Center for
Effective Lawmaking

# Legislative Effectiveness, Progressive Ambition, and Electoral Success

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**June 2025**

## Abstract

Are effective state lawmakers more likely than ineffective state lawmakers to be elected to Congress? We draw on a new dataset of state legislative effectiveness scores from 1993 to 2018 to examine the relationship between lawmaker effectiveness and the decision to run for, and ultimately be elected to, the U.S. House of Representatives. We find that more-effective state lawmakers are more likely to enter Congress. This pattern is due more to the progressive ambition of candidates than to voter decisions. Specifically, within citizen state legislatures, more-effective lawmakers are much more likely to run for U.S. House seats than are their less-effective counterparts. In highly professional state legislatures, however, more-effective lawmakers are more likely to run for Congress only when induced by an open seat. Our analysis finds no relationship between a state legislator's lawmaking effectiveness and the likelihood that she wins her primary or general House election.

♣ The authors thank discussants and participants at the American Political Science Association Conference and the Center for Effective Lawmaking Research Conference for helpful guidance. Volden and Wiseman thank the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and the U.S. Democracy Program of the Hewlett Foundation and the Democracy Fund for their support for the Center for Effective Lawmaking (www.thelawmakers.org).

**Legislative Effectiveness, Progressive Ambition, and Electoral Success**

How does a state legislator's experiences in her home chamber map into her subsequent political career? Between the 93rd-118th Congress (1973-2025), approximately half of all members of Congress had served as members of their state legislatures, with state legislative office being the most common pathway through which members enter Congress (Carnes 2013; Hirano and Snyder 2014, 2019; Thomsen 2017). Recent empirical scholarship points to the benefits of state legislature service for those who want to pursue higher office (McCrain and O'Donnell 2023). However, it is not clear whether it is simply any state legislative service that matters, or if the quality and adroitness of that service is also important in determining a state legislator's decision to run for higher office, and the likelihood that she is successful in moving up the political ladder.

Ideally, one of the benefits of American federalism is that state legislative experience enhances the quality of national representatives. For this to be true, of course, the best of the state legislators must be the ones to seek out and win seats in the U.S. Congress. In other words, legislators who excelled at the state level would be more likely to run for higher office, and they would likewise be able to make a compelling case to voters based on their experiences and lawmaking success. If such a process were working well, with state legislatures offering a "farm team" for Congress, proponents of political reform and governing capacity (e.g., LaPira, Drutman, and Kosar 2020) should, perhaps, focus their efforts on promoting those who have proven their worth at policymaking and reform in the states, and encouraging them to expand their political aspirations to higher offices.

Drawing on data from the lawmaking activities and electoral ambitions of legislators in 97 state legislative chambers between 1993-2018, we provide the first systematic exploration of

whether American federalism serves its purpose of promoting effective lawmakers from the states to the federal level. Specifically, we uncover strong evidence of effective lawmakers in the states being more likely to end up in Congress than ineffective lawmakers. We then ask whether this pattern arises due to the progressive ambition of effective lawmakers or due to the preferences of voters. On this point, we find that more-effective state lawmakers appear to be generally more likely to run for a seat in the U.S. House than their less-effective lawmaking counterparts. However, we also demonstrate that, among those who chose to run, state legislators who are more-effective lawmakers are no more or less likely to win their primaries or their general elections than less-effective state lawmakers.

Moreover, we uncover an important distinction between candidate emergence in more- versus less-professional legislatures. More-effective lawmakers in less-professional (i.e., citizen) legislatures are generally more likely to run for Congress than their less-effective counterparts. However, in more-professional legislatures, more-effective lawmakers are more likely to run for Congress only in open seat contests. Lacking an opportunity to run for an open seat, highly effective lawmakers keep doing their successful and impactful work at the state level. These findings highlight the differences in the relative attractiveness of serving in legislatures of varying degrees of professionalism, resonating with earlier studies of progressive ambition. As such, our study also adds foundational knowledge that the cost-benefit calculations involved in progressive ambition include the attractiveness and meaningful policy work that lawmakers are able to accomplish in their current position, in addition to the attractiveness of higher office.

More broadly considered, our findings point to how the process resulting in populating Congress with more-effective state legislators is driven by supply-side considerations – their willingness to run – more than by demand-side preferences of voters. These findings suggest

that candidate recruitment may play a larger role in the quality of lawmakers in Congress than does electoral choice by voters.

**Exploring the Relationship Between State Legislative Experience and Higher Office**

Scholars of congressional elections have long noted the increased success of candidates with prior experience in elective office (Abramowitz 1991; Canon 1990; Jacobson and Carson 2019; Maisel and Stone 1997). The ability to win a previous election is an excellent indicator of one's potential to win a seat in Congress, as it provides individuals with political resources, including lawmaking and policy experience, political connections, name recognition, staff resources, and fundraising acumen (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier 1996; Jacobson and Carson 2019; Maestas et al. 2006). Serving in the state legislature is particularly valuable because it offers individuals opportunities to gain experiences and develop political resources akin to those needed to campaign for and serve in Congress. State legislators gain experience drafting, debating, and amending legislation, serving on committees, representing constituents, and running political campaigns (Berkman 1993; Maestas et al. 2006). For these reasons it is unsurprising that state legislators often develop ambitions to serve in Congress (Black 1972; Schlesinger 1966). These state legislators with aspirations for higher office demonstrate what Schlesinger (1966) labeled *progressive ambition*. Scholarship on progressive ambition finds factors such as being term limited, constituency overlap between the current and future districts, and whether there is an open seat influence when officeholders choose to make a bid for higher office (Brace 1984; Rohde 1979; Treul 2009).

Several studies have drawn on samples of state legislators to examine variation in progressive ambition and the choice to run for Congress (i.e., Aldrich and Thomsen 2017; Hall 2019; Maestas et al. 2006; Maisel and Stone 2014; Phillips, Snyder, and Hall 2024; Stone and

Maisel 2003; Thomsen 2014, 2017). Additionally, anecdotal evidence points to prominent Members of Congress who cultivated their lawmaking skills while serving in state legislatures. Retired Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), for example, explains how he learned the nuts and bolts of legislative policymaking while serving in the Massachusetts House of Representatives; and the successes that he obtained in the statehouse influenced the tactics and strategies that he employed when he came to Congress (Frank 2015). More recently, Volden and Wiseman (2024) point to how highly effective lawmakers Representative Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Representative Steve Stivers (R-OH) likewise had significant track records of being very successful at advancing their legislative agendas in the New York State Assembly and Ohio State House of Representatives, respectively, prior to serving in the U.S. House. To the extent that Congressmen Frank, Jeffries, and Stivers represent a more general pipeline of effective state lawmakers taking their talents to the halls of Congress, we might expect to find a systematic pattern of successful state legislators being elected to Congress at a greater rate than their less successful counterparts.

Two main processes could plausibly explain a pattern of effective state lawmakers entering Congress at a greater rate than ineffective state lawmakers – a choice by potential candidates, or a choice by voters. The theoretical foundations and individual motivations behind these two processes differ from one another. Specifically, one possibility is that those state legislators who are successful in advancing their agendas recognize that they are generally more skilled in lawmaking than others. They find lawmaking to be rewarding and they seek to apply their skills in a more prominent legislative arena: the U.S. Congress. Such sentiments would be consistent with broader progressive ambition literatures, beginning with Rohde (1979) and advanced by a wide range of scholars including Fowler (1993), Fowler and McClure (1989), Hall

(2019), Maestas et al. (2006), Maisel and Stone (2014), Stone and Maisel (2003), and Thomsen (2014, 2017). This literature points to how potential candidates are cognizant of their skills and limitations, as well as the opportunities that are provided to them given the current political environment; and they make choices about whether to run for higher office in a manner consistent with maximizing their expected utility. They weigh the costs of giving up their current seat and running for higher office against the probabilistic benefits of gaining the more prestigious and powerful position.

For those state legislators who value bringing about policy change, amassing a track record of legislative successes at the state level might inform them about their underlying ability to advance their agendas more broadly, such as through service in the U.S. Congress. Such progressive ambition, based on their ability to make a policy impact, might induce them to choose to run for higher office. In contrast, those who are not successful in advancing legislation at the state level should have little reason to believe that they will achieve any more success in Congress and may therefore be less inclined to run. Volden and Wiseman (2014, 33-36) find such divergent paths between high-performing and low-performing freshmen in the U.S. House. Those who were highly effective were more likely to seek higher office (such as the U.S. Senate) over the next decade, while those who were ineffective were more likely to leave Congress to try something other than lawmaking. This logic motivates our first testable hypothesis:

***Lawmaking Effectiveness and Progressive Ambition Hypothesis:*** *More-effective state lawmakers are more likely to run for Congress than are less-effective state lawmakers.*

A second theoretical reason that we might see effective, rather than ineffective, state lawmakers in Congress is that voters may reward the more-effective state lawmakers in their primary and general elections. An extensive scholarly literature points to how most voters are

not well-informed about their elected representatives' activities (e.g., Lupia 2015), especially as they pertain to the lawmaking process (e.g., Grimmer et al. 2014). However, lawmaking effectiveness might be considered a valence dimension that is generically appealing to voters, independent of their party affiliation or political ideology (i.e., Groseclose 2001; Wiseman 2006). On this point, recent scholarship by Butler et al. (2023) demonstrates that, although voters are generally uninformed about the lawmaking effectiveness of their Members of Congress, credible information about their representatives' lawmaking effectiveness from an objective source significantly improves their opinions of their representative – regardless of their political party. Moreover, Treul et al. (2022) demonstrate how primary voters, in particular, are more likely to vote for those House incumbents who are more-effective lawmakers in Congress.

