A Puzzle of Candidate Recruitment: Candidate Pairings and Competitive Congressional Elections

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Abstract: In spite of the impressive literature on congressional campaigns, there is still much to be learned about these elections and the role of the candidates themselves in shaping outcomes. Because general election campaigns in the United States are usually match-ups between two candidates, understanding the conditions that produce more or less competitive outcomes requires observing pairs of candidates together, an approach we have rarely seen in previous studies. Accordingly, we set out to evaluate which candidate characteristics make a difference when we examine campaigns' dyadic structure. Results show that differences between candidates in race, gender and educational background can make a difference in the outcome of a contest, and certainly the margin of victory. Nothing is as consistently decisive as differences in previous office-holding experience. Having political experience is so fundamental to a challenger's prospects that our attention is directed to the puzzle of why so few challengers emerge having accumulated such experience.

The modal study of the impact of candidate quality on election outcomes examines the independent effects of candidate attributes on that candidate's vote share. But does this approach adequately capture the impact of candidate attributes on election outcomes? This paper argues that candidate characteristics make a difference to election outcomes when we examine them as part of campaigns' dyadic structure. Because general election campaigns in the United States are usually match-ups between two candidates, understanding the conditions that produce more or less competitive outcomes requires looking at pairs of candidates together. The impact of candidate characteristics on voters is bound to be conditional upon the particular pairings of candidates who are periodically interacting while campaigning against one another over a period of months. For instance, candidates with previous political experience are widely considered to be of higher quality with a greater chance of competing closely and winning, but the underlying theory is that a candidate's political experience matters relative to the other candidate's experience, not in isolation. Consequently, analyses that do not include competitors' differences on measures such as candidate quality provide an incomplete picture of campaigns and elections. Understanding how candidate attributes may or may not be influential on election outcomes, conditional on the comparative characteristics of competitors, offers important insight on how and when candidates stand out from broader local and global forces that shape elections.

From the standpoint of voters, candidates' background traits provide descriptive cues suggesting how politicians might behave if elected. These characteristics send informative signals beyond whatever limited policy statements candidates may utter during the campaign. Some of these signals are easily observable from viewing one candidate independently, such as their race, ethnicity, age, and gender. Other characteristics may become salient and consequential only when set alongside the characteristics of the opposing candidate. For many voters, the information carried by readily

apparent candidate characteristics may be the only foundation for judgment on Election Day (Hayes 2010; Koch 2002; McDermott 1998; 1997; Jacobsmeier 2015). As a result, candidate characteristics can play an important role in determining election outcomes. Identifying how voters react to assorted pairings of candidates over a series of election cycles furthers our understanding of what attributes voters find most revealing and informative.

Generalizations derived from research about how candidate traits matter in competitive relation to each other also serve the important purpose of informing candidate recruitment. Though there is an important element of self-starting, or self-recruitment, in contemporary U.S. elections, political parties and their aligned interests are vitally interested in recruiting and financing the most competitive possible candidates (Herrnson 2015; Seligman 1961). Even if a candidate is a self-starter, unless they are also self-financed, they must seek the support of party elders and party-friendly groups, backing the latter are under no obligation to supply, or to supply in quantity. Even the most entrepreneurial candidates still depend upon networks of party-linked associates to advance their political ambitions (Herrnson 2009).

Party operatives, for their part, do not live in a world of delusion. Given the importance of political party control in the legislative branch, discovering and recruiting candidates who can match-up well to rivals is a major focus of strategic study. Political strategists are well aware of the substantial advantages to incumbency, they see that congressional reelection rates are high, and that seats typically do not open up through retirement in sizable numbers. Perhaps because the number of hotly contested races in the usual cycle is small, there is a great deal of attention directed toward them (Maisel and Stone 2014). Anything that can be done to exploit an incumbent's weakness will be energetically pursued, including recruiting candidates whose characteristics will match-up favorably against the officeholder.

Although district characteristics surely matter to the structure of competition produced in them, there is a broad class of districts can be either competitive or not, depending upon the qualities of candidates. Not surprisingly, a small cadre of experts has grown up around the enterprise of forecasting congressional elections, with regular updates and attentive nationwide followings in the business, interest group and journalism communities (e.g., *The Cook Political Report*, *The Rothenberg Political Report*, and *Hotline/National Journal Rankings*). Presumably there would not be a market for this specialized knowledge if election outcomes were entirely predictable based on district composition alone.

Strategic recruitment also matters inasmuch as incumbents lose their reelection bids regularly enough to believe that it is not accidental. These seat changes are regularly helped along by political tides of electoral sentiment (Jacobson 1989). In 2014, for example, ten Democratic and three Republican incumbents lost. In 2012, ten Democratic and seventeen Republican incumbents lost to challengers, though this higher turnover is also partly the result of redrawn districts. These outcomes coincide with a long trend in the erosion of incumbency advantage (Jacobson 2015). Even more abundant examples attest to the competitiveness of seats that open up due to retirement, even though they may not have been competitive under an incumbent's influence.

There are bound to be limits on just how much candidate qualities matter to competitive elections, even with the most optimal combination of political experience, longevity in the district and fitting demographic and educational characteristics. Seats in many single-party districts are impervious to a general election challenge except under the most extreme circumstances. The defeat of scandal-plagued William Jefferson (D-LA) by Republican Joseph Cao in 2008 was one of these infrequent instances. Notably, Cao lost the very next election in this overwhelmingly Democratic New Orleans district, and it's unlikely that too much other than the political party of his opponent mattered. The upshot is that no political scientist will argue that candidate qualities are the sole factor in shaping

election outcomes, or even the overriding factor, and we do not disagree. However, candidate qualities do matter in ways that are subject to social science generalization, and they might make enough of a difference to decide some elections. Our thrust, then, is to evaluate the significance of Republican and Democratic candidate characteristics on election outcomes when those traits are considered, not individually, but in the context of the competitive dyadic circumstances of a campaign. Founded on a collection of detailed data on *all* candidates across seven election cycles, from the full range of competitive and non-competitive races[1], we explore which characteristics matter, and under what circumstances. To guide our investigation, we construct a foundation for hypothesis testing on a long tradition of research we only have space to abridge in the following pages.

