



Center for Effective Lawmaking

The Legislative Success of “Giant Killers”

Sean M. Theriault, The University of Texas at Austin
Jared J. Hrebenar, Stanford University
Isabel Reyna, The University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

Since the early 1970s, fewer than 10 percent of all those who run against sitting members of Congress win. In this paper, we examine the legislative effectiveness of those rare challengers who knock off incumbents, which we name, “Giant Killers.” We find that they have greater than expected legislative success. Either because they are simply stellar politicians (as one might expect from challengers who defeat incumbents) or because their party leadership celebrates their victories by prioritizing their legislation or giving them plum committee assignments, we argue that being a Giant Killer is an important component in understanding legislators’ early successes in Congress. Over the first part of their careers in the House, we find that these Giant Killers have around 20 percent higher legislative effectiveness scores than their counterparts; although Senate Giant Killers do not enjoy as large a bonus, it is still real and statistically significant.

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Sandy Adams (FL-24) and Rich Nugent (FL-11) both first won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010. On paper, they were nearly indistinguishable: two 50-something Midwestern transplants to Florida with military experience who parlayed their law enforcement backgrounds as part of that year's Tea Party electoral wave. Both had about a decade of experience in elected office, and both won their elections by more than 20 points.

Indeed, one could reasonably expect them to have similar legislative careers when they arrived in the nation's capital as first-term members of the new House majority party. Upon the beginning of their respective journeys through the marbled halls of Washington, the arcs of their political careers quickly diverged: Adams proved herself an industrious and effective legislator, sponsoring the hotly debated reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act and guiding it to final passage in the House. She sponsored numerous other pieces of substantive legislation, never missed a vote, and beat expectations to find a place in the upper half of House Republicans in terms of legislative effectiveness that congress. Nugent, on the other hand, saw each piece of legislation that he sponsored die before receiving any action in committee, missed votes, and ended his first term in Congress with a dismal effectiveness rating.

Admittedly, any number of explanations could be offered to explain this divergence in lawmaking prowess. From differing personal experiences, gender, staff expertise, leadership styles, or sheer luck, certain members of Congress simply succeed where others struggle. One under-analyzed explanation for why these two particular political stories diverged might have to go back to election day, though focusing a bit less on Adams and Nugent and a bit more on the names opposite them on the ballot. While Nugent entered Congress the same way most members do, by waiting for members to retire and running to replace them, Adams entered Congress by defeating an entrenched incumbent. Because of whom they beat, we name the victors like

Adams, “Giant Killers.” While admittedly not all incumbents are giants, the advantages that they accrue simply by being in office makes their reelection odds much better than those running against them. Because of the well-known and studied incumbency advantages, it is not surprising that so few incumbents lose (Jacobson and Carson 2020, Herrnson 2016). What is not well known, and should not be surprising, is that the very few challengers that beat incumbents are exceptional, at least in the electoral arena.

In this paper, we argue that they are not only exception in the electoral politics, but also in the legislative arena. We make this argument in four parts. First, we precisely define who qualifies as “Giant Killers” and then describe across time their proportion in Congress before explaining the characteristics that might lead to them having more successful legislative careers. Second, we determine the precise bonus giant killers have in legislative effectiveness through bivariate and multivariate analysis in both chambers. Third, we further analyze Senate data to give our arguments even more validity. Finally, in the conclusion, we suggest multiple paths for future research.

I. Giant Killers

Therault and Edwards (2020, 98) assert that “perhaps the best truism of congressional politics is that incumbents win.” Indeed, the incumbency reelection rate hovers around 95 percent in the House and, though with a bit bigger deviation, around 85 percent in the Senate. Jacobson and Carson (2020) summarize that the incumbency advantage has multiple sources including the institutional design of Congress (Mayhew 1974), the changes in voting behavior

(Ferejohn 1977), the services members provide to their constituents (Fiorina 1977), their greater access to campaign contributions (Jacobson 1980), and then, because of these sources, their ability to scare of challengers (Cox and Katz 1996). Indeed, incumbency is the most important determinant in understanding who wins congressional elections. And yet, each cycle some lose.

A. Defining Giant Killers

We define any representative or senator who arrived in his or her respective chamber by beating another incumbent as a “Giant Killer.” This narrow definition introduces a number of tough cases for which we want to be explicit. First, we include challengers who defeat appointed senators as Giant Killers.¹ Second, some House members arrived in the chamber after launching a campaign against an opposite-party incumbent, only to see that incumbent defeated in the primary. Going on to win that election would not classify that member as a Giant Killer, despite the fact that the incumbent member was seeking reelection. Third, those members who win their seats over other incumbents (typically in “redistricting fights”) are not classified as Giant Killers because they enjoyed the same incumbency advantages as their opponent. While their opponent may have been a giant, they, too, were a giant, suggesting a status-equal election contest not unlike two challengers competing for an open seat.

¹ We exclude that label from that part of their career prior to when the other senators who won during the same election are seated. For example, in 2020, Mark Kelly defeated Martha McSally and served for a few weeks in the 116th Congress; he even took a few votes. But his “Giant Killer” status does not kick in until the beginning of the 117th Congress, which was when the other senators newly elected on election day 2020 took their seats.

