

# Political Survival Strategies: Political Career Decisions in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies\*

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*Abstract.* As Brazilian federal deputies approach the end of their legislative terms, they have four major political career options: to retire from electoral politics; to run for state legislative office (regressive ambition); to run for re-election (static ambition); or to run for higher offices (progressive ambition). We developed a model that focuses on the determinants of political career choices by incumbent federal deputies in the 1998 Brazilian election. We argue that it is not the nature of political ambition that determines the career choices of federal deputies, but the evaluation of the risks and costs. A nested logit regression was used to estimate the impact of the distinct political strategies used by incumbents during their terms and their previous electoral campaigns in their choices of career. The main findings suggest that an incumbent's career choice is decisively influenced by the strategies they adopt to effectively use their resources.

## *Introduction*

In the 1998 Brazilian general election, of the 635 incumbents in the chamber of deputies,<sup>1</sup> 63 decided to retire, 35 preferred to run for higher office,

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\* Previous versions of this article were presented at the conference 'Brazilian Political Institutions in Comparative Perspective: The Role of Congress in Presidential System,' Centre for Brazilian Studies, University of Oxford, 28–29 May 2001; at the XXIII International Congress of Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Washington, DC, 6–8 Sept. 2001; and at the Fifth Annual Conference of the International Society for New Institutional Economics (ISNIE), San Francisco, 13–15 Sept. 2001. We are grateful to Laurence Whitehead, Mark Jones, Philip Keefer, David Samuels, Brook McNally and the three anonymous referees of this journal for their comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> The sample includes both substitute (122) and main office holders (513). For every elected Deputy in Brazil a substitute deputy is also elected. Some of these substitutes take office for substantial periods of time because it is very common for elected Deputies to be given jobs in Federal and State bureaucracies. Since all of the members in our sample did have a chance of serving in office for some period in time and were able to enjoy certain advantages as federal deputies even if they were elected as substitutes at first, they were included in the sample analysed. By excluding substitutes who occupied office, as Samuels

which included running for the Senate (16), for State Governor (8), or for Vice-Governor (11), ('progressive ambition'), 464<sup>2</sup> chose to run for re-election ('static ambition') and 19 decided to run for State Deputy.<sup>3</sup>

The most striking feature of these data is the high proportion of federal deputies running for re-election. This is a higher percentage than most other countries in Latin America,<sup>4</sup> and clearly suggests that one should not overlook static ambition as a main concern of federal deputies in Brazil. Samuels, however, has argued that progressive ambition is also essential in explaining career patterns and the low re-election success in Brazil's legislatures (around 65 per cent in 1998). In brief, Samuels argues that electorally vulnerable incumbents run for re-election, while 'safer' incumbents run for higher office.<sup>5</sup>

This explanation has serious implications for the role of the Chamber of Deputies in policy making. On the one hand, if the Chamber does not foster long-lasting careers where politicians can gain necessary experience and knowledge to become better public servants, the chances of the legislative branch becoming a central actor in policy formulation are bleak. On the other hand, if the majority of incumbents choose to stay in the Chamber for more than one term, the Chamber's influence in policy decisions will most likely increase. In Polsby's analysis of the institutionalisation of the House

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does in 'Pork Barrelling is not Credit Claiming or Advertising: Camping Finance and the Sources of Personal Vote in Brazil', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2002), pp. 845–63, we would arbitrarily exclude cases and therefore commit selection bias, see Barbara Geddes, 'How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics', *Political Analysis*, vol. 2 (1990), pp. 131–52. On average, substitutes appropriate R\$ 20,889 through individual amendments, and main office holders appropriate R\$ 37,436. Substitutes (*suplentes*) also propose an average of 16 amendments compared to an average of 29 by main office holders (*titulares*). Finally, there are no significant differences between *titulares* and *suplentes* regarding the number of absences from roll call voting in the Chamber. Substitutes are absent for 21% of votes and main office holders for 22%. These data suggest that substitutes used their prerogatives as federal deputies during the period in office, albeit less so than main office holders. Therefore, there are strong reasons to believe that substitutes should be included in the sample. *In fact, if we were to exclude them from the sample because they are less prone to run for higher office and more inclined to retire, we would be selecting on the dependent variable.* What makes them an important part of the population of federal deputies is the fact that they have access to the perquisites and resources of office. How they choose to use them should not be a criterion to exclude them from the sample.

<sup>2</sup> We also did not include in our sample, for obvious reasons, 9 federal deputies who died during their mandates, 33 who were elected mayors in 1996, two who were elected local representatives (*vereador*) in the same election, two who were appointed to the Federal Accounting Court, and finally, five who were expelled from the Chamber of Deputies.

<sup>3</sup> The terms are taken from Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Ambition and Politics Political Careers in the US* (Chicago, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> See Scott Morgenstern, 'Conclusion: Explaining Legislative Politics in Latin America,' in Scott Morgenstern and Benito Nacif (eds.), *Legislatures and Democracy in Latin America* (New York, 2002), p. 416.

<sup>5</sup> See David Samuels, 'Progressive Ambition, Federalism, and Pork-Barrelling in Brazil,' in Morgenstern and Nacif (eds.), *Legislatures and Democracy in Latin America*, pp. 315–40.

of Representatives in the USA, membership stability leads to increased institutional complexity such as a decentralised committee system with specific jurisdiction and power to enforce its preferences.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Morgenstern claims, the increase in the legislative branch's power has a direct impact on the incumbents' perquisites and resources, which fosters incumbents' electoral advantage and increases re-election rates.<sup>7</sup>

Given the importance of politicians' career choices with regard to the effectiveness of legislatures in democratic regimes, the central question of this study is: what are the main variables that explain federal deputies' career decisions? We address the question above by examining individual-level decisions in the 1998 Brazilian election for the Chamber of Deputies. In Brazil, as in the United States, there is substantial variation between the career decisions of legislators. Institutional variables (such as type of electoral system, party system and nomination procedure), therefore, cannot explain all the variation in political career choices. Among other variables we look at age, ideology, share of the vote in the previous election, district size and hierarchical position in committees, in an effort to explain the career decisions of Brazilian deputies.

