

Tenure, promotion and performance: The career path of US ambassadors

Eric Arias¹ · Alastair Smith¹

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Abstract The mission of diplomats have often been characterized as promoting peace while advancing national interests. Ambassadorial appointments are also portrayed as patronage, used as a reward for domestic political favors. Here, we develop an original database of the tenure of US ambassadors from sources at the US State Department to better understand the determinants of ambassadorial careers. We assess the tenure of both political appointees and career diplomats based on four factors: (1) Political factors, such as leader turnover in the US and the host nation; (2) Personal characteristics of the ambassador, such as age and gender; (3) Characteristics of the host nation such as population, wealth, trade and alignment with the US; and (4) Performance measures, such as improvements in economic, diplomatic and security relations. US Presidential turnover has the greatest effect on ambassadorial tenure, especially for political appointees. Performance measures have little impact on the tenure or future career prospects of ambassadors.

Keywords US ambassadors · Diplomatic relations · Tenure

JEL Classification D73 · F02 · F5 · H83

Diplomacy lies at the core of the study of international relations, with the discipline having some of its deepest roots in diplomatic history and practice. According to the

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✉ Alastair Smith
alastair.smith@nyu.edu

¹ Department of Politics, New York University, 19 West 4th St, New York, NY, 10012, USA

US State Department, “[t]he mission of American public diplomacy is to support the achievement of US foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”¹ Here we explore whether ambassadors who achieve these goals retain their posting longer and are reassigned to another, possibly more prestigious, mission. Unfortunately we find little evidence that high achievement in the stated goals of the State Department increases tenure or improves future career advancement. Instead, the turnover of US diplomats is driven by domestic political change.

The objective of this paper is to introduce a new data source spanning 2,916 US ambassadors from 1779 to 2014 and empirically assess the factors that determine the tenure and career paths of US ambassadors.² Although our endeavor is primarily an empirical exercise, our results speak to important arguments regarding bureaucratic accountability, or rather the lack of such accountability. The State Department and ambassadors are in a classic Principal-Agent (PA) relationship.³ The State Department dispatches an ambassador to a mission with directions to help implement the US’s economic, diplomatic and security goals. As in all cases where a principal tasks an agent to carry out policy, the agent may have different objectives than those of the principal. These differences could be in terms of policy goals or simply the level of effort the ambassador wants to exert.

There are two broad solutions to the PA problem. First, a principal can select an agent with similar policy preferences so that the agent also wants to achieve the principal’s goal. Currently about one quarter of US ambassadors are political appointments. Such appointments help solve the divergent policy interests problem since the President can hand pick, subject to Congressional approval, an agent with similar policy objectives. Although such selection solves the policy direction problem, political appointments do not necessarily alleviate an ambassador’s desire to shirk and some ‘cushy’ political appointments are seen as rewards for past political service rather than as appointment to a job.⁴

The second means for a principal to control the actions and efforts of an agent is to structure a series of rewards and punishments, such as retention or promotion, to incentivize ambassadors to work hard on the principal’s goals. Such incentives are likely to be important to career diplomats not chosen on the basis of political viewpoints or as a reward for past political service. How best to monitor agents is the perennial problem of principals. Lupia and McCubbins (1994) discuss two contrasting approaches from continual low level monitoring, which they describe as police

¹ Source: US Department of State. Web: <http://www.state.gov/r/index.htm>

² For ease of language, we refer to the person who heads a US mission in a host nation as the ambassador. However, it is important to note that ambassador is not always the title of the head of a mission.

³ There is an enormous economic and political science literature on principal-agent problems. See for instance Jensen and Meckling (1976).

⁴ See for instance Juliet Eilperin, “Obama ambassador nominees prompt an uproar with bungled answers, lack of ties.” *Washington Post*, February 14, 2014. Web: <http://goo.gl/U1YZ6N>. Last accessed: June, 8, 2015.

patrols, to rapid responses to urgent problems, often referred to as fire alarms. Here we develop performance measures based on economic, diplomatic, and security relations. In particular, with respect to economic relations we examine changes in the level of US exports to a host nation, as well as the signing of Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) and Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), and interactions within the World Trade Organization (WTO). We assess diplomatic relations through the similarity of voting records of the US and the host nation within the United Nations General Assembly. Security relations are measured via the presence of a military alliance between the US and host nation, the similarity of their alliance portfolios, and the presence or absence of a militarized interstate dispute between the US and host nation.

An ambassador who improves economic, diplomatic or security relations between a host nation and the US performs well. In contrast, if relations deteriorate, then the ambassador has failed. Admittedly these measures are a noisy means of assessing ambassadorial performance and many factors beyond an ambassador's control affect bilateral relations. However, the fact that the US sends ambassadors to head up missions suggests the US believes ambassadors affect outcomes, at least to some extent. By rewarding success with an extended term or promotion to a more prestigious posting and punishing failure with removal or assignment to a less prestigious posting the State Department could provide incentives to encourage high effort and adherence to the Presidents's policy goals. Alas we find little evidence of such incentive schemes: an ambassador's tenure and career path appears relatively insensitive to performance. Rather our findings are closer to the notion that ambassadorships, like many executive appointments, are captured by patronage concerns and are mainly driven by domestic politics (Haglund 2015; Hollibaugh Jr. 2015).⁵

The bulk of this paper is an empirical assessment of the tenure and career of ambassadors. We consider four broad classes of factors as determinants of ambassadorial tenure: (1) Political factors, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Host nation characteristics, and (4) Performance measures.

We conduct two sets of analyses. First, we examine the tenure of ambassadors. The results show that political considerations are dominant in determining whether ambassadors retain their job. Personal characteristics appear to have little impact on tenure. Several host nation characteristics affect tenure but the substantive impact of these factors is small. Most depressing in terms of accountability is that performance measures do not appear to influence tenure –and when the evidence (weakly) suggests they do, the impact of these factors is substantively small. In terms of ambassadorial tenure, success is not highly rewarded and failure is not strongly punished.

In a second set of analyses we examine the career implications of performance. Here we find even weaker results in terms of accountability. Strong performance as an ambassador does not increase the likelihood that an ambassador is reappointed to another post, nor does it improve the likelihood of a more prestigious posting.

⁵For other studies linking patronage appointments and international factors see Gray (2015) and Arias (2017).

1 Literature review

Political accountability is one of the central concerns of political science, economics and public policy (Barro 1973; Fearon 1999; Ferejohn 1986; Manin et al. 1999; Rogoff 1990). Thus, it is not surprising to see a well established body of literature that examines political survival—and how performance in office influences those survival prospects. For instance, one strand of literature examines the duration of cabinet governments in parliamentary systems (Diermeier and Stevenson 1999; Indridason and Kam 2005; King et al. 1990). Another literature focuses of the survival of the individual leaders who are head of state or head of government (Bienen and Van de Walle 1991; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Chiozza and Goemans 2004; Goemans et al. 2009; McGillivray and Smith 2008).

