How Valuable Is a Legislative Seat?
Incumbency Effects in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies[*]

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In many developing countries, national legislative seats are considered less valuable than (sub-national) executive positions. Even then, ambitious politicians may find a legislative seat valuable for two reasons: (a) as a *window of opportunity* for jumping to an executive office; or (b) as a *consolation prize* when no better option is available. Using a regression discontinuity design adapted to a PR setting, we examine these possibilities in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies between 1983 and 2011. In line with the consolation prize story, we find that marginal candidates from the Peronist party – which often controls the provincial governorship – are more likely to be renominated and serve an additional term in the legislature, but not necessarily to jump to an executive office. The effect is stronger in small provinces.

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In developed democracies, national legislative seats are often considered part and parcel of a successful political career, as reflected by both the static ambition and the high reelection rates of such officeholders (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Kendall and Rekkas 2012; André, Depauw and Martin 2015; Fowler and Hall 2017; Fiva and Smith 2018). But in many developing countries – and in some developed democracies like Italy – such legislative positions are much less valuable, as documented by the fact that national legislators are constantly trying to "jump" to subnational executive offices, like governorships or mayoralties (Jones et al. 2002; Samuels 2003; Pereira and Rennó 2013; Micozzi 2014a; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016; Kerevel 2015).

Even when politicians are not very interested in developing a long-term legislative career, however, they may find a national legislative office valuable for two reasons. According to the *window of opportunity* story, ambitious politicians who do not intend to develop a long-term career in the national legislature may nonetheless seek a legislative position as a stepping stone in the path towards a more valuable office. That is, executive positions may be easier to reach for those who already hold a national legislative seat, perhaps because this allows politicians to build ties with voters or party leaders (Micozzi 2009; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014). Alternatively, the *consolation prize* story posits that politicians may pursue a national legislative position because this represents the best of all *feasible* alternatives. Intuitively, competition for the most valued positions is harsher; politicians who try to attain any of such offices but fail – or who do not even try because they anticipate defeat – may well find that a seat in the national legislature is better than being left with nothing (Lodola 2009; Pereira and Rennó 2013; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016).

The case of Rosana Bertone, the governor of the Argentine province of Tierra del Fuego between 2015 and 2019,[1] illustrates both logics nicely. In 2001, just a 29-year-old provincial bureaucrat, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in a highly atypical election in which the most voted list won the two seats at stake with just 31.49 per cent of the vote. Had the second most

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[1] Bertone ran for a second term but was defeated in the first round of the 2019 election.

voted list obtained 441 additional votes (1.27 per cent), Bertone would have been left out of the Chamber. Four years later, she was promoted to the top of the party list, thus winning reelection easily, and she repeated in 2009. In 2011, while serving her third consecutive legislative term, she barely lost the gubernatorial election in the second round. Two years later she moved to the Senate, from where she finally jumped to the provincial governorship in 2015.

Bertone's story is of course exceptional; few Argentine politicians, and even fewer women – including former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and a handful of provincial governors – can show a comparable record. But if her success is out of the ordinary, her motivations seem completely unremarkable. As a young female bureaucrat with no previous political experience, in 2001 she probably could not aspire to anything better than the second position in the party list and hope that an exceptional result would place her in the Chamber of Deputies. Once there, she got reelected twice, but the fact that she first ran for provincial governor in 2011, sought a seat in the Senate after being defeated, and later exchanged it for the governor's mansion, strongly implies that she did not want to develop a long-term career in either Congressional chamber.

Taking inspiration from her story, in this paper we study systematically whether holding a legislative seat in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies can serve as a consolation prize, a window of opportunity, or both. We will never know whether the 441-vote difference in 2001 helped jumpstart Bertone's career. But we can examine whether candidates who, like her, barely managed to win a legislative seat became more likely to get reelected or develop a long-term political career than those who were left out by a handful of votes. Neither outcome is foreordained. Given the relatively limited resources provided by legislative offices in Argentina, a seat in the national legislature may provide little help for jumpstarting a long-term career even for ambitious politicians who try hard; for every Bertone, there may be several individuals who were left out of Congress by a whisker yet ended up developing a successful career afterwards. Holding a legislative seat may provide little help for obtaining reelection as a consolation prize, either. Romanian mayors (Klašnja 2015) and Indian, Japanese and Italian legislators (Uppal 2009; Ariga 2015; Golden and Picci 2015) have a

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zero or even negative incumbency advantage, meaning that bare losers are equally or even more likely to gain a new term than bare winners.[2] Whether this holds in Argentina is thus an empirical question.

Empirically, we employ a regression discontinuity (RD) design adapted to a proportional representation (PR) setting with closed lists to examine whether candidates who barely entered into the Argentine Chamber of Deputies developed a longer career than those who were barely left out. For members of the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ), which has often coincided with the governor's party, the results are consistent with the consolation prize story: bare winners are 37-49 percentage points more likely to be renominated within the next four years than bare losers, 26-28 pp. more likely to hold a legislative position in the future, and up to 36 pp. more likely to serve in any kind of elected position afterwards. In contrast, the window of opportunity story receives little support: the effect on the probability of serving in an executive position in the future is also positive – a 13-14 pp. increase in small provinces – but we do not have enough power to estimate it accurately. In contrast, for the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), estimated effects are both negative and large, though usually insignificant at conventional levels due to low power. We interpret this as resulting from a combination of two factors: internal party rules that place high hurdles for UCR incumbents who seek renomination (Caminotti, Rotman and Varetto 2011) and political dynamics that induce them to run for executive positions they are unlikely to win.

This work extends the existing literature in three ways. First, following recent interest in the long-term consequences of holding public office (Eggers and Hainmueller 2009; Querubín 2016; Fowler and Hall 2017), we examine the effect of winning a seat on a politician's long-term career. In line with the claim that a legislative position may not necessarily be perceived as a final destination, we also take into account the possibility that politicians may move between multiple

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[2]Evidence from close mayoral races in Mexico (Lucardi and Rosas 2016; Klašnja and Titiunik 2017), Colombia, Peru and Brazil (Klašnja and Titiunik 2017; Novaes 2018; Feierherd forthcoming) shows that the *partisan* incumbency disadvantage is even stronger in magnitude (in Japan, it is essentially zero; see Ariga et al. 2016).

positions over time. Second, we estimate our effects by comparing marginal winners and losers. In contrast, most of the existing literature on political careers and legislative behavior in Latin America has focused on *elected* representatives, implicitly ignoring candidates who failed to obtain a seat (Morgenstern and Nacif 2002; Morgenstern 2004; Londregan 2000; Crisp and Desposato 2004; Crisp et al. 2004; Jones et al. 2002; Micozzi 2013, 2014*a*,*b*; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016; Langston 2010; Rosas and Langston 2011; Kerevel 2015; Samuels 2003; Desposato 2006; Pereira and Rennó 2013; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014). Finally, we follow pioneering work on Sweden and Norway (Folke 2014; Fiva and Smith 2018; Fiva, Halse and Smith 2017; Kotakorpi, Poutvaara and Terviö 2017) and apply a RD to study incumbency effects in a PR setting with closed lists. As far as we know, ours is the first study to employ such a RD to estimate incumbency effects for legislative candidates in Latin America.

