The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning:

Potential U.S. House Candidates' Nomination and General Election Chances

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ABSTRACT

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We argue that as the individual qualities of potential House candidates (PCs) improve, their chances in both the nomination and general election chances become stronger. However the same is not true for two key characteristics of the district context in which potential candidates might run: the party of the PC in relation to the incumbent, and the partisan makeup of the district. As the partisanship of the district increasingly favors potential candidates, their chances of winning the general election go up, but their chances of winning their party's nomination go down. Likewise, potential candidates in the same party as the incumbent have much lower chances of winning the nomination stage and better chances of winning the general election than their counterparts in the opposite party.

We employ a survey of district informants in a random sample of House districts to measure the central variables necessary to explore these ideas. We find evidence for the following conclusions: incumbent and potential candidate quality both affect potential candidate chances, with "strategic qualities" generally having a stronger impact than "personal qualities." Potential candidate qualities have stronger effects than incumbent qualities, and positively affect prospective challenger chances in both the nomination and general election stages. District partisanship has essentially symmetric and very strong effects on potential candidate chances in both stages, negatively affecting nomination chances as the partisan makeup of the district favors the PC, and positively affecting general election chances. An expected parabolic relationship between chances of winning the seat and district partisanship clearly emerges in the analysis. These effects on PC chances are fundamental to our understanding of the sources of competition in U.S. House elections.

Potential candidates for high office think seriously about their chances of winning before they run. The better their chances of winning, the more likely they are to run. This proposition is central to the literature on strategic politicians and political ambition (Black 1972; Brace 1984; Jacobson 1989; Jacobson 1996; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Rohde 1979). The literature on strategic politicians tends to focus on national conditions that structure opportunity for potential House candidates. When conditions are favorable for a party, relatively high quality potential candidates come forward to run; when national conditions are not favorable, such candidates hold back because their chances of winning are diminished. Because high-quality candidates almost always bear a significant risk when they decide to run for higher office, they are especially sensitive to their chances of winning lest they squander their political resources on a fruitless effort (for example, see Jacobson and Kernell 1983: 23).

The literature on the incumbency effect in U.S. House elections arrives at similar conclusions about the importance of winning for potential candidates, although it focuses on the importance of local conditions – especially incumbency – that deter strong potential challengers from running. The explanation is widely accepted: Incumbents have an enormous advantage over most challengers in visibility and positive affect that they cultivate through the use of the perquisites and powers of their office (Abramowitz 1975; Cover and Brumberg 1982; Fiorina 1977; Mann and Wolfinger 1980; Mayhew 1974). Potential challengers presumably are aware of the incumbent's advantages, and are most likely to run when the seat becomes open (Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Fowler and McClure 1989; Fowler 1993; Kazee 1983). Because incumbents have staff subsidies and the frank, and can distribute benefits to their constituencies, they may not be vulnerable to challenge, even by potential candidates who might be substantially stronger candidates and better Representatives if they could challenge the incumbent in a fair contest. The incumbent-deterrence effect, therefore, is seen as severely distorting the process of electoral competition and representation.

Our purpose in this paper is to reexamine the question of potential candidate (PC) chances of winning a seat for the U.S. House of Representatives. We agree that PCs' chances of winning are likely to play heavily in their decisions about whether to run (Authors' work a). Indeed, it is precisely the

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importance of potential candidates' chances that motivates us to reexamine the question. We begin with an observation that much of the literature skips over: winning a House seat involves winning *two* distinct elections. In order to win the seat, the potential candidate first must win the nomination or primary stage, followed by the general election. The chances of winning the nomination are defined as the probability of winning *if* the individual decides to run. A PC's chance of winning the general election is the probability of winning *if* the individual wins his or her party's nomination. Both, therefore, are conditional probabilities, and the chances of winning the seat are computed by multiplying the probability of winning the nomination times the probability of winning the general election. Three conclusions follow from recognizing this simple fact: (1) The probability of winning the seat will almost always be lower than the conditional probability of winning the nomination or the general election;[1] (2) A strong chance of winning the nomination can be offset by a weak chance of winning the general election, and vice versa; and (3) The chances of winning each of the two stages of the process are formally independent, although of course, the chance of winning the seat is the joint probability of winning both stages.

The formal independence of PC chances in the two stages does not address the question of how other variables relate to them empirically. Our argument is that it is in understanding these relationships that the "not-so-simple" character of potential candidates' chances emerges. In the first place, there are clearly factors that tend to push nomination and general election chances in tandem. Characteristics of the potential candidates themselves are an obvious example. Across a set of potential candidates whose name recognition in their districts vary, those with greater visibility should, *ceteris paribus*, have higher chances of winning both the nomination and the general election stages. The same could be said for other attributes, such as fund raising ability, personal integrity, experience, and most other personal characteristics that can be considered resources when an individual runs for public office.

Are these sorts of variables enough to lead us to expect a consistent positive relationship between potential candidates' nomination and general election chances? We think not, because of how context may

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[1]The exceptions occur when one or both probabilities takes on extreme values of 0 or 1.0.

differentially affect chances in the two stages. One example of a "contextual" effect of this sort is incumbency. Potential candidates thinking about running for a House seat in which an incumbent is running for reelection must consider in which stage of the election they will face the incumbent. Potential candidates in the same party as the Representative must face the incumbent in the primary; those in the opposite party face the Member of Congress in the general election. Ignoring other factors at work on a potential candidate's chances, those who are in the same party as the incumbent typically face a more daunting task in winning their party's nomination than those who are in the opposite party. Therefore, the contextual variable "party of the incumbent" depresses the nomination chances of in-party potential candidates, compared with out-party potential candidates. In the general election, the situation is reversed, with the out-party candidate disadvantaged by having to face the incumbent.

However, whether a potential candidate is in the incumbent's party involves more than his or her relationship to the incumbent. Because House districts that are dominated by one party tend to elect incumbents from that party, being in the "incumbent's party" usually also means that one is in the majority party. District partisanship, we suggest, is a contextual variable that has offsetting relationships to a potential candidate's nomination and general election chances. In fact, because it is easy to confuse the two, it is important to separate as best we can the effects of district partisanship from incumbency (Alford and Brady 1989; Campbell 1997; Gelman and King 1990; Kostroski 1973). Since most incumbents share the partisanship of their district's majority, the natural predispositions of most voters in the district is to vote for the incumbent over the opposition party's nominee. It is possible to imagine, therefore, that it is the favorable partisan makeup of the typical incumbent's district, rather than anything incumbents do as officeholders, that accounts for their high reelection rates. Setting aside incumbency altogether for the moment, the relationships we expect between district partisanship and potential candidate chances are illustrated in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 Here]

General election chances for a potential candidate should improve as the partisanship of the district

becomes more favorable to the potential candidate. The reason is obvious: as the distribution of party identification increasingly favors the potential candidate so also does the tendency of the district to vote for the potential candidate, or *any* potential candidate of the same political party, as long as the nomination is in hand. Naturally, some PCs in the majority party have better prospects than others due to their greater skill or other personal attributes, but all potential candidates enjoy stronger general election chances as district partisanship is increasingly in their favor.

Much as being in the dominant party aids the potential candidate in the general election, being in the district majority party should *reduce* potential candidates' chances of winning their party's nomination. The relationship is negative because a party's nomination increases in value as district partisanship becomes more favorable. As the nomination becomes more valuable, competition from other potential candidates goes up, and the chances that any particular PC will win go down. This relationship is clearly demonstrated in V.O. Key's work (Key 1964: 416):

> If the Republicans usually attract a small vote in a jurisdiction, their primary nomination tends to go to an unopposed aspirant who has taken the trouble to get his name on the ballot. As the usual size of the Republican vote increases, primary contests occur more frequently.[2]

Whether, as we have constructed Figure 1, the negative effect of district partisanship on nomination chances precisely offsets its positive effect on general election chances is debatable, but we are confident that the probabilities associated with the two stages run in opposite directions. So long as this assumption is correct, the probability of winning the seat will exhibit a parabolic relationship with district partisanship, more or less as represented in Figure 1. In this illustration, the inflection point on the "seat" curve is exactly in the middle of the district partisanship scale because we portray the negative effects of district partisanship on nomination chances as symmetric with its effect on general election chances. With this assumption, one would conclude that the predicted high point of PCs' chances of winning their seat is in districts that are most balanced or competitive in their district partisanship. In other words, districts where the distribution of

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[2]Key reports data on Senate and House primaries showing monotonic relationships between contested primaries and partisan vote division in both political parties (Key 1964: 478, 488). See also Standing 1958 for a similar argument and results.

partisanship is balanced present the greatest opportunity for strong potential candidates because such

districts bestow the greatest *combined* chances of winning their party's nomination and the general election.