Taken together, these recent findings suggest that congressional primary and general electorates might weigh a state legislator's prior lawmaking effectiveness when deciding how to cast their ballots, motivating our second testable hypothesis:

***Lawmaking Effectiveness and Electoral Victory Hypothesis****: More-effective state lawmakers are more likely to win their primary and general elections for seats in the U.S. House than are less-effective state lawmakers.*

These two hypotheses need not be in competition with one another. It is also plausible that more-effective state lawmakers are more likely to serve in Congress because of a combination of these two factors: they are more likely to run for Congress *and* they are more likely to win their races conditional on running. Our analysis below is designed to disentangle these two plausible paths.

**Data**

Our first major research question is: Are more-effective state lawmakers more likely to serve in Congress than less-effective state lawmakers? If so, our secondary research questions, motivated by the above hypotheses are: Is the election of more-effective state lawmakers to Congress driven largely by patterns of candidate entry, by the preferences (and decisions) of primary or general election voters, or by both of these factors combined? Engaging with these questions requires: metrics of lawmaker effectiveness for each state legislator, information regarding which of them chose to run for the House (*entry*), and whether they ultimately won their primary and/or general elections for a House seat (*victory*).

Our metric of lawmaking effectiveness for state legislators is drawn from Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman (2025), who generated nearly 80,000 state legislative effectiveness scores for legislators who served in 97 different state legislative chambers between 1987-2019. They employed a methodology that is analogous to that used in Volden and Wiseman's (2014) generation of Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LES) for the U.S. Congress.[1] More specifically, Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman (2025) draw on publicly-available data to identify every bill that was introduced into every state legislature (other than Kansas), to match the bill to its primary sponsor, and to identify how far each bill went through each of five different status steps in the legislative process between introduction and (possibly) becoming law.[2] Each bill is coded as being commemorative, substantive, or substantive and significant; and then a State Legislative Effectiveness Score (SLES) is generated for each state legislator as a weighted average of these

[1] Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman (2025) generate scores for every state legislature except for Kansas, where the prevailing legislative procedures for the period analyzed do not allow analysts to identify which state legislator was the primary sponsor on bills introduced into the chamber.
[2] Similar to Volden and Wiseman's analysis of Congress, Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman only consider bills that, if enacted, will change existing state law.

fifteen metrics (numbers of bills across five lawmaking stages and three levels of bill significance). Later lawmaking stages and more significant legislation are given greater weight. Similar to Volden and Wiseman's LES, each SLES is normalized to take a mean value of "1" within each chamber for each legislative term (between elections). Hence, any state legislator whose SLES is greater than one is (by construction) above average in lawmaking effectiveness, in comparison to their peers; and those with lower scores are less effective.

While the SLES is a transparent and objective indicator of a given legislator's lawmaking effectiveness, concerns can be raised when employing the scores in their raw forms in the kinds of analyses that we propose to undertake. First, given the wide variation in legislative procedures and practices across state legislatures (e.g., Squire and Hamm 2005), simply comparing the SLESs of legislators across different states and time might not be substantively meaningful. An SLES value of, say, 1.5 might more strongly signal outstanding lawmaking effectiveness in Georgia than it does in Montana. Second, as is often the case when exploring the relationship between legislator behavior and electoral politics, concerns could be raised about including SLES data from the legislative terms in which legislators are potentially choosing to run for higher office in our analysis. Legislators who are seeking higher office might plausibly employ very different legislative tactics and strategies in their final terms than the legislative approaches that they engage with in a more typical legislative session; including their final terms of office in our analysis might facilitate biased results and inferences regarding the relationships between lawmaking effectiveness and running for (and winning) higher office.

To engage with the first potential concern, in addition to analyzing variation in legislators' raw scores, we also employ a transformed version of the SLES data in our analysis that allows us to consider how effective a state legislator was in comparison to a similarly-

situated legislator (in terms of seniority, party affiliation, and institutional positions) in the same chamber and the same legislative term. More specifically following Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman's (2021) approach, we first regress a state legislator's SLES on a set of indicator variables for whether the legislator was in the majority party and/or held a committee chair, as well as the number of terms served in the state legislature (seniority) – all of which are expected to be positively correlated with lawmaking effectiveness. From these regression results, run separately by legislative chamber and term, we then generate a predicted SLES, which is denoted as a state legislator's benchmark SLES, capturing the effectiveness of the average similarly positioned state legislator in the chamber in that term.

Any state legislator whose SLES exceeds her benchmark by at least 50% is then coded as being *above expectations* in lawmaking effectiveness, while any state legislator whose SLES is below 50% of her benchmark score is coded as being *below expectations*. (Those remaining legislators performing near their benchmarks are denoted as *meeting expectations* in lawmaking effectiveness.)

To engage with the second potential concern, in various empirical specifications that follow, we will control for a legislator's lagged SLES, as well as her *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations*, where the latter captures whether state legislator was below (coded as a 1), meeting (2), or exceeding (3) expectations in her lawmaking effectiveness in the penultimate legislative session before facing any given opportunity to run for Congress. By controlling for a legislator's lagged scores (and/or transformations of those scores), we are able to sidestep the endogeneity concerns that would be associated with those running for Congress paying differential attention to state lawmaking during such electoral competition. Similarly, for those who have already left the state legislature, analyzing their lagged values likewise removes any

biases associated with those about to leave their offices focusing on other matters than lawmaking altogether. Taken together, these data allow us to employ a consistent and objective metric of lawmaking effectiveness for every state legislator in our dataset.[3]

To capture the overall movement from the state legislature to Congress, we create an indicator variable that takes a value of "1" if a state legislator is elected to Congress in a particular election and "0" otherwise. Such an outcome can only occur if the legislator chooses to run, and if voters support her candidacy. Because we are interested in both of these steps, we create separate dependent variables for each. To measure candidate entry, we create an indicator variable that takes a value of "1" if a state legislator ran for a seat in the U.S. House during any particular election cycle, and "0" otherwise.[4] To measure whether a candidate won her election(s), we create indicator variables taking a value of "1" if a state legislator won her primary or general election, conditional on running for Congress, and "0" otherwise. In addition to these main dependent and independent variables of interest, we also account for a wide range of political and electoral variables that likely influence patterns of candidate entry and election outcomes.

A bit of a challenge arises in determining when and where state legislators find opportunities to run for Congress and therefore how best to construct the relevant set of

[3] While Bucchianeri, Volden and Wiseman (2025) produce SLES data for several state legislatures beginning with the legislative sessions that correspond to the 1996 elections, legislators in several states do not enter their dataset until later years. More specifically, AR, IL, ND, NM, OH, SD, and UT enter the dataset in 1997. AL, CO, CT, HI, ID, IN, MT, and NY enter the dataset in 1999. FL, GA, KY, and WY enter the dataset in 2001. DE enters the dataset in 2003. NE, OR, and RI enter the dataset in 2007. And lawmakers from MA enter the dataset in 2009.

[4] Scholars studying progressive ambition and the decision to run for higher office have constructed samples of potential candidates in a variety of ways, with the particular samples depending in part on the outcome of interest. Because so few state legislators run for Congress, some scholars have drawn on survey data. For example, Fulton et al. (2006), Maestas et al. (2006), and Stone and Maisel (2003), as part of the *Candidate Emergence Study*, used surveys to study lawmakers' reported attraction to a congressional career, where the sample included state legislators whose districts overlapped with 200 randomly selected U.S. House districts in 41 states. Other research that examines variation in the actual decision to run typically draws on datasets of thousands of state legislators over time to ensure that there are enough runners in the sample to engage in meaningful empirical analyses. Our research design aligns with this latter approach.

independent variables. It is worth noting that state legislators enter congressional races more strategically than inexperienced candidates (Jacobson and Kernell 1983); and the most important factors that shape whether experienced candidates choose to run, and eventually win, are the presence of an incumbent and the partisan tilt of the district (i.e., Canon 1993; Carson et al. 2007; Hirano and Snyder 2019; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). There are multiple ways to account for these factors empirically. One approach is to nest state legislators in a congressional district that they could have run in (given where their state legislative district was geographically situated), or the congressional district that they actually ran in, which occasionally does not overlap with their state legislative district (Aldrich and Thomsen 2017; Thomsen 2014, 2017). Nonrunners, in turn, would be nested in the congressional district that has the most overlap (in terms of population) with their state legislative district.

