Electoral Trajectories of Local Officeholders:

Are Some Launching Pads Better than Others?

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1. Introduction

The American electoral system links private incentives to public purposes. Service in government is engendered through processes in which those with personal ambitions for elective office are compelled to compete with one another for the opportunity of holding office. Politicians hoping for reelection are encouraged to pursue public purposes, rather than single-mindedly pursue private goals, so that voters will be inclined to return them to office. Underpinning this process is the progressive ambitions of politicians: the idea that unless or until stymied by the prospect of electoral loss, politicians will bid for successively higher offices through their elective careers (Schlesinger, 1966). Private ambitions lead to contests between increasingly experienced politicians seeking higher offices.

The assumption that ambitious politicians will seek higher, rather than lower, offices has not always held. As described by Kernell (1977), congressional careers in the 19th century were frequently short-lived, with many members of Congress opting to return to their states to pursue political careers in local or state politics after spending relatively short tenures in Washington. Well into the 20th century, there were at least some politicians who saw service at the local level as more rewarding than service in Washington. Richard Cohen recounts how Dan Rostenkowski, the once powerful chairman of the Ways and Means Committee until his departure from the US Congress, viewed service in Springfield and Washington, like many others schooled in Chicago politics, as stepping stones leading back to Chicago, the location of the highest political calling (2000: 24). The interplay of ambition and elective office is subject to at least two considerations. First, the question of what counts as a "better" office is likely to be situational. While it is doubtless a convenient working assumption to treat service in Congress as more desirable than, say, service in a state senate, such an assumption may not do justice to how individual politicians rank order their choices over offices for which they might run. The second consideration pertains to potential support in making a bid for elective office. The story of Congressman Rostenkowski is instructive. When he was a member of the Illinois state legislature and contemplating his next move, there was a debate among his political mentors in the Chicago machine, in particular Mayor Daley, as to what office he should seek: Clerk of the Cook County Court or a seat in Congress. Ultimately, the decision within the machine was to support his bid for the House of Representatives (Cohen, 2000). His career choice was contingent, at least in part, on whether he could receive the support of political benefactors. This suggests that choices of supporters are as integral to the mobility of elective officials as are the ambitions of the aspiring politicians.

In this paper, we bring together these two streams of thought into a single theory of electoral trajectories. In the following section, we review the literature on ambition theory and the literature on campaign finance, in particular the financing of local and state elections, in order to construct the outlines of a theory of electoral trajectories. In section three, we describe a database that we have compiled to test this theory of electoral trajectories. These data are drawn from the

experience of county level office holders in the state of California over the period 2002-2008. In section four, we subject hypotheses derived from this theory to analysis using these data. Section five offers our conclusions and speculations.

2. *Electoral trajectories*

A key premise of the literature on progressive ambition is that elected officials respond to the opportunity structure in which they find themselves as they seek to forge political careers that provide advancement and increasing prestige and remuneration (Schlesinger, 1966). When one considers that there are almost 90 thousand governmental units in America, most of which are headed by anywhere from as few as perhaps three to as many as several hundred elected officials, the potential pool of politicians that may harbor progressive ambitions easily numbers in the hundreds of thousands. While offering lots of intriguing clues, the literature on progressive ambition has not to date produced a coherent theory of which elected officials will bid for higher office or the conditions under which they will make these bids. Three key questions need to be answered. One, among the various offices for which a potential candidate might aspire, what office is the most likely target of a bid for advancement? Two, at what point in a politician's career will he or she attempt to make a move to another office? Three, among the set of current elected officials, which subset of politicians will attempt to make the jump to another office? While in this paper we do not advance a theory that fully answers each of these questions, we do attempt to push in that direction. To forecast our thesis, we argue that decisions about advancement are likely to be conditional on the relative correspondence between challenges of the current office and likely challenges of the targeted office, the expected differential in compensation between the current office and the potential office, and external factors, the most important of which is the likelihood of support of potential contributors.

Target Office. While conventional wisdom might suggest that there is a natural sort of hierarchy moving from elective office at the local level, through the state level, and ultimately the national level, the ranking of offices may be different for different politicians. As we suggested in the introduction, for much of American history this was not always the case. Even today, it need not hold for all or even most politicians. A compelling theory of electoral trajectories should treat the question of what counts as a "better" office as contingent on situational factors, rather than fixed for all politicians. The literature on progressive ambition suggests some insight into what counts as "better." Many years ago, Gordon Black (1972) formalized the decision of rational politicians in deciding whether to seek a new office. Essentially, Black's formulation is a straightforward expected utility calculation in which a rational office-seeker weighs the benefits of a new office, multiplied by the probability of attaining the new office, against the costs of running for the office. Rhode (1977) modifies the simple Black utility calculation to explicitly incorporate the expected utility associated with running for the incumbent's current office. This reformulation indicates that office seekers who are already office holders also weigh the utility obtained from their current office.