Theoretical framework

The value of a legislative seat: theoretical considerations. The value of a legislative seat can be studied along a variety of dimensions, including the (implicit) consumption value and ego rents derived from the office itself (Diermeier, Keane and Merlo 2005); the (in)direct financial and employment opportunities it provides (Eggers and Hainmueller 2009; Truex 2014); or the opportunities for corruption it opens (Querubín and Snyder 2013). While Argentine deputies certainly earn an above-average salary, due to data limitations – income information for individual Argentine politicians is either unavailable or unreliable – in this paper we examine how a legislative seat contributes to a politicians' future career. Assuming that (some) politicians want to develop a long-term career, to what extent does a legislative seat contribute to that purpose?

To answer this question, we distinguish between the *motivations* of individual politicians and the *opportunities* they have to satisfy them. Schlesinger's (1966) classic distinction between static and progressive ambition focuses on the first point. Statically ambitious politicians are broadly

satisfied with the office they occupy, and thus want to remain there: they do what they do in order to be reelected time and again. Their progressively ambitious peers, on the other hand, see their current office as a temporary position from which to move to a more valuable one afterwards. But there is also a third possibility: politicians who are progressively ambitious but seek to remain where they are because they have no chance of (successfully) running for a better position (Pereira and Rennó 2013; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016). In other words, they see their current office as a consolation prize: certainly better than nothing, but not what they would like to do until the end of their careers.

This third possibility underscores the fact that not all elected offices provide good opportunities for satisfying incumbents' aspirations. In many contexts, such incumbency effects are positive: current incumbents are better positioned than challengers for achieving what is generally considered desirable, be it reelection or jumping to another office. This typically reflects incumbents' advantages in terms of enacting legislation and claiming credit for public policy, but also in the most mundane matters of fundraising, advertising, access to staff and media coverage, all of which increases their name recognition *vis-à-vis* challengers (Fiorina 1977; Cover and Brumberg 1982; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Holbrook and Tidmarch 1991; Prior 2006; Ban, Llaudet and Snyder 2016). But incumbency effects may also be nil or even negative, notably when voters perceive incumbents as overly corrupt and thus kick them out before they become too good at embezzlement (Klašnja 2015). The incumbency advantage may also vary by office: an incumbent may be advantaged when seeking reelection, but maybe not when running for an executive position.[3]

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[3]We focus on the *personal* incumbency advantage, which captures an individual's capacity to leverage an elected position into another one. The *partisan* incumbency advantage, in contrast, captures the benefits that a party receives when one of its members controls a given office. The two need not go together: in the US the personal incumbency advantage is mostly positive (Lee 2008; Cattaneo, Frandsen and Titiunik 2015; Erikson and Titiunik 2015), but partisan advantages are either nil (Butler and Butler 2006) or negative (Folke and Snyder 2012; Erikson, Folke and Snyder 2015).

The value of a legislative seat in comparative perspective. Both ambition patterns and incumbency effects differ greatly between countries. In the United States, legislative seats are valuable in themselves, and thus legislators develop a pattern of static ambition: they want to get reelected time and again (Schlesinger 1966). Moreover, recent studies have credibly documented that incumbents running for reelection enjoy a substantial advantage over challengers (Butler and Butler 2006; Butler 2009; Lee 2008; Cattaneo, Frandsen and Titiunik 2015; Erikson and Titiunik 2015; Fowler and Hall 2017).[4] In parliamentary democracies, a legislative career is indispensable for gaining a position in the cabinet, and thus legislators also develop a pattern of static ambition (André, Depauw and Martin 2015). They also enjoy a large electoral advantage, as documented in Canada (Kendall and Rekkas 2012), Spain (Llaudet 2014) or Norway (Fiva and Smith 2018; Fiva, Halse and Smith 2017). Interestingly, the European Parliament – farther away from home, far less prestigious, and less influential in policy-making – constitutes an exception to this pattern (Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard 2009; Sieberer and Müller 2017).

In other latitudes, legislative seats offer few opportunities to influence public policy and comparatively limited resources for campaigning, and thus ambitious politicians are constantly trying to capture other, more valuable positions. Both in developing countries like India and in developed ones like Japan or Italy, incumbent legislators either enjoy few electoral advantages or are even disadvantaged when seeking reelection (Uppal 2009; Ariga 2015; Golden and Picci 2015). Similarly, Romanian mayors suffer a large incumbency penalty *vis-à-vis* challengers because voters perceive them as highly corrupt (Klašnja 2015). In Latin America, national legislators are often more interested in obtaining an executive seat at the subnational level – such as a governorship or a mayoralty – than in developing a long-term legislative career. In Jones et al.'s (2002) felicitous phrase, they are "professional politicians" but "amateur legislators:" they want to develop a long-term career in

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[4]Caughey and Sekhon (2011) find that in the US House, near-winners are systematically different from near-losers, but this discrepancy may be attributed to chance (Eggers et al. 2015).

politics, though preferably not in the national legislature (see also Micozzi 2009; Samuels 2003; Pereira and Rennó 2013; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016).

But even if a legislative seat is considered less valuable than other offices, it may prove helpful – in terms of both material resources and name recognition – for moving elsewhere. At the very least, incumbent legislators may remain where they are until the opportunity to jump to a better position appears on the horizon. The case of Rosana Bertone presented above illustrates this point well. The fact that she tried to move from the Chamber to the governorship and then to the Senate – and from there to the governorship again – clearly shows that she was progressively ambitious; at the same time, it is worth remembering that she sought reelection to her legislative seat twice before first running for the governorship in 2011. In line with this claim, research on the US, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and the European Parliament has shown that ambitious legislators who intend to run for a different position employ the opportunities provided by their office – submitting budget amendments and information requests, drafting geographically targeted bills, speaking in the plenary, communicating their expertise, or voting against the party line – to increase their visibility and popularity among prospective constituents (Treul 2009; Victor 2011; Ames 2001; Samuels 2003; Pereira and Rennó 2013; Kerevel 2015; Alemán, Micozzi and Ramírez forthcoming; Alemán, Slapin and Ramírez 2017; Micozzi 2009, 2013, 2014*a*,*b*; Micozzi and Rogers 2014; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014; Fukumoto and Matsuo 2015; Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard 2009; Pemstein, Meserve and Bernhard 2015; Sieberer and Müller 2017).

These considerations suggest the following implications. In a country like Argentina where progressive ambition is widely documented (Jones et al. 2002; Lodola 2009; Micozzi 2009, 2013, 2014*a*,*b*), the most interesting question is whether incumbent legislators can leverage their seat into a more valuable executive position in the future. This is the *window of opportunity* story that Rosana Bertone embodies so well. Of course, she may be a highly atypical case rather than a representative of a more general phenomenon. But even then, it may still be the case that legislative seats offer a *consolation prize* for progressively ambitious incumbents who have little chance of

capturing a more valuable position (Lucardi and Micozzi 2016). Unlike an (elected) executive position, a legislative seat does not offer control over a budget – the main source of patronage, name recognition and arguably corruption in Argentine politics. But it still offers some public visibility, the potential to negotiate with the (provincial or national) party leadership on a handful of crucial votes, as well as an attractive salary; it is certainly better than nothing. Thus, even if incumbent legislators are not more likely to capture an executive position than non-incumbents, they should be more likely to get renominated and serve another legislative term(s).