Another approach is to denote the pool of potential candidates whose state legislative districts are geographically nested in the same congressional district to examine patterns of entry only among runners and nonrunners in the same district (Phillips, Snyder, and Hall 2024). In such an approach, state legislators are similarly coded as being nested in a congressional district if some sizable portion of the voters in their state legislative districts are in the larger congressional district.[5] An advantage of the "pool-based" approach is that potential and actual candidates are compared to those in the same political and electoral context due to pool fixed effects. A disadvantage with this approach, however, is that the sample is much smaller than the

[5] Approximately three-fourths of state legislators run in the congressional district that has the largest overlap with their state legislative district. Our sample also includes former state legislators who ran for Congress (i.e., they ran for a U.S. House seat after they left their state legislature); and 76% of these individuals ran from the congressional district that had the largest overlap with their (former) state legislative district. Approximately 12% who ran for Congress ran in a nested congressional district with less overlap; and the remaining 12% ran in congressional districts that had no overlap with their state legislative districts.

former approach, because there must be at least one state legislator who runs for higher office in each pool for the congressional district to be included in the analysis.[6]

We use the former, "full sample," nesting rather than the latter, "pool-based," approach in our main analysis, and we nest runners in the congressional district in which they actually ran. The results that we present below are substantively identical to what is obtained if we employ the pool-based approach.[7] In matching runners and nonrunners to congressional districts for the full sample, we draw on Jacobson's presidential election return data to measure the partisan favorability of a particular district. More specifically, following Hirano and Snyder (2019), we code districts as *safe* if the candidate's party received more than 57.5% of the vote share in the previous or current presidential election, and *competitive* if the party received between 42.5% and 57.5% of the presidential vote. *Hopeless* districts are the baseline districts for comparison; and they are coded as such if the candidate's party received less than 42.5% of the presidential vote. In addition, we control for whether a House seat is open or incumbent-contested (where incumbent-contested races serve as the baselines for comparison). Ceteris paribus, we expect that state legislators are more likely to choose to run in open seats, and in safe or competitive districts, where their chances of winning are highest (i.e., Hirano and Snyder 2019; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Thomsen 2014, 2017).

In addition to controlling for the competitiveness and partisan leanings of a given congressional district, we also control for several other political and electoral variables that likely influence the costs and benefits of running for office. First, we control for the number of state

[6] Some pool-based approaches also do not include those who ran in a congressional district with no overlap with their state legislative district, though this is not inherent to pool-based approaches (as runners can also be nested in the pool they ran in, regardless of whether it overlapped with their state legislative district). Approximately 10% of sitting state legislators who run for Congress ran in a congressional district that did not overlap with their state legislative district at all.

[7] In Appendix Table A5 we analyze state legislators' decisions to run for Congress, controlling for pool fixed effects.

legislators who sit in the same congressional district as the runner is nested in; we would expect that state legislators are less likely to run for Congress as the number of potential competitors (among other state legislators) increases. We also employ the Squire (1992, 2017) index to account for significant differences in the scope of legislative professionalism across different state legislatures. Third, we control for whether a state legislator is term limited at the time that he or she chooses to run.[8] Finally, we draw on Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman (2025) to control for a variety of institutional and personal characteristics of each state legislator, including a legislator's party (and whether the party held the chamber majority), gender, seniority, and whether the legislator held a committee chair and/or was seated on a power committee.[9] We also include year fixed effects to account for election-specific trends. For those cases where candidates are running for Congress, but are not simultaneously serving in the state legislature, we use the data on their personal and institutional circumstances that corresponded to the final and penultimate sessions that they served in the state legislature. Descriptive statistics for all variables in our analysis are provided in Appendix Table A1. We provide a brief discussion of the methods employed to validate our data at the end of the Supplemental Appendix.

**Findings**

We begin our analysis by exploring the extent to which there is a relationship between a state legislator's lawmaking effectiveness and whether he or she eventually serves in the U.S. House. We estimate a series of cross-sectional time-series logit regressions, where the dependent variable takes on a value of "1" if state legislator *i* was elected to the U.S. House in

[8] Legislators' term limit data were drawn from Fouirnaies and Hall (2022) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).
[9] Bucchianeri, Volden and Wiseman (2025) code a committee as being a power committee if it engages with matters pertaining to budget, finance, appropriations, or rules.

election year *t*. The sample consists of all state legislators in our dataset, including those who never ran for election to the House. Hence, our analysis represents an overview of the data, blurring together self-selection effects on the part of the candidates who choose to run (or not run) for Congress as well as the selection effects on the part of voters to elect (or choose not to elect) more-effective state lawmakers to the House. That said, analyzing the entire sample in this manner does allow us to ask and answer, in a very direct way: are more-effective state lawmakers more likely than less-effective state lawmakers to be chosen to serve in Congress?

As we can see from our results in Table 1, the answer to this question is a resounding "yes." In Model 1.1 we present the results from a logit regression, where we regress whether a state legislator was elected to the House onto the lawmaker's State Legislative Effectiveness Score.[10] The positive and statistically significant coefficient on *SLES* implies that those legislators who are more-effective lawmakers in their chambers were more likely to be elected to Congress than those legislators who were relatively less effective lawmakers within their chambers. This finding holds when we use a legislator's lagged State Legislative Effectiveness Score, rather than her SLES, in Model 1.2. In other words, we see that those state legislators who were among the most effective lawmakers in their previous legislative sessions were more likely to be elected to Congress during their subsequent state legislative terms.

Consistent with conventional wisdom, we see that state legislators are more likely to be elected to the House when they are not facing an incumbent (i.e., open seat competitions), and when the district is politically favorable to them with regards to relative partisan competitiveness. We also see, as indicated by the negative and statistically significant coefficient on *Number of State Legislators in District*, that any given state legislator is more

[10] In all models in Table 1, we account for the fact that many legislators had multiple opportunities to run for Congress (and are therefore in the dataset more than once) with robust standard errors, clustered by legislator.

likely to be elected to the House when they face fewer potential (high quality) competitors in the congressional district in which they are running; and they are also more likely to be elected if they are coming from more professional state legislatures (in which the state legislature operates more similarly to what they would find in Congress), as well as if they are being term limited out of office.

Interestingly, we see that several personal and institutional characteristics of a state legislator, such as gender, political party, and committee chair service, have relatively little impact on the likelihood of being ultimately elected to the House. That said, the results suggest that members of "power" committees are more likely to be elected, perhaps because they are able to leverage their powerful committee membership for enhanced campaign contributions and electioneering activities. Members of the majority party are somewhat less likely to be serve in Congress, perhaps because they choose not to run for a House seat when they enjoy control within their state chambers and/or when voters hold them responsible for state policy outcomes in ways that inhibit their electoral successes.

Of course, as noted in the discussion above, comparing the magnitudes of the impacts of state legislators' raw SLES (or lagged values) can be somewhat complicated, given the wide range of variance across state legislative chambers, and agendas. Hence, in Model 1.3, we explore whether there is a relationship between a legislator's lawmaking effectiveness, relative to her baseline SLES, and whether she is elected to Congress. As we can see from that specification, the positive and statistically significant coefficient on *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* implies that those state legislators who met or exceeded their benchmark State Legislative Effectiveness Scores in the previous legislative session were more likely to be elected than those whose SLESs were below their benchmark scores.

**Table 1: Effective State Lawmakers are More Likely to Be Elected to Congress**

| | Model 1.1 | Model 1.2 | Model 1.3 | Model 1.4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *SLES* | 0.097* | | | |
| | (0.047) | | | |
| *Lagged SLES* | | 0.117*** | | |
| | | (0.035) | | |
| *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* | | | 0.305** | |
| | | | (0.099) | |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* | | | | 0.534** |
| | | | | (0.191) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* | | | | 0.662** |
| | | | | (0.225) |
| Open Seat | 2.859*** | 2.769*** | 2.768*** | 2.767*** |
| | (0.190) | (0.198) | (0.198) | (0.198) |
| Safe District | 1.235** | 1.419** | 1.430** | 1.425** |
| | (0.507) | (0.589) | (0.588) | (0.588) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.468*** | 1.589*** | 1.585*** | 1.585*** |
| | (0.322) | (0.341) | (0.340) | (0.340) |
| Competitive District | 2.179*** | 2.435*** | 2.437*** | 2.438*** |
| | (0.423) | (0.511) | (0.511) | (0.511) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.040*** | -0.038*** | -0.038*** | -0.037*** |
| | (0.010) | (0.010) | (0.010) | (0.010) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 1.923*** | 1.790*** | 1.818*** | 1.777*** |
| | (0.520) | (0.552) | (0.551) | (0.549) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 0.856*** | 0.798*** | 0.801*** | 0.792*** |
| | (0.169) | (0.171) | (0.171) | (0.171) |
| Female | 0.002 | 0.020 | 0.022 | 0.019 |
| | (0.142) | (0.152) | (0.152) | (0.152) |
| Republican | 0.014 | 0.050 | 0.065 | 0.058 |
| | (0.124) | (0.134) | (0.133) | (0.134) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.289* | -0.238 | -0.186 | -0.196 |
| | (0.144) | (0.150) | (0.150) | (0.150) |
| Committee Chair | 0.117 | 0.006 | 0.019 | 0.011 |
| | (0.148) | (0.151) | (0.151) | (0.151) |
| Power Committee | 0.232* | 0.133 | 0.125 | 0.124 |
| | (0.121) | (0.127) | (0.128) | (0.127) |
| Seniority | 0.175** | -0.056 | -0.061 | -0.059 |
| | (0.068) | (0.065) | (0.065) | (0.065) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.015** | -0.001 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | (0.006) | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.004) |
| Constant | -9.484*** | -8.265*** | -8.796*** | -8.629*** |
| | (0.584) | (0.703) | (0.716) | (0.717) |
| N | 78,426 | 57,692 | 57,692 | 57,692 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.272 | 0.276 | 0.278 | 0.278 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. The sample includes all state legislators during each election in which they could have run (including those who never ran for election to the House). Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The results demonstrate that state legislators who have higher lagged Legislative Effectiveness Scores, both overall and relative to expectations, are more likely to be elected to the House. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