Related to our study, some scholars look at other politicians within government, such as ministers, and examine how their performance affects whether they remain in office. National leaders and governments appoint ministers and the appointment process involves trade-offs between policy goals and political goals (e.g., Lewis 2008; Hollibaugh Jr. et al. 2014). Indeed, the intellectual history behind this patronage-expertise trade-off can be traced back to Wilson (1887)'s theory of the politics-administration dichotomy. In the context of our paper, the president might view ambassadorial appointments as opportunities for rewarding political supporters (Hollibaugh Jr. 2015) even if it comes at the cost of agency performance (Lewis 2008; Haglund 2015). Within a principal-agent framework, Berlinski et al. (2010) examine the tenure of leaders in terms of their performance. Dewan and Dowding (2005) look at retention of ministers in response to scandals that harm government popularity. Dewan and Myatt (2008) assess how a constraint on the number of available talented candidates limits a Prime Minister's decision to replace ministers in the United Kingdom. In their study of ministerial selection, Dowding and Dumont (2008) stress appointments being based on ministers possessing the requisite skills. Blondel (1991) emphasizes the importance of a minister's willingness to carry out the government's policy agenda, even when it imposes personal costs. Fischer et al. (2012) comprehensively review research on cabinet minister survival.

While the literature on minister turnover is large, it has primarily focused on the US and on parliamentary governments. However, there are a few exceptions. Quiroz Flores and Smith (2011) model minister retention across presidential, parliamentary and autocratic systems and find the balance between performance on the job and political loyalty varies across political systems. Egorov and Sonin (2011) examine relations between dictators and their viziers.

Perhaps most closely related to this paper are works by Francois et al. (2015) and Quiroz Flores (2009, 2016). These studies show a strong connection between the survival of national leaders and the tenure prospects of individual ministers. (Francois et al. 2015) examine ministers within African governments: ministers are initially reasonably secure but their risk of replacement increases as the national leader becomes ensconced in power. Quiroz Flores (2009, 2016) examines the survival of 7,428 foreign ministers from 181 countries between 1696 and 2004. He contrasts performance, in terms of avoiding disputes and wars (and success in such events if they do occur) with coalition dynamics (which he measures as the

tenure of the national leader). Coalition dynamics dominate performance in determining survival.

Our paper is not about ministers, but rather ambassadors. The historical importance of ambassadors can not be overstated as they play a key role in foreign policy (Mak and Kennedy 1992). However, despite their importance, it is often argued that ambassadorships are often used as executive rewards in exchange for political support. Motivated by this tension, recent research has begun to analyze ambassadorships more closely. Hollibaugh Jr. (2015) investigates the determinants of political versus career appointees. Combining both domestic and foreign factors, he finds that political appointees are more likely when there is little ideological distance between the president and the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, when the difficulty of the posting is low, and when the attractiveness of the posting is high. Haglund (2015) studies ambassadorial and Embassy-level performance. Using a novel data set of 197 embassy inspection reports by the State Department's Office of Inspector General from 2002 to 2013 to gauge performance, his finding suggests that political appointments are indeed associated with lower performance, while language skills and prior regional experience do not appear to affect performance. However, to the best of our knowledge there are no systematic assessments of the extent to which these elements, and others, influence ambassadorial tenure or career path.

2 The tenure and career of US ambassadors

The role of diplomacy in international affairs is a core theme in the study of international relations. The US Department of State, US embassies, and US ambassadors are the drivers of American diplomatic affairs abroad. Ambassadors, as chiefs of mission, represent the interests and policies of the United States, anywhere from arranging a simple travel visa to leading negotiation over commercial agreements. Yet many observers, including journalists, scholars and even ambassadors themselves, discuss the notion that patronage concerns drive US representation abroad. Indeed, three key pieces of legislation, since the end of the 19th century have directly or indirectly addressed issues related to political patronage. First, civil service reforms following the Pendleton Act of 1883 touched upon recruitment, retention, patronage, and performance by establishing a merit-based system for government officials. Second, the Rogers Act of 1924 created the Foreign Service, thus establishing a career organization based on competitive recruitment and merit promotion. Third, the Foreign Service Act of 1980, explicitly focused on the influence of campaign donations on ambassadorial appointments. These efforts, coupled with the reality that many political appointments often prove to be quite controversial, hint at the importance of domestic political concerns which arguably override bureaucratic and diplomatic goals.

Although, as noted above, a burgeoning literature has begun to study the nomination and confirmation processes behind appointments and how these processes might influence performance, little is systematically known about the tenure and career path of ambassadors and the extent to which appointment status and performance influences them. We aim to fill this gap.

The determinants of ambassadorial tenure can be broadly classified in four factors, namely (1) Political factors, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Host nation characteristics, and (4) Performance measures. We discuss each one of them next.

Political Factors Ambassadors come in two flavors, political appointees –who are nominated by the US administration and tend to be drawn from all walks of life– and professional career diplomats –who typically serve in the diplomatic corp for much of their careers. One argument for political appointments is that they are a reward for past political service. As such, we should expect that upon taking office a new President replaces the political appointees of his predecessors and reward those to whom he owes favors. As such, the tenure of political appointees are likely to be highly sensitive to changes in the US presidency. Overall, we hypothesize US presidential turnover to be associated with changes in ambassadorial appointees and for the effect to be stronger for political appointees compared to career diplomats.

Changes in host nation leadership can also precipitate ambassadorial change, although we anticipate political volatility in the host nation to be less salient than changes in US governance. Host nation leader change produces competing effects. On the one hand, given the volatility associated with leader change, the US may desire an experienced hand on the wheel rather than a newly appointed ambassador who is unfamiliar with situations and circumstances. On the other hand, host nation leader change may signal a change of relations with the US and therefore a change in personal might be warranted.

Ambassador Characteristics Individual characteristics of ambassadors may affect how long they serve. Given data availability, we focus on the age, career experience, gender and ideology of individual ambassadors to see the extent to which these factors affect tenure in office and subsequent career trajectories. As the ideological distance between the president and an ambassador grows, the likelihood of ambassadorial replacement increases.

Host Nation Characteristics Host nations differ greatly. In addition to differences in socioeconomic characteristics, namely wealth and population, we also examine political institutions and relations with the US on economic as well as diplomatic and security dimensions.

Performance Measures Based on the ideas of bureaucratic accountability, we anticipate that ambassadors who perform well are likely to see their tenure prolonged and subsequent career paths enhanced. Those that fail and preside over deteriorating relations between the host nation and the US are likely to be replaced. Performance is measured on three dimensions: economic relations, diplomacy relations and security alignment. Economic performance measures are based on the growth of US exports into the host nation, the signing of commercial agreements (PTAs and BITs), and on behavior at the WTO with respect to the request for consultations in the context of trade disputes. Diplomatic relations are measured using voting similarities between the US and the host nation in the United Nations General Assembly. A shift towards a closer alignment is taken as an indicator of improved diplomatic relations. Security

alignments are measured using alliance portfolio measures and the onset of militarized interstate disputes. If the host nation's alignment with the US improves this is taken as a measure of security success. In contrast, if the host nation becomes more distant, or should a dispute between the host nation and the US break out, then this is taken as a sign of poor performance on the security dimension.