We assume in this paper that the strategic decision federal deputies make concerning the office for which he/she will run in the next election is mostly determined by a self-evaluation of performance in office and the estimated chance of re-election. In other words, federal deputies' choices of career is guided not only by the incentives of the position pursued, such as a higher stipend or a bigger staff, but also by the electoral viability of that choice. That is, the higher utility of being elected to these offices is weighed against the risks and costs one must incur. Three main factors that influence the probability of re-election and the potential costs are institutional position and performance in office, personal characteristics and electoral vulnerability.<sup>8</sup>

We focus on the career decisions of Brazilian federal deputies at the end of their terms; therefore, we are not concerned here with the outcomes of the decision – either victory or loss in the actual election. Instead, we investigate the factors that shape the different career decisions. Drawing upon recent studies on re-election and career choice in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, as well as in the US House of Representatives, we formulate a simple theoretical model and provide empirical tests using data from the 50th legislature (1995–1998).

<sup>6</sup> See Nelson Polsby, 'The Institutionalisation of the U.S. House of Representatives,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 62, no. 1 (1968), pp. 144–68.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Morgenstern, 'Conclusion,' pp. 413–45.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard Hall and Robert Van Houweling, 'Avarice and Ambition in Congress: Representatives' Decisions to Run or Retire from the U.S. House,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 89, no. 1 (1995), pp. 121–36.

The next section discusses research on political ambition in the United States. We then outline the main features of the Brazilian political system and its differences from the US system. Although several important differences exist, we argue that two institutional similarities – the open nomination process and the prevalence of the personal vote – allow us to use a slightly altered model designed for the United States to explore career decision in Brazil's Chamber of Deputies.

In our model, choice of career is defined in terms of expected utilities. We find the nested logit econometric model to be the most appropriate and reliable type of model to test our hypotheses.

### *Ambition in the House of Representatives*

Joseph Schlesinger's seminal 1966 book, *Ambition and Politics*, is the major study of political career decisions in the United States. Schlesinger constructed a typology of politicians based on their political ambition by examining the characteristics of the individuals who ran for various political offices and were re-elected.

Several papers followed that employed a more analytical theoretical treatment and increasingly sophisticated statistical analyses. Black was the first to build ambition theory into a decision-theoretic framework.<sup>9</sup> Rohde employed the same framework to study House members.<sup>10</sup> He assumed that every politician, if given the opportunity with no costs or risks attached, would seek higher office. Thus, there is little variation in the preference for higher office. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all legislators run for higher offices. Politicians are rational individuals. Therefore, they weigh the utility of getting a higher office by the probability of winning against the possible costs of running. Brace extended Rohde's research by estimating a probit regression model of career selection.<sup>11</sup> Finally, as we will discuss later, Kiewiet and Zeng further improved the decision theoretic and the econometric models by merging the research of political career ambition with that on retirement in the House of Representatives.<sup>12</sup> We use a similar model in our analysis.

<sup>9</sup> See Gordon S. Black, 'A Theory of Political Ambition: Career Choices and the Role of Structural Incentives,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 66, no. 1 (1972), pp. 144–59.

<sup>10</sup> See David Rohde, 'Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives,' *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1979), pp. 1–26.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Brace, 'Progressive Ambition in the House: A Probabilistic Approach,' *Journal of Politics*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1984), pp. 556–71.

<sup>12</sup> Roderick Kiewiet and Langche Zeng, 'An Analysis of Congressional Career Decisions, 1947–1986,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 87, no. 4 (1993), pp. 928–41.

*Career Choice and Re-election in Brazil*

Elections for the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies are determined by proportional representation with open party lists. District magnitude ranges from 8 to 70. The seats are allocated proportionally to the percentage of the total votes that each party receives, using the d'Hondt method. Citizens may vote for a party (*voto de legenda*) or for a particular candidate. The seats obtained by the party vote are allocated according to the rank-order of the votes for the candidates. Traditionally, a great majority of voters vote for individual candidates rather than parties and election results critically depend on a candidate's ability to obtain individual votes.

Party delegates nominate candidates. According to Scott Mainwaring,<sup>13</sup> although the party conventions have formal authority over candidate nominations, they almost always ratify agreements that have been reached by top party and government officials before the conventions even occur. Usually conventions are presented with a single list (*'chapa única'*) – a ticket previously arranged and defined. Party nominations are, however, far from a scarce commodity. Each party can nominate up to one hundred and fifty per cent of the number of seats allocated to the state. For this reason, nominations are seen to be quite open.

As a result, the open-list electoral system and the candidate nomination process create incentives for individualistic behaviour because parties have very few mechanisms to control the outcome in the electoral sphere. Furthermore, there are no term limits and parties are obliged to nominate incumbents desiring re-election regardless of their conduct in office. This incumbent (*candidato nato*) rule,<sup>14</sup> frees politicians from the pressure of party leaders' influence, which ultimately undermines the authority of leadership.

Brazil's lower house is also less professional and institutionalised than its counterpart in the United States. Committees do exist, but they are much less powerful than those in the USA largely because the legislative branch in Brazil does not have the 'power of the purse', which is the final word on budgetary expenditures. Furthermore, there is greater oscillation in the patterns of career choice in Brazil than in the United States. Turnover rates in Brazil are higher and political careers are not as stable.<sup>15</sup> Finally, federal deputies in Brazil do not have the same resources as their counterparts in the United

<sup>13</sup> Scott Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil* (Stanford, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> The Supreme Court suspended this rule in 2002 and its future is unresolved. Since the suspension occurred after the 1998 election, it has no effect on our analysis.

<sup>15</sup> David Samuels, 'Ambition and Competition: Explaining Legislative Turnover in Brazil,' *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. XXV (2000), pp. 481–98.

States. Federal deputies in Brazil have smaller staffs, and smaller personal and office budgets.

The study of political careers in Brazil has, by and large, focused on recruitment and retention of national legislators.<sup>16</sup> Samuels analysed the career decisions of Brazilian legislators using the framework proposed by Schlesinger.<sup>17</sup> He focused his analysis on the system level with an implicit comparison to the US polity. One would expect that, given the Brazilian electoral system and the relevant literature, careers in Brazil should resemble the long legislative careers in the United States. However, this is not the case. Samuels claims that the high turnover rate in Brazil is a puzzle that needs to be solved.

Using the typology of ambition first proposed by Schlesinger, Samuels contends that Brazilian politicians have a higher level of progressive rather than static ambition, gearing their careers toward executive branch offices, mostly, but not exclusively, at the municipal and state level (running for mayors and governors). As electorally successful incumbents are attracted to the executive offices, the remaining incumbents are 'weaker' and face strong challengers, which results in an overall high turnover rate in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies. Samuels bases his argument on the fact that the rates of re-election attempts and success are much higher in the United States Congress than in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies. Secondly, Samuels shows that a higher proportion of deputies who are former senators and governors (his measure for electoral quality of legislators) run for higher offices. Thirdly, he stresses that incumbents face highly qualified challengers when running for re-election.