In Model 1.4 we replicate the analysis in Model 1.3, but we recode our *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* variable into two categorical variables that take on a value of "1" if a state legislator's Lagged SLES met (or, separately, exceeded) expectations in her penultimate legislative session, and "0" otherwise. The baseline category for such variables in this model include those state legislators whose lagged SLES was below expectations relative to their benchmark scores. Comparing across specifications, we see that the findings in Models 1.3 and 1.4 are quite consistent, in that those state legislators whose lagged SLESs were above expectations were more likely to be elected to the House than those whose lagged SLESs were below expectations (and an analogous finding holds for those legislators whose lagged SLESs met expectations). In addition, we see that the magnitudes and statistical significance of the coefficients on the other independent variables are virtually identical across specifications.[11]

The effect sizes on these variables of interest are substantial. Compared to a state legislator performing below expectations in lawmaking, one who meets expectations has a 71% greater odds of being elected to Congress.[12] And those exceeding expectations have a 94% greater odds of congressional service.[13] Although the probability of any given state legislator running for and being elected to Congress in any given election cycle is low, these relative odds accumulate substantially over time and across districts. Put another way, for the attractive case of an open seat in a safe district, the predicted probability of election to Congress by an ineffective state lawmaker is 1.52%, compared to 2.58% by an average lawmaker, and 2.92% by an effective lawmaker, all else equal. Taken together, these findings provide compelling support

[11] In models A2.1, A3.1, and A4.1 in Appendix Tables A2, A3, and A4, we show these results to be robust when excluding state legislators who ran for Congress after having left the state legislature in a previous legislative term (A2), when the final terms of all legislators are excluded from the analysis (A3), and when we include freshmen legislators in the analysis (A4).

[12] The calculation involved here is $e^{0.534} = 1.71$, or a 71% increase in the odds ratio.

[13] The calculation involved here is $e^{0.662} = 1.94$, or a 94% increase in the odds ratio.

for the claim that more-effective state lawmakers are more likely to end up in Congress than less-effective state lawmakers. Exactly why this relationship holds, however, is an open question.

Turning to the supply-side component of electoral outcomes, in Table 2 we present the results from a series of cross-sectional time-series logit regression models, where the dependent variable takes on a value of "1" if state legislator *i* ran for the House in year *t*, and "0" otherwise. Similar to our approach for the analysis presented in Table 1, we include several different metrics of a legislator's lawmaking effectiveness, including her raw SLES (Model 2.1), her lagged SLES (Model 2.2), and her lagged SLES relative to expectations, either as a step-based (Model 2.3) or indicator-based (Model 2.4) set of variables. Given that the sample consists of all state legislators for whom we have SLES scores (and/or their lagged values), any particular legislator may be in the dataset across multiple opportunities to choose to run, as accounted for through clustered standard errors on the models. Consistent with the *Lawmaking Effectiveness and Progressive Ambition Hypothesis*, we expect that the coefficients on these different effectiveness variables across all specifications will be positive and significant, indicating that more-effective state lawmakers are more likely to run for Congress than less-effective state lawmakers.

**Table 2: Effective State Lawmakers are More Likely to Run for Congress**

| | Model 2.1 | Model 2.2 | Model 2.3 | Model 2.4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *SLES* | 0.091*** | | | |
| | (0.025) | | | |
| *Lagged SLES* | | 0.119*** | | |
| | | (0.022) | | |
| *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* | | | 0.227*** | |
| | | | (0.056) | |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* | | | | 0.319*** |
| | | | | (0.100) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* | | | | 0.464*** |
| | | | | (0.118) |
| Open Seat | 2.157*** | 2.145*** | 2.144*** | 2.143*** |
| | (0.085) | (0.089) | (0.089) | (0.089) |
| Safe District | -0.220 | -0.197 | -0.196 | -0.199 |
| | (0.153) | (0.162) | (0.162) | (0.162) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.165*** | 1.180*** | 1.181*** | 1.182*** |
| | (0.138) | (0.147) | (0.147) | (0.147) |
| Competitive District | 0.585*** | 0.629*** | 0.631*** | 0.631*** |
| | (0.112) | (0.119) | (0.119) | (0.119) |
| State Legislators in District | -0.020*** | -0.021*** | -0.021*** | -0.020*** |
| | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 1.141*** | 1.047*** | 1.048*** | 1.034*** |
| | (0.292) | (0.305) | (0.304) | (0.303) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 1.132*** | 1.057*** | 1.066*** | 1.062*** |
| | (0.094) | (0.094) | (0.094) | (0.094) |
| Female | 0.091 | 0.130 | 0.129 | 0.127 |
| | (0.079) | (0.084) | (0.083) | (0.083) |
| Republican | 0.018 | 0.042 | 0.050 | 0.048 |
| | (0.069) | (0.074) | (0.074) | (0.074) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.246** | -0.186* | -0.139 | -0.144* |
| | (0.081) | (0.086) | (0.086) | (0.086) |
| Committee Chair | 0.115 | 0.005 | 0.023 | 0.020 |
| | (0.084) | (0.086) | (0.085) | (0.085) |
| Power Committee | 0.098 | 0.055 | 0.049 | 0.048 |
| | (0.069) | (0.073) | (0.072) | (0.072) |
| Seniority | 0.220*** | -0.077* | -0.077* | -0.076* |
| | (0.046) | (0.040) | (0.041) | (0.041) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.022*** | -0.002 | -0.002 | -0.002 |
| | (0.004) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) |
| Constant | -5.837*** | -4.865*** | -5.231*** | -5.055*** |
| | (0.217) | (0.271) | (0.295) | (0.281) |
| N | 78,426 | 57,692 | 57,692 | 57,692 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.202 | 0.207 | 0.207 | 0.208 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator ran for the U.S. House of Representatives, and the sample includes all state legislators during each election in which they could have run (including those who never ran for election to the House). Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The results demonstrate that more-effective state legislators are more likely to run for Congress. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

As demonstrated, first, in the results for Model 2.1, this is precisely the relationship that is obtained. The positive and statistically significant coefficient on *SLES* implies that those state legislators who were among the most effective lawmakers within their chambers were more likely to run for the House; this relationship likewise holds when we use a state legislator's Lagged SLES (Model 2.2), rather than her raw SLES. This relationship holds even upon controlling for a wide range of district characteristics, as well as various personal and institutional characteristics of the legislator. The coefficients on these control variables point to the strategic elements of choosing to run for Congress: state legislators are more likely to run for Congress in open-seat contests, especially in safe districts, for example. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we also see that state legislators are more likely to run for Congress when term limited out of office; and it appears that state legislators from more professional legislatures are more likely to run for the House, perhaps indicating that most citizen legislators see themselves as just that – citizens without a heightened progressive ambition.

On the other hand, we see that many of a legislator's personal and/or institutional circumstances do not seem to affect their likelihood of running for Congress. A legislator's gender, political party, and institutional position (with respect to holding a committee chair or being seated on a power committee) are not correlated with choosing to run for the House. One notable exception to this pattern, however, is the negative and statistically significant coefficient on *In Majority Party in State Legislature*, which implies that state legislators are less likely to run for the House when their party controls the chamber in which they sit. We also see across Models 2.2-2.4 that a legislator's seniority is negatively correlated with her decision to run for higher office. Taken together, these results suggest that there is something inherently attractive about serving in the state legislature as a senior member of the majority party, which makes it

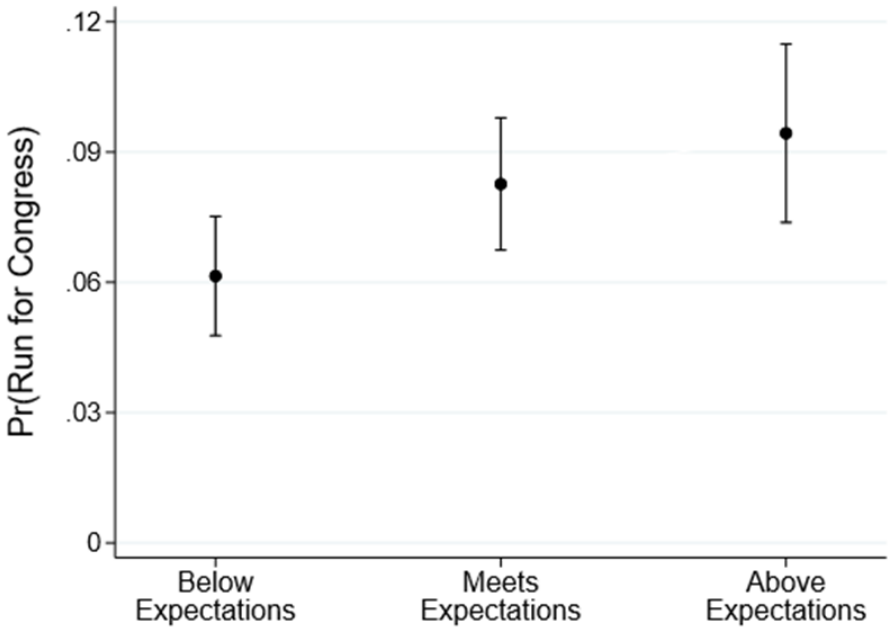
less likely for such members to run for the House, all else equal, perhaps due to the perceived value of continuing to exert influence in their current position.