The Power of Incumbency

Any account of the success of candidates running in congressional elections must reckon with the vaunted power of incumbency in maintaining inertia in the membership of the legislative branch (Kazee 1983; Fiorina 1977; Carson and Roberts 2013; Jacobsen 2015). There are few competitive races in any given congressional cycle and the reelection rates for House members who seek reelection are routinely upwards of 90% (Jacobson and Carson 2015; Erikson 1971; Jacobson 1983, 1987; Gelman and King 1991). However, incumbency is not wholly determinant as scholars have pointed out that legislators may strategically retire when they are not confident in their reelection chances (e.g., Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2004; Wolak 2007; Theriault 2008), which in turn may inflate reelection rates. In addition, incumbents are defeated frequently enough to result in legislators perceiving themselves to be vulnerable and "running scared" (Mayhew 1974).

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[1] We do exclude from consideration elections in which a candidate is unopposed, or the few in which a candidate is contested by a third-party challenger. Our focus is also on those races in which Republicans are in contests against Democrats, not top-two primary candidacies of the same party as in California, or in Louisiana runoff elections.

Although an electoral edge is consistently conveyed by incumbency, the advantageous impact is not uniform across election settings. There is variation among incumbents and the degree of competition they face in their reelection bids. Most incumbents win, but not all. Even among winning incumbents, not all win by the same amount. Variation in the electoral advantage of incumbency is generally attributed to differences in incumbent quality, which is conceptualized in terms of competence and integrity (e.g., McCurley and Mondak 1995; Mondak 1995; Stone et al. 2010; Cox and Katz 1996), although it is more frequently operationalized in terms of electoral security (i.e., percent of vote received in last election) or seniority. The critical insight from these studies is the recognition that not all incumbents are equally safe and therefore some will face a competitive challenger. Moreover, some incumbents are not challenged at all. In these cases, one cannot evaluate the power of incumbency when there is no contest to examine. Previous research is surprisingly vague on how these uncontested seats are treated in the literature on incumbency effects, specifically whether they are included in empirical analyses. It is likely that their inclusion would bias estimates of incumbent power upwards, which introduces some uncertainty as to the magnitude of incumbency power.

In contests where there is no incumbent legislator running, two high quality candidates are likely to compete for the seat. There is strong empirical evidence that open seat races not only attract higher quality candidates (i.e., those with previous political experience), but also tend to be more costly and more competitive (Abramowitz 1991; Wrighton and Squire 1997; Gaddie and Bullock 2000). Although open seat contests do not include an incumbent, they provide an important opportunity to examine the dynamics of candidate pairings and test our hypotheses regarding the relative advantages gained with specific match-ups of candidate traits.

The robust evidence in the scholarly literature that incumbency matters gives way to examinations of *why* incumbency matters. Some scholars point to the institutional resources and advantages that sitting Members of Congress enjoy, including franked mail, constituency service, name

recognition, and media coverage. Indeed, there is also evidence that these benefits of incumbency shape how voters decide who to vote for in congressional elections, most notably due to incumbents' use of the media and voters' reliance on name recognition (e.g., Prior 2006; Schaffner 2006; Kam and Zechmeister 2013).

The consensus in the literature, however, is that incumbent legislators' principal advantage comes from discouraging quality candidates from challenging the legislator. The classic notion of strategic politician theory (Jacobsen and Kernell 1983; see also Black 1972) posits that high quality candidates will choose not to run against incumbent legislators because of the myriad advantages enjoyed by the incumbent and will instead rationally postpone their ambitions until a seat opens up. One implication of this theory is that the logic is reinforcing as incumbents face lower quality challengers, which increases the odds that the incumbent wins, which, in turn, increases the odds that high quality challengers will not run against incumbents and so on. Evidence of the strategic nature of decisions to run for office are abundant, including frank admissions from interviews with potential challengers (Stone et al. 2004). Moreover, the association between incumbency and challenger quality has been pronounced since the late 1800s with the exception of the period from 1946-1964 (Carson, Engstrom, and Roberts 2007; Carson and Roberts 2013).

New research, however, suggests that the strategic deterrence of incumbency may not be as powerful as conventionally thought. The logic of incumbency scaring off challengers rests on candidates making decisions as strategic, rational actors, but this is a strong assumption. While many candidates are rational actors, it is likely that some are not – or at least that some candidates sometimes make "irrational" decisions. Recent work by Ban, Llaudet, and Snyder (2015) takes up this issue and examines whether estimates of the scare-off power of incumbency reflect differing levels of strategic behavior among high- and low-quality candidates; however they find no evidence of an upward bias in their assessment of incumbency in state legislative races. Other efforts to expand our understanding of the

power of incumbency have focused on distinguishing between the "scare off" power of incumbency and the advantages of party incumbency, and find that in close elections, the effects of strategic deterrence are quite modest (e.g., Hirano and Snyder 2009; Hall and Snyder 2015).

More generally, candidates' decisions about when to run are not solely determined by incumbency, but also are affected by factors independent of the incumbent. Candidates may make decisions for reasons that appear irrational when viewed through the lens of incumbency but nevertheless quite reasonable when factoring in personal or family considerations. To the extent, then, that incumbency alone does not determine potential challengers' decisions to run or the outcome of elections, it is quite logical that Members of Congress run scared. Focusing on candidate traits separate of incumbency, therefore, helps to make sense of the gap between objective assessments of incumbents' electoral safety and incumbents' own sense of vulnerability. It is this distinctive view of campaigns as pairings of candidates that allows for the examination of incumbent and challenger traits together, which more closely approximates how voters and the candidates themselves experience a campaign.

If we pivot from the perspective of the incumbent to that of a potential challenger or the extended party network looking to recruit candidates, are there certain types of candidates who would make a race more competitive? The role of candidate traits (aside from incumbency) has largely focused on the concept of candidate quality. In efforts to define what makes a higher quality candidate, scholars have examined the importance of previous political experience, typically gauged by whether a candidate has held elected office before. Scholars have also looked at candidates' ability to raise money since the rising costs of House campaigns increase the importance of fundraising skills (Abramowitz 1991; Maestas and Rugeley 2008). Related research on congressional candidacy focuses on the descriptive characteristics of the candidate pool and the underrepresentation of female, minority, and working-class candidates (e.g., Mansbridge 1999; Gay 2002; Pantoja and Segura 2003; Pearson 2010; Carnes

2012). The lack of descriptive diversity among those running for Congress focuses scholarly attention on two complementary questions: first, what motivates individuals to run? And second, what role does formal recruitment from parties and the extended party network (including interest groups, donor networks, etc.) play in recruiting potential candidates? Scholarship that takes up the question of who chooses to run often focuses on the differences in how men and women perceive becoming a congressional candidate and the different reactions they encounter (e.g., Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010a, 2010b; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Fulton et al. 2006; Palmer and Simon 2006; Lawless and Pearson 2008). Other scholars have studied the candidate recruitment process more generally, carefully documenting the role of parties and the interest groups and activists who are aligned with each party (e.g., Hernnson 1986; Kazee and Thornberry 1990; Masket 2007; Hassell 2015).

