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Candidate Emergence Revisited: The Lingering Effects of Recruitment, Ambition, and Successful Prospects among House Candidates

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IN THE SUMMER OF 2013, MORE THAN A YEAR before the filing deadline for congressional candidates in most states, political commentators were already conceding most races for the U.S. House of Representatives to one party or the other. Only about 10 percent of House races were deemed to be in play by the Cook Political Report and the Rothenberg Political Report, the two sources on which most political analysts rely for district-by-district assessments. Why were so few districts thought to be in play? One reason is because one party—in the vast majority of cases, the

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party not holding the seat in the 113th Congress—was unable to field a strong candidate. That explanation raises questions about why strong potential candidates who might be able to mount a viable campaign may be reluctant to throw their hats into the ring.

Decisions by potential candidates for office about whether to run—and the political ambition that drives them to bear the costs and risks of pursuing elective office—are critical to the functioning of representative democracy. As Joseph Schlesinger pointed out, political ambition helps resolve classic principal-agent problems because it fosters popular control over the behavior of politicians.¹ Politicians who aspire to elective office must anticipate the interests and motivations of voters when they decide when and where to run. Much research places the strategic calculations of prospective politicians at the center of their decision-making process.² However, we also know that explaining who runs for office involves more than a strategic calculus about winning and losing. It also involves an understanding of the resources that individuals bring to bear, the costs and barriers associated with running, especially for high office, recruitment efforts by party and community leaders, and the roots of ambition itself.³

¹Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1966).

²See, as examples, Gordon S. Black, “A Theory of Political Ambition: Career Choices and the Role of Structural Incentives,” *American Political Science Review* 66 (March 1972): 144–159; David W. Rohde, “Risk-bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives,” *American Journal of Political Science* 23 (February 1979): 1–26; Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); and Walter J. Stone and L. Sandy Maisel, “The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning: Potential U.S. House Candidates’ Nomination and General Election Prospects,” *Journal of Politics* 65 (November 2003): 951–977.

³There is a vast literature on these subjects; see, as examples, Jonathan S. Krasno and Donald P. Green, “Preempting Quality Challengers in House Elections,” *Journal of Politics* 50 (November 1988): 920–936; David T. Canon, *Actors, Athletes, and Astronauts: Political Amateurs in the United States Congress* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Linda L. Fowler, *Candidates, Congress, and the American Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Thomas A. Kazee, *Who Runs for Congress? Ambition, Context, and Candidate Emergence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994); Jeffrey J. Mondak, “Competence, Integrity, and the Electoral Success of Congressional Incumbents,” *Journal of Politics* 57 (December 1995): 1043–1069; John Zaller, “Politicians as Prize Fighters: Electoral Selection and Incumbency Advantage,” in John G. Geer, ed., *Politicians and Party Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 125–185; L. Sandy Maisel, “American Political Parties: Still Central to a Functioning Democracy,” in Jeffrey E. Cohen, Richard Fleisher, and Paul Kantor, eds., *American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001), 103–121; Jennifer L. Lawless, *Becoming A Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Paul S. Herrnson, “National Parties in the Twenty-First Century,” in Mark D. Brewer and L. Sandy Maisel, eds., *The Parties Respond: Changes in American Parties and Campaigns* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013), 133–160.

THE CANDIDATE EMERGENCE STUDY

Nearly two decades ago, we began thinking seriously about how to advance the study of candidate emergence in congressional campaigns.⁴ Our goal was to design a study of candidate emergence that met four criteria: it would be systematic and include a large number of potential candidates and House districts; it would be designed so that it could study both those who actually ran for Congress as well as those who did not run; it would be sensitive to the varying contexts in which races are run around the nation; and it would provide detailed information about the perceptions, motivations, and characteristics of the potential candidates in the study.

Because of the importance of strategic considerations in theories of candidate emergence, we focused on a single election (1998) and office (a seat in the House of Representatives), which allowed us to take careful account of the strategic environment to which potential House candidates would respond, including the nature of the district, the quality of the incumbent, and the likelihood that the incumbent would or would not run for reelection.

The single-election/office focus also permitted us to target individuals in a national sample of House districts who, if they were to decide to run, would make credible candidates. This last point was important because much of the literature on congressional elections was concerned about the sources of competition and incumbent safety, including the apparent unwillingness of strong potential challengers to take on entrenched incumbents.⁵ By focusing on candidates deemed to have a chance of running a credible campaign, we reduced the pool of potential candidates from the constitutional definition (every citizen over 25 years old) to a far more manageable number of realistic potential House candidates.

In conducting the Candidate Emergence Study (CES) in the period preceding the 1998 elections, we identified strong potential House candidates in two ways. Our first approach was to survey individuals who were well placed to identify other individuals in their district who would make strong candidates for Congress, if they were to run. Almost all of these district expert informants who responded were either national convention delegates or county chairpersons, with a sprinkling of academic experts.

⁴L. Sandy Maisel and Walter J. Stone, "Determinants of Candidate Emergence in U.S. House Elections: An Exploratory Study," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22 (February 1997): 79–96.