Turning to Model 2.3, the coefficient on *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* is positive, which implies that those legislators who were the most effective lawmakers in their state legislatures, compared to their benchmark scores, were the most likely to run for the House. Similar results are obtained in Model 2.4 which includes separate variables for whether a state legislator met or exceeded expectations. The most effective state lawmakers (as indicated by the positive and statistically significant coefficient on *Lagged LES Above Expectations*) are most likely to run for the House, ceteris paribus.

The sizes of these effects are illustrated in Figure 1, based on predicted values from Model 2.4 for the case of a safe, open seat. As the figure shows, under such fortuitous circumstances, ineffective state lawmakers (those below expectations relative to those in similar positions) seek a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives 6.1% of the time. In contrast, highly effective state lawmakers (above expectations), are much more likely to run – at a 9.4% frequency. Legislators who are average at lawmaking enter such races at an 8.3% rate.[14] Put another way, more-effective lawmakers are around a third to a half more likely to seek higher office than are less-effective state lawmakers.

[14] Despite the overlapping confidence intervals between the "Below Expectations" and "Meets Expectations" categories, these differences are indeed statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), seen most easily because the point estimates for each lie outside of the confidence interval for the other (and also seen in Model 2.4 itself).

**Figure 1: Effective State Lawmakers Run for Congress More Frequently**




*Note:* Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals are constructed based on Model 2.4. The figure shows the probability of different types of state lawmakers running for Congress in the case of an open seat in a safe district, with all other control variables held at their means (or modes in the case of binary variables). Results reveal support for the *Lawmaking Effectiveness and Progressive Ambition Hypothesis*, with lawmakers performing above expectations being significantly more likely to run for Congress than are those performing below expectations (and with those meeting expectations being in the middle).

On the whole, these results provide substantial support for the *Lawmaking Effectiveness and Progressive Ambition Hypothesis*: effective lawmakers appear to appreciate their skills as legislators, and they seek to apply their skills within more prestigious venues as opportunities arise.[15] These results likewise help to explain the findings that were presented in Table 1. One clear reason why more-effective state lawmakers are more likely to end up in Congress than less-effective state lawmakers is that they are more likely to *run* for Congress than are less-effective state lawmakers. The results in Table 2 do not, however, provide us with any insights as to

[15] In models A2.2, A3.2, and A4.2 in Appendix Tables A2, A3, and A4, we show these results to be robust when excluding state legislators who ran for Congress after having left the state legislature in a previous legislative term (A2), when the final terms of all legislators are excluded from the analysis (A3), and when we include freshmen legislators in the analysis (A4).

whether voters favor more over less effective state lawmakers when evaluating potential candidates.

To engage directly with this latter possibility, we turn to Table 3, where we present the results from a series of logit regressions, where the dependent variable takes on a value of "1" if legislator *i* won the primary (Models 3.1-3.3) or general (Models 3.4-3.6) election in year *t*, and "0" otherwise. Hence, the sample differs from the sample analyzed in Tables 1 and 2 in that, rather than analyzing all state legislators regardless of whether they ran for Congress in a given election, a state legislator only enters the sample analyzed in Table 3 if he or she ran for Congress. Similar to the models that are presented in Table 1 and Table 2, in all models, the core independent variables of interest are different metrics of a state legislator's lawmaking effectiveness: in this case, either their raw SLES or lagged value (Models 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, and 3.5), or an indicator variable for whether a legislator's lagged SLES met expectations or was above expectations, given her benchmark score (Models 3.3 and 3.6). Consistent with the *Lawmaking Effectiveness and Electoral Victory Hypothesis*, we expect that the coefficients on each of these different variables would be positive and significant, indicating that more-effective state lawmakers (whether measured by their raw SLES, or their lagged SLES relative to their benchmark SLES) are more likely to win their primary and general congressional elections than are less-effective state lawmakers.

**Table 3: Winning an Election is Unrelated to Lawmaking Effectiveness**

| | Primary Election | | | General Election | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 3.1 | Model 3.2 | Model 3.3 | Model 3.4 | Model 3.5 | Model 3.6 |
| *SLES* | 0.035 | | | 0.039 | | |
| | (0.054) | | | (0.045) | | |
| *Lagged SLES* | | 0.050 | | | 0.034 | |
| | | (0.088) | | | (0.090) | |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* | | | 0.240 | | | 0.264 |
| | | | (0.204) | | | (0.223) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* | | | 0.317 | | | 0.311 |
| | | | (0.233) | | | (0.266) |
| Open Seat | -0.546** | -0.569** | -0.587** | 0.811*** | 0.775*** | 0.758*** |
| | (0.183) | (0.194) | (0.194) | (0.218) | (0.231) | (0.232) |
| Safe District | -2.369*** | -2.691*** | -2.688*** | 1.437** | 1.676** | 1.684** |
| | (0.313) | (0.344) | (0.343) | (0.528) | (0.614) | (0.613) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.302*** | 1.505*** | 1.511*** | 0.595 | 0.665* | 0.668* |
| | (0.308) | (0.327) | (0.327) | (0.368) | (0.391) | (0.390) |
| Competitive District | -0.574** | -0.818*** | -0.815*** | 1.795*** | 2.032*** | 2.033*** |
| | (0.237) | (0.262) | (0.262) | (0.440) | (0.528) | (0.528) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.017*** | -0.018*** | -0.018*** | -0.016* | -0.015* | -0.015* |
| | (0.004) | (0.005) | (0.005) | (0.008) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 0.070 | -0.084 | -0.079 | 1.124* | 0.924 | 0.927 |
| | (0.528) | (0.573) | (0.575) | (0.608) | (0.642) | (0.645) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | -0.380* | -0.416* | -0.415* | -0.109 | -0.055 | -0.052 |
| | (0.175) | (0.183) | (0.183) | (0.204) | (0.210) | (0.210) |
| Female | 0.044 | 0.013 | 0.012 | -0.112 | -0.129 | -0.127 |
| | (0.155) | (0.164) | (0.164) | (0.173) | (0.182) | (0.182) |
| Republican | -0.034 | 0.009 | 0.004 | -0.038 | -0.015 | -0.018 |
| | (0.138) | (0.148) | (0.148) | (0.153) | (0.162) | (0.162) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.189 | -0.204 | -0.185 | -0.169 | -0.156 | -0.143 |
| | (0.152) | (0.170) | (0.161) | (0.173) | (0.190) | (0.179) |
| Committee Chair | -0.035 | -0.010 | -0.004 | 0.001 | -0.002 | -0.004 |
| | (0.159) | (0.165) | (0.166) | (0.176) | (0.181) | (0.183) |
| Power Committee | 0.329** | 0.310* | 0.302* | 0.201 | 0.132 | 0.127 |
| | (0.133) | (0.142) | (0.142) | (0.148) | (0.156) | (0.156) |
| Seniority | -0.045 | -0.089 | -0.093 | -0.061 | -0.049 | -0.054 |
| | (0.088) | (0.097) | (0.097) | (0.095) | (0.104) | (0.105) |
| Seniority$^2$ | 0.004 | 0.007 | 0.008 | 0.007 | 0.006 | 0.007 |
| | (0.007) | (0.008) | (0.008) | (0.008) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| Constant | 1.594*** | 3.081*** | 2.931*** | -3.660*** | -3.098*** | -3.281*** |
| | (0.477) | (0.615) | (0.629) | (0.668) | (0.840) | (0.857) |
| N | 1,139 | 1,021 | 1,021 | 1,134 | 1,017 | 1,017 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.105 | 0.116 | 0.118 | 0.099 | 0.100 | 0.101 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator won her primary or general election for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the sample includes all state legislators who ran for the House. Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The results demonstrate that there is essentially no relationship between a state legislator's lawmaking effectiveness and whether she won her race for a House seat conditional on becoming a candidate.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

Focusing first on Models 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, and 3.5, we see that the coefficients on *SLES* and *Lagged SLES*, while positive, are statistically indistinguishable from zero. Hence, we are unable to reject the null hypothesis that there is essentially no relationship between the lawmaking effectiveness of a state legislator and the likelihood of winning the primary or general election to serve in the House. The same null findings are obtained if we use whether a legislator's lagged SLES met, or was above, expectations, in comparison to her benchmark score, as shown in Models 3.3 and 3.6. At best, the positive coefficients in all models are suggestive, but the lack of statistical significance leads us ultimately to reject the *Lawmaking Effectiveness and Electoral Victory Hypothesis*. Regardless of whether the contest is a primary or general election, voters are not clearly choosing candidates based on their demonstrated lawmaking effectiveness, all else equal.[16]

Taken together, these findings are consistent with broader theoretical arguments and empirical findings about the lack of a meaningful accountability relationship between voters and their elected officials (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016, Lupia 2015), especially as it pertains to legislative politics and outcomes. While lawmaking effectiveness could plausibly serve as a valence consideration that influences voters' choices, this appears not to be the case when focusing on state legislators who are running for higher office. Either voters simply don't care about a state legislator's prior lawmaking effectiveness, or such information has not been presented to them in a compelling manner so as to influence their decisions, or both are true.[17] In any event, one main implication of our findings is that the extent to which we see more highly

[16] In Appendix Tables A2, A3, and A4, we show these results to be robust when excluding state legislators who ran for Congress after having left the state legislature in a previous legislative term (A2), when the final terms of all legislators are excluded from the analysis (A3), and when we include freshmen legislators in the analysis (A4).
[17] Butler et al. (2023) attempt to disentangle these two possibilities through the analysis of survey experiments of voters regarding incumbent members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

effective state lawmakers being elected to Congress than less-effective state lawmakers has little to do with expressed voter preferences for lawmaking effectiveness *per se*; rather, it appears that highly effective state lawmakers are more likely than ineffective lawmakers to step forward and accept the challenge of competing for a congressional seat.

