

Running in the Family: Dynastic Transmission of Political Power in the US Congress 1788-1996

(work in progress)

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Motivation

- Classic elite theorists Pareto and Mosca saw political elites as *self-perpetuating* (Putnam, 1976).
- Self-perpetuation means more than observation that for relatively long periods, specific segments of society hold power.
- Sustained political dominance may reflect original, and unchanging, advantages.

Motivation

- Distinguish between two cases:
 - Some original asymmetry (say, genes) puts some families in power and this asymmetry is unaffected by holding power
 - Holding power reinforces advantages in ability to access power – *self-perpetuation*.
- Does self-perpetuation manifest itself?
- Look at dynastic patterns in US Congress history (1788-1996) using biographical data (ICPSR).

So what?

- Ultimately, fairness of social systems linked to whether luck at birth matters
 - Does it matter in politics? Does self-perpetuation make it worse?
- If shocks have persistent effects, granting access to power to a segment of the population (even temporarily) may permanently affect their power.
 - Democracies may be expected to reduce birth-related asymmetries. But if running (a democratic) government augments asymmetries per se, the scope for equalization may be limited.
 - Implications for democratization and the binding power of institutions

Findings

1. We find that legislators holding power for longer have a higher chance of having relatives entering Congress later on.
2. This could reflect original family characteristics. To see if extra power adds new advantages, we use IV-RD approach exploiting close elections.
 - Basic idea: election outcome independent of family characteristics. Still true that winners of first reelection (legislators with longer careers) have a higher chance of seeing a relative entering Congress later on.

Findings

3. Politics and institutions

- Political competition (as measured by state-level index) is associated with lower prevalence of “elite” legislators
- Arguably exogenous change in rules for committee assignment (Katz & Sala APSR 1996) due to Australian ballot introduction.
- Use Groseclose & Stewart AJPS 1998 “power rank” and find that pre 1890, “elite” legislators get better committee assignments upon entry; post 1890 the opposite holds.

Plan for the talk

- (I) Related literature
- (II) Data and key variables
- (III) Impact of tenure length on the chance to have a relative entering Congress later in time
- (IV) IV-RD: impact of tenure length on the chance to have a relative entering Congress later in time
- (V) The personal profile of legislators with previous relatives in office
- (VI) Political competition and institutional determinants of dynastic transmission effects

(I) Related literature

- Empirical studies of political elites
 - Comparative: Putnam (1976)
 - Mexico: Camp (JoP 1982), Argentina: Imaz (1964)
- Intergenerational transmission
 - Income mobility (e.g., Solon JEP 2002)
 - Human capital (Sacerdote 2005)
 - Health and socioeconomic features (Currie & Moretti QJE 2003, 2005)

Related Literature

- Political careers, political selection, quality of politicians
 - Diermeier, Keane, & Merlo (AER, 2005)
 - Merlo & Matozzi (2005)
 - Caselli & Morelli (JPubE 2004)
 - Dal Bó & Di Tella (JPE 2003)
 - Dal Bó, Dal Bó, & Di Tella (APSR 2006)
 - Besley, Persson & Sturm (2005)
- Evolution of legislator characteristics
 - Clubok, Wilensky, & Berghorn (JoP 1969)
 - Brandes Crook & Hibbing (APSR 1997)

(II) Data and key variables

- ICPSR biographical information on legislators 1788-1996
- ICPSR elections data for congressional races
- Groseclose & Stewart (AJPS 1998/1999) data on congressional rankings
- De Figueiredo & Vanden Bergh (JLE 2004) data on political competition

(II) Data and key variables

Our variables capture historical evolution of legislators' personal characteristics

- Gender, Age
- Previous occupation and public sector experience
- Member of a political dynasty?
 - Posterior Relatives (“Postrelatives”)
 - Previous Relatives (“Prerelatives”)

