Ambition and Reelection: Theoretical Considerations*

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1 Introduction: Where’s the Career?

Most everybody is ambitious about their own careers. Most of us aspire to be promoted to positions with greater responsibilities and benefits and have a clear sense of what we mean by a “successful career.” Politicians are no different, and there is no apparent reason why they should be. However, unlike what happens in other occupations, politicians are forced periodically—i.e. at the end of each term they serve—to make a decision about what to do with their careers. This decision is made under the uncertainty about their ability to continue their careers according to their plans. The possibility of electoral defeat spares no one in spite of all that politicians do to avoid being voted out of office. Thus, at the end of each term, politicians must ponder what they want to do with their careers or where they want to go next. Politicians inform their decisions with their beliefs about their performance in office—or their performance as challengers—and their assessments of the difficulty of winning office in the following election. This raises the question about why some politicians decide to stay in office. Concretely, why do some politicians decide to get reelected while others seek election in “higher” or even “lower” offices? And also, why are some politicians more successful in having lasting careers? In this dissertation, I inquire about the factors that explain career decisions and career durations.

This topic is not new. The vast literature that stems from the U.S. case has conjured up—to use Mayhew’s own words—a quite stylized version of
the career politician. Politicians are characterized as ambitious individuals who desire to have long and successful careers (Schlesinger, 1966). Likewise, ambitious politicians are believed to be primarily concerned about their reelection because this is the prerequisite to achieve whatever their ultimate goals may be. Additionally, their behavior is described to be rationally oriented to attain precisely those goals (Mayhew, 1974). These elegant assumptions laid the foundations that allowed other scholars in the field to build on them to produce solid theories to account for the behavior of politicians and different dynamics of legislatures.\footnote{The examples abound. For instance, see Black (1972), Brady et al. (1999), Cox and Katz (1996), Fiorina (1994), and Rohde (1979) for explanations growing out of Schlesinger’s “ambition theory”; and Aldrich (1995), Ansolabehere et al. (2001), Arnold (1990), De Boef and Stimson (1995), Herrera and Yawn (1999), and Lipinski (2001) for works that build up on Mayhew’s reelection-seeking legislators.} However, as parsimonious as these assumptions are, they do not travel automatically to settings different to the one from which they originated, namely the U.S. case (Morgenstern et al., 2002; Morgenstern and Nacif, 2002). In other words, theories of legislative behavior may be found wanting when applied to cases where the legislative is not as institutionalized as the U.S. Congress, including Latin America.

As will be discussed later, there are important assumptions in the literature that do not necessarily hold in all Latin American cases. In particular, legislators do not appear to be “single-minded” reelection seekers. In fact, reelection rates vary widely in the region from countries, such as Mexico or Costa Rica, where immediate reelection to the legislature is constitutionally prohibited, to countries where a small proportion of sitting members of congress get reelected, such as Argentina or Brazil, and to countries where a majority of the congress is reelected, such as Chile. This variability in reelection rates challenges the ability of extant theories to account for the behavior of Latin American legislators.

It may also indicate that careers are erratic—or even nonexistent—given that politicians may only serve a few terms at best. If Latin American legisl-
lators are not primarily interested in getting reelected, how can we explain their behavior? What can be said about their “careers”? I shall argue that Latin American politicians are ambitious actors, who are concerned about their careers, and that we could apply rational actor models to explain their behavior. But, to analyze the careers of Latin American legislators, we need to adjust some assumptions made in the literature that do not particularly apply in the region.

Political careers are necessarily multipronged phenomena. Politicians consider a wide variety of issues when making career decisions, which may range from the intangible—including their charisma or the strength of their convictions—to the concrete—such as availability of campaign funds or the number of votes obtained in the last election. It would be tremendously difficult to map the career decision process in which politicians routinely engage in a complete and systematic fashion. Instead, I focus on career decisions that politicians make routinely and in the durations of their careers. These are but two particular dimensions of political careers, but these are dimensions that can be directly observed. Career trajectories can be traced from electoral records and as such they offer empirical evidence from which I am able to infer the decision calculi made by politicians about their careers and also the effects of those decisions on the duration of their careers.

Political careers are rich phenomena that are full of interesting anecdotes important to evaluate the decision making process in which politicians embark. It may be possible to track a few illustrative careers in depth through various means (participant observation, interviews, ethnography). However, such approach would have limited ability to generalize about what explains the particular career paths taken by politicians or why some careers are longer than others. The systematic approached followed in my research is depleted from the illustrative anecdotal evidence. But, the loss in detail in overly compensated by the ability to make generalizations. Besides the analysis of decisions and durations, the cases selected also allow me to offer insights
about the effects that different institutional settings have on political careers.