Despite the extensive literature, there is still much to be learned about congressional campaigns and the role of the candidates themselves in shaping outcomes. With the exception of whether an incumbent is running for reelection, there has been little attention to the identity, strengths, and weaknesses of the opposing candidate. Failing to consider the match-up (or dyad of candidates) limits our ability to explain the impact of candidacies on election outcomes because a comparison between two candidates is the typical scenario faced by voters (Banda 2015).

Theories of Candidacy

Candidate characteristics when compared against one another may augment the level of competition through two mechanisms, though in general terms these are not mutually exclusive forces. First, there is the prospect that voters are attracted to candidates who exhibit opposing, or at least, contrasting, characteristics to those they see in the other candidate. On the basis of this *candidate contrast theory*, divergent characteristics would serve to make a seat more competitive than it would be otherwise. Rather than running a male challenger against a male incumbent, there is a strategic

advantage to be obtained, *ceteris paribus*, by running a female challenger. Or if an opposition candidate is aged, it might be advantageous to support the nomination of a younger challenger, highlighting their energy and fresh ideas. In these circumstances, competition is enhanced by the capacity to draw distinctions.

A recent version of this contrast strategy was articulated in a *New York Times* op-ed by David Axelrod, President Obama's chief political strategist, saying that elections are shaped by the perceptions and style of an incumbent officeholder.[2] In the search for a replacement, voters are interested in finding someone who has traits dissimilar to the present occupant of the office. Although Axelrod has the presidency firmly in mind, a logic of contrast may apply to down ballot races as well. The foundation for candidate contrast theory lies in the conditions that make identities salient. A particular candidate characteristic is likely to be relevant to political choice if it is invoked as a salient identity in an election context. Salience is enhanced by contrast or divergence. Hence, a female candidate's gender is more likely to be relevant to politics when she is running against a man, than when she is running against a woman. A considerable body of research has found that men and women respond differently when they have the opportunity to cast a vote for a woman (Zipp and Plutzer 1996; Smith and Fox 2001; Brians 2005; Dolan 2008). Women may experience greater electoral success when they can build their candidacy around their identity as women, presumably an easier task when they are running against male opponents. Analogously, candidates who are older may have an easier time highlighting their experience as a qualification and turning it to their advantage when they are running against candidates who are markedly younger. With race and ethnicity, the logic is that the district's racial and ethnic majority will likely make it easier on candidates representing that majority when an opposing candidate

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[2] David Axelrod. "The Obama Theory of Trump." *New York Times* January 25, 2016.
http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/opinion/campaign-stops/the-obama-theory-of-trump.html?_r=0
Accessed 3/11/16.

is a member of the racial/ethnic group in the minority. Racial identity becomes more salient to choice in situations of contrast, according to theories of racial polarization (Bullock 1984, 239).

Distinct from the candidate contrast theory of candidacy, in which characteristics that are different from an opponent are thought to be electorally advantageous is the *similarity convergence theory,* in which a display of characteristics similar to the opponent is thought to augment a challenger's competitive position. A district electorate may be thought of as having a predilection for specific types of candidates that they tend to elect repeatedly. Any constellation of characteristics contributing to the inference that a candidate is nearer to this ideal-type will provide them with a competitive edge over candidates who are further away. For example, if a district has long exhibited a preference for electing white Republican men over age 60, the best quality challenger will be a similar Democratic man – e.g., a candidate who can seemingly minimize the distance between himself and his competitor, perhaps maintaining only the distinction of party affiliation.

Party affiliation is still the overridingly important consideration in vote choice such that a disadvantageous party label may not be overcome even by an otherwise optimal list of candidate attributes. But the convergence theory reasonably posits that voters are drawn by and attentive to the familiar because it elicits trust. When evaluating a candidate, knowing that they have competently held previous (local) office, for instance, is frequently a source of confidence to voters that the candidate is capable. For the electorate that values political experience, two candidates with previous elections under their belt will produce a more competitive outcome than just a single candidate with experience facing one without. In these cases, it is the convergence of like attributes that contributes to a hard-fought contest, not the pairing of dissimilar personal histories.

These theories of candidacy do make clear predictions and they are falsifiable. Surely it is possible that candidates with contrasting levels of political experience produce a more competitive outcome than those with similar political backgrounds. Candidates of differing ages may wind up more

competitive with each other than those of similar age. Very possibly some candidate attributes enhance competitiveness when they are the same across dyads, while others require contrast to produce close contests. Finally, across a large series of elections it is also possible that neither contrasting nor similar characteristics matter because particular traits are simply ignored by voters, or are swamped in their impact by myriad other sources of variation in election outcomes.

Data and Methods

We began by gathering extensive data on the sex, age, race/ethnicity, political experience, occupation and educational background of all House candidates back to 2002. This history was readily available for office-holders and for the majority of challengers. Background on some third-party candidates was difficult to find, but our main focus here is on the contenders from the two major parties. Cases in which two Democrats or two Republicans faced each other, as in the California contests that allow the top finishers in the open primary system to be from the same party, were excluded from this analysis. We also excluded Louisiana runoff elections in which the top two finishers in November were both from the same party. Uncontested elections were also excluded since they involved no campaign and no candidate comparisons.

As for the sources of challenger information, we started by merging several main data sources, followed by manual collection using less traditional sources on a candidate-by-candidate basis. First, the *Federal Election Commission* was the data source for both primary and general election results, and the incumbency/challenger status for each candidate (Incumbent, Challenger, Open Seat). Second, candidate biographical background data from *Project Vote Smart* were collected using web scraping tools for as many candidates as this source contained. To be sure, *Project Vote Smart* is far from complete, but the quantity of information available was quite consistent across electoral cycles and

provided the needed background on approximately 50% of all House challengers back to 2002, and most incumbents.

For the many challengers who did not list information on *Project Vote Smart*, or that offered incomplete information, we labored to complete the data on a candidate-by-candidate basis. Web based sources ranged from more limited candidate biographical data aggregators like *Vote-USA.org* and the Wall Street Journal's *Election 2012 Candidate Project*; archived images of candidate websites accessible through the Library of Congress project, *Archive.org*; contemporary news articles from Google searches and Lexis-Nexis containing district or candidate-specific profiles; and, for more recent cycles, candidates' personal, professional, or official campaign social media sites when made publicly available, including *Linked-In* and *Facebook*. While the dataset contains significant amounts of information for the majority of third-party candidates, the manual data collection process was focused mainly on gathering the background details for candidates from the two major parties. The culmination of these processes yielded complete district dyads of Democrats vs. Republicans for approximately 2,600 of 3,045 possible candidate pairings (435 seats x 7 cycles, from 2002 to 2014). The data are organized with cases (rows) as district-years, and candidate attribute variables are separated out by party candidate.