More recent research has enriched these rational actor models with factors that comprise the calculations of real world office seekers. Berkman's (1994) research on the move from state legislatures to Congress is suggestive on this score. He finds that decisions of state legislators to attempt the jump to Congress are influenced by the opportunities available to them for additional

advancement and policy impact, opportunities that are contingent in part on whether the legislators are of the minority or majority party in the state legislature. Legislators who are less likely to be able to make a difference in terms of policy or leadership are more likely to attempt the jump to Congress. Interestingly, Berkman (1993) also finds that former state legislators from more professionalized legislatures arrive in Washington more able to populate committees with greater substantive policy responsibilities and to move into various leadership roles. This suggests that the content of a current office may affect how potential office seekers weigh the benefits of a different office. The expertise that an office holder has acquired in one office may be better suited for some other offices than for others. Maestas et al. (2006) offer evidence consistent with this suggestion. Their presumption is that some state legislators have already crossed a threshold of ambition in which they harbor the desire to be in Congress (2006: 197). This presumption is problematic. It lacks an explanation for which specific members will cross the threshold of ambition for a different office.[1] This is the issue we address below.

Here, we retain the basic expected utility framework established by Black, with the extension by Rhode. However, we argue that the utility benefits of an office will be a function of three parameters. One is the transferability of the skill sets developed in an office. Our assumption is that the skill sets acquired in the current office constrains the range of potential future offices that are likely to be viewed as desirable. Operationally, we assume, consistent with Berkman's (1994) findings, that people who are currently serving in a legislative capacity will tend to seek a next position that is also legislative. A person serving in an administrative or executive position will tend to seek a next position that requires skills of an administrator. The skill sets may be more refined. A politician holding a position requiring legal skills, such as those of a district attorney, may be particularly inclined to seek a position as attorney general or secretary of state, offices that typically involve lawyerly talents.

The second parameter is opportunity for advancement within an office. A current office that offers considerable opportunities to move up in leadership or to play key policy setting roles will be viewed as providing more utility benefits. Interestingly, term limits have the affect of short-circuiting advancement opportunities. Some current office-holders, for this reason, may opt to avoid seeking an otherwise attractive office, if that office is term limited, because it offers truncated opportunities for advancement within the office. This is consistent with the 1999 paper by Berkman and Eisenstein (1999) in which they find that in states with more professionalized legislatures candidates for U.S. contests are less likely to emerge from the state legislature. The third parameter is the relative compensation packages offered by an office. Recall that Berkman (1994) finds that financial compensation is important in the decisions of legislators to make a bid for Congress. Legislators who are better compensated at the state level are less likely to run for federal office. Utility benefits of compensation packages involve a three way comparison between continuing in a current elective office, attempting a jump to a different office, or retiring from elective politics. This financial motivation is supported by Hall and VanHouweling (1995), who show that members of Congress pay particular attention to the current value of their

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[1] The other issue that might be questioned is the assumption of a natural hierarchy from state legislature to Congress. A truly general theory of electoral trajectories should be able to model the decision to retire, run for reelection, or run for a different seat across the multitude of offices that exist within the American electoral landscape.

retirement packages when deciding whether to run for reelection. When the monetary compensation of the office is offset by the expected financial benefits of retiring, significant numbers of members opt to retire. Monetary compensation, however, is only one aspect, albeit an important aspect, of the total compensation offered by an elective office. Future financial returns play a role in the current value of a position, as do the emotional and psychological benefits of holding an office.