Despite Samuels' generally compelling argument, a brief look at historical evidence shows that the number of incumbents who chose to run for re-election is quite high in comparison to those who chose to run for any other office. For instance, of the incumbents who ran for any office in 1982, 86.9 per cent chose to run for re-election. In 1986, this rate was of 91.3 per cent, in 1990 it was 88.8 per cent and 1998 it was 83.8 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Hence, Samuels might be overstating the claim that progressive ambition is a dominant feature of political careers in Brazil. In addition, by Latin American standards, one might also argue that retention of legislators is very high

<sup>16</sup> Fabiano Santos, 'Legislative Careers and "Congress-Dominated" Democracy: A Comparison between Two Democratic Experiences in Brazil.' Presented at the Latin American Studies Association Conference, Washington, DC, 6–8 Sept. 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Samuels, 'Progressive Ambition'.

<sup>18</sup> For data from 1982 to 1990 see Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems*. This is an indication that there are certain patterns of career choice, especially the choice of running for re-election, during the redemocratisation period in Brazil.

in Brazil.<sup>19</sup> In 1998, 65 per cent of those who ran for re-election did so victoriously. Finally, as Carey (2002) notes, the length of legislative terms in Brazilian lower house is twice that of the lower house in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that the number of Deputies seeking re-election and the number re-elected are smaller.

At the theoretical level, a central factor that is missing in Samuels' thesis is Rohde's assumption for the US House of Representatives, which is that when given a choice over a current office in the House or a Senate post, a representative will invariably take the higher position. Rohde assumed that every politician, if given the opportunity with no costs or risks attached, would choose the higher office.<sup>21</sup> In reality, however, there are always costs and risks involved in any political career decision, especially when seeking higher office. When the costs and risks of running for such offices are daunting, it is reasonable to assume that incumbents will avoid them by running for re-election for their lower house seat.

In Brazil, as in the United States, the costs and risks of progressive ambition are very high. Brazilian federal deputies, in this regard, are not at all different from their US counterparts, since the great majority of those who decide to run for an office adopt a risk-avoidance strategy and seek re-election. As a consequence, we argue, under the assumption that legislators are rational, that static ambition predominates in the United States and Brazil because of the high risks and costs entailed in the decision to run for higher office. These risks consequently constrain the career choices of incumbents, including those with meaningful electoral capital. In the Brazilian 1995–1998 legislature, of the 38 deputies running for higher offices, only seven succeeded. This only amounts to an 18.9 per cent success rate, whereas those running for re-election had a 64.9 per cent success rate. In light of high risks and costs an incumbent may face if he or she pursues higher office, many may be assumed to be risk-averse and likely to run for re-election, as is the case in the United States as well.

Finally, municipal executive branch elections present an altogether different set of options for federal deputies. As Samuels (2000) argues, running for mayor is an indication of progressive ambition.<sup>22</sup> Municipal executive positions in mid to large cities are very attractive in Brazil because they enjoy valuable discretionary power regarding budgets as well as job allocation. Also since federal deputies make the choice to pursue municipal executive

<sup>19</sup> Morgenstern, 'Conclusion,' p. 416.

<sup>20</sup> John Carey, 'Parties, Coalition, and the Chilean Congress in the 1990s', in Morgenstern and Nacif (eds.), *Legislatures and Democracy in Latin America*, pp. 222–53.

<sup>21</sup> David Rohde, 'Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives,' *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1979), pp. 1–26.

<sup>22</sup> Samuels, 'Ambition and Competition'.

positions during midterm elections and are not obliged to resign their terms as federal deputies, the risks and costs incumbents face are much lower. In the 1996 elections, 18 per cent of the deputies competed in local elections, of which 30 per cent were successful. We will discuss the cases in more depth while analysing the differences between those who choose different career paths.

Federal deputies also have the option of running for an office with lower risk, such as running for a position in state assemblies where the number of seats per district is invariably greater and the pool of challengers is usually less threatening.<sup>23</sup> Federal deputies with gloomy electoral prospects, but who would still like to serve in an elected office follow this path.

#### *A model and the proposed econometric test*

Our approach is to model the individual decision of federal deputies including variables for the costs, benefits and the probability of losing associated with each of the possible choices. It is easier to appreciate how they are related to career choice by explicitly modelling the expected utilities. Legislators can choose from  $J = (a_1, a_2, a_3)$ , where  $a_1$  denotes the decision to retire,  $a_2$ , to run for senator, governor or vice-governor, and  $a_3$  to run for re-election.

If one decides to retire, there are no probabilities involved. The legislator will receive the utility of retiring with certainty:

$$\text{Retire: } E[U_1] = U_1$$

Let  $E[U_j]$  be the expected utility of running for office  $j$ ,  $C_i$  be the cost of choosing  $a_i$ , and  $Q$  the probability of success, which depends on the action chosen. We normalize the cost of retiring to zero, since other options will be evaluated relative to this baseline. The expected utility of running for office is:

*Run for Governor/Vice-Governor, Senator:*

$$E[U(a_2)] = Q(a_2)U_2 + (1 - Q(a_2))U_1 - C_2 = U_1 + Q(a_2)(U_2 - U_1) - C_2$$

*Run for Re-election:*

$$E[U(a_3)] = Q(a_3)U_3 + (1 - Q(a_3))U_1 - C_3 = U_1 + Q(a_3)(U_3 - U_1) - C_3$$

The two expected utilities are very similar. The deputy gets the utility of the office  $i$  she is running for with probability  $Q_i$ ; gets the utility of holding

<sup>23</sup> In the Brazilian federalist system each state has a single-chamber legislature with similar responsibilities, within the state boundaries, to its federal counterpart.



no office (assumed to be the same as retiring) with probability  $1 - Q_j$ , and subtracts the costs of running for this particular office.

The next step is to assume that legislators compare the expected utilities of the available actions, and choose to run for the office in which the expected utility is the highest. That is, each individual chooses alternative  $a_j$  in  $J$  if and only if  $E[U(a_j)] > E[U(a_n)]$  for all  $n$  in  $J$ ,  $n \neq j$ . The problem, of course, is that we neither know the actual expected utilities, nor observe every relevant variable. Hence we make probabilistic statements and we should estimate an econometric model accordingly.

