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Avenues to success:  
Electoral strategies and ambition in the  
Brazilian chamber of deputies

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# **Avenues to Success: Electoral Strategies and Ambition in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies \***

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## **Abstract:**

In the second consecutive election for the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, the majority of incumbents (75% in 1998 and again 75% in 2002) decided to run for reelection and at least 70% of them in both elections were successful, suggesting thus it would be incorrect to ignore static ambition as the main target of Brazilian legislators. It also raises doubts about the assertion that incumbents use their posts to pursue their post-legislative careers. However, this number also suggests that not all legislators seek reelection, indicating that it is also incorrect to assume all of them are driven by similar motivations. In their attempts at career survival, incumbents may also run for higher offices (Senator, Governor, Vice-governor). A minority still, may run for state level offices (regressive ambition).

Given that static and progressive ambition are the two main types of career choice in Brazil, we focus on the factors that influence the career decision and electoral success of those who choose to run for reelection and those who choose to run for higher-level offices, i.e. senator and governor. We use data recently collected from the 2002 elections.

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## **Introduction**

This paper investigates what are the factors that influence the electoral success of Brazilian Federal Deputies in the 2002 elections. Differently from previous studies that focus exclusively on Federal Deputies' reelection bids (Ames 1995, Samuels 2000, 2001, Pereira and Renno 2002) or career paths (Samuels 2003, Leoni, Pereira and Renno, forthcoming), this paper focuses on the factors that influence career choice and electoral success of those who run for reelection as well as of those who attempt higher level offices, governor and senator. Two main explanations of electoral success, one set spurring from the motivations generated by the institutional framework of the Brazilian electoral system and the other from the internal rules of the Chamber of Deputies, will serve as the overall framework for the theory proposed.

The first explanation mentioned above is composed by local level political factors. What these variables have in common is a specific geographic restriction to their scope. That is, these variables refer to the performance of incumbents on issues that directly affect their electoral strongholds and that are related to how their vote is distributed throughout the electoral districts. Previous studies of elections in OLPR with at-large districts indicate that such institutional context generates incentives that lead to a personalized vote, in opposition to voting for political parties, and to a high saliency of constituency pressures in incumbents' electoral calculus (Ames 1995, Samuels 2001a).

The second group of variables refers to the involvement of the incumbent in national issues, his/her participation in Congress, and how the President and political parties affect elections. Figueiredo and Limongi (1995) have forcefully argued that the rules inside the Chamber of Deputies condition the performance of Federal Deputies and lead to a greater influence of national, centralizing political factors in the Brazilian political

system. According to them, the personalistic influence of the electoral system is mitigated by the rules inside Congress. If so, such centripetal force propagated by the Internal Rules of the Chamber of Deputies might also have an impact in the electoral strategies of incumbents by increasing the importance of national political factors in legislative elections.

This article provides evidence that local level factors, such as patterns of vote distribution, pork barrel and campaign expenditures are more decisive elements in the electoral success of incumbents who seek reelection and higher office. The influence of performance inside the Chamber and links to national level actors is restricted to affecting incumbents' career decisions.

### **Two Rival Institutional Settings? Electoral Rules and Chamber's Standing Orders**

The rules of the open-list proportional representation system, with at-large districts, are seen as creating incentives for politicians to nurture a personal vote. These are the traditionally explored explanations for electoral success in previous studies (Ames 1995). They refer to issues such as electoral vulnerability, patterns of voting distribution, campaign finance, and the use of pork barrel politics. Open-list PR rules tend to increase the links of politicians with specific municipalities and to make deputies independent from the pressures of their parties, since Deputies themselves are solely responsible for their electoral success.

On the other hand, rules inside the Chamber of Deputies seem to make Deputies less independent and more prone to the influence of national political issues and actors than they first appear, when only the open list PR rules are considered. Deputies appear to use the resources made available by the office to increase their visibility back home. In fact, deputies are willing to follow party leadership indications in roll call votes and to invest in

becoming active national figures as a strategy of strengthening their electoral capital. In other words, incumbents do receive some incentives to construct a career in Brasilia.<sup>1</sup>

We suggest that the Brazilian political system can be characterized neither as a purely decentralized nor as a purely centralized system. In fact, it condenses these two different and antagonistic forces. While, on the one hand, some features such as the electoral rules decentralize the political system, on the other, the internal rules of the decision-making process inside Congress, the constitutional powers of the executive branch, and its capacity of selectively distributing political and financial resources act towards centralizing the system. In fact, the electoral rules provide incentives for politicians to behave individually while the internal rules of the Congress, the president's power to legislate, and the centralization of pork distribution by the president, render legislator behavior extremely dependent on loyalty to the party and presidential preferences.