Heterogeneous effects. There are also reasons to believe that these effects may vary by district and/or party. On the one hand, a legislative seat should be more valuable in small districts. To the extent that name recognition is an important consideration when running for a district-wide seat – such as a governorship – this is a relevant issue. What legislators do to cultivate a personal reputation – drafting targeted bills, advertising the goods brokered for the district, etc – is more effective in small-scale constituencies, fostering higher degrees of "street credibility" (Crisp et al. 2004; Micozzi 2014*b*; Chasquetti and Micozzi 2014). Alternatively, incumbent legislators may leverage their position to develop a relationship with provincial party bosses, who play a crucial role in both nomination and election (De Luca, Jones and Tula 2002; Jones et al. 2002; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Lodola 2009; Cherny, Figueroa and Scherlis 2018). Even politicians attempting to jump from the legislature to an individual office such as a mayoralty may need the help of powerful copartisans if the latter control important resources or have a say over nomination procedures. In turn, provincial bosses may see an advantage in promoting politicians with whom they get along better or who do a better job once in Congress, but they may only find this out when an individual is effectively elected. But regardless of whether a legislator's principals are voters or (provincial) party leaders, becoming known among them should be easier in small districts, and thus we should expect the incumbency effect to be stronger there.

Incumbency effects may also vary by party, a point that has been amply documented in Brazil (Klašnja and Titiunik 2017; Feierherd forthcoming). Most obviously, some parties have stronger

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political machines than others; in Argentina, both the governor's party and the *Partido Justicialista* or PJ – which often coincide – tend to be stronger in small districts (Calvo and Murillo 2004; Gibson 2005). In contrast, the *Unión Cívica Radical* or UCR, the other big national party, has often been weaker. At the same time, being a large national party forces the UCR to field candidates in most provincial elections even when it does not expect to win. To the extent that such candidates are disproportionately chosen among incumbent legislators, these individuals should be less likely to seek and/or obtain reelection even as a consolation prize. The party's internal rules further reinforce this point: in several provinces incumbent legislators must obtain the backing of a supermajority of partisan delegates to gain renomination, a requirement that is absent for their PJ counterparts (Caminotti, Rotman and Varetto 2011). Thus, regardless of whether a national legislative seat offers a window of opportunity or a consolation prize, we should observe a stronger effect for legislators from the governor's party or the PJ than among their UCR counterparts.

Research design and data

Case selection. We focus on the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, a well-documented case in which nonstatic ambition, multilevel careerism, and pursuit of subnational executive offices predominate. In contrast, their control over financial resources (Calvo and Murillo 2004; Gervasoni 2010; Bonvecchi and Lodola 2011) and party nominations (De Luca, Jones and Tula 2002; Lodola 2009; Cherny, Figueroa and Scherlis 2018) make governors – and mayors of large cities – crucial political players at the provincial level. Indeed, despite the absence of term limits, only 20 per cent of national deputies (three quarters of which are successful) seek a new mandate at the end of their term, almost the same proportion as those who run for governor, vice-governor or mayor (18 per cent; see Lucardi and Micozzi 2016). This has important implications for congressional performance, notably low degrees of policy specialization (Jones et al. 2002) and the extensive drafting of purely symbolic bills (Micozzi 2009).

Deputies are elected by proportional representation in 24 multi-member districts that are coterminous with the country's 23 provinces plus its capital city. They serve four-year terms, but the Chamber is renewed by halves every two years, with each district electing half of its representatives in each electoral turn.[5] Seats are distributed using the d'Hondt formula, but only among lists that obtained at least 3 per cent of registered voters in the district. Except in Buenos Aires this matters little in practice because most magnitudes are relatively low and turnout is relatively high – 78% on average between 1983 and 2015.

Candidates are rank-ordered, and no preference votes are allowed. Thus, if a party receives s seats, the first s individuals in the list gain a seat. Legislators who resign, die or are expelled from the Chamber are replaced by the candidate occupying the $s + 1$th position in the party list, and so on. Nominations are made by provincial party branches, with the governor (for the incumbent governor's party), provincial party elites (for opposition parties) and the president (for the national incumbent party), all playing a role in the process (De Luca, Jones and Tula 2002; Lodola 2009; Cherny, Figueroa and Scherlis 2018). Since 1993, one in every three candidates must be a woman (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Htun, Lacalle and Micozzi 2013; Barnes 2016), but other than that, provincial party organizations face few restrictions when making nomination decisions.

Data. We combined data from three main sources. Electoral returns, which we used to construct the running variable are from Tow (N.d.). We have assembled a dataset of political careers in Argentina that contains information on all individuals who ever served as (vice-) president, national minister, provincial (vice-) governor, national senator, national deputy, mayor, member of the 1994 constituent assembly or member of the supra-national Mercosur Parliament between 1983 and 2015 ($n \approx 11,000$), together with information on the date in which the individual entered and left the office. Finally, we data on candidates running for the Chamber of Deputies between 1983 and

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[5]Actual district magnitudes range between 2 and 35, with a mean of 5.4 and a median of 3.

2015 ($n \approx 27{,}000$), including their party membership and position in the list.[6] We merged these sources into a dataset of *candidates* running for legislative office between 1983 and 2011. For each candidate we recorded her gender, partisan affiliation, whether she belonged to the governor's party and her position in the party list, plus her political experience both before and after the election.[7] See Online Appendix A for a more detailed description of the data and merging process.

Regression discontinuity with closed-list PR. Our identification strategy hinges on comparing the future careers of candidates who obtained a seat in the Chamber of Deputies to those who failed to make it. Successful and unsuccessful candidates are not generally comparable, so we focus on *marginal* candidates: those who were the last to win a seat in a district, or the next in line to receive an additional seat. This approach has its limitations, as legislators at the top of the party list are probably of higher quality than those located at the bottom. Thus, by construction we cannot determine the effect of holding a legislative seat for higher-quality politicians, precisely those better positioned for taking advantage of it. That said, to the extent that marginal legislators are of lower average quality than non-marginal ones, any results that we find should be interpreted as a lower bound on the effect of holding a legislative seat on an individual's career.

Specifically, we employ a regression discontinuity (RD) design, in which the treatment of interest – winning a legislative seat – is assigned according to the value of a known running variable: all observations for which the value of the running variable fall above a given cutoff are assigned to receive the treatment of interest, while those below the cutoff enter the control group. Throughout this paper we follow the continuity-based approach, where the identification assumption is that the running variable varies smoothly at the cutoff, while the probability of receiving treatment experiences a sharp "jump" at the discontinuity (Cattaneo, Titiunik and Vázquez-Bare 2017).

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[6]We have full data for 1995-2015, as well as information on most major-party candidates – the ones we actually employ in the analysis – for 1983-1993. Note that we only consider a candidate's partisan affiliation at the time of running; we ignore party splitting afterwards.