As Kiewiet and Zeng did before us, we chose not to estimate a multinomial logistic model.<sup>24</sup> This model assumes that the relative probability of choosing two of the alternatives is not affected by the presence of additional alternatives. For example, suppose a particular deputy is twice as likely to run for re-election as to retire. Now suppose the individual is presented with an extra choice: running for higher office. It is reasonable to expect that the availability of this choice should decrease the probability of running for re-election by a larger factor than the probability of retiring, thus changing the relative probabilities between retiring and running for re-election.

However, in the multinomial logit model, the presence of an additional alternative (such as running for higher office) does not affect the odds ratio. This feature is known in the econometric literature as a violation of the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumption. Given our theoretical model, as well as the results of IIA tests in a previous paper,<sup>25</sup> we did not expect the choice modelled to exhibit this property.

If we can group the alternatives meaningfully, there is another econometric model available, known as nested logit. This model allows for violations of the IIA assumption in the decision within the groups of alternatives, but still requires the assumption to hold across groups. Our main concern was to model the dependence among the alternatives, instead of assuming it away. The nested approach takes advantage of the 'natural' grouping of the alternatives in the estimation, and reflects more clearly our substantive discussion.<sup>26</sup>

The decision arrangement we chose can be graphically represented by the following tree structure (Figure 1).

<sup>24</sup> Kiewiet and Zeng, 'An Analysis of Congressional Career Decisions'.

<sup>25</sup> Carlos Pereira and Lucio Rennó, 'Successful Re-election strategies in Brazil: The Electoral Request of Distinct Institutional Incentives,' *Electoral Studies*, vol. 22 (2003), pp. 425–48.

<sup>26</sup> We estimated our model in the STATA 7.0 statistical package with the command `nlogit`. This produces full information maximum likelihood estimates. We refer the reader interested in the details of the nested logit model to Greene (2000, chapter 19, pp. 865–75).

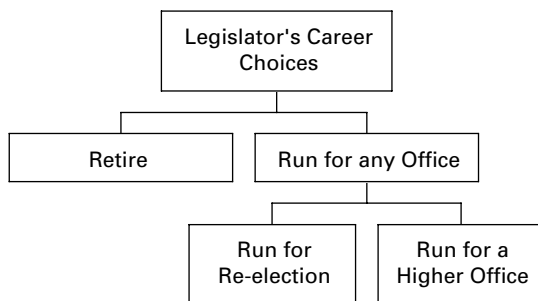


Fig. 1. *Decision tree model of political career choice.*

That is, following Hall and van Houweling (1995),<sup>27</sup> we hypothesise that the retirement option is very different from running for re-election or for higher office. However, they focus exclusively on the correlates of retiring and do not analyse the differences between static and progressive ambition. Unlike them in this aspect, we are able to estimate models for all of these decisions simultaneously due to the use of nested logit equations. We choose this configuration of career choices for two main reasons: (1) running for these offices implies important costs that are not borne by those individuals deciding not to run for any election; (2) deputies, senators and governors/vice-governors share the electoral district. We expect that the two electoral options are more similar to each other than the retirement option is to either of them.<sup>28</sup>

### *Correlates of career choice*

The next step is to discuss the impact of the different factors that influence incumbents' individual decisions. To recap, variables can influence the choice of a political career in two ways: they can affect the utility components, increasing or decreasing the value of holding a given office; and they can affect the probabilities of achieving a particular outcome.

**Age:** As in previous research about the US House of Representatives,<sup>29</sup> we hypothesise that age increases the utility of retiring. Age should affect the utility of higher office as well. Although we expect a linear effect of age in the decision to retire, we include a quadratic term in the estimation between the higher office and re-election choices. In the House of Representatives,

<sup>27</sup> Hall and Van Houweling, 'Avarice and Ambition in Congress'.

<sup>28</sup> The choices of running for state deputy and mayor will be discussed in detail when we present our findings.

<sup>29</sup> Kiewiet and Zeng, 'An Analysis of Congressional Career Decisions'; R. Hall, *Participation in Congress* (New Haven, 1996).

Brace found that the linear effect was positive and the quadratic effect was negative in the choice between re-election and running for higher office.<sup>30</sup> Even though this hypothesis has no theoretical relevance for our normative concerns, it is necessary as a control in order to correctly specify the model.

**Institutional Positions:** Although the committee system in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies is not as institutionalised as in the US House of Representatives, we expect the members' relative ranking to have important consequences in career choice. Pereira and Mueller have shown that the executive acts strategically in Congress through party leaders, substituting untrustworthy members with trustworthy ones in order to guarantee the victory of its preferences at committee level.<sup>31</sup> Several legislators confirmed this, explaining that their choice of committees was negotiated or even imposed by party leaders. Hence, committee membership and hierarchy are important. If not, what would explain the executive's concern for appointing favourable members?

Therefore, we created dummy variables that distinguish the consequences of being a leader in a standing committee from being a leader in an *ad hoc* committee. *Ad hoc* committees enjoy broad coverage from the media because they are created to deal with special issues, such as bills aimed at reforming the constitution or those that might cut across the jurisdiction of more than two standing committees, as well as with oversight issues. We expect that ranking in such committees would boost the probability of being elected for a higher office, since it raises incumbents' visibility and name recognition. A standing committee position should increase the probability of opting for re-election,<sup>32</sup> since it is a sign of intra-chamber ambition.<sup>33</sup> Incumbents who seek and hold power positions in the Chamber have a greater chance of achieving similar posts in future legislatures. We expect such variables to have a positive impact on the option of running for re-election, since they increase the payoffs for staying in office.

We also created a dummy variable reflecting the position of the deputy in the directorate of the chamber (president, vice-president and secretaries are coded as one). We expect it to increase the utility of holding the current office because it is also an indication of potential intra-legislative ambition.

<sup>30</sup> Brace, 'Progressive Ambition in the House'.

<sup>31</sup> See Carlos Pereira and Bernardo Mueller, 'A Theory of Executives Dominance of Congressional Politics: The committee system in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies,' *Journal of Legislative Studies* (forthcoming 2004).

<sup>32</sup> We expect that ranking in standing committees positively affects the probability, and not just the utility, of running for re-election, since this variable has a positive effect on re-election success in Pereira and Rennó, 'Successful Re-election Strategies'. This effect is congruent with our hypothesis that ranking in standing committees increases the utility of holding office. <sup>33</sup> Hall and Van Houweling, 'Avarice and Ambition in Congress'.

