

Seniority-based Nominations and Political Careers*

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Abstract

This paper investigates party use of seniority systems to allocate nominations for elected and appointed offices. Such systems, which can regulate party members' access to offices at multiple levels of their careers, are defined by two main rules or norms: an incumbent renomination norm, and a seniority progression norm. Using comprehensive electoral and candidate data from Norwegian local and national elections from 1945-2019, we find systematic patterns consistent with these two norms. Our work illuminates an institutional aspect of candidate selection that the current literature has ignored, while noting some of the important consequences of seniority-based nominations for party cohesion and stability.

Keywords: seniority systems; political selection; returns to office.

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1. Introduction

Political selection involves many dimensions, such as who initially becomes a candidate for office, who wins, the extent to which winners retain their positions (static ambition), and the extent to which winners seek higher positions (progressive ambition).¹ Recently, access to high-dimensional administrative data has allowed researchers to provide better answers to some classic questions about political selection, often focusing on the net result of the selection processes just noted.² For example, are winning candidates richer or more educated than the population at large? Do elections select on merit, somehow defined (Dal Bó et al., 2017)? What determines the career progression of an individual politician?

In this paper, we use comprehensive electoral and candidate data from both local and national elections to explore political selection in Norway. The important role of political parties in choosing candidates for office is well established; however, the extent to which rules or norms guide internal party selection is less well-understood (Dal Bó and Finan, 2018; McCarty and Schickler, 2018). We depart from the existing literature, both in political economy and political science, in our focus on political seniority systems.

As we define them, seniority procedures are methods of selection that prioritize prior experience holding political office. More specifically, we argue seniority systems consist of two components: an “incumbent re-nomination norm,” whereby any incumbent in good standing will be re-nominated (if they wish); and a “seniority progression rule,” whereby open nominations (those with no incumbent claiming them) will be allocated preferentially to party members currently holding pre-defined feeder offices. Together, these rules help create a career path within the party, such that nominations are meritocratic for entry-level jobs (for which no feeder offices exist), but then become seniority-based as one

¹The terms ‘static ambition’ and ‘progressive ambition’ stem from seminal work on US politics, including Schlesinger (1966), Black (1972), and Rohde (1979).

²Participants in the “administrative data revolution” include Dancygier et al. (2015), Hyytinen et al. (2018a) and Oskarsson et al. (2018), and a spate of papers, including Bhusal et al. (2019) Dahlgaard et al. (2019) and Thompson et al. (2019), directly inspired by Dal Bó et al. (2017).

moves up in the hierarchy of offices. In contrast to previous studies of seniority systems – which focus on the allocation of appointive offices, such as committee chairs (e.g. Epstein et al., 1997; McKelvey and Riezman, 1992; Muthoo and Shepsle, 2014) – we investigate whether parties use seniority to allocate nominations for elective office(s).

Seniority procedures for selecting nominees to elective offices can have important consequences. For example, accrued seniority increases a politician’s value of remaining in his/her party, rather than switching to another. Unless a switcher’s seniority will be “honored,” s/he must accept a demotion in order to join a new party. Thus, seniority systems can help build more stable parties. Relatedly, stripping a member of his/her seniority is a significant threat that only parties running seniority systems can deploy. Thus, seniority systems can help build more disciplined parties.

Our aims in this paper are as follows. First, we hope to put the investigation of seniority systems on the scholarly agenda. While there is an extensive comparative literature on candidate selection and recruitment, standard surveys (e.g. Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Norris, 1997) do not mention the possibility that parties use seniority systems in allocating their nominations. Although the study of seniority systems is well-established in legislative studies, it is remarkably absent from electoral studies. Second, we hope to provide methods that can be used to identify whether seniority systems are in place in closed-list systems. The challenge is that nominations allocated by “merit” (variously defined) might look like those allocated by seniority. For example, an incumbent might earn re-nomination by virtue of being a higher-quality candidate than his/her likely competitors, rather than by virtue of being credited by party nominating committees for his/her seniority. Third, we apply the methods we develop to Norway, a case with detailed data that allows us to empirically test these competing claims.