[7]When an individual ran multiple times, we recorded these values separately for each election.

In single-member district elections, there is one incumbent per district and the running variable is the margin of victory between the most voted candidate and the runner-up. PR systems feature multiple incumbents, so we exploit the fact that seats are assigned sequentially to compare the candidate that received the last seat that was allocated in a district to the candidate that was closest to win that seat, but failed. Calculating the running variable is thornier because the number of seats received by a party depends on the distribution of votes received by all other parties (Folke 2014; Kotakorpi, Poutvaara and Terviö 2017; Cox, Fiva and Smith forthcoming). That is, a party may win an additional seat because (a) its vote total increases; (b) the vote total of the party that received the last seat decreases; (c) the vote total of some other party (or parties) decreases; or (d) some combination of these possibilities. Thus, our running variable is the minimum percentage of votes that must have changed for a party to win or lose a seat.[8] For every list in every election, we first identified the candidate that got the last seat received by the list, as well as the individual that would have received the next seat had the list won an additional one. *Vote change to last seat* takes positive values for the former set of candidates, and negative ones for the latter.

We outline the general procedure here and discuss the details for implementation – which closely follow the approach pioneered by Folke (2014) – in Appendix B. Consider the election that took place in Catamarca in 2013, when four lists competed for three seats. Panel (a) in Table 1 shows the vote total received by each list, and the quotients that result from dividing these totals by 1, 2 and 3, while panel (b) lists the corresponding candidate names. Following the d'Hondt allocation method, each of the three largest quotients was awarded a seat. As the most voted party, the UCR had the largest quotient (79,512); accordingly, the first seat went to Eduardo Brizuela del Moral, who headed the party list. The next largest quotient, 77,148, corresponds to the PJ; thus, Néstor N. Tomassi received the second seat to be distributed. The last seat went to the UCR, whose

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[8]See Folke (2014); Fiva, Halse and Smith (2017) and Fiva and Smith (2018) for a similar approach. In contrast, the competitiveness measures proposed by Blais and Lago (2009) and Grofman and Selb (2009) focus on a single party's vote total and normalize by the number of votes per seat (see Cox, Fiva and Smith forthcoming).

Table 1: Running variable example: Catamarca 2013

	UCR (Frente Cívico y Social)	PJ (FPV) (Governor's)	Frente Tercera Posición	Partido Obrero
(a) Quotients				
1	**79,512.00**	**77,148.00**	*36,997.00*	*5,044.00*
2	**39,756.00**	*38,574.00*	18,498.50	2,522.00
3	*26,504.00*	25,716.00	12,332.33	1,681.33
(b) Candidates				
1	**E. Brizuela del Moral**	**Néstor N. Tomassi**	*José L. Barrionuevo*	*Ariel A. López*
2	**Myriam del V. Juárez**	*Silvia L. Moreta*	Gladys del V. Moro	Sonia J. Sosa
3	*Úrsula Díaz*	Víctor O. Gutiérrez	Claudio D. Bustamante	María E. Moreno

Vote and seat distribution for the 2013 election in Catamarca. For each party, elected candidates and their quotients are shown in **bold**, while candidates next in line to receive a seat appear in *italics*. The empirical analysis is restricted to the two candidates closest to winning or losing a seat *in the district*; these are **underlined**.

quotient from dividing its vote share by two – 39,756 – was larger than that of the PJ's and the Frente Tercera Posición (FTP) – 38,547 and 36,997, respectively.

Now consider how the UCR could have won all three seats at stake. One possibility is to increase the party's vote total to 231,444, in which case it will triplicate the PJ's. Alternatively, the vote total of the PJ and the FTP may have decreased by 50,644 and 10,493 respectively, in which case the new distribution of votes would have been {79,512; 26,504; 26,504; 5,044}. Thus, for Úrsula Díaz, the third-placed candidate in the UCR's list, *vote change to last seat* takes the value of -30.77: in order to get elected, a minimum swing of 30.77 per cent of the vote $\left(\frac{50,644+10,493}{198,701} \approx 30.77\right)$ should have changed in her favor. In contrast, for Silvia L. Moreta, who was located in the second place in the PJ's list, *vote change to last seat* is -1.19 per cent because an increase in the PJ's vote of just 2,365 votes (or a similar reduction in the UCR's vote total) would have given her a seat. Concomitantly, for the second-ranked candidate in the UCR's list, Myriam del Valle Juárez, *vote change to last seat* equals 1.19 per cent, while Néstor N. Tomassi, who headed the PJ's list, would had lost his seat only if his party's vote total had decrease by at least 40,152, or the FTP's support had increased by a similar amount. Thus, for him *vote change to last seat* equals 20.21.

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Outcome variables. For every candidate i running in election year t, we evaluate the effect of winning a legislative seat on five measures of i's future political career. *renomination* is a dummy indicating whether i ran again for legislative office at either $t+2$ or $t+4$, i.e. before the expiration of the term that began at t.[9] *legislator (after)*, *executive (after)* and *any office (after)* are dummies that indicate whether i served, respectively, in a national legislative position (the national Congress, the 1994 constituent assembly, or the Mercosur Parliament);[10] an executive position (president, vice-president, national minister, governor, vice-governor or mayor); or either of the two, at any moment in the future. *terms served (after)* is a count of the total number of executive and legislative terms that i served after t – i.e., excluding the term that began at t. While there is no accepted ranking of the relative desirability of different political positions, it is safe to assume that the top executive positions – (vice-)president, (vice-)governor and national minister – clearly come at the top, a seat in the Senate is more valuable than one in the Chamber of Deputies, and a seat in the Mercosur Parliament comes last. The relative value of a mayoralty depends in part on the size of the municipality in question, but the fact that so many legislators actively seek a mayoral position (Micozzi 2014*b*; Lucardi and Micozzi 2016) suggests that most ambitious individuals prefer to be mayors rather than national deputies.

Estimation. Following standard practice, we first identify a *reference party* and compare candidates from that party that barely won or barely failed to win a seat *in different elections*. We report results for three alternative reference parties: the incumbent *governor's* party; the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ); and the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR). The three, which often overlap, have captured the bulk of elected offices at both the national and subnational levels since 1983.

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[9]Losing candidates often run again in midterm elections, as do a handful of sitting legislators.

[10]In practice, this means that an individual served as national senator or deputy: depending on the sample, between 43 and 67 *marginal* candidates would end up serving as legislators, but no more than 1-5 of them served in the 1994 constituent assembly or the Mercosur Parliament.

In the above example, the analysis would be restricted to Myriam del V. Juárez, who won the last seat to be distributed but could have lost it with a swing of just 1.19 per cent of valid votes, and Silvia L. Moreta, who would have captured the seat with such a vote change.[11] That is, when the reference party is the UCR, Juárez is included in the analysis as a candidate who barely won a seat, to be compared to other UCR candidates who barely lost *in different elections*; while if the reference party is the PJ (or the governor's party), Moreta is included in the sample, to be compared with candidates from the same party who won a seat by a small margin in another election.