Districts where the partisan balance is most in the potential candidates' favor offer high chances of winning

the general election, but a very difficult hurdle in winning the nomination. As a result of the low nomination

chances, the overall chances of winning the seat are low. Likewise, districts where the partisan balance is

strongly against the potential candidate offer very high chances of winning the party nomination, which is

offset by very poor chances of winning the general election.[3] As a result, these districts present a relatively

low chance of winning the seat. The best opportunity is found in districts that maximize the offsetting

chances of winning, and these are not the districts where the chances of winning one stage of the process

are highest.

Our argument here is about the effects of district partisanship as distinct from incumbency.

Therefore, our expectation is that the effects represented in Figure 1 hold whether or not the potential

candidate is in the party of the incumbent. In districts with a clearly dominant party where the PC is in the

same party as the incumbent, district partisanship may be mistaken for incumbent deterrence. But our

expectation is that both incumbency and district partisanship are at work. Our task is to distinguish among

the variables that affect potential candidates' chances of victory in the two stages, and therefore their

chances of winning the seat.

Unfortunately, yet another confounding variable muddles our ability to distinguish the effects of

these contextual variables. The quality of the incumbent as a candidate may result from the tendency of the

electoral process to select the strongest candidates (Erikson 1971; Mondak 1995; Zaller 1998). As John

Zaller puts it in his recent critique of the incumbency literature,

> My argument, then, is that strong challengers emerge in congressional politics whenever they see an
> opportunity to win, that when they do they are able to command the resources necessary to mount

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[3]In one of the few papers that explicitly incorporates nomination chances in a model of potential
candidate behavior, Banks and Kiewiet suggest that relatively weak potential candidates in the party opposite the
incumbent's may be motivated to seek their party's nomination because their overall chances of winning are higher
than when the incumbent is not running and they must face stiff competition from strong potential candidates for
their party's nomination (Banks and Kiewiet 1989).

serious fights, and that, in consequence, incumbent MCs, like incumbent boxing champions, cannot survive in office much longer than their personal skills warrant (Zaller 1998).

Of course, the net result of a system that selects high quality candidates as office holders would be that incumbents usually win, and strong potential candidates would normally be deterred from testing their skills against those of the reigning "champion."

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. It could be that elections act as filters selecting the most skilled politicians, that skilled politicians in the majority party have an advantage over equally able candidates in the minority, and that once in office, talented politicians maintain their electoral strength by manipulating the resources of their office. Distinguishing among these effects would be difficult enough with the best of measures, but it is impossible in the absence of any measures at all. Few studies have attempted to gauge the quality of incumbents, although there have been studies of the results of incumbent activity (Alvarez and Saving 1997; Cover and Brumberg 1982; Fiorina 1981; Levitt and James M. Snyder 1997; McAdams and Johannes 1981; McCurley and Mondak 1995; Mondak 1995; Stein and Bickers 1994). However, no one to our knowledge has incorporated measures of incumbent quality, district partisanship, and challenger quality in the same design. As a result the evidence is always ambiguous, open to several interpretations.

One commonly used measure of the incumbency effect is "retirement slump," which is the average loss in vote margin the party suffers when an incumbent retires (Alford and Brady 1989; Jacobson 1996). This measure implicitly takes into account district partisanship because, absent redistricting, the partisan predispositions of a district are unlikely to change between one election and the next. But it says nothing about incumbent or challenger quality. What if Mondak and Zaller are correct that incumbents win because they are very talented politicians? We would expect a decline in the incumbent's party vote when a Representative retires because it is extremely unlikely that the party's nominee in the district on average would be as talented as successful retiring incumbents. Likewise, when a gifted incumbent-politician leaves the field, we would expect stronger potential candidates to emerge in the *other* party compared to the candidates who might have challenged incumbents in the election before retirement.

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DESIGN OF THE CANDIDATE EMERGENCE STUDY

Our approach to the study of candidate chances is markedly different than that of prior research on the problem. David Rohde, in his seminal article on the ambition of U.S. House members for higher office, makes the distinction between "prospective" studies of political ambition, which consider the opportunity to run as the operative question, and "retrospective" studies, which employ data on whether or not individuals run, how well they do, and what their qualities are, after the behavior has occurred (Rohde 1979: 3). A prospective analysis is necessary if the question is who does *not* run, as well as who does. Because our interest is in the decision-making process potential candidates go through as they contemplate running, we adopted a prospective approach.

In addition, because we see PCs' chances of winning as critical to their decision-making process, we adopted a prospective approach to studying potential candidates' probability of winning. In this, our study is unique. For example, although the theory turns centrally on House members' chances of winning a Senate or gubernatorial *seat*, Rohde's work must rely on indirect indicators of chances in the *general election only*, such as whether the seat is open and the partisan makeup of the state. Of course, taking a prospective approach means that perceptions of chances of winning at the time decisions are made about candidacy is the relevant factor, rather than a post-election measure of the actual outcome. An outcome-based measure is especially inappropriate when the focus is on potential candidates who do not run.

The Candidate Emergence Study (CES) is designed to identify potential candidates for the House of Representatives while they are in the process of deciding whether to run. It is particularly important for this paper that the design prospectively captures perceptions of PCs' chances of winning both the nomination and general election stages, which allows a much richer analysis of PC chances. Our design also permits us to incorporate measures of the district context, and incumbent and potential candidate quality. We began with a survey of informants in 200 randomly selected congressional districts to identify strong potential candidates for the House. Informants identified strong potential candidates in their district, and provided information about their district, the incumbent, and the potential candidates whom they identified. The second aspect of the design was to survey the potential candidates named by informants, and state

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legislators whose districts overlapped with the congressional districts in our sample. The Potential Candidate

Survey asked respondents similar questions about their House district and incumbent, as well as a variety of

questions about their decision-making process. We make only very limited use of the Potential Candidate

Survey in this article.

For the Informant Survey, our goal was to select 10 Democratic and 10 Republican political

activists from each district; we also selected one political scientist with a known expertise in American

politics from each district. We drew most heavily from two sources in identifying our informants: 1996

Democratic and Republican national convention delegates, and county chairs. In districts in which

insufficient numbers of informants from these two sources were identified, we supplemented our sample by

including 1992 convention delegates.[4] The survey was administered in the summer of 1997.

The Informant Survey asked each respondent to provide us with the names and addresses of up to

four individuals whom the respondent judged would be potentially strong candidates for the U. S. House of

Representatives. We encouraged informants to think broadly about who such potentially strong candidates

might be, so that we could capture individuals with varied backgrounds and characteristics. We asked them

to name individuals in either party, whether or not the individuals had ever expressed an interest in making

such a race, and whether or not they had been mentioned by others as potential candidates.

We received 1522 responses from informants, a response rate of 43% of our target sample.[5] These

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[4]In 105 of the 200 districts in our sample, we were able to identify at least ten informants in each party by pooling the number of convention delegates and county chairs. In districts with more than ten in either party, we chose randomly from the potential set of informants. In 95 of the districts, the number of county chairs and delegates in one party or the other (or both) did not equal ten. In those cases we added the names of 1992 convention delegates (and again sampled from those if the number exceeded ten). Even after supplementing our sample in this way, we were still unable to identify ten informants in 27 districts for Republicans and 48 districts for the Democrats. In all save 30 of these districts, we over-sampled the remaining party's potential informant pool to increase the number of total informants per district. In the remaining districts, we depend on a somewhat reduced pool of informants.

