Parties’ Strategic Behavior as a Source of Incumbency Advantage: An Analysis of Spanish Senatorial Elections from 1977 to 2008*

Elena Llaudet
Department of Government
Harvard University

August 18, 2013

*I thank Stephen Ansolabehere, James M. Snyder Jr., and Arthur Spirling for their advice and feedback. I also thank Bernard Fraga, Justin Gest, Adam Glyn, Janet Lewis, Leonid Peisakhn, Nicholas Pyeatt, Omar Wasow, the participants of the American Political Research Workshop at Harvard, and the participants of the Midwest Political Science Association for their helpful comments. Finally, I thank the Spanish Interior Ministry for providing the raw data analyzed in this paper.
Abstract

Identifying the sources of incumbency advantage has proved a difficult task. In this paper, I explore the role of parties in producing this phenomenon, a factor that has been mostly neglected by the literature. In particular, I gather data on every election to the Spanish Senate from 1977 to 2008 and exploit their multimember district system to estimate senators’ advantage over their co-partisan, non-incumbent challengers. I find a small but significant incumbency advantage that is estimated to increase the probability of all incumbents being reelected by almost 25 percentage points but that of vulnerable incumbents by more than 50 percentage points. Furthermore, I find that the main source of such advantage comes from the strategic behavior of the parties, which help their more vulnerable senators get reelected by ensuring that they be placed first on the ballot. Thus, this paper identifies the actions of parties as a source of incumbency advantage worth considering, especially in high-stakes elections where parties are powerful.
Incumbents are consistently found to have an electoral advantage over their challengers in developed democracies.\textsuperscript{1} The normative ramifications of this phenomenon depend in part on what we think its sources are. If incumbents are faring better than their challengers at the polls simply because they are better candidates, we would perceive their advantage as a sign of a healthy democracy. If, on the other hand, the electoral advantage of incumbents comes from their exploiting office resources to deter high-quality challengers, then the incumbents’ advantage would diminish the accountability and competitiveness of the elections and would therefore have serious negative consequences for representation.

Many scholars have looked for the potential sources of incumbency advantage, especially in reference to U.S. elections. Despite the large existing literature, there is very little consensus on what those sources are. The literature has focused primarily on the activities in which the \textit{incumbents} personally engage in order to accrue such advantage and has mostly neglected the activities in which \textit{parties} engage in order to favor their incumbents. In elections where parties are powerful, however, we might reasonably consider that party actions drive some of the observed incumbency advantage. In the study presented here, I provide extensive evidence of a meaningful incumbency advantage created not by the actions of individual politicians but by the actions of their parties.

In this paper, I study the elections to the Spanish Senate, as those are elections where the commonly studied sources of incumbency advantage are very unlikely to be present. Among other things, Spanish senators cannot credibly take credit for any particular piece of legislation, they have limited access to resources that they can use for their electoral advantage, and they do not have control over campaign funds. Consequently, if we find that

\textsuperscript{1}For U.S. elections see, for example, Erikson (1971, 1972); Mayhew (1974); Cover and Mayhew (1977); Gelman and King (1990); Levitt and Wolfram (1997); Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart III (2000); Ansolabehere and Snyder (2002); Gelman and Huang (2008). For parliamentary elections in the U.K see, for example, Gaines (1998), and Katz and King (1999). For German elections see Hainmueller and Kern (2008). For Japanese elections see Reed (1994); Hirano (2007). For Canadian provincial elections see Krashinsky and Milne (1983). For Canadian federal elections see Krashinsky and Milne (1985) and Kendall and Rekkas (N.d.). For municipal elections in Portugal see Migueis (2010).
Spanish senators have an advantage over their challengers, we should look for other sources as potentially responsible. In addition, the design of the electoral system of the Spanish Senate allows for an unusually precise measurement of incumbency advantage. Spanish senatorial elections follow a multimember plurality system, where multiple candidates from the same party run alongside each other when competing for multiple seats in a district. Following Hirano and Snyder (2009), we can estimate the incumbents’ advantage by comparing their electoral outcomes to those of their co-partisans running in the same race.

Analyzing a newly compiled dataset, I find that in the nine elections following the re-establishment of Spanish democracy in 1977, senators enjoyed a significant advantage over their co-partisan challengers. This advantage is estimated to increase the probability of all incumbents being reelected by almost 25 percentage points but that of vulnerable incumbents by more than 50 percentage points. Furthermore, I find that the main source of such advantage came from the strategic behavior of the parties, that helped their more vulnerable senators get reelected by ensuring that they be placed first on the ballot. Since during these elections, the law stipulated that candidates be ordered on the ballot alphabetically, in order to ensure that incumbents be placed first, parties had to nominate the incumbents’ running mates with last names further down the alphabet. Based on the evidence presented here, this practice became widespread after 1986, especially among parties that did not have sufficient support in the district to get all of their candidates elected.

The findings of this paper are relevant beyond the elections to the Spanish Senate. The evidence presented here identifies parties’ actions as a significant source of the incumbents’ advantage in Spanish senatorial elections; elections were parties have relatively weak incentives to get their preferred incumbents reelected but where we happen to be able to observe the phenomenon clearly. Although the specifics might vary by electoral system, one can only imagine how much more prominent this type of strategic behavior on the part of the parties is in high-stakes elections, especially those where parties are powerful. In general, political
parties have incentives to keep their incumbents in office, and therefore it is rational for them to try to actively help vulnerable incumbents gain an advantage over their challengers. In Spain, as the Senate is a relatively weak institution, parties view it as either a place of retirement for loyal politicians or a training ground for younger ones. Thus, although they have an interest in getting their chosen politician elected, the stakes are relatively low. Presumably, as the stakes become higher, the stronger become the incentives of the parties to help their incumbents. Their opportunities to do so, however, might vary according to the conditions and characteristics of a given election. For example, in other contexts, parties might supply organizational support, help with fundraising, coordinate public endorsements, discourage talented within-party challengers, provide key promotions, and offer high-profile appointments, among others. More research is needed to understand the impact of party actions on incumbency advantage in developed democracies other than Spain.