**Ideology:** We measure ideology by the w-nominate scores of the legislators.<sup>34</sup> These are based on the roll call behaviour of the Deputies, and became a *de facto* standard in the measurement of preferences of legislators in the US political arena. Leoni calculated the scores for Brazilian legislators that we use here.<sup>35</sup> The estimates produced by this scaling procedure in the Chamber of Deputies are to a large extent in accordance with the common wisdom about Brazilian politics. For example, Worker's Party (PT) members are on the extreme left and most of the right wing Liberal Front Party (PFL) members are on the right.<sup>36</sup>

Members on the left side of the ideological spectrum are more distant from the winning outcomes, and possibly derive less utility from staying in office for this reason. Hence we state the hypothesis that Deputies on the left of the ideological spectrum have a higher probability of leaving the chamber voluntarily.

Another possible explanation for this lies in two main differences in the structure and size of left and right wing parties. Left-wing parties hold fewer executive office positions than legislative positions. Most of these parties' influential members are federal deputies. Nonetheless, left-wing parties still have fewer members than right wing parties in federal, state, and municipal legislative branches. This fact leads to a situation in which the availability of candidates for higher offices in left-wing parties is smaller than in right-wing parties.

In addition, left-wing parties, especially the Workers' Party (PT), have rigid internal decision-making procedures, which allow very little space for members' personal preferences to prevail. That is, individual leaders or influential members hardly ever get their way, if the party decides otherwise. Just the opposite happens in right wing parties, which tend to be oriented mostly towards the desires of party bosses. The combination of a smaller number of candidates running for higher office, mostly recruited inside the Chamber of Deputies where the majority of important leaders of left-wing parties hold elected offices, and the rigid structure of internal decision-making in these parties, is a possible explanation as to why left-wing parties tend to force their best-known members to run for higher office.

<sup>34</sup> See K. Poole and H. Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (New York, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> See Eduardo Leoni, 'Ideologia, democracia e comportamento parlamentar: a Câmara dos Deputados (1991–1998),' *Dados*, vol. 45, no. 3, (2002), pp. 361–86.

<sup>36</sup> The analysis indicates that the ideological space has low dimensionality, with the first dimension correctly predicting 90 per cent of the roll call votes in the session we analyse in this paper. Both results generate confidence in the use of this measure of ideology in this setting.

**Seniority:** We define seniority as the number of consecutive terms a Deputy has served as office main-holder. We expect it to have a positive effect on running for re-election. One hypothesis is that legislators with more seniority have valuable working knowledge about the institution and its rules and hence derive more utility from staying in the Chamber.<sup>37</sup>

**Budgetary Appropriation:** This variable indicates the percentage of the total value of a federal deputy's individual amendments that is appropriated by the executive branch in the period 1996 to 1998. In other words, this variable measures how successful a Federal Deputy is in having his individual budgetary demands appropriated by the executive branch. In Brazil the executive has the prerogative to craft the annual budget proposal. Federal deputies are allowed to amend the budget bill and propose individual amendments that transfer funds – which normally favor their electoral strongholds – up to a total of US\$1.5 million per year. The Executive, however, decides if and when to disburse the funds and the Congress merely authorizes the budget. This variable is therefore an indicator of efficiency in obtaining resources to satisfy local electoral networks. Federal deputies who are more successful in having their amendments taken up will feel more inclined to return to the Chamber since they have developed the expertise and bargaining ability to obtain resources from the executive branch.

**Vote in 1994:** Samuels measures the electoral quality of candidates by the rank of their previous post. Thus, incumbents who were previously senators or governors are 'higher quality' members than those who had not held previous posts. We decided to measure the electoral capital of candidates more directly by looking at how many votes they obtained in the previous election compared to the mean number of votes the elected candidates received in the district. More formally, for candidate  $i$  elected in district  $k$  (of magnitude  $M^k$ )  $v_i$  represents the votes the deputy obtained in the previous election. Our measure of electoral margin is

$$Q_i = v_i \div \frac{\sum v_{jk}}{M^k}, j_k = 1 \dots M^k,$$

where  $\sum v_{jk}$  represents the total number of votes of the elected candidates in the district. This transformation is our solution to the problem of comparability of votes across states. We expect a positive effect correlation between the number of votes won in previous elections and the choice of running for higher offices. Elections for such positions are more demanding

<sup>37</sup> There is no formal seniority system in the Brazilian legislature as there is in the US Congress or British Parliament. Thus, seniority does not engender any special rights or access to power in Brazil.

because the number of votes required to win a seat is much higher and the pool of strong candidates is larger.

**Electoral Concentration:** Federal deputies whose votes are concentrated in their most important locality probably do not have the electoral muscle to obtain support throughout the various municipalities included in the entire electoral district. Districts in Brazil are statewide and they include very diverse constituencies and various municipalities. Hence, incumbents who obtained concentrated votes will be less likely to run for higher offices since they are not sufficiently well known throughout the entire district to win. Those who scatter their votes throughout the whole electoral district and, hence, are better known all over the district, probably feel more confident about taking the risk of running for higher office. Therefore, we expect that legislators with less concentrated votes are more likely to run for higher office.

Electoral concentration  $C$  for legislator  $i$  is defined as  $C_i = v_{im}/v_i$ , where  $v_{im}$  refers to the number of votes legislator  $i$  won in the municipality where she had the largest number of votes, and, again,  $v_i$  is the total number of votes of legislator  $i$  across the state.

**Number of district seats:** Kiewiet and Zeng claim that members from more populated states in the US House of Representatives run less for higher offices because 'large-state members confront a larger pool of formidable candidates-other House members like themselves' (p. 933).<sup>38</sup> Following these authors, we created a measure of the electoral context in which incumbents are imbedded by taking the log of the district magnitude, or number of seats in each district. Samuels also argues, in the Brazilian case, that those who run for higher offices usually do so in less competitive districts (states). Following his lead, our hypothesis is that the higher the district magnitude, the less likely it will be that incumbents seek higher offices, since the pool of 'strong candidates' is greater.

## *Results*

In order to analyse the two choices of political career that we did not include in the econometric model (run for state deputy and run for mayor),<sup>39</sup> we

<sup>38</sup> Kiewiet and Zeng, 'An Analysis of Congressional Career Decisions,' p. 933.