Figure 1: Relatives in the House and Senate

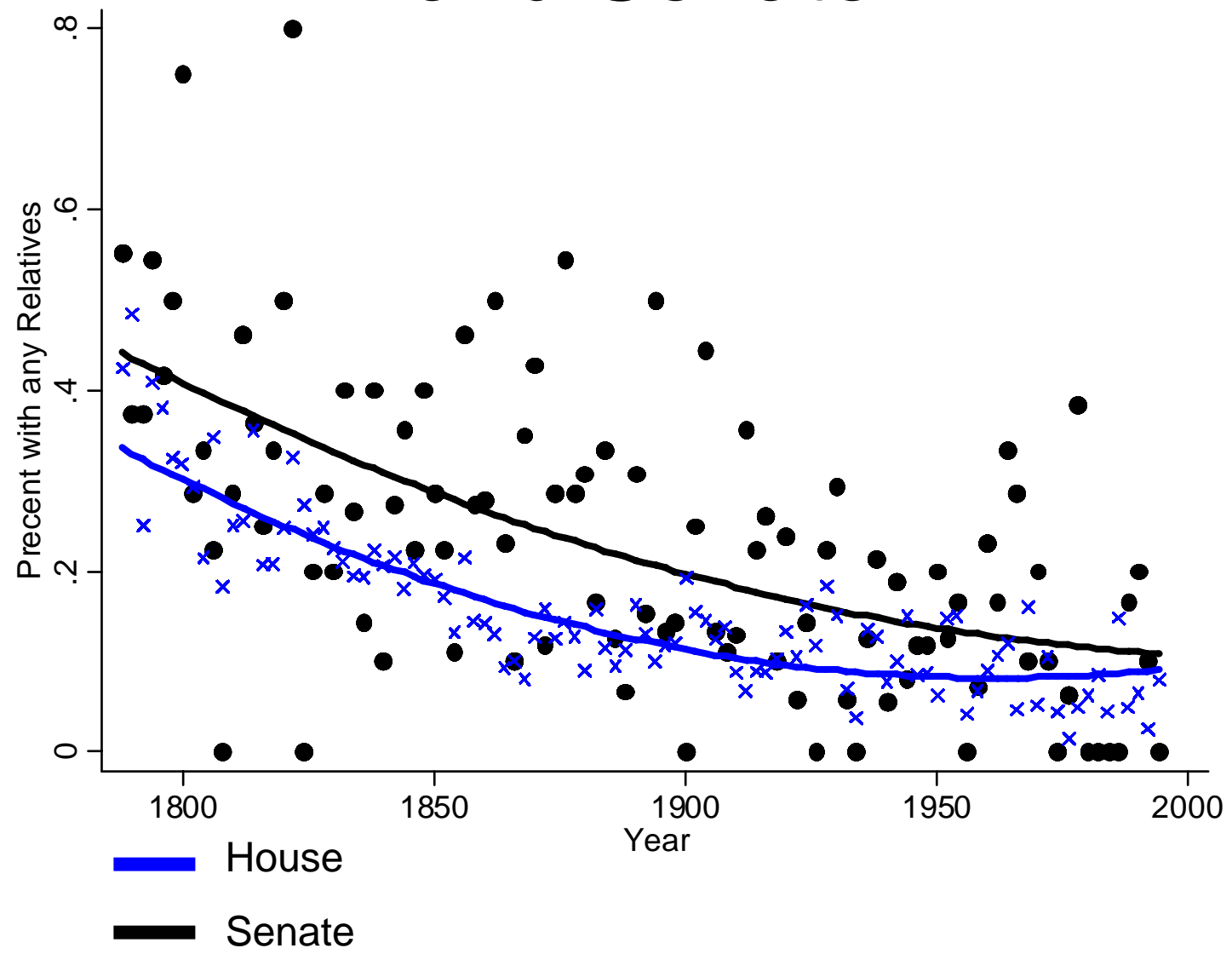


Figure 2: Relatives in the South vs. rest of the country

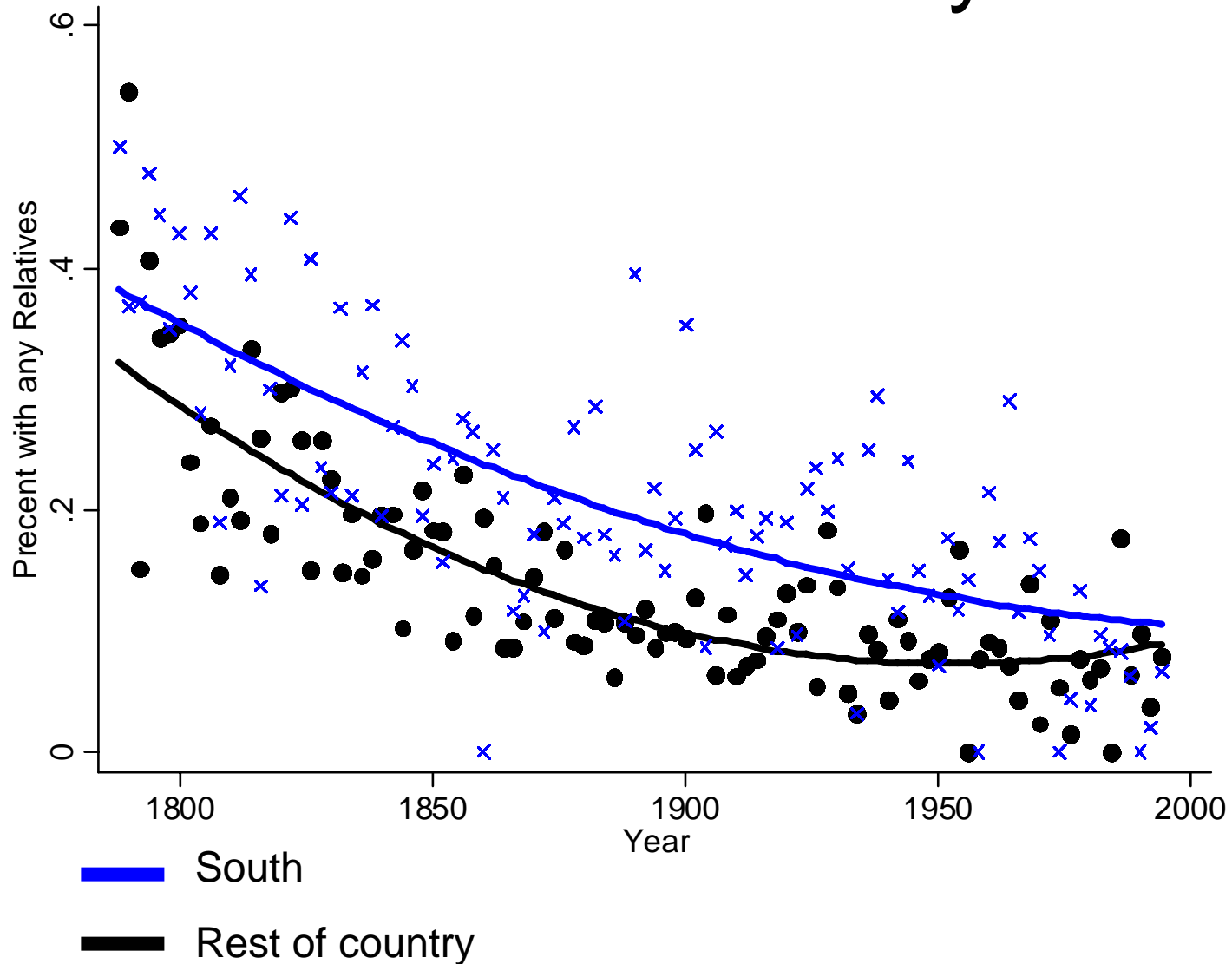


Table 1: Summary statistics—all data

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Previous relative in office	11455	8.68%	0.28	0	1
Posterior relative in office	11455	8.52%	0.28	0	1
Long term	11455	65.08%	0.48	0	1
Total tenure (terms)	11455	3.73	3.54	1	29
Age at death	10205	69.98	12.78	27	103
Age at entry	11455	43.87	9.25	21	86
Previous public office	11455	80.63%	0.40	0	1
College degree	11455	65.09%	0.48	0	1
Female	11455	1.48%	0.12	0	1
Outsider to state	11455	39.19%	0.49	0	1
House (vs Senate)	11455	89.05%	0.31	0	1
Military	11455	35.64%	0.48	0	1
Lawyer	10950	59.40%	0.49	0	1
Farmer	10950	7.15%	0.26	0	1

Table 2: Sample of the major types of family relationships

Relationship	Count	Percent	Cumulative
Father / Mother	267	16.29	16.29
Son / Daughter	398	24.28	40.57
Grandfather / Grandmother	45	2.75	43.32
Grandson / Granddaughter	81	4.94	48.26
Uncle / Aunt	101	6.16	54.42
Nephew / Niece	149	9.09	63.51
Brother / Sister	293	17.88	81.39
Cousin	148	9.03	90.42
Husband	34	2.07	92.5
Wife or Widow	32	1.95	94.45
Other	90	5.55	100
Total	1,639	100	

(III) Tenure length and transmission of power

- Are legislators with longer (and presumably more successful) careers more likely to see a relative entering Congress after them?