⁵The literature on incumbent safety, much of it stemming from David Mayhew's seminal work, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974) is perhaps best summarized in the work of Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012) and of Paul S. Herrnsion, *Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington*, 6th ed. (CQ Press, 2012).

Second, we considered as potential candidates all sitting state legislators whose districts substantially overlapped with one of the sample House districts. We looked at state legislators because we know that, on average, about 50 percent of House members have service in their state legislatures on their resumes. We mailed an in-depth survey to the potential House candidates we identified, timed to arrive approximately six months before the filing deadline for House candidates in their state. We chose this timing because candidate fields are not yet firmly established six months out from the filing deadlines, but serious candidates will already have been giving a potential race some thought by that time.⁶ As a practical matter, this meant that most of the responses to the “1998 survey” actually responded in 1997. The survey focused on the potential candidates’ (PCs) perceptions of their district, the incumbent, their chances of winning the nomination and general-election stages, if they decided to run in 1998, the chances they would actually run, the chances they would run at some point in the future, their chances of winning if they were to mount a future run, and detailed questions about their career background and aspirations.⁷

UPDATING THE 1998 STUDY

In this article, we report on an extension to the CES that covers the candidate entry behavior in congressional elections between 1998 and 2012 of all PC respondents to the 1998 survey. Because any potential candidate must consider many factors before deciding to run for the U.S. House—including the fact that incumbents tend to win re-election at high rates and the high costs of running, both monetary and in disruptions to one’s career and personal life—and because our pool of potential candidates was chosen either because someone thought that they would be a well-qualified candidate (whether they had shown any interest or not) or merely because they held a seat in the state legislature,⁸ few potential candidates in our original survey actually ran for the House in 1998. Thus, we were not surprised by the low yield of actual House candidates from our sample,

⁶Congressional primaries in 1998 were spread over six months of the calendar year; because filing deadlines were half a year earlier in the first states than in the last, we felt that one mailing would reach respondents when the information about various aspects of the electoral contexts on which they would base their decisions would vary widely.

⁷The survey instrument, data, selected publications, and other material related to the study can be found on the CES website: <http://ces.iga.ucdavis.edu/>.

⁸While many congressmen served in their state legislatures before running for the House, relatively few of the total pool of nearly 7,000 state legislators serving at any one time ever ran for Congress.

although the absence of a substantial number of actual candidates in the 1998 elections was a limitation.⁹

Theoretical Considerations

We explore the effects of characteristics and perceptions reported in the 1998 surveys on whether potential candidates ran for the House at some point during the period since our original study. We focus on five explanations that were significant in our earlier studies: potential candidates' ambition for a House seat; their perceptions reported in the 1998 survey of their future prospects if they were to run at some point following the 1998 elections; their perception of the costs of running for Congress; the source and extent of encouragement or recruitment they experienced prior to the beginning of the 1998 electoral cycle; and their self-assessment of their own strategic and personal strengths as a candidate. We have not re-contacted respondents to the 1998 potential candidate surveys, so we are limited to their answers given in that initial study to explain entry behavior that may have occurred a decade or more after the survey was conducted.¹⁰

A potential candidate's ambition to hold a seat in the House of Representatives is a first step in the decision to run for office. Candidates without the ambition to serve do not even ask the subsequent questions about the costs of running, the costs of serving in office, the chances of winning and like matter.¹¹ Interest in a congressional career is a first step in the decision-making tree; all subsequent decisions are dependent upon a positive answer to the question of whether a PC has the ambition to serve.

Once potential candidates determine that they are interested in service in the House, their decision whether or not to run—and when to run—is

⁹As a result, many of our studies from 1998 focused on the probability of running in 1998 as subjectively estimated by potential candidates a year or more before the 1998 elections. As examples, see Stone and Maisel, "The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning," 962; Walter J. Stone, L. Sandy Maisel, and Cherie D. Maestas, "Quality Counts: Extending the Strategic Politician Model of Incumbent Deterrence," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (July 2004): 479–495; Cherie D. Maestas, L. Sandy Maisel, and Walter J. Stone, "National Party Efforts to Recruit State Legislators," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30 (May 2005): 277–300; Sarah A. Fulton, Cherie D. Maestas, L. Sandy Maisel, and Walter J. Stone, "The Sense of a Woman: Gender, Ambition, and the Decision to Run for Congress," *Political Research Quarterly* (April 2006): 235–248; Cherie D. Maestas, Sarah A. Fulton, L. Sandy Maisel, Walter J. Stone, "When to Risk It? Institutions, Ambitions, and the Decision to Run for the U.S. House," *American Political Science Review* 100 (May 2006): 195–208.

¹⁰Our data are also limited by the fact that district lines, in many cases, were altered after the 2000 and again after the 2010 census and by our inability to track movement of our original respondents from one district to another, if any. This restriction has limited our ability to use many of the questions from our original survey, for example, the time a respondent has lived in his or her congressional district, or evaluations of the current incumbent (who might have changed over the period under study), but many others are still applicable.