Finally, the existing body of research makes clear that congressional election outcomes are responsive to a range of constituency characteristics independently of the particular candidates who happen to be running in a given cycle (Herrnson 2015; Jacobson and Carson 2015; Campbell 2015). We include district-level constituency variables from the *American Community Survey's* 5-year estimates for the age, racial composition and income of congressional districts. District level voting for the major party presidential candidates for 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 (adjusted, when necessary, for redistricting) was gathered, although for years in which there was major district change from the decennial redistricting process many seats would have to be dropped from the data. To avoid this significant loss of data, we chose to use the estimates of Republican and Democratic safety and district competitiveness from the

spring months of the *Cook Political Report* for each election year.[3] The party safety ranking is a seven-point scale ranging from safely Democratic to safely Republican, with the mid-point indicating the most competitive seats. The competitiveness ranking folds this indicator into a four-point scale with the highest value indicating the most hotly contested seats and the low values indicating the electorally safe seats (for both parties). Taken together, these indicators of constituency composition and partisan inclination provide necessary statistical control variables, and allow us to assess alternative explanations in our hypothesis testing.

Our dependent variable is the *competitiveness of the House election* for each general election contest. Higher values indicate a more competitive outcome.[4] Because lower values on this measure are reflective of a non-competitive race that may indicate that one member of the dyad is either safe, or hopelessly overmatched, we also examine the paired comparisons for their impact on the *Democratic percentage of the vote*. The same results for the Republican percentage of the vote are not included here but will be provided by the authors upon request.

The explanatory variables consist of combinations of candidate characteristics by sex, race, age, educational background, and political experience. Sex of the candidate is measured as an indicator variable that takes a value of one when the candidate is a female. Similarly, race is measured as a dichotomous variable indicating that the candidate is white (or not). Age is initially captured by the year of birth and then transformed into two indicator variables: one for older candidates (indicating age 60 or older) and one for younger candidates (age 40 or younger). Educational attainment is gauged by whether a candidate held at least a four-year college degree (or more).[5]

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[3] We relied upon both contemporary and archived records of *Cook Political Report* competitiveness and seat safety estimates from the website: http://cookpolitical.com/, accessed July 2, 2016.

[4] 100- |(% Rep - % Dem)|

[5] Approximately 2/3rd of all candidates (including incumbents) have a four year college degree and 1/3rd of candidates do not. It is possible that someone might have a four year college degree but not report it in their biography. It is also possible that some candidates erroneously or fraudulently report on their experience and credentials, or even their age. Cases of resume inflation have resulted in a number of recent high profile

Political experience is measured here in a more nuanced and detailed way than the
conventional dichotomous variable. First, we capture whether the candidates have a background of
serving in 1) local, 2) state, and/or 3) federal office as elected officials; the maximum score (3) indicates
that a candidate has served as an elected official at all three levels, whereas a minimum score (-3)
indicates that a candidate has never been elected to a local, state or federal office. This
operationalization improves on previous measures, which conceive of political experience as a quality
that is either present or absent, and usually fail to differentiate between the levels of government at
which political experience is gained. Our measure recognizes that some candidates have multiple office-
holding experiences (as well as the fact that in some cases, we do not know the candidate's level of
political experience but do not view that as a reason to exclude the case). Additionally, given the
research establishing the unique importance of experience, the absence of office-holding experience is
considered in this formulation *to count as a deficit* in a candidate's background, in the way that the
absence of military or legal experience may not.[6] Descriptive statistics for these measures are set forth
in Table 1 and Appendix Table A.1.

Standard cross-sectional time-series regression methods[7] are employed to estimate the impact
of each candidate combination on 1) competitiveness and 2) the Democratic vote share. Among the
candidate dyad variables, one of the possible outcome categories serves as the excluded baseline for
comparison. Several measures capturing electorally relevant features of the district constituency serve
as control variables for the analysis, including the *Cook Political Report's* estimate of Democratic or

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disqualifications and resignations from candidacy. Our effort was to code the reported experience and
qualification items according to the view of an informed but not omniscient voter or journalist making a
reasonable effort to compare candidate qualifications but not having bottomless resources to investigate
someone's educational record, work history, or reported birthdate and age.

[6] Authors deliberated among themselves on using dummy variables to indicate levels of office holding experience,
i.e., separate measures for local, state and federal. Estimating the models with these measures does alter the
results in small ways, though with the cost of greatly multiplying the number of variables included in each model.
Also the argument here is that the *accumulation* of past political experience, in a straightforward additive way, is
what contributes to a challenger's competitiveness as well as an incumbent's safety, not simply having held either
a local, state or federal level office.

[7] We utilize the *xtreg* routine, in Stata™

Republican leaning of the district, and the competitiveness rating for the coming general election. The

percentage of constituents who are African American, the median family income of residents, and the

percent of those 25 years or older in the district holding a four-year college degree are also included. To

account for the variable currents associated with individual election years, we include indicator (1,0)

variables for each cycle. These serve to capture the impact of prevailing surges for one party or the

other, sometimes associated with mid-term reactions to presidential job performance (Campbell 2015;

1991; Kernell 1977).

The approach of using dyads results in a large number of possible combinations, even when

measures are simplified to 1,0 indicators, creating challenges for hypothesis testing. Approaches in

which all possible combinations are included (except a baseline category) include a very large number of

explanatory variables, enhancing the likelihood of tests that are falsely positive. In any 20 tests, there is

an alarmingly high 64 percent chance of observing a statistically significant result at the p≤.05 level, even

if none of the tests are significant. With large scale multiple testing, the probability of making a Type I

error (also called the "false discovery rate") rises fast as candidate combinations are added.

A related estimation issue is that candidate characteristics are often correlated with one

another. The multicollinearity introduced by multiple tests will inflate standard errors, perhaps leading

to the conclusion that some characteristics do not matter to the election when they actually do (Type II

error). Age is likely to be related to political experience, for example, but when both are included in the

same model the results may well lead to the conclusion that age doesn't matter, while political

experience does. In spite of this prospect, however, we include the contrasting levels of past political

experience as an important explanatory variable, since so many previous studies have indicated that this

is apt to be directly and consistently important to election outcomes no matter what else might matter.

In our results, then, some explanations should take precedence over others because they are thought to

be more immediately related to the outcome than others.

