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Progressive Ambition in the House: A Probabilistic Approach

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The effectiveness of elections as instruments of popular control is at a minimum predicated upon the desire of elected officeholders to retain at least their current position. Additionally, a substantial body of research has pointed to the role differential ambition plays in shaping the careers and behavior of officeholders. The following analysis evaluates decisions by members of the U.S. House of Representatives either to seek reelection or to pursue higher office. Probit analysis is employed to disentangle the relative influence of factors contributing to decisions to seek higher office. This method also allows for the estimation of the influence of each of these factors in terms of how they contribute to the probability a member would seek higher office. Among the influences evaluated, factors conditioning the nature of the opportunity for higher office emerge as the more salient determinants of decisions to pursue that office. It is believed that this technique holds promise for future inquiries into the role ambition plays in the roll call and electoral activities of House members.

INTRODUCTION

The nature and extent of public control of elected officeholders in the absence of widespread participation has long been one of the more enigmatic features of American democracy. Joseph A. Schumpeter (1950) provided a conception of democracy that resolved much of this puzzle. Within this conception, it is the threat of a potential challenge and the electorate's ability to remove the officeholder that induces these officials to be cognizant of the public's interest. A necessary condition for elections to function as an instrument of popular control is the presence of officeholders with sufficient ambition to seek to retain the office they hold. In the absence of such ambition, the public has no tangible sanction it can invoke to induce the officeholder to behave in its interest.

* I am grateful to Joseph Schlesinger, David Rohde, and John Aldrich for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. In addition, the editor and anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Politics* made suggestions that improved the presentation. Special thanks to Dolores Siefert.

The importance of ambition to representative democracy was articulated forcefully by Joseph Schlesinger in *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States* (1966). In this work he created a threefold categorization of ambition: those seeking higher office were classified as having progressive ambition; those seeking to maintain their current positions were classified as having static ambition; and those whose ambition was limited to serving a current term before retiring were classified as having discrete ambition. "The central assumption of ambition theory," writes Schlesinger, "is that a politician's behavior is a response to his office goals" (1966, pp. 9-10).

Schlesinger's theory of ambition points to the importance of evaluating a politician's behavior, not so much in terms of where that politician has been or is currently, but in terms of future plans. The actions a politician takes today are assumed to be oriented toward the electorate whose support is needed in the next election. As Kenneth Prewitt argues, ambition theory adds another dimension to research on leadership and representation by holding that expectations of the future shape current behavior (1970b).

The addition of this new dimension to research on leadership contributed to numerous inquiries into the distribution and consequences of ambition in the various offices that comprise the American political opportunity structure. Of interest here is David Rohde's study of members of the U.S. House of Representatives (1979). Rohde takes a somewhat different approach to progressive ambition than Schlesinger. According to Rohde, the costs and risks associated with opportunities shape progressive ambition. He thus assumes that if upon their first day in the House members were offered a Senate seat or governorship without cost or risk, they would take it. Rohde contends that costs and risks do not tell the whole story, however. Two House members might be in objectively similar situations, yet one would seek higher office and the other not because people differ in their intensity of preferences for risky alternatives. Rohde thus invokes the concept of risk-taking to explain differences in the number of opportunities taken for higher office by members of the House.

Rohde posited a rational-choice calculus to underlie House career decisions, and derived from that calculus the following hypotheses for which he found initial support: (1) that a greater proportion of opportunities were taken for Senate seats than for governorships; (2) that a greater proportion of opportunities were taken for four-year governorships than two-year governorships; (3) that a greater proportion of opportunities for higher office were taken when no incumbent was seeking reelection; (4) that the proportion of opportunities taken for higher office is less when a state is safe for the opposition party than when it is safe for the member's

own party; (5) that the proportion of opportunities taken for Senate seats was directly related to the proportion of the state's population that the member's House district comprises; (6) that "high risk takers" had a greater likelihood of seeking higher office than "low risk takers"; and (7) that the probability a member will run will be inversely related to seniority.¹