<sup>39</sup> The reason for excluding State Deputies from the multivariate test is the small N, 19 cases only. There are two reasons for excluding mayoral candidates from the econometric test. The first is based on theory. The set of constraints and incentives generated by the mid-term election are completely distinct from those of the general elections. In the midterm election, incumbents do not risk losing office because they do not have to step down from their position as federal deputy. The only risk incumbents face when running for mayor is hurting their reputations and losing money if defeated in the mayoral contest. But, federal deputies who ran for mayor in 1996 returned to the Chamber. Running for mayor is not a self-contained category, since those who ran and lost thus became part of the group of

applied a test of difference in means in the variables included in the multivariate test for these two populations<sup>40</sup> and for those who ran for re-election. This test indicates if the mean value of the variables of interest for those who choose to run for mayor and state deputy is statistically different (alternative hypothesis) from those who run for re-election.

As we can see from Table 1, those who run for re-election and those who run for state deputy have statistically different means on three variables: district size, vote in the last election, and position within the Chamber Directorate. That is, federal deputies that believe the possibility of being re-elected is unlikely (and therefore have even less chance of being elected to a higher office) prefer to run for a lower, and safer, position. They still strive to hold an elected office, and are therefore ambitious, but opt for running for an office that they are more likely to win.<sup>41</sup> We use an oxymoronic expression, 'regressive ambition', to characterise such a choice. It is possible to infer thus that running for state deputy is a survival strategy for those incumbents who are electorally vulnerable and who do not hold power positions in the Chamber.

The difference in means between those who ran for mayor in the 1996 midterm election, which is a form of progressive ambition in Brazilian politics, and those who display static ambition corroborates Samuel's conclusions, while also shedding new light on the debate. On the one hand, our findings confirm that those who ran for mayor, on average, received more votes in the 1994 election than their counterparts, which suggests that they are less electorally vulnerable. In addition, they also ran in districts with less electoral competition, suggesting that they faced a weaker pool of challengers. Hence, those who run for re-election face harsher competition in their districts, as Samuels argues. On the other hand, those who ran for mayor, on average, did not hold positions in the Chamber's Directorate. Incumbents who ran for mayor did not appear to care about holding power positions in the hierarchy of Chamber of Deputies. This provides supportive evidence for Morgenstern's claim that some politicians 'use the legislature only as a

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incumbents who had to make a political career choice in 1998. This increases the complexity in modelling such choices. The second reason is methodological. To correctly model the election for mayor in the Nested Logit equations, an altogether distinct level in the decision tree would have to be created. Since the election for mayor occurs before 1998, an additional level would have to precede the two we presently have in our decision tree, which increases the computational costs and analytic clarity of our analysis enormously.

<sup>40</sup> We have used the test statistic 'Z' for  $X_1 - X_2$ .  $Z = (X_1 - X_2) - (\sigma_1 - \sigma_2) / \sigma_{x_1 - x_2}$ . The degrees of statistical confidence are: 2.72 = 1 per cent \*\*\*; 2.04 = 5 per cent \*\*; and 1.67 = 10 per cent \*.

<sup>41</sup> The district boundaries for state deputies are the same as the boundaries for the national federal deputies. However, there are always more seats in the state chamber than the number allocated to the state in the national legislature.

Table 1. *Difference in means between run for re-election and run for state deputy and run for mayor*

|             | Ideology | Elconc94 | Magnitude    | Vote94       | Age    | Budget | Coalit94 | Directorate  | Special | Standing |
|-------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|--------|--------|----------|--------------|---------|----------|
|             |          |          |              |              | Mean   |        |          |              |         |          |
| Re-election | 0.193    | 0.394    | 3.258        | 44,230.25    | 51.403 | 35.177 | 0.741    | 0.276        | 0.568   | 0.905    |
| S. Deputy   | 0.195    | 0.444    | 2.831        | 30,869.32    | 53.631 | 35.685 | 0.684    | 0            | 0.571   | 0.5      |
| Mayor       | -0.010   | 0.489    | 3.121        | 58,163.10    | 49.5   | 36.816 | 0.7      | 0.076        | 0.153   | 0.717    |
|             |          |          |              |              | SD     |        |          |              |         |          |
| Re-election | 0.446    | 0.239    | 0.750        | 29,189.95    | 9.578  | 17.715 | 0.438    | 1.449        | 1.290   | 1.383    |
| S. Deputy   | 0.395    | 0.255    | 0.776        | 15,569.54    | 11.562 | 22.021 | 0.477    | 0            | 1.452   | 1.286    |
| Mayor       | 0.487    | 0.206    | 0.759        | 46,237.74    | 9.578  | 23.020 | 0.464    | 0.480        | 0.670   | 1.356    |
|             |          |          |              |              | Z      |        |          |              |         |          |
| S. Deputy   | -0.02085 | -0.842   | 2.353<br>**  | 3.497<br>*** | -0.828 | -0.099 | 0.513    | 4.107<br>*** | -0.008  | 1.343    |
| Mayor       | 0.00055  | 0.343    | 5.287<br>*** | 3.953<br>*** | -0.150 | 0.003  | -0.278   | 4.107<br>*** | -0.000  | 0.748    |

Level of Statistical Confidence: 2.72 = 1% \*\*\*, 2.04 = 5% \*\* and 1.67 = 10% \*.



stepping stone for building state or local political careers'.<sup>42</sup> These politicians appear to display an alternating pattern of career choice, moving between executive and legislative branch elected posts at municipal, state and federal levels.

Table 2 shows the results of the nested logit model. The last row shows the likelihood ratio test between the nested logit model and the (non nested) multinomial logit model. This test is only statistically significant in the specification with the fewer variables. Therefore, a multinomial logit could be justifiable for two of the specifications. However, the inferences from the models are different, thus we chose the more conservative nested logit estimation.<sup>43</sup>

We present the results from three different specifications in order to show the stability of the coefficients when we enter and remove different variables from the econometric model. When all variables are present (column one) only ideology and district size are significant at the 5 per cent level in the part of the model differentiating the decision to run for re-election from the decision to run for higher offices. The direction follows our theoretical expectations. Running for higher offices in larger states is more risky, and therefore the deputies are less likely to choose this option, and legislators ideologically on the left were more likely to run for higher offices. Note also that budgetary appropriation, leadership in special committees and the square of age are significant at the 10 per cent level. The other equation (differentiating those retiring from those running for any office) shows that those who are able to get a higher percentage of the individual budgetary amendments actually disbursed by the executive and those with a more concentrated pattern of vote distribution were more likely not to retire.