3 Research design & data

3.1 US ambassadors

To assemble the appointments and tenure of ambassadors, we relied on information provided by the Office of the Historian, at the US Department of State, which documents the history of US representation abroad.⁶ As briefly noted above, it is important to clarify that throughout this paper we use the term Ambassador somewhat loosely. Our dataset is composed of Chiefs of Missions. Chief of Missions are often the Ambassador but this does not need to be the case. According to the Foreign Affairs Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-465, Section 102(3) (22 U.S.C. 3902)) a Chief of Mission is “[t]he principal officer in charge of a diplomatic mission of the United States or of a United States office abroad which is designated by the Secretary of State as diplomatic in nature, including any individual assigned under section 502(c) to be temporarily in charge of such a mission or office.” The data reflect the three classes of diplomatic representation established by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article 14: ambassador or *nuncio* (accredited to the Head of State); envoy, minister, or *internuncio* (accredited to the Head of State); and *chargé d'affaires* (accredited to the Minister of Foreign Affairs).⁷ Having clarified this, for sake of simplicity we will subsequently refer to all Chiefs of Missions as Ambassadors. Robustness checks in the appendix show there are no significant differences in terms of tenure and career path between the different designations.

When available, we retrieved the dates of service for each position held by every ambassador, namely the date of entry on duty and date of termination. If one of these dates was missing, then we imputed it with the date of termination of the previous ambassador or with the date of entry of the next ambassador, respectively. In some cases, mostly for *chargé d'affaires ad interim* or periods in the late 18th century and early 19th century, dates of service are listed from and to the nearest month. In these cases, we simply assume that the date of event was on the 1st day of that month.

Our ambassador dataset contains 2,916 ambassadors and 4,453 ambassador-appointments spanning from 1779 to 2014. Given the availability of other data sources and coding decisions, the number of observations in many analyses is substantially less.

⁶Web: <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/chiefssofmission>

⁷Although not a signatory, the United States followed Annex 17 to the Congress Treaty of Vienna (March 19, 1815) which established rank and precedence of diplomatic agents (ambassadors, envoys, and *chargés d'affaires*). The Procès-Verbal of the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle (November 9, 1818), recognized ministers resident as an intermediate class between Ministers and *chargés d'affaires*.

Personal Characteristics We collect personal characteristics. The key one being career status, which defines whether the ambassador is a *political appointee* (i.e., non-career) or a *career* (i.e., non-political) appointee.⁸

We compute ambassadors' ages, given the availability of years of birth and death. We also coded ambassadors' gender. To do so, we relied on an algorithm that encodes gender based on names and dates of birth, using either the Social Security Administration's data set of first names by year of birth or the Census Bureau data from 1789 to 1940 (Mullen 2014). In this way, we inferred the gender for 97.5% of our sample. For the 73 individuals for whom the algorithm failed to predict a gender, we manually coded it based on web searches.

We retrieved the ideology of a subset of ambassadors by using ideal point estimations from campaign finance records, specifically using the CFscore scaling methodology (Bonica 2014).⁹ Following (Bonica et al. 2015) analyses on presidential appointments, we focus on the mean absolute ideological distance between the president and the ambassador.

For the purposes of this paper, we excluded ambassadors whose appointment was to Hawaii, Holy See, Texas, Two Sicilies, and International Organizations (IOs).¹⁰ Similarly, across time and geographic regions a given ambassador might be a representative at different countries at the same time. For instance, a single individual is typically appointed to serve as the ambassador to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados. In these cases, we coded the host country as the nation where the ambassador resided. For instance in the Caribbean example, we kept Barbados and dropped the other postings. Alternative coding decision did not appreciably change our results.

Table 1 shows summary statistics for ambassadorial appointments, divided into political appointees and career appointees. The first section of the table examines the number of ambassadorial appointments held by each individual diplomat. For both political and career appointees the median number of appointments held is one. A comparison of the mean number of appointments suggests career diplomats receive more postings than political appointees (1.83 vs 1.23). The second section of Table 1 examines the number of career years that each ambassador holds as a head of mission. This section also reports the number of ambassadors who died in office. Such events are more common for political appointees than career diplomats (161 vs 35). However, this difference is largely explained by temporal differences. Prior to 1924 all ambassadors were political appointees and the lack of modern medicine meant

⁸Career appointees hold the Foreign Service Officer status, and are commonly referred to as non-political appointees or Foreign Service Officers appointees.

⁹Drawing on a comprehensive database of over 100 million contributions made during state and federal elections since 1979, the CFscore methodology uses patterns of who gives to whom to recover ideal points for candidates and contributors using a joint estimation procedure analogous to the widely used methods to scale roll call data.

¹⁰IOs and US Offices in IOs include ASEAN, AU, EU, IAEA, ICAO, NATO, OAS, OECD, OSCE, UN, UNAFA, UNESCO, UNIDO, USOARN, UNEO and UNVO.

Table 1 Summary Statistics of Ambassadorial Terms and Number of Positions Held

Summary Statistics	Political Appointees	Career Appointees
Number of Appointments Held		
Observations	1,523	1,358
Mean	1.23	1.63
Median	1	1
Max	6	7
Career Years		
Observations	1,523	1,358
Mean	3.43	4.29
Median	2.94	3.13
Max	27.72	28.28
Died in Office (Number)	161	35
Ambassadorial Appointments (Years in Office)		
Subjects	1,824	2,124
Mean	2.80	2.62
Median	2.48	2.68
Max	27.7	21.2

such ambassadors faced a high mortality risk. The final section of Table 1 examines the duration of each individual appointments as an ambassador (such appointments form the unit of analysis for our hazard models).

3.2 Other data

Political Variables We code both *US presidential turnovers* and *Host country leader turnovers*. To do so, we rely on leader survival data from the Archigos database, version 2.9, Goemans et al. (2009) updated by Arias et al. (2017) from 1800 to 2013.

Host Country Variables We analyze three types of host country variables: political, economic and security.

In regards to political variables, besides host country leader turnover, we include a measure of *Democracy*. We rely on Polity IV (2013 version) data from 1800 to 2013 (Marshall et al. 2013). We use the cumulative polity score (*Polity2*) and, to aid interpretation, we standardize it to range between 0 and 1, going from least to most democratic.

For economic variables, we mainly rely on data from the Penn World Tables (version 8.0) from 1950 to 2011. We include standard controls for wealth and market size, namely *GDP per capita* (Ln, in 2005 US constant dollars) and *Population* (Ln). For robustness, we also used the same variables from the Maddison Project from 1820 to

2010 (Bolt and van Zanden 2014) and obtained similar results.¹¹ We also control for the total volume of dyadic trade between the US and the host country (i.e., Imports plus Exports (Ln)). For this, we use the COW dyadic trade flows (Barbieri et al. 2009) from 1870 to 2009 which we converted to 2009 US constant dollars.

Security related variables come from the Correlates of War data. First, *Ally* represents a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the US and the country of appointment have any type of alliance, 0 otherwise.¹² We also include a measure of *Security Affinity*, namely τ_B scores which measure alliance portfolios and their similarity (Bueno de Mesquita 1981).

To measure diplomatic closeness to the US we use *UN Voting Affinity* data from 1946 to 2014 (Bailey et al. 2015). This affinity index that ranges from -1 (least similar interests) to 1 (most similar interests) is based on vote outcomes (approval, disapproval, and abstention) for votes in the United Nations General Assembly.