[5]Our target pool of usable informants was 3573. Our procedure was to mail a letter explaining the study, followed by a questionnaire, and a reminder postcard. Those who did not respond were mailed a second questionnaire. The questionnaire for the first two mailings asked informants to provide information about their district, their incumbent and the names of up to four potential candidates. Because the potential candidate segment of the questionnaire was lengthy and presented respondents with an unusual task, we sent a third mailing to informants who did not respond to either of the first two mailings asking only for their perceptions of the district

informants provided us with 1399 usable names and addresses of unique potential candidates in 192 of our sample districts.[6] The number of potential candidates recommended in each district ranged from as few as one to as many as twenty-one. On average, informants recommended just over seven unique candidates per district. Although we were concerned that the same district factors that deter strong challengers might also make it more difficult for informants to identify potential candidates, our analysis suggests that this was not the case. There is no relationship between a variety of district and incumbent characteristics and the number of potential candidates identified.[7]

Reliability and Validity of Informant Perceptions

Informant perceptions of potential candidate chances and of incumbent and PC quality are the primary data source for this analysis that follows. Our approach was to ask informants for independent judgments about characteristics or qualities, and then to use these measures in the models we construct. For example, we asked informants for ratings of their incumbent on a number of qualities, for their judgment about the makeup of their district, and their perceptions of the PC chances. We did *not* ask informants to tell us what they saw as the relationship between district characteristics and potential candidates' chances. We test hypotheses about that and other relationships of interest by examining the relationships between and among the relevant variables.

Obviously, this strategy can work only if informants' perceptions provide reliable and valid

and incumbent. Thirty-three percent responded to one of the first two mailings, another ten percent responded to the third mailing, for a total of 43%.

[6]Sixty percent of all informants identified at least one potential candidate. The average number of potential candidates identified was just over 2, for those informants who identified any at all. The total pool of potential candidates identified by informants was 2354. However, a number of these individuals were eliminated from the pool due to our inability to find a complete or correct address. Further, 30% of the usable potential candidates were identified by more than one informant.

[7]There is no statistically significant correlation between the number recommended and whether the incumbent ran for reelection in 1998, the number of terms served by the incumbent, the incumbent vote margin in 1996, or the party of the incumbent. Further, there is no significant correlation between the number of recommendations and the median income of the district or the percent urban.

measures of the characteristics in question. Survey researchers commonly rely upon respondents as informants about characteristics of themselves, such as their party identification, their opinions on issues, or their voting behavior in a recent election. We know that these estimates are sometimes subject to bias or distortion of one kind or another, but they are often the best or only measures available. We believe that using respondents as informants about salient aspects of their political environment, especially when the respondents are themselves actively engaged and well informed about that environment, is a legitimate and under-utilized research strategy in the social sciences. But it is incumbent upon us to consider the reliability and validity of the approach in this case.

We have followed standard practice and computed reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) on items used to construct candidate quality indices (see Table 1 for the items included in the indices). All of these results are very reassuring. For example, the Alphas for the informant sample are .69 for incumbents' strategic resources index, .90 for the personal qualities index, and .84 for the performance index.[8]

Because we have two independent samples of "informants" in every district (informants and potential candidates themselves) who were asked many of the same perceptual questions about characteristics of their districts and of the incumbent, we can assess the reliability of these judgments between the two samples. We asked both samples about five characteristics of their districts: strength of Democratic and Republican party organizations, the ideological positions of all voters in the district and of Democratic and Republican primary voters, and the state of the district economy. The mean inter-sample reliability across all five items is .77. The inter-sample reliability of incumbent characteristics depends on the items. On a relatively "easy" items such as incumbent ideology, reliability is a very high .95. On incumbent qualities such as integrity and grasp of the issues that are much more difficult to observe, inter-sample reliabilities average .54. The correlations on these incumbent quality items are lower than we would like, but they are all clearly and significantly positive. Moreover, they are consistent with those reported by

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[8]These reliabilities are computed on district mean estimates of incumbent quality. At the individual level, the reliabilities are as follows: Incumbent strategic resources .67; incumbent personal qualities .89; incumbent performance .84; PC strategic resources .74; PC personal qualities .88. The item content of these indexes is discussed below in the context of presenting our findings.

Mondak in the only other systematic quantitative study of incumbent quality of which we are aware (Mondak 1995).

Validity checks are more difficult because we need measures of the relevant concepts that are based on measures independent of respondent perceptions. On most measures we have no such items. However, on several items we do have separate measures, although it is at times dubious whether the non-perceptual measure is as good as our respondents' judgments. But if the question is whether informants and PCs can be trusted as judges at all, looking at the available data is interesting. Perhaps the best case of an external measure of a concept that we also measured using informants' perceptions is the liberalism of the incumbent. We have ADA scores computed from Representatives' roll call voting behavior that we can compare with placements by informants of their incumbent on a seven-point liberal-conservative scale. On this comparison, the evidence is very reassuring: the Pearson's r correlation between informants' ideological placement of incumbents and the same Representatives' ADA scores is a resounding .90.

We also asked about the partisan and ideological makeup of voters in the district. We lack as good a measure of the ideology of the district as we have of the incumbent, so we have compared informants' perceptions of district ideology with the percent in the district voting for Bill Clinton in the 1996 election. We use the same criterion variable to assess the validity of potential candidates' perceptions of district partisanship.[9] In both the district partisanship and ideology measures, respondents placed the district on 7-point scales, and we aggregated these perceptions to the district level to compute the correlation with district vote for Clinton. The correlation between district partisanship and vote for Clinton is .71; and between district ideology and vote for Clinton it is .76.

Overall, these results support the validity of our strategy of relying on district informants to measure concepts that otherwise would not be observable. While no method is perfect, the questions our design allows us to address are of sufficient importance to warrant a new approach. Indeed, if we are to study prospective candidates for the House before they declare with many deciding *not* to run, our design or

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[9]This item was included only on the potential candidate survey, so we use the PC sample as informants to measure the partisanship of the districts included in the study.

something very similar is the only way to proceed. Due caution is called for in interpreting our results, but we believe the evidence in favor of our design is very strong.

FINDINGS

Ratings of Incumbent and Potential Candidate Quality

We begin by examining perceptions of potential candidates and incumbents on a number of characteristics that may relate to their chances of winning. Respondents were asked to rate the incumbent in their district on 7-point scales ranging from -3, "Extremely Weak," through +3, "Extremely Strong." Therefore, a negative mean reflects a negative rating, and a positive mean reflects a positive evaluation. Informants were also asked to rate each potential candidate they identified on many of the same items, all of which are coded in the same way. Table 1 presents these mean ratings on three clusters of items, identified as "strategic qualities," "personal qualities," and "incumbent performance items." Where identical items were used for both incumbents and potential candidates the means are reported for both. The summary index for each cluster is composed only of the items asked about both incumbents and potential candidates (except for the incumbent performance index, which includes no items asked about potential candidates).[10] Informants' raw ratings exhibit a significant partisan bias in perceptions, especially on the personal qualities. As a result, we have statistically adjusted these evaluations to remove this bias in the means reported in Table 1, and for all results reported in this paper.[11]

[Table 1 Here]

Notice first that informants rate incumbents substantially higher than potential challengers on the

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[10]The clusters of items were partially identified by a principal components factor analysis that distinguished between strategic and personal qualities for both potential candidates and incumbents. The incumbent performance items loaded with the personal quality questions, but we have separated them in Table 1 in order to preserve comparability between incumbent and potential candidate ratings. Substantive results reported below do not differ if we substitute incumbent performance for personal quality in our incumbent quality analysis.