Patterns of political careers in Latin America differ with respect to the career patterns that emerge from the literature inspired by the U.S. case. Schlesinger’s and Mayhew’s strong assumptions imply that careers ought to be linear in nature. That is, politicians would get elected into office, stay in the same office for a number of terms, and then eventually move up to higher office. This need not be the case in Latin America. For instance, in his analysis of the Brazilian case, Samuels (2003) suggests that holding a post in the National Congress is considered a “stepping stone” for a fruitful career aimed at coveted positions at the local level, such as governor or mayor of a large city. This example illustrates that career paths may vary according to the particular attributes of their contexts. This does not imply that explanations about careers have to be *ad hoc* or on a case-by-case basis. It does imply, however, that great care is required to have the theory fit the cases. In fact, those particular attributes of the context can be known and, therefore, can be accounted for. Career paths need not mimic those of U.S. politicians, but being different does not imply that they cannot be explained using rational-actor models.

This chapter proceeds as follows. In section 2, I justify the substantive and theoretical importance of studying political careers. Section 3.1 elaborates the theoretical foundations needed to inquire about political careers paying particular attention to ambition theory and theories of incumbency advantage. Section 4 discusses the assumptions about the U.S. case that do not necessarily hold in the Latin American case and refines the theoretical framework needed to explain career patterns in the region. Based on these arguments, in section 5, I offer testable hypotheses about the factors that help explain careerism outside the U.S. Section 6 succinctly recaps the main ideas discussed in the chapter, and offers a description of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.
2 Career politicians and the quality of democracy

The question about political careers is at the heart of the idea of democratic representation. In one of its most basic forms, political representation implies the desire of politicians to keep their jobs and the ability of the citizenry to decide whether to renew the mandate of their representatives (Manin, 1997; Mansbridge, 2003; Pitkin, 1967; Przeworski et al., 1999). In this sense, accountable politicians are supposed to act in the best interest of their constituents and are supposed to care for the consequences that their behavior in office has either for them or their parties. Politicians are keenly aware that elections are frequently repeated events and that citizens assess their performance when deciding for whom to vote. Therefore, the concern of politicians for their future provides citizens with mechanisms to hold them accountable; this is precisely what Mayhew aptly labelled “the electoral connection.” Likewise, the concern of politicians for their future manifests itself through their desire to be reelected and to have prolonged careers. At least, this is what the stylized model of the career politician implies.

As Dahl (1989) pointedly explained it, contemporary, large-scale, democratic societies necessarily require discussions to be held, and decisions to be made without all parties involved being present. Thus, one of the defining features of democracy is the presence of elected officials at decision-making instances. Prerequisites that restrict who is eligible for office have long been abolished—e.g., restrictions based on gender, race, property ownership, or literacy. So, virtually any citizen may be elected into office. However, there are clear advantages for the quality of democracy when a society develops a professional class of individuals willing to devote themselves solely to the political activity.

In particular, political careers enhance the idea of democratic representation for two reasons. First, citizens are better served by career politicians.
The electoral connection provides incentives for politicians to promote the interests of their constituents, or otherwise citizens would not reelect them. Second, senior legislators are more effective and are better able to represent the interests of their constituents while in office because of the expertise they gain after years of service. I now elaborate on both counts.

The first count is not new, but it is a quite clear one. The connection with the electorate is instrumental for citizens to hold their representatives accountable. In fact, this may be the strongest option available to citizens to make their representatives see after their interests. Clearly, constituents may write letters to their representatives or voice their concerns at meetings with them or their party leaders. But, the vote is a powerful tool to reward responsive politicians and punish ineffective ones. If politicians are not interested in a long term career, this powerful tool becomes futile (Przeworski et al., 1999). Career politicians are desirable because they are more responsive to the demands of their constituents than ephemeral politicos serving single terms.\(^2\) The literature reiterates that the behavior of politicians is largely driven by their career interests (Cain et al., 1987; Mayhew, 1974; Rae, 1967), and as a result politicians establish long-term relationships with their constituents because they know that their careers hinge on maintaining a loyal base of support. Citizens are better served by politicians over whom they may exert even a modicum of influence to have politicians respond to their needs. Thus, careerism enhances democratic representation because citizens

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\(^2\)The accountability link between citizens and politicians does not necessarily break in countries that ban reelection to the legislature, such as Costa Rica or Mexico. Costa Rican politicians are willing to visit their constituencies and do long hours of tedious case-work. This may seem counterintuitive because there is no apparent immediate gain in their doing so. However, by keeping their constituents happy and loyal to the party, Costa Rican deputies help the performance of the party at presidential elections. The party that secures the presidency wins access to the bureaucracy, which allows the party leadership to reward those hard-working and loyal rank-and-file members. Thus, it is in the best interest of politicians to put up with the case-work in order to further their own careers—which are closely intertwined with the fate of the party (Carey, 1996). See also Camp (2002, 1995) and Smith (1979) for a description of the Mexican case.
may develop stronger bonds with career politicians and the latter need to be responsive to the needs of the former in order to further their careers.

Second, democratic representation is also enhanced when politicians are experienced, effective legislators. Indeed, legislatures benefit when they are populated by career politicians. Legislatures become institutionalized which allows them to be more influential in the creation of policies. Furthermore, as seniority increases, legislators more actively sponsor bills and more efficiently secure their passage (Hibbing, 1991).