Performance Measures Building upon a subset of the host country variables, we construct performance measures on three dimensions: economic relations, broad diplomatic relations and security relations. For economic relations, first, we construct the variable *US Exports Growth (in %)* which measures the growth (in %) in US Exports from year $t - 1$ to t .¹³ We also include indicator variables, *PTA Signing* and *BIT Signing*, that take the value of 1 if the US and the host signed a PTA agreement or a BIT on that year, and 0 otherwise. PTA data is drawn from Dür et al. (2014) and BIT data from UNCTAD. Finally, following recent work on the importance of diplomacy on WTO Dispute behavior (Gray and Potter 2015), we include two additional variables. *WTO Consultations by the Host* and *WTO Consultations by the US* measure the number of WTO consultations initiated by the host and the US, respectively, in a particular year. Data is drawn from Horn and Mavroidis (2011).

For diplomatic relations, we coded Δ *UN Voting Affinity* as the yearly change in UN voting alignment. Finally, for security alignment, we analyze two variables, namely the change in the alliance portfolio, using Δ *Security Affinity* (τ_B), and the variable *New MID*, which takes the value of 1 if a militarized interstate dispute occurs between the US and the host country, 0 otherwise. The stated goals of US ambassadors are to improve economic and political relations so improvements on these measures represent, albeit noisily, ambassadorial success.

Summary statistics are presented in the Appendix, on Table A1.¹⁴

3.3 Research design

We conduct two sets of analyses. The first set examines the tenure of ambassadors, while the second set examines their career path. In both cases, and for ease of

¹¹Not reported here, but available upon request.

¹²COW alliance types contains three, namely defense pact, neutrality pact and *entente*.

¹³Other export measures such as exports' value growth over host GDP, or the natural logarithm of exports' value growth provide the same substantive results.

¹⁴The Appendix is available at the *Review of International Organizations'* webpage.

exposition, we report the analyses by appointment status. That is, the analyses below show the results for political and career appointees separately.¹⁵

To analyze the tenure of ambassadors, we estimate Cox proportional hazard models where the event we estimate is the removal of a given ambassador from a given appointment (we discuss alternative estimations below). The hazard rate, $h(t)$, represents the conditional probability of being removed at time t , conditional on having survived up to that time, and is specified as follows:

$$h_{i,a,b}(t) = h_0(t)e^{\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}\beta} \quad (1)$$

where the hazard rate is a function of a baseline hazard function $h_0(t)$ and observed covariates, $\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}$. Here, $\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}$ represents a vector of covariates for ambassador i , country a (US) and country b (host) and where $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard rate at time t . The advantage of the semi-parametric Cox model is its flexibility. The underlying baseline hazard rate, $h_0(t)$, is not restricted to any particular functional form. The covariates operate multiplicatively on $h_0(t)$, shifting the expected risk of ambassador removal proportionally up or down depending on the values of the independent variables and β . Positive coefficient estimates imply that an increase in the given covariate is associated with an upward shift in the hazard function, $h(t)$ – i.e., an increase in the risk of being removed from the appointment.

A potential critique to our approach is that there is a norm of rotation at least every three years (Haglund 2015). However, this norm is not strictly adhered to. The Cox model can incorporate this norm into the baseline hazard rate, and as such, we analyze covariates that can move the hazard rate up or down from its base.¹⁶ Nonetheless, we aim to further address concerns created by this potential norm in two ways. Firstly, we complement our analysis using a conditional time gap model (shown in Table 2). The conditional time gap estimation explicitly accounts for repeated events of individual ambassadors holding multiple ambassadorial posts. Under this method the baseline hazard rate $h_0(t)$ is allowed to vary by the k -th failure in a repeated events model by the use of stratification, i.e., the data are stratified according to the k -th ambassadorial post. This method allows the hazard rate to vary by post but still provides a single set of coefficients for the overall effects of the covariates across each of the k appointments.¹⁷ Secondly, we also examine how performance in one posting affects subsequent appointments. Even if the length of a posting was largely preordained, as the norm argument might suggest, performance should still be important in shaping a diplomat's subsequent career.

The basic Cox model makes no assumption about the shape of the baseline hazard function $h_0(t)$. However, it does assume that the impact of covariates on the hazard

¹⁵We obtain the same results if we conduct a fully interacted model of appointment status and the other variables of interests. However, splitting the sample while using the Cox model has the added flexibility of allowing different baseline hazard rates for political and career appointees.

¹⁶Moreover, results are the same if one controls for an indicator variable on whether the ambassador is in his/her third of years of service in that post.

¹⁷As is standard, to address the issue of small number of events in the higher strata, we combine the third ambassadorial post or higher, into the a single one.

rate is constant across time. That is to say, if a unit increase in covariate X doubles the hazard at time 1, then the same unit increase in X should double the hazard at time 2. We test the validity of this assumption using Grambsch-Therneau and Harrell's rho tests. When the tests indicate that the proportionate hazard assumption is violated (i.e., that the impact of a unit change in a covariate on the hazard rate differs across time), then we follow standard procedures (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004) to account for these violations of the proportionate hazard assumption. Specifically for those variables that fail the proportionate hazard assumption tests, we include additional *Time Interacted Covariates* that are composed of the interaction of the problematic variable and the natural logarithm of survival time t .

In the analyses reported we treat people who died in their final year as ambassador or the year following their final year as censored events. The immediacy of death following such events suggests that poor health or mortality curtailed an ambassador's tenure, rather than a decision to replace them. Although not reported here, the determinants of those people who died in office are straightforward, namely age increases the vulnerability of ambassadors to dying while in office and death becomes less likely over time, possibly due to improvements in health care. We also include controls for year and year² (normalized to calendar year minus 1900 to avoid large magnitude covariates), although we do not report these temporal controls.

As noted above, following our analyses of ambassadorial tenure we assess the career path of diplomats. In particular, we ask, following the completion of a term as ambassador, what are the probabilities of *promotion* to a more prestigious ambassadorial appointment, appointment to a *similar* ambassadorial position, *demotion* to a less prestigious posting, or *retirement* (meaning the ambassador does not receive another posting).

4 Ambassadorial tenure

4.1 Basic statistics

The diplomatic workload of the US State Department has grown greatly over the history of the US. Figure 1 shows the number of ambassadorial appointments the US had over time. During the 18th Century the US had an average of 5 ambassadorial appointments. During the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries the averages grew to 31, 109, and 169, respectively.

