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Breaking into the House: An Analysis of Freshman Members of the U.S. House of Representatives

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Aaron R. Hacker, Author

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Aaron R. Hacker

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Abstract

The U.S. House of Representatives is truly the people's house. Each of its members is held accountable to the voters by regular biennial election cycles and vacancies may only be filled by popular election. Small districts with roughly equivalent populations provide opportunities for distinct subsets of the general population to elect legislators who represent their specific values and characteristics. As the electorate continues to diversify, one would expect new members of Congress to be similarly diverse.

Interestingly, in each election cycle these new freshmen representatives compose a relatively small group compared to the number of incumbents who are reelected. During the 1970s, researchers began to take note of the steady increase in incumbent vote margins that had commenced in the previous decade. The advantages that incumbent representatives enjoy are now well-documented. This thesis examines classes of freshmen House members in an attempt to better understand the individual and electoral circumstances through which new members are able to enter the House.

Using a quantitative analysis, I discover some trends that contribute to stability in the House as well as others that lead to change. Achievement based characteristics such as advanced education, success in certain occupations and prior elected office are consistent among new members of Congress. At the same time, other identity characteristics such as race, religion, and sexual orientation appear to be increasingly more diverse. This thesis has implications for the potential electability of future candidates, and consequently, the likely composition of future congresses.

Dedication Page

To my wife Chelsie

“Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.” Proverbs 31:29

To my children Matthias, Lainie, and Reuben

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Proverbs 9:10

To my parents, Jeff and Donna

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6

To my fellow scholars Nathan and Trisha

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12

To my faithful and dear friend J.

“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24

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Mr. Shane Rogers:

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

When Nelson Polsby claimed in 1968 that the U.S. House of Representatives had become institutionalized, one of the pillars of his argument was that entry into the U.S. House of Representatives had become relatively difficult. He pointed out that incumbent members were serving longer, while stating at the same time that, “there has been a distinct decline in the rate at which new members are introduced into the House” (pp. 146-148). The revelation that there are *more incumbents* and, naturally, *fewer freshmen* are two sides of the same coin. In his early research on the advantages of incumbency, Robert Erikson hinted at this dichotomy saying, “Evidence of an incumbency effect may partly be spurious, because of the likelihood of a reciprocal causal relationship between incumbency and electoral success. Although being an incumbent may increase a candidate's share of the vote, it is the candidates with the greatest electoral appeal who have the best chance of becoming incumbents” (1971, p. 396). Yet, in the years following Polsby's breakthrough article, political scientists have failed to fully explore this relationship. While much research has been directed toward understanding the advantages of incumbency, more needs to be written on the qualities of successful freshmen.

The overwhelming advantages of incumbency have been well-documented (Abramowitz, 1975; Alford & Hibbing, 1981; Born, 1979; Collie, 1979; Cover, 1977; Erikson, 1971; Ferejohn, 1977; Fiorina, 1977). It would seem fair to say that staying is the easy part, but before one can stay in the House, one must first get into the House. This thesis will refer to the process of getting elected to House for the first time as *breaking into* the House. I have decided to use this term because it appropriately implies that new

members of the House get elected by successfully overcoming the challenges that make entry into the House difficult. By studying trends in who has been able to break into the House in modern congresses, I hope to be able to evaluate the potential electability of future candidates, and consequently, the likely composition of the House in the future.

The Importance of House Freshmen

It may seem easy to marginalize House freshmen. After all, their inexperience and lack of seniority might make it appear that they play a limited role in the House.

Freshmen are rarely assigned to most of the more desirable and exclusive committees such as Appropriations, Rules, Ways and Means, or Foreign Affairs (Cox & McCubbins, 1993). Research has shown that as a whole, “districts and counties represented by freshmen... tend to receive less federal spending” (Berry, Burden, & Howell, 2010, p. 797). Even in trivial matters like selecting an office or parking space, freshmen choose from the last available, and by inference, least desirable options (Sidlow, 2006).

Yet, the individuals who have been able to break into Congress through the House of Representatives have played an important role in many of the major changes that take place there. “Newly elected legislators – particularly when they make up a large incoming class – can shift the ideological distributions within one or both parties and bring fresh perspectives on, and styles of, legislating and party governance” (Green & Burns, 2010, p. 225). They bring new expertise from prior occupations, and while they may lack Hill experience, many compensate by hiring experienced staff to help them legislate more effectively (Leal & Hess, 2004; Sinclair, 2012). They introduce new techniques, which like the Fosbury Flop¹ may seem unorthodox at first, but are later

¹ The Fosbury Flop is the name for a high-jumping technique developed by Dick Fosbury and popularized during the 1968 summer Olympics. Prior to this time, most high-jumpers straddled the bar as they jumped.

adopted as the new paradigm. For example, Sinclair notes that new Democratic reformers who entered the House in the late 1960s and early 1970s were responsible for rules changes which altered the distribution of influence in the House (2012). Authority once belonging solely to powerful committee chairs was redistributed to subcommittee chairs, rank-and-file members, and majority party leadership.

Altering the majority control of Congress is perhaps one of the most important ways that freshmen affect the functioning of the House. Cox and McCubbins contend that the majority party asserts control over the legislative agenda throughout every stage of the legislative process (1993; 2005). While it is possible that changes in majority party status could occur as a result of incumbents switching parties², the election of new representatives has always been responsible for changes that occur in majority party status in the House. A shift in party control usually occurs when one party composes a disproportionately large share of a freshman class. Consequently many of these freshmen enter the House with a strong sense of purpose, believing that they are part of a larger electoral mandate (Ashford, 1998; Formisano, 2012; Gimpel, 1996).

Freshmen responsible for shifting the majority are often rewarded by the grateful leadership of the new majority who also seek to preserve the majority by protecting vulnerable freshmen. Finding that most vulnerable members are freshmen, Jeffery Lazarus concludes that “majority party leaders have both the means and the incentive to ‘protect’ the pork projects proposed by vulnerable members of the majority party, and

Fosbury, on the other hand, would leap backwards over the bar. Fosbury was initially ridiculed for his awkward style, but following his record-setting gold medal performance, it quickly became the dominant technique and remains so today.

² At the beginning of the 107th Congress the Senate was evenly divided between both parties. When Vice President Dick Cheney was inaugurated on January 20, his tie-breaking vote gave Republicans control of the chamber. However on June 6, 2001, Republican Senator Jim Jeffords switched his party affiliation to Independent and began caucusing with the Democrats, returning them to the majority.

these members should receive a disproportionate share of spending” (2009, p. 1060). This confirms what Sinclair reported about the new Democratic leadership following the 2006 elections and subsequent takeover of Congress: “The leaderships in both chambers are aggressively promoting the individual reelection chances of the ‘majority makers,’ as they call the freshmen. They have been given good committee assignments, opportunities to offer amendments, to sponsor and speak on bills important to their constituencies, and aided in raising money” (2008, p. 92). Thus it seems that despite the seemingly low status of freshmen, they are able to have a significant impact on the institution, and are therefore worthy of careful study.

Notable Freshman Classes

During the period of time covered in this study, there were several classes of congressional freshman that were notable because of the impact that they had on the institution. In terms of the popular vote, the 1960 presidential election was one of the closest in history, yet it was followed in 1964 by one of the most lopsided elections. That year, Lyndon Johnson defeated Barry Goldwater by nearly a 2 to 1 margin. Riding Johnson’s coattails, Democrats won House seats across the country, outnumbering Republicans by more than 4 to 1 in the large freshman class. The new members of 89th Congress gave Democrats a supermajority in both chambers.

Having previously declared a “war on poverty,” President Johnson laid out his Great Society initiatives during his State of the Union address on just the second day of the 89th Congress. That congress would later enact many of his Great Society proposals including federal funding for education, Medicare and Medicaid, the Voting Rights Act, comprehensive environmental legislation, the creation of national endowments for arts

and humanities, and establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The new freshmen representatives were an instrumental part of this effort. Indeed, David Mayhew points out that “As in the case of the Great Society Congress, House newcomers can supply the votes to pass bills that could not have been passed without them” (1974, p. 296).

Following the Watergate scandal and the resignation of President Richard Nixon on August 9, 1974, anti-Republican sentiment was high. This was further exacerbated just one month later when President Gerald Ford granted an unconditional pardon to Nixon (Uslaner & Conway, 1985). Of the 92 freshmen elected in the mid-term elections later that year, 75 were Democrats. Many of newly elected Democratic freshmen came not from the traditional base in the South, but were elected from areas of the Northeast, Midwest, and West that had long been Republican strongholds. As a result, the Democrats who already held a majority in the House gained an additional 49 seats. Referred to in the press as the “Watergate Babies,” the Democratic freshmen were a younger group with more than half of them under the age of 40, and who tended to be more modern liberals in the mold of George McGovern. These new members immediately began to alter congressional operating norms by bucking the seniority system. The chairmen of the House committees on agriculture, banking, and armed services were unexpectedly deposed for being perceived as not progressive enough (Unekis & Rieselbach, 1983).

Twenty years later, it was Republican freshmen who were celebrating an electoral victory and planning how they were going to wield their new political power. The freshman class elected in 1994 included 74 Republicans compared to only 13 Democrats.

When the ballots were counted, not one Republican incumbent had been defeated and the Republicans had made a net gain of 54 seats, enough to take control of the House for the first time in more than four decades. Even long-serving, influential Democrats like Ways and Means committee chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), Judiciary committee chairman Jack Brooks (D-TX) and House Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA) were swept away in what came to be known as the Republican Revolution. Foley was the first sitting Speaker to not win reelection since Galusha Grow (R-PA) in 1862 (Wilcox, 1995).

When the Republicans took power, none had ever served in the majority before. Seizing the opportunity afforded by their new power, Republicans made a number of changes to the House rules that resulted in sweeping institutional reform (Gimpel, 1996). Committees were consolidated, committee staff was reduced, term limits for committee chairs and the Speaker were established, and proxy voting³ was eliminated (Wilcox, 1995). Republicans had campaigned nationwide on a legislative agenda known as the “Contract with America,” which consisted of 10 proposed laws designed to reduce the role of the federal government in American society (Owens, 1998). Though few of the contract’s provisions became law, the Republicans succeeded in bringing each item to a vote in the House within the first 100 days of the 104th Congress (Fenno, 1997).

The Republicans retained control of the House for the next 12 years. However, during the 109th Congress, the popularity of the Republican brand was in decline. The Republicans had been plagued by scandals (Hendry, Jackson, & Mondak, 2009), and support for the Iraq war had eroded (Jacobson, 2009). The 2006 mid-term elections gave control of the House back to the Democrats. The 2006 elections enhanced diversity in the

³ Proxy voting was the system whereby committee chairs and ranking minority members were allowed to cast votes for absent members. In this way, a committee chair could control the outcome of committee votes even if he were the only majority member present.

House. During the 110th Congress, Nancy Pelosi became the first woman ever to be chosen as House Speaker and the freshman class included the first Muslim and Buddhist members ever elected to Congress (Amer, 2008).

In 2010, the Republicans netted 63 seats, an even larger gain than in 1994. One third of the House Republicans during the 112th Congress were freshmen. Much of their electoral success that year can be traced to the Tea Party movement (Adkins & Dulio, 2012). As was the case in 1994, the White House was occupied by a Democrat, but unlike the 1994 elections, the Republicans did not retake control of the Senate. Because of Senate opposition, the Republicans' ability to advance legislation, such as a repeal of the Affordable Care Act, through Congress has been limited, and consequently the House Republicans have contented themselves with slowing or stopping the Democratic agenda (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). While the lasting impact of the Tea Party is yet to be seen, research indicates that the Tea Party freshmen have contributed to polarization within the House and a growing unwillingness of its members to compromise (Wolf, Strachan, & Shea, 2012).

The House as a Stepping Stone

Individuals who break into the House of Representatives often ascend to higher office. Many individuals who begin their federal electoral careers in the House go on to become a member of the United States Senate or a state governor. Roughly 1 in 5 current state governors has previously served in the House (National Governors Association, 2014). In the federal government, those numbers are even higher. In the 113th Congress alone, 52 Senators entered the Capitol first through the House (Glassman & Wilhelm, 2013).

Throughout the course of American history, 19 presidents have first served in the U.S. House of Representatives. The first president to come through the House was James Madison who is appropriately referred to as the “father of the constitution” and was one of the original House freshmen. The only sitting House member to ever be elected directly to the presidency was James Garfield⁴. In all but three Presidential Elections since 1960⁵, at least one major party candidate had come up through the House. In two of the three recent presidential elections that didn’t include a former House member (2004 and 2012) the eventual winners, George W. Bush⁶ and Barack Obama⁷, had each first unsuccessfully attempted to enter national politics through the House before choosing an alternate route to the White House.

George H.W. Bush was the last president to have served in the House of Representatives. Bush’s first elected office was as a representative from Texas’s 7th congressional district. Bush’s initial election to the House paved the way for him to become ambassador to the United Nations, chairman of the Republican National Committee, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Vice President of the United States, before eventually being elected president. Recent candidates Al Gore, Bob Dole, and John McCain all served in the House before their eventual run for president. Because of its role as a political stepping stone, the House of Representatives is an ideal place to study how new candidates work their way into national politics.

⁴ At the time Garfield had actually been chosen by the Ohio legislature to serve in the U.S. Senate. However, Garfield was elected president before taking his seat in the Senate.

⁵ 1984: Reagan v. Mondale, 2004: Bush v. Kerry, 2012: Obama v. Romney

⁶ George W. Bush first entered politics by running as the Republican candidate for Texas’s 19th congressional district. He was beaten by Democrat Kent Hance.

⁷ While serving as a state senator in 2000, Barack Obama ran in the Democratic primary for Illinois’s 1st congressional district. In this heavily Democratic district on Chicago’s south side, the primary is often the real contest. Obama was beaten by incumbent Bobby Rush, giving Rush the distinction of being the only person to ever defeat Obama in an election.