We offer one additional tweak. Giant Killer status is not necessarily determined at a members' first-ever term in Congress. Senators or representatives who retired, were defeated, or otherwise left the chamber, but then returned to the chamber by defeating an incumbent, are coded as Giant Killers for the congresses after their return (but, obviously, not before unless they obtained that seat by also defeating an incumbent then). We viewed this "status" as something that could only be gained, never lost: for instance, in Barry Goldwater and Hubert Humphrey's returns to the Senate after their stints in the national spotlight, both retained their Giant Killer identity that they earned in their first elections to the Senate, despite neither defeating incumbents in their second go-round.²

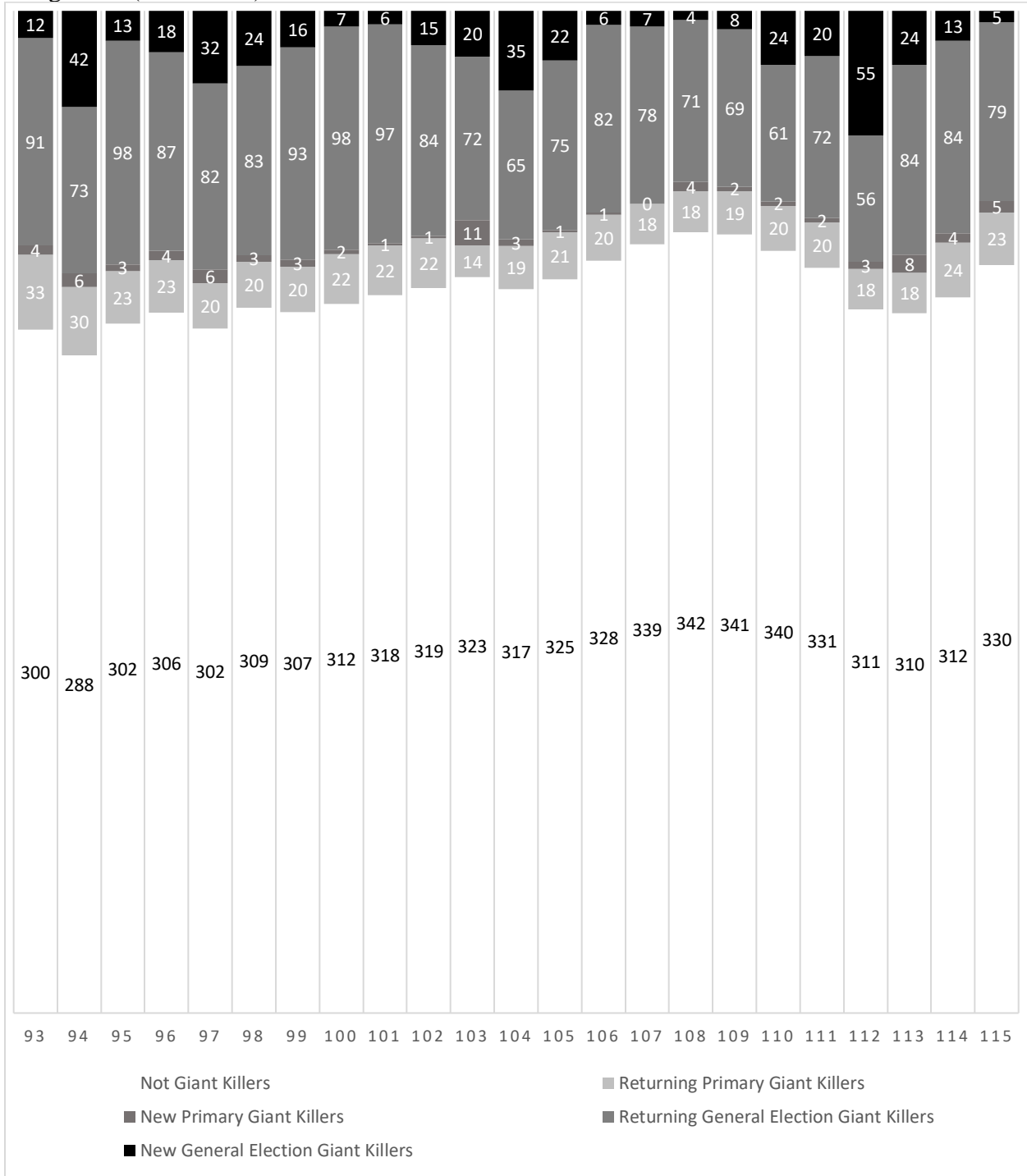
We further subset Giant Killers into two categories depending upon if they defeated incumbents during a primary or general election. The dynamics in these elections are likely to be quite distinct. Rarely would Primary Giant Killers enjoy the support of their party in the primary elections, whereas the General Election Giant Killers would almost always have significant party backing as they try to pull off the rare incumbent defeat. By separating General Election Giant Killers from Primary Giant Killers, we can discern the differences in legislative effectiveness not only between Giant Killer and non-Giant Killers, but between the subsets of Giant Killers themselves, which as we explain below will help tease out potential explanations for Giant Killers' greater legislative success.

² We should add that none of these tough cases change the overall results we report in this paper. Had we made the opposite call on each of these decisions, the thrust of the results would not change. It could have to do with the robustness of our results or the fact that so few members actually fall into these tough cases.