Initially, all ambassadors were political appointees and this remained the pattern until 1924. As the number of missions to be staffed grew, the US increasingly relied on career appointees. Figure 2 shows the proportion of career ambassadors. Today, about three quarters of all US missions are headed by a career diplomat rather than a political appointee. Figure 2 also shows the average length of tenure over time. Prior to 1800, the average ambassadorial tenure was over 4 years, reaching over 10 years at the beginning of the 19th Century. During most of 19th Century tenures oscillated between about 2 and 4 years. Following the Second World War average tenures have settled to around 2 years. Transport time and the bureaucratization of the diplomatic

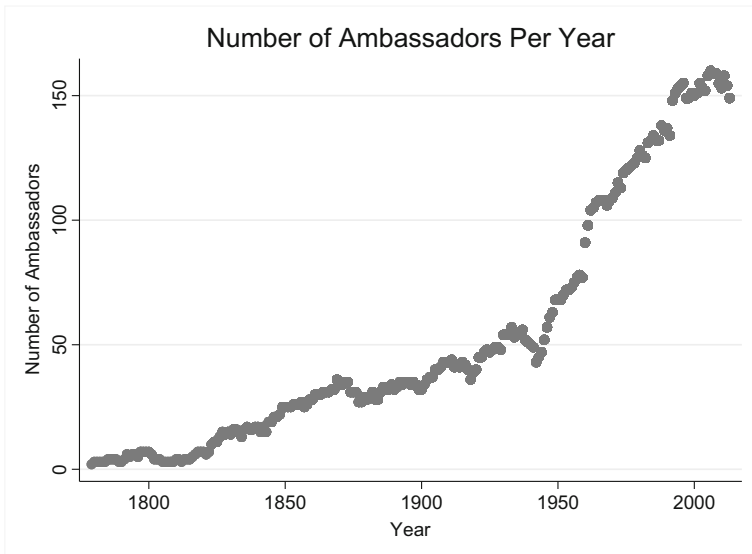


Fig. 1 Number of Ambassadors Per Year

service probably account for many of these trends. Prior to air and motorized travel it could take many months for an ambassador to reach his posting.

We now turn from descriptive statistics of ambassadorial tenure to systematic analyses of the determinants that lead to ambassador turnover.

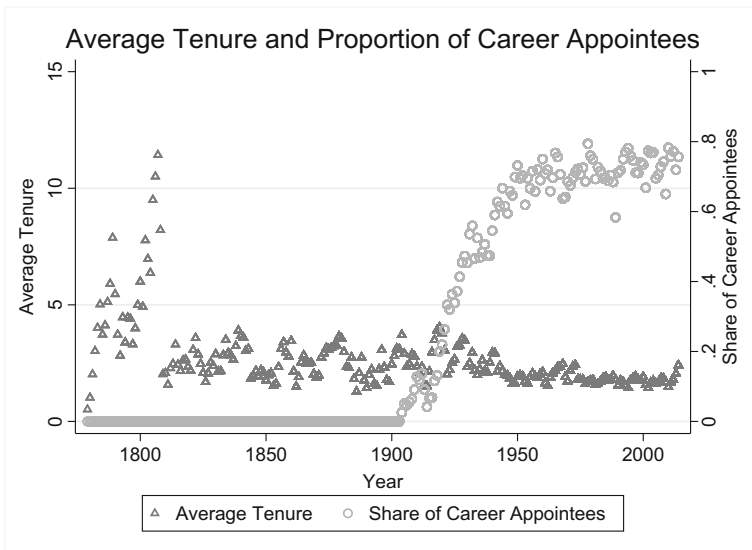


Fig. 2 Average Tenure and the Proportion of Career Appointments

4.2 Analyses of ambassadorial tenure

Table 2 examines the survival of 3,572 ambassadors. The combined analyses contain 13,298 ambassador-host-nation-year units of observation. 215 of the observations were censored. This censoring occurs for two reasons; either the ambassador is still serving in the last year for which we have data or we coded the observation as censored because of ambassadorial death (As described above, this was coded as dying in the year or the year following leaving office). In this table we include as many observations as possible – the earliest observation is from 1800. Hence the analyses include relatively few independent variables. In contrast, the hazard analyses in Table 3 include more covariates. Those analyses allow us to test more determinants of ambassadorial tenure, but at the cost of lost observations. Since most of the

Table 2 Cox Proportional Hazards Estimates: US Ambassadors' Tenure (1800-2013)

	Career	Political	Career	Political
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
US Presidential Turnover	0.195*** (0.057)	1.539*** (0.078)	0.222*** (0.057)	1.541*** (0.077)
Host Country Leader Turnover	0.108 (0.068)	0.042 (0.061)	0.134** (0.067)	0.043 (0.064)
Age	-0.028*** (0.009)	0.004 (0.003)	-0.037*** (0.009)	0.002 (0.003)
Female	0.054 (0.068)	0.120 (0.097)	0.077 (0.060)	0.126 (0.098)
Career Years	-0.099*** (0.012)	-0.182*** (0.051)	-0.538*** (0.086)	-1.036*** (0.177)
Democracy	-0.166** (0.071)	-0.196** (0.082)	-0.208*** (0.075)	-0.131 (0.087)
<i>Time Interacted Covariates</i>				
Age	0.039*** (0.009)		0.047*** (0.009)	
US Presidential Turnover		-0.341*** (0.064)		-0.372*** (0.064)
Career Years		-0.060* (0.034)	0.060 (0.081)	
Stratify by Post			✓	✓
Observations	7241	6057	7241	6023
# of subjects	1974	1598	1974	1590
# of failures	1872	1485	1872	1478

Robust standard errors clustered at the ambassador level in parentheses. The time period for the career ambassadors is post-1905. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 Cox Proportional Hazards Estimates: US Ambassadors' Tenure (1950-2000)

	Career	Political	Career	Political	Career	Political
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
US Presidential Turnover	0.224*** (0.082)	1.960*** (0.204)	0.560*** (0.154)	1.944*** (0.196)	0.559*** (0.154)	1.949*** (0.197)
Host Country Leader Turnover	0.182** (0.089)	-0.223 (0.138)	0.203** (0.087)	-0.196 (0.129)	0.203** (0.087)	-0.185 (0.131)
Age	0.001 (0.008)	0.005 (0.006)	0.002 (0.007)	0.005 (0.006)	0.002 (0.007)	0.010 (0.008)
Female	0.065 (0.118)	-0.021 (0.171)	0.019 (0.106)	0.019 (0.164)	0.017 (0.105)	0.021 (0.169)
Career Years	-0.087*** (0.017)	-0.288** (0.135)	-0.086*** (0.017)	-0.309** (0.124)	-0.086*** (0.017)	-0.303** (0.131)
Democracy	0.038 (0.111)	-0.100 (0.254)	0.012 (0.106)	-0.098 (0.247)	0.013 (0.106)	0.016 (0.195)
Population (Ln)	0.014 (0.033)	0.141** (0.061)	0.014 (0.031)	0.209*** (0.067)	0.015 (0.031)	0.132** (0.058)
GDP (Ln)	-0.084 (0.086)	-0.165** (0.082)	-0.091** (0.041)	-0.147* (0.079)	-0.092** (0.041)	-0.151* (0.081)
Trade [M+X] (Ln)	-0.032 (0.069)	0.040 (0.056)	-0.005 (0.030)	0.035 (0.053)	-0.005 (0.030)	0.028 (0.054)
UN Voting Affinity	0.783*** (0.262)	0.255 (0.274)	-0.354** (0.139)	0.285 (0.293)	-0.352** (0.139)	0.223 (0.288)
Tau Score Global	-0.344 (0.290)	0.987* (0.523)	-0.253 (0.270)	1.411 (0.961)	-0.257 (0.270)	1.103 (0.946)
Ally	0.395* (0.222)	-0.692* (0.372)	0.318 (0.210)	-1.023 (0.661)	0.317 (0.210)	-0.842 (0.647)
New MID	1.231** (0.593)	-0.759 (0.958)				
US Exports Growth (in %)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)				
Δ UN Voting Affinity	-0.950** (0.435)	-0.555 (0.366)				
Δ Tau Score Global	0.190 (0.498)	1.168** (0.568)				
BIT Signing	-0.384 (0.356)	0.654 (0.467)				
PTA Signing	-1.330 (0.872)	0.883*** (0.283)				
WTO Consultations by Host	-0.209 (0.371)	0.439*** (0.157)				