Career politicians help the legislature become a more institutionalized and professional body with a stable membership, internal division of labor, and universal rules (Polsby, 1968). That is, individuals who are willing to stay in office for the long haul are also interested in devising an internal structure for the legislature that helps them attain their career goals. Legislators respond better to the needs of their constituencies when the legislature has clear rules and an internal division of labor because they can allocate their time more effectively to both the production of public policy and to constituency service. A logic consequence that ensues from the division of labor is that legislators may become experts in narrow policy ranges (Krehbiel, 1991). This policy expertise no only allows legislators to produce better public policies but it also provides them with greater leverage to influence policy outcomes and enhances its ability to exert checks on the executive.

Additionally, seniority is correlated with a more efficient legislative behavior. In his longitudinal study of careers in the U.S. House, Hibbing (1991) offers convincing evidence of the relevant contributions to the legislative process made by senior members, which are disproportionate to the contributions made by novice members. As their tenures increase legislators become more active in legislative tasks including floor appearances—to speak and offer amendments—and bill sponsorship. Also, legislators tend to become more specialized and efficient. The enhanced legislative efficiency is not necessarily the result of the fact that senior members have access to leading positions
in the committee or party structure. The strong relationship between tenure and effectiveness holds even when controlling for leadership positions. Thus, careerism enhances democratic representation because it helps legislators become more effective at their jobs and it allows legislatures to become more professional and institutionalized.

In sum, given that legislatures play an important part in democratic societies—as the focus for discussion of diverging interests and decision making—then career politicians enhance the quality of democracy because they strengthen legislatures. Career politicians eliminate the need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ at the beginning of each legislative period because of the accumulated expertise of senior members. Voters can use the politicians’ track records to hold them accountable by assessing whether their performance really responds to the needs of the community. By doing so, citizens send strong signals to politicians that their behavior in office will be scrutinized. Thus, career politicians adjust their behavior in office to satisfy their constituency in order to secure their careers.

Therefore, from a normative point of view it is relevant to study political careers because it offers insights about crucial aspects of democratic representation. On the one hand, the study of political careers helps assess the strength of the electoral connection and the extent to which citizens use their votes as means to keep their representatives in check. On the other hand, it sheds light into the internal structure of legislative organizations, and provides information about the effectiveness of legislative bodies that are populated by career politicians. Contemporary democratic institutions require professional politicians. Thus, it is important to study the factors that allow politicians to decide to continue their careers and also the factors that explain the duration of their careers.
3 Ambition and Reelection Revisited

Career politicians have to reconcile simultaneously their personal ambitions to have a successful career with the interests of the constituency to whom they owe their seat (Fiorina, 1977; Mayhew, 1974). As rational actors, politicians act strategically in order to keep their seat, or as the case may be, to move to a more coveted position. In their strategic calculations, politicians need to consider how the decisions they make affect the support they will get from their constituents in the following election. The study of political careers requires that we take a broad look at the behavior of politicians and that we consider them to be both agents who represent the interest of their constituencies as well as rational actors who care about their destinies and act accordingly.

The idea of “political careers” intersects two main bodies of literature. Namely, it is directly related to theories of legislative behavior and also to theories that explain incumbency advantage. Career politicians are clearly interested in getting reelected and their behavior in office is guided precisely by their ambition to have a long and successful career. On the other hand, career politicians need to become experts at winning elective office. In the following pages, I explore these literatures to identify their assumptions in order to adjust them to the Latin American case. I also infer from these theories what the archetypal career looks like. These exercises allows me to develop a framework for the analysis of career decisions and durations in Latin America.

3.1 Ambition Theory

This theory assumes that the structure of political opportunities available for politicians molds their ambitions. That is, the institutional arrangements of a particular position affect the preferences of politicians to retire, stay, or move to higher office. Ambition theory assumes that the behavior of politicians is
a response to the goals of their office (Schlesinger, 1991, 1966). Schlesinger’s influential work elaborates the idea of ambition in several ways.

First, he contends that the desires and motives of individuals are shaped by the political opportunities available. Such opportunities are structurally determined in the sense that the political structure molds the preferences and choices of politicians. Second, given the relevance of the structure of political opportunities, politicians respond primarily to the immediate demands of the institutional arrangement in which they operate. Therefore, ambition theory explains political behavior from the ambitions of politicians. Third, Schlesinger categorizes the ambitions of politicians based on the ‘direction’ they tend to follow. Politicians can exhibit discrete ambition when they want a particular office for a specified term and then withdraw from public office. Politicians exhibit static ambition when they seek a long career in a particular office, or they can have progressive ambition when they aspire to obtain an office that is more important to the one in which they currently serve.

