Redistricting, Candidate Entry, and the Politics of Nineteenth-Century U.S. House Elections

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The effects of redistricting on candidate entry patterns in contemporary House races has received growing attention in the scholarly literature, yet virtually no consideration has been given to this question in the context of historical elections. This is unfortunate as the wider variation in congressional redistricting during the nineteenth century gives us increased leverage in terms of understanding strategic candidate behavior. Utilizing a new dataset of candidate quality for nineteenth-century House races, we examine whether candidates with prior electoral experience are more likely to run in districts that are altered during the redistricting process, and provide an account of how differences in the prevalence of redistricting may affect strategic entry decisions of politicians. Our results suggest that entry decisions and electoral outcomes are affected by redistricting in this era. Moreover, our analysis provides an opportunity to use history to test contemporary theories of congressional elections in a broader context.

When the Texas state legislature convened in January 2003, Republicans enjoyed unified control of the state government for the first time in 130 years. Recognizing the unique political opportunity of the situation, the Texas legislature began debating a new redistricting plan drawn to shore up Republican dominance in the U.S. House of Representatives. In an effort to prevent the plan from taking shape, Democratic state legislators twice fled Texas during the legislative session to prevent the quorum necessary to allow Republicans to vote on the redistricting plan. Eventually, however, Republican state legislators succeeded in pushing their revised redistricting plan through a special session of the legislature during the fall.[1]

The redrawing of Texas districts set off a mad scramble among incumbents and would-be challengers. Some Democratic incumbents chose to retire (and one switched parties) rather than run in hostile districts, while aspiring Republican challengers were prompted to run as a result of more favorable districts lines. While the case of Texas may strike the modern observer as a sign that partisanship in the contemporary era has reached a fever pitch level, this type of off-cycle redistricting actually has analogs in an earlier historical era. During the nineteenth century, for instance, the occurrence of redistricting was much more variable. Some states frequently redrew the maps, often as a direct result of change in partisan control of state legislatures, while others went several decades

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[1]The Democrats opposed the Republican redistricting plan since it created opportunities for the Republicans to pick up as many as six additional seats in the upcoming elections. Although the Democrats sought legal action in an attempt to obstruct implementation of the redistricting plan, the U.S. Supreme Court in early 2004 refused to block the plan, allowing Republicans to pick up additional seats in the House as a result of the off-year redistricting.

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without redrawing district boundaries. Indeed, during the last few decades of the nineteenth century, state legislatures routinely engaged in partisan gerrymandering in an effort to advantage candidates of their party (Engstrom 2003). Thus, while the Texas districting story may appear to be a product of the contemporary partisan climate, it is not unlike strategies regularly employed by state legislatures in an equally polarized era of American history.

The variation in redistricting practices during the nineteenth century provides us with a unique opportunity to use history as a "laboratory" to examine questions that are more difficult to address in the post-*Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964) era. Although the effects of redistricting on candidate behavior, since the 1960s, has received some attention in the literature (Cain 1985; Canon 1999; Cox and Katz 2002; Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti 2003; Lublin 1997), much less is known about the potential consequences, if any, redistricting may have had on candidate entry decisions in an earlier era. This is unfortunate, since the wider variation in congressional redistricting in the nineteenth century gives us increased leverage in terms of understanding strategic candidate behavior. Indeed, an investigation of redistricting during this era affords us the opportunity to examine how differences in the timing and prevalence of redistricting may affect strategic entry decisions. Moreover, it gives us a chance to engage in "comparative" political analysis.

In this article, we examine the effect of redistricting in the nineteenth century on patterns of candidate entry decisions in congressional races. Utilizing a dataset of candidate quality for late nineteenth-century House races, we examine whether experienced, or quality, candidates are more likely to run in redrawn districts that are altered in a way favorable to their party during the redistricting process. In particular, we examine elections held during the last three decades of the nineteenth century—a period characterized by intense polarization and frequent redistricting. We find that districts that were drawn more competitively saw a higher incidence of entry among candidates with electoral experience. In addition, we find that candidate entry and redistricting exhibited both independent and interactive effects on electoral outcomes in this period.

We begin our discussion by summarizing the literature on candidate entry decisions in light of redistricting in the contemporary era. From there, we offer a theoretical explanation as to why we should expect to find a linkage between redistricting and candidate entry decisions in an historical context and how this offers increased leverage in addressing related questions in the modern era. We next discuss the data utilized in our analysis before presenting our empirical results. In the final section, we summarize the implications of our analysis.