After presenting the results in Tables 2 and 3 for all dyads, controlling for Republican and Democratic incumbency, we also disaggregate the analysis into estimates for those contests in which Democratic incumbents are present (N=1,165), when Republican incumbents are present (N=1,185), and for open seats (N=274). These auxiliary models help to clarify the impact of dyadic combinations in the frequent circumstances in which challengers face well-entrenched incumbents, as well as in the less common circumstances in which a seat is vacated through retirement, resignation or mortality. The number of elections to fill open seats is considerably smaller than those in which an incumbent is running, costing us precision in our estimates and inflating the standard errors of explanatory variables. Nevertheless, the advantage to separate estimation by seat status is to approach greater clarity in the exposition of the results.

Competition, Vote Share and Incumbency

An election that is perfectly competitive between the two major party candidates scores a 100 on the measure employed. Competitive general elections are not in abundance in most House election cycles. As the descriptive statistics in Table 1 show, the average level of competition across the seven election cycles is only 69.9 (σ=17) when we exclude the uncontested elections. Even after the uncontested races are eliminated, the average House election is being settled by 30 percentage points, a direct expression of the value of incumbency. The resulting distribution shows a modest left skew, but insufficient to justify data transformation. Across all 2,608 cases in the data, 181 (7 percent) were decided by 5 or fewer percentage points, and at the other extreme about six were minimally contested resulted in victory margins in excess of 90 percent. The distribution of values for the Republican and Democratic percentages of the vote are largely normal, with only a few cases lying in the extreme tails, while the Democratic mean is positioned at 50.1 (σ=17.5), and the Republican mean is 47.9 (σ=17.4). The higher mean for Democrats is a reflection of the fact that their districts are more densely populated

and vote more one-sidedly Democratic than the Republican districts vote Republican (see summary statistics in Table 1).

[Table 1 about Here]

The value of incumbency in contested elections over this period is best revealed in Table 2, the f model tests for the impact of the demographic characteristics along with examining education. For Republican challengers facing Democratic incumbents, b= -4.5 (p≤.001), indicating that those contests are about 4.5 percentage points less competitive compared with the baseline of open seat races. Republican incumbents do not see the same level of safety, however, as their seats are not less competitive than open seats once uncontested elections are eliminated and other factors are taken into account. Aside from these estimates of impact for the value of incumbency, there are several other candidate combinations that stand out clearly for their magnitude. For educational background, the estimates in Table 2 show that cases in which less educated competitors are involved on either side, or on both sides, are less competitive than those where both challengers have at least a 4-year degree. Second, when Republican women are competing against Democratic men, the outcome is about 3.7 points less competitive than when both candidates are men. Third, match-ups featuring Democrats who are experienced running against Republicans who are not are about 6 percentage points less competitive than elections featuring two experienced candidates. Elections in which neither candidate has past political experience are also less competitive (b=-4.93; p≤.001).

When both major party candidates are minorities, whether they be Latino or African American, it drops the level of competition considerably (b=-6.86; p≤.001) compared to districts where two white candidates are running. This finding suggests that the districts where you are likely to find two minority candidates vying for a seat probably have a history of one-party dominance. White Republicans running against non-white Democrats generally result in lopsided outcomes (b=-4.46; p≤.001), likely because the typically minority-held Democratic districts contain large and loyal minority constituencies. Other

candidate combinations are less influential overall but could shape the outcome in more closely contested races, or perhaps in combination with other aspects of candidate comparison. Political experience is probably most notable in that Republicans lacking experience running against Democrats with experience significantly alters the election outcome over two candidates who are both running having some political background. The political experience contrast is an unquestionably powerful influence on competitiveness, so much so that once political experience differences are considered, other candidate characteristics are of less importance in evening the playing field.

[Table 2 about Here]

There is ambiguity in the results for competition inasmuch as non-competitive match-ups are often mismatches in which one candidate wins by a large margin, e.g., 20 or more percentage points, while the other may have barely made up any ground campaigning since their initial announcement. The results we present in Table 3 replace competitiveness with the Democratic percentage of the vote and provide additional insight into the candidate dyads that consistently fail to produce competitive outcomes, while offering specifics on how they fail. Aside from the well understood fact that Democratic incumbency augments the Democratic vote (b=10.10; p≤.001), while Republican incumbency depresses it (b=-2.65; p≤.001), several other findings stand out. First, for political experience, when Republicans and Democrats have dissimilar backgrounds, there is a significant change in the ultimate vote share. The results also suggest that when matched-up against each other, Republicans with some political background can count on winning by an average of 2.1 percentage points (p≤.001) over Democrats lacking political experience. When the reverse circumstance holds, Democrats benefit even more, augmenting their vote share by 3.94 (p≤.001) over cases where the candidates are evenly matched in experience.

Second, for race, controlling for incumbency, Democratic white candidates do better up against a minority Republican (b=1.47, p≤.01) than they do when paired against a white Republican – note the

important caveat that this result arises after controlling for the racial composition of the district. In the few instances where Republican minorities are matched up against Democratic minorities, the Democratic percentage of the general election vote is also about 2.6 (p≤.001) percentage points higher (see Table 2), again having set aside the uncontested seats held by black and Latino Democrats. Plainly, Republicans do not do better when fielding minority recruits against minority Democrats than they do when they run white candidates in these situations.

When Republican men are matched up against Democratic women, Democrats do better, on average (b=1.65, p≤.001), then they do when both candidates are men. Age differences between candidates do not matter to a statistically significant degree, at least as they are measured here, and once other variables are taken into account (see Table 2).

Turning to the impact of the educational and occupational match-ups on the Democratic percentage of the vote, the biggest difference is when the candidates are unequally matched in their educational background. When Democrats have a 4-year college degree, but Republicans do not, the Democratic percentage jumps by 2.3 percent. When the reverse is true, the Democratic percentage drops by 2.7 percent. Business, legal, and military experiences do not matter once education and political office holding are accounted for as alternative explanations.

How to Defeat a Democratic Incumbent

The results from the models presented in Table 2, described above, provide an overall picture of the combinations that produce competitive outcomes and higher Democratic (Republican) votes controlling for incumbency. But what are the best match-ups when the aim is to defeat a Democratic incumbent? For that, the additional models for contests including Democratic incumbents, Republican incumbents, and for open seats, offer some guidance (see Table 3). Collectively, they serve as a sobering reminder that incumbents are hard to defeat under any circumstances. At the more conservative level

of statistical significance we rely upon, a contest in which the Republican has less experience than the Democratic candidate does not reduce the level of competition, however, when the Democrat has less experience than the Republican, competition drops by 4.32 percentage points (p≤.001). For contests in which both candidates are amateurs see a lower level of competition as well (b=-3.70; p≤.001).

