higher office and 15 percent more likely to win reelection than winning an election as a state deputy (regressive ambition), including the entire period of the 50th to the 53rd Legislatures in our study. Thus, we claim that running for reelection has a more predictable outcome for federal deputies: they know they are more likely to win reelection than any other office. In other words, the uncertainty of victory is higher when running for offices outside the Chamber of Deputies.

Finally, in table 3 we modeled career choices directly by using a multinomial logistic regression composed by the four options incumbents have at the end of the term: to retire, run for a lower office (state deputy), run for reelection, or run for a higher office. The base outcome category is running for reelection, or static ambition. Hence, we contrasted static ambition with retirement, regressive ambition, and progressive ambition.

Table 3: Multinomial Regression Coefficients, with Robust Standard Errors and Clustering by Federal Deputy, to Explain Career Choice: Brazil, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd Legislatures

Variables	Retire	Regressive Ambition	Progressive Ambition
Titular in the current legislature	-1.15	-2.33	-2.71
	(0.27)**	(0.41)**	(0.28)**
Campaign expenditures measured in reais (BRL) in the previous election	-0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)**	(0.00)	(0.00)**
Number of votes in the previous election	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Percentage of votes received in the municipality in which the federal deputy received more votes in the previous election	-0.43	0.38	-0.50
	(0.46)	(0.74)	(0.66)
Number of terms in office	0.16	-0.11	0.22
	(0.07)*	(0.19)	(0.10)*

10   Our simulations are based on the results of model 2 in table 2.

Variables	Retire	Regressive Ambition	Progressive Ambition
Position in the directing table of the Chamber of Deputies	-0.23	-0.03	-0.05
	(0.21)	(0.18)	(0.07)
Dummy indicating if federal deputy holds an official leadership position in his party	-0.56	-0.31	-0.25
	(0.34)	(0.47)	(0.27)
Number of projects approved	0.04	0.28	0.39
	(0.32)	(0.41)	(0.29)
Percentage of roll call votes that the deputy voted following the indication of the government leader	1.06	0.62	1.05
	(0.33)**	(0.37)	(0.38)**
Mean percentage of amount of money allocated through budgetary amendments executed	-1.09	-1.81	0.13
	(0.52)*	(1.03)	(0.58)
Age at the election	0.14	-0.20	-0.12
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.08)
Age squared	-0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Percentage of days the deputy held office: total number of days effectively in office	-2.03	-0.60	1.11
	(0.45)**	(0.69)	(1.00)
Constant	-4.61	3.99	-0.59
	(2.75)	(2.69)	(2.40)
N			1,447
Pseudo R-squared			0.27

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Most of the variables that are statistically significant differentiate the choice of static ambition in relation to retirement and progressive ambition. Campaign expenditure in the prior term – used as an indication of the candidates' "war chests" and potential for obtaining funds in the current election – decreases the likelihood of them retiring and increases the likelihood of them running for a higher office. In other words, the incumbents who received more money in the prior elections were more likely to run for important offices (static and progressive ambition) than to retire. The number of terms in office and voting with the government in roll call votes increases the candidates' chance of retiring and of running for a higher office, unlike static

ambition. So neither increases the probability of static ambition. These are factors that push incumbents away from the Chamber of Deputies.

There are more differences in relation to static ambition between those who retire and those who set their sights on a higher office. There are not many differences between those who have static and regressive ambition; only one variable is significant in differentiating these two options. In addition, two variables are only significant in increasing the likelihood of static ambition in relation to retirement: the percentage of the amount of money allocated through budgetary amendments and the percentage of days the deputy held office.

6   Conclusion: Implications for Legislative Politics and Professionalization

While some pundits criticize high reelection rates as being evidence of a "political mafia" at work, the maintenance of a core of specialized and experienced legislators is widely seen by the literature on legislative elections and political careers as being essential to an effective and efficient legislature. Where legislators have experience and specialization, they can effectively oversee bureaucracy, provide a counterweight to the powerful executive branch (in presidential systems), and generally produce higher-quality policies and legislation. Many systems lack experienced legislatures, however; staff turnover is frequent, and a legislative term is merely a brief stop on the path to other political opportunities.

In some systems, immediate reelection is prohibited by constitutional or other legal restrictions. But in most Latin American countries, reelection rates are a function of legislators' career ambitions. Where legislative seats are valuable career goods, reelection rates should be high. Consequently, if the legislature does not foster long-lasting careers where politicians can gain the experience and knowledge necessary to become professionals, reelection rates should be low – and the chances of the legislative branch becoming a central actor in policy formulation are bleak.