The House vs. the Senate

There are good reasons for examining freshmen members of the House of Representatives rather than freshmen members of the entire Congress. While there is much that could be learned by studying freshmen who initially enter Congress through the U.S. Senate such as Bob Corker (R-TN) and Al Franken (D-MN), including freshmen senators would be problematic. First, it is much more likely that new members of Congress will enter through the House of Representatives than the Senate. Each of the 435 members of the House of Representatives is up for reelection during every biennial election cycle, while at the same time, only a third of the hundred-member Senate would be up for reelection every two years. In other words, for every Senate seat up for election during any election cycle, there are roughly thirteen House seats to be filled.

There are not only more opportunities to campaign for a House seat than for Senate seat, but also a greater pool of eligible candidates. The U.S. Constitution requires that members of the House be at least twenty-five years old and a United States citizen for at least seven years. A senator must be at least thirty years old and a United States citizen for at least nine years. Every candidate eligible to run for a Senate seat would also be eligible to run for a House seat, but not all candidates who are eligible to run for the House would be eligible to run for the Senate. Even if a hopeful candidate was eligible to run for one of the few available Senate seats, the Senate, as the upper house of Congress with (usually) a larger constituency, would likely generate stronger competition for the office and require greater resources for campaigning.

The relative difficulty of election to the Senate as compared to election to the House helps explain why the House often serves as a stepping stone to the Senate. It is

rare for a member of the Senate to move to the House⁸, but it is not at all unusual for a member of the House to advance to the Senate. Though this might be considered an upward move, it is still another example of an incumbent member of Congress *staying* in Congress and does little to help explain how new members are able to break in.

Other problems caused by structural differences between the House and Senate favor studying freshmen House members separately from the Senate. As I mentioned earlier, there are differences in constituency size. The Constitution prescribes that members of the House represent equally proportioned districts, while a Senator represents his or her entire state. Therefore, in terms of the population represented, the size of a Senate constituency will differ considerably from the size of representative districts in the state. Not only that, but a Senate constituency will differ considerably from state to state. Representative districts on the other hand will be fairly consistent both within a state and across the states. A Senate race in Texas might be much different than a Senate race in neighboring New Mexico, while a House race in Texas is likely to be fairly similar to a House race in New Mexico (Rohde, 1979).

The way that vacancies are filled is important. Amendment XVII of the Constitution provides a way for the executive of a state to fill a Senate vacancy with a temporary appointment. No such provision exists for the House of Representatives. Vacancies in the House are always filled by election. Recent examples of Senate appointment include Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), both of whom were appointed to fill seats vacated by their fathers. Murkowski was even appointed by her father, Frank Murkowski, to fill the seat he left to become governor of Alaska. Each

⁸ Claude Pepper (D-FL) served for more than 14 years in the Senate before failing to be nominated in the 1950 Democratic primary. In 1962, he was elected to the House where he served until his death in 1989.

of these senators has demonstrated the staying power of incumbents by being reelected to full terms, but doubtlessly, appointment is very different than a first election. Members who are appointed do not break into office but are instead *put* into office by the will of a single individual. Without a mechanism comparable to appointment, members must break into the House through election by convincing a majority of voters.

Thesis Overview

The freshmen who enter each congress can have both an immediate and long-term impact on the institution. Therefore, it is critical to take a deeper look at the individuals who are able to successfully break into the House and bring about change. By examining individual and aggregate data from each freshman class beginning with the 86th Congress and concluding with the 113th Congress, I will attempt to answer several research questions related to trends in member characteristics over time. First, are there trends that remain stable over time? If stable trends do exist, I expect that they will be related to personal achievement. For example, I expect that a large proportion of each class of House freshman will share similarly advanced educational and professional backgrounds. By identifying these common characteristics, I hope to discover how they are beneficial to candidates seeking to break into Congress.

Secondly, are there trends that have been consistently moving in a predictable direction? If there are, I expect that most of these will not be based on personal achievement. Minority status is one example. The 2008 and 2012 presidential elections which featured prominent female candidates, a Mormon candidate, and resulted in the eventual triumph of the nation's first African American president lead me to believe that minorities may be enjoying a more favorable political environment than ever before. I

expect to find that there are more women and minorities represented in recent classes of congressional freshmen than in the earlier classes in the sample. Such a finding might indicate that, while in the past, members of minority groups had a difficult time breaking into the House, they are currently finding fewer barriers to entry.

Finally, are there trends that are erratic, or in other words, trends that aren't really trends? I expect to find that variables such as the age of a candidate may make no difference and may vary widely from year to year. In the following chapter, I will review the relevant literature on the nature of individuals who attempt to break into the House. I will then explain the methodology used to collect and analyze my data. In the fourth chapter, I will present my findings and provide an analysis of the data. My research will conclude with a discussion of the implications of my findings.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Throughout the hot summer of 1787, the framers of what would become the United States Constitution developed, drafted, and debated the document that would form the federal government. On June 23 of that year, during the height of the convention, James Madison asserted, “The objects to be aimed at [a]re to fill all offices with the fittest characters, & to draw the wisest & most worthy citizens into the Legislative service.” In order for this to occur, healthy electoral competition that gives voters a choice and holds legislators accountable is essential (Adkins & Dulio, 2012; Jacobson, 1989; Kazee, 1994). Yet, it is the threat of strong electoral competition that may deter good candidates from ever entering the race (Fowler & McLure, 1989; Jacobson, 1992). Accordingly, when examining the literature about how new candidates enter the House of Representatives, it is important to examine both the motivation that drives potential House candidates to seek office, as well as the process by which they decide whether or not to act on those impulses. Finally, it is useful to look at individual factors that may affect a candidate’s perceived ability to win, and consequently, his or her decision to run.

Ambition

Despite the fact that as an institution, Congress traditionally has low approval ratings, is often the butt of jokes, and is arguably the least liked of the three branches (Ahuja, 2008; Fisher, 2010; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Mann & Ornstein, 2006) it seems that Madison’s goal of attracting the best and brightest citizens to Congress has been realized. Even in the very first congress, most House members were wealthy, had prominent occupations, and were well-educated (Remini, 2006). All but two members had prior political experience (Bickford & Bowling, 1989). After reviewing the list of

newly elected representatives in 1789, George Washington wrote to his friend, the Marquis de Lafayette, that “the new Congress on account of the self-created respectability and various talents of its members, will not be inferior to any assembly in the world.”

The trend of selecting House members from the upper echelons of society continues today (Davidson, Oleszek, & Lee, 2012). Linda Fowler (1996) points out that the business and professional classes have been consistent sources of House members. This should come as no surprise. Scholars have long understood that the same motivation which propels an individual to success in other areas would also prompt individuals to seek political power (Hain & Piereson, 1975; Lasswell, 1948). Fox and Lawless note “There is broad acceptance of the notion that anyone who ultimately decides to seek high-level office is competitive and driven. Clear indications of ambitious behavior in realms outside of politics, therefore, can help predict who might consider running for office” (2005, p. 646).

Before an individual ever seriously considers running for office, he or she must possess at least some degree of ambition to do so, and it must be sufficiently strong to outweigh the significant costs associated with running (Fox & Lawless, 2005). Fowler and McClure go so far as to say that “a good congressional candidate must have a burning desire to serve in Washington” (1989, p. 238). In his classic book *Ambition and Politics*, Joseph Schlesinger contends that “Representative government, above all, depends on a supply of men so driven” (1966, p. 2). Schlesinger argues that ambition and a favorable political opportunity structure induce self-interested politicians to direct their actions toward future political goals. Schlesinger’s work provides one of the most

insightful and enduring theories offered as an explanation for why people choose to run for political office.

Schlesinger's theory outlines three directions of ambition that motivate political candidates to seek office. The first, discrete ambition, motivates an individual to seek a singular office for a singular term and then withdraw (Schlesinger, 1966). I have already pointed out the tendency of incumbent legislators to stay in office, and so I would speculate that discrete ambition is not a common motivating factor among most of those who break into the House of Representatives. Otherwise, Congress would have an extremely high turnover rate.

The second type of political ambition that Schlesinger describes is static ambition. Static ambition motivates a politician to maintain a particular office with the intention of making a long-term career out of it (Schlesinger, 1966). Schlesinger points out that maintaining a congressional office "is certainly a marked goal of many American congressmen and Senators" (1966, p. 10). This fits nicely with the research on incumbency, and while freshman representatives might later develop some degree of static ambition, this type of ambition would not be responsible for their initial victories. Static ambition is only relevant *after* a freshman representative has broken into Congress.

Schlesinger's third type of political ambition, progressive ambition, is most applicable to new House members. An examination of the American political system reveals a pyramidal stratification of offices (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981). Higher offices are more attractive, yet at the same time, they are fewer in number and elicit stiffer competition. Progressive ambition provides the impetus for individuals to seek progressively more important offices (Schlesinger, 1966). When candidates succeed in

breaking into the House, they transition from not being members of Congress to being members of Congress. This is an upward move, and a difficult one at that, which must be prompted by some type of upward ambition.

Rohde (1979) pointed out that Schlesinger's model was based on a retrospective analysis in which ambition was identified and classified based on the *outcome* of a political career. For example a member of Congress who chose not to seek a higher office during a long tenure would be said to have demonstrated static ambition. However, in a prospective analysis, it becomes clear that a politician's career decisions may be based more on the availability of opportunities to seek higher office, the associated risk of such a decision, and the officeholder's individual tolerance for risk. Rohde found that "progressive ambition is held by almost all members of the House. That is, we assume that if a member of the House, on his first day of service, were offered a Senate seat or a governorship without cost or risk, he would take it. Thus static ambition is not something chosen a priori, but is a behavior pattern manifested by a member because of the risks of the particular opportunity structure he finds himself in, and his unwillingness to bear those risks" (Rohde, 1979, p. 3). It seems then that ambition, while necessary for election to the House, cannot by itself account for the decisions of individuals to seek election to the House.

Strategic Candidate Emergence

If it is true that the political class is made up of successful individuals, we should expect that they operate strategically to maximize individual success. More bluntly, Jacobson and Kernell (1981) state that politicians are not fools. It is central to the literature that a potential candidate's decision to run for office is a function of his or her

probability of winning the election (Brace, 1984; Carson, 2005; Jacobson, 1989; Jacobson & Kernell, 1981; Maisel & Stone, 1997; Rohde, 1979; Stone & Maisel, 2003). They wait and watch for the best opportunities to run for office. “Potential participants in congressional campaigns begin assessing the prevailing breezes well before the election – and before the final decisions about candidacy have been made.” According to Thomas Kazee, this initial assessment phase is critical because “decisions of potential candidates – decisions made well before the first campaign speech is given or the first advertising dollar is spent – shape the universe of winners in congressional elections” (1994, p. 4).

Fox and Lawless (2005) point out that while many potential candidates possess the requisite nascent political ambition, many never make the leap to considering a candidacy. Of the factors that Fox and Lawless examined⁹ they found that an individual’s sense of efficacy as a candidate had the greatest impact on his or her decision to run for office. In other words, if a candidate perceives himself or herself as a highly qualified candidate, and therefore more likely to be successful, he or she will be more likely to seek office. In their survey, they also found that the vast majority of individuals who had considered a political candidacy had expressed interest in running for office at the local level, though these individuals were also much more likely to envision themselves climbing the political ladder to higher office (Fox & Lawless, 2005).

These results corroborate the literature on progressive ambition and strategic candidate emergence. They also help to explain why prior service in a state legislature is a common experience among new House members (Berkman, 1993; 1994; Berkman & Eisenstein, 1999; Fowler, 1996; Fowler & Mclure, 1989). This service is extremely

⁹ Fox and Lawless examined 6 factors which they expected would exert an independent influence on a candidate’s decision to run for office. They are: strategic considerations, ideological and political interests, a politicized upbringing, minority status, competitive traits, and stage in life.

valuable to new House candidates. As members of their state legislature, these candidates already have at least some name recognition and knowledge about how to conduct a successful campaign. Also, Jacobson and Kernell (1981) point out that there are functional similarities between state legislatures and Congress. “This makes some officeholders at lower levels more plausible, hence advantaged, successors to a higher office than others” (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981, p. 21). Their legislative experience provides a “head start in a congressional race” that would be very difficult for progressively ambitious potential candidates to ignore (Fowler & Mclure, 1989, p. 75) In recent congresses, former state legislators have consistently accounted for roughly half of the seats in the House of Representatives (Berkman, 1993; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013).

Since so many House members hold state and local offices prior to running for Congress, those offices constitute stakes that are risked when the officeholder decides to run. “Even the politician who serves in an office solely to enhance his future mobility must plan carefully the timing of his move. The institutional advantages provided by the opportunity structure mean that running and losing, and in the process losing one’s office base, not only interrupts a career, but well may end it... The seasoned state senator whose district represents a large chunk of the congressional district, however, will await optimal political conditions before cashing in his investment” (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981, pp. 22-23).

Vacant Seats and Special Elections

Since entrenched incumbents are so notoriously difficult to defeat, the most optimal political condition that would entice a potential candidate would seem to be the

lack of an incumbent (Fowler & Mclure, 1989; Sigelman, 1981). In recent decades, three fourths of new members of the House of Representatives have entered through vacant seats and special elections (Gaddie, Bullock, & Buchanan, 1999). Special elections are nearly always without an incumbent¹⁰ and occur outside of the normal election cycle. Therefore, special elections can provide unique opportunities for individuals who might not otherwise consider running, and allow the winner to benefit from incumbency during the next normal election cycle (Kincaid, 1978; Nixon & Darcy, 1996; Solowiej & Brunell, 2003). For example, the phenomenon of widows succeeding their husbands in Congress through special elections has been called “perhaps the single most important method of entrance into Congress for women,” a group that has struggled to achieve parity in the House with men (Solowiej & Brunell, 2003, p. 283).