B. The Frequency of Giant Killers Across Time

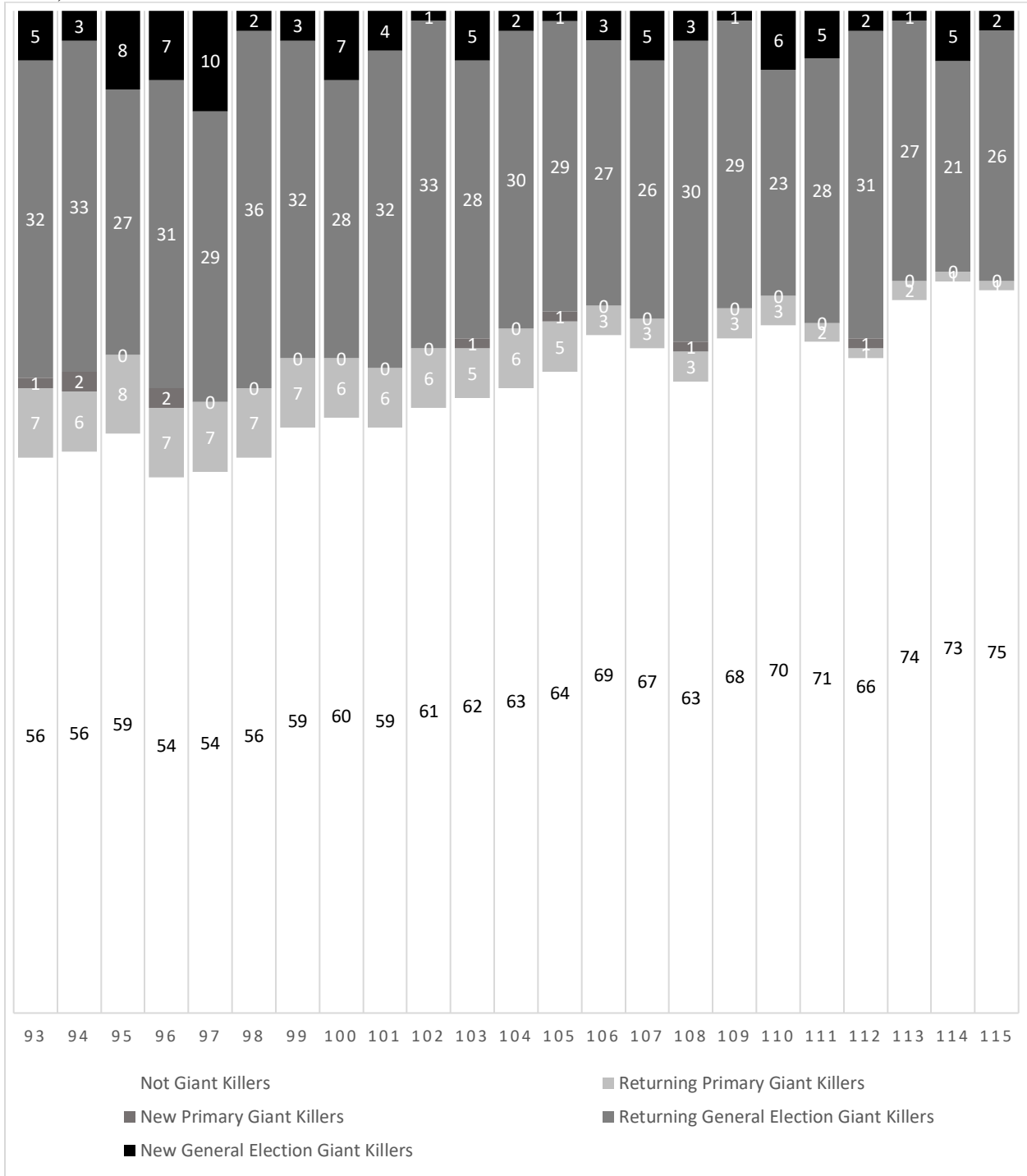
In aggregate from the 93rd through the 115th Congress, Giant Killers comprised 28 percent of the House, though the number of Giant Killers has gone down over time. Not unsurprisingly, the two largest new class of Giant Killers entered the House in 1974 (Watergate Babies) and 2010 (Tea Partiers). The broad sweep of the last 50 years in the House shows that most representatives are not Giant Killers; furthermore, General Election Giant Killers are far more common than their Primary Giant Killer counterparts.

Figure 1: The Number and Type of Giant Killers in the House of Representatives, 93rd to 115th Congresses (1973-2018).



Giant Killers are a relatively larger proportion of the Senate than they are of the House, though their numbers have more recently shrunk (see figure 2). Whereas they constituted nearly 50 percent of the Senate in the beginning of our dataset, their numbers have been almost halved in the last few congresses. The largest class of new Giant Killers entered the Senate in 1981, the same year that Reagan entered the White House and brought with him a new Republican-majority Senate. The number of Primary Giant Killers has experienced the largest decline. In the beginning of our data set, they sat in 8 or 9 seats in the Senate; by the end, Mike Lee (R-UT) constituted a conference of just one.

Figure 2: The Number and Type of Giant Killers in the Senate, 93rd to 115th Congresses (1973-2018).



C. Why Giant Killers May Have Greater Legislative Success

When new members are sworn into office, they all take the same oath and are generally treated in the same freshman kind of way. In the House, seniority among those sworn in on the same day is determined by lot (Kellermann and Shepsle 2009). The Senate procedure, while not as random, still does not prioritize Giant Killers in any way.³ Nevertheless, we think that Giant Killers might be more effective for two different reasons: one having to do with who they are and the other having to do with who they beat.

First, by virtue of beating an incumbent, Giant Killers may simply be exceptionally talented politicians. Just as it is not easy to beat an incumbent, it is not easy to pass legislation, and the skills that helped an individual do the former may prove useful at achieving the latter. While getting the details right in legislative drafting is not the same thing as developing policy papers, and while assembling an enacting legislative coalition is not the same thing as getting campaign contributions, the organizational and interpersonal skills on the campaign trail may not be that unrelated to those that are required for a successful legislative record.

It should be noted that being a Giant Killer may also be an indication of either a more carefree approach to electoral politics or an utter disregard for the political science literature. Both by anecdote and study (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Maisel and Stone 1997; Carson et al 2011), the most strategic politicians are most likely to wait for an open seat to launch their

³ For those taking the oath on the same day, seniority is determined by “former service in order as senator, vice president, House member, cabinet secretary, governor, and then by state population.” (<https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/chronlist.pdf>; accessed on 14 January 2020).

congressional campaigns. While individual personal circumstances (e.g., reaching the end of a term limit for state legislator or a free attempt at Congress while serving in an office with a different reelection date) or strategic calculations (e.g., a vulnerable incumbent either because of malfeasance or incompetence) may compel even risk-averse ambitious politicians to throw their hats in the ring against an incumbent, few challengers are expected to win their races at the time they announce their candidacies. Because the odds are so low, most strategic politicians opt for the more likely path to Congress – winning an open seat.