Table 3:
Posterior relatives in office by tenure length

All data

	Posterior relative	Children	Obs.
One term	7.13%	2.63%	4,000
More than one term	9.27%	3.55%	7,455

Born before 1910, did not die in office

	Posterior relative	Children	Obs.
One term	7.17%	2.63%	3,457
More than one term	9.84%	3.85%	5,355

Table 4: Tenure length and Postrelatives

	Dependent variable: Postrelatives				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Longterm	0.02144	0.01835	0.02667	0.02901	0.02892
	[0.00491]***	[0.00409]***	[0.00459]***	[0.00431]***	[0.00454]***
Prerelative					0.16892
					[0.02601]***
Female					-0.05281
					[0.02537]**
College degree					0.01241
					[0.00861]
Outsider					-0.00039
					[0.00818]
Previous public office					-0.00125
					[0.00772]
Military					0.01498
					[0.00688]**
Lawyer					-0.00048
					[0.00583]
Farmer					0.00974
					[0.01010]
Senate only					0.05005
					[0.01182]***
House to Senate					0.06844
					[0.02305]***
Senate to House					0.0877
					[0.06448]
Age of entry decade	N	N	N	N	Y
Death age decade	N	N	N	N	Y
Year Effects	N	N	N	Y	Y
State Effects	N	N	N	Y	Y
Died in office excluded	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Born before 1910	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Observations	11455	10379	8812	8812	8490
R-squared	0	0	0	0.09	0.13

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 5: Tenure length and Postrelatives

	Dependent variable: Postrelatives				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Total tenure	0.0041 [0.00084]***	0.00231 [0.00074]***	0.00439 [0.00101]***	0.00763 [0.00105]***	0.00561 [0.00095]***
Prerelative					0.16876 [0.02575]***
Female					-0.04936 [0.02473]*
College degree					0.01269 [0.00877]
Outsider					-0.00013 [0.00830]
Previous public office					-0.00181 [0.00764]
Military					0.01481 [0.00691]**
Lawyer					0.00004 [0.00590]
Farmer					0.01047 [0.00999]
Senate only					0.03655 [0.01136]***
House + Senate					0.04998 [0.02342]**
Senate + House					0.08485 [0.06249]
Age of entry decade	N	N	N	N	Y
Death age decade	N	N	N	N	Y
Year Effects	N	N	N	Y	Y
State Effects	N	N	N	Y	Y
Died in office excluded	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Born before 1910	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Observations	11455	10379	8812	8812	8490
R-squared	0	0	0	0.09	0.13

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

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Tenure length and postrelatives