Timing. Maestas et al (2008) offer the most sophisticated account to date to explain when current office holders in state legislatures will seek a seat in Congress. They do this be imposing formal parameters on the concept of opportunity structure first elaborated by Schlesinger (1966). The key parameters in the Maestas et al (2008) model are the electoral prospects of winning a targeted seat, prospects that improve when the incumbent retires or dies, and the costs associated with giving up a current seat, costs that drop toward zero if that seat has term limits that are soon to expire (pp. 197-98). Both of these parameters are fairly elastic. For example, Fulton et al (2006) find differing self-perceptions of electoral prospects between male and female state legislators about their prospects of winning a seat in Congress. We argue that these two parameters should be further expanded. One of the key determinants of a county official, especially one who holds a nonpartisan elective office but is interested in running for a partisan office, will be the congruence between his or her personal party affiliation and that of a majority of the voters that determine the outcome of the targeted office. An office holder who would be running on the side of the partisan minority in the jurisdiction is likely to assess his or her chances of winning as considerably lower than someone running on the side of the partisan majority. A second key determinant is what the prospects may be of other strong candidates jumping into the race. The entry into a contest of other quality candidates will tend to decrease the probability of success by a given office seeker. Likewise, one might argue that the cost parameter should be expanded to incorporate not just the cost incurred by giving up a current office, but the potential costs of running for a new office. Conceptually, candidates are likely to treat as separate issues their chances of winning a new office from their ability to raise the money to make such a bid. That is, candidates are likely to view the prospect of winning as conditional on fundraising. We argue, however, that the fundraising component of the decision to run for a new seat is better treated as a separate topic, inasmuch as it points to how we might begin to answer the question of which office holders are likely to attempt the move to a new elective office.

Office seekers. The key question which the progressive ambition literature to date has lacked a compelling way to answer is this: from among the population of current office holders, which ones will actually seek a new office? Our attempt to provide a way of answering this question takes us into the literature on campaign finance. We begin with the premise that, except for very small-scale municipal or special district elections, running for office is costly. Costs of running, of course, can vary from a few thousand dollars to hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. Most politicians cannot afford to pay these costs, certainly over repeated election campaigns, out of their own pockets. Instead, they rely on contributions from supporters. To be sure, there is no shortage of research that details the importance of money in election campaigns, a limited sample of which includes studies of the financing of congressional races (Jacobson, 1978, 1980, 1990; Green and Krasno, 1988; Erikson and Palfrey, 1998), senate races (Gerber, 1998; Goldstein and Freedman, 2000), state legislative campaigns (Caldeira and Patterson, 1982;

Gierzynski and Breaux, 1991, 1993; Breaux and Gierzynski, 1991; Thompson, et al, 1994) and local elections (Arrington and Ingalls, 1984; Fleischmann and Stein, 1998; Krebs, 2001, 2005). Most of this research concerns the relative amounts required to be successful in running for office, typically contrasting the financial needs of challengers versus incumbents. Our focus is different. Our interest is in the calculations of contributors to campaigns.

The readiness of supporters to contribute to campaigns, in our view, represents an important signal to potential office seekers about their electoral viability should they run for a given office. That is, contributors are providing critical information that they view an office holder as someone worthy of investment. One variant of this view of contributions is utilized by Maestas and Rugeley (2008) who focus on a candidate's own investment of personal resources in a campaign as an indicator of seriousness in running for a particular office. However, the sense in which we want to treat contributions is somewhat closer to that of Fleischmann and Stein (1998). In their study of contributions in local races in Atlanta and St. Louis, they found that contributors targeted incumbents and candidates running in citywide races. Their conclusion was that these contributors were pursuing an investment strategy, presumably with the goal of maintaining or establishing a relationship with the key governmental players in each city. The notion that contributors invest in future access and policy goods has also been used in studies at the national level, often to explain the preference among donors for giving to incumbents and holders of key chairmanship, but also to explain why donors prefer some candidates over others in open seat races (Gaddie, 1995).

While theories of progressive ambition presume that some office holders harbor the desire to seek higher office, which typically means running a more expensive campaign. The decisions of external actors, taken together, act as a screen or filter. The willingness to fund an office holder in a bid for a different office means that he or she is able to actually conduct a race. In the absence of such external funding, the office holder is left with two decisions: try to continue in the current office, which with incumbency advantages is likely to be less costly, or retire. With external financial support, the office holder is able to operationalize a desire, perhaps long harbored, to continue in politics by seeking a new office. External funders on this view play the key role in determining which particular office holders will be able to seek other offices. Our hypothesis, therefore, is that among the population of current office holders, contributions "select" the few that will seek a different office. An interesting implication of this is that these contributions may flow to office holders who might, in the recesses of their hearts, have preferred to seek a different office. That is, the factors that make up the preferences of the donors may not align along the same set of factors as those of politicians. More importantly, however, it suggests that donors are selecting the candidates that they believe have the skills, background, assets, etc., to be able to win an office.