We report sharp RD (i.e., intent-to-treat or ITT estimates), which require fewer assumptions than fuzzy ones (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik forthcoming). Following these authors, we fit a separate local linear regression to the outcome variable among all observations located within certain distance to the cutoff, employing a triangular kernel that gives more weight to observations closer to the cutoff, and clustering the observations by province.[12] The RD effect is the difference between the predicted value of the polynomial approaching the cutoff from above and that approaching it from below. The procedure minimizes the root mean squared error (RMSE) of the estimates; since this quantity is a function of the outcome variable, the bandwidth (and hence the number of observations) may vary depending on the outcome of interest.[13]

Results

Balance checks. We begin by showing that marginal winners and losers are comparable across a range of pre-treatment characteristics. Figure A8 in the Appendix shows that the density of the running variable does not change discontinuously at the cutoff in any sample, and the *p*-values

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[11] Note that these values are symmetric by construction (Folke 2014:1368).

[12] We employed the `rdrobust` software implemented in R (Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik 2015*b*).

[13] The bandwidth is *not* the region where observations are comparable (see Cattaneo, Titiunik and Vázquez-Bare 2017). The same logic applies to the clustering by province, which affects the variance and thus the RMSE (see Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik forthcoming, sec. 4.4.2).

of 0.40 or higher imply that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that they come from the same distribution. In addition, Table A3 indicates that for a series of pre-treatment covariates, including the lagged version of the outcome variables, a female dummy, and a candidate's position in the party list, there are few systematic differences between candidates who fell above or below the cutoff. Only 3 of the 60 point estimates reported in the table – all corresponding to the midterm election dummy for either the governor's or the PJ sample – are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Given our small sample sizes, these null findings may reflect low statistical power rather than true null effects (see below). Two facts point against this interpretation, however. On the one hand, most *p*-values are quite large: two-thirds of them are above 0.40. On the other, Figures A9 to A12 show that with some specific exceptions – notably the probability that a UCR candidate has previous elective experience – few variables seem unbalanced at the cutoff.

Graphical evidence. Figures 1 and 2 below examine the distribution of the outcome variables across the range of the running variable. The bins are constructed using the Integrated Mean Squared Error (IMSE)-optimal evenly-spaced method using polynomial regression (ESPR) proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2015*a*), with the size and hence the number of bins calculated separately at either side of the cutoff. The lines indicate the fit of a second-order polynomial regression estimated separately at each side of the cutoff, using a uniform kernel.

Figure 1 shows that in the all-province sample, candidates belonging to the governor's party or the PJ who barely win at *t* have a (much) higher chance of being renominated within the next four years. Marginal PJ incumbents are also more likely to serve as national legislators and to serve more elective terms in total. For the UCR, in contrast, most effects appear to be negative. The relationship is starker in small provinces:[14] the first two columns of Figure 2 suggest that for candidates from the governor's party or the PJ, barely winning a legislative seat at *t* does increase

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[14]The small-province sample excludes observations from Córdoba, Santa Fe, and the province and City of Buenos Aires, which elect 132 of the country's 257 deputies, but relatively few marginal legislators.
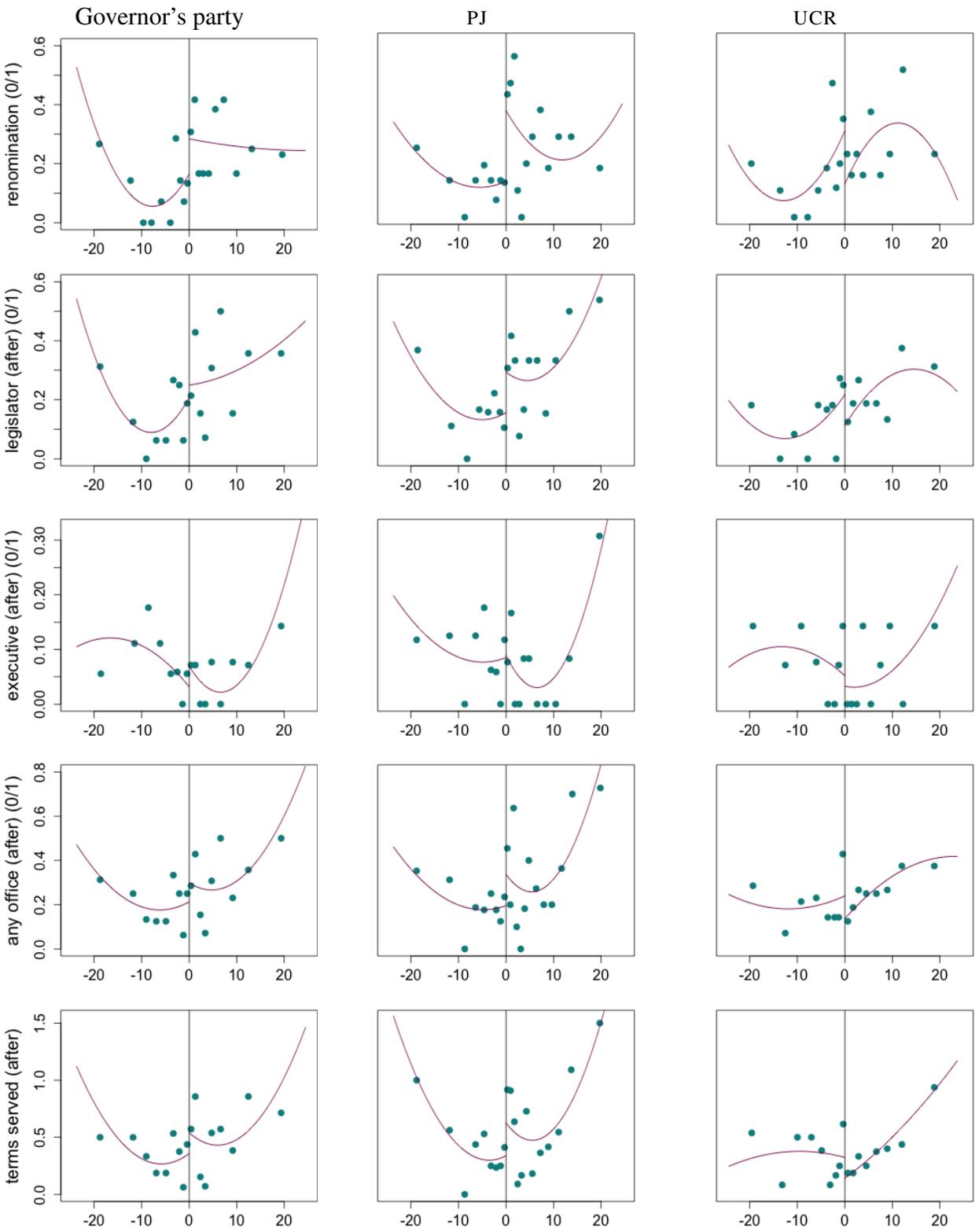
Figure 1: Mimicking variance RD plots with quantile-spaced bins (Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik 2015a) – All provinces. The lines indicate the fit of a second-order polynomial regression estimated separately at each side of the cutoff, using a uniform kernel.