Second, because most Giant Killers earn that distinction by capturing a seat previously held by the other party, perhaps their party leadership treats them differently when they arrive in the hallowed halls of the Capitol. In fact, it could be that the promises that leadership made to a successful businesswoman or a popular sportscaster that compelled them to pause their professional careers to try their hand at politics. Once they take their seats in Congress, leadership may reward them with better committee assignments or may prioritize their legislative goals in hopes of making a vulnerable first-term member safer.

Distinguished Primary Giant Killers from General Election Giant Killers may help parse any legislative bonus that Giant Killers might enjoy. For however hard it is to defeat an incumbent in a general election, it is even harder in a primary, when candidates typically cannot even rely upon their party to assist them, and in some instances have their party vigorously oppose them. As a result of climbing an even steeper mountain, these Primary Giant Killers may be truly exceptional politicians. But, counteracting that exceptionalism, once Primary Giant Killers show up in Congress, they may face lingering hard feelings from the party conference or caucus that used to contain their primary opponent, which may make passing their bills even more difficult. In essence, then, the existence of Primary Giant Killers may help parse out why it

is that Giant Killers enjoy greater legislative success. And, the distinction between the House, where members have shorter time horizons and more anonymous existences (Asher 1973), and the Senate, where interpersonal relationships matter more (Matthews 1960, Theriault 2013)

II. The Legislative Effectiveness of Giant Killers

The 1990's professional wrestler, Ric Flair, made famous the concept we explore in this paper: "To be the man, you have to beat the man."⁴ While the data in the previous section suggests that most members of Congress just wait until the "man" or "woman" retires and then runs for his or her seat, sufficient members do not wait until a retirement for us to examine if they have a fundamentally different experience within Congress than those who gain their seats through open-seat races. Our dependent variable is the members' legislative effectiveness scores (LES), which are derived from the success and importance of the legislation members sponsor (Volden and Wiseman 2014, 2018). The scores have a mean of 1 in both chambers every congress. They range from 0 (no introduced bills that get any legislative traction) to 18.7 in the House (Charlie Rangel in the 110th Congress) and 10.1 in the Senate (Howard Cannon in the 96th Congress).

⁴ Please excuse the gender-exclusive language. Quoted in Zack Pumerantz, October 25, 2011, "The 100 Best Sports Quotes of All Time," The Bleacher Report (<https://bleacherreport.com/articles/910238-the-100-best-sports-quotes-of-all-time>; accessed on 8 August 2020).

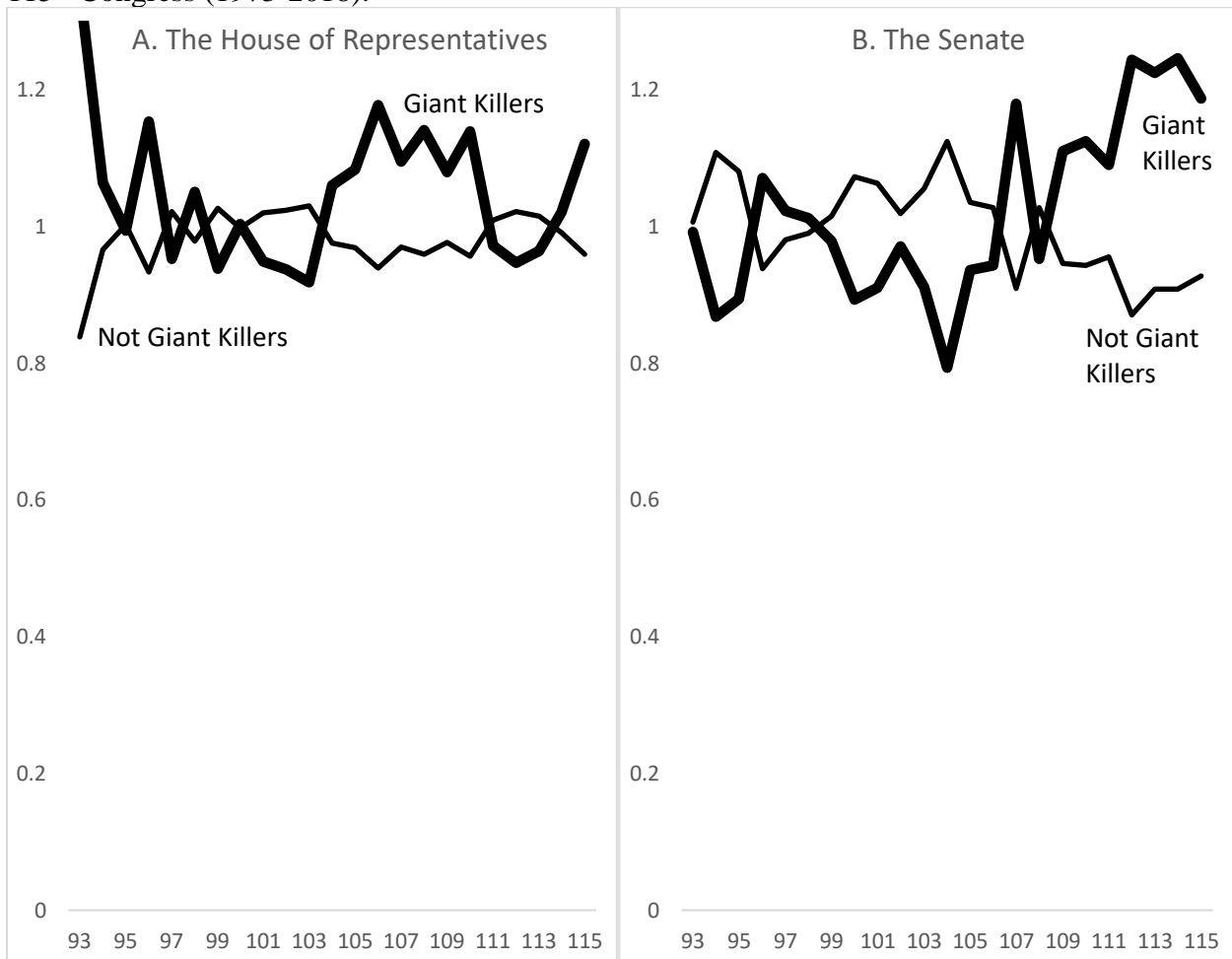
At the simplest level, the data show that Giant Killers are marginally more effective than those members elected in open-seat contests. For all congresses and coding a members' status for the duration of their entire careers in Congress, Giant Killers in the House have a mean LES of 1.05 in the House (and a mean LES of 1.01 in the Senat), whereas their counterparts' mean is 0.98 (0.99) – though small, the difference has a p-value of 0.03 (0.32), which meets the standards of statistical significance in the House. If we isolate the comparison to members' first term in Congress, the difference is greater: Giant Killers in their first term have a mean LES of 0.56 (0.41), while their counterparts' mean is 0.43 (0.40). At least in the House, Giant Killers in their first term are 30 percent more effective than those representatives who win open-seat contests.⁵