Redistricting and Electoral Coordination

Research examining the causes and consequences of congressional redistricting focuses almost exclusively on politics since the 1960s, yet surprisingly little work has actually examined the entry decisions of incumbents and challengers.[2] Nevertheless, two recent works stand out in addressing this oversight. Most notably, Cox and Katz (2002) examine the relationship between entry decisions among candidates and constituency changes stemming from redistricting. Cox and Katz contend that strategic challengers realize their chances of winning are greater following a redistricting, because of underlying changes in the constituency, and are more likely to enter. Incumbents, on the other hand, may be more likely to face a difficult reelection contest because of the resulting upheaval in district boundaries. As a result incumbents are less likely to seek reelection following redistricting. Cox and Katz maintain that the regularization of redistricting prompted by the Supreme Court's decision in *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964), which led to a regular ten year cycle of redistricting, made it easier for both incumbents and quality challengers to coordinate their entry decisions (i.e., to avoid one another).

In a related analysis, Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti (2003) examined the effects of redistricting on candidate entry decisions in U.S. House races from 1972 to 1998. They found that the likelihood of quality challengers running declines as the redistricting cycle progresses—in other words, experienced candidates become less likely to enter the longer it has been since the most recent redistricting. They also found that national conditions play a more prominent role in candidates' entry decisions early in the redistricting cycle, but that this trend declines over time. Additionally, they conclude that local conditions figure much more significantly in candidate entry decisions for competitive districts as the redistricting cycle progresses.[3]

[2] Erikson (1972), Tufte (1973), and Bullock (1975) were among the first to consider the effects of redistricting on changing patterns of partisan competition in House races, but they did not systematically examine the effects of congressional redistricting on candidate's entry decisions. More recently, Jacobson and Dimock (1994) and Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (1997) have examined the linkage between candidate entry decisions and redistricting, although both papers primarily use redistricting as a control variable.

[3] On the topic of redistricting, see also Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2000); Butler and Cain (1992); Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran (1996); Canon (1999); Desposato and Petrocik (2003); Epstein and O'Halloran (1999); Overby and Cosgrove (1996); and Shotts (2001). For a more general discussion of candidate emergence in House races, see Stone and Maisel (2003).

Strategy and Choice in the Nineteenth Century

As the brief summary of the existing literature suggests, virtually no attention has been given to the impact of redistricting on candidate behavior in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the emphasis in the congressional elections literature has generally been on House races in the postwar era. On one level, this should not come as a surprise since elections held during the latter part of the nineteenth century were very different affairs from what we are accustomed to today. As Argersinger notes, nineteenth-century politics were extremely volatile with elections "characterized by high levels of partisanship and electoral competitiveness" (1985–86, 671). Furthermore, most legislators did not view service in the U.S. House as the pinnacle of their career path until late in the century (Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999a; Kernell 1977; Polsby 1968; Price 1975). Instead politicians tended to move between offices, serving in Congress for a few terms and then returning to local or state political office (Kernell 2003).[4]

Candidate recruitment practices were also quite different. In contrast to contemporary candidate-centered politics, nineteenth-century elections and political careers were party-centered (Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999b; Jacobson 1989; Keller 1977; Silbey 1991). This is perhaps most clearly seen in the nomination of candidates. Prior to the adoption of the direct primary at the beginning of the twentieth century, parties selected their House nominees in district-level caucuses (Dallinger 1897; Ostrogorski 1964). These party caucuses were typically made up of coalitions of county and/or city party organizations—themselves often comprised of smaller factional associations—who sought to nominate candidates that were loyal to the party, able to mobilize followers, and could enhance the overall attractiveness of the party ticket (Bensel 2004; Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999b; Swenson 1982).[5]

The mechanics of nineteenth-century balloting also made it easier for parties to exert control over candidates and the electoral process. Prior to the states adopting the Australian or "secret" ballot near the turn of the century, the parties were responsible for printing and distributing election ballots. As Argersinger notes:

> For most of the period there was no secret ballot. Instead voters used party tickets, printed by the different parties, containing the names of only their own candidates, and often varying widely in size and color. Distributed at the polls by partisan "hawkers" or "ticket peddlers," these party tickets made the voter's choice of party a public act and rendered voters susceptible to various forms of intimidation and influence while facilitating vote buying. (1985–86, 672)