Rohde's analysis presents a compelling argument concerning some prominent antecedents of progressive ambition and how they operate. His analysis, however, stops short of measuring and articulating the magnitude of influence each of the above factors has on progressive ambition. The research presented here seeks to extend and refine the initial findings presented by Rohde. These findings are extended by deriving additional hypotheses that can be construed to follow logically from the decision calculus Rohde forwarded. The findings are refined by subjecting his and these additional hypotheses to a more rigorous multivariate analysis that will allow the influences of the hypothesized factors to be disentangled and given substantive import. Probit analysis is employed to estimate how variations in the nature of the opportunity for higher office, the value of the House seat, and House members' personal attributes shape the probability a member seeks higher office. These probabilities, it may be assumed, are not only indicative of the conditions under which members would be most likely to seek higher office, but are also a characterization of the risk and opportunity that characterize a member's environment. As such a characterization, it may serve as a useful heuristic device that could ultimately prove fruitful for evaluating the behavior of incumbent House members.

PROGRESSIVE AMBITION: ADDITIONAL ANTECEDENTS

The basic logic of progressive ambition, as presented by Rohde, is that anything increasing the expected utility of higher office or reducing the expected utility of the currently held office will contribute to the likelihood that an attempt at higher office would be made, with risk-taking propensities further conditioning this likelihood. In seeking additional antecedents of progressive ambition, attention is turned to factors that could shape these expected utilities.

A number of eminently plausible factors come to mind. Among these

¹ The reader will note the absence of seniority in the model that follows. As one might suspect, age and seniority are highly correlated ($r = .64$) resulting in multicollinearity that manifests itself by the diminished precision of the coefficients associated with each when both variables are included in the model. A composite variable was constructed from age and seniority, but this added little to the explanatory power of the model and was not statistically significant. Multicollinearity did not appear to be a problem elsewhere.

are differences in the electoral formidability of incumbent opposition,² membership in the majority versus the minority party, the well-documented change in the nature of House service during the 1970s (Cooper and West, 1981; Frantzich, 1978a, 1978b; Hibbing, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c), electoral vulnerability, and redistricting. The expectations and measurement of these variables will be articulated below.

A final variable to be considered here that was not examined by Rohde is age. Joseph Schlesinger pointed to the importance of age in shaping ambition, and subsequent research has provided evidence of how age shapes career commitment, recruitment and ambition (Schlesinger, 1966; Fishel, 1971, 1973; Hain, 1974; Prewitt, 1970b). This substantial body of literature suggests that a multivariate analysis like the one to follow would suffer from severe inaccuracies if the influence of age was not controlled for. Thus, age will be incorporated in the model as a curvilinear function, the expectation being that the relatively young and the relatively old members of the House are less likely to pursue higher office than members falling between these two extremes.

PROGRESSIVE AMBITION: A PROBABILISTIC APPROACH

The analysis of the factors pointed to by Rohde as well as those derived above would obviously benefit from a multivariate technique that would allow us to disentangle and summarize the effects of these predictor variables. The dependent behavior in the current context is a dichotomy: to seek reelection to the House or to pursue higher office. In such a situation probit analysis is an appropriate technique. Use of probit analysis will allow us to evaluate specific statistical hypotheses and will, with suitable manipulation, allow us to attach substantively meaningful values to the model's coefficients.³

The conditional probability of seeking higher office is defined here as:

$$\begin{aligned} Pr[SHO = 1 / (& B_0 + B_1Age - B_2Age^2 + B_3CO + B_4Rt + B_5Party \\ & - B_6Stcomp + B_7Redis + B_8Office - B_9Twoyr \\ & - B_{10}Margin - B_{11}Firstsen - B_{12}Secsen - B_{13}Firstgov \\ & - B_{14}Secgov + B_{15}Change)], \end{aligned}$$

² The notion about incumbent-senator vulnerability being evaluated here was suggested by Donald Matthews, who stated that "if the senator survives the first challenge to his position, then he becomes more secure than before" (1973, p. 242). In terms of gubernatorial vulnerability, Schlesinger suggests that governors accumulate grievances which produce the rejection of incumbents (1966, p. 69). Stephen Turett suggests "[d]elay for a governor may be tantamount to defeat, while time is a senator's ally" (1971, p. 109).