Before testing to see if these distinctions can withstand the comprehensive multivariate analysis presented in Volden and Wiseman (2014, 2018), we first explore the difference between Giant Killers and their counterparts across time and over the tenure of their congressional careers. The across-time analysis has a similar pattern in both chambers. Up until the mid-point of our analysis, Giant Killers are not that distinct from their counterparts, though starting in the 104th Congress (1995-6) in the House the patterns diverge (see figure 3, panel A). The crossover point happens 3 congresses later in the Senate (see figure 3, panel B). In the House, Giant Killers did 0.05 better in the first half and 0.08 better in the second half. The difference over time is even greater in the Senate where Giant Killers did 0.09 worse in the first half, but 0.21 better in the second half.⁶

⁵ The House difference has a p-value of 0.0001; the Senat's p-value is 0.41.

⁶ Neither of the differences in the first half is close to statistical significance; both of the differences in the second half easily reach it (p-value=0.03 in the House; p=0.007 in the Senat).

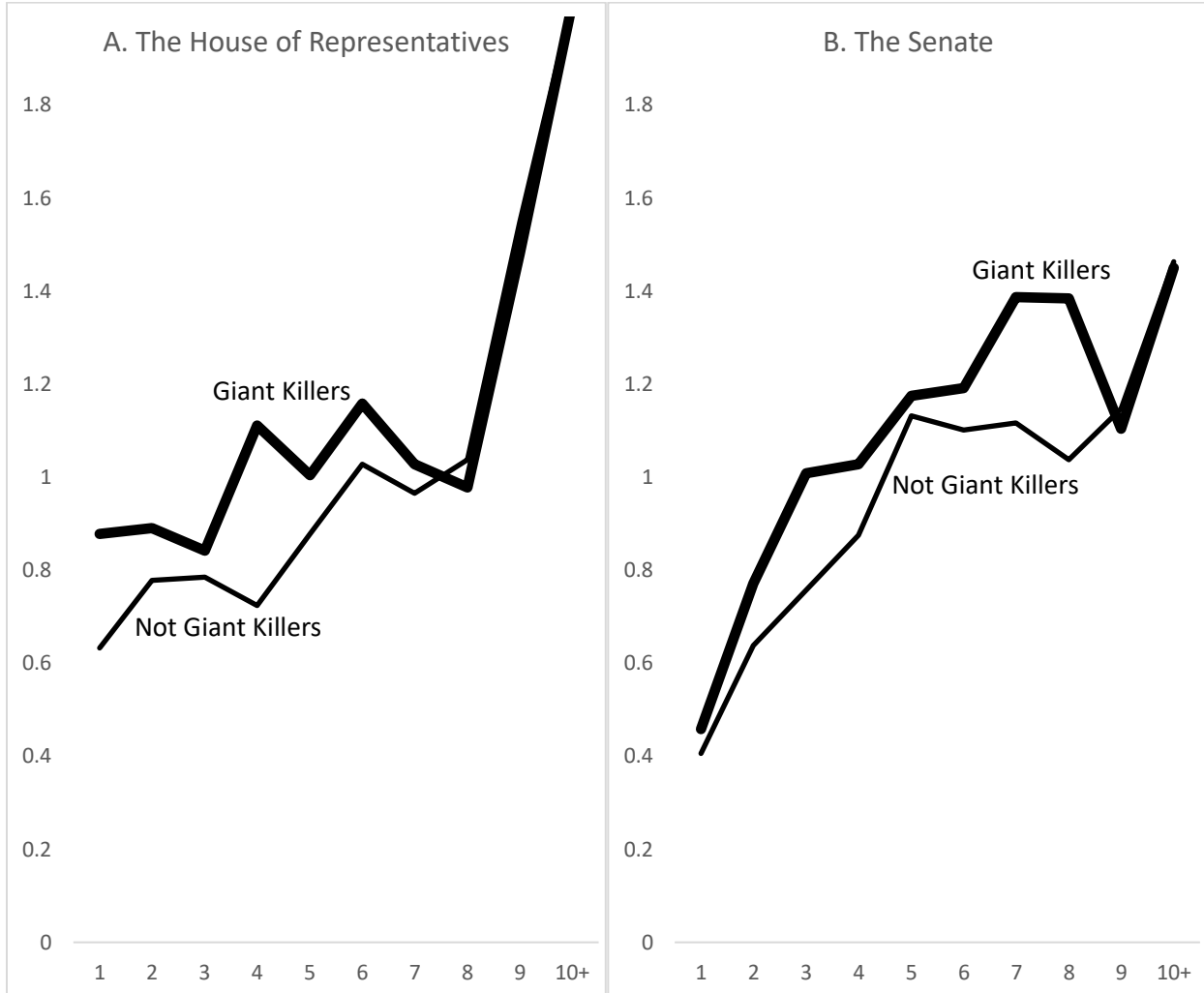
Figure 3: The Legislative Effectiveness Scores for Giant Killers and Their Counterparts, 93rd to 115th Congress (1973-2018).