Hypotheses. In sum, we hypothesize the following:

H1: We expect that current office holders, should they seek a new office, will target an office that utilizes many of the skills developed in the current office.

H2: We expect that current office holders will forego targeting a new office while opportunities for advancement exist in the current office.

H3: We expect that current office holders will select between continuing in a current office, targeting a new office, or retiring, based upon the relative benefits (financial and psychological) available in each, contingent upon the expected probability of success in retaining the current office or winning the targeted office.

H4: We expect that office holders will be more likely to seek a new office when the electoral prospects of winning the office are high, which includes situations where the incumbent in that office is or soon will be term limited out, has retired, or died, and where there are few other seekers of the office.

H5: We expect donors will "select," based on the volume and timing of their contributions, the current office holders who will be the seekers of particular offices.

3. Research Design, Data, and Methods

To evaluate these hypotheses on electoral ambition, we take a close look at the career paths of elected county office holders in California. County governments across the U.S. have taken on increasing policy and administrative responsibilities (Streib and Waugh, 1991; Menzel, 1996). The visibility and importance of county office may make these positions useful launching pad for electoral careers. The size and geographic scope of counties may give county officeholders special advantages in visibility and name-recognition over city and other local government officials who may also seek state legislative office.[2] At the county level politicians may seek either legislative or executive offices, distinctions that we previewed as important for career training and future electoral ambitions. California counties elect legislative bodies—Boards of Supervisors, typically five officers elected on a non-partisan ballot, with election of the board split across two elections so as to prevent turnover of the full body in one election. California counties also elect a range of county executive offices including Assessor, Clerk-Recorder, Auditor-Controller, District Attorney, Sheriff-Coroner, Superintendent of Schools, and Treasurer-Tax Collector. Because the terms of county officials are staggered across two election cycles, we identified a full "cohort" of county officials over two election cycles, 2000 and 2002. We use the California Elections Data Archive (CEDA) to record the names, offices, and vote totals of all winning county office candidates in the 2000 and 2002 elections.[3]

The key dependent variables for our analysis involve electoral career choices and fundraising by the candidates who do seek state legislative office. For each county officeholder, we determine if the officeholder ran for the legislature during the mid-point in their county term, at the end of their four-year county term, and two years after the conclusion of their four-year county term.

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[2] We do not know of another study analyzing the career trajectories of elected county officeholders. While there may be value in analyzing a wide range of local officeholders, we believe the variation in county offices, and the variation of counties across the State of California, provides us with unique leverage to test the relevant propositions that we drew from the literature.

[3] The California Elections Data Archive can be found at:
http://www.csus.edu/isr/includes/ISR%20website/CEDA%20Intro.stm.

Data on state legislative candidates was taken from the California Secretary of State. We record if the officeholder ran for re-election to county office at the end of the term, or if they did not run. The career movement of this cohort of county officials provides the base for our analysis. For county officeholders who do run for the legislature, our argument also prompts us to seek information about their fundraising. Campaign finance data for the legislative races featuring these county officeholders was also taken from the California Secretary of State. Specifically, we recorded the total funds the candidate raised in the election year, as well as the total funds raised by all candidates running for that same legislative seat.

Our argument about career trajectories rests on the assumption that context, or the characteristics of the current county office held by the official, matters. Thus, a variety of independent variables were recorded to help evaluate the hypotheses listed above. The first hypothesis prompts us to make distinctions about what type of career experience the county official has gained while in office. Here we use a simple dichotomous variable to distinguish between legislative experience for Board of Supervisors officials and executive experience for all other county offices. The second hypothesis requires a measure of the potential value of continued incumbency in the current office. As noted in the literature, term-limits are the key institutional feature limiting the value of current offices. We obtained information about term-limits from the California State Association of Counties. The presence of term-limits is also measured as a simple dichotomous variable. The third hypothesis calls into question the value of the current seat and the desirability of county versus state office. To understand the context of local service, we record the county population from the U.S. Census, and the vote percentage for the county officeholder in the last county election from the CEDA. We also record county revenue for the 2000-01 budget year from the *Counties Annual Report* issued by the California State Controller. The fifth and final hypothesis requires more detailed understanding of the legislative seat that the county officeholder hopes to occupy. In addition to the campaign finance information noted above, we identify if the legislative seat sought by the county officeholder is open or held by an incumbent, the number of candidates in both the primary and general elections, and the overlap between the county officeholder's current jurisdiction and that of the state legislative district. Electoral and campaign finance information for legislative races, again, comes from the California Secretary of State. We measure the overlap in county and legislative jurisdiction in two ways. First, we use party vote total in the 2004 presidential election at the county level as an estimate of partisanship in the legislative district. We also identify the proportion of votes in the legislative election that came from the county officeholder's own county. We explain these measures further as the analysis unfolds.