¹¹Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, and Stone, "The Sense of a Woman," 235–48 and Maestas, Fulton, Maisel, and Stone, "When To Risk It?" 195–208.

determined by a series of cost (and benefit) factors. PCs must assess their own qualifications and resources as they relate to strategic qualities (ability to raise money, to fund their own campaign, to organize a campaign staff) and personal strengths (ability to solve problems, to work with others, to lead). PCs make strategic decisions regarding the chances they have to win an election; they must decide whether the immediate upcoming election—the election of 1998 in the case of our study—represents their best opportunity to win or whether postponing an election run will increase the chances of winning. Similarly, they look at the personal costs of running including lost control over leisure time and time with family, career opportunities, and drain on personal finances.¹² Each PC must look at all of these factors, but the decision-making process is not a neat and orderly set of responses to questions. Rather, these factors are interrelated and visited at differing times and given differing emphasis by different individuals.

Finally, while congressional candidacies are essentially self-started, encouragement to run or active recruitment by political leaders (or lack of these factors) can push PCs in one direction or the other. The Hill committees of the two national parties (the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee) spend time and resources to convince PCs who they feel will be strong contenders to run for office—and those efforts are important in the decision-making processes of PCs.¹³ Local party organizations and community groups do much of the same sort of recruiting, seeking to find the best candidates to run in their cities and towns.

These five factors—all found to be of importance in our previous work in which the dependent variable was the PCs' perceptions of their chance of running in 1998 (or beyond)—remain theoretically interesting and worthy of exploration with data based on whether previously identified PCs actually ran in subsequent elections.

As a theoretical point of departure, we employ a simple model that draws directly on our earlier work applying and modifying the standard rational-actor model of candidate entry based on an expected utility calculus:¹⁴

$$U(O) = P(B) - C$$

¹²Maestas, Fulton, Maisel, and Stone, *Ibid.*

¹³L. Sandy Maisel, Cherie D. Maestas, and Walter J. Stone, "The Party Role in Congressional Competition," in L. Sandy Maisel, ed., *The Parties Respond: Change in American Parties and Campaigns* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 121–38; Maestas, Maisel, and Stone, "National Party Efforts," 121–138; Maisel, "American Political Parties"; and, Herrnson, "National Parties in the Twenty-first Century."

¹⁴Black, "A Theory of Political Ambition"; Rohde, "Risk-bearing and Progressive Ambition"; Jacobson and Kernell, *Strategy and Choice*.

In this formulation, the utility of holding office (in this case, a seat in the House of Representatives) is a function of the probability of winning the seat (P) times the “benefit” (B) associated with the office, minus the costs of running for the seat. The higher the utility the individual has for a seat by this equation, the higher the probability he or she will run. Because we do not have data on the opportunity structure facing potential candidates in the series of elections under study, we rely on basic indicators available from the 1997 PC surveys. In employing this model, we equate the benefit term with attraction to a career in the House of Representatives, which is also what we mean by “ambition” for a House seat. Our use of this model does not contradict our assumption that ambition is a fundamental consideration for explaining candidate emergence.

Data

The design of the original Candidate Emergence Study is described in great detail in our earlier work and will not be repeated here.¹⁵ As noted, the study was based on potential candidates identified either by district informants as potentially strong candidates for a House seat (even if the PC had never shown an interest in running for Congress), or by state legislators whose districts overlapped substantially with one of the 200 House districts in our random sample of districts. For this study, we begin with the Potential Candidates who responded to our 1998 survey ($N = 1,122$) and record whether they had run in congressional elections between 1998 and 2012, using Federal Election Commission reports to determine candidacies. We noted whether the PC ran in a primary and/or a general election and how many times the PC ran.¹⁶ The resulting data set, then, is composed of data on the history of each PC’s entry or non-entry in a House campaign combined with their responses to the detailed survey we conducted before the 1998 election cycle.

Results

As noted, very few potential candidates we identified in the original study actually ran in 1998, which was the election immediately following our study (1.9 percent of potential candidates ran in a primary or general election for the House in 1998). In any single year following 1998, the

¹⁵The Candidate Emergence Study research design is described most thoroughly in Stone and Maisel, “The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning,” 956–59.

¹⁶More PCs ran in primaries than in general elections, of course, because success in a primary in the vast majority of cases (except those few running as independents or those nominated in party conventions) is necessary to qualify for the general election ballot.

TABLE 1
Breakdown of Entry Behavior by Type of Campaign and Potential Candidate

	<i>State Legislator, Not Named by Informant</i>	<i>State Legislator, Named by Informant</i>	<i>Named, Non-State Legislator</i>	<i>Full Sample</i>
Percent who made at least one run in either stage	5.4	13.2	10.3	7.6
Percent who ran in primary	5.2	13.2	10.0	7.4
Percent who ran in general election	3.0	7.8	5.6	4.3
N	692	129	301	1,122

largest percentage who ran in either stage was 2.0 percent (in 2000 and 2002), while the smallest percentage running in a single year was in 2008 (when .8 percent ran).

As we state above, the prospect of running for the House of Representatives presents potential candidates with a formidable set of challenges and obstacles, which means that even among potential candidates selected because they would be credible candidates, few actually make the leap in any single year. However, by aggregating the data across the eight elections between 1998 and 2012, we can maximize the number of individuals who eventually became actual candidates. Even aggregating these candidacies reveals that a distinct minority of the PC respondents ever took the leap to actual candidacy.