Distributive policy, understood as policies with diffuse costs and specific benefits (Lowi 1963), is an area where this duality becomes especially evident. In Brazil it is the executive that has exclusive power to initiate the annual budget. Deputies are granted the right of presenting individual budgetary amendments benefiting localities as they see fit but aiming at maximizing their chances of political survival.<sup>2</sup> Parties have almost none, if any, influence on the decisions made by Deputies regarding both how they allocate their

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<sup>1</sup> We borrow the idea of a career in Brasilia from Fenno's brilliant discussion of a Washington career and home career (1978). In Brazil, however, these two moments are less separated than in the US. Since political careers are less stable in Brazil (Samuels 2003), it is not unusual that sophomore and even freshman Deputies gain national prominence by holding important offices inside the Chamber.

<sup>2</sup> Actually, the rules regarding amendment have varied considerably in the past years. In 1992 and 1993 only individual legislators could propose amendments. In 1993 collective amendments by 'state bloc' (*bancadas estaduais*) and other committees were permitted. For the annual budgets of 1994 and 1995 four types of amendments were accepted: standing committees, political parties, state bloc and legislators. Since 1995, under Resolution nº 2/95-CN, amendments can be made by standing committees, regional bloc, state bloc, and by individual legislators.

amendments and the approval of these amendments.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Samuels claims that governors are more effective than national party leaders in influencing Federal Deputies' allocation decisions (2001a).

However, the approval of the budgetary amendments by the floor does not guarantee that federal funds will be automatically disbursed. It is the executive branch that is entitled to determine which amendment will be executed and when, making the budget contingent on the amount of available resources in the national treasury. This gives the President and party leaders that support the President, a very impressive bargaining instrument, which is commonly used as a form of influencing the voting behavior of Deputies (Pereira 2000). Even though Deputies can claim credit for approving all of their amendments, their success in distributing pork is contingent upon the will of the executive branch, which takes into consideration legislators' record of support for presidential legislative proposals on national issues as an indicator of loyalty and an important factor influencing the liberation of public funds for individual budgetary amendments.

Hence, deputies are set quite free by the electoral system with at-large districts but are quite limited by their relations with other political actors, most importantly party leaders and members of the executive branch. These two dynamics create incentives and constraints that mold the electoral strategies deputies adopt.

### **Variables and Hypotheses**

Variables related to local issues include the vote distribution of candidates, which refer to levels of domination and competition of the incumbent's main electoral stronghold,

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to recognize however that party leaders have an important role negotiating legislators' demands with the executive. Party leaders bridge backbenchers with the executive branch.

campaign expenditures, and the influence of pork barrel. These variables are directly related to the incentives created by the electoral system.

National variables include the participation of the incumbent in floor and committee activities, in proposing and approving legislation, in the hierarchical status of the Deputy in the Chamber, represented by the positions he/she holds, and by his record on roll call votes. In summary, all of these factors are indicators of the investment incumbents make in carrying out their terms (Hall 1996). We will test if such investment pays off in the elections.

### *Local Variables*

The first two variables analyzed refer to the effect of the spatial distribution of incumbents' vote and the level of competition inside the most important electoral base of the incumbent in the 2002 election – that is, in the municipality he/she received more votes. CONCENTRATION02 represents the sum of votes obtained in the municipality where the incumbent got most votes divided by the total amount of votes that she/he got in the whole state (electoral district). Thus, this variable is an indicator of the extent in which strategies of concentration/dispersion of votes inside the at-large districts increase electoral success of incumbents.

Our model also takes into account a measure of local competition and domination. The variable COMPETITION02 represents the number of votes a candidate received in the municipality he/she was most voted minus the total votes of the candidate with the highest vote in this municipality other than the candidate under study. So, if the sign of this difference is positive it means that the incumbent was the most voted one inside his/her bailiwick. If the sign is negative, then another candidate received more votes inside the

electoral stronghold of the incumbent. Incumbents with positive values in this variable face less competition than those with negative values.

In previous studies, those who concentrate their votes and those who face more competition are seen as more vulnerable and hence have bleaker chances of getting re-elected (Ames 1995, Pereira and Renno 2003). We argue, following such studies, that concentrating votes will have a negative impact in electoral success for those who run for reelection and even more so for those who run for higher offices and need to get a higher number of votes, scattered throughout the state, to be elected. In summary, those who scatter their votes have more chances of winning.