³ The method of interpreting probit coefficients used here is the same as that used in Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978).

where:

- $Pr(SHO)$ = the probability a representative seeks higher office;
- Age = the representative's age;
- Age² = the representative's age squared;
- CO = $1/(\text{the number of districts in the representative's state})$;
- Rt⁴ = 1 if, when first running for the House the representative challenged an incumbent or ran in a district carried by the other party by 57 percent or more in the previous three elections;
- Party = 1 if the representative was a Republican;
= 0 if the representative was a Democrat;
- Stcomp = the average electoral margin of the representative's party in races for governor and senator over the previous four years;
- Redis⁵ = 1 if the representative was hurt substantially by redistricting, 0 otherwise;
- Office = 1 if opportunity was for the Senate, 0 if opportunity was for governor;
- Twoyr = 1 if opportunity was for a two-year governorship, 0 otherwise;
- Margin = the difference between the representative's proportion of the vote in the last election and that of the closest competitor;
- Firstsen = 1 if incumbent senator was seeking reelection for the first time, 0 otherwise;
- Secsen = 1 if incumbent senator was seeking reelection for the second or greater time, 0 otherwise;
- Firstgov = 1 if incumbent governor was seeking reelection for the first time, 0 otherwise;
- Secgov = 1 if incumbent governor was seeking reelection for the second or greater time, 0 otherwise;
- Change = 1 if year greater than 1969, 0 otherwise.

⁴ Every effort was made to replicate the original measure utilized by Rohde (1979). To compile this indicator, the conditions under which each member first sought election to the House were examined. These conditions were found in the Congressional Quarterly, *Guide to U.S. Elections* (1975).

⁵ To compile this indicator, Congressional Quarterly's pre-election reports from 1958 to 1976 were examined. Members were categorized as being harmed if the narrative account of the member's district alteration was basically unequivocal. All others were placed in the helped or not affected category. Although subjective, this method is quite conservative in that some members who may very well have been harmed by redistricting were nonetheless relegated to the helped or not affected category in the absence of an absolute commitment by the reporter commenting on the redistricting.

The results of estimating this model appear in table 1.⁶ As can be seen, our goodness-of-fit measure, estimated R^2 , indicates that the model taken as a whole explains almost half of the variance in decisions to seek higher office ($R^2 = .4847$).⁷ In the absence of alternative specifications for comparison, little more can be said on the basis of R^2 , but considering the rarity of the behavior being studied, this level of explanatory power would, at least on its face, seem promising.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF PROBIT ESTIMATION

VARIABLE	ESTIMATE	EXPECTATION	MLE/SE	SIGNIFICANT AT
Constant	-3.85	$B_0 < 0$	-2.68	.004
Age	0.0984	$B_1 > 0$	1.768	.038
Age ²	-.0012	$B_2 < 0$	-2.18	.014
Constituency Overlap	2.15	$B_3 > 0$	10.59	.0001
Risk Taking	0.21	$B_4 > 0$	2.08	.019
Party	0.16	$B_5 > 0$	1.56	.059
Competitiveness of State	-0.007	$B_6 > 0$	-2.84	.002
Redistricting	0.78	$B_7 > 0$	2.83	.002
Office	0.33	$B_8 > 0$	2.90	.002
Two-Year	-0.92	$B_9 < 0$	-3.73	.0001
Margin	0.002	$B_{10} < 0$	0.798	.212
Senate—1st Reelection	-0.56	$B_{11} < B_{12} < 0$	-4.76	.0001
Senate—> 1st Reelection	-0.86	$B_{12} > B_{11} < 0$	-6.05	.0001
Gov.—1st Reelection	-1.20	$B_{13} < 0$	-5.34	.0001
Gov.—> 1st Reelection	-1.07	$B_{14} < 0$	-3.28	.0005
Change	0.211	$B_{15} > 0$	1.98	.024