Table 1 shows that 7.4 percent ran in a primary campaign at some point; 4.3 percent ran in at least one general election, but because of the obvious overlap, only 7.6 percent ran in at least one election in the years included, either primary or general.¹⁷ The first column comprises state legislators whom we surveyed because their state legislative district significantly overlapped with one of the congressional districts in our sample, but who were *not* named by a district informant as a strong potential candidate. The second column comprises PCs who were in our sample because they were named by one of our informants and who were also state legislators meeting the district-overlap criterion. The third column contains PCs named by our informants who were not state legislators. Finally, the fourth column summarizes the results for the entire sample.

¹⁷These percentages ignore the smaller numbers of potential candidates who ran in multiple years, almost all of whom won their first election to the House and ran in subsequent years as incumbents. The percentage of potential candidates who ran is slightly higher among non-respondents (9.0percent) than among respondents. The percentage of the sample that ran and won a seat in Congress is small (1 percent of respondents; 2 percent of non-respondents). These comparisons suggest that respondents to the PC survey may have slightly under-represented the strongest potential candidates.

The data in the table match our rough expectations. Most of the PCs in our sample were included because they were state legislators from overlapping districts, but who were not identified by district informants as strong potential candidates. Relatively few of these (5.4 percent) ran for Congress at any point between 1998 and 2012; only 3 percent of them ran in a general election during that period.¹⁸ A higher percentage of PCs named by our informants who did not serve in the state legislature ran, which suggests that informants had a good sense of who might be a qualified candidate. Finally, even more of the named PCs who were state legislators ran than is the case for those who were named but not serving. State legislators have already demonstrated that service in elective public office is appealing to them, so this is not surprising. The difference between columns 1 and 2 indicates that not all state legislators are alike in their ambition, personal and strategic qualities, and electoral context. Some represent districts that overlap their House district more than others; some are more ambitious; some view service in the state legislature as more fulfilling than moving to Congress. These sorts of patterns have been well established in the literature on state legislators and political ambition.¹⁹

Our task is to explain candidate emergence among PCs in the period between 1998 and 2012. Respondents who eventually ran in either a major-party primary or a general election for a U.S. House seat at least once are coded as having run (and are coded 1); all others are counted as not having run and are coded 0.²⁰ As a first step, we examine the relationship between PCs' perceptions that they would run when responding to our 1998 survey and their eventual candidacy. Only about 30 percent of the 1998 sample rated their chances of running in the future as even or better, with only 9 percent saying that they were extremely likely to run. Figure 1 shows that only about a fifth of those who said they were "extremely likely" to run in the foreseeable future actually ended up as candidates during the 1998–2012

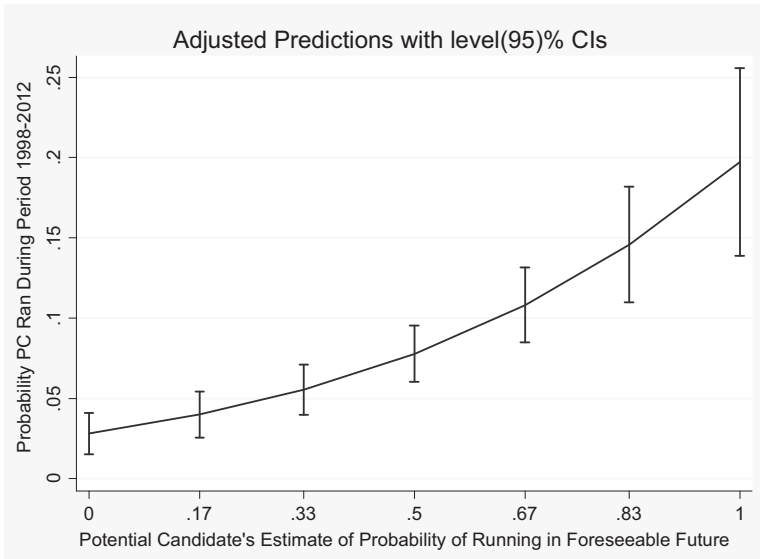
¹⁸A few PCs ran in a general election without running in a primary because they ran as independents or were nominated for special elections by party conventions, which is why in columns 1 and 3 the percentage who ran in any election is slightly higher than the percentage running in a major-party primary.

¹⁹John C. Wahlke, Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan, and Leroy C. Ferguson, *The Legislative System: Explorations in Legislative Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962); James David Barber, *The Lawmakers: Recruitment and Adaptation to Legislative Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965); Gary F. Moncrief, Peverill Squire, and Malcolm E. Jewell, *Who Runs for the Legislature?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001).

²⁰Unfortunately, we cannot determine how many 1998 potential candidates eventually ran for some other office; we do not see a theoretical reason, for the purpose of explaining candidate emergence, to distinguish those who ran and won a primary from those who ran and lost, thus we choose to dichotomize our sample of PC into eventual candidates or non-candidates.