[11]The adjustment procedure involves regressing the evaluaton on partisanship: $\hat{Y} = a + b_1$ *(Informant Partyid)*. Informant party identification is coded so that -1 = informant and incumbent/PC are in opposite parties; +1 = informant and target are in the same parties. The intercept, therefore, represents the expected rating for an informant who is indifferent in partisanship.

strategic qualities we asked about: name recognition, ability to raise money, and support from the individual's party outside the district. All of these differences are statistically significant and reflect an awareness of the substantial advantages incumbents enjoy. On both name recognition and ability to raise money, incumbents appear to have an especially large advantage over potential candidates. The strategic quality index reflects the substantial edge that incumbents have over potential candidates in the minds of our respondents. The low rating of potential candidates' ability to fund their own campaigns (a question not asked in the incumbent battery) suggests that potential candidates were evidently not selected by informants primarily because of their personal wealth.[12]

On the personal quality items, a very different picture emerges, as potential candidates' ratings appear to exceed those of incumbents. We do not necessarily conclude from their higher ratings on personal qualities that potential candidates in fact have a greater dedication to serving the public, ability to work with other political leaders, integrity, and the rest, nor that they wold be perceived in that way by everyone in the district. Although scores are purged of partisan bias, it is still the case that informants' ratings are of potential candidates whom they identified as strong potential candidates. It does seem fair to conclude, however, that while potential candidates clearly are behind incumbents in strategic resources, they are roughly on a par with incumbents in their personal qualities. Both incumbents and potential candidates are held in high regard by informants, as the ratings tend to be strongly positive across the items in our batteries. In any event, as will become clear, our primary focus is on the effects of variation in potential candidate and incumbent quality rather than on comparing point estimates of incumbent and potential challenger quality.

Evaluations of incumbents' performance as Representatives reflect a clear impression by informants that incumbents do a much better job of providing constituency services and in staying in touch with the district than they do with the more overtly legislative side of their job. They are less successful at bringing home the bacon, and informants are least impressed with incumbents' legislative accomplishments in the House. These rankings seem consistent with theories such as David Mayhew's (1974) that suggest

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[12]The potential candidates' ratings of incumbents are very similar to informants. Potential candidates see themselves at an even larger disadvantage on strategic resources than informants do primarily because PCs rate their own resources lower than informants do.

incumbents have more success servicing their constituencies than they do advancing a broader legislative agenda.

Incumbent and Potential Candidate Chances

We asked informants to give us their judgments of their incumbent's chances of winning their party's nomination in 1998 if they chose to run, and their chances of winning the general election if they won the nomination. We also asked for identical judgments about the potential candidates whom they named: the chances that the PC would win the nomination if he/she chose to run in 1998, and the chances that the PC would win the general election if he/she won the nomination. These judgments about chances are on 7-point scales, ranging from "Extremely Unlikely" through "Toss Up" to "Extremely Likely." We have scored the items on 7-point scales to conform to subjective probability scales to make the results easily interpretable. We have coded the item extremes .01 ("Extremely Unlikely) and .99 ("Extremely Likely), and the midpoint .50 ("Toss Up"). The two categories on either side of .50 are equidistant between the extreme and the mid-point. The coding we have adopted is inevitably a rough approximation of the underlying subjective probabilities that we are attempting to measure. It has the virtue of producing data that are readily interpretable and consistent with the verbal cues we gave respondents in the question wording. However, caution must be exercised when interpreting the results. Certainly they cannot be understood as precisely indicating the probabilities of the hypothetical outcomes described by the questions, although we do take them as capturing relative differences.

Informants' perceptions of the chances an incumbent or potential candidate will win the seat are

computed as follows:[13]
$$\overline{X}_{P_i(W_j)} = \frac{\sum \left[P_i(N_j | R_j) \bullet P_i(E_j | N_j) \right]}{n_{ij}}$$

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[13]The conditional nature of the probability estimates were operationalized in the questions as follows: "Please give your best estimate of how likely each of the following is: The incumbent U.S. Representative in your district [this potential candidate] will win the primary election in 1998 if he/she runs." And, "The incumbent U.S. Representative [this potential candidate] will win the general election in 1998, if he/she wins the primary."

Where,

P_i = Subjective probability estimate by the *ith* informant;
W_j = *jth* incumbent or potential candidate wins the seat;
N_j = Nomination by the *jth* incumbent or potential candidate;
R_j = *jth* incumbent or potential candidate runs;
E_j = Election by the *jth* incumbent or potential candidate;
n_{ij} = Number of cases.[14]

Based on incumbents' strategic advantages, it is no surprise to see in Table 2 that informants perceive incumbents as much more likely than potential candidates to win the seat if they choose to run (first column of Table 2). The mean subjective probability of the incumbent winning the seat is .79, while the mean probability for in- and out- party potential candidates is about .25. These estimates indicate that the incumbents enjoy about a 3:1 advantage over the average strong potential candidate in winning the seat.

{Table 2 here}

Again, we caution that care should be taken in interpreting these results. The expectation that strong potential candidates, if they were to run, would have about a 1 in 4 chance of unseating the incumbent may seem high when compared with the much lower success rates challengers typically enjoy. However, it is important to keep in mind that the vast majority of strong potential candidates named by our informants did not run in 1998. Indeed, that is the point of our larger study: We seek a better understanding of the strong potential candidates who do not run and who, if they were to enter the race, would presumably have better than average chances of beating the incumbent. It is also possible that informants' judgments about PC chances err on the optimistic side. It is true, for instance, that potential candidate respondents themselves judged their chances of winning if they were to run as somewhat lower than informants did.[15] This does not prove that informants were mistaken, although if the purpose of the

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[14]The number of cases for the incumbent analysis is equal to the number of informants, since each informant rated only one incumbent. The number of cases for the PC analysis is equal to the number of informants X the number of PCs rated. Sixty percent of informants named at least one potential candidate; the average number of PCs rated by each informant who named a potential candidate was just over two.

[15]In particular, our PC respondents in the same party as the incumbent were more pessimistic about their chances of winning their party's nomination by unseating the current Representative. Whereas informants rated in-party potential candidates' chance of winning their party's nomination at .34, potential candidates themselves rated their chances of beating the incumbent for their party's nomination at only .18. This, of course results in a much lower probability of winning the seat compared with informants' perceptions (.13 compared with .25) even though

analysis were to explain PC choices about running, informant perceptions of their chances would surely be less relevant than the potential candidates' own judgments (Authors' work b). Because the focus of our analysis in this paper is on explaining variation in PC chances if they were to run, a possible optimistic bias in informants' perceptions is less disturbing so long as the relative chances of potential candidates are validly measured.

Our expectation that potential candidates' nomination and general election chances depend on whether the PC is in the incumbent's party is supported in the data. Informants judge potential candidate chances of winning the nomination to be twice as high for out-party potential candidates (.69) than for those who share the party identification of the incumbent (.34). Conversely, informants see out-party potential candidate chances of winning the general election as substantially weaker (.35) than in-party potential candidates (.57). The result of combining these offsetting nomination and general election chances for in- and out-party PCs is the roughly equal chances of winning the seat for potential candidates of either the incumbent's or the opposition party.

The Effects of District Partisanship

The offsetting pattern of potential candidates' nomination and general election chances is consistent with our expectations about the importance of incumbency as a contextual variable that influences prospective challenger's chances. Incumbency dampens in-party potential candidates' nomination chances because, were they to run, these PCs would face the daunting task of wresting their party's nomination from a sitting Representative. Out-party potential candidates, in contrast, would have a relatively easy time of winning their party's nomination, only to face the incumbent in the general election. Because incumbents are difficult to unseat in the general election, an out-party PC who sought the nomination would likely face little serious competition.

The problem with this interpretation of the results in Table 2 is that it does not take into account the

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in-party PC perceptions of their chances of winning the general election were very close to the informant mean (Authors' work b).

partisan makeup of the district. Indeed, we expect district partisanship to work in much the same way as incumbency, which makes it difficult to determine whether the offsetting effects of incumbency in Table 2 are due to incumbent deterrence or to the underlying partisan makeup of the district. For example, the fact that in-party PC nomination chances are low could be due to the difficulty of beating an incumbent for his party's nomination, or it could be due to the fact that the majority party's House nomination is more valuable than the minority's nomination, and hence would attract more competition. While it is perhaps most plausible to assign the low nomination chances of in-party potential candidates to incumbent deterrence, it does not make much sense to assign the potential candidate's high general election chances to incumbency. In-party general election chances are most likely to be high because districts with a strong partisan majority elect individuals (whether they are potential candidates or incumbents) who share the dominant party identification.[16]

We begin by examining the bivariate relationships between district partisanship and potential candidate chances. In Figure 2 we plot the mean PC chances as perceived by the informants who identified them to us, by district partisanship. Consistent with our expectations, PC nomination chances are negatively associated with district partisanship, while general election chances are positively associated with dominant district party identification. The correlations reported in the figure are computed on the individual-level data. The crossing or off-setting pattern of PC chances in the two stages is consistent with the theoretical expectations suggested in Figure 1, and with our findings of a similar pattern associated with party of the incumbent. Moreover, the expected parabolic relationship between district partisanship and potential candidates' chances of winning the seat appears in the data. That is, the best chances of winning the seat are not in districts where either nomination or general elections are at their peak. Rather, a potential candidate's best chances of winning the seat are in districts where the *combined* chances of winning the two stages are highest. These are in districts relatively equally balanced in partisanship, rather than in districts dominated by one party or the other.