In the remainder of the paper, I first review the existing literature on the sources of incumbency advantage. Then, I describe the characteristics of the Spanish senatorial elections and the data employed in the analyses. Then, I provide an intuition about the concept of incumbency advantage, describe the specific methodology used for the estimations, identify the empirical strategy used to gauge how much of the observed incumbency advantage comes from the particular mechanism of strategic ballot position, and make a couple of other methodological points. Finally, I present the results and conclude.

**Literature Review**

There is a vast literature exploring different potential sources of incumbency advantage. However, we have yet to have a clear understanding of all the sources behind this phenomenon.

The literature on the causes of the incumbency advantage in the U.S. is the most extensive. Perhaps because the parties in the U.S. are not perceived to be as powerful at
the national level as the candidates themselves, this literature has focused primarily on
the strategies incumbents employ to improve their electoral odds. Scholars have investigated
whether incumbents generate such advantage by ideologically aligning themselves to their
constituents (Mayhew, 1974; Serra and Moon, 1994); bringing pork to the district (Mayhew,
1974; Fiorina, 1980; Feldman and Jondrow, 1984; Stein and Bickers, 1994, 1997; Alvarez
and Saving, 1997; Levitt and Snyder, 1997); focusing on constituency service (Fiorina, 1977;
Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Fiorina, 1981; Yiannakis, 1981; Johannes, 1984; Cain, Fer-
ejohn and Fiorina, 1987; Serra and Cover, 1992; Serra, 1994; Campbell, 1983; Parker and
Parker, 1985); raising high levels of campaign funds (Glantz, Abramowitz and Burkart, 1976;
Jacobson, 1978, 1980; Abramowitz, 1991); scaring off high-quality challengers (Levitt and
Wolfram, 1997; Canon, 1990; Cox and Katz, 1996); and engaging in activities that might
increase their name recognition (Stokes and Miller, 1962; Mayhew, 1974; Abramowitz, 1975;
Ferejohn, 1977; Romero, 1996), among others.

The few studies of the sources of incumbency advantage in other developed countries seem
to have followed the lead of the U.S. literature and examine the same type of activities. For
example, analyzing British parliamentary elections, Gaines (1998) finds that the recent focus
of MPs on constituency service has not resulted in a higher level of incumbency advantage.
Migueis (2010) finds that the financial transfers from the Portuguese central government to its
municipalities are not the main driver of incumbency advantage in their municipal elections.
Hirano (2007) examines office-holding benefits and candidate quality as explanations for the
the advantage of the incumbents in the 1988 Canadian elections cannot be explained by their
higher levels of campaign funds.

In summary, even though the literature on political parties has long identified them as
organizations that aim to foster the electoral success of their affiliates (Aldrich, 1995), the
literature on the causes of incumbency advantage has seldom focused on parties' actions. The
evidence presented here suggests that parties’ behavior is a potential source of incumbency advantage worth exploring, especially in electoral contexts in which parties are powerful.

**Spanish Senatorial Elections and Data**

The elections to the Spanish Senate provide an interesting opportunity to look for new sources of incumbency advantage because the commonly studied sources are unlikely to be present. This is the case for several reasons:

First, the Spanish Senate has little legislative power. It has most of its power subjugated to the lower chamber of the Spanish legislature, called the Congress of Deputies. For example, most pieces of legislation must be initiated by the Congress of Deputies and the Congress of Deputies can override a Senate veto with a simple majority. This means that the ideological positions of senators make little difference to policy making and that no senator can credibly take credit for any particular piece of legislation that benefits his or her constituents.

Second, senators in Spain do not have access to many resources that they can use to their electoral advantage. For example, only the president, the two vice-presidents, and the four secretaries of the chamber have personal assistants. In addition, Spanish senators have neither the resources nor the opportunity to provide constituency services.

Furthermore, Spanish senators do not raise or control the funds for their electoral campaigns. The government provides campaign funds, which are then controlled by the parties, not by individual politicians. As a result, electoral campaigns tend to be party-centered rather than candidate-centered. If there is a candidate mentioned in the campaign at all, it tends to be the party’s proposed candidate for the presidency, who is one of their candidates for the Congress of Deputies. Rarely do electoral campaigns mention any of the candidates for the Senate.

---

2Electoral campaigns are publicly financed as long as they stay within certain limits and the party is successful in gaining some representation in the legislative branch.
As a result, senators' name recognition in Spain is extremely low. Given these conditions, if we find any significant incumbency advantage in Spanish senatorial elections, we should expect that it comes from sources other than those commonly explored in the incumbency advantage literature.

**Characteristics of the Spanish Senatorial Elections**

The Spanish Senate is composed of 264 members, 208 of whom are elected via a multimember plurality system. The remaining 56 senators are appointed by the regional legislative assemblies. This paper focuses on the election of those 208 members, which is the only instance in Spanish national politics in which citizens cast their votes for candidates, rather than parties.

There are 59 districts in Spain. In the majority of districts, four senators are elected and voters are allowed to vote for up to three different candidates, from the same or from different parties. In order to optimize their results, the major parties usually nominate as many candidates to each race as citizens have votes.

Because Spanish senatorial elections generate very little public interest, citizens have little knowledge about the characteristics of particular candidates. Thus, despite the fact that citizens cast their votes for particular candidates within a party rather than for a party in general, most citizens cast their votes based solely on partisan considerations. As a result, two factors largely determine outcomes in Spanish senatorial elections. The first factor is the popularity of the party. The second is the order of the candidates on the ballot, conditional on the party’s popularity. For example, in districts where four senators are elected, the first

---

3 All senators, party leaders, and journalists interviewed estimated that less than one percent of the population would be able to name one of his or her senators.

4 There is one district for each of the 47 peninsular provinces, one for Ceuta, one for Melilla, and one for each of the ten islands. Ibiza and Formentera share a district.