Equal Opportunity Elections - Women and Minorities

It is important to examine the research regarding groups whose members may face additional barriers to the already difficult process of breaking into the House. The legitimacy of representative democracy depends on the ability of all of its citizens to participate (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Weatherford, 1992). It has already been established that congressional candidates tend to come from a political class, which by its very nature excludes individuals on the basis of merit, or more appropriately, lack thereof. Yet

¹⁰ There are rare exceptions. Albert Watson (D-SC) was stripped of his seniority by the House Democratic Caucus for supporting Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964. Watson resigned his seat and successfully ran as a Republican to fill the vacancy caused by his resignation. During the 97th Congress, Representative Phil Gramm (D-TX) had served on the House Budget Committee and as a cosponsor of the Gramm-Latta budget was instrumental in implementing President Reagan’s economic program. As a result, at the beginning of the 98th Congress in January, 1983, the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee removed Gramm from the House Budget Committee. In protest, Gramm resigned his seat and successfully ran as a Republican one month later in the special election to fill his vacant seat (Baker, 1985; Grose & Yoshinaka, 2003).

legitimacy begs the question, are there other groups who are discouraged or otherwise deterred from running for Congress?

Women and minorities have traditionally been underrepresented in Congress (Burrell, 1994; Foerstel & Foerstel, 1996; Gertzog, 1995; 2004; Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, 2008; Swers, 2002). However, in recent years, both houses of Congress have become increasingly more diverse in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity (Fowler, 1996; Kanthak & Krause, 2010; Mansbridge, 1999). Concerning women, Gertzog notes that “voters seem to be more inclined than they once were to support women,” and that “the accessibility of women to the House has improved markedly” (1995, p. 38) Karen O’Connor (2001) claims that one of the reasons for the increased success of women is the availability of funding. “The development of scores of women’s political action committees (PACs) has contributed significantly to the success of female candidates” (O’Connor, 2001, p. 2). In their examination of state legislators, Fulton et al. (2006) find that though women are generally less ambitious than men, they possess a sensitivity to opportunity that makes them just as likely as their male counterparts to seek election to higher office.

Minorities have also made gains in Congress. If minorities do face barriers to entry, it would seem that they are not a result of voter preference. Calfano and Paolino (2010) found that the attitudes of white evangelical candidates toward black candidates were motivated more by ideological considerations than racial ones. In fact, white evangelicals tended to view conservative black candidates even more favorably than white ones (Calfano & Paolino, 2010). This coincides with Kanthak and Krause’s assertion that “People value colleagues with diverse perspectives, but not necessarily

diverse preferences” (2010, p. 841). Benjamin Highton concluded “Despite theoretical expectations that predict the existence of white voter discrimination against African American candidates, remarkably little is apparent” (2004, p. 1). He attributes the problem to other factors. “For instance, in white districts, African Americans not only rarely win elections, they rarely emerge as candidates... Potential black candidates may be discouraged by party leaders, campaign donors, and other political activists” (Highton, 2004, p. 17). Highton claims that if black candidates would simply decide to run despite the discouragement, they would likely meet with a fair amount of success.

Even so, Fox and Lawless (2005) find reason to be concerned about participation by women and minorities. Their data “reveal a portrait of a candidate-emergence process that is far from fully inclusive of all members of the candidate eligibility pool. Despite the fact that women and members of racial minority groups are now succeeding in professions that had long been closed to them, the highly accomplished women and blacks in our sample are significantly less likely ever to have considered running for office” (Fox & Lawless, 2005, p. 653). Women and minorities of comparable educational and professional backgrounds were much less likely than white men to view themselves as highly qualified candidates.

The research seems to indicate that barriers to entry for women and minorities have more to do with the candidates’ own perceptions than reality. The good news is that these perceptions should be easier to change. As more women and minorities successfully break into the House, the resulting descriptive representation can improve the perceptions of future candidates (Mansbridge, 1999). This in turn can create a feedback loop similar

to a snowball effect, whereby descriptive representation results in more descriptive representation until a critical mass has been achieved.

What about Amateurs?

While Polsby (1968) envisioned a highly professional House, David Canon (1990) explains that times of political upheaval tend to favor the election of political amateurs. Canon defines amateurism simply as “lack of prior political experience,” and at the time of his writing, he claimed that political amateurism was particularly common in the House, “with an average of one-fourth of the members having no previous public office experience and more than half in some years having no elective experience” (1990, pp. xi-xii). Cannon distinguishes between hopeless amateurs who have little or no chance of winning and high quality amateurs who may have substantial assets, a strong community presence, or celebrity status. Maestas and Rugeley (2008) find that serious amateurs are able to fundraise and compete at nearly the same level as non-incumbent candidates with prior political experience.

However, this research needs to be clarified. Fowler (1996) points out that individuals like Fred Thompson who had no prior office-holding experience before becoming a Senator might be mistakenly labeled as a political amateur despite extensive political connections. Also, the success of political amateurs is dependent on the political climate (Canon, 1990; Jacobson & Kernell, 1981). They might do well during one election cycle and do poorly during the next. Canon’s research helps to inform my own. Since political amateurs are a bit of an electoral anomaly, I do not expect them to contribute to any sort of predictable electoral trend over time.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Establishing a Starting Point

When looking at trends over time, it can be difficult to determine an appropriate place to start. Certainly when examining members of the House of Representatives, one possible place to start would simply be at the beginning. The first Congress convened on March 4, 1789, with the House finally achieving a quorum on April 1 of the same year (Remini, 2006). Consider Polsby's ground-breaking work on the institutionalization of the House. For each of the three characteristics that Polsby studied, his data was exhaustive of the entire lifespan of the House. His approach was an effective way to show the gradual shift toward institutionalization that had been occurring over the long history of the House. However, for the purpose of my analysis, beginning with the first Congress is both prohibitively difficult and unnecessary. As of February 11, 2014, the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives reports that 10,818 unique members have served in the House. The size alone means compiling or updating a dataset for each of these members would be a monumental task. Also, as research moves further back in time, records become more difficult to locate. Fortunately, my analysis attempts to focus on modern trends in freshman classes, and while the word "modern" is by no means a concrete concept, it seems safe to conclude that at a minimum, congresses prior to the second world war would not be considered modern.

I have chosen to begin my analysis with the 86th United States Congress which convened January 3, 1959. All freshmen elected to the 86th and subsequent congresses are included in my dataset. The 86th Congress proves to be a useful starting place for a variety of reasons. The primary reason it was chosen was because it was the first congress

in which all fifty states were represented.¹¹ Beginning with the 86th Congress also means that every member of the 113th Congress with the exception of the remarkably long-serving Representative John Dingell¹² (D-MI) will be included in the sample. This starting point means that the sample will begin at a time of important social change. For example, the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the 1960s dramatically altered traditional attitudes about women and minorities and paved the way for more diversity within the House. The Congressional Research Service (2014) reported that the average age for all House members in the 113th Congress was 57, an age which very closely corresponds to the period of time covered by the sample. Including the 86th through the 113th United States Congresses means that the sample includes 28 congresses and nearly 2000 members. Therefore, the sample accounts for about one fourth of all congresses and roughly one fifth of all House members.

Defining a Freshman

With a starting point established, deciding who qualifies as a freshman in any given congress is the first determination that must be made before individual characteristics can be examined further. For the purposes of this research, any constitutionally eligible individual who won election to the House for the first time with a starting date that is or would have been on or after June 3, 1959 will be included in the sample, and each individual shall only be included one time. The congress in which the

¹¹ Hawaii joined the union on August 21, 1959. Daniel Inouye was sworn into the House as Hawaii's first at-large representative on the same day.

¹² John Dingell, born July 8, 1926, was elected to the 84th Congress in a special election to fill the seat vacated by his father upon his father's death. Dingell has served in the House continuously since taking office on December 13, 1955. On June 7, 2013, Dingell surpassed Robert Byrd as the longest serving member of Congress in U.S. history.

member will be considered a freshman will be the congress during which his or her first date of service, as recorded by the Clerk of the House, occurred.

These conditions provide guidance when dealing with certain anomalies. For example, consider the case of House members with nonconsecutive service. Since 1976, Ron Paul (R-TX) has served nearly 19 years in the House during three different nonconsecutive periods of time that were punctuated by gaps of two and twelve years¹³. Paul first ran against incumbent Robert Casey (D-TX) for election to the 94th Congress in the 1974 general elections but was unsuccessful. However when Casey was appointed to a position in the Ford administration, Paul was elected to the 94th Congress for the first time in a special election to complete the last nine months of Casey's term. Paul was defeated for reelection to a full term in 1976. Paul became a member of the 96th Congress when he ran successfully for his old House seat in 1978. Though he was technically not an incumbent and his previous service was brief, he doubtlessly still benefited from at least some of the advantages of his prior incumbency.

Therefore, Paul would be listed in the dataset only once as a freshman in the 94th Congress, but even this is somewhat odd. After all, Paul actually lost the general election to the 94th Congress. His special election took place seventeen months after the 1974 general election, yet was within only 7 months of the 1976 general election. Chronologically, Paul may have had more in common with the freshmen of the 95th Congress, yet he was never a member of the 95th Congress. Ron Paul's electoral history helps to illustrate both the difficulty and the importance of establishing valid criteria to determine when members truly are freshmen.

¹³ Ron Paul served from 1976-1977, 1979-1985, and from 1997-2013

The criteria also help to deal with other potential issues. For example in 1982, Apollo 13 astronaut Jack Swigert (R-CO) was elected to the House from Colorado's sixth congressional district. However, during his campaign for office, Swigert developed a malignant tumor and died eight days before the beginning of his first congressional term. Therefore, Swigert was never actually sworn in as a member of the House, yet he is included in the sample because he demonstrated an incontrovertible ability to break into the House despite being prevented from actually taking his seat. This would also be true in the hypothetical case that a freshman was posthumously elected. While incumbent House members¹⁴ and at least one freshman Senator¹⁵ have been posthumously elected, I have been unable to find any records indicating the posthumous election of a House freshman.

Selecting Variables

Having assembled a list of freshmen representatives, the next task is to identify meaningful characteristics and circumstances that may affect candidate emergence, voter preference, and consequently, the composition of freshman classes. Research shows that voters often have little more than a superficial knowledge about political candidates (Baron, 1994) and that this is especially true in the case of newcomers in House elections (Miller, 1990). Baron goes so far as to lament "the considerable voter ignorance of both issues and candidate positions on those issues" (1994, p. 33). Voters do not want to appear uninformed (Miller, 1990), so to counteract their lack of knowledge with a

¹⁴ Examples include Patsy Mink (D- HI) and Nick Begich (D-AK). In the case of Begich, his plane disappeared about one month prior to the election and was never found. Begich was legally declared dead after the election but is suspected of dying before.

¹⁵ In 2000, Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan was running for the U.S. Senate when on October 16, just weeks before the election, he was killed in a plane crash. Carnahan was posthumously elected to the Senate. His successor to the governorship, former Lt. Governor Roger Wilson appointed Carnahan's widow Jean Carnahan to fill the vacancy.

minimal investment of time and effort, voters will often use cues from a candidate's personal information as a shortcut to a more informed vote (Popkin, 1991).

Characteristics such as gender (McDermott, 1997), race (McDermott, 1998), sexual orientation (Golebiowska, 2003), occupation (McDermott, 2005), religion (McDermott, 2009), prior military service (Krasa & Polborn, 2010), and political experience (Berkman & Eisenstein, 1999) have been shown to be sources of such cues. Therefore, it makes sense to include those variables as well as others that would be obvious or at least easily noticeable to voters and that would be expected to have a rational impact on voter choice. Of course, it would not make sense to analyze whether a candidate was right-handed or whether the candidate was a good golfer since this information would not likely be known to potential voters and even if it was, it would not be expected to affect their vote.

The most obvious characteristics of which voters are most likely to take note are those that can be determined simply by looking at a candidate (Golebiowska, 2003). These characteristics include a candidate's gender, race, and perhaps ethnicity. To a certain extent, age also falls into this category. Though I would not expect most voters to be able to tell a candidate's exact age based on appearance, I do assume that voters will be able to distinguish candidates who are very old or very young, and that these determinations may affect voter choice (Kenski & Jamieson, 2010). Other variables such as occupational, military, and political experience are well-known because they are widely reported by the media or promoted by the candidates. The specifics of a candidate's educational background may be unknown to voters, but may be generally inferred based on a candidate's occupation. Beyond that, other legitimate characteristics

may have varying electoral significance based on the level of voter awareness. While a candidate's race¹⁶ or gender may be difficult to disguise, others such as religion and sexual orientation may be completely concealable depending on the degree to which they are practiced in public. Since candidates have more control over disclosure of these variables, they may only play a role if such candidates choose to reveal that information.

Another variable that may give freshmen representatives an edge has to do with the long history of political dynasties in the United States. Since the first Congress, many House members have had relatives who had also served in Congress, and in recent years that number has been as high as ten percent (Feinstein, 2010). The literature shows that officeholders derive intangible benefits similar to a "brand name" advantage that can be transferred to family members (Dal Bó, Dal Bó, & Snyder, 2009; Feinstein, 2010). For this reason, the dataset will include a variable to identify dynastic candidates.

External to a candidate's individual qualities, it is helpful to include variables that paint a picture of the electoral circumstances by which a candidate is able to break into the House. Research demonstrates that there are fairly common electoral events that favor the election of new House freshmen, most of which are related to the absence of an incumbent (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981). Examining variables regarding these events expands our understanding of the nature of House freshmen by providing insight into the context of their elections. One variable may be used to simply code for the presence or absence of an incumbent.

¹⁶ In November, 2013, Houston Community College System board candidate Dave Wilson made national news after successfully campaigning against a black incumbent by intentionally misleading voters into thinking that he was black, when in fact he was white. Given the publicity that goes along with congressional races, it is difficult to imagine such a ruse succeeding for a House candidate.