**Where and When Do Effective Lawmakers Seek Higher Office?**

The findings above offer the opportunity to further explore the progressive ambition motivations of highly effective state lawmakers. Specifically, is the tendency for highly effective lawmakers to choose to run for Congress generalizable across all state legislators, or are there aspects of their respective legislative environments that influence their decisions over whether to stay in their current positions or try to attain higher office? As we noted earlier, the theory of progressive ambition would suggest that incumbents' decisions to run for higher office should be influenced by the opportunities that they are presented with, as well as the relative attractiveness of their current positions.

Central to such choices may be the professionalism of the state legislature in which they sit (Squire 1992). We have already demonstrated in Table 2 that there appears to be a positive relationship between the scope of a legislature's professionalism (as measured by the Squire Index) and a state legislator's decision to run for higher office, but there may be reason to believe that the decisions of more- and less-effective lawmakers may be moderated by the professionalism of the chamber in which they serve. After all, given that the most professional state legislatures (e.g., California) are analogous to mini-congresses, highly effective lawmakers in these environments can have a substantial influence on policymaking. Hence, they might be less enthusiastic about pursuing the opportunity to obtain a seat in Congress, in comparison to

highly effective lawmakers in less-professional legislatures, for whom the difference between serving in their state houses and the U.S. House is notably starker.

We engage with these considerations in Table 4, where we present the results from a series of logit regression analyses that are analogous to those presented in Table 2, where the dependent variable takes on a value of "1" if a legislator chooses to run for the House, and "0" otherwise. In addition to the covariates that we explored in Table 2, we also include (in Model 4.1) an interaction between a legislator's lagged lawmaking effectiveness and her legislature's professionalism. This interaction allows us to assess whether highly effective lawmakers serving in more professional legislatures engage in a different decision calculus than those serving in less professional legislatures. Because we are particularly interested in trying to assess how a legislature's professionalism affects the entry decisions of incumbent legislators who serve in that legislature, the sample consists solely of those legislators who were sitting in the legislature in the term directly preceding a congressional election cycle in which they might have chosen to run for the House. In other words, we do not include any legislators who had exited the state legislature prior to their congressional election entry decisions.

**Table 4: Professionalism and Open Seats Influence Effective Lawmakers' Decisions to Run**

| | Model 4.1<br>All Legislatures | Model 4.2<br>Low Prof. | Model 4.3<br>High Prof. | Model 4.4<br>High Prof. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Lagged SLES* | 0.238*** | | | |
| | (0.067) | | | |
| *Lagged SLES × State Legislative Professionalism* | -0.425* | | | |
| | (0.252) | | | |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 1.820*** | 1.852 | 0.798* | 0.828* |
| | (0.408) | (2.492) | (0.413) | (0.416) |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* | | 0.791*** | 0.486*** | 0.059 |
| | | (0.203) | (0.139) | (0.207) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* | | 1.019*** | 0.576*** | 0.202 |
| | | (0.222) | (0.168) | (0.254) |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations × Open Seat* | | | | 0.710** |
| | | | | (0.279) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations × Open Seat* | | | | 0.630* |
| | | | | (0.336) |
| Open Seat | 2.299*** | 2.143*** | 2.359*** | 1.764*** |
| | (0.105) | (0.184) | (0.127) | (0.260) |
| Safe District | -0.073 | -0.080 | -0.042 | -0.040 |
| | (0.186) | (0.283) | (0.257) | (0.257) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.181*** | 0.870** | 1.374*** | 1.381*** |
| | (0.167) | (0.284) | (0.211) | (0.212) |
| Competitive District | 0.659*** | 0.490* | 0.770*** | 0.772*** |
| | (0.142) | (0.213) | (0.195) | (0.196) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.021*** | -0.017*** | -0.036*** | -0.036*** |
| | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.009) | (0.009) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 0.904*** | 0.536* | 0.989*** | 0.990*** |
| | (0.106) | (0.252) | (0.121) | (0.122) |
| Female | 0.106 | 0.288* | -0.002 | -0.001 |
| | (0.093) | (0.157) | (0.117) | (0.117) |
| Republican | 0.110 | 0.343* | -0.017 | -0.018 |
| | (0.082) | (0.150) | (0.101) | (0.102) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.152* | 0.049 | -0.182 | -0.182 |
| | (0.092) | (0.159) | (0.116) | (0.116) |
| Committee Chair | 0.039 | -0.073 | 0.114 | 0.116 |
| | (0.092) | (0.171) | (0.111) | (0.111) |
| Power Committee | 0.066 | -0.047 | 0.118 | 0.119 |
| | (0.080) | (0.143) | (0.098) | (0.098) |
| Seniority | -0.001 | 0.107 | -0.034 | -0.035 |
| | (0.047) | (0.092) | (0.054) | (0.054) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.007* | -0.015* | -0.004 | -0.003 |
| | (0.004) | (0.008) | (0.004) | (0.004) |
| Constant | -5.549*** | -6.607*** | -5.356*** | -5.011*** |
| | (0.305) | (0.594) | (0.400) | (0.408) |
| N | 57,421 | 28,540 | 28,445 | 28,445 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.213 | 0.178 | 0.231 | 0.232 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a sitting state legislator ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the sample includes all sitting state legislators during each election in which they could have run (including those who never ran for election to the House). Robust standard errors, clustered by

legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The results demonstrate that the marginal impact of lawmaking effectiveness on the decision to seek higher office is greater in less professional legislatures than in more professional ones. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

Taken together, the results in Table 4 point to an important nuance in the relationships between lawmaking effectiveness, legislative professionalism, and progressive ambition. Beginning with Model 4.1, we see that, consistent with the findings in Table 2, the coefficients on *Lagged SLES* and *State Legislative Professionalism* are positive and statistically significant, indicating that more-effective lawmakers and those legislators serving in more professional legislatures are more likely to run for higher office. The negative and statistically significant coefficient on *Lagged SLES* × *Professionalism*, however, implies that the heightened progressive ambition of highly effective lawmakers is diminished in the most professional legislatures. In other words, the marginal impact of one's lawmaking effectiveness on her decision to run for higher office is greater in citizen legislatures than in more professional legislatures.

Models 4.2 and 4.3 divide the sample in half, into legislators serving in less (4.2) and more (4.3) professional legislatures, and replicating the analysis from Model 2.4.[18] Comparing across models, we see in both subsets that state legislators who met or exceeded their benchmark state legislative effectiveness scores were more likely to run for Congress than those who were below expectations. However, the distinction between categories is notably starker in less professional legislatures. Perhaps highly effective lawmakers in professional legislature are loath to leave their successful environment without some heightened assurances of victory on their quest for higher office.

We explore this possibility in Model 4.4. Focusing again on the more professional legislatures, a highly effective lawmaker's decision to run for higher office appears to be related

[18] The median dividing line was drawn at a Squire Index value of 0.18.

to the political opportunity structure she finds. The positive and statistically significant coefficients on *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* × *Open Seat* and *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* × *Open Seat* indicate that in more professional legislatures, highly effective lawmakers are only more likely to run for Congress when there is an open seat. When there is not an open seat, however, a legislator's lawmaking effectiveness has no bearing on her decision to run for the House.

Specifically, lacking an open seat, only about 0.3% of highly effective legislators (in our Above Expectations category) are willing to leave a professional legislature to seek higher office – no different from ineffective legislators in the Below Expectations category. But when a congressional seat opens up, highly effective lawmakers are much more likely to take the leap. They seek a non-safe seat at a 3.4% rate (compared to 1.5% for ineffective lawmakers). And for a safe open seat, highly effective lawmakers in professional legislatures throw their hats in the ring at an 11.9% rate (double the 5.6% rate for ineffective lawmakers).

These differences in legislators' decisions to run, depending on the underlying professionalism of the legislature in which they serve, speaks to broader questions about the nature of progressive ambition in state legislatures. A key insight that emerges from Rohde's (1979) foundational scholarship, for example, is that we would expect sitting legislators to be more likely to run for higher office when the expected utility associated with running for higher office is greater than the expected utility associated with maintaining one's current position – where the expected utility calculation accounts for the opportunity costs associated with retaining or forgoing one's current position. To the extent that some legislators seek to successfully advance their policy initiatives from introduction into becoming law, our results suggest that more-effective lawmakers in citizen legislatures place a lower value on retaining their current

positions relative to those top lawmakers in professional legislatures. In the more professional legislatures, however, highly effective lawmakers seem to require the added inducement of an open seat to counter-balance the appealing nature of the success they are experiencing in the state legislature.