4. Analysis

We begin our analysis with hypothesis 1, which holds that current office holders, should they seek a new office, will target a position that utilizes skill sets developed in their current office. Operationally, we are limited to a dichotomous definition of skills: legislative and administrative/executive. Our presumption is that county supervisors, whose responsibilities are legislative in nature, will be more likely to seek a seat in the state legislature than will their counterparts in county government who hold elective administrative or executive positions. This hypothesis is strongly supported, as can be seen in the frequency cross-tabulations reported in Table 1a. On the vertical axis of the table, we show the three choices available to county

official: retire (which due to data limitations may occasionally mask an official that opts to run for a different local office), run for reelection, or seek a seat in the state legislature. Notice that the observed and expected frequencies are essentially the same for county officials holding legislative type offices and administrative/executive offices when considering the choice of retiring or running for reelection. The same is not true when considering the relationship between the type of current office and the frequency of running for the state legislature. Of the 610 office holders in our dataset whose career trajectory could be tracked, 274 were in legislative-type positions; 336 were in administrative/executive offices. Yet 17 of the 18 office holders who sought election to the state legislature held legislative type positions within county government. Only one was the holder of an administrative/executive type office.

(Table 1a about here)

We have also analyzed using multichotomous logit the choices of the county office holders, as a function of the type of county office held. The independent variable, again, is whether the office holder is in a legislative-type position or an administrative/executive position in county government. The dependent variable is the trichotomous choice of retiring, running for reelection, or running for a state legislative position. As Table 1b shows, there is no discernible difference between retiring and running for reelection as a function of the type of county job held. However, there is large, statistically significant difference between running for reelection (the base condition) and opting to run for the state legislature. Holding a position in county government that requires legislative competencies is strongly predictive of running for a state office with legislative responsibilities.

(Table 1b about here)

We turn next to the second hypothesis, which holds that current office holders forego targeting a new office so long as opportunities for advancement exist within the current office. The uneven application of term limit restrictions offers a straightforward, albeit limited, means of measuring opportunities for advancement. Term limits, by intent, truncate the opportunity of office holders to continue in a position as long as they continue to find it rewarding. To be sure, there are other aspects of advancement opportunities that this measure neglects. Some offices offer more learning opportunities than others. Some offices offer more chance to move into leadership roles or policy specialization. Nevertheless, offices that are term limited, other things being equal, offer fewer of all of these goods than do offices that are not term limited.

To test hypothesis 2, we once again employ multinomial logit, with the trichotomous variable measuring retirement, running for reelection, or seeking a seat in the state legislature as our dependent variable. Because of the possibility that there may be intercorrelation between legislative-type seats (already shown to influence career choices) and term limits, we include both the variable from the prior analysis that captures the type of county office and term limits. Table 2 reports the results of this analysis. We see that the variable identifying legislative-type county offices continues to significantly predict cases of running for state legislature. We also see that term limits also produces an independent effect of running for state legislature. Interestingly, term limits does not predict the choice of retirement. We assumed that this would be the case. While the sign is in the expected direction, the Z score is below the level at which

insignificance can be rejected. This would suggest that the option to retire is exercised during electoral careers prior to term limits forcing retirement sufficient to keep term limits from being a significant predictor of retirement.

(Table 2 about here)

The third hypothesis focuses specifically on the trichotomous choice of retiring, running for reelection, or jumping into a race for the state legislature, based upon the rewards of continuing to serve, relative to the rewards from serving in the state legislature, or retiring. We include two proxy variables that are intended together to capture the bundle of financial, post-electoral career opportunities, and psychological rewards associated with holding the current office versus retiring or running for the state legislature. One of these is the population size of the county; the other is the size of the county public budget. Notice that we do not – and cannot – include a variable to capture the financial compensations of serving in the state legislature, as this would be a constant for all candidates and thus perfectly collinear with the intercept term. We also include a variable capturing the percentage of the vote won by the office holder in his or her last election. This variable is expected to be negatively associated with retirement, as a stronger prior win makes the office holder more confident of future reelection. Additionally, we include the term limits variable, because of the prior assumption that the rewards for serving in an office that comes to an end prematurely will be less than serving in an office with unlimited opportunities to seek reelection, as well as the type of county office currently held (legislative versus administrative/executive), which has already been shown to be correlated with the dependent variable.