Table 3 (continued)

	Career	Political	Career	Political	Career	Political
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
WTO Consultations by US	−0.239 (0.310)	−1.425* (0.854)				
Performance Index			−0.093 (0.117)	−0.186 (0.200)		
Good Performance					−0.050 (0.082)	−0.235* (0.141)
Bad Performance					0.016 (0.081)	−0.058 (0.125)
<i>Time Interacted Covariates</i>						
US Presidential Turnover		−0.626*** (0.196)	−0.335** (0.141)	−0.648*** (0.188)	−0.332** (0.141)	−0.624*** (0.186)
GDP (Ln)	−0.017 (0.076)					
Trade [M+X] (Ln)	0.035 (0.065)					
UN Voting Affinity	−1.241*** (0.233)	−0.421* (0.239)		−0.516* (0.272)		−0.435 (0.269)
New MID	−1.226** (0.549)					
Δ UN Voting Affinity	1.083*** (0.407)					
Career Years		−0.199* (0.113)		−0.183** (0.090)		−0.194* (0.103)
Democracy		0.198 (0.228)		0.134 (0.220)		
Population (Ln)				−0.116** (0.051)		
Tau Score Global				−0.570 (0.922)		−0.208 (0.895)
Ally				0.506 (0.642)		0.324 (0.623)
Age						−0.005 (0.009)
Observations	3808	1608	3936	1628	3936	1628
# of subjects	1086	463	1103	464	1103	464
# of failures	974	413	999	417	999	417

Robust standard errors clustered at the ambassador level in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

covariates are only available for the post-war period the analyses in Table 3 contains fewer observations (between 5,564 and 5,416 depending data availability).

In Table 2 odd-numbered columns analyze career appointees while even-numbered columns analyze political appointees. The first two columns estimate a basic Cox model and the last two implement the conditional gap time approach (stratifying by ambassadorial posts) with similar overall findings. The upper part of the table provides coefficient estimates for each covariate in the model. The lower part of the table, labeled *Time Interacted Covariates*, shows the coefficient estimates for the interaction of the logarithm of time, $Ln(t)$, with the covariates that failed the non-proportionate hazard tests. Both career and political appointees show an elevated risk of replacement after presidential change. For career diplomats, presidential turnover increases the risk of removal by 21% (Model 1). The impact of presidential change is much larger for political appointees. In the first year of a political appointee's posting, presidential turnover increases the removal risk by approximately 365% (Model 2). As indicated by the negative coefficient estimate on the *Time Interacted US Presidential Turnover* variable, the impact of presidential turnover on a political appointee's tenure is reduced over time, but only marginally. Even in the fourth year of a posting, the estimates indicate that a change in president increases the risk of removal by close to 200%. As expected, political appointees are more likely to be replaced when a new president takes office than are career diplomats.

The negative coefficients on the democracy variable suggest that ambassadors are less likely to be replaced when serving in a democracy rather than an autocracy. The variables *Age*, *Female* and *Career Years* are personal characteristics of the ambassador. The estimates suggest that while gender has no impact of ambassadorial tenure, more experienced ambassadors typically serve longer terms in office—this is true for both career and political appointees. Age appears to have no effect on the tenure of political appointees. However taking into account both age and its interaction with $Ln(t)$, older career ambassadors are more likely to be replaced.

Table 3 examines the impact of host-nation characteristics and performance measures. Unfortunately, data availability means a substantial loss of observations compared to Table 2. Once again, odd-numbered and even-numbered columns analyze career and political appointees, respectively. Models 1 through 6 estimate Cox models using different measures of ambassadorial performance.¹⁸

The impact of political factors and personal factors are similar to those seen in the previous analyses. Age and gender have no discernible effect on ambassadorial tenure but Career years does. Long serving diplomats are less likely to be replaced. As with the previous analyses, the largest substantive effect is US political turnover, particularly for political appointees. Host Country Leader Turnover also increases the risk of replacement for career ambassadors. However, the magnitude of the effect is small relative to the effect of US presidential change.

To assess the impact of performance, Columns 1 and 2 in Table 3 include a set of specific performance related measures. The evidence is arguably mixed. For career

¹⁸We obtain similar result from the conditional time gap model.

ambassadors, in their first year of a posting, the occurrence of a new militarized interstate dispute increases the risk of removal by approximate 240%. However, over time the risk imposed by the onset of a new MID is diminished. It should also be noted that occurrences of militarized disputes are rare.

Improvements in diplomatic relations also affect the tenure of career diplomats, as measured by improvements in the UN Voting Affinity, however, the effects vary over time. In the first few years, improved relations reduce the risk of ambassador turnover. However, substantively the effect is small and it diminishes over time. The economic measures of performance, improvements in US exports and the signing of trade and investment agreements, appear to have no impact on the tenure of career appointees. Turning to political appointees, performance measures also appear to have only marginal effects on the tenure of ambassadors, and when performance measures are significant they appear to increase the risk of political appointee turnover, as evidenced by the positive coefficients on Δ Tau Score and PTA Signing. The positive coefficient estimate on the WTO Consultations by Host variable suggests that political appointees are more likely to be replaced if the host nation requests consultation at the WTO regarding US trade policy. However, the substantive impact of these performance measures is extremely small in comparison to the impact of political change.

To further investigate the impact of performance, we collapse all the performance measures into a *Performance Index*, where higher values represent better performance. To create such index, we first standardized all performance related variables by year (mean 0, variance 1), meaning we capture ambassadors' relative performance, and then we take the average across all measure (noting that some variables, such as MID onset represent poor, not good performance).¹⁹ Columns 3 and 4 show the results using the *Performance Index*, and while the coefficient's sign points to the idea that better performance increases tenure in office, the estimates are statistically insignificant. To ensure that performance does not have any non-linear effects, we use the Index to create indicator variables of *Good*, *Neutral* and *Bad Performance* according to terciles. Columns 5 and 6 use these indicators instead (with *Neutral Performance* being the baseline category). While *Good Performance* is weakly associated with longer survival for political appointees, the overall results reveal that the dominant factors affecting ambassadorial tenure are political. US Presidential turnover is by far the strongest determinant of the risk ambassadors face, and this risk is especially high for political appointees.