A variable denoting a special election would also be related to the absence of an incumbent since special elections are held as a result of a vacancy caused by the resignation, death, or expulsion of an incumbent. Another variable associated with changes in incumbency will address the circumstances surrounding redistricting. Congressional districts may be redrawn every decade with some being eliminated and others added. At the same time, incumbents may be drawn out of one district and into another which may or may not already contain an incumbent. The addition of new seats and the transfer of incumbents following redistricting provide additional opportunities for House freshmen.

Sources of Data

It would be extremely handy if a complete and exclusive list of freshmen representatives was available for each congress. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate such a list. There are good sources of information though. From 1992 to 1998, four biennial editions of the *New Members of Congress Almanac* were published. One was published at the beginning of each congress from the 103rd – 106th. These references are useful for identifying freshmen that broke into the House during general elections, yet because they were published at the beginning of each congress, they do not include any freshmen that may have broken in later through special elections. Additionally, the limited period of time that they cover means that they are only of partial value to me. Another method for identifying House freshmen is necessary.

One of the most comprehensive sources of information is the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. Rule II § 2 of the House Rules establishes the Clerk as the primary record keeper for the House. The Clerk's Offices of History, Art, & Archives

maintain membership profiles of each congress including election statistics and an official annotated membership roster by state with vacancy and special election information. These offices also maintain the House entries of the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Among other things, the biographical directory includes the dates of service for each House member.

Lists of freshmen representatives can be generated by comparing successive membership rosters and confirming service dates in the biographical directory. If a member is present on one roster, but is not present on the previous roster, he or she is presumed to be a freshman member of that congress. Since this method could potentially result in duplication as a result of nonconsecutive service, it is essential that the presumed freshman's first date of service be confirmed with the biographical directory. The biographical directory also includes each member's date of birth and usually includes information relating to the member's education, occupation, military service, prior elected office, and some dynastic family connections.

The biographical directory does not provide all the member information necessary for my research. Characteristics such as an individual's race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation are often not explicitly mentioned in a member's directory entry, though some of this can be inferred from available clues such as an individual's name, picture, and associations¹⁷. The Clerk's Offices of History, Art, & Archives have produced other original research that helps to fill in these gaps. Their publications such as *Women in Congress, 1917-2006* and *Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007* help to identify members who belong to those respective groups.

¹⁷ The biographical entry for Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL) never mentions that he is black, but does display his picture and notes his service as the secretary for the Democratic National Convention's Black Caucus.

Beyond the primary source of the Clerk of the House, there are several other fine reference materials available. The two that I have relied on most are the *Almanac of American Politics* and *CQ's Politics in America*. Each of these sources is published biennially, the former since 1972 and the latter since 1984. They are rich with concise biographical information for each House Member during the congress covered by the particular edition. A 2002 reference work entitled *The Almanac of Women & Minorities in American Politics 2002* helps provide information on minorities other than black House freshmen. For additional data on the religious affiliations of House members, I examine surveys from the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. Alternative sources of information on military veterans who have served in Congress include reports by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and interest groups such as the National Defense PAC. The Brookings Institute's Vital Statistics on Congress provide aggregate data on women, minorities, prior occupations, and religious affiliations in Congress.

Measuring and Coding Variables

With variables established, it becomes necessary to adopt standards for measuring and coding relevant data for each variable. Each coding schema must be reliable and meaningful. Coding some variables is straightforward. For example, the special election variable was simply a binary variable that codes whether or not a freshman's election was a special election. This is similar to the prior military service variable which codes whether or not a freshman had previously served in the military. The gender variable codes whether the freshman was male or female. The redistricting variable codes whether or not the congress in which a freshman was elected immediately followed a decennial

census. The defeated incumbent variable codes whether or not a freshman had defeated an incumbent in either the primary or general elections.

For the age variable, I use a freshman's actual age as of the first date of service as an interval level variable. In order to calculate the values for this variable, I record each freshman's date of birth and first date of service. I then use a formula to calculate the difference between the two dates, thus establishing the freshman's age in years. For education and prior elected office, I created ordinal variables. The education variable is subdivided into less than high school, high school, some college (including an associate's degree), a bachelor's degree, and a graduate or professional degree. The variable denoting prior highest elected office codes for no prior elected office, local elected office, and state elected office.

As an ordinal variable, the prior highest elected office variable has a potential problem because it assumes that service in a state legislature is more valuable than service at the local level. However, this may or may not be true depending on the size and importance of the local office. Undoubtedly, being the mayor of my hometown of Westfield, Illinois which has a population of 700 carries much less political capital than being the mayor of Peoria or Chicago. In most cases, however, I assume that the proposed hierarchy is valid (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981). Another possible problem with the variable is that it does not consider non-elected office. Fowler and McClure (1989) point out that Fred Eckert's (R-NY) prior non-elected service as a United States Ambassador was critical to his first election to the House. Nevertheless, serving in government, even in high-level appointments, is more demonstrative of an ability to navigate a bureaucracy than to secure votes in an election.

Several nominal variables are difficult to code because of their nonexclusive nature. For example, there are many individual occupations that could be coded. The appendix of job titles for the Illinois Central Management System exceeds two hundred pages. In order to produce generalizable results, a few broad categories must be produced into which similar occupations can be classified. The *Vital Statistics on Congress* occupational data place members into 26 separate fairly specific categories. A system that further consolidates similar occupations is the National Career Cluster Framework developed by the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education. This framework attempts to categorize occupations into sixteen different career clusters. Since my research examines common trends among House freshmen, it is not necessary to have a specific code for every freshman's occupation, but only those that are most prevalent. Outlying occupations can be assigned a catch-all code. I have decided to assign a specific code for eight occupations that occur most frequently in the *Vital Statistics on Congress*: law, business/finance, medicine/healthcare, education, government/ politics, military, agriculture, and journalism/communications. All other occupations are listed in an "other" category. While it seems unlikely to be necessary, a code of 0 is reserved to indicate no prior employment experience.

Relying on data from *CQ Roll Call Member Profiles*, the profile of the 113th Congress produced by Jennifer Manning (2014) of the Congressional Research Service highlights other difficulties with coding occupation. "Most members list more than one profession when surveyed by *CQ Roll Call*, and the professions listed are not necessarily the ones practiced by Members immediately prior to entering Congress" (Manning, 2014, p. 2). Consider the case of Representative Doug LaMalfa (R-CA). LaMalfa is a fourth

generation rice farmer. He has a bachelor's degree in Ag Business and is the manager of the multi-million dollar LaMalfa Family Partnership. Prior to running for Congress in 2012, he served for ten years in the California state legislature. One can see how LaMalfa's prior occupation could easily be categorized as agriculture, business/finance, or government/politics. In situations like this, I will use the occupation listed in reference materials. When there are multiple occupations listed or if there is no reference material available, I will code for the occupation that I consider the foundational occupation. For LaMalfa, I would code his occupation as agriculture because it was the foundation for his business success and was his occupation prior to and throughout his service in the state legislature.

There are hundreds of religious denominations in the United States, and like occupations, these must be consolidated into categories. The *Vital Statistics on Congress* organize religious affiliations into four broad categories: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and "all other." Campbell, Green, and Layman (2011) use very similar groupings but add categories for Mormons and nonreligious individuals. I adopt each of these and add three more – Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism – based on Pew's classification of major world religions. I also include a code for freshmen who refuse to identify their religious affiliation.

In order to code for racial and ethnic minorities, I use categories based on those of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I assign codes for seven different racial/ethnic categories: white, black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific islander, multiracial, and "other." Even with codes developed for any conceivable race or combination, determining how to label a freshman can be difficult because race is a

somewhat individualistic concept. Khana (2010) finds that the so-called one-drop rule¹⁸ continues to shape racial identity today. In other words, individuals with one white parent and one minority parent often consider themselves to be racial minorities¹⁹ rather than biracial or multiracial. The Clerk of the House appears to have taken this same approach when compiling *Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007*. Reeves (1997) noted that newspaper reporters frequently referred to candidates simply as black or African American even if they were multiracial. Therefore in my sample, freshmen who have one white parent and one minority parent are coded based on the minority parent. Freshmen with parents from different minority races such as Hansen Clarke (D-MI) whose father is Bangladeshi and whose mother is black is coded as multiracial.

When a dynastic family connection is identified, coding distinguishes whether the freshman is a spouse, a descendant, or a sibling of an influential political family member. Additional codes are used for other family connections, such as a niece, and multiple connections such as the Kennedy family. In the event that the initial dynastic family member is included in the sample, he or she will not be considered dynastic because the individual to establish the dynasty could not have benefited from its existence when breaking into the House. For example, Donald Payne Sr. (D-NJ) would not be coded as dynastic, whereas his son Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ) who succeeded him in the House would be coded as a dynastic decedent.

However, the timing of the dynasty isn't always so clear. Asa Hutchinson (R-AR) was an unsuccessful candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1986 and for state Attorney General

¹⁸ The "one-drop rule" is the notion that one drop of minority blood makes someone a minority. This logically precludes the notion that one drop of white blood makes someone white.

¹⁹ President Barack Obama is often referred to as the first black president despite the fact that only one of his parents was black.

1990. In 1992, Asa's brother Tim Hutchinson (R-AR) was elected to the U.S. House. After Tim was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1996, Asa succeeded him in the House. These circumstances beg the question, was Tim's election aided by his brother's prior unsuccessful candidacy or was Asa's electoral success a product of his brother's success? Both cannot be credited with initiating the dynasty. For the purpose of this research, a dynasty will begin with a successful election. Therefore, Tim Hutchinson would not be coded as dynastic while his brother Asa would be coded as a dynastic sibling.

Determining what constitutes a dynasty and whether or not a freshman is part of a dynasty can be a challenge. Undoubtedly, widows who succeed their husbands and progeny who succeed their parents benefit enormously from their dynastic family connections. However, the strength of a relationship and whether or not it is of any value to the candidate can be hard to ascertain. For example, John Culberson (R-TX) who was first elected to the House in 2000 is a distant relative of Charles Allen Culberson (D-TX). From 1891 to 1923, the latter served as the state Attorney General, Governor, and U.S. Senator from Texas. Prior to that, Charles Allen Culberson's father David Browning Culberson (D-TX) had served as U.S. Representative from 1875-1897. While John Culberson might possibly be seen as a product of this political dynasty, the distant relationship and the elapsed time make it seem unlikely that the family history had any impact on his election.

The newest variable to be coded is based on sexual orientation. It wasn't until the 106th Congress that Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) became the first openly homosexual freshman to break into the House. Recently, Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) joined the 113th Congress as the first openly bisexual member to break into the House. While there have

been several other homosexual and bisexual members of Congress prior to Baldwin and Sinema, each publicly acknowledged his or her sexual orientation only after election and often involuntarily. Since my analysis only examines the characteristics of individual freshmen at the time of their first election to the House, only openly gay or bisexual House freshmen at the time of election will be coded as such.

The LGBT variable has its flaws. My research makes the assumption that unless it is explicitly disclosed, voters are unaware of a candidate's sexual orientation. However, Golebiowski points out that stereotypes about gay candidates may have the effect of informing voters. "Since gays and lesbians as groups are widely stereotyped, voters may be inclined to categorize them as gay or lesbian using the gay and lesbian stereotypes as a heuristic." (Golebiowska, 2003, p. 316). Indeed, when Gerry Studds (D-MA) became the first openly gay congressman following the 1983 congressional page sex scandal, it was widely reported that his constituents were not surprised. Later, when fellow Massachusetts Democratic Representative Barney Frank became the first congressman to voluntarily come out as gay, many had already suspected it (Weisberg, 2009). Yet, it would be nearly impossible to develop a reliable coding schema for stereotypical behavior and public perception of potentially gay or bisexual freshmen. So, my coding is limited to those freshmen whose sexual orientation is known on Election Day.

Analyzing Data

There are several different methods for analyzing the completed dataset and displaying trends. Within each congress, most variables can be sorted by codes which can then be counted and compared against both their own congress and other congresses in the sample. Quantities can be compared either as raw totals or as percentages of a whole.

For the age variable, measures of central tendency such as mean, median, mode, and range can be used to compare average ages, common ages, and extreme ages over time.

These trends can then be graphed using time as a horizontal axis.

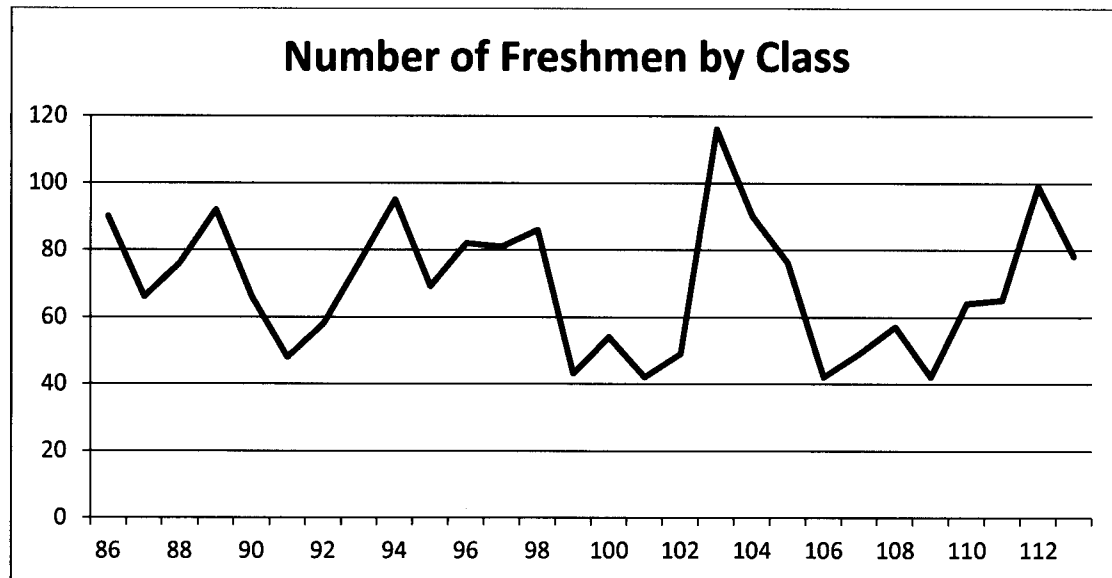
Chapter 4 – Results

The data yield a number of interesting findings. Some results are consistent with expectations while others are surprising. In this chapter, most results are graphed over time. When appropriate or elucidatory, raw numbers are graphed or presented in a table, but since class sizes can vary considerably, groups within classes are usually reported as a percentage of each class in order to make an accurate comparison. For women and minorities, scatter plot graphs with best-fit lines are used to illustrate similar linear growth. Dynastic and LGBT freshmen are addressed in the text but are not graphed because there are so few individuals in either group.