FIGURE 1

Relationship between 1998 Prediction of Running in the Future and Entering a Race, 1998–2012 (Error Bars Indicate 95% Confidence Intervals)



period.²¹ Predicting something as complex as running for the House is extremely difficult, even in the near term, because those who intend to run must reexamine their decisions up to the last minute as the political context they face changes in unpredictable ways.²²

As noted, we begin our analysis with the expected utility model of candidate entry. Consider first the *P* and *B* terms. To measure potential candidates' chances of winning, if they were to run, we asked respondents to provide their "best estimate of how likely it is that you would win your party's nomination for Congress if you were to seek it in the foreseeable future [and] ... the general election for the seat if you were to win your party's nomination in the foreseeable future." Responses to both questions were on seven-point scales ranging from "Extremely Unlikely" to "Extremely Likely." We transform responses into "pseudo-probabilities" ranging in numerical value from .01 (for "Extremely Unlikely") through .50 (for "Toss-

²¹Figure 1 is based on a logistic regression of the candidate-entry variable (whether the potential candidate ran for Congress in any election between 1998 and 2012) and responses to a question on the 1997 PC survey asking respondents to estimate the chances that they would run for a House seat "in the foreseeable future." The survey instruments and data sets from the Candidate Emergence Study are available on the project website: <http://ps.ucdavis.edu/people/wstone>.

²²Louis Sandy Maisel, *From Obscurity to Oblivion: Running in the Congressional Primary*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Stone and Maisel, "The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning," 961.

up”) to .99 (for “Extremely Likely”). Because winning a seat entails winning *both* the nomination and general-election stages, our prospects measure is the estimated chances of winning the general election multiplied by the estimated chances of winning the nomination.²³ It is important to recognize that this measure of electoral prospects is less likely to reflect a careful assessment of the immediate structure of opportunity in the district, because so much change is likely between the time of the survey and the years when potential candidates ultimately may have decided to enter a race. Whereas we could show that electoral prospects in 1998, the first election after the survey was conducted, reflected such factors as the quality of the incumbent, the likelihood that the incumbent would run for reelection, whether the district was marginal in the previous election, and the party of the incumbent,²⁴ these sorts of factors were unknown to potential candidates responding to our question about their chances if they were to run at some point in the future (and remain unknown to us in our analysis). Instead, estimates of future prospects are likely to reflect more-enduring characteristics of the potential candidate herself, including the skills of the potential candidate, her social network, and her reputation for competence. These estimates are likely to become less relevant over time as district characteristics change, but they almost surely have a component that endures beyond the next few elections.²⁵

As explained in our earlier work,²⁶ we treat general attraction to a career in the House of Representatives as a measure of “ambition” for a seat in Congress and a stand-in for the *B* term in the expected-utility formulation. Accordingly, we asked potential-candidate respondents to indicate the “attraction to you personally of a political career in the U.S. House of Representatives.” Responses were coded on a seven-point scale from “Extremely Low” to “Extremely High.”²⁷

²³Stone and Maisel, “The Not-So-Simple Calculus,” 963. The mean estimate of PC prospects for a future run by this measure were .38 with a standard deviation of .29. About 14 percent of the sample estimated their chances effectively at zero, while 5 percent thought their prospects virtually assured them a seat if they were to run.

²⁴Stone, Maisel, and Maestas, “Quality Counts,” 487.

²⁵Among potential candidates who run in any given year, we can observe their future prospects, as stated in the 1998 survey. The average future prospects among those who ran in 1998 was only slightly higher (.53) than the average future prospects for winning among those who ran in 2012 (.45). There was a slight average (but insignificant) decline over the 12-year period. The decline in the estimated chances of running was steeper (but still not significant), from .76 among those who ran in 1998 to .54 among those who ran in 2012. These enduring values of chances of running and winning among PCs who ultimately ran suggest that there is an element linked to the individual PC, rather than being fully dependent on the district and national context.

²⁶Fulton et al., “The Sense of a Woman,” 235–238; Maestas et al., “When to Risk It,” 195–198.

²⁷The mean response was just above the mid-point on the scale, with 15 percent of respondents indicating an extremely low attraction to a House career, and 18 percent stating their attraction was extremely high.

TABLE 2
*Logistic Regression of Running for Congress on Elements of Expected Utility Model,
 1998-2012*

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Attractiveness of a House career	.199*	.079
Subjective chances of winning in future	1.112*	.481
Loss of privacy	-.299*	.142
Democrat	.410	.265
Named PC sample	.193	.264
Log likelihood		-225.80
Chi squared		33.66
Pseudo R-squared		.069
N		921

* $p < .05$.