$N = 3231$
 $R^2 = .4847$

⁶ This model is estimated utilizing data concerning all House members who had the opportunity for higher office between 1952 and 1976. Just as Rohde did, we excluded from consideration opportunities for odd-year governorships because pursuit of such opportunities did not necessitate the sacrifice of the member's House seat. The data utilized in this analysis were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The *Roster of United States Congressional Officeholders* and *Biographical Characteristics of Members of the United States Congress, 1789-1980* that were merged into one file by the Consortium were further merged by me with *Candidate and Constituency Statistics of Elections in the United States, 1788-1978*, another Consortium data set. The Consortium bears no responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here.

⁷ In probit analysis, neither the residuals about the regression plane nor the deviations of the dependent variable about its mean can be observed. Because of this, both the sum of the squared residuals and the total sum of squares are estimates. Consequently, R^2 is also an estimate of the true R^2 . See McKelvey and Zavoina (1975, p. 112).

In terms of individual coefficients, let us at this point scrutinize those that appear problematic and reserve discussion of others. In terms of directional plausibility, only two variables yield coefficients that are problematic, and problematic only if considered in the extreme values of their variables. The first of these variables is that associated with competitiveness of state. As operationalized, this variable and its associated coefficient suggest members would be most likely to run in states that were carried by the opposition party by 100 percent. This is, to say the least, highly implausible and no doubt reflects the simple measurement used and the intervening influence of primary contesting.⁸

The other variable whose corresponding coefficient is suspect in terms of plausibility is that associated with the member's vulnerability, and it too is only implausible in the extremes. Within limits it suggests that safe members are more likely to pursue higher office than are vulnerable members; but in extremes it suggests that the safest members are the most likely to seek higher office. Again, this is implausible both theoretically and empirically, and the underlying relationship is no doubt more complex than this operationalization suggests.⁹

In terms of statistical significance,¹⁰ we can note further that the coefficient associated with Margin does not allow us to reject the null hypothesis of its value being zero at any acceptable or reasonable level of significance. This, combined with the low magnitude of its coefficient, leads to the assertion that, at least as measured and specified, retrospective vulnerability has little if any impact upon decisions to seek higher office. The other coefficient falling short of statistical significance is that associated with Party, but it falls just barely short and could reject the null at a less demanding level of significance of .10. Furthermore, this

⁸ V. O. Key (1956) found that when a party dominated the general election, the level of primary contesting went up. Similarly, when a party had very little expectation of winning in the general election, the level of primary contesting went down. See also Standing and Robinson (1958).

⁹ In fact, James L. Payne (1982) has found that progressive ambition is related to electoral performance. Members of the House who seek higher office are in general enjoying increasing electoral trends. The results concerning vulnerability presented in the current analysis are thus a test of a simple hypothesis, and the evaluation of the hypothesis Payne's analysis suggests is left for future research.

¹⁰ Technically, we are dealing with a population. It becomes necessary to invoke the normal caveat that a population is technically defined as the set of all possible outcomes. Thus, each decision for higher office is only one outcome from the set of all possible outcomes. The purpose of using inferential statistics is to use the set of observed outcomes (decisions) for each individual to estimate how these variations are related to different independent variables. Failure to reject a null hypothesis suggests that the observed outcomes have an underlying distribution of possible outcomes whose effect upon the dependent variable is not statistically different from zero. See Hanushek and Jackson (1977, p. 325).

coefficient is in the theoretically anticipated direction and thus does not seem overly problematic.

Substantively, probit coefficients are difficult to interpret. In probit analysis, the dependent variable is assumed to correspond to the cumulative standard normal distribution which is curvilinear, and hence the impact of a given independent variable depends upon values taken by other variables in the equation (or, more specifically, where these other variables locate the estimate of the dependent behavior on this curve). Thus, the specific influence of a given variable is partly a function of the constellation of values of other variables in the equation. To remedy this, the probit equation has been solved for each coefficient for fixed levels of probability. The results tell us the difference a given variable makes in terms of decisions to seek higher office under different hypothetical levels of probability to seek higher office.