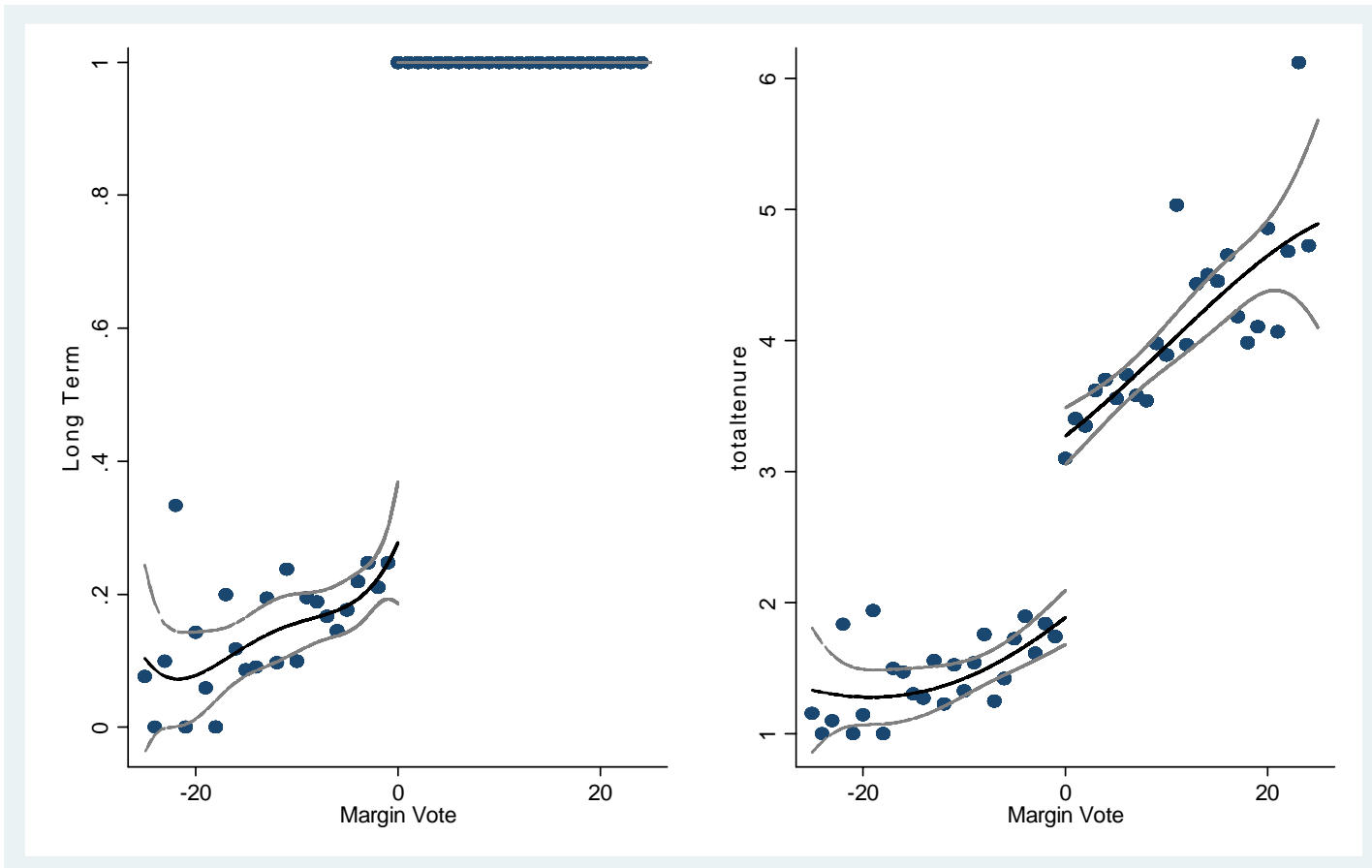
Interpretations

- (1) Fixed family characteristic (IQ, wealth) explains both a legislator's longer tenure and his postrelative's higher chance of entry
- (2) Self-perpetuation is present
 - IQ, wealth, may be augmented by power
 - Preference formation
 - Other cumulative assets (info, contacts with party machine, name recognition, political skills)

(IV) Quasi-Experimental Design

- Need to find an instrument to randomly assign tenure to see if there is an omitted variable bias in previous regressions
- Use close elections (Lee, Moretti, and Butler QJE 2004)
- Key idea, in close elections the outcome should be random
- IV-RD approach: election outcome instruments for tenure length, using global polynomial technique (Hahn, Todd, Van der Klaauw ECTCA 2001)
- Focus on House only, and on legislators without Prerelatives

Figure 3: Polynomial interpolation, impact on tenure of vote margin in first reelection



Total tenure first stage is strong:
t-stat on win = 6.27
F-stat = 119

Longterm first stage also strong:
t-stat on win = 29.55
F-stat = 211

Note: Long term equals 1 if legislator is reelected at least once. For legislators losing the first reelection Long term is not necessarily zero as some may run again later and regain a House seat. Total tenure is total number of congresses a legislator held office. For the same reason, losers in the first reelection may go on to hold office for more than one congress.

Figure 4: Polynomial interpolation of the impact of the vote margin on posterior relatives