We have a battery of questions designed to capture the range of costs that potential candidates might consider as relevant, ranging from the loss of privacy that inevitably attends running for high office, to lost income and other career costs, to concerns about being victimized by negative ad campaigns, and to other costs related to campaigning. We have argued that the relevance of these costs is largely in explaining ambition for a House seat, since most costs are known well in advance and would be more likely to affect the attractiveness of a House career rather than the decision to run in any given year.²⁸ One dimension of cost, however, is consistently significant in explaining the emergence of candidates over the period under study — the loss of personal and family privacy when one runs for high office — so we include this measure in our analysis to capture the “C” term in the expected utility model.²⁹

Table 2 presents the results of regressing candidate emergence during the 1998–2012 period on covariates associated with the expected utility model of candidate entry, plus a control for the party of the PC and a design control to indicate whether the PC was in the sample of individuals identified by district informants (0 = state legislators not named by district informants as strong potential candidates).³⁰ We see significant positive effects for attractiveness or ambition for a House seat and the subjective chances that PCs gave themselves of winning a seat if they were to run at

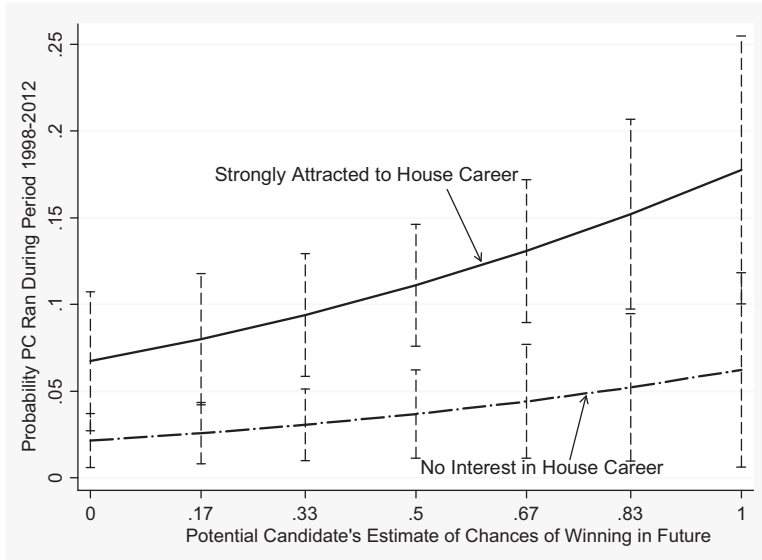
²⁸Maestas et al., “When to Risk It,” 197.

²⁹Respondents were asked to indicate how much each factor (in this case “Lost personal and family privacy”) would influence their interest in running for the U.S. House. They were encouraged to answer “even if you have no interest in running for the U.S. House.” Responses were scored on a four-point scale from “Makes no difference” to “Strongly discourage.”

³⁰We have run rare-events logistic regressions replicating all results reported, with no difference in the effects presented.

FIGURE 2

Running for Congress by Attraction to House Career and Subjective Chances of Winning (Error Bars Indicate 95% Confidence Intervals)



some point in the future. We also see, as expected, that the cost of lost privacy associated with a House candidacy can decrease the chances of running.

Figure 2 shows the magnitudes of effects of ambition and prospects. As the theory expects, there is evidence of a conditional relationship between ambition and prospects. Among potential candidates who expressed no interest in a House career, estimated prospects of winning if they were to run has no significant effect (although the observed slope is modestly positive). Among those who are strongly attracted to a House career, in contrast, the PC's judgment of prospects has a significant positive effect. This is consistent with our claim that ambition is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for candidate emergence. Among individuals ambitious for a House career, prospects positively predict an eventual run for Congress, whereas among those not attracted to a House career, prospects have no significant impact on running. As ambition for a House seat increases, the effect of prospects kicks in to motivate a run.

We turn next to covariates describing potential candidates' background, characteristics, along with recruitment effects as possible explanations of candidate emergence. The first three variables in the table were the basis of our evaluation of the expected utility model in Table 2. We include education, age, gender, and income as relevant to the personal resources individuals might have that may affect decisions to run. Recruitment contacts are

TABLE 3
Logistic Regression of Running for Congress on Expected Utility and Background Variables

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Attractiveness of a House career	.056	.090
Subjective chances of winning in future	.964	.586
Loss of privacy	-.405**	.153
Education	.436 [†]	.199
Age	-.160	.134
Female	-.446	.396
Income	-.100	.093
Recruitment contacts index	.287**	.076
Self-assessed campaign skills and resources	-.235	.178
Self-assessed personal qualifications	-.015	.252
Democrat	.243	.280
Named PC sample	-.233	.310
Log likelihood		-207.19
Chi squared		56.90
Pseudo R-squared		.121
N		864

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

an important potential factor affecting candidate entry because candidates must marshal support and resources from a wide variety of sources, and because recruitment efforts by others may stimulate interest in running. The recruitment variable is a count of the number of sources ranging from the national party to local sources, district and community sources, and from the potential candidate's family that contacted the PC about running for the House. We also include two indices capturing PCs' self-assessed campaign skills and resources, and their personal qualifications for office.³¹

Several conclusions stand out from the analysis (Table 3). First, neither attractiveness of a House career nor subjective prospects for victory are statistically significant in this model. Exploring the reasons for this will require additional analysis, but the primary explanation appears to be that other variables capture the effects of these two factors once they are included in the model. At the same time, being recruited is likely to be a proxy for (and to stimulate) high self-assessed electoral prospects, and it may encourage individuals to run. Other such effects on the elements of the expected utility model will become apparent below.

³¹The campaign skills and resources measure is based on self-assessed name recognition in the district, ability to raise campaign funds, ability to fund one's own campaign, public speaking ability, national party support, and interest-group support. The personal qualifications measure is based on self-assessed ability to solve problems, to work effectively with other leaders, and dedication to public service.