We also included a variable that counts the effective number of candidates (NUMBER OF CANDIDATES) competing in the incumbents' municipality. Theoretically, one would expect that having more contestants at the municipal level is harmful for incumbents who rely on that municipality's vote. However, the fragmentation of vote between several candidates decreases the maximum amount of votes necessary to win an election. Hence, we expect that effective number of candidates should have a positive impact in electoral success.

We also computed a weighted measure of campaign expenditures for incumbents and include that in the equation. Samuels (2001) has made some very interesting claims about the role of money in Brazilian elections and we test such claims in the 2002 election by including in the model a variable that indicates the monetary value of each vote for all incumbents. Hence, the variable is the dividend of the total amount of campaign expenditures by the total amount of votes received by the incumbent. It is, therefore, a measure of cost of a single vote. Since campaign expenditures and the number of votes necessary to get elected vary by state, a measure of the cost of a vote for each deputy



increases the comparability of the results and is more appropriate than considering only the absolute value of the total expenditure. This form of measuring the impact of campaign finance is different from that applied by Samuels (2001), so we will avoid for now comparing our results to his. We choose to adjust expenditures by total vote, instead of adjusting by district magnitude, as does Samuels, because district magnitude of the entire district may play a secondary role in incumbents' definition of expending strategies. Since most incumbents tend to concentrate votes in specific localities, what really matters to incumbents is how they invest their money to maximize their votes in those localities. Hence, the operationalization of the campaign expenditure variable also takes into account how successful the incumbent was in translating money into votes.

Finally, a key factor related to local issues that influences how successful incumbents are in elections is access to pork barrel policies. PORK refers to policies that benefit specific localities – the main bailiwick (municipality) of the incumbent under study. This variable is measured as the share of the total value of all amendments presented from 1999 to 2002 that benefit the incumbents' electoral stronghold. PORK should have a positive impact in reelection success, but not necessarily in success when running for higher level. In such cases, incumbents need to garner votes from all over the state, and therefore, need to diversify the municipalities they allocate funds to.

#### *National Variables*

Two hypotheses about the effects of national level political factors will be tested. The first one refers to the participation of the incumbent inside Congress by presenting legislative proposals, actively participating in voting sessions and in committee activities. The second assesses the role of ideology and supporting the president in roll call votes. The

third refers to the role of the Executive branch in affecting the disbursement of funds through incumbents' budgetary amendments.

The first hypothesis tests if legislative activities carried out by the incumbent have an impact on the outcome of elections. We focus first on incumbents' investment in the presentation of policy proposals of all sorts at the floor (decretos legislativos, projetos de lei, projetos de lei complementar, projetos de resolução, emendas constitucionais). This is related to the set of law making initiatives of incumbents and we name this additive index of all his/her proposals as LAWMAKING INITIATIVES. This first index does not take into consideration if the proposals were approved or not by Congress. Incumbents can claim credit for attempting to pass legislation. The second variable that measures performance inside Congress is success in approving policy proposals. This variable is named LAWMAKING SUCCESS, and is also a count of the different types of legislation proposed by the incumbent that were approved by the Chamber. Differently from the first indicator mentioned above, this last index includes only the proposals that were approved. Since approval is much harder than just proposing a bill, this last variable should be more salient in incumbents' credit claiming strategies. A third indicator of participation in Congress regards incumbents' initiatives of requesting information. This variable is labeled INFORMATION REQUESTS. It includes all initiatives that are related to obtaining information, like requesting hearings, proposing investigation committees and proposing focalizing initiatives. These actions are clearly related to accountability enforcement aspects of a Federal Deputies' responsibilities. A fourth measure of legislative performance is participation in Committees. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES include presenting legislation proposals inside committees and demanding information inside committees. The difference between this variable and the previous ones is that this one is restricted to committee

participation. A fifth measure of performance is that of being the Rapporteur of a bill. Rapporteurs have a great amount of power because they mold the final format of main legislative proposals. Rapporteurs are responsible for adjusting the originally sent legislative proposal to the discussions that take place in committees. It is this final version of the law that will then be voted in the floor. Finally, we also control for the amount of time, in days, the incumbent held his position as Federal Deputy. In Brazil, incumbents can get leaves of absence to hold jobs in the bureaucracy at federal, state and municipal levels. Hence, the time each incumbent spends in office is not constant. This variable (DAYS) is the ratio of days in which the incumbent was the main office holder. The less the incumbent stayed in office, the less access he has to office resources. This variable should have a positive impact in getting reelected. It should also increase the likelihood of running for reelection. Incumbents who stay in office longer are probably more likely to attempt to return to office.