Following Schlesinger, Black (1972) and Rohde (1979) formalized ambition theory and developed ways to empirically test it. Based on a decision calculus devised by Riker and Ordeshook (1973), Black defined the utility function of holding office as the difference between the benefits derived from being in office, accounting for the probability of electoral victory, and the costs associated with campaigning for and holding onto office. Formally, Black postulated the following utility function for office-seekers:

\[ U(O_i) = (P_{io} \times B_{io}) - C_{io}, \]

where \( U(O_i) \) is the utility of an office for an individual; \( P_{io} \) is the probability of attaining that office; \( B_{io} \) is the benefit associated with holding that office; and \( C_{io} \) are the costs incurred by the individual while running for that office. These studies of Black and Rohde are relevant not only because they both showed that politicians do in fact aspire to higher offices; their research
also elaborated on the factors associated with the career decisions made by politicians. Their findings suggest that politicians take into consideration individual factors such as their electoral strength and seniority. Additionally, politicians take into consideration several aspects of the electoral environment of the prospective seat to assess their probability of winning. This assessment involves analysis of whether the incumbent is running, the “safety” of the seat in electoral terms, the relative size of the district, and a general sense of its levels of competition.

In short, ambition theory helps us explain the shapes of political careers because it allows us to model relatively simple utility functions about the decisions that politicians make as the end of their mandates approaches. These decision calculi include joint assessments of the value of holding office and the probability of attaining such office, on the one hand, and evaluations of the costs associated with seeking that particular office, regardless of whether the individual is seeking reelection or election to higher office, on the other hand. Typically, these assessments take into consideration personal features of the candidates as well as characteristics of the electoral arrangement in which they participate.\(^3\) Therefore, these relatively simple calculi allow us to compare the expected utility associated to holding different offices. The comparison of the expected utility derived from holding different offices allows me to establish a hierarchy of the different offices available. Thus, it is possible to ascertain precisely what constitutes progressive, static, or regressive ambition. Moving to offices with higher expected utility would constitute a “progressive” move, seeking reelection implies static ambition, and moving to offices with lower expected utility amount to showing “regressive” ambition. In later chapters, I offer a rank-ordering of the different offices available for

\(^3\) Ambition theory has been also used to explain a wide array of phenomena including voluntary retirement (Jones, 1994; Kiewiet and Zeng, 1993), why some senators seek the presidency and other do not (Abramson et al., 1987), why weak challengers are not deterred from running for office (Banks and Kiewiet, 1989), the relationship between ambition and policy responsiveness (Maestas, 2000), and even membership in the Soviet Politburo (Ciboski, 1974).
the cases under study. I assess the value each office by deriving the expected utility associated with holding that particular office.

3.2 Incumbency Advantage

Ambition theory elucidates aspects related to the calculations made by politicians about what they consider to be the best way to promote their careers. In other words, ambition theory informs us about the specific ways in which politicians try to further their careers. In turn, theories that explain incumbency advantage offer key insights about why incumbents are able to hold on to their seats. That is, once politicians decide where to run for office, incumbency advantage is helpful explaining why some contestants are more successful than others at winning office. Thus, from this literature I substantiate why some factors help me explain career decisions and durations.

The core assumption of the incumbency advantage literature is that holding office gives legislators an upper hand vis-à-vis their non-incumbent counterparts. In general, scholars in this field explain how different factors related to incumbency advantage affect electoral competition on different levels. Elections are by definition events whose results are uncertain because, in essence, all participants in an election have a positive probability of winning (Przeworski, 1991). However, the probability of winning is not necessarily equal for all candidates. Incumbency advantage explains how the probabilities of winning or losing are not homogenously distributed among the participants in electoral races. That is, there are several factors that “bias” the probabilities in favor of some participants and against other ones. Some of these factors are particularly relevant to the study of political careers and as such, I discuss them briefly in what follows. These factors include the effects of seniority, partisanship, and electoral performance.

Politicians make their career decisions under uncertainty because the risk of electoral defeat is always present. However, the risk of defeat is not the same for everybody all the time. Incumbency advantage theory contends
that senior legislators are better able to serve their constituents because they have access to better positions and greater access to resources that can benefit the district. As such, seniority creates an incentive for citizens to vote for incumbents because doing otherwise would put into office individuals with little ability to deliver goods to the district (King and Zeng, 2000; McKelvey and Reizman, 1992). Thus, seniority is a factor that strongly offsets the risk of losing an election. For instance, Finocchiaro and Lin (2000) show that the risk of electoral defeat for members of the U.S. Congress is at its highest point on the first term, it then gradually declines in subsequent terms and slightly rises after several terms to reflect “constituency fatigue.”

In other words, incumbents are more vulnerable to electoral defeat the first time they are up for reelection and their vulnerability decreases as they serve more terms. However, there is a saturation point after the 7th or 8th terms after which experience and long tenure actually work against incumbents and increase, albeit slightly, their chances of losing election. Their findings ratify the idea that incumbents have an edge over challengers. But they also show that incumbents are not completely invulnerable because their advantage varies with their seniority.