5 The districts from the peninsula are given four senators each but the rest are given between three and one. Mallorca, Gran Canaria, and Tenerife have 3 seats each and citizens are allowed 2 votes. Ceuta y Melilla have 2 seats each and citizens are also allowed 2 votes. Menorca, Ibiza-Formentera, Fuerteventura, Gomera, Hierro, Lanzarote, and la Palma have 1 seat each and citizens are allowed 1 vote.
three seats often go to all the candidates of the most popular party in that district.\textsuperscript{6} The remaining seat tends to go to one of the candidates from the second most popular party, usually the one listed first on the ballot. Based on party popularity and ballot position alone, we can predict 90\% of the winners in the Spanish senatorial elections from 1977 to 2008.\textsuperscript{7}

Up until 2010, candidates had to be listed on the ballot by the alphabetical order of their last names.\textsuperscript{8} In 2010, the law was changed to eliminate the alphabetical rule and give parties the power to freely decide the order in which candidates appear on the ballot. Here, I focus only on the elections that occurred while the order was determined by the last names of the candidates, that is, the elections from 1977 to 2008.

**Data**

The analyses employ electoral results for the ten elections that took place after Francisco Franco died and Spain re-instituted its democracy. The raw data were provided by the Interior Ministry of Spain.\textsuperscript{9} The data were provided at the level of the polling station for

\textsuperscript{6}As mentioned earlier, major parties tend to nominate as many candidates as votes given to citizens. In districts with four seats, citizens are given three votes and, thus, major parties usually nominate three candidates.

\textsuperscript{7}Given that the elections for the Senate happen simultaneously to the elections for the Congress of Deputies, where citizens vote for parties, we can construct a measure of party popularity at the district level based on the results of the Congress of Deputies election in the districts.

\textsuperscript{8}From 1977 until 1982, the Senate ballot listed the candidates in alphabetical order, not grouping them by party and simply indicating their party affiliation next to each name. Starting in 1986 and up until the 2008 election, the ballot listed the candidates grouped by party, and within each party, candidates were listed in alphabetical order. Thus, in all the elections from 1977 until 2008, the order of the candidates within each party was based on the candidates’ last names.

\textsuperscript{9}The data required cleaning and assembling. The identification of the incumbents in each election was particularly elaborate as it involved merging the files using senators’ names as the key variable. (The identification numbers provided for both senators and parties were different each year). Because the names of the senators were sometimes reported differently (due to misspellings or to omission of middle names, for example), I had to manually modify some of them. Every effort was made to ensure that the right matches occurred and that all of the incumbents were identified.
the elections from 1986 to 2008 and at the level of the districts for the first three elections.\textsuperscript{10} For the analyses presented here, the observations were aggregated at the district level.

**Incumbency Advantage: Definition and Methodology**

The initial goal of the analysis is to estimate the electoral advantage that Spanish senatorial incumbents have over their challengers, which in multimember districts includes challengers from the incumbents’ own party.

Most scholars have studied the phenomenon in single-member districts. In that type of election, incumbency advantage is usually understood as the benefit derived from: (1) holding office for at least a term, (2) being a high-quality candidate, and (3) deterring high-quality challengers from entering the race (Cox and Katz, 1996; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997). In multimember districts, the composition of incumbency advantage would be the same except that the third component would include the benefit of deterring high-quality challengers from one’s own party from entering the race. In other words, in electoral systems with intra-party competition, the electoral advantage of incumbents might come not only from attracting votes away from candidates from an opposing party but also from luring votes away from candidates from their own party.\textsuperscript{11}

**Methodology for Estimating Incumbency Advantage**

The design of the Spanish electoral system allows for an unusually precise measurement of incumbency advantage. Spanish senatorial elections follow a multimember plurality system, where multiple candidates from the same party run alongside each other when competing for multiple seats in a district. Following the method introduced by Hirano and Snyder (2009),

\textsuperscript{10}There are about 60,000 polling stations in Spain, each capturing the vote choice of 200 to 2,000 individuals. Thus, the dataset consists of more than 13 million observations, containing information about the electoral outcomes in each of the polling stations of the 11,181 candidates who ran for the Senate in the period under study.

\textsuperscript{11}See Ariga (2010) for a description of the different types of incumbency advantage that one encounters in multimember districts as compared to single-member electoral systems.
we can estimate the incumbents’ advantage by comparing their electoral outcomes to those of their co-partisans running in the same race. As the candidates being compared belong to the same party and are running in the same district, their electoral outcomes should only differ in as much as their quality and access to office resources differ. Thus, the resulting measure of incumbency advantage is a reasonable indicator of how much of an electoral boost senators enjoy due to (a) their already having served at least one term, and (b) their being better candidates than their co-partisan counterparts. Notice, however, that this measure of incumbency advantage does not capture the so-called “scare-off effect” that incumbents might have on high-quality challengers from a different party. Thus, it is worth noting that it might only be a partial measure of the total incumbency advantage of senators in Spain. For the sake of simplicity, however, throughout the paper I will refer to this measure as that of the incumbency advantage of senators in Spain.

In order to use this method to analyze Spanish Senate elections, we first have to compute the dependent variable. Because I would like the measure of the candidate’s vote share to range from zero to one across all districts, I use the following formula:

\[
\text{Vote Share Candidate}_{ipdt} = \frac{\text{Votes for Candidate } i \text{ of Party } p \text{ in District } d \text{ at Time } t}{\left( \frac{\text{Valid Votes in District } d \text{ at Time } t}{\text{Number Votes per Citizen in District } d} \right)}
\]

where the numerator is the total number of votes that candidate \( i \) of party \( p \) received in the district \( d \) at time \( t \), and the denominator is the maximum number of votes that candidate \( i \) would have received in the district \( d \) at time \( t \) if every person who went to the polls voted for him or her, among others. The denominator is composed of the total number of valid votes placed in district \( d \) at time \( t \) divided by the number of votes that citizens are allowed to cast district \( d \).
The models estimated are as follow:

\[ \text{Vote Share Candidate}_{ipdt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Incumbent}_{ipdt} + \theta_{pdt} + \epsilon_{ipdt} \]  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where \( \text{Vote Share Candidate}_{ipdt} \) is the vote share that candidate \( i \) from party \( p \) received in district \( d \) at time \( t \); \( \text{Incumbent}_{ipdt} \) is a dummy variable indicating whether the candidate is an incumbent; \( \theta_{pdt} \) are fixed effects for each combination of district \( \times \) party \( \times \) year; and \( \epsilon_{ipdt} \) are the usual residuals.