TABLE 4
Logistic Regression of Running for Congress on Elements of Expected Utility Model and Recruitment (standard errors)

	Model 1	Model 2
Attractiveness of a House career	.158 [*] (.085)	.162 [*] (.085)
Subjective chances of winning in future	.772 (.523)	.770 (.522)
Loss of privacy	-.306 ^{**} (.147)	-.313 ^{**} (.147)
Recruitment contacts index	.219 ^{***} (.075)	
Recruited by national party/committee		.627 ^{**} (.311)
Recruited by contact in local community		.708 ^{**} (.315)
Democrat	.462 [*] (.275)	.450 (.277)
Named PC sample	.048 (.300)	.009 (.294)
Log likelihood	-208.01	-206.10
Chi squared	44.27	48.11
Pseudo <i>R</i> -squared	.096	.105
<i>N</i>	827	827

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

A second conclusion from this table is that recruitment apparently has a powerful and lasting effect on actual candidate emergence. This, too, bears a closer look, to which we turn momentarily. Third, the cost variables of both lost privacy and education have the effect we would expect on running for Congress. And, although more-educated PCs are more likely to run, the same cannot be said for those with higher income; nor does gender have an effect on PCs' willingness to run. Finally, we do not see an effect of self-assessed campaign skills and resources, or personal qualifications.

Table 4 provides additional evidence on the importance of recruitment in explaining PCs' entry behavior. The recruitment contact variable in Table 3 is a composite index. Without exploring all the permutations possible from the component measures, Table 4 reports an analysis first (in Model 1) of the overall recruitment index in the context of the expected utility model estimated in Table 2. The results indicate a strong effect of recruitment and a loss in significance of the chances of winning. This finding makes sense, since, as we will demonstrate, recruitment is associated with more confidence by the PC in his or her long-term chances of winning. Thus, the recruitment variable absorbs some of the effect originally observed in the prospects variable. In Model 2, we present two indicators of the source of contact: whether the PC was urged to run from a national party source (either the national party or the congressional campaign committee), and whether the PC was recruited by local community leaders other than party officials. Both are significant, and each independently increases the probability of running by about five points.

Finally, it is instructive to examine how the variables we have analyzed relate to two of the critical components of the expected utility model: the

TABLE 5
Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of Ambition and Subject Prospects of Winning on Selected Predictors (standard errors)

	<i>Ambition for a House Career</i>	<i>Subjective Chances of Winning a Seat in Future Run</i>
Loss of privacy	-.078 [*] (.010)	-.037 [*] (.008)
Education	.004 (.012)	-.004 (.010)
Age	-.093 [*] (.009)	-.072 [*] (.007)
Female	-.103 [*] (.026)	-.013 (.021)
Recruited by national party/committee	.014 (.031)	.035 (.025)
Recruited by contact in local community	.140 [*] (.025)	.088 [*] (.020)
Self-assessed campaign skills and resources	-.009 (.013)	.078 [*] (.011)
Self-assessed personal qualifications	.056 [*] (.019)	.042 [*] (.016)
Democrat	.013 (.021)	-.032 (.018)
Named PC Sample	.084 [*] (.024)	.075 [*] (.020)
Constant	.608 [*] (.132)	.030 (.109)
Adjusted R-Squared	.292	.281
N	827	827

Note: Both dependent variables scaled 0–1.

* $p < .01$.

ambition (or *B*) and prospects (or *P*) terms. As we will see, some of the variables we have analyzed that do not directly affect the decision to run do have important effects on these factors which ultimately shape who becomes a candidate. Table 5 presents regression analyses of each of these two variables on selected independent variables used in Table 3 to explain candidate–entry behavior. We have re-scaled the ambition or attraction to a House-career variable to 0–1 for this analysis, so that the magnitude of the coefficients between the two equations can be directly compared.

Consider first the variables that significantly affect both ambition for a House seat and PCs' estimation of their prospects of winning: loss of privacy and age are both negatively associated with ambition and perceived chances of winning in a future run for the House. Recruitment effects, especially those initiated locally, are an example of a factor that works both directly on the probability of running and indirectly through ambition and prospects. Of course, we must be careful about inferring causation in results such as these. For example, if potential candidates are reasonably good at estimating their prospects for victory, the statistical effect of recruitment may result in part from the interest recruiters have in selecting a winner. It may also be true, of course, that recruitment efforts boost an individual potential candidate's confidence in his or her electoral prospects.

Notice that women do not see their chances of winning as lower than those of men, but they are significantly less likely to entertain ambitions for a House career. Thus, while we did not observe a significant difference in the

probability of running between men and women, the gender difference in ambition may be a factor in the background that ultimately reduces the number of women running for and serving in Congress.³²

While we do not want to make too much of self-assessed measures of qualifications for office and campaign skills and resources, the effects of these variables in Table 5 fit with other work showing the importance of these dimensions of candidate quality in congressional elections.³³ That both campaign skills and resources and personal qualifications are positively associated with prospects suggests that potential candidates understand the importance of their personal reputations for competence and skill in government, as well as the resources and abilities they bring to the campaign process. It is also of interest that campaign skills do not affect ambition, while personal qualifications are significantly related to attraction to a House career.