Class Size

Throughout the congresses studied, there did not seem to be any long-term trend in the size of freshman classes. Classes varied in size from 42 in the 101st, 106th, and 109th Congresses to 116 in the 103rd Congress. The sample included 1951 unique freshmen and the mean class size was 70. Interestingly, in the classes immediately following a decennial census, the mean class size was about 82 while the average for all other classes was 67. In other words, freshmen were 22% more likely to enter the House following a decennial census and the accompanying reapportionment of seats. A comparison between mid-term and presidential election years showed little difference. The average class size for presidential election years was 67 while the average class size following mid-term elections was 72.

Figure 4.1



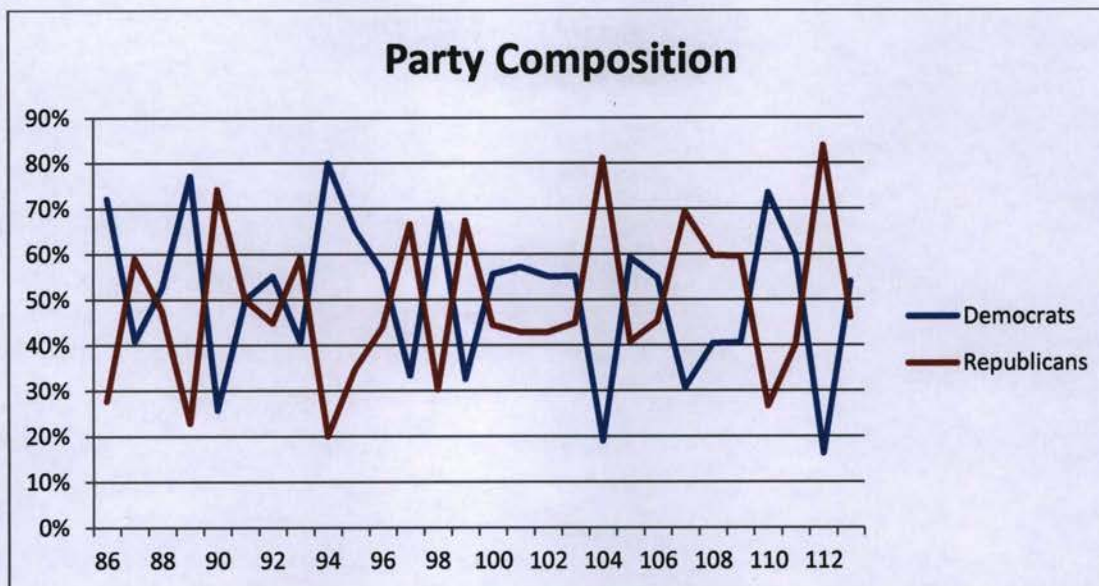
Party Composition

The party composition of each class varied often. This is not necessarily indicative of wide swings in national voter preference. A higher percentage of Republican freshmen in one class could simply be the result of a high number of Republican retirements. The balance of power in the House is only altered when a seat changes hands from one party to another. In fact, in the 103rd Congress Democrats made up 55% of the class and President Clinton was elected in the 1992 election cycle, yet Republicans made a net gain of 9 seats in the House.

Therefore, the purpose of examining party composition within freshman classes is not to determine when one party had a better year than the other, but rather to demonstrate that opportunities for freshmen in either party are not dependent on party control in the House. Despite relatively stable party control for most of the period studied, neither party has held a monopoly on House freshmen for any significant length of time. Opportunities were remarkably well-distributed. For the entire sample,

Republicans accounted for 48.5 % of House freshmen while Democrats accounted for about 51.5%. Only one freshman in the sample did not belong to either major party.²⁰

Figure 4.2



Age

The data reveal that age may also play a role in the availability of opportunities for House freshmen. In the sample, ages of freshmen ranged from 71 to the constitutional minimum of 25. There were three freshmen who were 71 years old at the time they entered the House including two who were elected to the most recent congress.²¹ There were also three freshmen in the sample who were only 25 when they joined the House, the youngest of whom was only 24 when elected.²² The average age of freshmen

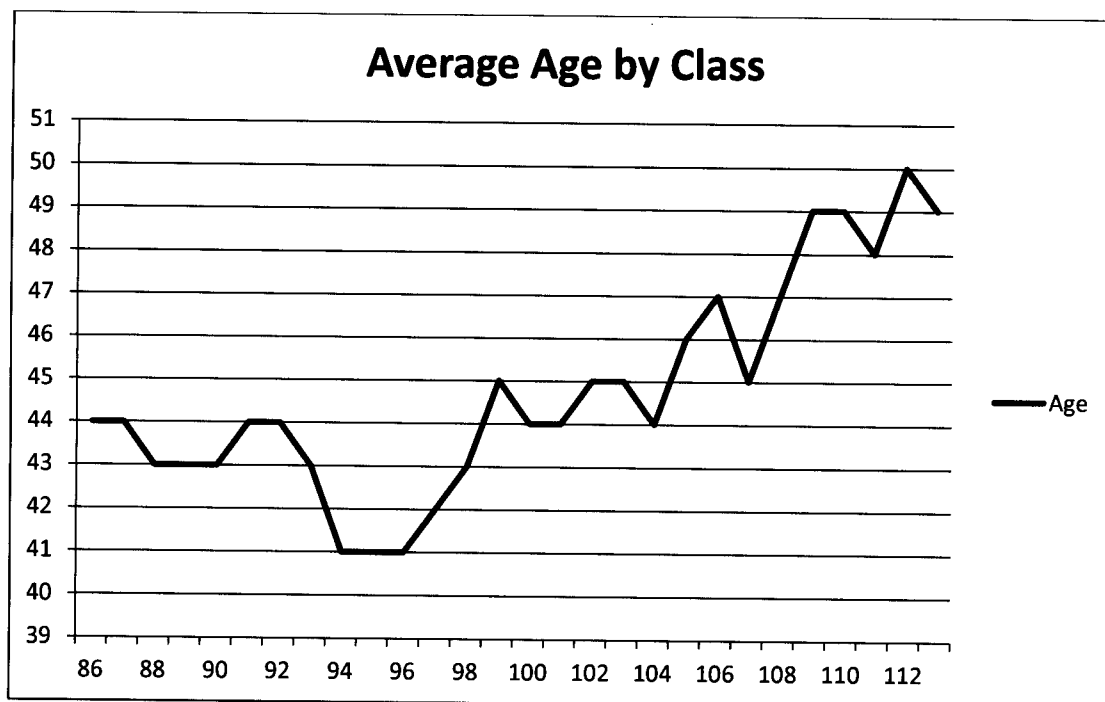
²⁰ Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was elected to the House as an Independent in 1990. Since his election Sanders, who now serves in the Senate, has caucused with the Democrats.

²¹ George Crockett (D-MI), was elected in a special election to the 96th Congress. Gloria McLeod (D-CA) and Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) were elected to the 113th Congress in the 2012 general elections. At 71 years, 9 months, and 26 days, Lowenthal was the oldest of the three at the time of entry into the House.

²² William Green (D-PA) was elected to in a special election to the 88th Congress. Jed Johnson Jr. (D-OK), the son of former representative Jed Johnson Sr. (D-OK) was elected to the 89th Congress. Thomas Downey (D-NY) was elected to the 94th Congress. The youngest, Johnson, having defeated veteran legislator Victor Wickersham (D-OK) in the Democratic primary, was elected in the general election on November 3, 1964. Johnson's 25th birthday occurred on December 26, 1964, just eight days before the 89th Congress convened.

members hit a low of 41 in the 1970's but has been steadily climbing since then. On average, members today enter the House nearly a decade older than they did 35 years ago.

Figure 4.3



Special Elections

Special elections played a limited yet disproportionately large role in the election of House freshmen. Over the period of time studied, special elections made up only about 2% of the total available elected seats. However, they accounted for about 12% of the freshmen in the sample. At their peak, there were 13 special elections in each of the 91st and 110th Congresses. For most of the congresses in the sample, special elections usually accounted for about 10%-20% of House freshmen, but occasionally made up an even larger percentage. In the 91st and 101st congresses, one out of four House freshmen gained entry through special elections.

Figure 4.4

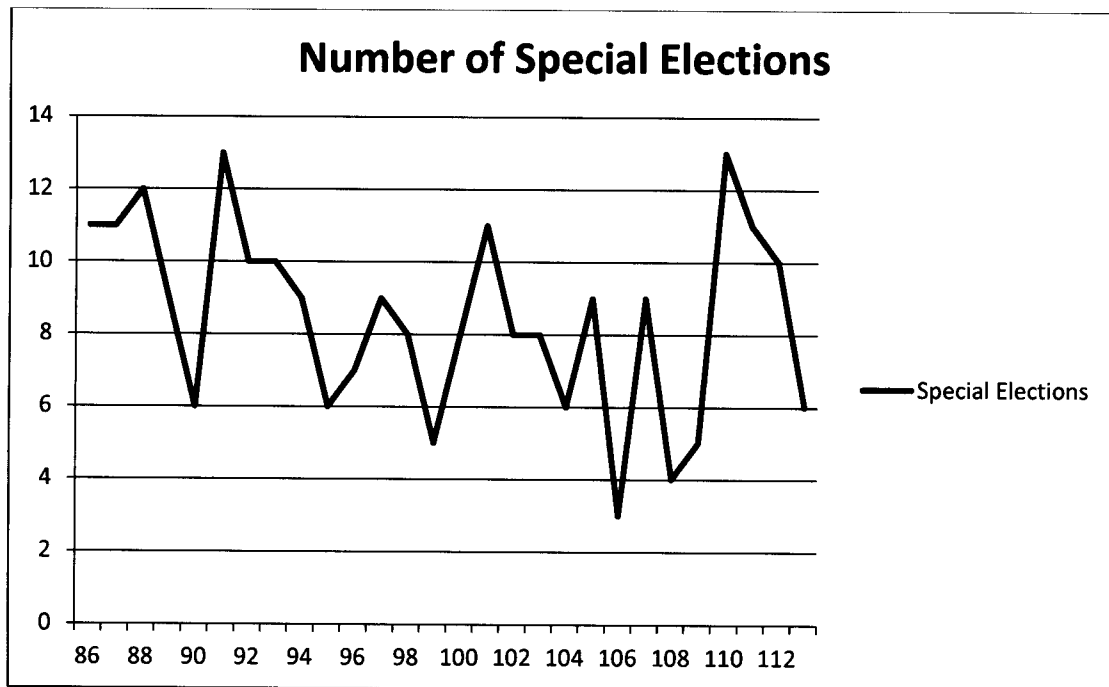
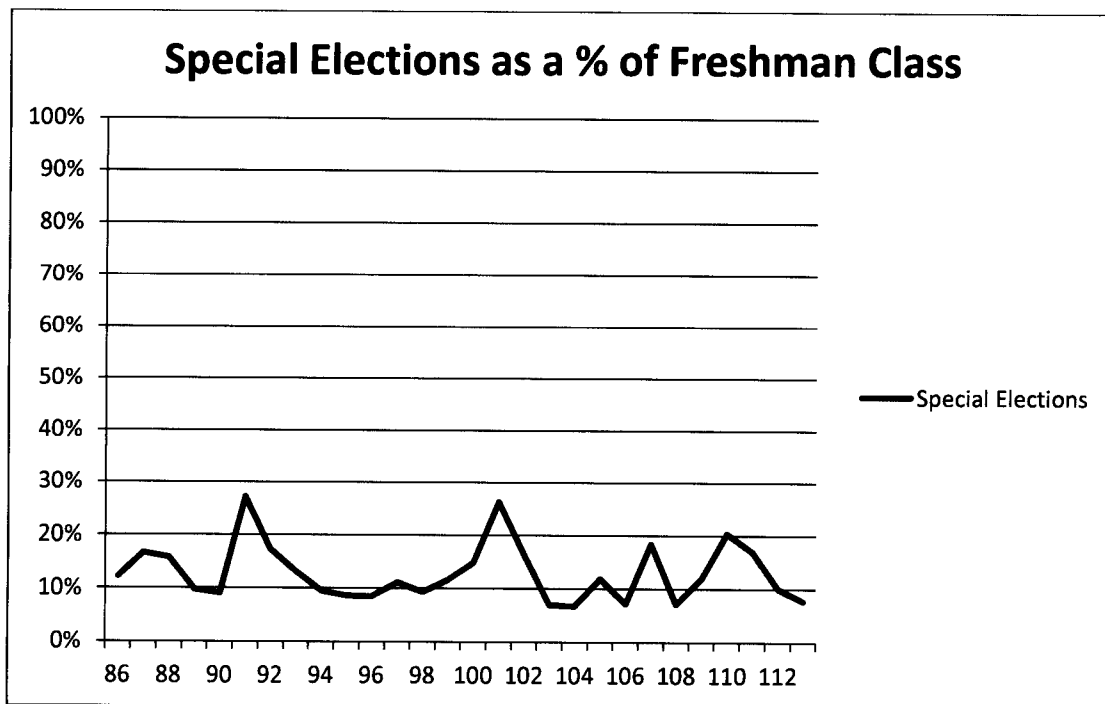