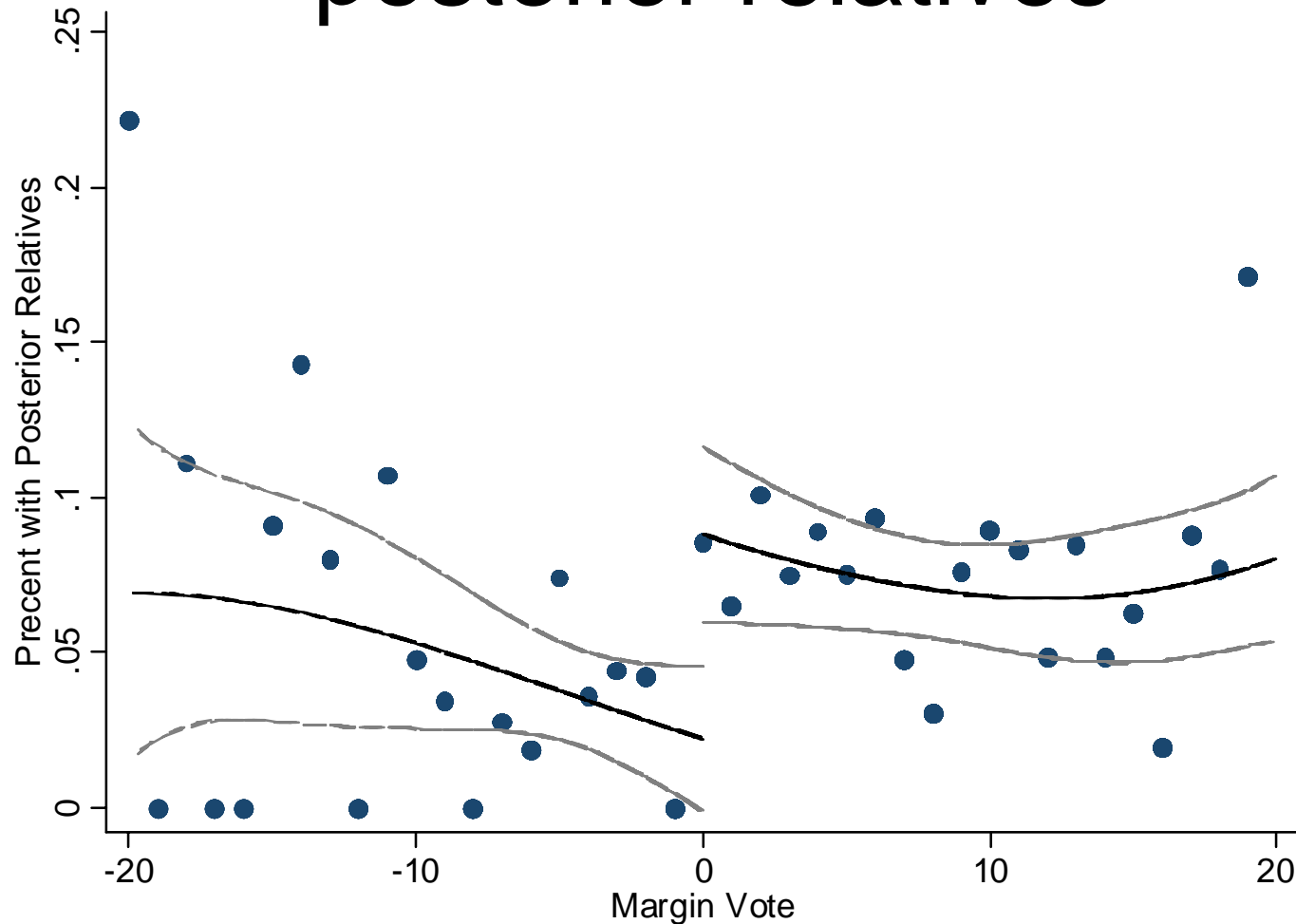


Table 6: The impact of tenure length on Postrelatives – IV estimates

	Window Size							
	(1) 2.50%	(2) 2.50%	(3) 5%	(4) 5%	(5) 10%	(6) 10%	(7) 25%	(8) 25%
Longterm	0.04866 [0.02120]**	0.05143 [0.02310]**	0.04214 [0.01220]***	0.04053 [0.01248]***	0.04254 [0.00907]***	0.0382 [0.00852]***	0.03064 [0.00702]***	0.02826 [0.00713]***
Personal controls		Y		Y		Y		Y
Region	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Decade	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	518	506	1065	1047	1836	1804	3095	3034
R-squared	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 7: The impact of tenure length on Postrelatives – IV estimates

Window Size

	(1) 2.50%	(2) 5%	(3) 10%	(4) 25%	(5) 25% (w/Prerel)	(6) 25% SY	(7) 25% SY
Longterm	0.0725 [0.06558]	0.04802 [0.03802]	0.0375 [0.02542]	0.06252 [0.02140]***	0.05031 [0.02589]*	0.04687 [0.01565]***	
Total Tenure							0.03078 [0.00966]***
Prerelative					0.12522 [0.02492]***		
Personal controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Region	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	State	State
Decade	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Year	Year
Vote margin quartic pol.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	506	1047	1804	3034	3034	3034	3034

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

All regressions include a quartic polynomial on Vote margin.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Checking identifying assumption

Table 8: Check assignment is random (raw comparisons)

Vote margin windows

	2.5% window			5% window		
	Lost	Won	Diff p-value	Lost	Won	Diff p-value
Year of entry	1887.90	1885.48	0.415	1888.88	1885.00	0.074
Age at entry	44.68	43.88	0.323	44.72	43.82	0.117
Age of death	71.00	71.18	0.874	70.90	71.51	0.409
Female	0.80%	0.75%	0.951	0.42%	0.51%	0.829
College graduate	63.35%	60.67%	0.532	60.59%	60.03%	0.855
Outsider	42.23%	44.94%	0.535	43.61%	42.18%	0.64
Previous public office	86.85%	78.28%	0.01	82.60%	80.27%	0.127
Military	29.48%	29.96%	0.905	28.09%	31.63%	0.21
Lawyer	59.59%	66.28%	0.12	56.69%	61.07%	0.151
Farmer	6.53%	4.21%	0.248	6.16%	6.23%	0.962
Observations	251	267		477	588	