[Table 3 about Here]

Beyond political experience, there are a few combinations that can make a difference. Republican women running against Democratic male incumbents find themselves in more competitive races (b=4.62; p<.001) than those in which both candidates are men. Notably, the results for the Democratic percentage of the vote underscore that Republican women compete better against Democratic incumbents than Republican men do, shaving about two percentage points off the Democratic vote (b=-2.22; p≤.001).

Results for Democratic incumbents show that when the Republican challenger's political experience exceeds Democratic political experience, the Republican does not gain appreciably. On the other hand, if the Democratic candidate has more experience than the Republican, the Democratic candidate is awarded with a 4.02 (p≤.001) gain in vote share, reflecting past research on the value of political experience (Maestas and Rugeley 2008). But when both candidates are light in past political experience, that tie works to the Democrat's advantage (b=3.55; p≤.001). We see hints in these results that Democrats who are well-educated (e.g., with law and professional degrees) perform better when their Republican opponents lack a similar level of education (b=1.77; p≤.001). The primary lesson from these results is to underline the importance of recruiting a Republican challenger who has held political office, and can approximately match the educational background of the opposition. Recruiting a Republican woman to run against a Democratic incumbent can make some difference. Other candidate comparisons are of marginal importance once political qualifications, gender and education are taken into account.

How to Defeat a Republican Incumbent

Unsurprisingly, Democratic incumbents are pretty secure, and truly threatening, competitive, match-ups are infrequent. In our results for Republican held seats, we see parallels. Just as Democratic incumbents are most vulnerable to Republicans with political backgrounds, the same is true for the Republicans. Republican incumbents are more vulnerable when they are running against experienced Democratic challengers than when they are challenged by amateurs. Democratic challengers who are better educated can run more competitive races against Republican incumbents than those who lack a college degree. As in the case of Democratic incumbents, when both candidates lack much political background, competition is diminished. Democratic challengers who are racial/ethnic minorities tend to do poorly against white Republican incumbents ($b=-2.95$; $p \leq .001$)

[Table 3 about Here]

Republican men find themselves facing a more competitive challenge when facing Democratic women than they do when running against Democratic men ($b=1.46$; $p \leq .04$ for competition; $b=.89$; $p \leq .03$ for Democratic percentage) although these estimates do not quite reach the more demanding level of statistical significance required here. White Republican incumbents are considerably more secure when they are being challenged by minority Democrats, controlling for the racial composition of the district. White Democrats do much better challenging white Republican incumbents, producing an outcome that is 1.8 ($p \leq .001$) points more Democratic. As with Democratic incumbency, matching the incumbent's political experience and education level is a plus in the effort to unseat GOP House members.

How to Win an Open Seat

Although there aren't a large number of open seats across these six election cycles, our results in our final table do offer some direction (see Table 4). In the models for competitiveness, political

experience does not appear to make much of difference, except marginally so in cases where Democrats are experienced and Republicans are not (b=-4.24 p≤.08). But when we examine the Democratic percentage of the vote, we see that political background is undeniably advantageous to the candidate who has more of it. When Republicans exceed Democrats in political experience, it reduces the Democratic percentage of the vote by 5.9 (p≤.001) points. When the Democratic challenger enters a race with the edge in political experience, it yields a 7.6 (p≤.001) point gain in vote share, compared to a contest in which candidates are matched in experience. In the fight for open seats, then, Republican political experience counts for a little less than Democratic political experience.

The same can be said for educational background. When Democrats are well educated and Republicans are not, this benefits the Democratic candidate by 5.88 percentage points (p≤.003) in the model for Democratic vote share. But when the opposite is true, the Democratic candidate loses about 5.3 percentage points (p≤.006). The only other notable effect here is that when both candidates are age 40 or under, the Democratic candidate benefits considerably (b=11.6; p≤.001). Of course this also implies that Republicans gain substantial vote share when both candidates are aged (over age 60).

[Table 4 about Here]

Finally, it's safe to infer based on the results in Table 3 that open seat contests are shaped more by district demographics and the party bias of districts as measured by the congressional election handicappers than they are from any combination of candidate characteristics. These outcomes are also contingent on the socioeconomic and racial composition of districts and their attendant political balance (see Table 4).

As far as what parties and campaigns can do to better position themselves, the key to competing for an open seat is to recruit a candidate with at least the same amount of political experience, and a similar educational background, as their opponent. When facing a minority Democrat,

Republicans will do five points better, on average, by running a white candidate. Nothing evaluated in this series of hypothesis tests displaces the importance of political experience and education.

Discussion

What have we learned? First, political experience matters most consistently to fielding competitive candidates, and there is nothing new about that. But what surprises us is that in a vast number of electoral circumstances and settings, political experience is about all that matters to general election outcomes. There is a large literature about specific candidate characteristics written mainly from the perspective of the descriptive underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups. We certainly do not deny the importance of research on the representation of minority groups, women, the elderly, vocational and economic groups or any other interest. Our research, however, may provide insight into why many groups are poorly represented in the first place. What we have shown is that the descriptive characteristics of candidates don't matter very much to election outcomes once political experience is taken into account. This is probably why we see the persistent underrepresentation of women and minorities in the U.S. House. Men and white candidates are not always singled out as preferable by voters for their gender and race, but men and white candidates have accumulated a great deal more political experience than their opponents, regardless of party. Descriptive underrepresentation in the national legislature is perpetuated by the same biases that structure the accumulation of political experience elsewhere in the political system (see Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010a). Our findings also suggest that recruiting outsider female and minority candidates is not a sure-fire shortcut around the basic problem that positions that serve as a stepping-stone to Congress remain dominated by white males. Until more women and minorities accumulate the appropriate background, they are unlikely to be competitive for higher office, but when the experience imbalance is addressed, we should expect women (and minorities) to be competitive and make impressive gains in Congressional representation.

Having set forth a broadly true generality, there are important exceptions where candidate recruitment can move beyond finding someone with office-holding experience. The Democratic Party appears to have a broader range of competitive options in the search for candidates. Republican incumbency does not have the same protective value that Democratic incumbency does. What this means is that Republican incumbents are vulnerable to a range of Democratic challengers, not just politically experienced ones.