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[16]In our sample districts, the correlation between district partisanship and the partisanship of the incumbent is .68. In districts rated as strongly Republican, only 4% are represented by a Democratic incumbent, whereas 94% of districts rated strongly Democratic are represented by a Democratic incumbent.

[Figure 2 here]

The Effects of Candidate Qualities

In contrast to the effects of incumbency and district partisanship, characteristics of individual potential candidates should positively affect a potential candidate's chances in both the nomination and general election arenas. Potential candidates with greater strategic resources such as name recognition and the ability to raise money should have better prospects in both the nomination and general election arenas. There is no reason why such qualities and resources should help a PC's chances in one stage of the election and hurt in the other. Likewise, personal qualities should be desirable in both arenas and therefore enhance PCs' chances of winning the nomination and the general election as they increase. Of course, if both nomination and general election chances climb with increases in strategic and personal qualities, the overall chances of winning the seat will also go up.

[Figures 3a and 3b here]

Figures 3a and 3b demonstrate that the expected positive relationships emerge for both strategic and personal qualities. As informants' judgments of PCs' strategic qualities increase, the mean estimates of their chances of winning both stages and the seat also increase. All three bivariate correlations on the ungrouped data are positive and highly significant. The effects of personal qualities on informants' perceptions of candidate chances are also positive, although they tend to be somewhat weaker than the effects of strategic resources. Despite the weaker correlations, it is reassuring that informants see potential candidates high on the sorts of personal qualities captured by questions on this dimension as having stronger chances of winning, should they decide to run.

Assessing the Effects of District Context and Candidate Quality

So far we have been concerned only with describing the effects on potential candidates' nomination and general election chances one variable at a time. We have three explanations in play:

(1) *Incumbent deterrence:* Incumbents deter potential candidates' chances of winning because of

the advantages of their office. Being in the party of the incumbent hurts a PC's chances of winning the nomination; being in the opposite party of the incumbent hurts the PC's chances of winning the general election.

(2) *District partisanship:* When district partisanship favors potential candidates, their chances of winning the general election improve, but their chances of winning the general election go down. Potential candidate chances are best in balanced districts which maximize the joint probability of winning both the nomination and general election stages. District partisanship may explain much of what looks like incumbent deterrence because majority districts tend to elect incumbents in the dominant party. Thus, district partisanship is exogenous to incumbency, and must be taken into account in any assessment of incumbent deterrence.

(3) *Potential candidate and incumbent quality:* This explanation emphasizes the importance of candidate quality, including the quality of the incumbent. PC quality, unlike incumbency and district partisanship, has positive effects on both nomination and general election chances. In this view, incumbent quality deters strong potential candidates in the same way that *any* quality competition hurts a PC's chances. Elections work to select the highest quality candidates, so on average, incumbents are very high quality.

Our task is to incorporate measures of all three explanations as fully as we can into a single analysis of PC chances. Our analysis is designed to explain potential candidates' nomination chances, general election chances, and chances of winning the seat. We begin with Table 3, which presents analysis of potential candidates' nomination and general election chances. In order to distinguish as best we can the effects of district partisanship from incumbency, we present a baseline analysis that includes district partisanship, along with estimates of PC and incumbent strategic and personal qualities. This analysis (model 1) allows us to see the effects of district partisanship without any measure of the partisan status of the potential candidate relative to the incumbent. In model 2, we include a dummy variable for whether the incumbent and potential candidate are in the same party. This is endogenous to district partisanship because as districts are more uniformly partisan, they tend to elect incumbents in the dominant party. Because the unit of analysis is the potential candidate, we code district partisanship on a 7-point scale from -3 (least

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favorable to the potential candidate) to +3 (most favorable to the potential candidate). Therefore, as the party identification of the district is more favorable to the potential candidate there is a strong tendency for the incumbent to be in the same party as the PC (r = .68).

The basic findings nicely conform with expectations. Consider first the baseline analyses of PC nomination and general election chances. The offsetting character of the relationship between district partisanship and PC chances in the two stages is strongly evident. As district partisanship increasingly favors the PC, nomination chances drop sharply and general election chances increase. Likewise, the effects of candidate quality are consistent with expectations, to the extent that they have independent significant effects. PC strategic and personal qualities relate positively to chances in both stages, and the stronger the incumbent, the weaker the chances of the potential candidate in both the primary and general election.

{Table 3 here}

In model 2, we introduce the "same party" dummy. We expect its effect on PCs' nomination chances also to be negative, and positive on general election chances. Further, we expect the direct effect of district partisanship to decline in equations (2) compared with equations (1) because of the mediating effects of the "same party" variable. Both expectations hold. Being in the same party as the incumbent hurts a potential candidate's nomination chances quite dramatically by lowering his/her chances by about 34 percent. The best way to think about the positive effect of the "same party" dummy on potential candidates' general election chances is not that being in the incumbent's party helps a PC's chances so much as being in the opposite party hurts. Thus, reversing the dummy indicates that PCs in the party opposite the incumbent have just over a 10% lower chance of winning the general election than those in the party of the incumbent.[17]

The effects of the candidate quality measures persist in the Model 2 estimations. Potential candidate qualities positively affect both nomination and general election chances; incumbent quality

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[17]By definition, a PC in the incumbent's party who has won his party's nomination (the condition for estimating the PC's chances in the general election) would not face the incumbent in the general election stage.

negatively affects PC chances in both stages. Strategic quality effects for potential candidates and incumbents are significant in both specifications, while personal quality effects are weaker and/or not significant. Notably, incumbent quality does not have as strong a negative effect on PC chances as the positive effect of potential candidate quality has on nomination and general election chances, a point we return to below.

How can we use these results to disentangle the incumbency effect from district partisanship and candidate quality? A simple analogy may help. Most of us have no desire to wrestle a 500-pound gorilla. But, if we had to do battle with a gorilla, we might think our chances would be marginally better against a 400-pound gorilla than against one weighing 500 pounds.

The "same party" dummy in the nomination chances equation (model 2) indicates that being in the same party as the incumbent lowers a potential candidate's chances of winning the nomination by about 34 percent. This is an indication of a substantial "incumbency effect" as it is conventionally understood. Facing off against an incumbent for the party's nomination is a high-risk thing to do, even if it is not quite as chancy as getting into a ring to wrestle a gorilla.

Having said that the partisanship of the incumbent is endogenous to district partisanship, however, we can assess the relative effect of district partisanship and incumbency. By the logic of path analysis, the total effect of district partisanship on nomination chances[18] (-.07 + (.68*-.47) = -.39) is almost equal to the direct effect of incumbent partisanship (-.47). It would seem that the partisan structure of the district competes on a nearly equal footing with incumbency in explaining potential candidates' nomination chances. In the case of general election chances, the total effect of district partisanship (.21 + (.68*.16) = .32) considerably outweighs the direct effect of being in the party opposite the incumbent (-.16). This result suggests that many analysts may too readily assign to incumbency the effect of the underlying partisanship of the district.

We must also accommodate into the explanation the results on potential candidate and incumbent quality. The negative effects of incumbent quality indicate that stronger incumbents hurt more than weaker

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[18]Recall that the correlation between district partisanship and the partisanship of the incumbent is .68.

ones. But it is probably true, as Zaller contends, that almost all incumbents are relatively strong, so the

effect of *variation* in incumbent strength is not as great as the effect of facing an incumbent regardless of

strength as opposed to not facing an incumbent. In other words, an incumbent is an incumbent, and it does

not make too much difference how strong they are relative to one another. A gorilla is a gorilla, and the

difference between one weighing 400 pounds and one weighing 500 pounds is not great. The "same party"

dummies in Table 3 capture the effect of facing an incumbent in the nomination or general election as

opposed to not facing an incumbent. In our by now over-taxed analogy, they describe the loss in chances

associated with wrestling *any* gorilla. The incumbent quality measures capture the effects of facing a strong

vs a not-so-strong incumbent. Their effects are like the relatively weak effects we might observe on our

chances against gorillas of varying weight.