Having isolated the importance of being a Giant Killer in the second half of our study’s time frame, we now examine the effect of being Giant Killers over the course of their congressional careers. It could be that the ability to knock off an incumbent is simply an indication of being a better politician or the euphoria that a Giant Killer experiences leads to an increase in the beginning of their congressional career that dissipates over time as open-seat winners gain legislative experience and the importance of being a Giant Killer wanes. Again, the data show a similar trend in both chambers, though with a different “break-even” point – and,

again, the Senate lags the House (see figure 4). The distinction between Giant Killers and their counterparts in the House is real for the first ten years. In the Senate, it is not until their ninth congress that the counterparts do as well as the Giant Killers.

Figure 4: The Legislative Effectiveness Scores for Giant Killers and Their Counterparts over the Course of their Careers.



The boost that Giant Killers get in legislative effectiveness appears to be greatest in the second half of our study’s timeframe and the first half of most members’ congressional careers. The simple data analysis from this section is also validated by a consistent finding from Volden and Wiseman (2014, 2018) that members’ effectiveness increases with their seniority. Furthermore, our analysis shows that the effectiveness is greatest in the point of their careers where the Giant Killer boost has completely dissipated.

When both of these findings are taken into consideration, the real effect of being a Giant Killer is stark. Giant Killers in their first five congresses in the House after the 104th Congress are more than 20 percent more effective than their counterparts. Giant Killer senators in their first nine congresses after the 108th Congress are 17 percent more effective.

III. The Giant Killer Effect while Controlling for Other Variables

To determine if the Giant Killer effect is real, we include its operationalization in the comprehensive models that Volden and Wiseman (2014, 2018) developed for each chamber. We first test their model using the data up through the 115th Congress (2017-8), though we did make a couple of minor tweaks to both chambers' regression models. In the House, we used the incumbents' two-party vote rather than their percentage of the vote that they received on election day.⁷ Also, to include those members who were elected in special elections we used an indicator variable for those members that served the full 2-year term.⁸ In the Senate, to include those senators who were appointed to office we use an indicator variable for those members who were not appointed, which becomes an interaction term for vote percentage. For both variables, appointed senators have a value of 0; the 0 for the vote percentage will have no affect because of

⁷ Because they differ only with the presence of third-party candidates, which we think slightly distorts the electoral safety measure, the two-party vote and win percentage are highly correlated.

⁸ Because they are necessarily elected in open seats, we wanted to include even those elected in special elections.

the 0 for the indicator variable.⁹ Rather than maintaining consistency across chambers, we maintain consistency with the sets of independent variables that Volden and Wiseman (2014, 2018) used, which, differed slightly.

To operationalize the Giant Killer effect appropriately, we include several variables in both chambers' regressions. First, an indicator variable that takes a value of "1" if the member is a Giant Killer and in the first part of their congressional career (to maintain consistency with the previous section, the cutoff in the House is 5 terms and in the Senate is 8 terms). Second, to account for the across-time change in the data analysis in the previous section, we include an indicator variable if the congress for the Legislative Effectiveness Scores is in the second part of the data analysis (beginning with the 104th Congress in the House and 107th in the Senate). Third, an interaction variable of these first two indicator variables. If the Giant Killer effect from the previous section is robust to multivariate analysis, this interaction term should be positive. We now discuss the results by chamber.

A. The Giant Killer Effect in Multivariate Analysis: The House

We closely match the Volden and Wiseman (2014) House results (see column A of table 1), which provides confidence at two different levels. First, we feel that it demonstrates that we have properly simulated their results. Second, it suggests that the relations that they thought were important are still relevant on data up through the 115th Congress.

⁹ Because we include appointed senators as incumbents, we thought we should capture the effect they have on the tests even in the congress to which they were appointed.

Table 1: The Legislative Success of Giant Killers in the House of Representatives.

	(A) Volden-Wiseman Results	(B) With Giant Killer Variables
Seniority	0.059*** (0.01)	0.060*** (0.01)
State Legislative Experience	-0.112** (0.07)	-0.115** (0.07)
State Legislative Experience *	0.520*** (0.21)	0.543*** (0.21)
Legislative Prof.		
Majority Party	0.440*** (0.04)	0.411*** (0.05)
Majority-Party Leadership	0.458*** (0.15)	0.457*** (0.15)
Minority-Party Leadership	-0.133*** (0.05)	-0.125** (0.05)
Speaker	-0.677*** (0.24)	-0.688*** (0.24)
Committee Chair	3.059*** (0.23)	3.059*** (0.23)
Subcommittee Chair	0.764*** (0.07)	0.770*** (0.07)
Power Committee	-0.212*** (0.05)	-0.211*** (0.05)
Distance from Median	0.009 (0.09)	-0.068 (0.11)
Female	0.078** (0.05)	0.060* (0.05)
African American	-0.290*** (0.07)	-0.287*** (0.07)
Latino	0.000 (0.10)	-0.017 (0.10)
Size of Congressional Delegation	-0.003** (0.00)	-0.003** (0.00)
Full Term	0.008 (0.11)	-0.010 (0.11)
Win Percentage	0.014* (0.01)	0.017** (0.01)
Win Percentage ²	0.000* (0.00)	0.000** (0.00)
Giant Killer (First Five Terms)		-0.049 (0.05)
Post 104th Congress		0.051 (0.05)
Giant Killer (First Five Terms) *		0.231*** (0.07)
Post 104th Congress		
Constant	-0.341 (0.37)	-0.450 (0.37)

N=10,080; ***Statistically significant at 0.01; **Statistically significant at 0.05; *Statistically significant at 0.1.