The pseudomonopoly over access to the ticket enhanced the importance of party organizations. Moreover, the party ballot made it exceedingly difficult for voters to split their tickets and vote for candidates of different parties (Engstrom and Kernell 2005; Katz and Sala 1996; Rusk 1970). For a voter to do so, he would have to physically mark out or paste over one name on a party ballot and replace it with the candidate of his choice. This act of splitting a ticket was cumbersome and was further discouraged because voting took place in full view of party workers who could easily monitor voters dropping their ticket into the ballot box (Bensel 2004; Cox and Kousser 1981; Engstrom and Kernell 2005; Rusk 1970).

Altogether, the structural features of post-Civil War elections were quite different than contemporary elections. Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons to believe that nineteenth-century candidates, and the organizations that nominated them, were affected by many of the same strategic parameters that modern candidates face such as the likelihood of victory, the value of the seat, and the opportunity costs of running for office. Indeed, we contend that the dynamics facing congressional candidates in the late nineteenth century are more similar to those faced by modern ones than previously thought.

This argument builds upon an extensive literature demonstrating that nineteenth-century congressmen (and the party organizations that selected them) responded rationally to changes in their incentive structure when deciding to run for reelection in Congress (see, e.g., Aldrich 1995; Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999a; Fiorina, Rohde, and Wissell 1975; Kernell 1977, 2003; Price 1975). For example, as the size of the federal government grew, and the power of congressional committees steadily rose, the value of staying in the House also increased—which contributed to a decline in voluntary turnover in the House. Moreover, there is a growing amount of evidence that nineteenth-century legislators were affected by an "electoral connection" in terms of their career and legislative decisions (see, e.g., Bianco, Spence, and Wilkerson 1996; Carson and Engstrom 2005; Carson et al. 2001; Stewart 1989).

[4] This was sometimes formalized in the practice of "rotation in office," which operated in various parts of the country during the nineteenth century (Kernell 1977, 2003; Silbey 1985, 1991; Struble 1979).

[5] Party organizations also offered "insurance" to candidates, in the form of patronage positions or other political office, in the event they lost their bid for a House seat (Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999b). This insurance mechanism aided the parties in recruiting, perhaps otherwise reluctant, candidates to run for Congress.

Thus, while we know a fair amount about incumbent decisions, there has been comparatively little research examining the decisions of challengers in this era or on the patterns of incumbent versus quality challenger matchups. Given that the literature examining the contemporary era has consistently found that it generally takes an experienced challenger to unseat an incumbent (Jacobson 1989; Jacobson and Kernell 1983), it naturally leads us to ask: is the impact of quality challengers on House races confined to the contemporary era or is it a pattern that can be found more generally throughout American political history?

Recently, Carson and Roberts (2005a) have found evidence that experienced challengers did indeed behave strategically during this historical era. They found that much like today, candidates with previous electoral experience were both more successful at securing votes and more likely to run when national and local conditions favored their candidacy. In their analysis, factors such as national economic conditions, an incumbent who previously won with a small electoral margin, and the presence of an open seat were all strongly related to experienced candidates' entry decisions. Thus, regardless of whether prospective candidates had to seek the approval of the party machine or run on their own via a direct primary, there is much reason to suspect that experienced candidates ran when they could maximize the probability of victory (on this point, see also Kernell 1977). If nineteenth-century challengers were responding to "traditional" indicators of national forces, were they also responding to changes in their district brought on by redistricting?

The incidence of redistricting in the nineteenth century provides a nice arena in which to push these findings even further. Redistricting was much more variable in this era prior to the Supreme Court's decision in *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964), where each state is now required to redraw district boundaries after each decennial census to comply with the "one person, one vote" rule. First, states did not always confine redistricting to just those years following a census as some states chose to redistrict more than once a decade (Engstrom 2003).[6] Ohio, for example, redrew its district boundaries six times in six consecutive elections. Second, states that did not gain or lose a seat in the federal apportionment were not obligated to redistrict. Connecticut, which consistently had four congressional districts, did not redistrict for 70 years (1842–1912). Thus, following a census there would be a mix of states; some redrawing, others not.[7] This variation in redistricting practices presents us with a chance to further test modern theories of the impact of redistricting on candidate entry patterns. If redistricting affects candidate entry and exit decisions, then we should expect to see that experienced candidates were less likely to run when given an unfavorable disruption of their districts, and more likely to run for office when districts were drawn to the benefit of their party.