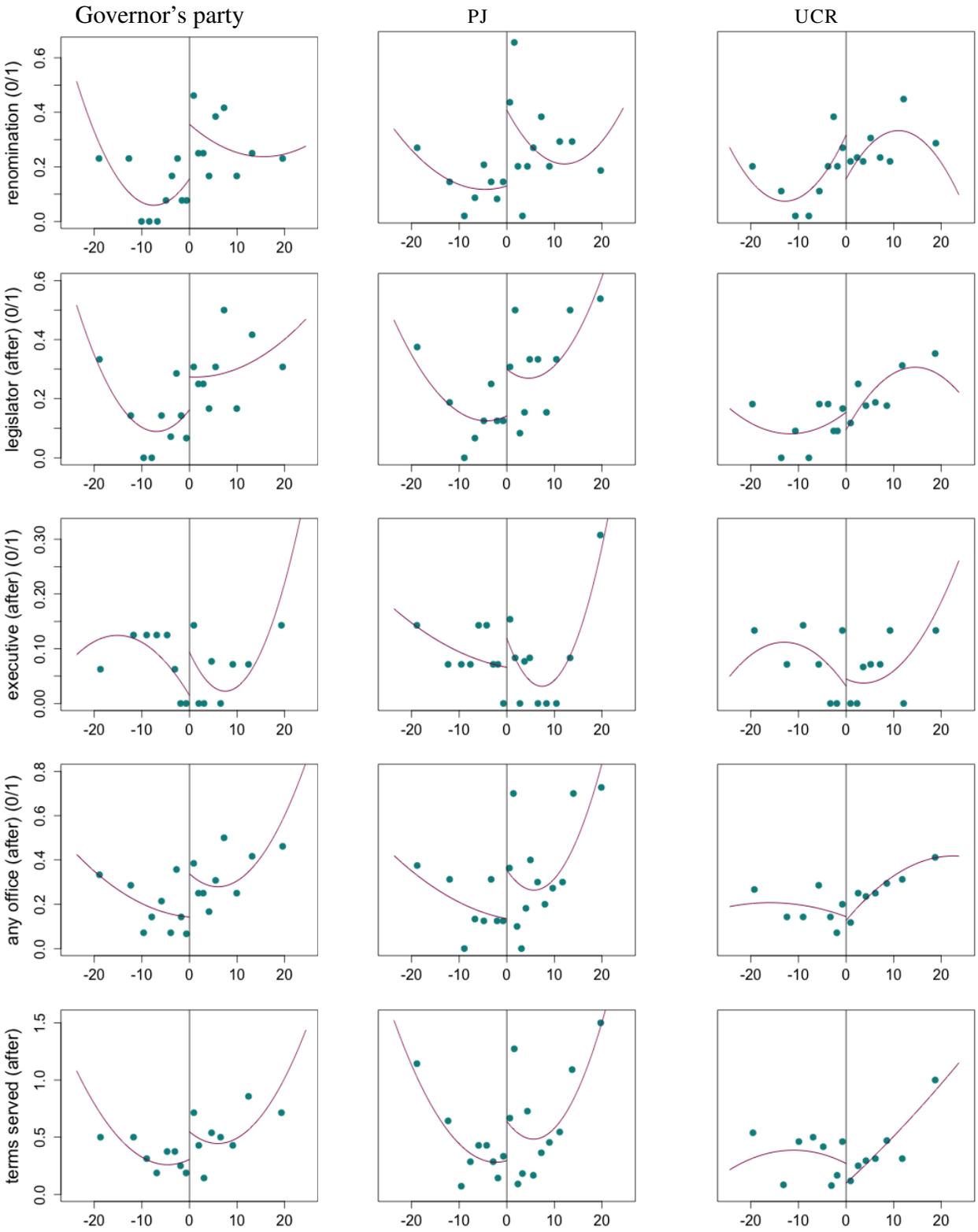Figure 2: Mimicking variance RD plots with quantile-spaced bins (Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik 2015*a*) – Small provinces (M ≤ 5) only. The lines indicate the fit of a second-order polynomial regression estimated separately at each side of the cutoff, using a uniform kernel.

the value of a politicians career at $t' > t$ for all outcomes, though it remains to be seen whether such differences are statistically significant. For the UCR, the effect is again negative for *renomination*, but appears to be zero for the remaining outcomes.

Main results. Table 2 presents the sharp RD estimates. Panel (a) reports the results for the all-province sample, while panel (b) restricts the analysis to small provinces. We find that marginal winners leverage their seat into a consolation prize in the future, especially in small provinces, though the effect is restricted to the PJ. In part, this reflects the fact that due to the limited number of observations – overall sample sizes are 265, 285 and 237 for the governor's party, the PJ and the UCR, respectively – we can only detect relatively large effects. Indeed, the tests reported in Table A4 show that we have enough observations to detect an effect as large as a standard deviation of the outcome variable in the control group (SD_C) with 80% power, and effective power against such an effect is well above 0.80. We have too few observations to estimate half such an effect with the same power, however. In the PJ case, the absolute value of the estimated effects reported in Table 2 is above $\frac{SD_C}{2}$ for most outcomes, which means that nominal sample sizes are large enough to have 80% power against the effects we actually estimate. For the governor party's and UCR samples, in contrast, the estimated effects are lower in size, and thus statistically insignificant estimates may be due to low power rather than to actual null effects.

The consolation prize story predicts that incumbent legislators should be more likely to seek reelection when they do not expect to capture another, more valuable position. Consistent with this claim, marginal PJ winners are between 37 and 49 percentage points more likely to be renominated than their marginal loser counterparts. The effect is also positive – though roughly half in size and only significant at the 0.10 level in the small-province sample – for the governor's party. To put these numbers in perspective, Table A1b in the Appendix shows that less than a fifth of marginal candidates sought renomination within the next four years. These higher renomination rates translate into a positive effect on the probability that marginal winners will serve a new legislative term, though the effect sizes are cut by roughly two-thirds, and low power means that

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Table 2: The effect of a legislative seat on a politician's career in Argentina, 1983-2011