We first test to see if the increased legislative success for Giant Killers that we observed in the bivariate results persists in the multivariate test (column B). Before the 104th Congress, being a Giant Killers results in a lower LES of 0.049, though that estimate is not statistically significant. After the 104th Congress though Giant Killers have a 0.233 higher LES.¹⁰ This effect is both substantively and statistically significant. Given that the LES average for members in their first five terms is only 0.674, members who knock off an incumbent have LES scores one-third higher than their counterparts.

We can put this effect into a broader context. The regression output suggests that the boost gained from being a Giant Killer in the first five terms during the latter part of the time period we examine is almost four times as much as that gained for being a woman, a result that Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer (2018) trumpeted with great fanfare. Furthermore, it is worth almost 4 congresses of seniority, about half as much as being in the majority party, and about one third of being a subcommittee chair. All of this is to suggest that those challengers who beat incumbents on their way to taking their seat in the House chamber significantly overperform their counterparts who won in open seats.

In additional analyses that we performed, we could not uncover a systematically bigger effect for Primary Giant Killers from General Election Giant Killers. It could be that their even better political skills equally offset the punishment of beating a caucus or conference friend or that by the time the member takes the oath of office in the House all that matters is the letter –

¹⁰ The 0.233 Giant Killer effect is determined by adding the indicator variable coefficients for Giant Killers in their first five terms and post 104th Congress to the indicator variable.

“D” or “R” – behind their name. In a chamber where numbers matter more than personalities, these results were not altogether that surprising.

B. The Source of the Increased Legislative Success

We gain further insight into the potential sources of this legislative boost by substituting our dependent variable in the above multivariate analysis for the various stages of the legislative process included in the calculation of the LES – allowing us to determine if, for instance, Giant Killers are more effective because they simply introduce more bills or because a higher proportion of the bills they introduce move along in the legislative process. When we break this process down, a few noteworthy results emerge, again for our population of post-104th Congress Giant Killers in their first five terms. Giant Killers, on average, have 0.74 more bills reported out of committee and 0.49 more bills pass the House.¹¹ Part of this greater success could be a consequence of the Giant Killers introducing two more pieces of substantive legislation on average than their peers,¹² even as they sponsor a similar amount of non-substantive legislation.¹³

We now consider the smallest subset of our dataset – Primary Giant Killers – and attempt to ascertain what differentiates them from their general election counterparts. From the dataset, a

¹¹ Both findings are statistically significant at 0.01.

¹² Statistically significant at 0.05.

¹³ Several other areas were explored to see if Giant Killers displayed a boost along certain stages of the legislative process compared to non-Giant Killers, or if General Election Giant Killers and Primary Giant Killers differentiated from one another at any step of the process. None of these results proved statistically significant.

few insights allow us to construct a narrative: we find that Primary Giant Killers sponsor a notably higher proportion of commemorative bills compared to their general election and non-Giant Killer counterparts, a differential that only grew after the 104th Congress. This result could suggest an attempt by Primary Giant Killers to mend fences after presumably upsetting important interest groups and power players in their district when they defeated the incumbent. In essence, we posit that the increased proportion of commemorative legislation points to their attempts to smooth over resentment that they may have caused when they defeated a member of their own party – honoring individuals in their district, renaming post offices, and generally being seen “working for the district” as much as possible. These conclusions, of course, are speculative, but consistent with our deeper dive into the legislative activities of the Giant Killers.

In our consideration of Primary Giant Killers, we also examined a possible exception to our working theory that they were likely to enter the halls of Congress with some level of resentment from their colleagues. Though exceedingly rare, on occasion, party leadership *wanted* certain incumbents to be defeated, which would then make our Primary Giant Killers not a resented usurper, but instead a welcomed replacement for a particularly problematic member of the caucus or conference. Examples of these situations are not always clear, but we examined a few obvious cases to check our argument. Our population of “party-desired” Primary Giant Killers include Representative Mo Brooks, who ousted a former Democrat in the primary to take his seat in the House in 2010, Representative David Trott, who defeated a strong Tea Partier in a 2014 primary that party leadership was worried would lose the seat, and Representatives Hansen Clarke and Dwight Evans, who ousted incumbents plagued by scandal in the 2010 and 2006 primaries, respectively. We could detect no obvious benefit accrued to this group upon their arrival in Washington – suggesting that the party leaders did not spend additional resources in

supporting the new member, even if they were pleased that they beat the incumbent. On the contrary, we found that this group had a below average LES, though not in large enough numbers to constitute a statistically significant result. Perhaps these members thought that by virtue of defeating a hated member of the caucus they felt that they did not need to deliver as much to their district. Or, alternatively, most of these members ran in safe seats, which reduced the incentive for their party leaderships to disproportionately help them upon taking the oath of office. This dataset is, admittedly, too small to derive definitive findings, but the trend does provide some insight on the nature of Primary Giant Killers.

C. The Giant Killer Effect in Multivariate Analysis: The Senate

As with the House results, we are able to closely match the Volden and Wiseman (2018) results in the Senate (see column C of table 2). Again, we test to see if the legislative success among Giant Killers that we observed in the bivariate results persists in a multivariate test (column D). Before the 106th Congress, being a Giant Killers results in a -0.089 lower LES. After the 106th Congress though Giant Killers have a 0.030 higher LES. Admittedly, the differences are not huge, but they are big enough and consistent enough that the variables are jointly significant.