Recall from Figure 1 that we expect a parabolic relationship between district partisanship and the

chances a PC will win the seat because of the offsetting relationship of district partisanship on nomination

and general election chances. Both specifications in Table 4 strongly support this expectation, indicating

once again the importance of the structure of district partisanship for potential candidates' chances. These

results confirm our expectation that the chances PCs have of winning their seat are best in constituencies

where the partisanship balance is relatively even, rather than strongly favoring one or the other party.

Potential candidates in districts dominated by the opposition party have excellent chances of winning their

party's nomination, but their chances of winning the general election are very small. Conversely, PCs in

districts dominated by their own party have excellent general election prospects, but their chances in the

nomination round are diminished because of the expected competition from the incumbent and from other

strong candidates. Moreover, we cannot observe the effect of district partisanship on chances of winning

the seat at all without an appropriate non-linear specification.[19]

{Table 4 here}

The negative effect of being in the same party as the incumbent (model 2) almost certainly reflects

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[19]Recall from Figure 2 that the zero-order correlation between chances of winning the seat and district partisanship is .001.

the stronger incumbent-deterrence effect on primary chances than on general election chances. That incumbents are a major impediment to potential challengers in their own party's primary is well known, and this is reflected in the depressed overall chances of winning the seat that go with being in the incumbent's party. A 5.5% difference in chances may not seem large, but remember from Table 2 that potential candidates' average chances of winning their seat if they were to run were judged to be about .25.

The results in Table 4 again suggest that potential candidate quality has a stronger effect on PC overall chances than incumbent quality. For example, in Table 4 (2), the total effect of PC strategic and personal quality is greater in magnitude (.084 + .034 = .118) than the total effect of incumbent quality   (-.042 + -.024 = -.066). This is to suggest once again that potential candidates' chances of winning the seat are more responsive to variation in their own quality than they are to variation in the quality of incumbents. However, this does *not* mean the incumbency advantage is a myth, or nonexistent in our data. Recall from Table 1 that incumbents enjoy a very substantial advantage in strategic resources over potential candidates. Among the potential candidates analyzed in Table 4, this advantage amounts to almost exactly one unit on the 7-point quality scale.[20] Thus, although a potential candidate with a one-unit strategic advantage over a competing potential candidate has an 8% higher chance of winning the seat, incumbents on average have an advantage over PCs because of their greater resources.

In addition to confirming our expectations about the effects of district partisanship and candidate quality on PC chances, our results shed new light on the three explanations for high incumbent reelection rates in the U.S. House. Our findings strongly support all three explanations. First, district partisanship matters a great deal. It has the expected positive effect on general election chances and a negative effect on nomination chances, and it sets the context for the partisanship of the incumbent. Thus, a very substantial part of the explanation for high incumbent reelection rates is that most of them were selected by their fellow partisans in their districts, and most are affiliated with the district partisan majority. Second, incumbency per se appears to matter a great deal as well, especially in the nomination stage. Incumbents have a huge advantage over prospective challengers in their own party in the primary, and they have a very substantial

[20]The mean incumbent strategic quality rating is 1.92, whereas the mean PC strategic quality rating is .94.

edge over strong PCs in the opposite party when they face off in the general election. Notably, these incumbency advantages accrue to Representatives independent of their strategic resources and personal qualities. And third, quality matters. Our results consistently show a strong effect of quality among potential candidates, and a somewhat weaker effect of quality among incumbents.

CONCLUSION

Potential U.S. House candidates who think strategically cannot consider only their chances in the general election. They must also think about their chances of winning their party's nomination. Explicitly recognizing the two-stage character of the process forces us to confront the complexity of potential candidates' strategic calculus. PCs cannot merely assume that the factors that help them in the nomination round will also help them in the general election. It is reasonable to suppose that most of the resources and personal characteristics of individual candidates that would help them win their party's primary would also help them in their general election effort.[21] But it is also clear that the effects of district partisanship and incumbency affect potential candidates' chances very differently in the two stages. It is in the interplay of these factors that the "not-so-simple" character of potential candidate chances becomes clear.

Getting straight our understanding of the forces at work on potential candidates as they decide whether to run requires us to understand those that specifically bear on their chances of winning if they should decide to run. This in turn requires a research design capable of incorporating measures of the relevant variables, even though the "outcomes" of interest – PCs' chances of winning if they run– are events that have not occurred, and most likely will not occur. Ours is the first study to include richly varied measures of incumbent and potential candidate quality in a design that also embraces sufficient variability in district context to enable us to distinguish among the variables at work on PC chances. Our results not only confirm the importance of district partisanship in the process. They also reveal the extent that district partisanship may be hidden by the more visible and easier to measure incumbency factor. The effects of

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[21]An example of a characteristic that might not play the same in both stages might be ideological "extremism" or a reputation as a strong partisan. Such qualities might be helpful with partisan primary electorates but be harmful in the general election campaign.

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district partisanship are also difficult to uncover because they work in offsetting ways on the nomination and general election stages.

Our evidence also supports the claim advanced most recently by Jeffrey Mondak and John Zaller that the electoral process is sensitive to candidate quality (Mondak 1995; Zaller 1998). The higher the quality of the incumbent, the lower the chances of the average strong potential candidate, should he or she decide to mount a challenge. Moreover, it is not merely "quality" in the strategic resources an incumbent commands, although these have a consistently strong effect in reducing PC chances. Incumbent quality in the more fundamental sense of characteristics such as integrity and competence also have an impact on potential candidate chances, reducing their likelihood of winning if they were to mount a challenge. Quality in the potential candidate also matters. In fact, our PC quality measures consistently have stronger effects on prospective challengers' chances than parallel measures of incumbent quality. Our results can help reassure those who look to the electoral process to select leaders who, on a variety of dimensions, are well suited for high public office.

The offsetting effects of district partisanship on potential candidates' chances in the nomination and general election stages indicate that the district environment most congenial to potential candidates' chances of winning the seat is balanced in its partisan makeup. Virtually all congressional election scholars would expect that the most competitive districts are ones where the partisan makeup of the district is balanced, but this is almost always based on analysis of the general election stage alone. Focusing on the general election only, it is easy to see that balanced districts would be attractive to strong candidates in both parties because their prospects in the election are relatively even. Thus, an out-party potential candidate in a balanced district would have a better chance of winning the general election than a minority potential candidate in a district heavily against her in its partisan makeup. When we focus on both stages of winning the seat (as potential candidates surely must), we see that these districts are not attractive to the strongest potential candidates because their general election prospects in these districts are especially high, The reason, of course, is because the *combined* chances are at their highest in these districts. Because the competitiveness of elections depends vitally on the quality of the candidates who decide to run, it is very likely that districts

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that are balanced in their partisan makeup regularly experience competitive elections because potential candidates see their prospects as relatively good, and are therefore more likely to run.

Competitive House elections are essential to providing electoral choice, fostering accountability, and promoting representation. Observers have appreciated for some time that electoral competition depends directly upon the quality of the challenge that is mounted, especially when incumbents run for reelection. Understanding how and why quality matters and the conditions under which strong potential challengers are most likely to succeed helps us to comprehend the basis of competition in House elections. In an era when contested congressional elections appear to be in decline, increasing our appreciation of what fosters competition and choice should be high on our research agenda.