renomination (0/1)	(a) All provinces					(b) Small provinces (M ≤ 5)				
	est.	95% CI	*p*-val.	bwd.	N	est.	95% CI	*p*-val.	bwd.	N
Governor's	0.16	[-0.10:0.49]	0.19	7.36	88|80	0.26	[-0.06:0.66]	0.10	8.07	79|73
PJ	0.37	[0.17:0.67]	0.00	6.23	90|77	0.49	[0.18:0.97]	0.00	5.70	66|63
UCR	-0.13	[-0.45:0.18]	0.40	4.80	57|59	-0.07	[-0.54:0.39]	0.75	5.52	49|54
legislator (after) (0/1)										
Governor's	0.05	[-0.21:0.33]	0.67	8.81	100|89	0.19	[-0.03:0.51]	0.09	6.97	69|66
PJ	0.26	[0.02:0.58]	0.04	4.97	78|70	0.28	[-0.06:0.74]	0.10	6.10	68|65
UCR	-0.20	[-0.48:0.00]	0.05	4.29	54|53	-0.07	[-0.50:0.27]	0.56	5.47	48|53
executive (after) (0/1)										
Governor's	0.05	[-0.15:0.23]	0.69	4.80	73|62	0.14	[-0.08:0.41]	0.19	5.44	63|54
PJ	0.02	[-0.17:0.19]	0.91	6.78	93|81	0.13	[-0.05:0.38]	0.14	6.29	69|66
UCR	-0.17	[-0.42:0.03]	0.09	5.30	59|62	-0.17	[-0.49:0.07]	0.15	5.22	48|52
any office (after) (0/1)										
Governor's	0.12	[-0.17:0.51]	0.31	6.35	82|75	0.31	[0.04:0.70]	0.03	6.06	67|60
PJ	0.22	[-0.03:0.54]	0.08	5.28	82|73	0.36	[0.01:0.84]	0.04	5.87	67|65
UCR	-0.22	[-0.60:0.06]	0.11	6.08	63|68	-0.09	[-0.47:0.21]	0.45	6.31	54|59
terms served (after)										
Governor's	0.34	[-0.31:1.18]	0.25	6.53	83|76	0.48	[-0.31:1.52]	0.19	6.34	68|62
PJ	0.50	[-0.11:1.20]	0.11	6.46	92|80	0.66	[-0.22:1.77]	0.13	6.55	70|68
UCR	-0.41	[-1.00:-0.00]	0.05	4.56	56|58	-0.38	[-1.16:0.22]	0.18	5.92	52|58

Sharp RD estimates. The running variable is *vote change to last seat*. For each reference party, the sample is restricted to marginal candidates. We report conventional point estimates with robust CIs and *p*-values based on the MSE-optimal bandwidth proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014). To calculate the estimates, we clustered observations by province and fitted a separate local linear regression at both sides of the threshold, with a triangular kernel. Reported number of observations corresponds to the *effective* sample size. In panel (a), overall sample size is $(142 + 123 = 265)$ for the governor's party, and $(149 + 136 = 285)$ and $(111 + 126 = 237)$ for the PJ and UCR, respectively. In panel (b), overall sample sizes are $(128 + 111 = 239)$, $(127 + 124 = 251)$ and $(100 + 116 = 216)$ for the governor's party, the PJ and the UCR, respectively.

in small provinces the estimates are only significant at the 0.10 level. Still, effect sizes are roughly comparable to the probability that a marginal legislator will serve an additional term, which hovers around 21-24 percentage points for the PJ and the governor's party (see Table A1b).

We find little support for the window-of-opportunity story, however. In the full sample, the effect of winning a seat on the probability of obtaining an executive position in the future is positive

but small – 5 pp. for the governor's party, 2 pp. for the PJ – and far from being statistically significant. The estimates jump to a respectable 13-14 pp. in the small-province sample – doubling the probability that a marginal candidate will serve as an executive in the future (see Table A1b) – but neither effect is statistically significant due to low power. Indeed, Table A4 shows that in order to detect an effect as large as the one we report, the number of observations in the treated group should increase by 50-100%. To put it differently, it is not so much that we find evidence against the window-of-opportunity story (in small provinces), but rather that a positive effect, if it exists, is not large enough to be detected with the number of observations we have.

The last two sets of results confirm this. The estimates for *any office (after)* are generally larger in size and more reliable than those for serving as legislator or executive afterwards, especially in small provinces – a point that is also visible in Figure 2. This makes sense, as this variable combines both future legislators and executives, and the estimates are positive for both. On the other hand, estimates for the total number of (future) terms served show that, besides the term that begins at t, bare winners serve around half an additional legislative term in some other position, though the estimates are not statistically significant.

For the UCR, in contrast, all point estimates are negative, though only one – that for the number of future terms served in the all-province sample – is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.[15] Indeed, Table A4 shows that the corresponding tests are underpowered, and the problem is especially marked in the small province sample, where actual sample sizes fall well below the values required to achieve 80% power against the estimates reported in Table 2.

Still, some effect sizes are quite large, especially in the full sample: -20 percentage points for the probability of serving as a legislator in the future, -17 pp. for the probability of gaining an executive seat, and 0.41 fewer terms served in the future. All three are statistically significant at the 0.10 level. This contradicts both the consolation prize and the window-of-opportunity stories. In contrast, the estimates for *renomination* are much closer to zero, suggesting that the effect is

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[15]The *p*-value for *legislator (after)* is 0.05, but only due to rounding; note that the 95% CI does include zero.

not being driven by the fact that bare UCR winners are shunning executive positions in favor of a legislative career. Rather, the results indicate that UCR candidates who barely make it into Congress become less likely to develop *any* kind of political career afterwards. Our – admittedly speculative – interpretation is that UCR legislators are disadvantaged because they are less likely to count with the support of a copartisan governor than their Peronist counterparts (Calvo and Murillo 2004). This both makes them "natural" candidates for an executive position, discouraging the pursuit of reelection, but also makes them unlikely to win a different office. The point is not only that the governor's party – generally the PJ – is advantaged in terms of material or institutional resources, but also that it has a larger and better pool of candidates from which to draw on. In contrast, opposition parties often have few good candidates, and thus must nominate them for valuable positions – such as the provincial governorship – that they are unlikely to win. Consistent with this story, Table A1b shows that 43% of marginal UCR candidates occupied the top position of the party list, three to four times more frequently than their peers from the governor's party (9%) or the PJ (13%). Unlike their counterparts from other parties, top-ranked UCR politicians are far from sure of winning even a *legislative* seat. Marginal winners and losers who belong to the same party are comparable, but marginal winners and losers from different parties need not be, in a way consistent with the negative incumbency effects found for UCR politicians.

Additional results. The results reported in Appendix F further reinforce these points. Table A7 shows that disaggregating the *executive (after)* variable between mayors and non-mayors hardly changes the results for the governor's party or the PJ, though the UCR results are mostly driven by executive positions other than mayor – a strong enough effect to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Alternatively, a position in the Senate – which we originally coded as a legislative one – is clearly more valuable than one in the Chamber. However, distinguishing between positions that are roughly equivalent to being serving as national deputy – member of the Mercosur Parliament or the 1994 constituent assembly – and those that can be considered more valuable – all executive positions plus national senator – does little to change the results. The small sample sizes mean that

these results are rarely statistically significant, but the point is that they are not obviously driven by our coding of elected offices.

The plausibility of the consolation prize story is further reinforced by the fact that the results are very similar if we restrict the sample to candidates who had no previous experience as executives or national legislators (Table A8),[16] or who were running for the first time (Table A9). To the extent that these are less weighty politicians, the pull of reelection as a consolation prize should be comparatively stronger for them. Indeed, despite the considerable reduction in sample size, the point estimates are very similar in size, and those for first-time candidates remain statistically significant. Furthermore, the negative estimates for the UCR are substantially attenuated; those for inexperienced candidates even become positive, though far from significant.