To simplify discussion, the substantive consideration that follows will be divided into variables that shape the nature of the opportunity for higher office, those that condition the value of the member's House seat, and the effects of varying personal attributes of members upon the likelihood of their seeking higher office.

THE NATURE OF THE OPPORTUNITY

In table 2 differential probabilities associated with the value of the higher office and the likelihood of winning it are displayed. Briefly, it can be seen that an opportunity for a Senate seat contributes quite markedly to the likelihood of a member seeking higher office when compared to a four-year governorship, and that a very dramatic difference exists between an opportunity for a Senate seat and a two-year governorship (differing in likelihood by as much as 46.6 points). Clearly, the type of opportunity available exerts a very large influence upon the likelihood that a member pursues higher office.

In terms of factors shaping the likelihood of winning the higher office it can be seen that the presence of an incumbent, in general, substantially reduces the likelihood that a member will seek higher office. In terms of differential incumbency advantage, it can be seen that the incumbent senator seeking reelection for the first time is less capable of reducing the likelihood of a challenge from a House member than a more senior incumbent senator. Just the opposite holds for governors, with incumbents seeking their second term being slightly more successful at reducing the likelihood of a challenge from a House member. The data presented here support the notion that there are electoral differences in these offices, and we might suspect that the presence of these differences conditions the behavior of incumbents in these higher offices as well as House members

TABLE 2
THE EFFECT OF THE NATURE OF THE OPPORTUNITY UPON THE LIKELIHOOD OF A MEMBER OF
THE HOUSE SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE

LIKELIHOOD OF A MEMBER SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE (%)	INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A SENATE SEAT	DECREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO AN INCUMBENT SENATOR		DECREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO AN INCUMBENT GOVERNOR		INFLUENCE OF PARTISAN BIAS ON THE PROBABILITY OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE		INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE DEGREE OF SHARED ELECTORATE				
		SEEKING HIS: 1ST REELECTION		SEEKING HIS: 1ST REELECTION		AVG. STATEWIDE MARGIN WAS		NUMBER OF CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS IN STATE:				
		1ST REELECTION	> 1ST REELECTION	1ST REELECTION	> 1ST REELECTION	10% UNFAVOR.	10% FAVOR.	1	5	10	25	
10	6.85	-6.80	-6.80	-8.42	-9.36	-9.10	1.12	-1.31	70.50	9.50	4.12	0.56
20	10.50	-16.10	-11.92	-15.54	-17.90	-17.20	2.06	-1.86	70.49	14.00	6.60	1.18
30	12.50	-22.50	-15.99	-21.60	-25.70	-24.40	2.60	-2.20	64.80	16.40	8.00	1.56
40	13.20	-27.90	-19.10	-26.65	-32.60	-30.66	2.80	-2.50	57.30	17.14	8.60	1.68
50	12.93	-32.12	-21.20	-30.50	-38.50	-35.77	2.80	-2.80	48.40	16.64	8.50	1.60
60	11.90	-34.80	-22.17	-32.90	-42.90	-39.40	2.50	-2.80	39.18	15.17	7.90	1.40
70	10.23	-35.50	-21.60	-33.30	-45.10	-40.88	2.20	-2.60	29.60	13.00	6.90	1.20
80	7.90	-33.20	-18.97	-30.80	-44.06	-39.09	1.86	-2.06	19.86	9.80	5.43	1.06
90	4.74	-22.57	-13.00	-23.36	-36.40	-31.30	1.31	-1.10	9.90	5.73	3.38	0.82

whose ambitions must be at least partially conditioned by this electoral clock.