Checking identifying assumption

Table 9: IV estimates for Longterm on each observable

	Longterm coefficient	P value
Postrelative	0.046729	0.005
Business	0.009038	0.618
Female	0.000725	0.932
College Graduate	0.00619	0.888
Outsider	-0.030839	0.541
Previous public office	-0.038659	0.253
Age at entry	-0.672196	0.351
Age at death	1.232645	0.22
Military	0.023096	0.554
Farmer	0.006314	0.714
Lawyer	0.019407	0.255

Note: IV-RD estimates on 25% Vote margin window with quartic polynomial on Vote margin, state and year fixed effects and standard errors clustered at state level.

(V) Impact of previous relatives on a legislator's profile

- Having previous relatives is strongly correlated with many important characteristics
- We run regressions examining the impact on:
 - Chamber of entry, previous experience, gender, college degree, outsider, tenure

Table 10: Impact of having Prerelatives on characteristics of entrants

Dependent Variable	(1) House	(2) Age of entry	(3) Pre. public office	(4) College degree	(5) Outsider	(6) Female
Prerelative	-0.07503 [0.01842]***	-0.50866 [0.35166]	-0.05641 [0.01849]***	0.14033 [0.01805]***	-0.03102 [0.02218]	0.02492 [0.00795]***
Year Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
State Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	8765	8765	8765	8765	8765	8765
R-squared	0.1	0.15	0.04	0.16	0.19	0.09

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 11: Impact of previous relatives on congressional careers

	(1) Longterm	(2) Longterm	(3) Total tenure	(4) Total tenure
Prerelative	0.00995 [0.01974]	0.02084 [0.02001]	0.0706 [0.14075]	-0.04164 [0.13742]
House		0.2181 [0.02055]***		-1.03206 [0.14718]***
Age of entry		-0.00663 [0.00058]***		-0.08639 [0.00657]***
Previous public office		0.05972 [0.01084]***		0.52768 [0.08598]***
College degree		0.03864 [0.01351]***		0.17706 [0.06927]**
Outsider		-0.01875 [0.01073]*		-0.15024 [0.07615]*
Female		-0.02124 [0.03688]		-0.35644 [0.22569]
Year Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
State Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	8765	8765	8765	8765
R-squared	0.1	0.14	0.17	0.22

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

(VI) Political & institutional factors in dynastic transmission of power

(a) Congressional Committee Rank

- We examine the impact of having previous relatives on the initial committee rank a House representative gets.
- Rank is a revealed preference measure (Groseclose & Stewart AJPS 1998)
 - From 0 (highest rank) to 1 (lowest rank)
- 1890-92 seen as turning point in professionalization of committee assignments (Katz & Sala, APSR 1996)

Table 12: Impact of Previous Relatives on Initial Committee Rank

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Relatives	-.014 (.011)	-.0145 (.012)	-.0442 (.0137)***	-.0427 (.0143)***
Post-1890 * Pre-Relatives			.0772 (.0175)***	.0731 (.0175)***
Personal Controls	N	Y	N	Y
State Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	8426	8214	8426	8215

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level. Data excludes individuals who entered through the death of a family member.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

(VI) Political & institutional factors in dynastic transmission of power

(b) Political Competition

- Is more political competition associated with a lower probability that an individual with prerelatives enters Congress?
 - Regression: Prerelatives on how competitive the state's political environment is
- We use a political competition index derived from the composition of the ***state legislature***
 - Measure goes from -.5 (least competitive) to 0 (most competitive)
 - Data begins in 1878 until the present