In our first efforts at analyzing this hypothesis, we encountered excessive multicollinearity between the county population measure and the county public budget measure. The Pearson Product moment correlation between the two variables is 0.8649, which means that the the two variables share approximately 75 percent of their variation with one another.   Consequently, Table 3 reports the results of the analysis of hypothesis 3, with the variable for the county public budget dropped from the analysis. The type of county office currently held has essentially the same impact as it did above; that is, it predicts the decision to run for the state legislature but not the decision to retire. By contrast, the term limits variable now is predictive of both the decision to run for higher office (as it did above) and the decision to retire. The county population variable is significant, but negative in the analysis of the decision to retire. This means that the larger the county, the less likely the incumbent is to opt to step out of his or her current office. Rewards of the current office apparently play a role in inducing current office holders to continue to seek reelection (contingent on term limits). Surprisingly, we do not see a negative relationship between county size and the decision to run for higher office. Indeed, we see no significant impact of this variable on the decision to seek a seat in the state legislature. We also do not see any impact in either of the equations of the prior vote margin received by the office holder. As we expected this to be a reasonably good measure of the expected probability of success in running for reelection or for state legislature, this was an unexpected non-finding.

(Table 3 about here)

Our fourth hypothesis concerns the expected entry of current office holders into a race when the electoral prospects of winning the race are high, as a result of the death, voluntary retirement, or forced exit due to term limits of the seat's occupant. We also surmised that entry would be more likely if relatively few similarly qualified candidates entered the race. Unfortunately, at this point we do not have data on the disposition of the legislative seats for which our sample of county-level office holders *might* have, but did not, run. This precludes us from testing this hypothesis at the moment.

Our fifth, and final, hypothesis is that the "selection" of current office holders to run for higher office is the product of decisions taken externally to the office holders. Our argument is that the funding decisions and non-decisions of donors represent the key determinants of whether a particular office holder will seek higher office. This hypothesis produces an issue in which one of our key values will generally be unobserved. Candidates that do not (or will not) receive campaign contributions to run for a different office generally are unlikely to enter the race for that office. As a result, we will not observe campaign contributions for them. At the same time, there are office holders who might have entered the race, but for reasons already examined above would prefer to stay in their current office or even to retire. This, too, will result in our observation of zero dollars, even though the theoretical amount that might have been raised by that office holder may be substantially greater than zero.

 To cope with this issue, we have employed a conventional two-stage modeling approach. In the first stage, we utilize the key variables from the analyses above to estimate a selection variable. This selection variable is simply the entrance of the office holder into a race for a state legislative seat. The two key independent variables in this analysis are term limits and the type of county office held (i.e., legislative versus administrative/executive). Note that we excluded the county size measure, as this was a key determinant of the decision to stay in the current office or retire, but was unrelated to the decision to jump into a race for state legislature. In the second stage of the model, we analyze the behavior of campaign contributors to the office holders who jumped into campaigns for legislature. Given the asymmetries in the amounts contributed, we log contributions to each of our office holders. On the right hand side of this second stage model, we include four independent variables. The first is a dummy variable indicating that the seat is open or not. Our expectation is that office holders running in open seats will be able to raise significantly more money than when running in a seat with an incumbent, since the latter will generally be the "selected" candidate in such non-open races. The second measure included is the logged value of contributions to all other candidates, which, if our thesis is correct, will not be positively related to funds to the county office holders. The reason is simple. To the extent that contributors are "selecting" a given candidate, our expectation is that other candidates will find it relatively difficult to raise dollars to match those of the selected candidate. The third variable is a dichotomous variable indicating that the office holder is of the same party as the majority voters in the jurisdiction. Our measure for this is less than optimal in two respects. First, we currently have no information about the specific party affiliations of voters within each particular legislative district. Instead we are using party breakdown in the county where the office holder currently serves. Second, our measure is from the presidential contest in 2004. The two-party breakdown from that year is probably a reasonable estimate, but notice that it measures the voters who happened to turn out for that election, which may well be different from the voters who turned out in other legislative elections during the period of our study. Finally,

we include a variable measuring the proportion of the county's population that is in the legislative district in which our candidate is running. Our expectation is that the greater the overlap, the more contributors will seek the county holder as the favorite to win the legislative seat and thus will be more generous in their contributions.