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Table 1. Mean Quality Ratings of Incumbents and Potential Candidates

	Informants' Ratings of:	
	Incumbents[a]	Potential Candidates[a]
Strategic Qualities:		
Name recognition in the district	2.14	1.11
Ability to raise money to fund campaign	2.24	1.38
Support from party outside district	1.78	1.20
Ability to fund campaign with his/her own money	NA	.06
Strategic quality index[b]	**2.06**	**1.23**
Personal Qualities:		
Dedication to serving the public	1.32	1.76
Grasp of the issues	1.34	1.64
Ability to find solutions to problems	.71	1.24
Public speaking ability	1.15	1.51
Ability to work with other political leaders	1.12	1.34
Personal integrity	1.28	1.56
Personal quality index[b]	**1.07**	**1.50**
Incumbent Performance Items:		
Legislative accomplishments in the House	.40	NA
Ability to bring federal funds to district	.57	NA
Ability to provide constituency services	1.20	NA
Ability to stay in touch with the district	1.40	NA
Incumbent performance index	**.90**	**NA**
Overall strength rating	1.87	1.29
Smallest N	1317	1988

[a]Mean estimates are statistically adjusted to remove effects of informant partisan bias (see note 11).

[b]Items used in quality indexes were identical for incumbents and potential candidates.

Source: Authors' Candidate Emergence Study surveys; based on districts in which incumbents were running for reelection in 1998.

Table 2. Informant Ratings of Incumbent and Potential Candidate Chances*

	Chances of Winning Seat	Chances of Winning Nomination	Chances of Winning General Election
Mean[a] Informant Perceptions of:			
Incumbent (N = 1362)	.79	.91	.84
Potential Candidate in Same Party as Incumbent (N = 783)	.25	.34	.57
Potential Candidate in Party Opposite Incumbent (N = 1023)	.27	.69	.35

*Districts in which incumbents were running for reelection in 1998.

[a]Means corrected for partisan bias.

Table 3. OLS Analysis of Informants' Perceptions of Potential Candidates' Nomination and General Election Chances[a]

	Nomination Chances				General Election Chances			
	(1)		(2)		(1)		(2)	
District Context:	b	beta	b	beta	b	beta	b	beta
District partisanship	-.085**	-.410	-.016**	-.079	.061**	.320	.040**	.207
PC and incumbent same party	--	--	-.335**	-.473	--	--	.106**	.161
Potential candidate quality:								
PC strategic quality	.080**	.263	.080**	.264	.073**	.259	.073**	.260
PC personal quality	.014	.039	.023**	.063	.040**	.115	.036**	.104
Incumbent quality:								
Incumbent strategic quality	-.035**	-.093	-.044**	-.118	-.049**	-.142	-.044**	-.128
Incumbent personal quality	-.007	-.025	-.013[#]	-.043	-.032**	-.115	-.030**	-.111
Intercept	.505**		.657**		.424**		.376**	
F	100.891**		145.908**		107.760**		95.946**	
Adjusted R^2	.232		.346		.243		.256	
N	1655		1642		1667		1655	

[a]Based on districts in which incumbents were running for reelection. All PC chances, quality, and incumbent quality measures adjusted for informant partisan bias.
'**' $p < .01$; '*' $p < .05$; '#' $p < .10$.

Table 4. OLS Analysis of Informants' Perceptions of Potential Candidates' Chances of Winning the Seat[a]

	(1)		(2)	
District context:	b	beta	b	beta
District partisanship	.045*	.298	.055**	.354
District partisanship squared	-.006**	-.330	-.006**	-.314
PC and incumbent in same party	---	---	-.055**	-.104
Potential candidate quality:				
PC strategic quality	.083**	.363	.084**	.367
PC personal quality	.033**	.117	.034**	.121
Incumbent quality:				
Incumbent strategic quality	-.042**	-.150	-.042**	-.151
Incumbent personal quality	-.023**	-.104	-.024**	-.109
Intercept	.148**		.130**	
F	69.726**		61.669**	
Adjusted R^2	.203		.209	
N	1616		1604	

[a]Based on districts in which incumbents were running for reelection. All PC chances, quality, and incumbent quality measures adjusted for informant partisan bias.

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

Figure 1. Theoretical Relationship between Potential Candidate Chances and District Partisanship

PC Nomination Chances

PC General Election Chances

PC Chances of Winning Seat

PC Chances (y-axis: 1.00, .90, .80, .70, .60, .50, .40, .30, .20, .10, .00)