There is ample anecdotal evidence suggesting that redistricting altered the entry decisions of incumbents and potential challengers during this era. When a district was redrawn to make an incumbent vulnerable, one or more experienced candidates typically lined up for a chance at the nomination. Consider the case of Ohio during the 1890 redistricting where the majority party Democrats dramatically reshaped district boundaries throughout the state. Several incumbent Republicans found themselves in hostile territory, with ambitious Democrats chomping at the bit to run in these favorable districts. The *New York Times* reported that for Republicans:

> In some of the newly made districts there will be woe and heaviness of spirit between the time of nomination and election day. No one will more keenly realize this than [Republican] Hon. T.E. Burton of the Cleveland district. He is in a gerrymandered district where a Democratic majority is almost a certainty; *he is sure to be pitted against the strongest man the Democrats can name.* (italics added, *New York Times*, July 25, 1890, p. 5, col. 5)

On the other hand, in districts where there was little hope of winning, parties often resorted to nominating candidates with little experience. Following the redistricting of Ohio in 1892, the Times reported that "C.S. Mauk, an obscure Mercer County lawyer, has been selected to lead the forlorn Republican hope in the Fourth District . . . into which the Republican legislature crowded 8,000 Democratic plurality" (*New York Times*, May 8, 1892, p. 9, col. 6).

In sum, these anecdotes suggest that candidates, and the parties that nominated them, responded strategically

[6]Unlike the modern period in which some states have delegated the districting process to nonpartisan commissions, congressional redistricting in the nineteenth century was carried out through the standard statute-making process. New congressional district boundaries required the state legislature to pass a plan along with the governors' signature. Moreover, in this period before "one-person, one vote" there was no federal court involvement. Thus, states had more latitude in determining *when* and *how* to redistrict.

[7]Some of the off-census redistricting, particularly in the "four" years, was the result of state legislatures failing to create a plan in time for the previous election, either because the legislature could not meet in time, or because the legislature could not overcome partisan and factional disagreements. Beginning with the Apportionment Act of 1872, Congress allowed states that failed to redistrict to elect any newly gained seats "at-large."

to changes in district boundaries in addition to other district and political characteristics. Where there was an unfavorable disruption of their districts experienced candidates were less likely to run and more likely to run for office when districts were drawn to the benefit of their party. Given the preceding discussion, there is also reason to expect that candidates based entry decisions on whether an incumbent of the other party was seeking reelection, the party's margin in the previous election, and how well the party's presidential candidate performed in the district during the most recent presidential election. In the next section, we turn to a more systematic analysis of the effect of redistricting on candidate entry patterns for post-bellum congressional elections.

Data

To empirically test our expectations regarding the effects of redistricting on candidates' entry decisions, we collected a considerable amount of historical elections data. Our search for these data was largely facilitated by Dubin's (1998) *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*, the most comprehensive source for electoral data over time. Using this source of candidate information, we were able to collect relevant information on the names of the incumbent and related challengers, the vote totals on which percentages of the two-party vote were computed, as well as the partisan affiliation for each candidate. We supplemented the latter with information contained in Martis (1989) to fill in any gaps in party identification.

Given that we were interested in examining candidate entry patterns as well as the effects of experienced candidates on incumbents' electoral fortunes, it was also necessary to collect data on challengers' political backgrounds. To do so, we took advantage of the increased amount of turnover in the House during this era by utilizing the online *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774 to Present*.[8] This resource allowed us to obtain relevant background information on candidates who defeated congressional incumbents as well as candidates who served prior to or after the election in question. We supplemented this data with information found on "The Political Graveyard" website,[9] which often provides extensive background information on politicians from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (in addition to where they are buried). Background information for candidates was also collected from *Google*™, various biographical directories of state legislators, and Ancestry.com (a searchable website of local newspapers).[10]

Throughout our analysis, we measure candidate quality as whether or not the candidate currently holds or has previously held elective office. While other, more nuanced, measures exist, we chose not to employ them for two specific reasons. First, and most importantly, almost all studies have demonstrated that the simple dichotomy performs as well as more sophisticated measures in other studies of challenger quality (see Jacobson 2004), thus the dichotomous measure gives us a more parsimonious model without suffering any substantive loss. Second, it would be extremely difficult to construct a scale measure that would compare the "quality" of previous offices held in this time period. That is, while the simple dichotomy is a blunt measure, and may indeed be an imprecise measure of candidate quality, we think that constructing a more nuanced measure for this time period may increase measurement error for some offices, while providing very little additional precision in other cases.