The risk of electoral defeat also varies according to the party to which the politician belongs. According to Ansolabehere and Gerber (1997), U.S. House Democrats exhibit lower retirement rates than their Republicans counterparts. This incumbency advantage has produced legislative majorities favorable for Democrats. The authors model the decision to retire from office including factors such as the chance of winning reelection, the career opportunities outside the House, and whether the politician’s party will be in the majority. The logic behind this last factor suggests that the chance of retirement increases if politicians have little hope that their electoral victory will move the party from the minority into the majority. Thus, politicians who are members of dominant parties have an advantage over politician of other parties in their ambition to have a durable career.
The electoral performance of politicians in a given election may also alter their probabilities of electoral defeat in the subsequent election. That is, if a politician has performed well—in terms of the votes obtained or the margin of victory—then her chances of defeat in the following election may decrease. Indeed, scholars have found an increase of the percentage of the vote obtained by incumbents across all levels of tenure and also that margin of victory increases as tenure increases (Alford and Hibbing, 1981; Dawes and Bacot, 1998).\textsuperscript{4}

In section 5, I take these factors and formulate testable hypotheses about their relationship with the career decisions made by politicians and also how they affect the duration of careers.

4 \textbf{Latin America’s multifarious political careers}

The cursory review of ambition and incumbency advantage theories provides an stylized version of the typical career pattern. These theories suggest that once a career politician overcomes the hurdle of getting elected for the first time, it is somewhat easier to get reelected repeatedly. Being in office increases the probability of reelection because incumbency reduces the costs of attaining and holding office. As costs decrease for incumbents, the expected benefit form office actually increases (Cox and Katz, 1996; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997). As a result, politicians have great incentives to stay in office for several terms. Incumbents build up public recognition over time and collect benefits from office at reduced costs to the point where the benefits from office approach the expected benefits from higher office. Given that greater notoriety

\textsuperscript{4}Incumbency advantage is not an exclusive feature of single-member districts. Cox and Morgenstern (1995) provide a method to compute incumbency advantage in multi-member districts to compare with measures of incumbency advantage in single-member districts. Their results show that in multi-member districts the incumbency advantage increases but at a slower rate than in single-member districts.
increases their probability of winning office—even a higher one, politicians might decide to seek higher office.

This stylized model of the career politician owes its explanatory power to the rather parsimonious assumptions that support it. As mentioned, these assumptions pertain to the U.S. case, but do not necessarily hold for other cases. Borrowing from Morgenstern and Nacif (2002), I will discuss the basic assumptions from the U.S. case that require consideration before being “transported” to study careers in Latin America. I will also show how Samuels (2003) successfully uses ambition theory to explain career patterns in Brazil paying particular attention to the way in which he adapts the assumptions of the canonical model to adjust the intricacies of his case of study.

According to Morgenstern and Nacif, there are at least four basic assumptions from the models that explain congressional behavior in the U.S. that cannot be made in a more general model of legislative politics. The first assumption in the canonical model—and possibly the most important—is the reelection goal. As already discussed, the literature assumes that legislators worry particularly about their re-elections because that goal antecedes any other ulterior objectives that politicians may have. That is, attaining her re-election is an instrumental goal for a legislator to achieve whatever it is that she really is pursuing. As already mentioned as well, Latin American legislators are not as keen on reelection as their American counterparts—at least not uniformly. Since reelection rates vary from very high levels—comparable to the U.S. case, as in Chile—to very low levels, it is important to consider that career paths may lead to posts outside the National Congress.

Second, the model takes for granted key characteristics that are only germane to the U.S. electoral system. Namely, the model assumes that politicians compete in single-member districts that use plurality rule and that there is no intra-party competition. Electoral systems in Latin America use Proportional Representation (PR) formulas in multi-member districts in which electoral competition among co-partisans is quite prevalent. The fact
that there is more electoral competition—both among and within parties—in PR, multi-member district systems than in plurality systems has implications for the type of relationship that politicians develop with their constituencies. In contrast with plurality systems, PR systems typically use districts that are bigger in terms of area and magnitude from which several representatives are chosen by their inhabitants. The choice between plurality and PR systems is a trade off between identifiability and representation (see for instance Grofman and Lijphart, 1986). In PR systems, it is not obvious for politicians where “home” is given that their home districts are shared with other legislators, as Crisp and Desposato (2004) aptly discuss. Thus, politicians may have a difficult time building a strong core of supporters in their districts to help them get reelected because voters are constantly disputed among a plethora of candidates—incumbents and challengers, competitors and co-partisans alike—competing to represent the district.

Third, career politicians are assumed to operate under a stable two-party system. Such configuration allows for the formation of a clear majority party that may monopolize policy making and use it to its advantage (Cox and McCubbins, 1993). For instance, as Ansolabehere and Gerber (1997) point out, the advantage enjoyed by the Democratic party has implied that its members have had longer careers on average. The partisan life in other countries is more volatile than in the U.S., with higher levels of inter-party and intra-party competition and conspicuous party-switching. Those kinds of partisan structures hamper rather than promote careerism.

Fourth, the literature also assumes a given constitutional balance of power between the executive and the legislative branches. The alleged subordination of the legislative to the executive in so called third wave democracies could contribute to the varying levels of institutionalization and professionalization found in Latin American legislatures. Legislatures that are not institutionalized offer little incentives to their members to carve a long term career there and instead may motivate politicians to further their careers
someplace else.