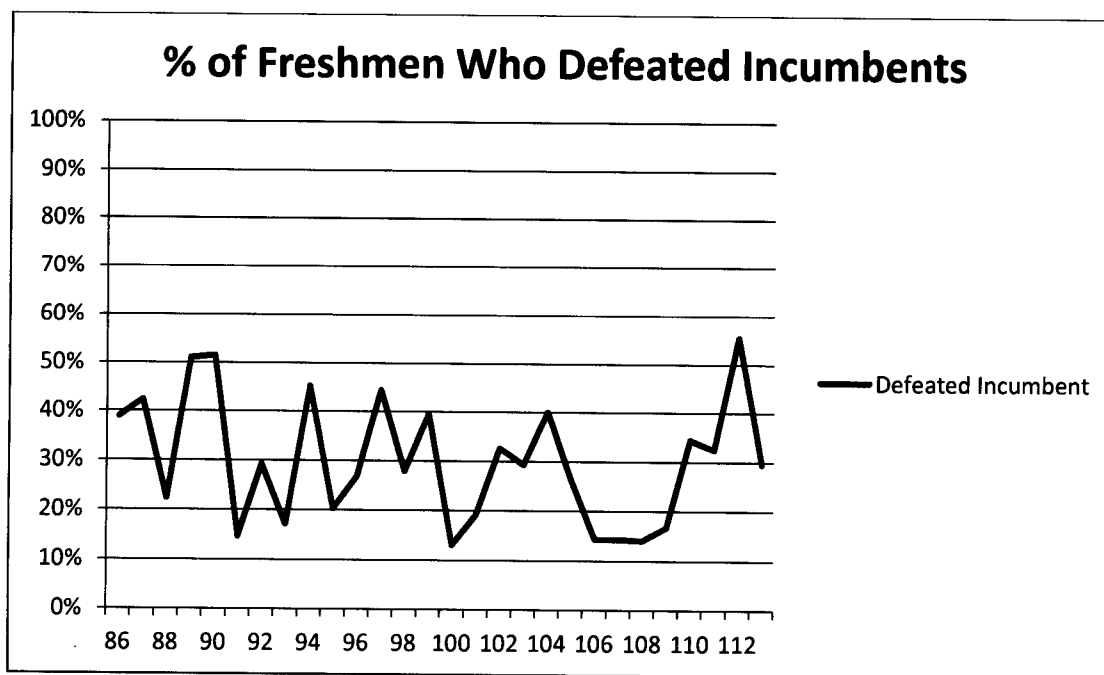
Figure 4.5



Defeating Incumbents

Since incumbents enjoy important advantages over challengers, I had expected to find that very few freshmen would defeat incumbents as they broke into the House. The data did confirm that House freshmen were more likely to enter through open seats, though surprisingly, 32% of all House freshmen in the sample actually defeated incumbents in either the primary or general elections on their way into the House. At the lowest point, only six freshmen defeated incumbents in the 106th Congress to account for about 14% of the class. In several classes, however, freshmen who defeated incumbents made up more than half of the class. In the 112th Congress for example, 55 freshmen defeated incumbents which accounted for about 56% of the class. The percentage of defeated incumbents does not seem to be trending in a particular direction over time and there was little difference between mid-term and presidential elections. It is noteworthy that one in three freshmen in the sample defeated incumbents.

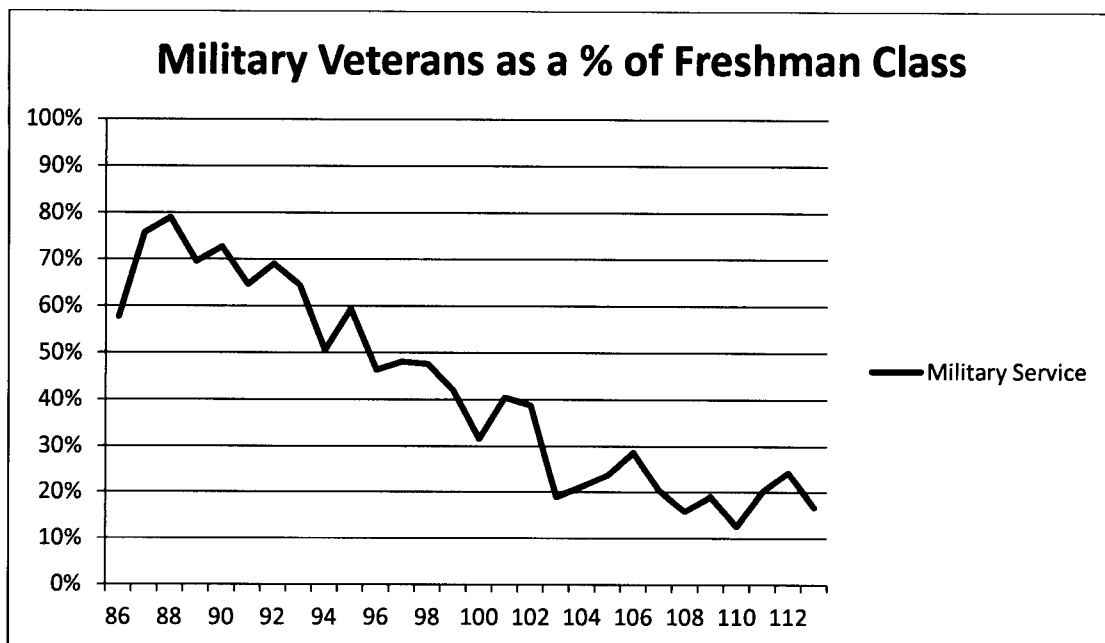
Figure 4.6



Military Service

The decline in the percentage of military veterans in each class of freshmen is one of the strongest trends suggested by the data. Census data show that the number of veterans in the United States has been declining over the past several decades and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs projects that the number will continue to decline in the decades to come. Bianco (2005) points out that the overall decline of veterans in the House is the product of generational replacement. The resulting change is a striking contrast. Early in the sample, four out of five freshmen were veterans whereas today, that number is only about one in five.

Figure 4.7

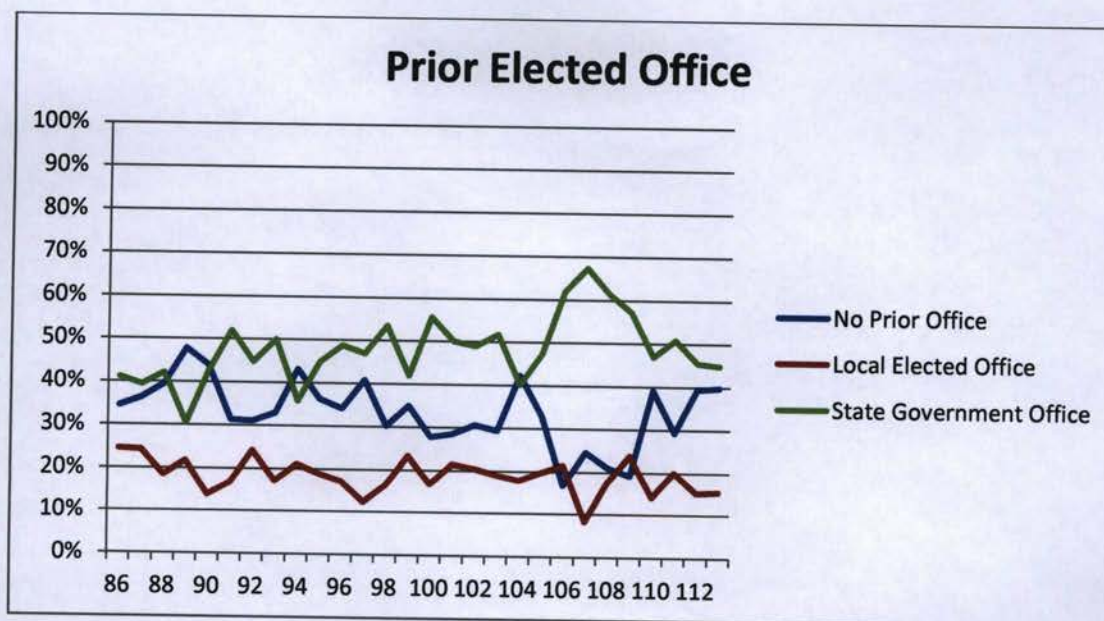


Prior Elected Office

About two-thirds of freshmen in the sample had previously served in an elected office prior to entering the House. The distribution of those offices did show evidence of a consistent hierarchy, but not necessarily in the expected order. As expected there were

usually more state government officeholders than any other group, but interestingly, freshmen were more likely to have no prior elected experience than local elected office only. This may be because a number of local officeholders went on to serve in a state office before breaking into the House. Occasionally, political amateurs even matched or outperformed state elected officials. Inexperienced freshmen seemed to be most successful during times of political upheaval. For instance, amateurs made up the largest share of the Great Society Congress (89th), the Watergate Babies (94th), and the Republican Revolution (104th). Over time, political amateurs have consistently shown that they are a viable source of House freshmen.

Figure 4.8

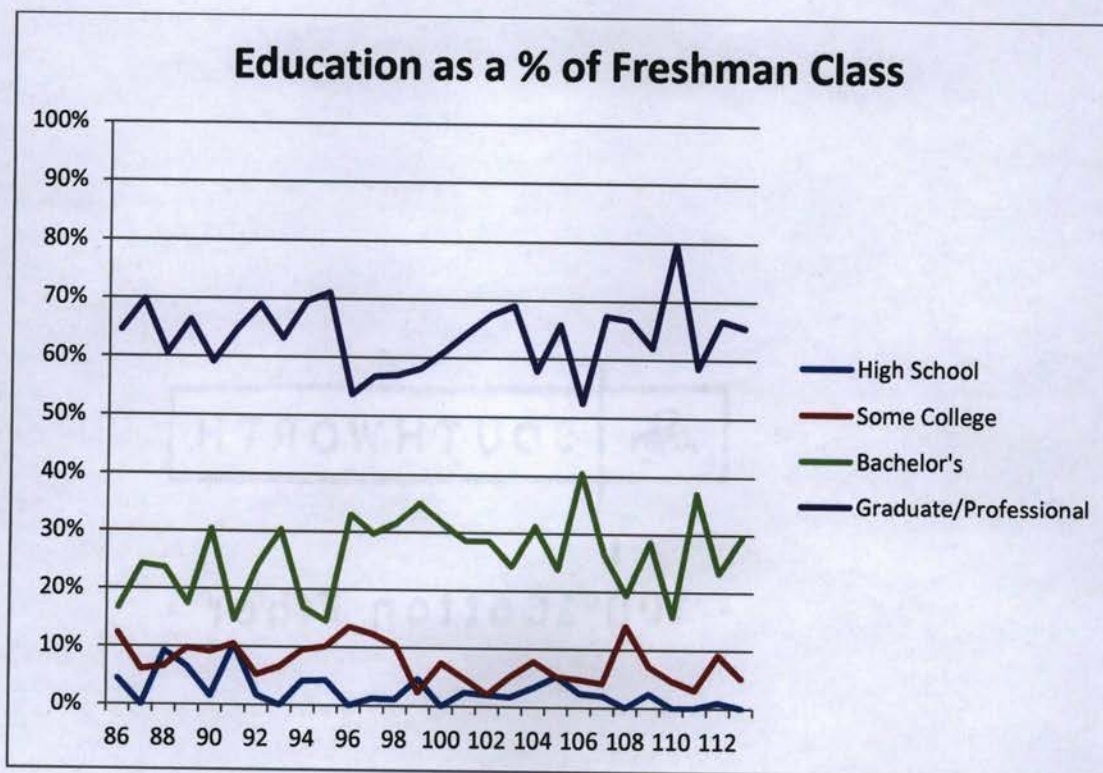


Education and Employment

As predicted, most freshmen had an advanced level of education. Approximately 90% of all freshmen in the sample had at least a bachelor's degree or higher. Of the few

freshmen with less than a bachelor's degree such as Bobby Schilling²³ (R-IL) and Stephen Fincher²⁴ (R-TN), most were usually independently successful in business or agriculture. The large number of advanced degrees also correlates with the occupations that are most often represented in the sample. The law profession represented the highest percentage of freshmen careers. Just over 40% of all freshmen in the sample were attorneys. Law, along with business, education, and government and politics supplied about 80% of all freshmen in the sample. Many of the occupations in these fields require advanced degrees and even in those that don't, an advanced degree is usually highly valued (Benson, Finegold, & Mohrman, 2004; Crewson, 1995)

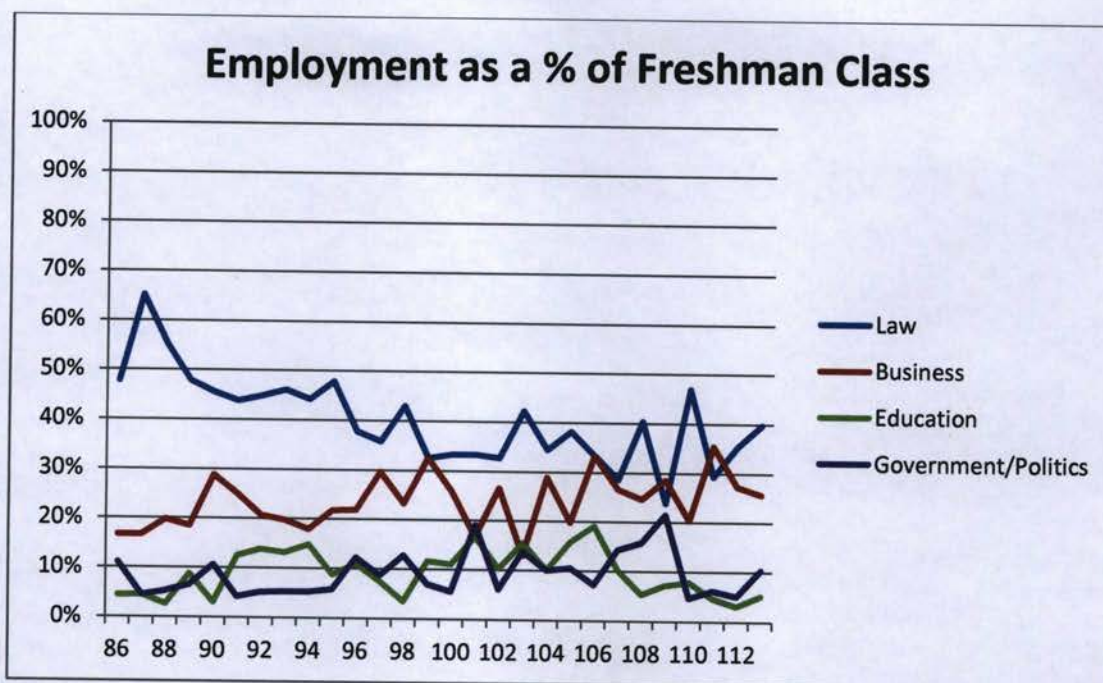
Figure 4.9



²³ Bobby Schilling attended Black Hawk Community College and worked as a successful Prudential insurance agent before opening his own pizza restaurant.