The second main hypothesis that will be tested at the national level is related to incumbents' patterns of voting in roll call votes. Since the executive branch holds the power of the purse in Brazil, voting in favor of the President's proposals is a way of obtaining access to the disbursement of funds. Hence, supporting the President may pay off electorally because incumbents that do so may have more access to pork. On the other hand, the 2002 elections saw very low levels of presidential popularity and candidates that may have been linked with the president may have suffered because of it. In fact, Lula da Silva's victory was accompanied by a huge victory of the Workers' Party in Chamber elections. Therefore, supporting the president in roll calls may not have had a positive impact in electoral success in 2002.

We are grateful to Eduardo Leoni who gave us his W-nominate measures for the 51st legislature. According to him, the first dimension of the nominate scale is strongly determined by the position of the president. Hence, the IDEOLOGY variable is an indicator of closeness between Federal Deputies votes in roll calls and the position of the president.

Finally, the last hypothesis related to national level politics is the mean level of appropriation of Federal Deputies budgetary amendments. As was said above, the executive branch disburses funds in an arbitrary fashion. The variable MEAN BUDGET is an indicator of how successful the incumbent was in getting moneys allocated by his/her budgetary amendments actually disbursed by the executive branch. It is a ratio of amount of money proposed in budgetary amendments disbursed by the executive. Deputies who are more successful in disbursing federal transfers should be more successful electorally.

### **Data and Analysis**

In the 2002 race, around 88% of all main office holders decided to run for some elective office. 75% of all incumbents ran for reelection, 10% ran for higher offices, i.e. governor, senator, vice-president, roughly 2% ran for lower offices (state deputy), and about 12% retired from office. Of those who ran for reelection, 70% were successful.<sup>4</sup> The rate of success of those who ran for higher offices was the exact inverse of those who ran for reelection; 30% were successful. This clearly indicates that running for higher office involves serious risks.

Given that running for reelection and for higher offices are the most common political career options made by incumbents, it is important to verify what are the factors that lead incumbents to decide to run for such offices. Table 1 contains the logit coefficients

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<sup>4</sup> This means that the retention rate in the Chamber of Deputies is of 52%. That is, only half of the incumbents returned to office in the new legislature.

for the different variables. Only variables related to performance in office are included in the model. Since those who retired have no electoral data for 2002, variables measuring electoral performance in 2002 cannot be included in the equation.

**Table 1. Logit Coefficients for choosing to run for Reelection and Higher Office.**

VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
RAPPORTEUR	.016	.019
IDEOLOGY	.322	.033
DAYS	5.190	.000
LAWMAKING SUCCESS	-.024	.741
LAWMAKING INITIATIVE	.008	.324
INFORMATION REQUEST	.003	.718
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES	.006	.353
PORK	21.230	.063
MEAN BUDGET	-.296	.576
Constant	-3.991	.000

N 492  
Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> 36%

Four variables differentiate those who run for reelection and higher offices from the ones who either retire or run for lower level offices. Being a rapporteur, ideology, days in office and pork barrel all affect incumbents' decision to choose a higher office. Incumbents who vote in favor of the president (measured by the ideology variable), who are RAPPORTEURS and who held office for a longer period tend to run for reelection or higher office. But the most decisive factor is being successful in disbursing public funds to specific localities.

On Table 2 we are able to include in the equation the variables that measure vote distribution and competition at the local level. The results help understand a bit more the factors that influence career choices. The dependent variable is a dummy indicating if the incumbent ran for reelection or ran for higher office (higher office = 1). When contrasting the choice of running for reelection from running for higher office, incumbents' choices are

affected again by their closeness to the president and by their pork barrel strategies. But now, they are also affected by the amount of time the incumbent held his/her position as main office holder, by electoral competition in his/her main bailiwick and by the number of candidates running in his/her electoral stronghold.