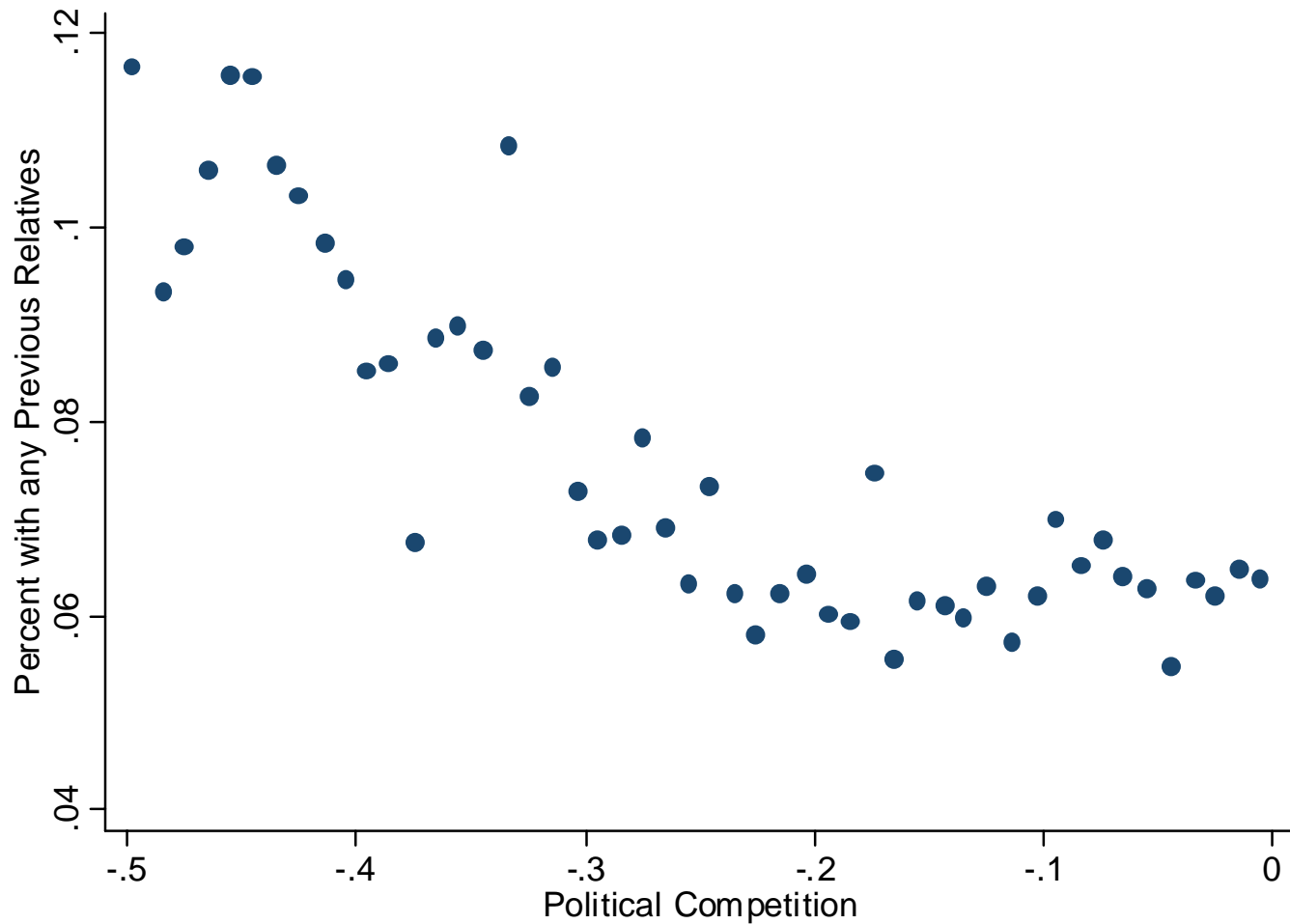
Table 13: Previous relatives and political competition

	Dependent variable: Prerelatives			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Political Competition	0.1851 (.074)**	.1986 (.0747)***		
Political Competition ^ 2	.535 (.1639)***	.5464 (.1667)***		
20th-40th Percentile of Political Competition			-.0181 (.0174)	-.0179 (.0186)
40th-60th Percentile of Political Competition			-.0378 (.016)**	-.0383 (.017)**
60th-80th Percentile of Political Competition			-.0351 (.0167)**	-.0347 (.0176)*
80th-100th Percentile of Political Competition			-.0303 (.0174)*	-.0286 (.019)
Year Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
State Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Excluding first 30 years of statehood	N	Y	N	Y
Observations	6417	6139	6374	6096

In brackets, robust standard errors clustered at the state level. Data excludes individuals who entered through the death of a family member.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Figure 5: Predicted impact of political competition on prerelatives



Conclusions

- More political power (longer tenure) associated to higher chance to have a postrelative in power
- IV-RD approach suggests causal interpretation, so shocks to power held by a family have persistent effects
- Suggests that self-perpetuating forces act on composition of the political class

Conclusions

- Luck at birth (and afterwards) matters in politics. Maybe a reflection of delegation to public spirited, or best and brightest, but
 - “Elite” legislators have less public office experience, and no longer careers
 - “Elite” legislators less prevalent under stronger political competition
 - Upon entry, “elite” legislators went from more to less powerful inside House when ranking (based on committee assignments) became more associated to policy expertise
- Future research: a lot, especially work on transmission channels and family links