Least Favorable to PC — Balanced — Most Favorable to PC

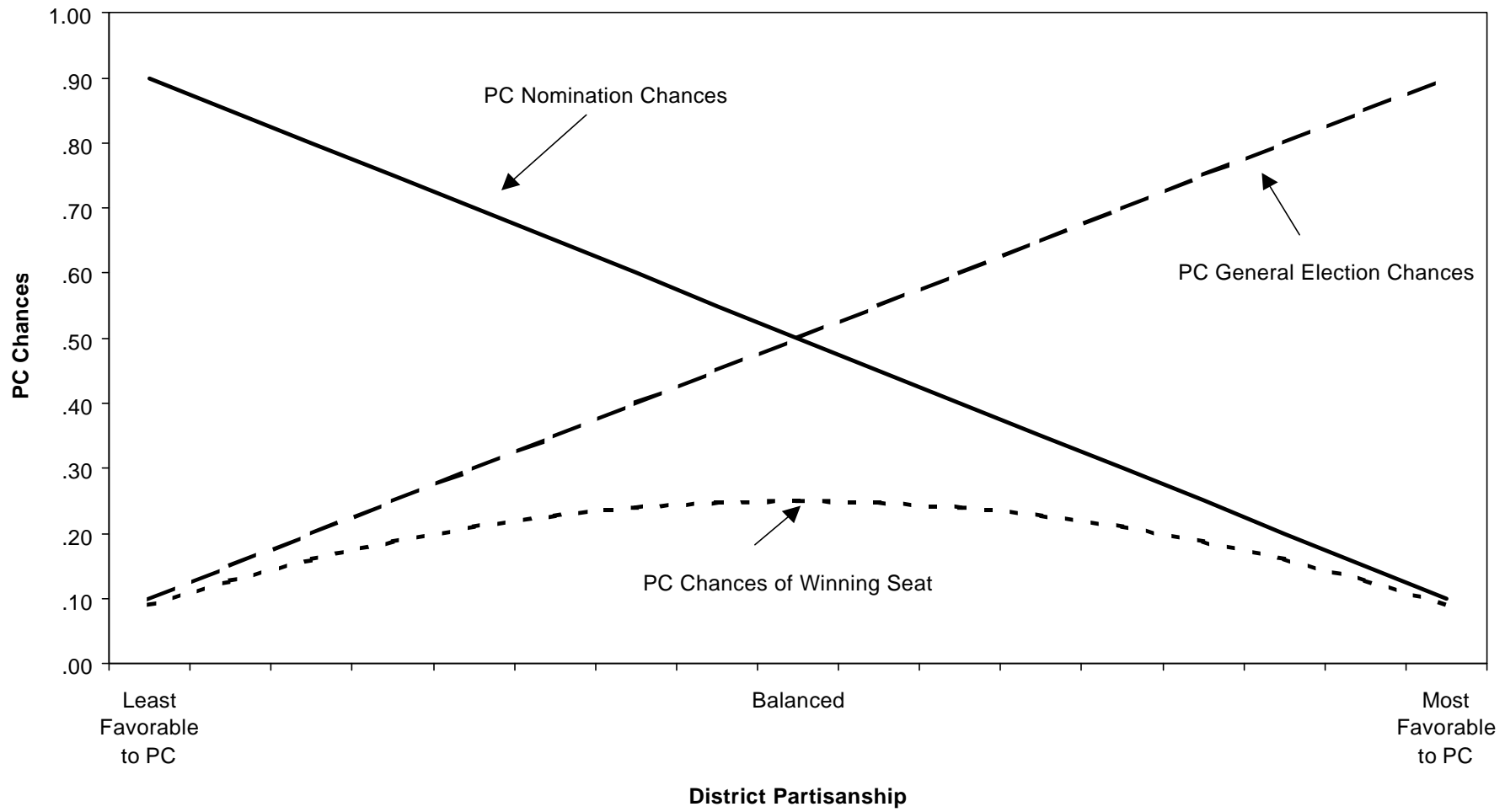**District Partisanship**

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Figure 2. Informant Perceptions of Potential Candidate Chances by District Partisanship
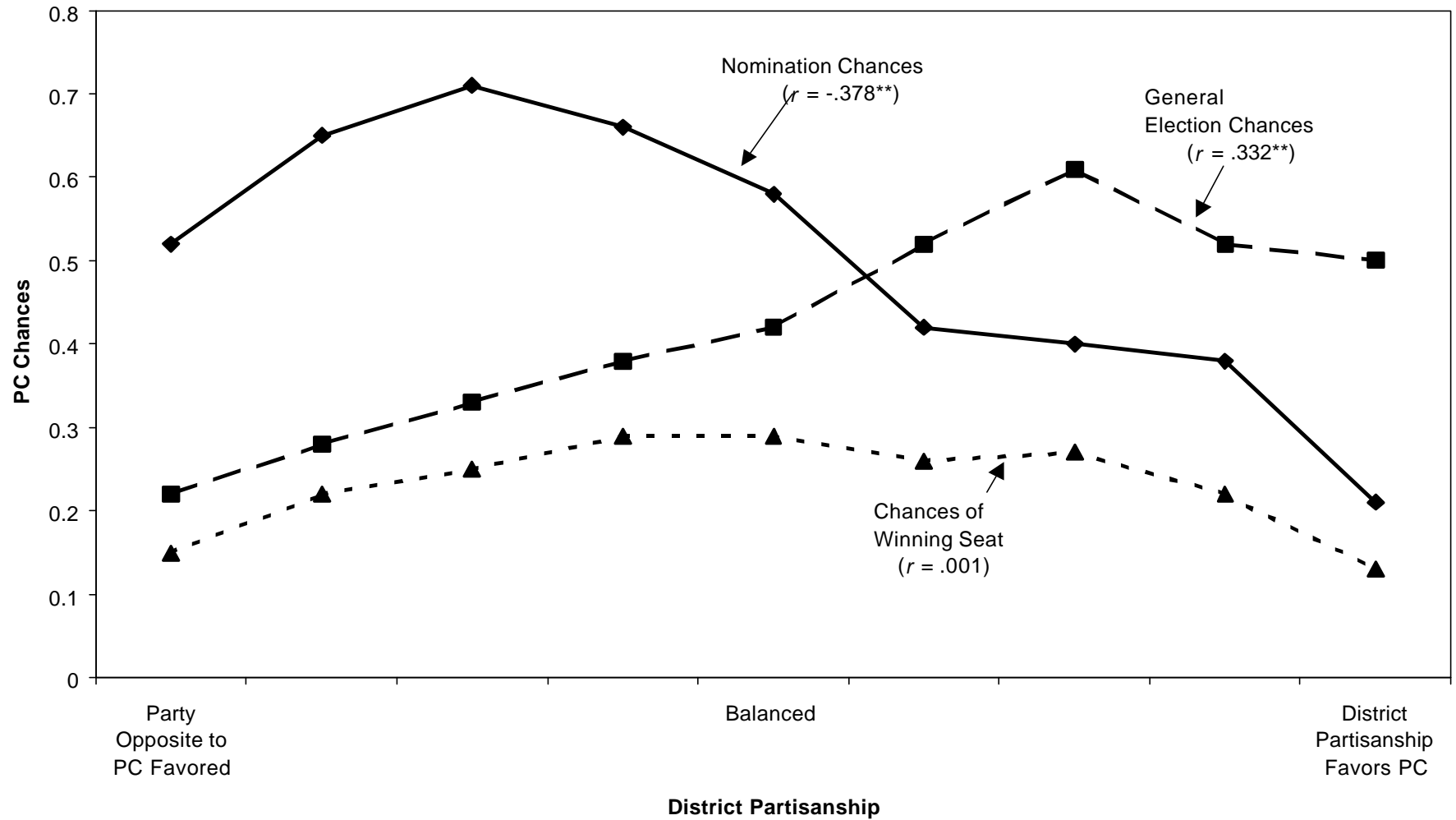
Figure 3a. Informants' Perceptions of PC Chances by PC Strategic Quality

Nomination Chances
(r = .245**)

General Election Chances
(r = .331**)

Chances of Winning Seat
(r = .398**)

PC Chances

Lowest Quality

Highest Quality

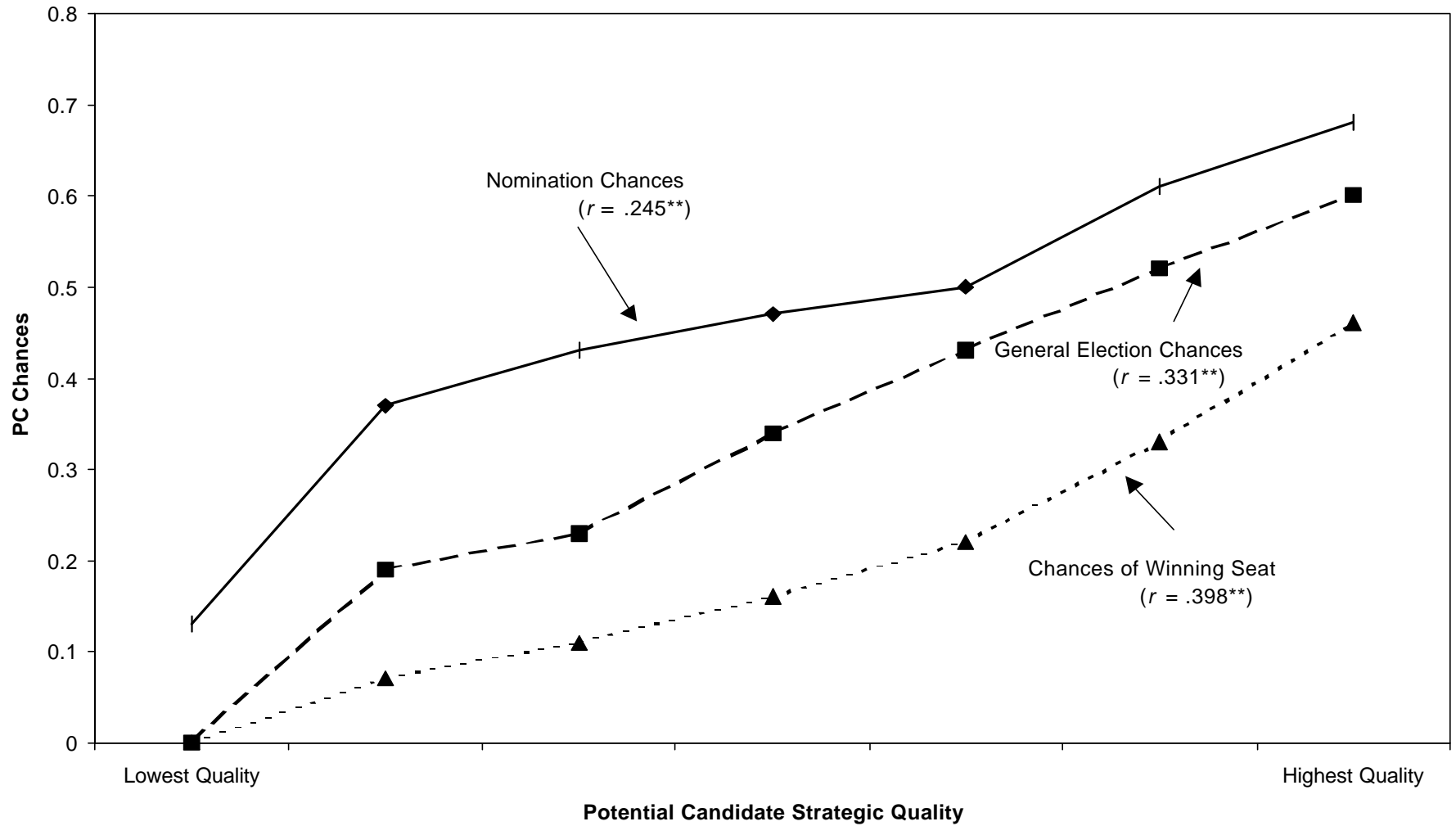**Potential Candidate Strategic Quality**

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Figure 3b. Informants' Perceptions of PC Chances by PC Personal Quality

Nomination Chances
(r = .159**)

General Election Chances
(r = .190**)

Chances of Winning Seat
(r = .235**)

PC Chances

Personal Quality

Lowest Quality

Highest Quality

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