The remaining factors posited to condition the likelihood of winning are the competitiveness of the state and the degree of shared electorate. The competitiveness of state variable, as noted previously, is problematic, but within limits suggests that members are slightly more likely to pursue higher office in states that have an unfavorable partisan bias. For obvious reasons little can be made of this result. Alternatively, the degree of shared electorate can be seen to exert a very dramatic effect upon a member's decision to seek higher office. The model suggests that only in extreme conditions would members from single-district states or at-large districts not run for higher office, while members in large states labor under a severe disadvantage in terms of seeking higher office. Whether it is due to previously confronting much if not all of the relevant electorate for higher office, or due to the smaller pool of viable candidates in smaller states, the extent of shared electorate exerts a substantial influence upon the likelihood of a member seeking higher office. Much like differences in incumbency advantage mentioned above, differences in shared electorate, we might suspect, condition the behavior of incumbents in these higher offices as well as House members considering candidacies for these higher offices.

THE VALUE OF THE HOUSE SEAT

Our attention now turns to variations in the value of the House seat and how these shape the likelihood that members seek higher office. Being in the minority party exerts only a moderate influence upon the likelihood of seeking higher office, increasing this likelihood by 6.4 at most. Even less substantial is the influence of the member's margin of victory in the last election which, even at the extreme of a 40 percent margin, is estimated to increase the likelihood of seeking higher office by 3.23 at most. The effects of a harmful redistricting, however, are found to alter drastically the likelihood of seeking higher office, contributing by as much as 30.3. At least in this context, perceived vulnerability appears to exert a strong influence upon a House member's decision to run for higher office. However, conclusions about this should be cautious. Underlying redistricting may be pledges of support and other deals that might heighten the member's estimate of the probability of attaining higher office. Whether because it reduces the member's chances of returning to the House or because the process of redistricting leads to bargains that alter the member's estimate of success of securing higher office, the evidence presented here points to the importance of redistricting in shaping at least some candidacies for higher office.

TABLE 3
THE EFFECT OF THE VALUE OF THE HOUSE SEAT UPON THE LIKELIHOOD OF MEMBERS
OF THE HOUSE SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE

LIKELIHOOD OF A MEMBER SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE (%)	INFLUENCE OF PARTY ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE		INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO MEMBER'S MARGIN OF VICTORY IN HIS LAST ELECTION		INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO BEING HARMED SUBSTANTIALLY BY REDISTRICTING		INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBUTABLE TO BEING IN THE HOUSE IN THE 1970s
	MEMBER WAS A:		MEMBER'S MARGIN WAS:				
	DEM.	REPUB.	10 %	40 %			
10	0	2.90	.2	1.13	20.50		4.03
20	0	4.82	.6	2.36	27.60		6.47
30	0	5.94	.8	2.99	30.30		7.87
40	0	6.40	.9	3.25	30.20		8.44
50	0	6.30	.7	3.18	28.20		8.35
60	0	5.90	.6	2.90	24.80		7.76
70	0	5.17	.5	2.60	20.30		6.76
80	0	4.10	.5	2.12	14.74		5.34
90	0	2.65	.4	1.46	8.10		3.30

The result concerning the increases in likelihood of seeking higher office attributable to being in the House in the 1970s is revealing. First, the result remains statistically significant even when the effects of the other variables in the model are controlled, suggesting that something about House service, other than the factors controlled for here, did indeed change during the 1970s. Second, the increase in seeking higher office suggests that, at least for some members, the disaffection with politics emerging in this decade was largely disaffection with the House. The disaffection with the political career resulting from reforms and attitudes emerging before and continuing through Watergate appears to have been largely with House service because this disaffection did not reduce but actually increased the likelihood that members would seek higher office.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

In this category we consider variations in the personal attributes of risk-taking propensities and age, and how these influence the likelihood a House member would seek higher office. A fundamental notion underlying risk-taking is that two people in objectively similar situations could make different choices based upon their risk-taking propensities. Multivariate analysis such as the one presented here allows for the statistical control of other influences; therefore, this very question can be addressed. Recalling table 1, the coefficient associated with risk-taking was statistically significant and in the anticipated direction. Risk-takers are thus significantly (in the statistical sense) more likely to pursue higher office than are the less risk acceptant. The question becomes: how much more likely? Examining table 4, it can be seen that risk-taking propensities can exert a determining influence but only if the constellation of other variables in the equation yields a prior probability of running of over .40. Indeed, risk-takers are more likely than others to pursue higher office, but this influence is sufficient to outweigh only the more minimal negative influences upon this decision. Thus, while as Rohde originally suggested, risk-taking propensities might distinguish the progressively from the statically ambitious, the results presented here suggest that they do not distinguish the progressively ambitious notably better than such factors as party or the change in the nature of House service in the 1970s. Nonetheless, it is a significant predictor of decisions to run for higher office, and more refined measurement of its underlying dimensions may divulge a more substantial impact attributable to risk-taking propensities.