The inclusion of fixed effects for each combination of district, party, and year focuses the analysis on electoral outcomes at the district level of co-partisans running together. Running this linear regression is equivalent to calculating the average difference between the electoral outcome of incumbents and that of their co-partisan non-incumbents running in the same district. The advantage of performing the analysis this way is that the regression analyses indicate whether the difference between the two electoral outcomes is statistically different from zero.\textsuperscript{12,13}

In addition to models estimating the incumbency advantage of senators in Spain, I also run models estimating the effect that such advantage has on the candidates’ probability of being elected. These models take a form identical to the vote share model in (1) but use as a dependent variable \( \text{Elected}_{ipdt} \), which takes the value of one if candidate \( ipd \) was elected at time \( t \) and zero otherwise.

\textbf{Methodology for Estimating the Size of a Particular Source}

The source of incumbency advantage is also of interest, specifically how much of the incumbents’ electoral advantage derives from their strategic positioning on the ballot.

\textsuperscript{12}Block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used throughout. I use district-years as blocks when analyzing the entire time period. I use districts as blocks when analyzing the data before and after 1989. See Bertrand, Duflo and Mullainathan (2004) for a description of the virtues of block bootstrap.

\textsuperscript{13}Given the model specification, the regressions only include observations of the parties that nominated at least one incumbent and one non-incumbent.
To gauge the impact of this particular mechanism, let us assume the basic causal chain described in Figure 1, in which incumbency status has both a direct effect on electoral outcomes (path $c$) and an indirect effect through the mechanism of candidate ballot position (the path $a$-$b$ in the diagram). Since the total effect of incumbency status on electoral outcomes is equal to the sum of these two effects, direct and indirect, then we can estimate the indirect effect, which is the mechanism-specific path that we are interested in, by calculating the difference between the total effect and the direct effect (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

Model (1) estimates the total effect that incumbency status has on electoral outcomes, $\hat{\beta}_1$. To estimate the direct effect that incumbency has on electoral outcomes, once we control for candidate ballot position, we can use the following model:

$$ Vote \ Share \ Candidate_{ipdt} = \beta_0' + \beta_1' Incumbent_{ipdt} + \beta_2' First \ on \ the \ Ballot_{ipdt} + \beta_3' Third \ on \ the \ Ballot_{ipdt} + \theta_{ipdt} + \epsilon_{ipdt} $$ (2)
where everything is as Model (1) but now we control for the position of the candidate on the ballot by including whether candidate *ipdt* is listed first or third among his co-partisans.\(^{14}\)

The difference between these two effects, \(\hat{\beta}_1 - \hat{\beta}_1',\) should be a reasonable estimate of the indirect effect that incumbency has on electoral outcomes through the specific mechanism of candidate ballot position as long as certain assumptions are met (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Glynn, 2011). In addition to the usual assumptions necessary for unbiased estimates, we have to assume that there is no interaction effect at the individual level between incumbency and ballot position. In other words, we need to assume that being the incumbent and appearing first on the ballot does not have an effect above and beyond the sum of these two effects separately. Given the lack of public attention to senatorial elections, incumbents have very little name recognition, and thus this assumption is reasonable. Furthermore, as shown later, the data is consistent with this assumption.

As before, in addition to models estimating the direct and indirect effects of incumbency on the vote share of the candidates, I also run models estimating the direct and indirect effects that such advantage has on the candidates’ probability of being elected. The procedures are the same as described above, except that here the dependent variable is whether or not the candidate was elected.

**Heterogeneity of Effects Based on the Vulnerability of the Candidates**

Throughout the analysis I allow for the estimates to differ according to the popularity of the candidates’ party in the district in which they are running. In particular, for each district I distinguish between the most popular party, the second most popular, and the rest.\(^{15}\) To make these distinctions, I use the electoral outcomes of the simultaneous elections to the Congress of Deputies, where citizens are asked to place votes for closed-party lists. The

---

\(^{14}\)The baseline category is being listed second.

\(^{15}\)It is worth noting that there are some parties that nominate candidates for the election to the Senate but do not run in the election to the Congress of Deputies. For these parties, I do not have information about their popularity in the district, and thus, they end up in the “rest” category.
assumption made is that elections to the Senate do not affect elections to the Congress of Deputies. That is to say, there are no spillover effects, which, given the characteristics of Spanish elections, seems reasonable.

As described earlier, candidates face very different prospects of election depending on the popularity of their party. While all candidates from the most popular party in a district are almost assured election, only one of the candidates from the second most popular party is likely to be elected. For the candidates from the rest of the parties, the odds of gaining a seat are quite low.\footnote{Historically, fewer than 1.5% of the candidates from parties other than the top two have been elected.}

I estimate different effects based on the popularity of the parties to allow the candidates’ level of vulnerability to play a role in the analysis. For example, we may observe that the more vulnerable incumbents receive more help from their parties than those who are in safer seats. This would be consistent with recent findings (Hirano and Snyder, 2009; Hirano, 2007).

**Focus on Two Most Popular Parties in the Races**

Lastly, the analysis focuses exclusively on the incumbency advantage of candidates in the two most popular parties in each district. One could argue that the incumbency advantage observed in other parties is qualitatively different than that in the two most popular parties. A candidate from a less popular party cannot simply rely on his or her party’s reputation to win a seat. To be elected, he or she must usually be a popular figure.\footnote{This is consistent with the information provided in the interviews.} For this reason I exclude from the study incumbents from parties other than the top two.

Even though in Spanish senatorial elections there are, on average, candidates from 12 different parties in each race, historically candidates from the two most popular parties in
each district have won 93 percent of the seats.\textsuperscript{18} Out of the 934 incumbents who ran in the elections under study, 89% belonged to one of the top two parties.