Samuels (2003) study of careers in Brazil nicely illustrates how the canonical model can be employed to understand the motivation of politicians to develop their careers away from the national congress. The extant literature on the Brazilian legislature suggests that politicians there do not focus their energies on building long careers on the Chamber of Deputies. Instead, Brazilian deputies are known for the brevity of their service in office. Between 1945 and 1995, the average legislature was composed of 56% freshmen, 24% sophomores, 11% members with 2 terms served, 5% members with 3 terms served, and 4% members with 4 terms served (Samuels, 2003, p. 41). These data reveal that the vast majority of deputies served only one or two terms and then moved on. Samuels explores to where deputies move after their ephemeral service in the Chamber.

The few comparative studies on other cases focus on national-level careers thus largely ignoring positions in sub-national office as possible career moves. Samuels’ analysis of the Brazilian case elucidates that the opportunity structure faced by career politicians is not necessarily homogenous across countries. In a federal system, such as Brazil, governors or mayors of large cities may have access to significant resources making those positions desirable. Samuels studies the structure of political careers in Brazil using a cost-benefit analysis of holding different offices which allows him to compare how politicians perceive and rank different offices. Typically, the benefits derived from office include its emolument, different perquisites such as the size of the budget that the office controls, the ability to influence politics, franking privilege or airline tickets to visit the district, the potential for advancement, and so forth. Consideration of the probability of winning allows politicians to refine their assessment of the value of an office because their estimated probabilities of reaching a given post determines the expected util-

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5 See for instance, Smith (1979) or Carey (1996) for analyses of the Mexican and Costa Rican cases, respectively.
lity from that post. Indeed, a cabinet position may be the most desirable post but only a handful of people actually become ministers. Hence, the expected utility of a national portfolio for any given politician is close to naught because the probability of actually serving in the cabinet are infinitesimally small. Finally, the costs of seeking elective office can be estimated in monetary terms by considering campaign funds. Costs can also take into account other factors such as opportunity costs or greater accountability. However, measuring such costs or the costs of attaining non-elective offices can be rather cumbersome.

The analysis of the Brazilian case rests on three key assumptions of ambition theory that allow Samuels to apply the theory to a context different to the one from which it originally emerged. First, politicians are assumed to be instrumentally rational with regards to their careers. Politicians make career choices based on a rational calculus of benefits, probabilities of attaining office and the costs incurred for seeking a particular office. It is expected that politicians choose the alternative with the greatest expected utility. Second, politicians are assumed to have “progressive” ambitions. That is, politicians seek more attractive office when the expected benefits from it outweigh the costs. Third, political careers are assumed to be hierarchical. In this sense, it is possible to rank order different political offices—within and outside of the legislature—according to how desirable they are for politicians (Samuels, 2003, p. 16). These assumptions subtly adjust ambition theory to explain the behavior of Brazilian politicians. In particular, the idea of “progression” is redefined such that the mayoralty of a mid-sized city is considered as a better ranked office than a congressional seat. Brazilian politicians do wish

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6 Moving to higher office may imply a closer relationship with the electorate or may entail greater responsibilities that make the job more demanding. Increased workloads or responsibilities that may result from representing a larger constituency may be perceived as a burden of higher offices. Workloads and responsibilities may even be greater for politicians that move from the legislature to the executive—e.g. becoming mayor or governor—where they are directly responsible to the people and their tenure may be recalled.
their careers to progress. Nevertheless, progress is not where the canonical career suggests it is.

Samuels makes an interesting contribution to both the understanding of career patterns in a developing democracy and to the strengthening of the theory itself. He outlines and makes explicit the underpinnings of ambition theory and adjusts them to the case being explained. By doing so, Samuels develops a solid and appropriate theoretical framework to understand Brazilian career patterns. At the same time the explicative power of the theory is tested in a challenging setting. This is particularly useful for the present research project because it illustrates how to apply ambition theory to cases in which the legislature may not provide the incentives to develop long-lasting careers.

5 Hypotheses

As mentioned earlier, I focus on two separate dimensions of political careers, namely decisions and durations. Despite being different dimensions, I formulate the same hypotheses to explain why politicians make certain career decisions and also why some are more successful than others in furthering their careers. Even though I model these dimensions as separate ones, they are deeply intertwined with each other. Politicians make decisions about where to run because they believe that seeking election to a given office is the best way to further their careers given the information available to them at that particular point in time. They also believe that running for a particular office is the best way to further their careers, otherwise they would choose a different course of action. In other words, the duration of a career is related to the choices made by politicians at the different electoral junctures. Politicians jointly ponder about having a long, successful career, and about

7The careful way in which the theory is applied to the Brazilian case offers persuasive counterarguments of those critical of the use of rational choice theories to understand Latin American politics. For instance, see Weyland (2002).
the best way to achieve it. Thus, I assume that politicians make a single calculus—however complex it may be—about their careers based on their assessments they have available of the expected utility they may derive from their choice. Therefore, given that the decision process is the same for both dimensions, I use the same set of explanatory variables to explain changes in decisions and durations.