Despite the fact that federal deputies have improved their direct and indirect salaries,[11] the Brazilian Congress does not seem to provide enough

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11   There has been a continuous increase in legislators' salaries over the years. In 1985, their overall remuneration (including indirect payments for housing and travel) was approximately BRL 11,000. By 2003, this had almost increased six-fold to approximately BRL 60,000. A similar increase can be seen in staff resources, rising from BRL 10,000 in total salary in 1995 to BRL 35,000 in 2003. However, the maximum number of staff per legislator has not changed; it is 20.

professional or institutional incentives for incumbents to want to seek re-election yet. In reality, though, quite the opposite is the case. The decision-making process in the Chamber is centralized, lying in the hands of a small number of legislators; the executive constantly interferes in legislative business by issuing decrees (*Medidas Provisorias*) and unilaterally calling urgency procedures regarding specific bills; individual legislators can be substituted by party leaders at any time in standing and special committees, decreasing the incentives to acquire further specialization and experience; legislators are not allowed to initiate legislation on specific issue areas such as budgetary and administrative policies; and so on.

Immersed in such an unwelcoming institutional environment as they are, it is puzzling that the great majority of legislators keep on running for reelection. This paper has argued that the reason incumbents tend to run for reelection is that the career decisions federal deputies make are mostly determined by the predictability of their electoral success. When confronted with the classic dilemma enunciated in the title of this article, the majority of incumbents apparently decide to stay in office.

Brazil's case provides evidence that challenges theoretical arguments suggesting a direct relationship between the organization of Congress and career choice, as pointed out by Mayhew's now classic idea of electoral connection. Although we believe that reelection-oriented legislators have more incentives to increase the internal complexity of the legislative body, professionalization is not directly driven by legislators' career goals and ambition. Furthermore, incumbents will continue to run for reelection, even if it is to a Congress that is weak, if that proves to be the safest electoral bet. Hence, to understand career choices in such settings, it is important to look for the reasons in the electoral arena and not in the legislative one.

We therefore provide supporting evidence for Swift's idea that legislative organization and career goals are only ephemerally related to each other (1988). She based her claim on the finding that legislators' career goals and electoral success were high in the early American House of Representatives during the domination of the Speaker's era (1789 to 1914). In those days, decision-making in the House was more centralized and committee chairs were subordinated to the Speaker. Swift argued that political party strength and realignment was a more likely explanation of the internal organization of the American House than legislators' career ambitions.

The organizational structure of Brazil's current Chamber of Deputies resembles that of the early American House of Representatives: the Speaker prevails over committee chairs. However, in Brazil, we claim that the way the Chamber is organized is much more a consequence of a preponderance of the executive sector in policy-making than of career ambitions or partisan

realignments. Otherwise, one would expect a Congress with more budgetary powers and professional incentives. In fact, the Constitution of 1988 and the Rules of the Chamber (*Regimento Interno*) clearly give the executive sector more legislative and budgetary power than Congress.

Cunow et al. (2012) have shown that pork-barrel politics was fundamental to assure that the executive branch maintained most of its powers in the 1988 Constitution, accrued during the military dictatorship in Brazil. Using data from the most recent constitutional convention in Brazil, they show that legislators with greater prospects for long careers were actually less likely to support any strengthening of the legislative sector. According to them, legislators' short-term need for pork trumped their long-term interest in a stronger institution. In accordance with our argument here, static ambition led to a weaker Congress instead of a more institutionalized or professionalized one.

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Não sei se fico, não sei se vou: Explicando ambição de carreira pelo sucesso eleitoral no Brasil

Resumo: Por que concorrer à reeleição quando seria mais lógico, diante dos incentivos do sistema político, concorrer para outros cargos considerados mais atrativos? Esse artigo analisa os fatores que influenciam tanto as escolhas de carreira política como os determinantes do sucesso eleitoral para os deputados que decidiram concorrer não apenas para reeleição mas também para outros cargos eletivos. O Brasil é tomado como estudo de caso, um país tipicamente caracterizado pela fragmentação partidária e executivo forte. Argumenta-se que legisladores concorrem para reeleição porque esta é a rota mais segura para sua sobrevivência eleitoral no sistema político brasileiro. A probabilidade de vitória é mais alta para aqueles que concorrem a reeleição do que para aqueles que concorrem para qualquer outro cargo eletivo. Como a escolha pela ambição estática é condicionada pelos resultados eleitorais e não necessariamente pelo desejo intrínseco do legislador de desenvolver uma carreira legislativa, a trajetória de carreira não necessariamente acarreta melhoras nas condições profissionais e institucionais do parlamento brasileiro. Desta forma, nossos achados lançam dúvida sobre as teorias que relacionam a trajetória de carreira de legisladores e a institucionalização do próprio legislativo.

Palavras-Chave: Brasil, reeleição, carreira política, profissionalização do legislativo, Deputado Federal