Results

The main results are summarized in Table 1. Incumbents from the two most popular parties are estimated to have, on average, an electoral advantage of a little less than .7 percentage points over their co-partisan non-incumbents, which, in spite of its small magnitude, is estimated to increase the incumbents’ probability of being elected by almost 25 percentage points. In general, Spanish senatorial elections are won by small margins; thus, even a small increase in a candidate’s vote share can have a large effect on that candidate’s probability of success. On average, the difference between winning and losing is only 3 percentage points in vote share.\textsuperscript{19}

A more interesting story comes to light when we distinguish among incumbents based on the popularity of their party in the district. As shown in Table 1, incumbents from the second most popular party in a district have a significantly higher incumbency advantage than those from the most popular party, an effect of 1 percentage point compared to .5 percentage points. This larger advantage provides incumbents from the second most popular party an increased probability of being elected of more than 55 percentage points. In other words, among candidates from the second most popular party in the district, the probability of incumbents being elected is 55 percentage points higher than that of their co-partisans running in the same race. In contrast, the electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbents from the most popular party does almost nothing to boost their probability of re-election. The

\textsuperscript{18}All but 11 of the remaining 158 seats went to candidates who ran as independents or whose party did not have a ticket in the Congress of Deputies election, and therefore I do not have a measure of that party’s popularity in the district. Given the regional nature of the Senate, some parties form especially to push a specific regional issue in the Senate and, therefore, only participate in those elections.

\textsuperscript{19}This is calculated as the average difference between the vote share of the candidate who was elected with the least number of votes and the vote share of the candidate with the most number of votes among those candidates that were not elected.
probability of incumbents from the most popular party being elected is estimated to be only 2 percentage points higher than that of their co-partisans in the race. This makes sense, since as discussed earlier, all candidates from the most popular party are almost assured to win a seat, regardless of their individual characteristics. Historically, only 7% of the candidates from the most popular party did not get elected.

All told, the advantage of incumbents in Spanish senatorial elections is estimated to be responsible for the reelection of 81 senators out of the 731 that were reelected in this time period. However, if we only look at vulnerable senators, that is senators from the most popular party, we find that their estimated incumbency advantage is responsible for the reelection of 76 of them, out of the 184 reelected.

These results remain substantially the same whether we analyze the candidate’s overall vote share or the vote share received by the candidates out of the number of votes received by the top two parties in the district.\textsuperscript{20} Likewise, it makes little difference whether we focus on all the races or whether we limit ourselves to those races in which the two most popular parties captured at least 80 percent of the vote. (This can be seen by comparing the results from the different columns in Table 1.)

\textsuperscript{20}Note that to compute this variable, we need to limit ourself to races that are so-called “symmetric,” defined as races where both major parties nominate as many candidates as votes allowed per citizen.
Table 1: Estimated Incumbency Advantage of Top Two Parties in Spanish Senatorial Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Races Analyzed</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Races</td>
<td>All Symmetric Races</td>
<td>Symmetric Races where Top Two Parties Captured 80% Vote Share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Two-Party Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Two-Party Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Two-Party Elected</td>
<td>Vote Share</td>
<td>Elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.0067</td>
<td>.2481</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0198)</td>
<td>.0091</td>
<td>.2471</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0207)</td>
<td>.0077</td>
<td>.2688</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0278)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0048</td>
<td>.0211</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0087)</td>
<td>.0073</td>
<td>.0226</td>
<td>(.0011)</td>
<td>(.0093)</td>
<td>.0049</td>
<td>.0032</td>
<td>(.0011)</td>
<td>(.0070)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0095</td>
<td>.5617</td>
<td>(.0007)</td>
<td>(.0432)</td>
<td>.0116</td>
<td>.5497</td>
<td>(.0009)</td>
<td>(.0447)</td>
<td>.0112</td>
<td>.5969</td>
<td>(.0010)</td>
<td>(.0570)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>853</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Symmetric races are races where the two top parties nominated as many candidates as number of votes allowed per citizen. The baseline category are the co-partisan non-incumbents in the same race. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. See formula (1) for a complete description of the linear model used. Block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used throughout. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.
Ballot Position Effects

After the first few elections of Spain’s new democracy, scholars noticed that the position of a candidate on the ballot for the Senate had a substantial effect on the candidate’s electoral outcome (Lijphart and López Pintor, 1988). Candidates positioned further up the list were found to systematically fare much better than those further down. This was true regardless of whether the candidates were grouped by party.\footnote{As mentioned earlier, starting in 1986 the ballot went from listing all candidates in alphabetical order, regardless of party affiliation, to grouping candidates by parties and then listing them in alphabetical order within each party.}

Spanish senatorial elections are not unique in this regard. Scholars have found in many other elections that the position of the candidates on the ballot can have an effect on their electoral success.\footnote{There is an extensive literature on the subject matter. See for example Brook and Upton (1974); Upton and Brook (1974); Robson and Walsh (1974); Taebel (1975); Upton and Brook (1975); Kelley and McAllister (1984); Darcy (1986); Bowler, Donovan and Happ (1992); Darcy (1998).} The so-called ballot position effects derive from the fact that the uninformed or unengaged electorate tends to vote for the first person on the ballot, since they do not have the information necessary to distinguish between the candidates in any other way. If there are multiple candidates for each party, as is the case in the Spanish elections to the Senate, the first candidate listed for each party will tend to do better than the last candidate listed for that same party. The idea here is that the electorate might have strong party preferences but might not have enough information to have an opinion about the different candidates from the same party.