(Table 4 about here)

Table 4 contains the results of this two stage analysis, which was conducted using the QLIM procedure in SAS. As expected, both the term limit and office-type variables were significantly and positively related to the selection of county office holders to jump into a race for the state legislature. In terms of our hypothesis about the "selection" process, we have mixed results. The open seat variable is strongly related to the volume of funds contributed to the county office holders in these races for the state legislature. This corroborates the expectation that donors are reluctant to be generous to candidates running in races where there is a current incumbent, whereas they are much more generous when the position is vacant. Notice that the generosity of donors appears not to be conferred on the other candidates that also jump into these races. As we surmised, the coefficient for funds contributed to other candidates in each of the races has a negative sign. More importantly, the relationship between funds donated to the county office holders in these races is not related to the funds received by the other candidates. One of the surprising non-findings in this analysis is that the party congruence variable is insignificant. Perhaps this is the result of the noise in our particular measure. Although the sign is positive, the coefficient fails the test of significance. We also have an interesting non-finding on the percentage of overlap between the county and the state legislative seat. We expected a significant positive correlation. In fact, we obtained a negative sign on the coefficient with a t-statistic that is not sufficiently large to be considered significant but is not far from such a level. Taken as a whole, however, it appears that there is evidence for a selection process taking place among donors. Indeed, though our purpose in this paper is to focus on who runs, not whether those who do so are more likely to win, it is instructive to glance at the win/loss issue in terms of this selection hypothesis. Of the two county office holders that ran against sitting incumbents, both lost: a success rate of 0 percent. Among the county office holders who ran in open seats, 13 won and 3 lost, for an overall success rate of 81.3 percent. It appears that the contributors were wise, or perhaps the better word is prudent, in their greater generosity to the county officials who ran in the open seat contests.

5. Summary and Future Research

This investigation of the career trajectories of county officeholders helps us extend the theory of progressive electoral career ambition. Starting at the local level with elected county offices that have varying job requirements and financial and psychological value to the incumbent officeholder, we assess which county officeholders take a step on the career ladder toward the state legislature. For politicians who hope that county office will serve as a path to the legislature, we have some initial evidence to support the idea that some launching pads are better than others. Our investigation of one cohort of California county officials (2000 and 2002) over three state legislative election periods supports the notion that officials seek higher offices in which complementary skills may be required. Specifically, service on the county Board of Supervisors may help develop the legislative experience desired in a run for the state legislature.

Of the eighteen county officeholders who ran for the legislature during the period under study, all but one came from the position of Supervisor. Consistent with existing research, term-limits appear to reduce the value of the current office, making a new electoral career step more likely. Finally, donors are influential in selecting county officeholders to run for the legislature. County officeholders tend to run for open seats, and when they do, they enjoy fundraising advantages over other entrants in the race. Contributions flow to candidates that are likely to wage successful campaigns. Consistent with the literature on progressive electoral ambition, we can describe county officeholders who run for the legislature as strategic in their pursuit of their career advancement.

We believe using county office as the starting point for an analysis of career ambition has unique advantages. Most importantly, we can begin to discern which offices may be used as a rung on the ladder toward the legislature, and which offices are less likely to be part of this career trajectory. As we conduct this analysis, we remain sensitive to the observation that local offices themselves may be highly valued by incumbent officeholders and political aspirants. Further, serving in local office may be seen as a civic or community service, rather than as part of a career choice (Prewitt, 1970). For some county officeholders, another local office may be the next desired career step, rather than the state legislature. Because of this, the next step in our research will be the addition of data to determine if county officeholders seek other county or local seats, rather than the legislature. Additionally, our current focus on general election candidates for the legislature may mask additional county officials who run for the legislature during the primary election, but lose. Thus, as we continue to refine this research, we also plan to add data on state primary elections. Several additional improvements can be made to the data to increase our leverage on the five hypotheses outlined in this paper. Still, an examination of county offices is a distinct entry point into the analysis of electoral career ambition. The current findings help us clarify which seats have value to aspiring politicians in their paths to the legislature, and the importance of campaign contributions for the realization of those aspirations. Continuing this research should increase our understanding of the value of local seats, and the career trajectories of aspiring politicians.