Combined with the results in Table 1 and Table 3, these findings suggest that the greater propensity for more-effective state lawmakers to serve in Congress does not follow from voters demanding more-effective lawmakers. Rather, the larger supply of effective state lawmakers from citizen legislatures, generally speaking, and from more professional legislatures in the case of open seat contests, ensures that a greater number of them end up in Congress relative to their less-effective counterparts.

**Implications and Conclusion**

One of the benefits of American federalism is the possibility of states serving as laboratories of democracy. For public policies, this means the opportunity to experiment with various approaches, abandoning policy failures and spreading successes to other states or upward to the nation as a whole. For politicians, this means gaining state-level experience at lawmaking, ideally with the most effective performers continuing their service as they move from the states to the national level. While the scholarly work on policy diffusion is immense, we here offer the first systematic test of the diffusion of effective lawmakers from the state to the national level.

Relying on new scores for the lawmaking effectiveness of members of state legislatures, we find strong evidence that those who are highly effective are nearly twice as likely to enter Congress as those who are ineffective. Most of this effect seems to result from self-selection, with highly effective lawmakers being much more likely to seek higher office than are less-effective lawmakers in certain types of legislatures. Although there may be a slight electoral

advantage for effective lawmakers, the effects based on analyses conditional upon running for office show neither sizable nor statistically significant support from voters for effective over ineffective lawmakers as candidates.

In sum, these patterns suggest that, for American federalism to serve the purpose of leading the most effective politicians to higher office, recruitment and selection is highly important. Relying on voters to be discerning in terms of the selection of effective lawmakers is not likely to be sufficient, at least not without offering them better information about the lawmaking effectiveness of state officials seeking higher office. More work could be done in exploring whether and how such information provision might change voting outcomes. One possibility is that voters today are highly supportive of "outsider" candidates (Hansen and Treul 2021). If voters are not viewing state legislators as "outsiders," either because they are seen as experienced politicians, or because the candidates themselves do not do a good job of branding themselves as such, it could be affecting the electoral success of the effective state legislators.

More could also be done to understand the conditions under which effective or ineffective lawmakers stay in their state legislature or seek higher office. Our results highlight the ways in which highly effective lawmakers in professional legislatures appear to be particularly opportunistic in waiting for open seats. Additional research could likewise explore how or whether incumbent legislators seek to build on their legislative experiences, such as serving in the majority party, holding committee chairs, or maintaining other leadership roles, when choosing whether to run for higher office.

In addition to the findings put forth here, it will be important for future researchers to examine the transferability of effective lawmaking skills from the state to the national level. Are effective state lawmakers likely to be more effective once they reach Congress? Are such effects

conditional on state legislatures mimicking Congress in terms of professionalism? Are there other institutional differences that allow for some states to become even better training grounds than others for effective lawmaking in Congress? The analysis presented here will help to motivate these future inquiries.

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**Table A1: Descriptive Statistics, Variable Definitions, and Sources**

| Variable | Description | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| SLES | Legislator's State Legislative Effectiveness Score | 1.003 | 1.096 |
| Lagged SLES | Lagged State Legislative Effectiveness Score | 1.026 | 1.118 |
| Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations[a] | 1 = Below Expectations, 2 = Met Expectations, 3 = Exceeded Expectations; described in text | 1.943 | 0.664 |
| Elected[b] | 1 = Elected to U.S. House, 0 = otherwise | 0.004 | 0.061 |
| Ran for Congress[b] | 1 = Ran for U.S. House 0 = otherwise | 0.014 | 0.119 |
| Won Primary Election[b] | 1 = Won Primary Election, 0 = otherwise | 0.519 | 0.500 |
| Won General Election[b] | 1= Won General Election, 0 = otherwise | 0.257 | 0.437 |
| Open Seat[b] | 1 = Open House Seat, 0 = otherwise | 0.126 | 0.331 |
| Safe Seat | 1 = Safe Seat, 0 = otherwise; described in text | 0.455 | 0.498 |
| Competitive District[b] | 1 = Competitive District, 0 = otherwise; described in text | 0.397 | 0.489 |
| Number of State Legislators in District[b] | Total number of state legislators whose districts are geographically situated in CD | 29.637 | 39.528 |
| State Legislative Professionalism[d] | Squire Index | 0.202 | 0.124 |
| Term Limited[c] | 1 = Legislator is Term Limited, 0 = otherwise | 0.053 | 0.223 |
| Female[a] | 1 = Legislator is Female, 0 = otherwise | 0.231 | 0.421 |
| Republican[a] | 1 = Legislator is Republican, 0 = otherwise | 0.505 | 0.500 |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature[a] | 1 = Legislator's Party Controls Majority of State Legislative Chamber, 0 = otherwise | 0.619 | 0.486 |
| Committee Chair[a] | 1 = Legislator is Committee Chair, 0 = otherwise | 0.258 | 0.438 |
| Power Committee[a] | 1 = Legislator serves on a committee related to the budget, finance, appropriations, or rules | 0.443 | 0.497 |
| Seniority[a] | Number of consecutive terms served by member in Chamber | 3.750 | 3.180 |

*Sources:*
[a]Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman (2022)
[b]Thomsen (2017)
[c]Fouirnaies and Hall (2022) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)
[d]Squire (1992, 2017)

## Table A2: Robustness of Results to Excluding Former State Legislators

| | Model A2.1 Elected | Model A2.2 Running | Model A2.3 Win Primary | Model A2.4 Win General |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lagged SLES Met Expectations | 0.800*** | 0.590*** | 0.096 | 0.303 |
| | (0.231) | (0.115) | (0.241) | (0.270) |
| Lagged SLES Above Expectations | 0.751** | 0.737*** | 0.168 | 0.104 |
| | (0.274) | (0.133) | (0.278) | (0.319) |
| Open Seat | 2.819*** | 2.297*** | -0.819*** | 0.564* |
| | (0.226) | (0.105) | (0.241) | (0.271) |
| Safe District | 1.821* | -0.076 | -2.484*** | 1.918* |
| | (0.789) | (0.186) | (0.403) | (0.831) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.616*** | 1.187*** | 1.705*** | 0.774* |
| | (0.382) | (0.167) | (0.387) | (0.448) |
| Competitive District | 2.776*** | 0.662*** | -0.454 | 2.388*** |
| | (0.718) | (0.142) | (0.311) | (0.748) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.038*** | -0.020*** | -0.017** | -0.013 |
| | (0.012) | (0.003) | (0.006) | (0.009) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 2.275*** | 1.370*** | 0.191 | 1.516* |
| | (0.610) | (0.327) | (0.675) | (0.769) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 0.551** | 0.896*** | -0.423* | -0.183 |
| | (0.205) | (0.106) | (0.218) | (0.253) |
| Female | -0.013 | 0.097 | 0.123 | -0.139 |
| | (0.173) | (0.093) | (0.186) | (0.208) |
| Republican | 0.094 | 0.108 | 0.010 | 0.007 |
| | (0.151) | (0.082) | (0.170) | (0.186) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.106 | -0.118 | -0.252 | -0.034 |
| | (0.168) | (0.092) | (0.189) | (0.206) |
| Committee Chair | 0.003 | 0.051 | -0.023 | -0.121 |
| | (0.167) | (0.091) | (0.190) | (0.207) |
| Power Committee | 0.077 | 0.061 | 0.266 | 0.039 |
| | (0.143) | (0.080) | (0.166) | (0.176) |
| Seniority | -0.039 | 0.002 | -0.103 | -0.115 |
| | (0.069) | (0.047) | (0.120) | (0.128) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.001 | -0.007* | 0.008 | 0.011 |
| | (0.005) | (0.004) | (0.010) | (0.010) |
| Constant | -9.405*** | -5.838*** | 2.758*** | -3.375*** |
| | (0.890) | (0.308) | (0.715) | (1.044) |
| N | 57,421 | 57,421 | 750 | 747 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.282 | 0.215 | 0.120 | 0.101 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator was elected to the U.S. House (A2.1), whether a state legislator ran for a U.S. House Seat (A2.2), and whether a state legislator won her primary (A2.3) or general (A2.4) election for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The table demonstrates robustness of the main results upon excluding former state legislators. *$p < 0.05$*, **$p < 0.01$*, ***$p < 0.001$,* one-tailed.