The Pearson correlation between age and its square is 0.99, so the second column excludes the squared term. As expected, the variable age turns out to be a significant predictor of running for higher offices and retirement: the former at the 5 per cent level and the latter only at the 10 per cent level. Older deputies are not surprisingly more likely to retire, and are also more likely to run for higher offices. Membership in *ad hoc* committees is no longer significant.

Finally, in the third column we leave out the variables measuring committee leadership. Age is now a significant predictor of retirement at the 5 per cent level. The budgetary variable, on the other hand, is no longer statistically significant. Finally, note that seniority becomes a significant

<sup>42</sup> Morgenstern, 'Conclusion'.

<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the small-Hsiao test (see Junsen Zhang and Saul D. Hoffman, 'Discrete Choice Logit Models: Testing the IIA Property', *Sociological Methods & Research*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1993), pp. 193–213) rejects the hypothesis that the alternatives are independent at the 5.6 per cent level.

Table 2. *Nested logit model of the choices of career*

|  | (1)               | (2)               | (3)               |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Run for high offices                           |                   |                   |                   |
| Constant                                       | 3.411 (3.396)     | -2.868 (1.355)**  | -3.046 (1.223)**  |
| Age  | -1.891 (1.261)    | 0.56 (0.193)***   | 0.553 (0.186)***  |
| Age <sup>2</sup>                               | 0.223 (0.116)*    |                   |                   |
| Seniority                                      | -0.306 (0.23)     | -0.372 (0.227)    | -0.385 (0.2)*     |
| Ideology                                       | -2.175 (0.46)***  | -2.125 (0.457)*** | -1.914 (0.429)*** |
| Vote 1994                                      | 0.471 (0.394)     | 0.45 (0.389)      | 0.512 (0.384)     |
| Budget   | 1.929 (1.052)*    | 1.841 (1.004)*    | 1.765 (0.924)*    |
| Log district magnitude                         | -0.861 (0.276)*** | -0.889 (0.27)***  | -0.825 (0.27)***  |
| Concentration <sub>94</sub>                    | -0.853 (0.896)    | -0.72 (0.877)     | -0.617 (0.839)    |
| Standing committee                             | -0.578 (0.44)     | -0.52 (0.432)     |                   |
| Special committee                              | 1.002 (0.567)*    | -79 (0.56)        |                   |
| Run for any office                             |                   |                   |                   |
| Constant                                       | 2.683 (5.592)     | -83 (1.385)       | 0.752 (1.628)     |
| Age  | -1.034 (1.93)     | -0.503 (0.285)*   | -0.747 (0.3)**    |
| Age <sup>2</sup>                               | 0.055 (0.185)     |                   |                   |
| Seniority                                      | 0.121 (0.16)      | 0.166 (0.189)     | 0.327 (0.221)     |
| Ideology                                       | 0.241 (0.758)     | 0.544 (0.899)     | 1.257 (1.006)     |
| Vote 1994                                      | 0.474 (0.522)     | 0.406 (0.545)     | 0.158 (0.59)      |
| Budget   | 2.69 (1.143)**    | 2.514 (1.21)**    | 1.916 (1.334)     |
| Log district magnitude                         | 0.227 (0.334)     | 0.359 (0.4)       | 0.638 (0.435)     |
| Concentration <sub>94</sub>                    | 2.92 (0.889)***   | 3.023 (0.917)***  | 3.365 (1.032)***  |
| Standing committee                             | 0.499 (0.393)     | 0.57 (0.407)      |                   |
| Special committee                              | -0.548 (0.467)    | -0.641 (0.456)    |                   |
| Observations                                   | 503               | 503               | 503               |
| Likelihood ratio test vs.<br>Multinomial logit | 0.618             | 0.403             | 0.039             |

(1) The baseline category is running for re-election.

(2) \*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Standard errors in parentheses.

predictor of running for higher offices, but only at the 10 per cent level. Those more senior are, all else equal, less likely to run for higher offices.

Please note that we did not include power positions in the chamber among the independent variables explaining retirement. Of the 21 deputies holding such positions, none retired and only one decided to run for higher office! Holding power positions in the Chamber is clearly related to intra-Chamber ambition. Those who actively participate in the Chamber's agenda setting and decision-making have a strong incentive to stay there. The chances of Deputies who occupied a position in the Chamber hierarchy in previous legislatures in maintaining similar positions in future legislatures is greater than of those who have not occupied such posts before.

One negative result is probably just as important as the ones already mentioned: those running for higher offices are not much different from

those running for re-election when we compare the amount of votes won when they were elected to office. That is, those more likely to be electorally successful are *not* more likely to run for higher offices, at least at the regular election.

As we are interested not simply in the statistical significance of the variables, but rather in their actual impact on the different career choices, we decided to plot the predicted probabilities of choosing each option while changing some variables of interest and holding all other variables constant.

We can see from Figure 2 that most results are not just statistically but also substantively significant. Notice, for example, the sharp increase in the probability of running for re-election when the deputies move from the left to the right and the corresponding decrease in the probability of running for higher office. An average member with an ideology score equal to a typical member of the PT ( $-0.8$ ) is estimated to have a 0.67 probability of running for re-election. A deputy with a score of 0.4 (close to the mean for the PSDB), on the other hand, has a 0.85 probability of running for re-election.

Age has the opposite effect. A deputy with the average age has a 0.8 probability of running for re-election. A deputy ten years older would have an estimated 0.74 probability of running for re-election, that is, a 6 percentage points decrease. Conversely, the probability of retiring increases from 10 to 12 per cent, and the probability of running for higher offices increases from 8 to 13 per cent.

District magnitude has a similarly large impact on decisions. In smaller states like *Acre* (8 seats), the probability of running for higher offices is as high as 14 per cent. In larger states such as *Rio Grande do Sul* (31 seats), where the competition is fierce; this estimated probability reduces to 5 per cent, just over one third of the former.

The pattern of spatial distribution of votes in the previous election is also an important predictor of retirement. A legislator who gathered 40 per cent of his/her votes in a single municipality (the average value) has a predicted probability of retiring of 8 per cent. In contrast, a legislator who has electoral concentration a standard deviation above the mean (64 per cent) has a probability of retiring of only 4 per cent.