To capture the effect of redistricting, we created a variable which models the extent, and partisan direction, to which a district was changed. Because most congressional districts in this era were comprised of one or more whole counties, we were able to take the two-party congressional vote by county from the most recent election before a new redistricting (ICPSR 8611) and then aggregate these votes into the proposed new district lines (Martis 1982).[11] We then took the difference between a districts' lagged vote before and after it was modified. This gives us an "exogenous" measure of the extent to which a district was altered, and the extent to which that alteration benefited one of the parties. This provides a fairly direct measure of how a district was changed before and after redistricting, which should be a stronger predictor of candidate entry decisions than simply indicating whether or not

[8]The biographical directory is located at http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp.

[9]The Political Graveyard website can be accessed at http://www.politicalgraveyard.com.

[10]Even with these invaluable resources, we were unable to find information for all candidates who ran for the House. We considered following the lead of Jacobson (1989), by coding candidates for whom we could not find any background information as nonquality in our dataset. We also considered including only those races in which we could find information on candidate quality on both candidates seeking election. In the end, we followed the advice of King et al. (2001) and imputed the missing values. While this is less than ideal, the results we present do not differ substantively across any of the three specifications we employed. Tables with the alternative specification are available upon request.

[11]Similar procedures are used for modern redistricting by Born (1985); Cain (1985); Glazer, Grofman, and Roberts (1987); and Kousser (1996). A related procedure was also conducted for aggregating presidential vote at the county level to the district level. For districts composed of a combination of whole and partial counties, however, we relied on more detailed maps as well as county and district-level information in Parsons, Beach, and Dubin (1986) and Parsons, Dubin, and Parsons (1990) to calculate district-level presidential vote.

each district has been redrawn (see Cox and Katz 2002; Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti 2003).[12]

Multivariate Analysis

If candidates in this time period are making strategic decisions about when to seek a seat in the U.S. House, we should see a relationship between the change in the underlying nature of a district and candidate entry. Specifically, we should expect to see more experienced Democratic candidates seeking office when districts are redrawn to be more Democratic, with the reverse pattern holding for seats drawn to be more Republican. To evaluate this relationship, we created a trichotomous variable (Democratic quality advantage) measuring the quality advantage held by a party in a given district. This variable is coded 1 if the Democrats have either an incumbent or experienced candidate facing an inexperienced Republican candidate, −1 if the Republicans have either an incumbent or experienced candidate facing an inexperienced Democratic candidate, and 0 if both parties field experienced or inexperienced candidates.[13]

Table 1 presents results of an ordered probit model seeking to explain the Democratic quality advantage ($DQA_{i,t}$) as function of the change in Democratic vote share due to redistricting ($CDEM_{i,t}$) lagged Democratic presidential vote ($DPV_{i,t-1}$), whether or not an incumbent was running ($IR_{i,t}$), with year (t) and state (j) fixed effects:[14]

$$DQA_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 DPV_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 CDEM_{i,t} + \beta_3 IR_{i,t} + \sum_t \beta_{4t} YEAR_t + \sum_j \beta_{5j} STATE_j + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

[12]Note that this approach also helps mitigate the dependency between districts in each state. Since the redrawing of one district within a state often means others have to be redrawn, measuring redistricting with a dummy variable does not allow the analyst to determine the extent or perceived effect of redistricting. Our approach allows us to differentiate fundamental alterations in the composition of a district from merely cosmetic changes.

[13]To be clear, this measure combines incumbents and other experienced candidates seeking office. While we would be hesitant to combine these two categories in the modern era we think it is warranted in this era for three specific reasons. First, there is little evidence suggesting a "direct" incumbency advantage in the late nineteenth century (Carson and Roberts 2005b). Second, the practice of rotation (Kernell 1977) was still present in this era, which means that many of the "experienced" candidates we have identified are former House members. We do not believe that candidates who served, retired due to the practice of rotation, and then ran again warrant treatment any different from those candidates who hailed from states not practicing rotation. Third, fitting models that treat incumbents differently than other experienced candidates produced no change in substantive interpretation of the results (models available upon request).