It is clear that those who are closer to the president tend to prefer to remain in the Chamber. Incumbents who run for higher offices tend to come from parties that are in opposition to the president.<sup>5</sup> Incumbents who spend more time in the office of Federal Deputy are also more likely to try to return to office, by running for reelection. Those who are successful in disbursing pork barrel to their electoral strongholds have strong incentives to run for reelection. Finally, the electoral variables have predictable impacts. Incumbents who are electorally safe in their most important municipalities, where the vote is shared by several candidates and, therefore, is fragmented, tend to run for reelection. Hence, if an incumbent dominates his/her electoral stronghold and the vote in that municipality is fragmented, the incentives for running for reelection are higher.

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<sup>5</sup> We have argued elsewhere (Leoni et al, forthcoming), that left wing parties, because they hold fewer gubernatorial posts, tend to have their most prominent legislative leaders running for gubernatorial office. This leads to a greater evasion of left-wing party members from Congress. José Genuíno, from the Worker's Party, who ran for governor of São Paulo, is a prime example of this phenomenon. He had been the most voted deputy in Brazil in the 1998 elections and would surely be reelected if attempted to do so in 2002. However, he was the Workers' Party best bet for the gubernatorial elections in São Paulo, and did in fact, come in in second place, loosing to the incumbent gubernatorial candidate.

**Table 2. Logit coefficients for choosing to run for Higher Office over running for Reelection.**

VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
RAPPORTEUR	.001	.371
IDEOLOGY	-1.102	.001
DAYS	-3.510	.087
LAWMAKING SUCCESS	-.085	.440
LAWMAKING INITIATIVE	.001	.857
INFORMATION REQUEST	.003	.796
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES	.009	.345
PORK	-17.878	.041
MEAN BUDGET	1.315	.185
COMPETITION02	-4.689	.000
CONCENTRATION02	-.769	.602
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	-.877	.000
CONSTANT	9.574	.000

N 397

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> 11%

We now focus on the determinants of electoral success. Table 3 contains all of the above variables and adds the campaign expenditure data. Results indicate that pork; all of the electoral variables and campaign expenditures are central explanations of electoral success. From the variables related to participation inside Congress, only requesting information also increases the likelihood of being elected.

Incumbents who are successful in transferring monies to their main bailiwicks, who are active in accountability-oriented activities in the Chamber and who dominate their bailiwicks, have greater chances of being reelected. In addition, in municipalities where the vote is distributed through various candidates, incumbents also have more chances of winning. On the other hand, campaign expenditures weighted by total vote, has a negative impact in electoral success. That is, incumbents who spend more per vote are less successful in getting reelected. Incumbents that fail in translating money into votes; who spend too much for a vote are less likely to win.

**Table 3. Logit coefficients for Reelection Success.**

VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
RAPPORTEUR	.002	.308
IDEOLOGY	.044	.793
DAYS	-.100	.947
LAWMAKING SUCCESS	-.029	.575
LAWMAKING INITIATIVE	.002	.621
INFORMATION REQUEST	.021	.081
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES	.000	.927
PORK	4.433	.070
MEAN BUDGET	.736	.165
COMPETITION02	.972	.034
CONCENTRATION02	-2.074	.008
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	.036	.010
CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES	-.098	.080
CONSTANT	-.055	.971

N 318

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> 11%

Table 4 contains the results of an identical model applied to electoral success in higher-level elections. Given that the total n is 49 for running for higher office, comparisons between the models applied in the distinct samples should be carried out with caution. Therefore, we simply attempt to describe how those who ran for higher office and won are different from those who lost. The obvious conclusion, after examining table 4, is that there are very few distinctions between those who win and loose higher office. The only variable that is statistically significant is campaign expenditure and it has a positive impact. In races for higher office, those who spend more per vote are more successful.



**Table 4. Logit coefficients for Electoral Success in Higher Office.**

VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
RAPPORTEUR	.006	.732
IDEOLOGY	2.567	.110
DAYS	2.291	.751
LAWMAKING SUCCESS	-.255	.636
LAWMAKING INITIATIVE	-.060	.333
INFORMATION REQUEST	.180	.329
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES	.001	.977
PORK	-3.320	.853
MEAN BUDGET	1.490	.747
COMPETITION02	19.298	.121
CONCENTRATION02	2.449	.490
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	1.117	.280
CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES	3.167	.092
CONSTANT	-28.733	.140

N 49

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> 79%

Finally, table 5 contrasts those who were victorious in attempts both at higher offices and at reelection. The goal is to evaluate if there are clear distinctions between incumbents who attempt to stay at the Chamber and those who win higher levels. Positive values in the difference in means for a specific variable indicate that the group who won reelection has higher values on that variable.