4.3 Further tests and robustness

To analyze further tests and the robustness of these findings, the appendix contains additional results. Table A2 introduces ideological distance as a key covariate. One should interpret these results with caution as the number of observations is limited (178 career and 170 political ambassadors respectively). Further the sample of individuals who engage in large campaign donations—the way ideology is

¹⁹ Other methods, such as factor analysis provide the same results.

estimated— might be different from the set of ambassadors who do not donate. At face value, there is clear evidence that US presidential turnover drives ambassadorial turnover, although the effect is only present for political appointees. Ideological distance, meaning the ambassador holds markedly different policy positions to the president, seems to decrease ambassadorial tenure but only in political appointees and with a decreasing effect over time (as suggested by the time interacted covariate). Finally, in this sample of ambassadors, performance measures also provide mixed results. The individual performance measures are not significant at conventional levels, with the exception of BIT signing for career ambassadors. However, Performance Index suggests performance affects tenure, increasing tenure for career diplomats but reducing tenure for political appointees. However, the impact of Performance disappears in the tercile specification, as seen in Columns 5 and 6.

Table A3 replaces US Presidential turnout with changes in the party of the President. For instance, the transition between Presidents Reagan and Bush in 1989 is coded as no change; but the change from Bush to Clinton in 1993 is coded as a presidential party change. Table A6 shows the results when the sample is restricted to periods after the Rogers Act and the Foreign Service Act, respectively. Table A5 replicates the analyses excluding observations according to the role of the head of mission, namely removing *chargé d'affaires* or keeping only ambassadors. These results are similar to those reported in the main text.

While the evidence presented so far provides strong support for US presidential turnover as the key driver behind ambassadorial tenure, and rather weak support for the importance of performance measures, one valid criticism is that those average effects might be misleading. Specifically, there might be reasons to suspect that performance measures might have different effects depending on the country, presumably being more important in countries that are more relevant to US interests. To tackle this, Table A4 repeats the main analyses but analyses Non-G20 and G-20 countries separately. G20 membership represents a simple, albeit imperfect, measure of country relevance in the international arena. The results reinforce the initial findings. US presidential turnover seems to have greater impact on the tenure of US ambassadors in G20 countries, while once again, the performance index is far from reaching statistical significance.

To make sure that our results are not driven by our choice of estimation, we implement several tests. First, Table A7 contains Cox models with shared frailty based on host nation. Such models can be thought of as equivalent to including country-specific random effects. Then, Table A8 implements a simple analysis comparing different parametric models, namely Weibull, Log-Normal, Log-Logistic and Exponential. While all of them provide similar results, the Weibull model exhibits the best fit according to the AIC statistic. Based on that, Table A9 further tests the robustness of previous analyses using the parametric Weibull model. Finally, Table A10 shows the results when implementing a linear probability model with both ambassador and year fixed effects.

These additional analyses produce substantively similar results as those reported in the main text. US presidential turnover has the largest effect, especially for political appointees. While some performance measure are significant in some analyses, the magnitude of the effects are small in comparison to the impact of political change and

overall the performance measures exhibit no clear consistent pattern on ambassador tenure.

Our analyses of tenure indicate that performance has little impact on how long ambassadors keep their appointments. These results suggest a lack of ambassadorial accountability. However, before we can assert that performance incentives are missing, we examine the impact of performance on future career. Good performance might not be rewarded in the immediate position, but rather be rewarded with another, possibly more prestigious appointment. It is to such career considerations that we next turn.

5 Ambassadorial career considerations

Table 4 summarizes the fate of diplomats when they leave an ambassadorial posting. The unit of analysis is an ambassador leaving a posting. Some diplomats hold up to 7 postings, so the same individual may represent multiple observations. Arguably, a political appointee's expectation of remaining in a diplomatic posting is probably lower than that of a career appointee, as they are often expected to return to their former profession. To take these expectations into account, as before, we analyze career and political appointees separately. There are 3,605 ambassadorial terms for which we have data. Of these 2,766 appointments end in retirement, which we take to mean that the individual ambassador does not receive another ambassadorial appointment. 839 appointments end with the individual being appointed to head another mission. An ambassador's next job might be more prestigious (*Promotion*), a similar ranking (*Similar Job*), or a less prestigious job (*Demotion*).

Ranking the prestige of postings is a non-trivial task. Many idiosyncratic features make one assignment more attractive to an individual than another. Here we base

Table 4 Career Path of US Ambassadors

	Retirement	Another Job	Total
Career Ambassadors			
Retirement	1,270	0	
Demotion	0	78	
Similar Job	0	377	
Promotion	0	214	
<i>Total Career</i>	1,270	669	1,939
Political Ambassadors			
Retirement	1,496	0	
Demotion	0	23	
Similar Job	0	81	
Promotion	0	66	
<i>Total Political</i>	1,496	170	1,666
<i>Total</i>	2,766	839	3,605

promotion or demotion on an objective ranking of nations based on population size and wealth (per capita GDP). We argue large wealthy nations are the most important to the US and therefore constitute the more prestigious postings. To capture this, we create a *Host Nation Rank*. For each year we rank order all the nations from smallest to largest and assign each nation a score due to its percentile ranking. We repeat the same exercise with respect to wealth and assign a Host Nation Rank as the average of these two percentiles. We regard the next appointment as a promotion if the subsequent host nation has a Host Nation Rank score that is 15 or more percentile points higher than the existing posting. A demotion is coded as a 15 point decline—but the results we present are relatively insensitive to the 15 point cutoff and we obtained similar results with smaller or larger cutoffs.²⁰ Table A11 shows summary statistics.

Given their performance on the current job, we ask if an ambassador gets another ambassadorial posting, and, if so, whether that posting is a promotion, a demotion or a similar position. We start with the simple question of whether an ambassador is reassigned to another posting. Table 5 presents logit analyses. The models include the personal factors of ambassadors (*Age* and *Career years* of past ambassadorial experience), host nation characteristics (democracy and Host Nation Rank) and performance measures. As before, we construct both specific performance measures as well as the *Average Performance Index* and its corresponding tercile indicators (Good, Neutral, and Bad). Since an ambassador's term typically occurs over several years, we need to aggregate performance over the whole posting. In the case of change in exports we utilize the average change over the posting. With respect to security alignment and UN Voting Affinity we utilize the difference between the start and end of the posting. For the MID, BIT, PTA and WTO Consultation measures we use the cumulative number of events during the posting.

Unsurprisingly, old ambassadors are more likely to retire than their younger contemporaries, as evidenced by the negative coefficient on age. Experience appears to increase the likelihood of another posting: the coefficient estimates on career years are positive and tend to be larger for political appointees. The host nation characteristic of democracy appears to have no impact on the probability of a subsequent job, while the Host Nation Rank seems to decrease the odds of a subsequent job for political appointees. Turning to the effects of performance measures, these appear to have little or no impact; and in the cases where they are marginally significant, their coefficient estimates are contrary to the hypothesized effect (for instance, the weak evidence on average export growth).²¹

Contrary to the expectation of bureaucratic accountability arguments, performance is not associated with the odds of receiving another ambassadorial appointment. However, before dismissing the idea that good performance is rewarded, we further dissect future employment by Promotion, Similar Job or Demotion.

²⁰Table A16 in the Appendix replicates the analysis presented here but uses the the terciles categories from the Host Nation Rank—High Ranked, Neutral Ranked, and Low Ranked Post—instead of Promotion, Similar Post, and Demotion, finding the same substantive results.

²¹Similar results appear when only analyzing the period under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. See Table A12.