[14]Lagged Democratic presidential vote share is the proportion of the two-party vote share received by the Democratic presidential candidate in the previous election accounting for redistricting (i.e., for districts that were redrawn, this is the previous presidential vote aggregated into the boundaries that comprise the *new* district). Change in Democratic vote share is equal to the lagged vote share accounting for the effects of redistricting minus the lagged vote share without accounting for the effects of redistricting. Thus for all districts that were not redrawn this variable is equal to zero; districts drawn to benefit Republicans have a negative value for this variable, while districts drawn to benefit Democrats receive a positive value.

TABLE 1 Effects of Redistricting on Candidate Entry Decisions, 1872–1900

Variable	Coefficient	S.E.	Δρ
Democratic Presidential Vote	0.038*	0.002	0.29
Incumbent Seeks Reelection	0.86*	0.03	0.44
Change in Democratic Vote Share	0.011*	0.001	0.11
1874	0.62*	0.12	
1876	0.049	0.12	
1878	−0.055	0.12	
1880	−0.052	0.12	
1882	0.085	0.12	
1884	−0.14	0.12	
1886	0.028	0.12	
1888	−0.0023	0.12	
1890	0.19	0.12	
1892	−0.089	0.12	
1894	−0.37*	0.12	
1896	0.058	0.11	
1898	0.16	0.12	
1900	−0.11	0.12	
Cutpoint 1	0.89		
Cutpoint 2	2.93		
Log-Likelihood	−2608.33		
Number of Cases	3605		
Pseudo R^2	0.32		

*p < .05.

Note: Entries are ordered probit coefficients. The dependent variable is scored 1 if only the Democrat is a quality candidate, zero if both or neither candidate is a quality candidate, and −1 if only the Republican is a quality candidate. The first entry in the column labeled **Δρ** represents the change in probability of the Democratic party holding a quality advantage as the Democratic presidential vote changes from one standard deviation below the mean (48.97) to one standard deviation (13.54) above the mean. The second entry in the column labeled **Δρ** represents the change in probability of the Democratic party holding a quality advantage as the variable measuring incumbent seeking reelection changes from a Republican to a Democratic incumbent running. The third entry in the column labeled **Δρ** represents the change in probability of the Democratic party holding a quality advantage as variable measuring the change in the partisan composition of the district due to redistricting changes from one standard deviation below the mean (.53) to one standard deviation (15.23) above the mean.

The results in Table 1 suggest that the change in the partisanship of a congressional district due to redistricting influenced candidate entry decisions. Districts with a larger Democratic presidential vote were more likely to pit a quality Democratic congressional candidate versus an inexperienced Republican, and the reverse is also true. The results in Table 1 also suggest that when an incumbent of either party sought reelection, the opposing party was less likely to field an experienced candidate.[15] This suggests that incumbents, or parties, were relatively successful in scaring off potential high-quality opponents, which is consistent with evidence of an "indirect" incumbency advantage during this era (Carson and Roberts 2005b).

Given our focus on redistricting, we are most interested in the parameter estimate for the partisan change in the district due to redistricting. The results in Table 1 reveal that even when controlling for the underlying partisanship of a district, redistricting is strongly associated with candidate emergence. All else equal, the Democratic party was more likely to have a quality advantage in districts redrawn to include more Democratic voters, while the Republican party was more likely to hold a quality advantage in districts redrawn to include more Republicans. Substantively, the effect of redistricting is quite large. Holding all other variables at the mean, a district drawn at one standard deviation above or below the mean more than doubles the probability that the party benefiting from redistricting will hold a quality advantage in the seat.

Given the large effect of an advantage in candidate quality demonstrated, parties surely sought to gain this advantage for themselves when possible. The results presented in Table 1 clearly suggest that redistricting helped parties achieve this goal. The magnitude of this change is quite large and suggests that both incumbents and experienced candidates are less likely to seek office when a district has been altered to benefit the other party's candidate. Taken as a whole, the results in Table 1 provide convincing evidence that the redrawing of district lines in the late nineteenth century was strongly related to candidate recruitment and entry. Next, we assess the extent to which these phenomena were related to electoral outcomes.