**Table A3: Robustness of Results to Including Former Legislators, Final Term Excluded**

| | Model A3.1<br>Elected | Model A3.2<br>Running | Model A3.3<br>Win Primary | Model A3.4<br>Win General |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lagged SLES Met Expectations | 0.584** | 0.402*** | 0.196 | 0.225 |
| | (0.196) | (0.104) | (0.212) | (0.237) |
| Lagged SLES Above Expectations | 0.616** | 0.531*** | 0.322 | 0.162 |
| | (0.233) | (0.123) | (0.243) | (0.279) |
| Open Seat | 2.736*** | 2.169*** | -0.586** | 0.669** |
| | (0.200) | (0.091) | (0.201) | (0.237) |
| Safe District | 1.593** | -0.135 | -2.640*** | 1.772** |
| | (0.664) | (0.169) | (0.355) | (0.693) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.679*** | 1.181*** | 1.569*** | 0.807* |
| | (0.348) | (0.150) | (0.336) | (0.404) |
| Competitive District | 2.683*** | 0.684*** | -0.761** | 2.241*** |
| | (0.584) | (0.125) | (0.272) | (0.607) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.037*** | -0.020*** | -0.018*** | -0.016* |
| | (0.010) | (0.003) | (0.005) | (0.008) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 1.869*** | 1.158*** | -0.308 | 0.880 |
| | (0.556) | (0.307) | (0.589) | (0.669) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 0.783*** | 1.069*** | -0.362* | -0.056 |
| | (0.173) | (0.095) | (0.184) | (0.213) |
| Female | -0.019 | 0.129 | -0.009 | -0.181 |
| | (0.155) | (0.085) | (0.168) | (0.187) |
| Republican | 0.069 | 0.058 | 0.045 | -0.017 |
| | (0.136) | (0.076) | (0.151) | (0.165) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.182 | -0.173* | -0.196 | -0.119 |
| | (0.152) | (0.089) | (0.164) | (0.183) |
| Committee Chair | 0.033 | 0.036 | 0.019 | 0.011 |
| | (0.153) | (0.088) | (0.168) | (0.185) |
| Power Committee | 0.119 | 0.060 | 0.337** | 0.103 |
| | (0.129) | (0.074) | (0.144) | (0.159) |
| Seniority | -0.043 | -0.017 | -0.095 | -0.095 |
| | (0.066) | (0.043) | (0.103) | (0.108) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.001 | -0.005 | 0.008 | 0.009 |
| | (0.004) | (0.003) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| Constant | -8.951*** | -5.479*** | 2.813*** | -3.139*** |
| | (0.779) | (0.290) | (0.666) | (0.933) |
| N | 57,643 | 57,643 | 972 | 968 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.280 | 0.211 | 0.113 | 0.102 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator was elected to the U.S. House (A3.1), whether a state legislator ran for a U.S. House Seat (A3.2), and whether a state legislator won her primary (A3.3) or general (A3.4) election for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The table demonstrates robustness of the main results upon lagging the effectiveness variables for former state legislators to their penultimate term. *$p < 0.05$*, **$p < 0.01$*, ***$p < 0.001$,* one-tailed.

**Table A4: Robustness of Results to Including Freshmen State Legislators in Analysis**

| | Model A4.1 Elected | Model A4.2 Running | Model A4.3 Win Primary | Model A4.4 Win General |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lagged SLES Met Expectations | 0.530** | 0.325*** | 0.249 | 0.249 |
| | (0.191) | (0.100) | (0.200) | (0.225) |
| Lagged SLES Above Expectations | 0.658** | 0.463*** | 0.298 | 0.304 |
| | (0.225) | (0.118) | (0.230) | (0.267) |
| Freshman | -1.073*** | -1.359*** | -0.061 | 0.438 |
| | (0.319) | (0.160) | (0.364) | (0.380) |
| Open Seat | 2.833*** | 2.130*** | -0.528** | 0.815*** |
| | (0.194) | (0.086) | (0.187) | (0.225) |
| Safe District | 1.327** | -0.268* | -2.415*** | 1.624** |
| | (0.539) | (0.157) | (0.322) | (0.560) |
| Open Seat × Safe District | 1.514*** | 1.198*** | 1.400*** | 0.624* |
| | (0.331) | (0.142) | (0.315) | (0.378) |
| Competitive District | 2.294*** | 0.568*** | -0.602** | 1.964*** |
| | (0.460) | (0.115) | (0.242) | (0.477) |
| Number of State Legislators in District | -0.037*** | -0.019*** | -0.017*** | -0.015* |
| | (0.009) | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.008) |
| State Legislative Professionalism | 1.786*** | 1.033*** | -0.135 | 1.038* |
| | (0.529) | (0.295) | (0.549) | (0.622) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 0.772*** | 1.058*** | -0.405* | -0.076 |
| | (0.171) | (0.094) | (0.179) | (0.208) |
| Female | 0.010 | 0.112 | -0.005 | -0.146 |
| | (0.146) | (0.080) | (0.158) | (0.176) |
| Republican | 0.033 | 0.042 | -0.043 | -0.041 |
| | (0.129) | (0.071) | (0.142) | (0.156) |
| In Majority Party in State Legislature | -0.237* | -0.176* | -0.209 | -0.180 |
| | (0.144) | (0.082) | (0.154) | (0.174) |
| Committee Chair | 0.042 | 0.055 | -0.037 | -0.001 |
| | (0.149) | (0.084) | (0.162) | (0.180) |
| Power Committee | 0.157 | 0.051 | 0.337** | 0.175 |
| | (0.125) | (0.070) | (0.137) | (0.153) |
| Seniority | -0.061 | -0.077* | -0.091 | -0.054 |
| | (0.065) | (0.041) | (0.096) | (0.105) |
| Seniority$^2$ | 0.000 | -0.002 | 0.008 | 0.007 |
| | (0.004) | (0.003) | (0.007) | (0.008) |
| Constant | -8.698*** | -4.984*** | 2.168*** | -3.529*** |
| | (0.668) | (0.265) | (0.596) | (0.784) |
| N | 74,550 | 74,550 | 1,088 | 1,083 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.286 | 0.217 | 0.110 | 0.105 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator was elected to the U.S. House (A4.1), whether a state legislator ran for a U.S. House Seat (A4.2), and whether a state legislator won her primary (A4.3) or general (A4.4) election for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year fixed effects. The table demonstrates robustness of the main results upon including freshmen (whose effectiveness has not yet been established). *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

## Appendix Table A5: Robustness of Results to Controlling for Candidate Pools

| | Model A5.1 | Model A5.2 | Model A5.3 | Model A5.4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *SLES* | 0.125** | | | |
| | (0.046) | | | |
| *Lagged SLES* | | 0.149*** | | |
| | | (0.036) | | |
| *Lagged SLES Relative to Expectations* | | | 0.303*** | |
| | | | (0.066) | |
| *Lagged SLES Met Expectations* | | | | 0.312** |
| | | | | (0.113) |
| *Lagged SLES Above Expectations* | | | | 0.606*** |
| | | | | (0.133) |
| Legislator is Term Limited | 1.230*** | 1.227*** | 1.248*** | 1.248*** |
| | (0.214) | (0.163) | (0.164) | (0.164) |
| Female | 0.092 | 0.117 | 0.115 | 0.115 |
| | (0.088) | (0.103) | (0.103) | (0.103) |
| Republican | -0.360* | -0.660 | -0.626 | -0.625 |
| | (0.163) | (1.262) | (1.264) | (1.264) |
| In Majority in Legislature | -0.026 | 0.079 | 0.127 | 0.127 |
| | (0.275) | (0.238) | (0.238) | (0.238) |
| Committee Chair | 0.108 | -0.005 | 0.015 | 0.015 |
| | (0.120) | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.108) |
| Power Committee | 0.032 | -0.023 | -0.032 | -0.032 |
| | (0.096) | (0.094) | (0.093) | (0.093) |
| Seniority | 0.288*** | -0.027 | -0.035 | -0.035 |
| | (0.068) | (0.051) | (0.050) | (0.051) |
| Seniority$^2$ | -0.026*** | -0.006 | -0.004 | -0.004 |
| | (0.006) | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.004) |
| Constant | -4.001*** | -2.755** | -3.294*** | -2.997** |
| | (0.168) | (1.051) | (1.060) | (1.055) |
| N | 12,167 | 8,881 | 8,881 | 8,881 |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.158 | 0.149 | 0.150 | 0.150 |

Results are from logit regressions where the dependent variable is whether a state legislator ran for the U.S. House of Representatives, and the sample includes all state legislators during each election in which they could have run (including those who never ran for election to the House). Robust standard errors, clustered by legislator, are shown in parentheses, and all models control for election-year-pool fixed effects. The results demonstrate that state legislators who have higher lagged Legislative Effectiveness Scores relative to expectations are more likely to run for Congress, even accounting for the competitiveness of the candidate pool. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

## Further Data Validation

To validate our empirical approach, we used Thomsen's (2022) data of congressional candidates to benchmark our sample of runners against the full universe of state legislators who ran for Congress during this period to ensure that the totals match as closely as possible. There are approximately 1,560 former or sitting state legislators who ran for the U.S. House in either a regular or special election in the states and years covered by the SLES data. Our sample includes 1,191 of these candidates: approximately 77 percent of the universe of runners with state legislative experience. The remaining 23 percent of the candidates held state legislative office in the years prior to the SLES data collection, and thus do not have SLES scores. We include former and sitting state legislators because the size of the sample decreases significantly if only sitting state legislators are included in our analysis. Of the 1,191 candidates in our sample, 915 of them were sitting state legislators at the time that they ran (77% of the size of our sample and 59% of the universe of candidates with state legislative experience).

We can additionally examine the coverage of our sample by comparing the total number of general election winners with state legislative backgrounds during this period to the total number of general election winners in our dataset. Our dataset includes 307 general election winners out of a total of 324 general election winners with state legislative experience during this period of time: 95% of all former and current state lawmakers who entered Congress in this era. While we are unable to include those who held state legislative office prior to the years covered in the SLES dataset, we included as many state lawmakers as possible and sought to ensure that they map as closely as possible onto the universe of runners.