Finally, notice that the design control indicating whether the potential candidate was named by a district informant as a potentially strong candidate is significant in both equations. We do not take this to mean that being named caused PCs to have greater ambition for a House career or a higher estimate of their electoral prospects if they were to run. Rather, this effect almost certainly reflects the quality of judgments made by our informants when they identified strong potential House candidates. Naturally enough, they named individuals whose chances of winning would be relatively strong. Moreover, it is probable that they named individuals with higher average congressional ambitions, despite our request that they name individuals who may or may not have ever considered running for that high office.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the sources of political ambition and the decision making of potential candidates as they become actual candidates is a central question

³²The puzzle of why women are under-represented in public office is complex, as our results suggest. For two important statements addressing gender and ambition, see Sarah A. Fulton, "Running Backwards and in High Heels: The Gendered Quality Gap and Incumbent Electoral Success," *Political Research Quarterly* 65 (May 2012): 303–314; Richard L. Fox and Jennifer L. Lawless, "Uncovering the Origins of the Gender Gap in Political Ambition," presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.

³³For example, see Jeffery Mondak, "Competence, Integrity, and the Electoral Success of Congressional Incumbents," *Journal of Politics* 57 (December 1996): 1043–1069; William T. Bianco, *Trust: Representatives and Constituents* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Walter J. Stone and Elizabeth N. Simas, "Candidate Valence and Ideological Positions in U.S. House Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (April 2006): 371–388; Mathew K. Buttice and Walter J. Stone, "Candidates Matter: Policy and Quality Differences in Congressional Elections," *Journal of Politics* 74 (July 2012): 870–887.

for democratic theory, but it presents a number of significant challenges to the empirical researcher. Identifying a pool of potential candidates who can be studied is one such challenge.³⁴ Another is combining data on potential candidates with the strategic calculations, opportunities and barriers, and myriad choices they must make when they decide whether to run for any particular office. In the Candidate Emergence Study, we sought to advance our understanding by focusing on the strategic, political, and personal factors that help explain why individuals who met a threshold criterion of “strong potential candidate” chose to run or not to run. A problem with our approach, however, was that although we had a large number of potential candidates in our study, very few of them actually decided to run in the election immediately following the period of our study.

In this research, we have sought to address this limitation by expanding the window of opportunity for a potential candidate to emerge as a candidate. While there are inevitable limitations to this extension, we have been able to show that the basic contours of our understanding from the original data collection hold when explaining candidate entry in the 1998–2012 period. Potential candidates are influenced by their prospects for success, by the benefit they attach to the office, and by the costs associated with making a run. However, perhaps the most striking result from this extension is the enduring effect of interpersonal contacts that encourage individuals to run for office. It is not surprising that this is true, since running for and holding high office is an intensely social (as well as political) experience. We found a strong effect of both national and local recruitment contacts, especially as a direct effect on the probability of entry as a candidate. However, the pervasive effect of local, community-based contacts in all of our analyses is a robust finding that reinforces the local and inter-personal nature of running for Congress. It borders on cliché to quote Tip O’Neill’s famous nostrum that “all politics is local,” but our evidence certainly reinforces that piece of conventional wisdom.

Our research, of course, does not attempt to predict the future; if anything, we have shown that predicting the past from the more distant past is challenge enough! But it does speak to that future. Our pool of potential candidates was identified more than a decade before the most-recent year included in this study. Some aspects of the political context remained the same over that period; thus, we know that strong, highly

³⁴An alternative approach to ours has been creatively introduced by Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless in their surveys of “feeder” occupational groups from which most potential candidates for elective office in the United States come. See Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Takes a Candidate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Lawless, *Becoming a Candidate*.

qualified potential candidates, particularly those in the minority party, will be hesitant to run in districts in which their party (and, therefore, they themselves) have little chance of winning. But other aspects of congressional politics evolve. The two parties' Hill committees, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee, increased their activity and became much more strategic in recruiting candidates. Our findings indicate that these efforts should bear fruit, inasmuch as potential candidates see their electoral prospects as improved when "objective" experts say they have a good chance.

Perhaps a greater change toward the end of the period was the emergence of local Tea Party chapters. Their self-defined role was to hold politicians to account, and they have not been hesitant to challenge incumbents in strong Republican areas. While the Tea Party organizations did not exist when our original research was done, it is not difficult to see the impact of their appeal on potential candidates, men and women interested in what Congress does (or does not do) who are encouraged to run by fellow Tea Party sympathizers. That is exactly the kind of interpersonal contact that leads potential candidates to become actual candidates, the kind of local influence that we have seen and on which Speaker O'Neill so famously relied. From our research, we would not be surprised to see more locally stimulated challengers to incumbents appear in future primaries and more emerge as nominees, either by beating incumbents or by winning primaries when incumbents decide that they would rather retire than fight. An important implication of this local perspective in the context of the Tea Party movement, however, is that it has clear implications for the Republican Party and therefore for the nation.*

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