²⁴ Stephen Fincher did not attend college. A seventh generation farmer, Fincher has worked on his family farm since graduating from high school.

Figure 4.10



Women and Minorities

The rise of women and racial and ethnic minorities in freshman House classes contributed to diversity in freshman classes. As expected, these groups have continued to make up a larger share of successive freshman classes. However, the progress has been both slow and steady. I had expected that advancement toward proportional representation in freshman classes would manifest itself as an exponential curve increasing over time, yet this trend has been unexpectedly linear with a fairly flat slope. Women accounted for just 11% of the total sample. If the rate of increase remains constant, it will take another 76 years before parity is achieved. The trend among minorities in freshman classes has closely mirrored that of women. Minorities made up 9% of the total sample. African Americans accounted for just over half of all minorities. Recently, with minorities accounting for one in four members, the freshman class of the 113th Congress was the most racially and ethnically diverse.

Figure 4.11

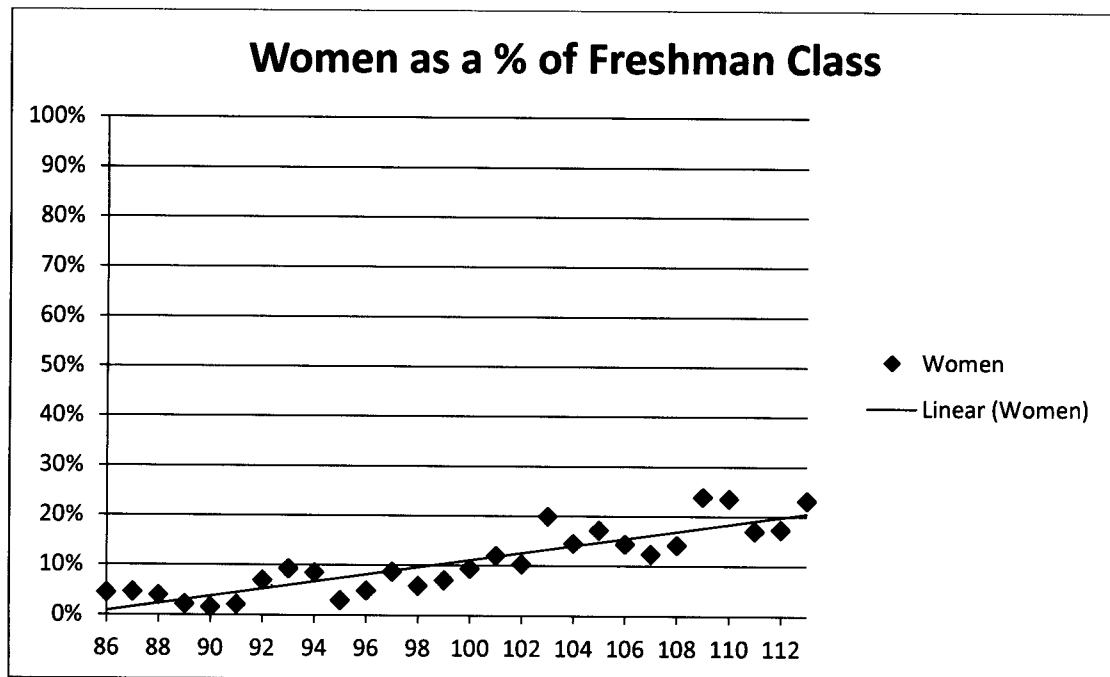


Figure 4.12

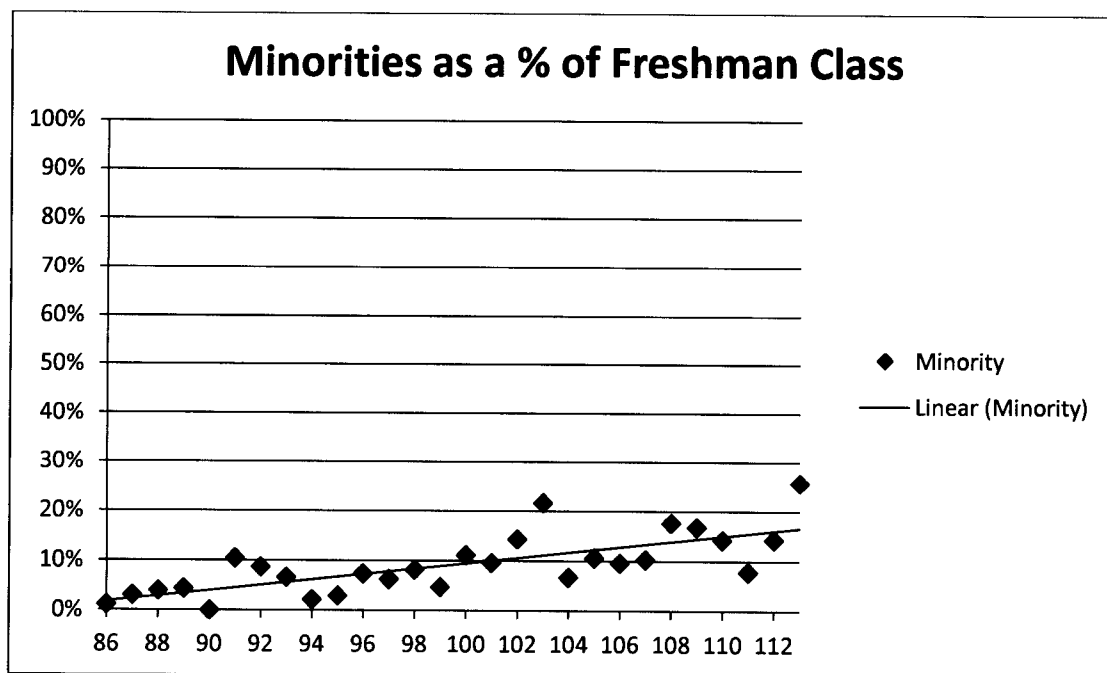


Table 4.1

Racial and Ethnic Minorities by Freshman Class					
Congress	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Multiracial
86	0	0	0	1	0
87	0	1	1	0	0
88	1	1	0	1	0
89	1	1	1	1	0
90	0	0	0	0	0
91	4	1	0	0	0
92	5	0	0	0	0
93	4	0	1	0	0
94	1	0	0	1	0
95	0	1	0	1	0
96	5	0	0	1	0
97	4	1	0	0	0
98	4	3	0	0	0
99	1	1	0	0	0
100	4	0	1	1	0
101	2	2	0	0	0
102	6	1	0	0	0
103	16	7	0	1	1
104	6	0	0	0	0
105	4	4	0	0	0
106	1	2	0	1	0
107	2	1	1	1	0
108	6	3	1	0	0
109	2	3	0	2	0
110	7	0	1	1	0
111	0	1	0	4	0
112	7	5	0	1	1
113	5	9	1	5	0

Dynastic Freshmen

About 5% of all freshmen in the sample were at least partly the product of a political dynasty. While this is a small percentage, it still represents an important point of entry for a select group of freshmen. Descendants accounted for 62% of the dynastic freshmen, while spouses accounted for an additional 20%. Six freshmen had been

preceded in Congress by siblings. There was at least one dynastic freshman in each of the congresses in the sample, and many had more. In the 107th Congress, nearly one out of every five freshmen was part of a political dynasty.

Religion

Because reliable religious data was unavailable prior to the 95th Congress, findings are presented from that point forward. Overall, religious trends remained mostly unchanged over the period of time studied. Protestant Christians consistently made up most of the freshman classes, followed by Catholics, and Jews. Those three religions accounted for more than 90% of freshmen in the shortened sample. The only noticeable trend was a slight decrease in the number of Protestants corresponding to a slight increase in the number of other religions represented. Mormons made up a small but consistent group. Other religious affiliations included Unitarians and Christian Scientists. The religious affiliations of approximately 3% of freshman members were unknown either because no data was available or because the member refused to identify a religious affiliation.

There were several new major world religions first represented beginning with the 110th Congress. That freshman class included the first two Muslims²⁵ as well as the first two Buddhists²⁶. A third Buddhist²⁷ joined the House in the 112th Congress and the first Hindu²⁸ freshman was elected to the 113th Congress. Interestingly, while other freshmen

²⁵ Keith Ellison (D-MN), Andre Carson (D-IN)

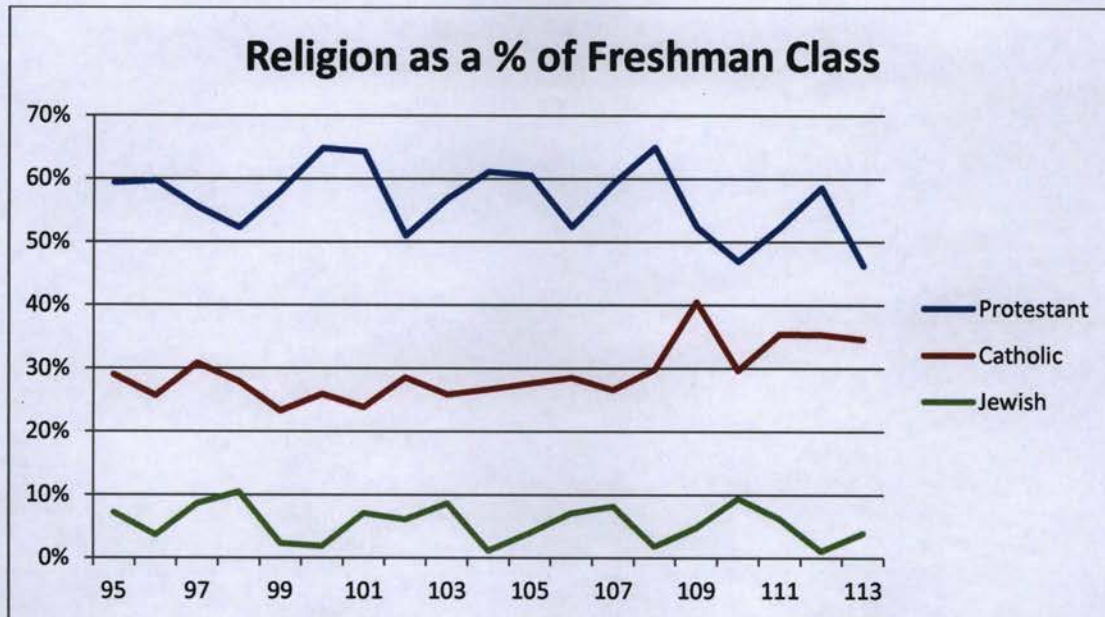
²⁶ Mazie Hirono (D-HA), Hank Johnson (D-GA)

²⁷ Colleen Hanabusa (D-HA)

²⁸ Tulsi Gabbard (D-HA)

have refused to identify a religion in the past, the first freshmen to publicly declare a religion as “none”²⁹ was also part of the freshman class of the 113th Congress.

Figure 4.13



Sexual Orientation

Openly LGBT freshmen have recently been making inroads into the House. Since the first openly LGBT freshman³⁰ was elected to the 106th Congress, there have been six additional openly LGBT freshmen elected in contemporary classes. Both the 111th Congress³¹ and 112th Congress³² included an openly LGBT freshmen. The largest increase for this group occurred during the 113th Congress when four openly LGBT freshmen³³ were elected to the House during the 2012 general election. While it still seems too early to call this a trend, it does appear to have the potential to become one.

²⁹ Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) – Pete Stark (D-CA) has acknowledged being an atheist, but in surveys described himself as a Unitarian.

³⁰ Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

³¹ Jared Polis (D-CO)

³² David Cicilline (D-RI)

³³ Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Mark Takano (D-CA), Sean Maloney (D-NY), and Mark Pocan (D-WI)

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

It is a frequently quoted axiom that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In many ways the House of Representatives is both evolving and enduring as new members consistently conform to some electoral norms while defying others. This is important because ultimately, the people's house is a house of people and it is only as good as the men and women who serve in it. The examination of new members is a study of the flow of talent, character, and experience into the House.

No representative can be perfectly representative of his or her district. After all, with only 435 total members to represent more than 300 million people, each House member represents about 700,000 people on average, and furthermore, these constituencies are not perfectly homogenous. Even so, the House of Representatives was intended to be the legislative body with the closest ties to the public. Originally, its members were the only federal government officials directly elected by the voters. For the most part their constituencies are smaller than those of their Senate counterparts³⁴. The House of Representatives offers the best opportunity for representative government at the federal level. As such, it is reasonable to believe that characteristics across freshman classes, both static and dynamic, are the product of an electorate and an electoral system that is somewhat fixed and somewhat fluctuating.

Trends Demonstrating Stability

Most of the measured characteristics that showed little change over time were primarily related to a high personal achievement. Education, employment, and prior

³⁴ The U.S. Constitution guarantees each state at least one Representative. Apportionment following the 2010 census includes 7 states with only one representative: Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming. In those states, the constituents of the at-large representative are the same as those of the state's U.S. Senators.

elected office data all showed that most freshmen throughout the sample possessed advanced degrees, held prestigious occupations, and had a strong electoral pedigree. The research shows that this is a function of the nexus of candidates, voters, and electoral conditions. Candidates with these qualities are more likely to be ambitious (Fox & Lawless, 2005) and more likely to engage in political participation (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Mayer, 2011), while at the same time, voters are more likely perceive these candidates as strong (McDermott, 2005).