Finally, budgetary appropriation has a similar effect. An average member had 35 per cent of his/her individual amendments actually disbursed by the executive and has a 10 per cent predicted probability of retiring, while a similar individual with a higher success on this variable (52 per cent, or one standard deviation above) has only a 6 per cent probability of retiring. The predicted probability of running for higher offices, on the other hand, almost doubles, going from 6 to 11 per cent. Deputies who are able to get a higher percentage of the total value of their amendments funded,

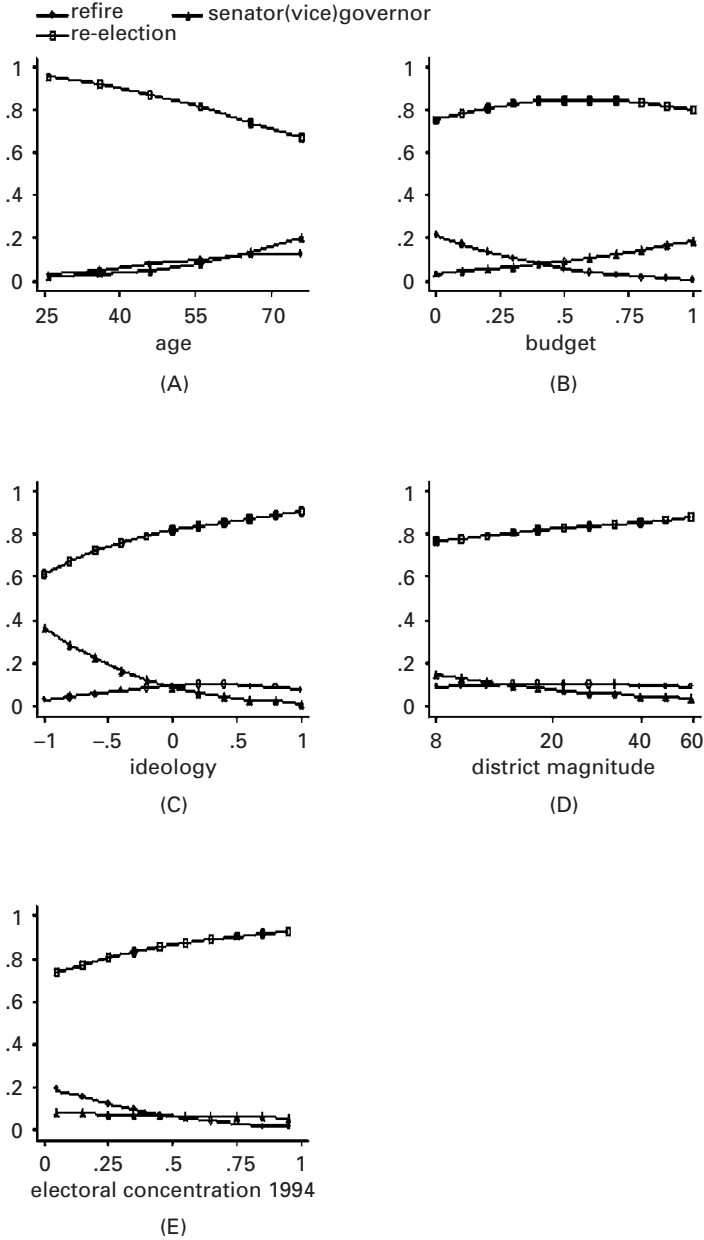


Fig. 2. *Predicted probabilities.*

seek higher offices. It seems that pork barrel does not only increase the chances of seeking any office, but also of choosing higher office. It is not an incentive for the deputy to return to the Chamber, as we supposed. On the

contrary, what emerges is a strategy of increasing visibility and boosting incumbents' chances of running for a higher office in more competitive elections.<sup>44</sup>

### *Conclusions*

First of all, the majority of Brazilian federal deputies decide to run for re-election. Although, the proportion is still smaller than in the United States, it is higher than several other Latin American countries. In addition, when we only take into account the deputies who ran for any office, the great majority (about 80–90 per cent in the various elections since redemocratisation) run for re-election. This indicates that the Chamber has offered stronger incentives for static ambition than for any other choice of career.

Overall, our findings in relation to holding power positions in the Chamber, being a standing committee leader, and being electorally vulnerable cast serious doubt on the proposition that those who run for re-election are 'weaker' candidates than those who run for higher offices (i.e. governor and senator). The data suggest, rather, that incumbents who run for re-election tend to occupy power positions within the Directorate and they are not more electorally vulnerable or less experienced (in terms of seniority) than those who run for governor and senator. The lack of statistical significance in several variables indicates that incumbents who make distinct career choices are not overall very different from each other.

We confirm, however, that the level of competition inside districts does affect incumbents' choices of which office to run for. In districts with a smaller pool of strong challengers, federal deputies feel safer running for governor and senator. We also find supportive evidence that incumbents who ran for mayor in 1996 are different in some respects from those who decided not to do so. The former had better electoral results in the 1994 election and won elections for mayor in districts with less competition. Hence, deputies who stayed in the Chamber after the midterm municipal elections of 1996 were, in general, more vulnerable electorally than those who won mayoral contests. However, when it came to the choice about which office to run for in 1998, electoral vulnerability was not a factor that impacted on the decision. Therefore, Samuels' statements about progressive

<sup>44</sup> It is important to recognise, however, that in previous and less parsimonious models we found some interesting differences between those two groups of federal deputies. For instance, incumbents who run for high offices display a dispersal strategy regarding pork. In other words, they do not concentrate their amendments in their main electoral base as those who run for re-election do. This finding suggests that those incumbents that intend to run for positions regulated by plurality rules (governor and Senate) would be better off if they dispersed their energy and policies across the whole electoral district (state).

ambition are only valid when progressive ambition is understood in terms of running for mayor. When we include the choices of running for governor and senator, differences between those who ran for re-election and those who did not are not so easy to detect.

Finally, it is important to highlight that incumbents who are electorally vulnerable and perform poorly in the Chamber (hold fewer power positions and manage to get fewer amendments funded) decide to run for lower offices. 'Weaker' candidates are forced into secondary positions in the Brazilian political system. On the other hand, static and progressive ambition in Brazil is based on good performances in office and during elections.

Natural selection, understood as the predominance of the fittest (or the less vulnerable electorally and the more productive incumbents while in office), seems to apply to Brazilian federal deputies' patterns of career choice. A practical consequence of this pattern is that stronger candidates seek career options where they can exercise more power. It must be stressed that such options do not lie exclusively outside the Chamber of Deputies, but are also found within it, when the prospects for holding power positions in the Chamber are tangible.