Given that redistricting and candidate entry appear to be strongly related, we might also suspect that the relationship between the two mitigates their independent impact on electoral outcomes. In Table 2 we present the results from a set of models seeking to explain the Democratic share of the two-party vote in all House races from 1872 to 1900 as well as only on newly created and open seats. For these models, we regress the Democratic party's share of the two-party vote in a given district ($DTP_{i,t}$) on lagged Democratic presidential vote ($DPV_{i,t-1}$), the change in the lagged Democratic vote share due to redistricting ($CDEM_{i,t}$) the Democratic quality advantage in the election ($DQA_{i,t}$), and the presence of an incumbent in the race ($IR_{i,t}$) (this is included in the former, but not the latter model).[16] We fit these models via ordinary least

TABLE 2 Effects of Candidate Quality and Redistricting on the Democratic Two-Party Vote, 1872–1900

	All House Seats		Newly Created and Open Seats	
Variable	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**	**Coefficient**	**S.E.**
Democratic Presidential Vote	0.55*	0.014	0.63*	0.024
Incumbent Seeks Reelection	2.02*	0.19	–	–
Change in Democratic Vote	0.42*	0.011	0.38*	0.019
Democratic Quality Advantage	2.21*	0.22	1.78*	0.34
1874	5.66*	0.68	4.88*	1.07
1876	2.07*	0.67	0.62	1.09
1878	−1.66*	0.65	−3.79*	1.07
1880	−1.21*	0.65	−2.09*	1.16
1882	1.30*	0.65	0.85	1.04
1884	1.20*	0.66	2.07	1.20
1886	2.25*	0.65	1.19	1.12
1888	0.87	0.65	0.64	1.11
1890	2.91*	0.64	1.30	1.15
1892	1.60*	0.65	0.87	1.10
1894	−4.76*	0.65	−4.27*	1.13
1896	1.32*	0.62	−0.93	1.09
1898	4.51*	0.64	0.77	1.23
1900	2.09*	0.63	2.71*	1.25
Constant	21.14*	1.16	17.52*	2.55
Number of Cases	3605		1134	
Adjusted R^2	0.76		0.71	
MSE	6.83		7.05	

*$p < .05$.

[15]We also fit two separate probit models: one for Democratic entry and the other for Republican entry (with candidate quality as the dependent variable). The results were substantively the same.

[16]One major change in the electoral environment during this time period was the spread of the Australian ballot during the 1890s. There are reasons to suspect that the Australian ballot could have affected a voters' ability to reward or punish incumbent candidates. We do not include an indicator variable for the Australian ballot, however, because adoption of the reform comes fairly late in our time-series (early to mid-1890s). Since our data stop in 1900, it is a variable with very little post-reform variance. In addition, it is collinear with the state and year fixed-effects terms in the models reported in Table 2.

squares with year (t) and state (j) fixed effects:

$$DTP_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 DPV_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 CDEM_{i,t} + \beta_3 DQA_{i,t} + \beta_4 IR_{i,t} + \sum_t \beta_{5t} YEAR_t + \sum_j \beta_{6j} STATE_j + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

For both models, the results presented in Table 2 suggest that both redistricting and candidate quality are exerting an independent impact on the Democratic share of the two-party vote. We find that both the presidential vote share at the district-level and the extent to which the district was altered by redistricting have a strong effect on the electoral outcome.[17] Districts drawn to include more Democratic voters produce election outcomes with higher vote shares for Democrats, with the reverse pattern holding for seats drawn to include more Republican voters. More specifically, the average redrawn seat produced a net vote shift of approximately 3% of the two-party vote for the party advantaged by redistricting, all else equal.

Table 2 also indicates that holding an advantage in terms of candidate quality increases the expected vote share for a party. The substantive impact of a quality candidate is over 2% of the vote share for a nonincumbent quality candidate and over 4% for an incumbent. Thus, the results presented in Table 2 clearly demonstrate that running candidates with previous electoral experience increases the vote share for the party, even when controlling for the underlying partisan composition of the district.

Taken as a whole, the results in Table 2 suggest that candidate quality and redistricting were important determinants of electoral outcomes in the late nineteenth century, both for seats defended by incumbents as well as newly created and open seats.[18] The combined effect of a quality advantage and the average change in the district due to redistricting produced a net change in the two-party vote share of approximately 5%, all else equal. Given that approximately one-half of congressional elections during this era were decided by a margin of 5 percent or less of the vote, our results suggest that most districts were potentially winnable for either party given the right mix of redistricting and candidate entry, all else being equal. This is in sharp contrast to the modern era where most incumbents who seek reelection tend to win by rather large margins.