Incumbents who win reelection are different from those who win higher office in 3 aspects. First, those who win reelection tend to focus their participation in Congress in being rapporteurs. Those who win reelection appear to have been a rapporteur in a higher number of policy proposals. This is the only variable of performance inside congress that differentiates between those who win higher office and those who win reelection. When it comes to their performance in office, both groups exhibit practically identical performance.

The main differences are in fact in the electoral domain. Those who win reelection tend to dominate their most important bailiwicks. That is, incumbents who choose to run

for reelection are much more dependent on the electoral situation of their main municipality, than those who choose to run for higher office. This is expected because those who run for higher office must have a broader range of support throughout the state and not just in specific localities. To be elected for Federal Deputy, on the other hand, requires less votes and dominating a specific locality becomes more central. In addition, candidates that win higher-level offices face a more fragmented competition in their most important bailiwicks. This is so because those who run for higher office end up getting most of their votes in highly populated areas, usually state capitals. Those are also the areas where most other candidates also pick up votes.

Finally, the cost per vote for those who win reelection is higher than for those who win higher offices. Campaign expenditures translate more efficiently into votes in majority and plurality elections than in the open-list proportional representation ones. Even though successful candidates for higher office spend more in absolute terms than successful candidates for reelection, the latter also receive much more votes than the former. Therefore, the ratio of money per vote is higher for those who run for the Chamber. In other words, a vote for Federal Deputy costs more than a vote for Senator and Governor.

**Table 5. Independent Sample t test for Incumbents who won Reelection and who won Higher Office**

VARIABLES	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
RAPPORTEUR	5.282	278	.000	278.2491	52.68229
IDEOLOGY	-.291	271	.771	-.0901	.30966
DAYS	-.607	278	.545	-.0253	.04173
LAWMAKING SUCCESS	-.107	276	.915	-.0958	.89813
LAWMAKING INITIATIVE	.392	271	.696	6.0822	15.52699
INFORMATION REQUEST	.724	271	.470	7.7690	10.73327
COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES	.231	269	.818	2.9250	12.68489
PORK	-.343	280	.732	-.0082	.02392
MEAN BUDGET	-.485	280	.628	-.0382	.07875
COMPETITION02	2.200	276	.029	.2405	.10933
CONCENTRATION02	-.438	276	.661	-.0282	.06424
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	-3.145	272	.002	-13.5827	4.31850
CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES	5.987	275	.000	1.4094	.23541

## Conclusion

On this paper, we analyzed the factors that influence incumbents' career choice and electoral success, focusing on those who run for higher-level offices (senate and governorships) and those who run for reelection. We applied a theoretical approach that focuses on two distinct sets of incentives that may orient electoral strategies. The first set spurs from the performance of the incumbent in the Chamber and is related to his/her participation in the decision-making process of the Chamber regarding national level issues. The second set is based on local level pressures incumbents face when deciding to run and

during reelection. The former is highly determined by the centralizing rules inside the chamber whereas the second are influenced by the nature of the electoral system, especially the at-large open-list proportional representation districts.

Overall, incentives created by the electoral system are much more salient in affecting the electoral success of incumbents. Factors such as pork barrel, patterns of vote distribution, and campaign expenditures play a more central role in defining electoral success than the lawmaking initiative and success of incumbents. However, participation in the functioning of the Chamber and links with the Executive Branch cannot be totally disregarded, since they do affect incumbents' career choices. Tables 2 and 3 showed that being close ideologically to the executive branch and being present in the Chamber do affect career decisions. Nonetheless, even then, deciding to run for higher office and reelection is quite affected by factors related to local level pressures, such as electoral competition, number of candidates competing in a locality, and distribution of federal funds to specific municipalities.

We also find that incumbents who win higher office aren't so different from those who win reelection. A main, and interesting, difference is in the patterns of campaign expenditures. Incumbents who win reelection are less effective in translating expenditures into votes. Those who win higher office spend more in absolute terms, but also gain more votes. If we look back at table 3, we see that expenditure weighted by total vote has a negative impact in the electoral success of reelection candidates. This indicates that those who unsuccessful in translating expenditures into votes in their reelection bid are less successful. On the other hand, on the elections for higher offices, the more one spends in each vote, the higher the chances for reelection.

A future step of this research agenda is to combine data from 1998 and 2002 in the analysis of career choice and electoral success. The accumulation of data from different elections will allow for the elaboration of broader generalizations about election outcomes in new democracies.

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