The need for money in House elections also helps to explain why these candidates have and will likely continue to dominate freshman classes. Jacobson (1990) found that strong campaign spending can increase a challenger's vote share by as much as 12%. Federal Election Commission data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics show that breaking into the House still comes at a considerable financial expense. Since 2000, the average cost of winning an open seat in the general election has exceeded \$1.5 million and the average cost of defeating an incumbent has exceeded \$1.8 million. Candidates must often contribute their own resources to a campaign which necessarily assumes that they have substantial resources from which to contribute. Only serious candidates, which include both experienced politicians and amateurs capable of investing in their own campaigns, are able to raise the funds necessary to have a fighting chance (Maestas & Rugeley, 2008).

The only other personal attribute that showed little change was a freshman's religious affiliation. It may simply be that since religion cuts across gender, racial, and socioeconomic divisions, it is one way in which freshmen are truly representative of the population. Survey data from the Pew Research Forum's Religion and Public Life Project

show that religious affiliations of the general population tend to be geographically distributed and correlate strongly with those of freshmen in the sample. It seems likely that religious composition of freshman classes is similar to the religious composition of the overall population because freshmen share the religious affiliations of the districts from which they come.

Figure 5.1

Religion of 113th Congress Freshmen

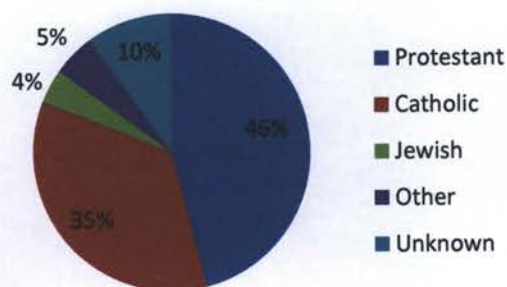
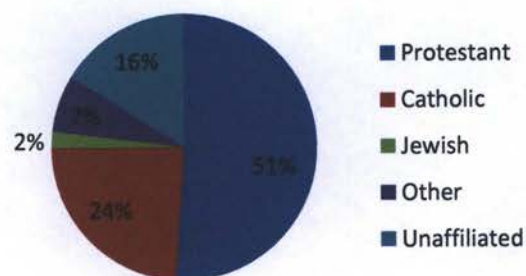


Figure 5.2

**Religion of American Population
(Pew Data)**



Trends Showing Steady Movement

Several trends showed evidence of either consistent growth or consistent decline over time. These changes have generally coincided with changes in the attitudes and perceptions of voters, experiences of candidates, and even practices of government. Descriptive representation among both women and minorities has been increasing over time. Research shows that women are not at a competitive disadvantage and are able to raise funds and secure votes at a level equal to or surpassing that of men (Jenkins, 2007). The creation of majority-minority districts following the 1990 census also helped send more minorities to the House (Branton, 2009). Yet, the progress has been slow for both groups. One explanation offered is that "In terms of the pipeline professions that lead to a

career in politics, white males continue to dominate disproportionately, especially in the fields of law and business. Thus, many members of traditionally marginalized groups will likely remain severely underrepresented” (Fox & Lawless, 2005). In a later study focusing on gender, Fox and Lawless conclude, “Our findings strongly suggest that traditional gender role socialization continues to perpetuate a culture in which women remain unaccustomed to entering the electoral arena” (2011, p. 70).

The increase in the average age of freshmen over time may be the result of a multitude of factors. The National Institute on Aging (2011) notes that life expectancy has increased. With a longer lifespan, it may be that an increase in older-than-average candidates drives the mean age up. At the same time, building families and careers starts later and takes longer than in the past. Census data show that people are marrying later and a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Mathews & Hamilton, 2009) points out that individuals are waiting longer to have children. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reports that an employee’s highest salary is usually earned later in life. Thus, it may take more time to develop the resources, network, and personal preparedness needed to enter politics.

One trend notable for its steady decrease is the presence of military veterans as a percentage of freshman classes. As with other characteristics, this decrease is likely symptomatic of a corresponding change in the population. The veteran population is at its lowest in a generation (Office of the Actuary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Nevertheless, military veterans are still being actively recruited by both parties because the public generally has a high regard for military service (Freking, 2013). With thousands of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan,

political parties have a large pool of servicemen and women from which to choose. In this political environment, the decreasing percentage of veterans in freshman classes may be on the verge of leveling off or even making a course correction.

Trends Showing New Movement

While the representation of new religious groups in freshman classes is important, this likely does not signify a trend that will continue to grow, since most of these groups make up only a small percent of the population. The exception might be the potential growth of secularism in the House. The unaffiliated are the most under-represented group, possibly because of a taboo surrounding the atheist label. Though Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) became the first House freshman to publicly declare her religion as none, it appeared that she was not entirely comfortable with the characterization. Shortly after her victory in 2012, her campaign released a statement saying, “Kyrsten believes the terms non-theist, atheist, or non-believer are not befitting of her life’s work or personal character.” This may also help to explain why previous members refused to specify a religious affiliation. They may have been representative of the unaffiliated, but felt uneasy about saying so. Sinema’s cautious, yet pioneering position may pave the way for similar freshmen who share the values of the large unaffiliated segment of the population.

Another group showing new movement is the LGBT group. With the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a key provision of the Defense of Marriage Act being ruled unconstitutional, and several new states recognizing marriage equality, LGBT rights are advancing at both the federal and state levels. It would seem that the LGBT community is also poised to make strides in proportional representation. However, in order to determine if representation is proportional, the size of the group must be known. Estimating the size

of the LGBT population presents a number of challenges (Martinez, Wald, & Craig, 2008; Overby & Barth, 2006). Gary Gates (2011) of the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law estimates the gay population at about 3.5% of the national population. Whether or not this estimate is accurate, and if so, whether the population is substantially large enough or will be in the future to create a trend in freshman classes is yet to be seen.

While there has not yet been an openly transgender freshman, there have been a few serious transgender candidates from both parties. Donna Milo is a conservative transgender woman who fled communist Cuba in the 1960s. In 2010, Milo ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination in Florida's 20th congressional district, coming in third with 22% of the vote. Paula Overby is a transgender woman who is currently seeking the Democratic nomination in Minnesota's 2nd congressional district. As candidates like these emerge, they may contribute to an overall LGBT trend.

Erratic Trends

Most of the erratic trends were related to largely unpredictable electoral conditions. Outcomes such as class size, party composition, the number of special elections, and the vulnerability of incumbents varied widely from one election cycle to another. No one can be certain when an incumbent will become ill, die, seek another office, or become embroiled in a scandal. For example, Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD) lost the 2002 general election for South Dakota's at-large congressional district to Republican Governor Bill Janklow. Shortly thereafter, Janklow, who had a history of traffic violations, ran a stop sign striking and killing a motorcyclist. Janklow was subsequently convicted of manslaughter and resigned his seat. Herseth Sandlin went on

to win the special election to replace Janklow (Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, 2006).

Other external events that shape elections may occur without warning. The economy might take a turn for the better or worse, a national tragedy may occur, or a military victory may be won. These types of events may create a national wave which is strong during one election cycle but fades before the next (Adkins & Dulio, 2012). For example, anti-war sentiment no doubt contributed to the Democratic takeover of the House in 2006 (Grose & Oppenheimer, 2007), while the anti-incumbent Tea Party movement played an important role in restoring control to the Republicans in 2010 (Karpowitz, Monson, Patterson, & Pope, 2011).

Dynastic candidates are also somewhat of an erratic yet persistent oddity. Sometimes extensive planning by both the political dynasty and party leaders goes into the process of succession from one family member to another. Prior to the 2004 elections, Nick Smith (R-MI) had announced his decision to retire from the House and had endorsed his son Brad Smith as his successor. However, during the contentious Medicare Part D vote, the elder Smith refused to vote with his party in favor of the legislation. Party leaders attempted to influence Smith by making support for his son contingent on switching his vote (Mann & Ornstein, 2006). Ultimately, Smith did not switch his vote, and his son was defeated in the Republican primary. Other dynastic succession such as a widow following her husband into the House may be much more sudden. In any case, it appears that dynastic candidates will continue to be a part of future elections. The 2014 political landscape already includes several dynastic House candidates. Weston Wamp, the son of former Representative Zach Wamp (R-TN), and Doug Owens, the son of

former Representative Wayne Owens (D-UT) have both announced candidacies for the seats once held by their fathers.

Additional Research

The composition of the House, which governs the quality of the House, is constantly shifting. Though perhaps obvious, it warrants stating that in any congress, some members exit, some members enter, and some members stay. This relationship can be expressed as the equation: $C = I - X + F$. In this equation, the composition (C) of each congress is equal to the number of incumbents (I) from the previous congress with the exception of members who leave (X) and new freshmen who enter (F). In terms of simple enumeration, C will always equal 435 because I will always equal 435 and X will always equal F . In other categories the composition may vary. For example if the previous congress had 20 women, none of whom exited, and one new woman was elected, the composition of women would show a net gain: $C_w = 20 - 0 + 1 = 21$. However, if the previous congress had 12 black members, of whom three retired and six were defeated, and four new black freshmen were elected, the composition of blacks would show a net loss: $C_b = 12 - 9 + 4 = 7$. A researcher looking only at freshmen may be tempted to falsely conclude that blacks had a better year than women.

Because each quantity is influenced by the others, research based on one element will have implications for the whole. In addressing the introduction of new members into the House, this thesis only examines one determinant of House composition. The literature on progressive ambition and candidate emergence also offer insights on new members, while the research on incumbent advantages, static ambition, and strategic decision making including strategic retirement help shed light on those members staying

and leaving. I envision future research that will synthesize these elements into a unified theory of House composition.

Figure 5.3

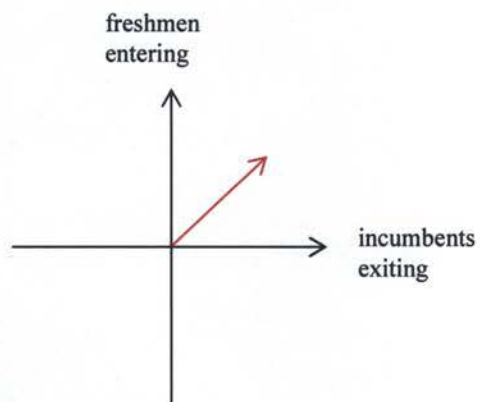


Figure 5.4

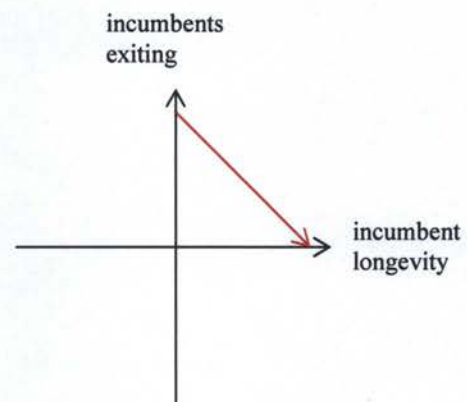


Figure 5.5

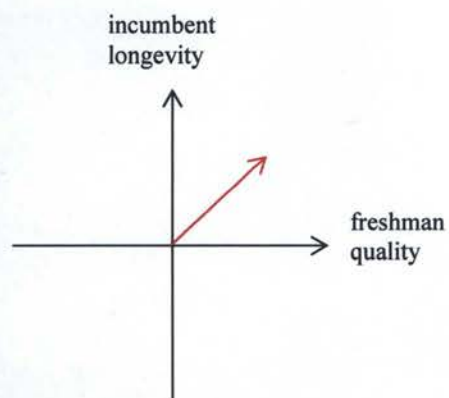


Figure 5.6



In a unified theory of House composition, freshmen entering the House would be a function of incumbents exiting the House. The departure of incumbents would itself be a function of incumbent longevity, which in turn could be a function of the quality of freshmen. Possible evidence for this theory arose during the course of data collection for this thesis. As data were being compiled, it was occasionally apparent that freshmen in some classes did not have the longevity of freshmen in other classes. For example, a third of the freshmen in the 89th Congress only served one term, and consequently played a role in the introduction of new freshmen to the next congress. Most of those who served only one term were defeated for reelection to the 90th Congress. Either Alexander Hamilton or James Madison writing under the pseudonym Publius observed in *Federalist No. 53* that “A few of the members, as happens in all such assemblies, will possess superior talents; will, by frequent reelections, become members of long standing; will be thoroughly masters of the public business, and perhaps not unwilling to avail themselves of those advantages.” If this is true, perhaps the contrapositive is also true. In other words, is it also possible that some members do not possess superior talents and therefore fail to win reelection, contributing to a shift in the composition of the House?

Another possible topic for additional research concerns the number of times that candidates run for Congress before actually breaking into the House. The *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* lists occurrences when members were unsuccessful candidates or nominees for Congress. While collecting data for this thesis, it was not unusual to encounter candidates who had run for Congress unsuccessfully several times before finally being elected. Though candidates like David Gill (D-IL) and Jim

Oberweis (R-IL) are often referred to pejoratively as perennial candidates, new research could reveal that perhaps persistence pays off in some House races.

Final Thoughts

The genesis for this thesis came out of a deep appreciation for the unique American system of constitutional government in which laws that govern the citizenry are made by representatives of their choosing. The appeal of Congress and the House of Representatives in particular is enhanced by the fact that practically anyone who meets some very basic constitutional qualifications can be elected to serve as a national legislator. Sadly, it seems the legislative branch is more often the target of ridicule than praise. However, the picture that emerges from an examination of freshman classes shows much to be hopeful about. In many ways, freshman classes have become more representative over time while consistently drawing from a pool of high-quality candidates.

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