Using a similar methodology as was used to estimate the advantage of incumbents, we can estimate the ballot position effects for the period under study.\footnote{In these analyses, instead of using a dummy indicating who the incumbents are, we simply have two dummies, one indicating whether the candidate was listed first and another indicating whether the candidate was listed third. I use the same dependent variables and continue to use fixed effects for every combination of year, district, and party. As before, I limit the analysis to the top two parties in the districts.} As shown in Table 2, I find strong ballot position effects in Spanish senatorial elections. From 1977 to 2008, being positioned first on the ballot, compared to being positioned second, is estimated to increase...
a candidate’s vote share by 1 percentage point on average. This translates into an increased probability of being elected of 35 percentage points. Once again, if we distinguish among candidates based on party popularity, we find that ballot position effects have much larger consequences for candidates from the second most popular party than for those from the most popular party in the district. Being placed first on the ballot, as opposed to being placed second, increases the probability of being elected by only 4 percentage points for candidates from the most popular party but by fully 66 percentage points for candidates from the second most popular party. Again, this disparity makes sense since candidates from the most popular party are already very likely to win, so an extra percentage point of the vote share makes little difference.\textsuperscript{24}

The effects of ballot position on a candidate’s vote share is estimated to be the same regardless of whether the party has an incumbent running. Table 3 shows the estimated ballot position effects for all the two most popular parties as well as for only those that had no incumbents running. The differences between the estimates are not statistically significant. This suggests that the estimated ballot position effects are not driven by the strategic position of incumbents on the ballot. The data is consistent, therefore, with the assumption of no interaction effect at the individual level between incumbency and ballot position.

\textsuperscript{24}Note that being moved further down the list, from second to third, also has some negative effects on the candidate’s vote share but the magnitude of such effects are much smaller than those going from first to second. For details see Table 2.
Table 2: Estimated Ballot Position Effects in Spanish Senatorial Elections, 1977-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote Share Elected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Candidates from Top Two Parties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First on the Ballot</td>
<td>.0100</td>
<td>.3488</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0007)</td>
<td>(.0130)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third on the Ballot</td>
<td>-.0060</td>
<td>-.0541</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0009)</td>
<td>(.0114)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Popular Party Candidates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First on the Ballot</td>
<td>.0104</td>
<td>.0376</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0012)</td>
<td>(.0100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third on the Ballot</td>
<td>-.0068</td>
<td>-.0434</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0012)</td>
<td>(.0104)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Most Popular Party Candidates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First on the Ballot</td>
<td>.0095</td>
<td>.6616</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0006)</td>
<td>(.0258)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third on the Ballot</td>
<td>-.0053</td>
<td>-.0732</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0010)</td>
<td>(.0173)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The baseline category are the co-partisans in the same race that are listed second on the ballot. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. Block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used throughout. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.
Table 3: Estimated Ballot Position Effects in Spanish Senatorial Elections, 1977-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties Analyzed</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: Vote Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Top Two Parties</td>
<td>Only Top Two Parties Without Incumbents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All Candidates**
- First on the Ballot: 0.0100 (0.0007), 0.0096 (0.0016)
- Third on the Ballot: -0.0060 (0.0009), -0.0076 (0.0020)

**Most Popular Party Candidates**
- First on the Ballot: 0.0104 (0.0012), 0.0106 (0.0037)
- Third on the Ballot: -0.0068 (0.0012), -0.0104 (0.0038)

**Second Most Popular Party Candidates**
- First on the Ballot: 0.0095 (0.0006), 0.0091 (0.0009)
- Third on the Ballot: -0.0053 (0.0010), -0.0059 (0.0018)

Notes: The baseline category are the co-partisans in the same race that are listed second on the ballot. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. Block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used throughout. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.
Parties’ Strategic Behavior

Scholars were not the only ones who noticed the effects of ballot positioning on electoral outcomes. Based on the evidence presented here and interviews with party leaders, it seems that after the first few elections, the parties became aware of it too and started to exploit this phenomenon to help reelect their most vulnerable incumbents.25

The nomination of candidates for Spanish national elections is controlled by the parties (Montabes and Ortega, 1999). Through a centralized process, parties nominate candidates for both the Senate and the Congress of Deputies.26 Parties are known to wield this power to enforce party discipline among legislators (Field, 2006), and they seem not to be reluctant to use it. For example, in the time period under study, only 50% of the senators ended up running for reelection.

Based on interviews with party leaders, only incumbents who please their party while in office are nominated to run again once the term is up. It seems, then, that in the context of the Spanish Senate, the main electoral benefit of serving in office is the opportunity to show one’s party leaders that one can legislate in accordance with their wishes. Given the low interest of the public and the importance of one’s party affiliation, senators who wish to remain in office will work to please their party. Unlike in other democracies, such as the U.S., the main constituency for senators is not voters but their own party leaders.

Once an incumbent is chosen to run for reelection, however, it is in the parties’ interest to help him or her succeed.27 As noted before, candidates from the most popular party in each district have a high probability of being elected. Incumbents from these parties are quite safe.

25During the 2011 electoral campaign, I conducted several interviews of party leaders involved in the candidate nomination process from the major parties in Spain. In addition, I interviewed senators, campaign managers, and political journalists.

26Even though the major parties in Spain utilize some sort of primary system in order to gauge the popularity of the candidates among the rank and file members at the local level, the ultimate decision-making power resides with the party leaders.

27After all, if party leaders decide to nominate an incumbent to run for reelection it is because they are pleased with their performance.
and do not require assistance. However, the same cannot be said of the candidates from the second most popular party. Most of the time, only one of these candidates will win a seat, and almost always, it will be the candidate from the party who is listed first on the ballot.\footnote{This is true 89\% of the time.} Ballot positioning for these candidates is, thus, of the highest importance. Given that the order of the candidates on the ballot was done alphabetically during the period studied, if the party leaders involved in the candidate selection process wanted to help vulnerable incumbents get reelected, they had to choose the running mates of the incumbents with last names further down the alphabet. This type of strategic nominating behavior was suspected by Montabes and Ortega (2002), who analyzed the 2000 Spanish senatorial elections and found that despite the alphabetical rule, incumbents were disproportionally positioned first on the ballot, especially when they were in vulnerable positions.\footnote{Bagues and Esteve-Volart (2012) argued a similar exploitation of the nomination process. They argued that parties were choosing female candidates based on their last name, in order to ensure that they be placed on disadvantageous positions on the ballot.}