Our findings also indicate that part of the explanation for the highly competitive nature of nineteenth century congressional elections may lie in institutional features such as district design. This is rather ironic considering that redistricting is often blamed in the modern era for *reducing* electoral competition. These results also raise the possibility that the impact of redistricting in creating coordination between incumbents and challengers may not necessarily be unique to the post–*Wesberry* electoral environment (Cox and Katz 2002). Our findings suggest that, at times, redistricting was a prominent factor affecting the decisions and electoral fortunes of candidates in an era well before the courts entered the political thicket of districting.[19]

Discussion

One of the advantages of testing contemporary theories of congressional or electoral politics across time is that it gives us an opportunity to examine the robustness of such theories in a comparative context. Assuming that the right underlying conditions are present, we should expect to find that contemporary theories work in an earlier, historical era. If such theoretical explanations do not hold across time, however, this may indicate that it is necessary to revise our theories in light of the contradictory evidence. Such revision is an important and necessary component of the scientific enterprise. Indeed, it often becomes necessary to balance the need for parsimonious theories against rival explanations accounting for a greater amount of variation in terms of observed outcomes.

In this article, we set out to determine whether candidate entry patterns in nineteenth-century House elections were affected by congressional redistricting. Although the

[17]We also included a variable measuring the degree of population overlap between the old and the new congressional district and interacted it with the presence of an incumbent. That interactive variable was neither statistically, nor substantively, significant, suggesting little evidence of a personal vote during this historical era. In a separate model (results not reported), we conducted a similar analysis using county-level data and found substantively similar results to those reported in the article. In that model, however, a variable indicating whether a county was new to the incumbent was significant and yielded a relatively modest (2%) effect on vote share. Due to space limitations, we intend to explore this result more systematically in future work.

[18]For evidence that redistricting sometimes altered the national distribution of party seat shares, see Engstrom and Kernell (2005).

[19]This does not deny Cox and Katz's findings regarding the importance of the reapportionment revolution. Rather it suggests that when redistricting is predictable in its occurrence, candidates will find it easier to plan when to run and when to stay out. Given that Cox and Katz's analysis begins in the 1940s, an era devoid of any substantial redistricting, it is not surprising that they find little impact of redistricting on entry decisions before the court decisions of the 1960s.

effects of redistricting on entry decisions have received limited attention in the context of contemporary elections, we know virtually nothing about how redistricting during this earlier era affected the behavior of strategic politicians. Unlike the contemporary era, states were not required to redraw their districts every 10 years following each decennial census. At the same time, a number of states during the latter part of the nineteenth century redrew their district boundaries much more frequently in an attempt to gain a partisan advantage in the upcoming election.

Utilizing a newly created dataset of candidate quality for House races in the latter part of the nineteenth century, we examine whether candidates with prior electoral experience are more likely to compete in districts that are significantly altered during the redistricting process. As expected, we find that there is indeed a strong relationship between constituency change and candidate entry—the more a district is changed as a result of redistricting, the more likely we are to see quality candidates decide to run. We also find evidence that both the entry of candidates and redistricting affected the outcome of congressional elections in this era. Thus, our results confirm the relationship between candidate entry and redistricting in the modern era discussed by Cox and Katz (2002) and Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti (2003). At the same time, our findings show that the *extent* of change in a district stemming from redistricting strongly affects candidate entry decisions. Moreover, the effects seem to be more pronounced in comparison to the modern era where redistricting tends to produce fewer competitive House races. Our results also demonstrate substantial evidence of strategic behavior in an era of party centered elections—a finding that runs contrary to much of the conventional wisdom about electoral politics during the nineteenth century.

The encouraging nature of our findings convinces us that additional and related questions pertaining to redistricting are worthy of further study. We believe that extensions of our analysis into the twentieth century will offer additional insights into how redistricting affected strategic candidate behavior during this era. Moreover, we think it would be instructive to investigate the relationship between redistricting and polarization in the nineteenth century to determine if the two patterns are correlated with one another (i.e., redistricting helps to account for the increased amount of polarization we see during this partisan era). Finally, we think studying an earlier era of politics with frequent redistricting will help us understand the implications of modern state parties such as the Republicans in Georgia and Texas which have employed this strategy in an attempt to achieve a more favorable party balance in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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