Table 5 Logit Model: Are Ambassadors Appointed to Another Ambassadorial Position? (1950-2011)

	Appointed to Another Ambassadorial Position					
	Career	Political	Career	Political	Career	Political
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Host Country Ranking	−0.002 (0.004)	−0.016** (0.008)	−0.001 (0.004)	−0.017** (0.008)	−0.001 (0.004)	−0.016** (0.008)
Age	−0.163*** (0.015)	−0.046*** (0.016)	−0.153*** (0.014)	−0.052*** (0.016)	−0.154*** (0.014)	−0.053*** (0.016)
Career Years	0.053* (0.028)	0.116** (0.053)	0.041 (0.027)	0.111** (0.051)	0.041 (0.027)	0.117** (0.051)
Female	0.247 (0.205)	−0.184 (0.568)	0.206 (0.192)	−0.313 (0.561)	0.196 (0.192)	−0.294 (0.562)
Democracy	−0.070 (0.190)	−0.080 (0.387)	−0.082 (0.181)	−0.049 (0.378)	−0.106 (0.182)	−0.128 (0.382)
Δ UN Affinity	−0.269 (0.264)	−0.331 (0.601)				
Δ Tau Score Global	1.018 (0.739)	−1.364 (1.311)				
MID	0.190 (0.379)					
Avg. Δ U.S. Exports	−0.004** (0.002)	−0.011* (0.006)				
BIT	0.027 (0.357)	−0.133 (1.110)				
PTA	0.555 (0.523)	1.373 (1.209)				
WTO Consultations by Host	−0.027 (0.423)					
WTO Consultations by US	−0.612 (0.417)					
Avg. Performance Index			0.261 (0.409)	−0.627 (0.681)		
Good Performance					−0.220 (0.163)	−0.092 (0.393)
Bad Performance					−0.058 (0.161)	0.613* (0.340)
Observations	1319	555	1403	610	1403	610
Log-Likelihood	−789.76	−198.61	−848.20	−206.90	−847.26	−203.95

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6 Multinomial Logit: Promotion, Demotion, Similar Job or Retirement (1950-2011)

	Career (1)	Political (2)	Career (3)	Political (4)
Demotion				
Host Country Ranking	0.057*** (0.010)	0.015 (0.037)	0.056*** (0.010)	0.018 (0.036)
Age	-0.137*** (0.034)	-0.008 (0.062)	-0.136*** (0.034)	-0.028 (0.063)
Career Years	-0.068 (0.069)	0.199 (0.159)	-0.068 (0.069)	0.317 (0.202)
Female	0.044 (0.569)	1.723 (1.261)	0.050 (0.570)	1.841 (1.310)
Democracy	-0.254 (0.426)	3.631 (3.858)	-0.245 (0.428)	3.487 (3.882)
Avg. Performance Index	0.540 (0.905)	-1.633 (2.412)		
Good Performance			-0.012 (0.398)	-0.568 (1,606.184)
Bad Performance			-0.109 (0.392)	15.586 (1,264.431)
Similar Job				
Host Country Ranking	0.010** (0.005)	0.002 (0.010)	0.010** (0.005)	0.002 (0.010)
Age	-0.132*** (0.017)	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.134*** (0.017)	-0.033* (0.019)
Career Years	0.036 (0.032)	0.082 (0.060)	0.036 (0.032)	0.088 (0.060)
Female	0.335 (0.223)	-0.247 (0.764)	0.319 (0.224)	-0.261 (0.765)
Democracy	-0.304 (0.217)	-0.379 (0.466)	-0.332 (0.219)	-0.430 (0.469)
Avg. Performance Index	0.417 (0.484)	-0.896 (0.839)		
Good Performance			-0.273 (0.195)	-0.145 (0.508)
Bad Performance			-0.079 (0.191)	0.574 (0.429)
Promotion				
Host Country Ranking	-0.050*** (0.007)	-0.065*** (0.015)	-0.050*** (0.007)	-0.064*** (0.014)
Age	-0.207***	-0.104***	-0.209***	-0.103***

Table 6 (continued)

	Career (1)	Political (2)	Career (3)	Political (4)
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.028)
Career Years	0.114** (0.048)	0.206** (0.087)	0.113** (0.048)	0.202** (0.087)
Female	0.066 (0.309)	−14.121 (665.733)	0.062 (0.310)	−14.893 (987.588)
Democracy	0.351 (0.308)	0.330 (0.644)	0.317 (0.309)	0.283 (0.651)
Avg. Performance Index	−1.319* (0.745)	0.079 (1.458)		
Good Performance			−0.287 (0.275)	0.259 (0.657)
Bad Performance			0.116 (0.265)	0.614 (0.616)
Observations	1369	607	1369	607
Log-Likelihood	−1214.19	−245.72	−1213.99	−240.32

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6 contains multinomial logit analyses that, against the base-case of retirement, assess the probabilities of Promotion, Similar Job and Demotion.²² Across all three models, Host Nation Rank shows a consistent pattern. Ambassadors (mostly career appointees) currently in high ranked nations are more likely to be demoted; while those in low ranked nations are more likely to be promoted. We should not be surprised by these results. An ambassador in a highly ranked nation cannot be promoted by our measure as there is nowhere more prestigious to go. Similarly, those in low ranked states cannot be demoted further. As with the analyses seen in Table 5, age makes another appointment less likely at any rank.

If ambassadors are rewarded for good performance, then we would expect positive coefficients on the *Avg. Performance Index* and *Good Performance* variables in the Promotion and Similar Job equations. Such a result would indicate ambassadors who perform well would be rewarded with another comparable or better job. The results do not support this hypothesis. Across the board, the performance coefficients are insignificant and, if anything, some coefficient signs indicate better performance reduces career prospects.²³

²²Tables A13 through A15 in the Appendix show the results using specific performance measures, finding similar results.

²³We find similar results when looking at G20 and non-G20 countries separately. This is also true when examining the period following the Foreign Service Act, with the exception of promotions of political appointees (although these are only 7 cases); see Table A17.

6 Conclusions

Using data from the US State Department we create a database of the tenure and career path of US ambassadors. We consider four categories of variables (1) Political, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Host-nation characteristics, and (4) Performance measures, and examine how these factors affect ambassadorial tenure. To our knowledge, there are no similar previous studies.

Political factors are by far the most important determinants of tenure. In particular, turnover in the US presidency makes ambassador replacement much more likely. For career appointees, a change in the presidency increases the deposition risk by about 21%; for a political appointee the comparable figure is an increase of about 365% in the first year with the impact declining slightly over time. Turnover within the host-nation government also increases the risk of deposition for career appointees, although not for political appointees.

Bureaucratic accountability arguments suggest that bureaucrats should be rewarded for good performance to incentivize them to work hard. We test these ideas in the context of US ambassadors by examining if improvements in economic, diplomatic and security relations improve tenure and career prospects. The overall findings suggest that improvements in these measures appear to have little to no effect on tenure.

To assess whether there is a link between performance and career, we examined the extent to which performance measures affect whether a career diplomat was given another posting and, if so, was the posting to a more or less prestigious host nation. The results of logit and multinomial logit models suggest performance does not improve reappointment or promotion prospects. Political factors seem far more important than performance in determining the tenure and career prospects of US ambassadors.

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