More generally, we can find evidence of the parties’ strategic placement of incumbents on the ballot (see Table 4). Incumbents are much more likely to be placed first on the ballot and less likely to be placed third than their non-incumbent co-partisans across the board. Further, we find stronger differences in probabilities between incumbents and non-incumbents in parties that are likely to only gain one seat. As shown in Table 4, incumbents from the second most popular party are 57 percentage points more likely to be placed first on the ballot than their co-partisan counterparts, while incumbents from the most popular party are 23 percentage points more likely to be placed first on the ballot than the non-incumbents running from the same party in the same race. These two coefficients are statistically different from each other. Similarly, incumbents from the second most popular party are 32 percentage points less likely to be placed third on the ballot than their non-incumbent co-partisans, while
Table 4: Estimated Likelihood of Ballot Position in Spanish Senatorial Elections, 1979-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>First On the Ballot</th>
<th>Third On the Ballot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>One Incumbent Running from the Party (n=1,148)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.4016</td>
<td>-.2124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0372)</td>
<td>(.0280)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.2263</td>
<td>-.1053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0547)</td>
<td>(.0456)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.5714</td>
<td>-.3163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0483)</td>
<td>(.0321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two</td>
<td>-.3451</td>
<td>.2111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0730)</td>
<td>(.0563)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two Incumbents Running from the Party (n=435)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.0759</td>
<td>-.0586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0568)</td>
<td>(.0604)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0424</td>
<td>-.0466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0641)</td>
<td>(.0674)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.2222</td>
<td>-.1111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.1140)</td>
<td>(.1426)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two</td>
<td>-.1798</td>
<td>.0645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.1298)</td>
<td>(.1585)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The baseline category are the co-partisan non-incumbents in the same race. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. Throughout, block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.
incumbents from the most popular party are only 11 percentage points less likely to be placed third on the ballot than their running mates.\textsuperscript{30}

We can see a similar story presented graphically in Figure 2, which shows the different distribution of last names for incumbents and non-incumbents of these two types of parties. As incumbents are more vulnerable in the second most popular parties in the district, their running mates tend to have last names that come from the last half of the alphabet. Far less skewed is the distribution of last names of candidates running with incumbents who are more likely to retain their seats, that is, those from the most popular party.

Lastly, these results are consistent with information collected in interviews with party leaders involved in the candidate nomination process from the major parties in Spain. The current Secretary General of the “Partido Popular” in Barcelona stated it clearly: “The order of the candidates on the ballot is very important. [When the ballot order was alphabetical,] the last name of the incumbent used to condition who his or her running mates could be. Choosing the running mates of vulnerable incumbents based on last name was a practice that \textit{all} political parties used to engage in. It simply made sense. It was logical.”\textsuperscript{31} Because in 2010 the alphabetic ordering was eliminated to give parties the power to decide the ordering themselves, parties no longer need to engage in such behavior.

\textsuperscript{30}These are the statistics for parties that have only one incumbent running. Similar distinctions are found when two incumbents are running, although the coefficients are much smaller. In addition, given the small number of observations in these regressions, the coefficients are also not statistically significant.

\textsuperscript{31}Quote in translation
Figure 2: Distribution of Last Names by Incumbency Status and Party Popularity

Incumbents
Non-Incumbents

Most Popular
Party

Second Most
Popular Party
Strategic Ballot Positioning as a Source of Incumbency Advantage

Using the methodology described earlier, we can explore the extent to which the observed incumbency advantage in Spanish senatorial elections derives from the mechanism of strategic ballot positioning of vulnerable incumbents.

Table 5 shows the decomposition of the total incumbency advantage into direct and indirect effects; the indirect effects are the mechanism specific path that we are interested in as they are the effects that incumbency has on electoral outcomes through candidate ballot position. Based on these analyses, I find that the strategic position of incumbents on the ballot accounts for more than half of the observed incumbency advantage of the senators in the two most popular parties in Spain (.35 percentage points out of .67).

As this strategy is particularly used to help vulnerable incumbents, we should expect the effect to be larger for incumbents from the second most popular party than for incumbents from the most popular party. Table 5 shows that this is indeed the case. The strategic placement of incumbents on the ballot explains .56 percentage points of the advantage of incumbents from the second most popular party, but only .20 percentage points of the advantage of incumbents from the most popular party. The difference between these two coefficients is statistically significant at the 95% level.

The evidence is even clearer once we consider that this practice did not begin in earnest until after the first few elections. As shown in Table 6, for incumbents from the two most popular parties, placement on the ballot is an insignificant amount of the incumbency advantage observed in elections before 1989, while placement on the ballot explains almost all of the advantage in later elections.\(^{32}\) Ballot positioning accounts for only .12 percentage points of the advantage of .79 observed before 1989, but it accounts for .50 percentage points out of the advantage of .62 observed from 1989 to 2008. The indirect effects of incumbency on