As for the theories of candidacy, when it comes to both political experience and educational attainment, contrast is important to gaining (or maintaining) an electoral advantage while convergence of similar backgrounds promotes competition. In cases of unequal political experience, the candidate with the edge is consistently the one who has held office facing an opponent who has not. The exact nature of this advantage is unclear. Is it superior local name recognition? Is it a superior fundraising network? Or campaign organization know-how? Our data cannot answer this specific question, but we speculate that it is all three. Candidates entering elections with any or all of these enhancements will make a striking contrast to those who have none of them, and the difference will improve their chances of winning. On the other hand, not having experience at any level of government is a real negative that a candidate will find difficult to overcome.

Turning to other candidate attributes, whether you will run a more competitive race by being similar to your opponent or distinct from them depends on the positive or negative valence of specific characteristics. Office-holding experience and educational qualifications are usually of positive valence to voters and competitiveness is more likely when a candidate can match their opponent on these traits.

For attributes such as race and gender, voters' attitudes about these characteristics can be either positive or negative, and sometimes possession of a contrasting characteristic can make a candidate more competitive. For instance, contrast apparently stands out to voters when Democrats have nominated women to run against Republican male incumbents. Such contrasts award Democrats a

small electoral edge that Democratic men do not obtain. Female gender is a positively valenced attribute for Democrats when running against Republican men that being male is not. For most of the characteristics we examine, however, it is the sharing (convergence) of that characteristic across the two candidacies that yields a more competitive general election outcome. Out-parties should recruit candidates who have similar backgrounds to the incumbent office holders they are trying to defeat, especially when it comes to political experience. The incentive for in-partisans is to secure their seats by using incumbency advantage to scare off prospective challengers who are similar to themselves in qualifications and experience, then turn to highlight the difference between incumbent and challenger background when less qualified candidates enter the arena.

Our research has been hampered by the typical challenges confronted by the study of cases organized by dyad. Combinations of characteristics quickly multiply, necessitating very large data collections to present convincing tests. Future research will add additional cycles of candidate data onto the seven we have encompassed here, perhaps increasing the number of pairings by 50 or 100 percent, and augmenting the statistical power of our tests. Another drawback is that we have not examined characteristics beyond dyadic comparisons by seat status, supposing, for example that a white female with a local office-holding experience might be a superior competitor to a white male lacking this experience. These comparisons are surely worthwhile, but multiply combinations to such an extent that they must await the collection of a substantially larger dataset than we have gathered here, perhaps for elections more numerous than the number provided biennially by the U.S. House.

Some may be discouraged by the conclusion that political experience is the linchpin to running a competitive election and that so much about a candidate simply doesn't make an appreciable difference once past office-holding is considered. But we think this conclusion serves to focus our attention with great precision on the preconditions for obtaining political experience. If the competitiveness of challengers is assured, first and foremost, by having some office-holding experience, then why do so few

ever reach that level of experience? Specifically, political science requires more knowledge about the circumstances that generate such a small assemblage of capable and willing candidates. To promote more competition, the solution is not to disparage political qualifications as an important entrée for higher office, but to see that more candidates emerge who meet this standard. A great deal of weight has also been placed on the advantages enjoyed by incumbents, but less has been said about equipping more citizens to obtain the political experience that would enhance their competitiveness as challengers. Moving forward, the study of elections might do well to steer greater emphasis toward the responsibility of motivating citizens to seek the lower level offices that will enable more competitive match-ups for higher level offices.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables, All Cases		
Variable Name	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Competitiveness of Two-Party Vote, High Values = Closeness	69.94	17.66
% Democratic Vote General	50.11	17.49
Spring Cook Rating For Competition	1.34	0.77
Spring Cook Partisan Forecast	.13	2.76
Cycle 2004	.14	0.35
Cycle 2006	.15	0.35
Cycle 2008	.15	0.35
Cycle 2010	.16	0.36
Cycle 2012	.14	0.35
Cycle 2014	.13	0.34
Democratic Incumbent	.45	0.50
Republican Incumbent	.45	0.50
Median Family Income (Thousands)	62.64	17.15
% Black Population in CD	11.69	14.10
% 4-Year College Graduates in CD	17.27	5.59
Open Seats	.11	.31
R and D are Both Female	2122	.17
D is Female R is Male	.29	.46
R is Male D is Female	.09	.28
Both R and D are Under 40	.01	.10
D is Over 60, R is Under 40	.05	.22
R is Over 60, D is Under 40	.04	.19
D and R are Nonwhite	.05	.22
D is White, R is Nonwhite	.07	.25
R is White, D is Nonwhite	.16	.37
D Bachelor's Degree, R None	.18	.38
R Bachelor's Degree, D None	.10	.31
R and D Lack Bachelor's Degree	.04	.19
R Has Political Experience, D None	.34	.48
D Has Political Experience, R None	.32	.47
R and D Lack Political Experience	.13	.33

Table 2. Effects of Candidate Demographics and Experience on Competitiveness and Vote Share, 2002-2014

All Contests

Variable	Competition	Democratic Vote Share
Democratic Incumbent	-4.50** (0.83)	-10.10** (0.49)
Republican Incumbent	0.08 (1.30)	-2.94** (0.73)
Neither Candidate Political Experience	-4.93** (1.91)	0.18 (0.53)
D Political Experience, R None	-5.79** (0.74)	3.94** (0.43)
R Political Experience, D None	-1.07 (0.72)	-2.11** (0.42)
Both Candidates Female	2.60 (1.41)	0.37 (0.83)
D Male, R Female	3.65** (1.02)	-1.32 (0.60)
R Male, D Female	-0.56 (0.64)	1.65** (0.38)
Both Candidates Young	5.46 (2.34)	2.15 (1.38)
D Young, R Old	-2.03 (1.21)	0.59 (0.71)
R Young, D Old	-1.48 (1.06)	0.69 (0.62)
Both Candidates Racial Minority	-6.86** (1.30)	2.60** (0.77)
R White, D Minority	-4.46** (0.74)	0.07 (0.44)
D White, R Minority	-1.84 (0.96)	1.48* (0.56)
Cook Competitiveness Rating	6.65** (0.34)	
Cook Party Forecast	0.96** (0.23)	1.06** (0.13)
Neither Candidate Bachelor's Degree	-4.88** (1.53)	0.17 (0.90)
D Bachelor's Degree, R None	-2.61** (0.66)	2.14** (0.39)
R Bachelor's Degree, D None	-2.97** (0.80)	-2.55** (0.47)

District Percent Black	-0.31** (0.03)	0.29** (0.02)
District Percent 4-Year College Degree	-0.66** (0.11)	-0.40** (0.07)
District Median Income	0.26** (0.04)	0.828** (0.04)
Year Dummy - 2004	-0.02 (0.84)	1.50* (0.49)
Year Dummy - 2006	1.57 (0.83)	5.70** (0.49)
Year Dummy - 2008	-1.15 (0.90)	5.18** (0.53)
Year Dummy - 2010	2.11 (0.88)	-2.65** (0.52)
Year Dummy - 2012	0.44 (0.92)	3.46** (0.54)
Year Dummy - 2014	1.07 (0.98)	-0.48 (0.58)
Constant	65.32** (1.91)	38.27** (1.04)
R-Squared	0.27	0.56
N	2608	2608

Estimates from random-effects generalized least squares regression; Standard errors in parentheses
*$p < .01$, **$p < .001$.