The discussion of the literature offered in sections 3.1 and 4 provides a framework for the analysis of these dimensions. The literature suggests that politicians calculate the expected utility of running from office based on their assessment of their personal characteristics and also on those of the electoral district in which they run for office. Nevertheless, these decisions are not taken in an institutional vacuum. Instead, the behavior of politicians is bounded and shaped by the institutional arrangements in which they operate.

As Carey and Shugart (1995) suggest, the electoral rules provide strong incentives for politicians to work on behalf of their own personal reputations or the reputation of the party to which they belong. In a nutshell, electoral systems provide incentive for politicians to promote the reputation of their parties if party leaders control access to the party label, votes are polled at the party level, and citizens cast partisan votes. Naturally, the inverse conditions—no control, no pooling, votes at the sub-party level—provide incentives for politicians to care about their personal reputations. Additionally, district magnitude also affects the behavior of politicians, but its effect depends on whether the electoral system allows for intraparty competition; that is, whether leaders have control of the access to the party label or not. If there is no intraparty competition, the incentives for personal vote seeking behavior decrease as the magnitude gets larger. In contrast, if there is party competition, the incentives for personal vote seeking behavior increase with magnitude because copartisans need to differentiate from one another—and from competitors from other parties (Carey and Shugart, 1995, 430). However, the effect of magnitude on personal vote seeking is mediated by the
ratio of copartisan candidates to the number of seats available in the district (Crisp et al., 2007).

Different incentives from the electoral system produce different types of behavior from ambitious, reelection-seeking politicians. These incentives ought to affect the “career behavior” of politicians as well. The typical career patterns in a given country should vary with the degree to which party leaders are able to control the behavior of their rank and file members. That is, career patterns ought to be more dynamic in systems that promote personal vote seeking incentives because such systems encourage politicians to develop direct ties with their constituencies. Thus, politicians assess the overall utility of different offices for their career plans with little or no consideration of how their individual career decisions affect the performance of their parties. On the other hand, in systems that promote party reputations, the career decisions of politicians are constrained by the assessments of the party leaders about the performance of the party. That is, party leaders may affect the decision process of politicians by suggesting certain career moves or even dictating whom should run where.

Therefore, I compare the Chilean and Colombian cases in order to assess the impact of different institutional settings on the career decisions and durations of individual politicians. In Carey and Shugart’s (1995) very own ranking of electoral formulas Chile is ranked as a system in which party reputation “matters significantly” (p. 427), whereas Colombia is described as a “personal-list system” in which candidates “need not have received party endorsement to use the party label” (p. 429). Chile and Colombia are interesting cases to study because their electoral systems are placed on opposing ends of the party vs. personal vote seeking incentives. Thus, careers in Chile should be more coordinated by the parties, while careers in Colombia should be more dynamic and heterogeneous.

I now turn to the formulation of concrete hypotheses to explain differences in career decisions and durations.
5.1 Individual factors

As mentioned, at the end of each term, politicians are forced to decide what they are going to do in the following election. They make this decision about the best way to further their careers based on all the information that they have available at that point in time. This is true for incumbents and challengers alike. Independently of whether someone has been in office during that period, as elections approach all politicians assess their chances of attaining office based on their personal experience and their evaluation of the competition levels in their districts.

As portrayed in the literature, seniority has an important impact on the ability of politicians to get reelected because it allows them to build a relationship with their constituents over time. Seniority is synonymous with experience and tends to be related effectiveness in the sense that senior legislators are expected to occupy leadership positions in committees and other high places in the legislature’s organization. Legislators in these positions are better equipped to modify the legislative agenda and affect the policy outcomes. Additionally, senior politicians are more renowned in their districts which makes it easier for them to seek election in higher office. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H1: The greater the seniority of a politician, the greater the likelihood of seeking election to the same office or to a higher office.

Additionally, past electoral performance may also affect the decisions that politicians make with regards to how to prolong their careers. Given that electoral defeat is an undesirable outcome, politicians consider their electoral strength when deciding whether to seek election in the same office, lower or higher office. Large margins of victory in the previous election suggest that candidates already have a strong base of support on which they can count for their next election, all else being equal. In contrast, small margins of victory imply that there are other candidates with considerable electoral support in
the district that can complicate the likelihood of successes in future elections. As mentioned, incumbents and nonincumbents make similar assessments. For instance, if a politician failed miserably in the previous election, he may consider running for a lower office. Also, if a politician came close to winning but lost by a small margin, she may feel encouraged and confident to try again to get the post in the following election. Thus, the margin of victory is an useful indicator for a personal factor that helps explain career decisions.\footnote{The operationalization of this variable is discussed in later chapters. It suffices to mention here that the margin of victory for losing candidates is smaller than zero, whereas it is greater or equal to one for the victorious candidates in the district.}

This may be formalized as the following hypothesis:

**H2:** *As the margin of victory increases, the likelihood of seeking election to the same office or to a higher office also increases.*

Regardless of how strong the electoral system encourages politicians to cultivate their personal reputations or those of their parties, party labels also play a role in the career decisions made by politicians. Membership to dominant parties provides an edge over politicians who are members of other parties. Thus, members of lesser known parties may face additional difficulties to fulfill their aspirations of reelection or higher office. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**H3:** *Membership in dominant parties ought to be related with an increased likelihood of seeking election to the same office or to a higher office.*

Furthermore, there are additional factors that favor some individuals in detriment of others, including incumbency status and gender. In section 3.2, I discussed at length the reasons why incumbents enjoy an advantage over their nonincumbent counterparts, so I will not elaborate any further. However, the incumbency advantage works against women because the majority of incumbents are men. Thus, as incumbents are reelected, the possibilities for
women to get elected decrease (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005). Thus, I formulate the last two hypotheses about personal factors:

**H4:** Incumbent candidates ought to have an increased likelihood of seeking election to the same office or to a higher office as compared to nonincumbent candidates.