---

\(^{32}\)The year 1989 is chosen as the cut-off point because qualitatively it is around the time that the parties claim to have started this strategic behavior. In addition, the data presents a structural break on that year, based on Wald tests.
### Table 5: Estimated Incumbency Advantage of Top Two Parties in Spanish Senatorial Elections, 1979-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Vote Share</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Effect</td>
<td>Direct Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.0067 (.0008)</td>
<td>.0032 (.0004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0048 (.0008)</td>
<td>.0028 (.0006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0095 (.0007)</td>
<td>.0039 (.0006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two</td>
<td>-.0047 (.0010)</td>
<td>-.0011 (.0008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The baseline category are the co-partisan non-incumbents in the same race. See formula (1) for a description of the linear model used to estimate the total effects. See formula (2) for a description of the linear model used to estimate the direct effects. The indirect effects - the mechanism specific path - are the difference between the direct and total effects. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. Throughout, block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote Share</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elections from 1979 to 1986</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.0079</td>
<td>.0067</td>
<td>.0012</td>
<td>.1625</td>
<td>.1234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0016)</td>
<td>(.0012)</td>
<td>(.0009)</td>
<td>(.0340)</td>
<td>(.0324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0077</td>
<td>.0067</td>
<td>.0009</td>
<td>.0441</td>
<td>.0424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0019)</td>
<td>(.0014)</td>
<td>(.0011)</td>
<td>(.0151)</td>
<td>(.0152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0084</td>
<td>.0067</td>
<td>.0017</td>
<td>.3655</td>
<td>.2675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0020)</td>
<td>(.0015)</td>
<td>(.0010)</td>
<td>(.0864)</td>
<td>(.0857)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two</td>
<td>-.0007</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>-.0008</td>
<td>-.3214</td>
<td>-.2251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0021)</td>
<td>(.0017)</td>
<td>(.0012)</td>
<td>(.0879)</td>
<td>(.0878)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elections from 1989 to 2008</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Incumbents</td>
<td>.0062</td>
<td>.0012</td>
<td>.0050</td>
<td>.2855</td>
<td>.0293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0006)</td>
<td>(.0004)</td>
<td>(.0005)</td>
<td>(.0236)</td>
<td>(.0168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0033</td>
<td>.0009</td>
<td>.0024</td>
<td>.0097</td>
<td>.0024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0006)</td>
<td>(.0006)</td>
<td>(.0096)</td>
<td>(.0099)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Popular Party Incumbents</td>
<td>.0098</td>
<td>.0017</td>
<td>.0081</td>
<td>.6330</td>
<td>.0870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0006)</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0423)</td>
<td>(.0454)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two</td>
<td>-.0065</td>
<td>-.0008</td>
<td>-.0057</td>
<td>-.6233</td>
<td>-.0846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0012)</td>
<td>(.0008)</td>
<td>(.0010)</td>
<td>(.0441)</td>
<td>(.0459)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The baseline category are the co-partisan non-incumbents in the same race. See formula (1) for a description of the model used to estimate the total effects. See formula (2) for a description of the model used to estimate the direct effects. The indirect effects—the mechanism specific path—are the difference between the direct and total effects. All regressions include fixed effects for each combination of year, district, and party. Throughout, block bootstrap standard errors with 10,000 simulations are used. Coefficients significant at the 95% level are shown in bold.
electoral outcomes through candidate ballot placement is found not to be statistically significant before 1989, regardless of the popularity of the party.\textsuperscript{33}

If we focus on the years when this practice was prevalent, we find stronger evidence that this mechanism was particularly used to favor the more vulnerable incumbents. For incumbents of the second most popular party, ballot position accounts for .81 percentage points out of their estimated advantage of .98 percentage points. For incumbents of the most popular party, it accounts for .24 percentage points out of their estimated advantage of .33. The indirect effects for the two types of parties are statistically different from each other at the 95\% level.

In terms of the probability of being elected during this period, incumbents from the most popular party are found to have no statistically significant advantage over their co-partisans. Incumbents from the second most popular party, however, are estimated to be 63 percentage points more likely to be elected than their running mates, and most of their advantage is estimated to derive from their strategic placement on the ballot.

In summary, we find strong evidence that, after the first few elections, Spanish parties nominated the running mates of vulnerable incumbents based on their last name in order to boost the incumbents’ prospects for re-election. This strategic party behavior is found to be the main source of the observed incumbency advantage in the elections between 1989 and 2008. The remaining observed incumbency advantage, measured by the direct effects, is small and more often than not insignificant, and it might simply be due to the quality differential between the candidates. As some of the incumbents’ running mates were chosen

\textsuperscript{33}During the first few elections in Spain, party leaders had yet to realize the importance of ballot position, however, incumbents are nevertheless found to have a statistically significant advantage over their co-partisan counterparts. Based on conversations with party leaders, the incumbency advantage of the first few elections was due to the popularity of the candidates themselves as well as a more candidate-centered campaigns. The first few elections were more candidate-centered because (a) the parties were still forming and were not yet known entities to the electorate (in other words, they did not have a brand name yet), (b) the Senate was still taken as a serious legislative chamber and thus citizens paid attention to their elections, and (c) the candidates were popular figures, for the most part.
based primarily on last name, their quality as politicians might not be comparable to that of the incumbents.

**Conclusion**

The literature on the sources of incumbency advantage has focused primarily on the actions of individual politicians and, for the most part, neglected activities in which parties engage to boost the electoral chances of their affiliated incumbents. It is reasonable to expect parties to help their incumbents get reelected, and to therefore generate some of the incumbents’ advantage over their challengers, especially in elections where the stakes are high and parties are powerful. In this paper, I find evidence of a meaningful incumbency advantage created not by the actions of the incumbents themselves but by the actions of their parties.

In particular, in this paper I study elections to the Spanish Senate, a context in which the commonly studied sources of incumbency advantage are not likely to be present. Using the method introduced by Hirano and Snyder (2009), I estimate the incumbency advantage of senators from 1979 to 2008. Exploiting the multimember district system of the Senate in Spain, I compare the electoral outcomes of incumbents to those of non-incumbents from the same party running in the same race, and estimate the effects of the incumbent’s office holder benefits and quality differential on electoral outcomes.

I find a small but significant incumbency advantage that is estimated to increase the probability of all incumbents being reelected by almost 25 percentage points but that of vulnerable incumbents by more than 50 percentage points. Furthermore, I find that the main source of such advantage derives from the behavior of the parties, that help their more vulnerable senators get reelected by ensuring that they be placed first on the ballot.

As the findings of this paper suggest, parties have an incentive to use whatever resources are available to help their incumbents remain in power, especially those in vulnerable positions. To this end, parties might supply organizational support, help with fundraising,
coordinate public endorsements, discourage talented within-party challengers, provide key promotions, and offer high-profile appointments, among others. The case of the Spanish Senate is likely just the tip of the iceberg since their elections are relatively low stakes, and more research is needed to fully understand the role of parties in causing the incumbency advantage observed in other developed countries.
References


Migueis, Marco. 2010. The Effect of Political Alignment on Transfers to Portuguese Municipalities. PhD thesis MIT, Department of Economics.


39