Nineteen of Argentina's twenty-four provinces elect an odd number of deputies, and thus have different district magnitudes every two years (Lucardi 2019). This may induce ambitious politicians to strategically run in some election years in order to maximize their chances of success. Consider again the case of Catamarca. In the 2013 election summarized in Table 1, the two largest parties were separated by less than 2,500 votes, and thus there was a close competition for the third seat between the second-placed candidate in each list. But had district magnitude been 2 instead of 3 – as was the case in 2011 or 2015 – the second-placed candidates in either list would have stood little chance of being elected. To the extent that this promotes self-selection, we may end up comparing high-quality winners in elections held with magnitude 3 against low-quality losers in elections held under magnitude 2; it would be the quality of the candidates, rather than the fact of being elected, that makes the difference.[17] Thus, Tables A10 and A11 look at elections held under small or large magnitudes, respectively, but only in provinces with an odd number of representatives. Interestingly, candidates elected in small-magnitude years are much more likely to be renominated – with a p-value of 0.06 despite the tiny sample size – but are comparatively unsuc-

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[16]Though they may have served as provincial legislators or municipal councillors.

[17]We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possibility.

cessful in getting reelected or jumping to other positions. The negative effects for the UCR tend to be concentrated in these small-magnitude elections as well. In contrast, candidates from the governor's party or the PJ who are elected in large-magnitude years are a whooping 39-56 pp. more likely to capture any other office in the future, and serve roughly one full elective term afterwards – the latter effect being significant at the 0.10 level. These results are compatible both with the claim that there is strategic selection into large-magnitude elections, and with the possibility that marginal candidates elected in large-magnitude elections have an easier time getting elected again, though we do not want to make much of these tests because they are certainly underpowered. They do indicate, however, that our results are not being driven by a comparison between high-quality candidates running in large-magnitude elections and low-quality ones contesting low-magnitude races.

Tables A12 and A13 disaggregate candidates by gender. Again, the small samples render most estimates insignificant, and we do not want to read much into them. Still, it is worth noting that the positive effect of incumbency on *renomination* is much larger in magnitude – and generally significant – for women. This is consistent with a consolation prize story: since they tend to be disadvantaged in terms of access to executive positions (Franceschet and Piscopo 2014), women tend to invest somewhat more developing a legislative career (Lucardi and Micozzi 2016).

Robustness checks. Appendix G shows that these results are robust to a wide array of specification. First, Figures A13 to A15 show that the estimates reported in Table 2 are quite stable around the optimal bandwidth choice reported in Table 2. Second, Tables A14 and A15 report fuzzy RD estimates that account for the fact that despite substantial compliance (see Appendix C), a handful of bare winners did not assume office, but several bare losers did following the death or resignation of a colleague. But regardless of whether we weight these individuals equally or according to the time they effectively spent in office, the point estimates change little.

Third, and in line with the balance checks reported in Appendix D, Table A16 shows that controlling for gender, prior experience, election characteristics and position in the party list does

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not change the results; if anything, the confidence intervals get smaller, as they should, which results in a handful of estimates becoming statistically significant. Interestingly, the estimates that do change are those for the UCR, which almost invariably become smaller in size and are no longer significant, suggesting that part of the explanation for the negative results in Table 2 has to do with the imbalanced candidate characteristics seen in Table A3 and Figures A9 through A12. That said, comparing Tables A4 and A5 suggests that adding controls provides little benefits – and even worsens the situation – in terms of statistical power, so we do not want to read much into this. Similarly, fitting a second-order polynomial instead of a local linear regression results in similar (Table A17) but underpowered estimates (Table A6). Lastly, employing a single-party version of the running variable – i.e., only taking into account how a party's vote share should change for it to win or lose a seat (Cox, Fiva and Smith forthcoming) – also produces similar estimates, though the CIs are predictably wider (Table A18).

Conclusion

From the perspective of a progressively ambitious politician, how valuable is a seat in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies? We considered two possibilities: that a seat may provide a window of opportunity for jumpstarting a long-term career; or that it may provide a consolation prize when other possibilities are closed. We found little evidence of the former, but considerably support for the latter, though subject to two caveats: (a) the effect is driven by the PJ; and (b) several estimates are statistically insignificant due to low power. A potential explanation, which we leave for future research, is that Argentine deputies, in addition to being relatively well paid, may manage to obtain plum appointments in the private (or public) sector after their term is over, as in Britain or Russia (Eggers and Hainmueller 2009; Remington 2008). Indeed, term-limited governors and mayors often run for a legislative position at the end of their term, implying that they do see some value in holding a legislative office, at least when other alternatives are precluded. The fact that

the renomination effect is much stronger for women, for whom winning an executive position is harder, further reinforces the point.

That said, the fact that the analysis is limited to marginal candidates and the effect only appears for a subset of them call into question the external validity of the findings. If marginal candidates are systematically different from the rest, our results may not apply to the high-quality politicians who are generally placed at the top of party lists.[18] Nonetheless, this does not seem to be an especially serious issue. Tables A8 and A9 show that the size of the effects is similar for unexperienced and/or first-time candidates, though the reduced sample size makes the estimates insignificant. Furthermore, most Argentine politicians seeking a seat in the Chamber of Deputies are not former (vice-) presidents, (vice-) governors, or mayors from important cities (see Table A1): they are closer to the marginal candidates studied in this paper than to the "big fish" that head the legislative lists of large parties. In any case, the advantage of holding a seat should be stronger for higher-quality legislators, and thus our estimates should be interpreted as a lower bound.

Our interpretation of the negative effects for the UCR is that the PJ controlled two thirds of provincial governorships during this period, which both boosted the electoral performance of its candidates and may have forced UCR politicians to run for offices they had little chance of winning. In addition, internal party rules mean that UCR legislators face a higher hurdle at obtaining renomination than their peers (Caminotti, Rotman and Varetto 2011). Nonetheless, other explanations are possible. UCR candidates benefitted disproportionately from national-level swings in some elections (1983, 1985, 1997 and 1999), raising the possibility that bare winners and losers in those years may not be comparable to the party's bare losers and winners in other years. Alternatively, voter backlashes due to the party's poor economic performance in 1989 and 2001 (Torre 2003; Calvo and Escolar 2005) may have hurt its candidates particularly badly. We are unable to adjudicate between these explanations, but they suggest interesting questions for further research.

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[18]Of course, this is a feature of RD designs more generally.

In this study we presented an innovative approach to estimate the value of a legislative seat in environments where careerism is dynamic and multilevel. We hope this will help extend the use of RD techniques to PR systems, which account for roughly half of (democratic) national lower house elections since 1950 (Bormann and Golder 2013, Figure 3). Previous work has employed this approach to study the connection between partisanship and policy (Folke 2014) as well as the formation of political dynasties (Fiva and Smith 2018), but the methodology is useful for causally evaluating individual-level careers and behavior in environments where progressive ambition is the norm as well. In this paper we showed that a congressional seat in Argentina may not be the elixir of a political trajectory, but legislators' observed behavior suggests that they consider it a better option than being left with nothing. Further studies can determine whether similar results apply in countries like Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico or Colombia, focusing on marginal candidates rather than restricting the sample to elected legislators, as the literature on political careers in Latin America has implicitly done so far.

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