In considering age, it can be seen that its effect is substantial, which points to the importance of controlling this factor when estimating the influence of the other variables considered here. In the period under consideration, the age at which a member is estimated to have the greatest

TABLE 4

THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES UPON THE LIKELIHOOD
OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE

LIKELIHOOD OF A MEMBER SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE (%)	DECREASES IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE ATTRIBU- TABLE TO BEING YOUNGER OR OLDER THAN THE ESTIMATED GLOBAL MAXIMUM AGE OF 43 YEARS				
	MEMBER'S AGE IS:				MEMBER WAS A HIGH-RISK TAKER
	32	52	62	72	
10	-2.40	-1.73	-5.80	-8.93	4.00
20	-3.80	-2.57	-2.98	-16.80	6.43
30	-4.70	-3.20	-12.98	-16.80	7.82
40	-5.40	-3.60	-15.30	-29.60	8.40
50	-5.80	-3.88	-16.76	-34.36	8.32
60	-5.80	-3.90	-17.27	-37.60	7.72
70	-5.40	-3.60	-16.60	-38.80	6.73
80	-4.40	-2.81	-14.20	-36.70	5.31
90	-2.80	-1.65	-9.58	-28.85	3.32

likelihood of seeking higher office is approximately forty-three. In table 4 differences from this maximum likelihood attributable to age are displayed. Clearly, and not too surprising in light of past research, age exerts a substantial influence upon progressive ambition.

CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding analysis, factors construed logically to influence the likelihood that a House member would seek a higher office were derived, measured, and statistically controlled. These factors were given substantive meaning by estimating the extent to which they increased or decreased the probability that a House member would seek higher office. At this point we may evaluate the implications and usefulness of this information.

The foregoing analysis points to the fundamental importance of the nature of the opportunity in shaping decisions for higher office. Clearly, if ambition shapes current behavior as theory suggests, variations in the nature of the opportunity for higher office may be playing a very large role in shaping the behavior of at least some House members. One may only speculate on how variations in incumbency advantage, at-large districts, redistricting, and other factors from state to state and/or through time have shaped significantly the expectations and behavior of both House members and those in higher offices so that they speculated about challenging.

That the nature of the opportunity emerges as the more significant category of influences is not surprising in light of recent research upon increases in discrete ambition—that is, retirement—occurring during the 1970s (Cooper and West, 1981; Frantzich, 1978a, 1978b; Hibbing, 1982a, 1982b). Basically, this research has pointed to the importance of the nature of the House career and how changes in the nature of this career can alter substantially the incentives to retain membership in that body. Concerning decisions for higher office we can see that in a very similar manner these decisions reflect variations in incentives that are implicit in varying opportunities for higher office.

In addition, it is hoped that the research presented here may serve as a heuristic device that might be applied to interpretations of the behavior of incumbent House members. The model serves as an initial attempt to summarize the risk environment of House members. This characterization of the House members' environment, if related to their roll-call behavior or to their electoral activities, or both, might ultimately yield a fuller understanding of the influence of ambition upon the political process.

Finally, this technique could be applied to decisions for candidacies for other offices. Recent research by Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell (1981) presents initial but compelling evidence of the importance of strategic congressional candidacy decisions, how these shape the choices offered local electorates, and ultimately how they contribute to the "meaning" of midterm congressional elections. A probabilistic approach to the strategic candidacy decisions surrounding congressional elections, such as that presented here, could allow for the isolation and measurement of the influence of national trends in support for the president and his party, and could extend greatly our understanding of the nature of midterm congressional elections.

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