Table 3. Effects of Candidate Demographic and Experience Match-ups on Competitiveness and Vote Share, 2002-2014

Dependent Variable	Competition		Democratic Vote Share	
Variable	*Race With Republican Incumbent*	*Race With Democratic Incumbent*	*Race With Republican Incumbent*	*Race With Democratic Incumbent*
Cook Competitiveness Rating	5.28** (0.64)	6.24** (0.63)		
Cook Party Forecast	0.55 (0.41)	0.50 (0.40)	1.86** (0.18)	1.42** (0.17)
Neither Candidate Political Experience	-3.92** (1.14)	-3.70* (1.29)	-2.00* (0.66)	3.55** (0.73)
D Political Experience, R None	-0.10 (1.90)	-4.32** (0.80)	0.70 (1.09)	4.02** (0.44)
R Political Experience, D None	-1.88* (0.74)	1.61 (1.88)	-1.86** (0.42)	-0.36 (1.07)
Neither Candidate Bachelor's Degree	-0.72 (1.79)	-3.99 (2.26)	-0.99 (1.03)	2.04 (1.29)
D Bachelor's Degree, R None	1.72 (1.15)	-2.60** (0.70)	1.14 (0.66)	1.78 (0.39)
R Bachelor's Degree, D None	-2.92** (0.78)	1.27 (1.90)	-1.88** (0.45)	-0.88 (1.09)
Both Candidates Female	4.31 (2.06)	0.54 (1.78)	2.37 (1.19)	-0.99 (1.01)
D Male, R Female	2.04 (1.48)	4.62** (1.41)	1.55 (0.86)	-2.22* (0.81)
R Male, D Female	1.46 (0.70)	-2.14 (1.11)	0.89 (0.40)	1.13 (0.64)
Both Candidates Young	4.61 (3.88)	4.30 (3.17)	3.49 (2.22)	-0.68 (1.81)
D Young, R Old	0.39 (1.09)	1.98 (3.53)	0.48 (0.63)	-0.92 (2.01)
R Young, D Old	-1.18 (2.30)	-0.71 (1.03)	-0.36 (1.32)	0.55 (0.59)

Both Candidates Racial Minority	0.43 (3.23)	-10.54** (1.56)	2.74 (1.87)	6.38** (0.90)
R White, D Minority	-2.95** (0.81)	-9.63** (1.40)	-1.80** (0.47)	6.04** (0.81)
D White, R Minority	2.28 (1.91)	-2.17 (0.98)	0.67 (1.10)	1.34 (0.56)
District Percent Black	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.36** (0.04)	0.11 (0.04)	0.20** (0.02)
District Median Income	-0.14 (0.06)	0.34** (0.05)	0.07 (0.03)	-0.14** (0.03)
Year Dummy - 2004	3.99** (1.03)	-3.18* (1.06)	2.74** (0.58)	1.31 (0.60)
Year Dummy - 2006	10.74** (1.01)	-7.11** (1.06)	6.54** (0.57)	3.71** (0.61)
Year Dummy - 2008	8.52** (1.17)	-8.24** (1.11)	5.45** (0.67)	4.38** (0.63)
Year Dummy - 2010	-1.52 (1.21)	5.41** (1.06)	0.08 (0.69)	-4.73** (0.60)
Year Dummy - 2012	7.21** (1.19)	-3.52* (1.21)	4.65** (0.68)	1.01 (0.69)
Year Dummy - 2014	1.44 (1.26)	3.46* (1.29)	0.89 (0.72)	-2.40** (0.73)
Constant	53.01** (2.64)	70.97** (2.89)	32.42** (1.31)	53.59** (1.46)
R-Squared	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.49
N	1185	1165	1185	1165

Estimates from random-effects generalized least squares regression; Standard errors in parentheses

*$p < .01$, **$p < .001$

Table 4. Effects of Candidate Demographic and Experience Matchups on Competitiveness and Vote Share, 2002-2014

Open-Seat Races

Dependent Variable	Competition	Democratic Vote Share
Cook Competitiveness Rating	6.59** (1.14)	
Party Forecast	2.06 (0.86)	-1.39* (0.46)
Neither Candidate Political Experience	-2.91 (2.69)	-2.54 (2.03)
D Political Experience, R None	-4.24 (2.44)	7.56** (1.82)
R Political Experience, D None	-0.55 (2.21)	-5.90** (1.68)
Neither Candidate Bachelor's Degree	-17.62 (7.91)	-6.99 (5.84)
D Bachelor's Degree, R None	-5.46 (2.47)	5.89* (1.99)
R Bachelor's Degree, D None	-2.08 (2.57)	-5.29* (1.92)
Both Candidates Female	-2.57 (4.64)	5.49 (3.19)
D Male, R Female	0.22 (3.20)	1.67 (2.42)
R Male, D Female	0.70 (2.08)	1.09 (1.54)
Both Candidates Young	0.08 (5.00)	11.61** (3.63)
D Young, R Old	-7.03 (5.29)	4.98 (3.62)
R Young, D Old	-2.10 (4.77)	-2.57 (3.44)
Both Candidates Racial Minority	1.91 (4.62)	6.79 (3.63)
R White, D Minority	-5.43 (2.24)	2.27 (1.62)
D White, R Minority	-2.99 (4.14)	-2.33 (3.13)
District Percent Black	-0.31** (0.08)	-0.31** (0.07)
District Median Income	0.26 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.08)

Year Dummy - 2004	-4.84 (3.30)	-3.93 (2.48)
Year Dummy - 2006	-2.78 (3.32)	5.92 (2.46)
Year Dummy - 2008	-3.49 (3.32)	3.92 (2.42)
Year Dummy - 2010	-6.82 (3.08)	-2.73 (2.27)
Year Dummy - 2012	-5.95 (3.09)	3.74 (2.25)
Year Dummy - 2014	-4.93 (3.56)	-1.78 (2.53)
Constant	73.24** (5.23)	46.35** (3.32)
R-Squared	0.18	0.55
N	274	274

Estimates from random-effects generalized least squares regression; Standard errors in parentheses
*p < .01, **p < .001