**H5:** Female candidates ought to have a smaller likelihood of seeking election to the same office or to a higher office as compared to their male counterparts.

### 5.2 District factors

Politicians also consider in their career decisions their perceptions about the competition levels in their districts. As mentioned, elections are by definition uncertain events and the levels of competition are governed by a myriad of characteristics. Furthermore, there is no precise way to anticipate how competitive a race is going to be before election day. However, all politicians make their decisions under this uncertainty. That is, no one has privileged information that can use to their advantage. At best, politicians use the electoral results of the previous election to form an idea of how tough competition will be in the following one.

In general terms, the more competitive a particular election is, the more difficult it becomes to win a seat for incumbents and challengers alike. Now, there are several ways to account for the levels of competition of a given district. The degree of competitiveness of an electoral district is largely determined by the number of seats available and the number of candidates seeking to be elected to it. Thus, one can account for competition by considering the raw number of seats available (Carey and Shugart, 1995), or one may use a more nuanced measure, such as ratio of candidates to seats (Crisp et al., 2007). Thus, it may be that case that electoral competition decreases as the number of seats available in a given district increases because by definition
the district allows a larger number of legislators to obtain seats. Or, it may be the case that competition decreases as the ratio of candidates to seats decreases because there are fewer disputants per seat available. As a result, the probability of being elected into office increases with the number of seats being allocated in the district. In turn, electoral competition increases as the number of candidates increase because the size of the population is a fixed and finite amount. When a fixed amount of votes has to be divided among a larger number of candidates, the chance of earning a seat decrease for all candidates homogeneously. Therefore, I formulate the following hypotheses:

**H6:** As the levels of competition in the district increase, the likelihood seeking election to a different office increases.

**H6a:** As district magnitude increases, the likelihood of seeking election to the same office increases.

**H6b:** As the ratio of candidates to seats increases, the likelihood of seeking election to a different office increases.

However, not all candidates are equally strong. That is, competition levels do not affect all candidates equally. Vote shares may be concentrated on a few candidates or may be distributed rather evenly across a large number of them. Thus, it is important to account for the different forms in which electoral competition may manifest in a given district. The extent to which a district is the bailiwick of one or few candidates may scare away other competitors, forcing them to seek election to a different office. Additionally, the electoral weight of different candidates may be assessed by measures such as the effective number of parties. Such measures weight each party (or candidate, as the case may be) by its size in terms of votes garnered or seats attained. In general, it can be asserted that the greater the competition levels in the district, the greater the likelihood that the politician retires or experiences electoral defeat. The following hypotheses account for different forms of competition in the districts:
H7: As the district becomes dominated by one or few candidates, the likelihood seeking election to a different office increases.

H8: As the effective number of competitors increases, the likelihood of seeking election to a different office increases.

6 Conclusion: The road ahead

In this chapter, I have discussed the general theoretical considerations with regards to the behavior of professional politicians. It does so by bringing together the seminal works of Schlesinger and Mayhew on ambitious and reelection-seeking politicians, respectively, and discussing at length the behavioral implications of the theory. Then, I point out the restrictions of the basic assumptions in the model such that the model can be used to explain the behavior of politicians in other settings. This allows me to formulate hypotheses regarding factors that may explain careerism in Latin America, where politicians exhibit “dynamic” ambitions.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to assess the claims made about careers decisions and durations. As mentioned, I will compare the Chilean and Colombian cases in order to test the hypotheses in institutional settings that provide opposite incentives for politicians with regards to their behavior. In chapters 2 and 3, I offer a descriptive account of what careers look like in Colombia an Chile. In those chapters, I assess the shape of political careers by using broad, original data sets that cover electoral results for a variety of elective offices in the 1958–2002 period for Colombia, and the 1989–2004 period for Chile. These chapters show that politicians are interested in prolonged careers but that the particular shape that career take vary in the two cases.

Chapters 4 and 5 offer statistical analyzes of the impact of personal and district factors on career decisions and durations. To do so, I provide rank ordering of elective offices by considering the benefits, difficulty of winning,
and costs associated with different offices. The hierarchy of offices that emerges allows me to model the shape of the ambition that politicians exhibit. That is, I am able to ascertain whether a politician is moving to a higher or a lower office. I use multinomial logistic regression to evaluate the impact of individual and district factors in the decision of where to run for office. I use event history analysis to assess the effects of individual and district factors in the durations of political careers.
References