Table 1(a):

Observed/ Expected	County Office		Total
	Administrative/Executive	Legislative	
Retire	90	76	166
	91.4	74.6	
Reelection	245	181	426
	234.6	191.4	
Seek State Legislative Seat	1	17	18
	9.9	8.1	
Total	336	274	610

Kendall's tau-b = 0.0359 ASE = 0.040
Pearson chi2(2) = 18.9117 Pr = 0.000

```
Table 1(b)
Multinomial logistic regression
-------------+---------------------------------------
Choice       |      Coef.   Std. Err.       z    P>|z
-------------+---------------------------------------
0 (retire)   |
 legislative |   .1336848    .184053     0.73   0.468
 _cons       |  -1.001449   .1232588    -8.12   0.000
-------------+---------------------------------------
1 (reelect)  |  (base outcome)
-------------+---------------------------------------
2 (state leg)|
 legislative |   3.135975   1.033649     3.03   0.002
 _cons       |  -5.501258   1.002039    -5.49   0.000
-------------+---------------------------------------
Number of obs  =       610
Log likelihood =   -421.527
LR chi2(2)     =     21.75
Prob > chi2    =    0.0000
Pseudo R2      =    0.0252
```

```
Table 2
Multinomial logistic regression
-----------------------------------------------------------
Choice          |        Coef.    Std. Err.       z    P>|z|
----------------+------------------------------------------
0 (retire)      |
  legislative   |    .0604652    .1921336     0.31    0.753
  term limits   |    .5926767    .4048202     1.46    0.143
        _cons   |   -1.001449    .1232588    -8.12    0.000
----------------+------------------------------------------
1 (reelect)     |  (base outcome)
----------------+------------------------------------------
2 (state leg)   |
  legislative   |    2.598612    1.058908     2.45    0.014
  term limits   |     2.14887     .548664     3.92    0.000
        _cons   |   -5.501254    1.002037    -5.49    0.000
-----------------------------------------------------------
Number of obs   =          610
Log likelihood  =  -414.35176
LR chi2(4)      =        36.10
Prob > chi2     =       0.0000
Pseudo R2       =       0.0417
```

```
Table 3
Multinomial logistic regression
------------------------------------------------------------
Choice          |       Coef.    Std. Err.      z     P>|z|
----------------+-------------------------------------------
0 (retire)      |
 legislative    |      .15804    .2116067     0.75    0.455
 tlimit         |    1.403123    .4652915     3.02    0.003
 countyp~2000|    -5.93e-07    1.90e-07    -3.12    0.002
 votepctlast    |    .0069079    .0049039     1.41    0.159
 _cons          |   -1.396229    .4583523    -3.05    0.002
----------------+-------------------------------------------
1 (reelect)     |   (base outcome)
----------------+-------------------------------------------
2 (state leg)|
 legislative    |    2.583141    1.076906     2.40    0.016
 tlimit         |    2.523366    .6312389     4.00    0.000
 countyp~2000|    -1.82e-07    1.70e-07    -1.07    0.284
 votepctlast    |   -.0000364    .0115511    -0.00    0.997
 _cons          |   -5.413382    1.410456    -3.84    0.000
------------------------------------------------------------
Number of obs  =         610
Log likelihood = -404.42758
LR chi2(8)     =       55.95
Prob > chi2    =      0.0000
Pseudo R2      =      0.0647
```

```
Table 4

QLIM Procedure


                                  Standard
    Variable          N      Mean      Error
    jump            610  0.029508   0.169365
    fundsownlog      18   11.7955   3.593391

Model Fit Summary

Number of Endogenous Variables                    2
Endogenous Variable            jump fundsownlog
Number of Observations                          610
Missing Values                                   53
Log Likelihood                            201.96967

Parameter Estimates

                                 Standard              Approx
Parameter                Estimate      Error    t Value   Pr > |t|

jump.Intercept           0.002675   0.008828      0.30    0.7619
jump.tlimit              0.177174   0.028788      6.15    <.0001
jump.legislative         0.035814   0.013805      2.59    0.0095
_Sigma.jump              0.161578   0.004626     34.93    <.0001
fundsownlog.Intercept   13.864657  10.495749      1.32    0.1865
fundsownlog.openseat     6.230218   2.388870      2.61    0.0091
fundsownlog.fundsotherlog -0.081048  0.127980     -0.63    0.5265
fundsownlog.partycongruence 1.303812 1.910064      0.68    0.4949
fundsownlog.vfc         -0.036612   0.028037     -1.31    0.1916
_Sigma.fundsownlog       3.001387   0.686835      4.37    <.0001
_Rho                    -0.318070   0.492628     -0.65    0.5185
```

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