Table 2: The Legislative Success of Giant Killers in the Senate

	(A)	(B)	(C)
	Volden-Wiseman Results	With Giant Killer Variables	With GK Variables by Election
Majority Party	0.352** (0.09)	0.347*** (0.09)	0.346** (0.09)
Committee Chair	1.046** (0.11)	1.041*** (0.12)	1.041** (0.11)
Subcommittee Chair	0.199** (0.08)	0.204*** (0.08)	0.202** (0.08)
Majority-Party Leadership	0.017 (0.16)	0.009 (0.16)	0.004 (0.16)
Minority-Party Leadership	-0.115* (0.06)	-0.121** (0.06)	-0.124* (0.06)
Power Committee	-0.150** (0.06)	-0.151*** (0.06)	-0.148** (0.06)
State Legislative Experience	-0.212* (0.11)	-0.214** (0.11)	-0.215* (0.11)
State Legislative Experience *	0.958* (0.47)	0.974** (0.48)	0.965* (0.48)
Legislative Prof.	-0.057 (0.12)	-0.073 (0.13)	-0.091 (0.13)
Distance from Median	-0.002 (0.14)	-0.025 (0.14)	-0.029 (0.14)
Majority-Party Women	0.243** (0.10)	0.226** (0.10)	0.227* (0.10)
Minority-Party Women	-0.259** (0.05)	-0.264*** (0.05)	-0.263** (0.05)
Freshman	0.093** (0.02)	0.092*** (0.02)	0.092** (0.02)
Seniority	-0.004** (0.00)	-0.004*** (0.00)	-0.004** (0.00)
Seniority ²	-0.102 (0.11)	-0.096 (0.11)	-0.058 (0.11)
African American	0.125 (0.14)	0.120 (0.14)	0.120 (0.15)
Latino	0.022 (0.10)	0.036 (0.10)	0.035 (0.10)
Not Appointed	0.002 (0.00)	0.002 (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)
Win Percentage	0.000 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)
Win Percentage ²			
Giant Killer		-0.080* (0.06)	
(First Eight Terms)			
General Election GK			-0.053 (0.07)
(First Eight Terms)			
Primary GK			-0.252** (0.08)
(First Eight Terms)			
Post 106th Congress		-0.003 (0.06)	0.000 (0.06)
Giant Killer *		0.122 (0.10)	
Post 106th Congress			0.098 (0.10)
General Election GK *			0.147 (0.10)
Post 106th Congress			0.341* (0.15)
Primary GK *			
Post 106th Congress			
Constant	0.325* (0.15)	0.352** (0.15)	0.341* (0.15)

N=10,080; ***Statistically significant at 0.01; **Statistically significant at 0.05; *Statistically significant at 0.1.

As we did with the House results, we can put these substantive results into a broader context. Being a Giant Killer in the Senate is worth slightly more than one-third of an additional congress of experience and about one-seventh of being a subcommittee chair or a woman serving in the minority party. Again, this effect is not substantively large, but the joint statistical significance suggests that it is real.

IV. One Final Word about the Senate

We will be honest. Once we saw the results for the two chambers, we were inclined to simply write this paper about the House and pretend – like many other congressional scholars – that the Senate does not exist. A deeper dive into the Senate data, though reveals an interesting pattern that speaks to the distinction between Primary versus General Election Giant Killers. The House data analysis suggested that both had similar effects on their effectiveness (or, perhaps the extra ability of pulling the rare primary win was almost equally offset by the rebuke the party leveled for defeating one of their former caucus or conference members). In the Senate, a distinction existed, and it rang true to how we thought it would.

The results (see column C from table 2) show both consistency and difference across the stages of when newly elected members earn their Giant Killer status in the Senate. The differences between the pre-106th and post-106th are consistent. Giant Killer status is 0.147 greater in the latter period for Primary Giant Killers and 0.099 greater for General Election Giant Killers. Where they differ is that Primary Giant Killers actually are 0.199 less effective in the earlier period and 0.149 less effective in the latter period than General Election Giant Killers.

Again, drawing these distinctions does not necessarily show statistical significance in all the variables, but the set of variables are jointly significant.

Once the punishment suffered by Primary Giant Killers is separated from the reward of General Election Giant Killers, the substantive effect of that reward increases to 0.044, though still not nearly as large as the House effect. Being a General Election Giant Killer is worth about a year in the Senate and about one-fifth as much as being a subcommittee chair or a woman in the minority party.

The contrast between the House results (not shown) and the Senate results on when the member earns their Giant Killer status is also consistent with how we think the two chambers and their members operate. The sore feelings senators may have toward the new kid who shows up after beating one of their friends is simply greater in a chamber where personal relationships still matter. In the “People’s House,” personal relationships do not matter as much as merit and ability – at least according to the tea-leaf reading of our results suggests.

V. Conclusion

This paper bridges one of the oldest and most developed paths of congressional research – the incumbency advantage – with one of the newest and most exciting paths for future congressional research – the determinants of legislator success. While incumbents win the vast majority of the races that they run, when they do not win, the challengers to whom they lose go on to have more productive legislative careers than those members who gain their office in open-

seat contests. We find that this effect is real and pronounced for the first 5 terms in the House. Afterward, it appears that the Giant Killers bonus disappears.

While the Senate Giant Killer bonus is not as big, it is still statistically significant. Furthermore, when the election during which they earn the status is taken into consideration, we find that the bonus only accrues to General Election Giant Killers; Primary Giant Killers have less legislative success. These results suggest that while they may be even better politicians for defeating an incumbent in a primary, they suffer a stigma once they join the conference or caucus to which their vanquished opponent used to be a member.

We see at least two future directions for the research that we present here. First, we could imagine parsing out more systematically why Giant Killers overperform. Is it that they are simply better politicians? Or are they given better committee assignments or treated better by party leadership because of their vaulted or vulnerable electoral status? Second, the findings from this paper may suggest that those challengers who defeat incumbents constitute a subset of legislators that are simply different, not unlike those who were elected in a particular election (Watergate Babies, Tea Party Members, or Nancy Pelosi's Majority Makers) or who had particular experiences (the Gingrich Senators).

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