To pursue the aims just articulated, we first model an abstract office hierarchy in a closed-list proportional representation (PR) electoral system, then provide a detailed look at political careers in Norway in the period 1945-2019. To assess whether Norwegian parties follow seniority norms, we focus on several “incremental moves” that a

Norwegian politician might traditionally seek, such as promotion from local councilor to mayor, promotion from mayor to a spot on the parliamentary list, and re-nomination to a winnable spot on the parliamentary list (should such a position be obtained). In order to accomplish any of these moves in a closed-list system, it is crucial to secure an appropriate nomination spot (as we explain further below). In Norway, we consistently find patterns that would be expected under seniority progression (or re-nomination). We use both panel regressions and regression discontinuity (RD) designs to improve our ability to address issues of causality.

After providing some evidence that Norwegian politicians are very stably attached to their parties, as would be expected if those parties followed seniority norms, we also consider some of the opportunities that parties can offer to their members late in their careers (such as cabinet posts and “revolving door” positions). Finally, we examine two key challenges to our analysis – one inferential (can one distinguish seniority from skill acquisition?) and one theoretical (can parties credibly commit to following seniority rules?). We conclude by discussing the implications of seniority systems for party stability.

2. Office and Nomination Hierarchies

Throughout the paper, we use as a running example a country in which only three types of elective political office exist: local council seats, intermediate posts such as mayoralities, and national parliamentary seats. The values of these seats are denoted $V_L < V_I < V_N$, where the subscripts indicate the level (local, intermediate, national). This three-level example suffices to illustrate a hierarchy of elective offices. In principle, office hierarchies can also include intra-legislative posts (e.g., committee chairs), executive posts (e.g., cabinet portfolios), and private sector posts (e.g., positions on corporate boards or in lobbying firms).

Continuing with our three-level example, we assume that seats at the local and national levels are filled via closed-list PR elections. Moreover, for simplicity we shall assume

that only hopeless and safe list positions exist. Candidates with hopeless positions are sure to lose, while those with safe positions are sure to win. Thus, nomination to a hopeless spot is worth nothing (in the current period), while nomination to a safe local (resp., national) spot is worth V_L (resp., V_N).

Given these simplifying assumptions, a generic politician in a particular party in a closed-list system can progress through the following five stages, which we call the “nomination hierarchy”:

1. Being nominated to a losing position on the local list
2. Being nominated to a winning position on the local list
3. Being nominated to an intermediate post
4. Being nominated to a losing position on the national list
5. Being nominated to a winning position on the national list

Nomination to a losing position on the national list typically does not require the candidate to surrender their current office. For example, mayors may run on the parliamentary list and continue serving if they do not win. It is for this reason that we put nomination to a losing spot on the national list higher than nominations to lower offices.

We characterize the process that a generic party uses to choose its nominees as follows. First, each potential nominee i is given an overall score, $S_i = (1 - \sigma)q_i + \sigma s_i$. Here, q_i denotes i 's ability or quality, while s_i represents i 's “seniority score,” which depends on the highest office i has held and for how long. For example, the party might rank its members by seniority within each office and assign larger scores to those higher in the seniority ranking. The overall score, S_i , is then a weighted average of the candidate's quality and seniority with weight $\sigma \in [0, 1]$ on seniority and weight $1 - \sigma$ on quality.

Second, the probability π_{ik} that candidate i wins, when competing against candidate k for a particular nomination, is given by a contest success function (Skaperdas, 1996):

$$\pi_{ik} = \frac{S_i^\alpha}{S_i^\alpha + S_k^\alpha} \quad (1)$$

Depending on the values of the weight σ and the exponent α , this formula can represent

procedures that award nominations strictly on the basis of seniority ($\alpha \rightarrow \infty, \sigma = 1$), strictly on the basis of quality ($\alpha \rightarrow \infty, \sigma = 0$), or on the basis of both seniority and quality. Moreover, the formula can be extended to cover cases in which more than two candidates compete for a given nomination in the nomination hierarchy.

How much nominations based on quality and those based on seniority would differ depends on the distribution of quality in the candidate pool. If all candidates have the same quality, then the correlation between quality and seniority (q_i and s_i) will be zero and it will be relatively easy to tell whether seniority procedures are in use or not. In contrast, if quality varies across candidates, then quality and seniority (q_i and s_i) will be positively correlated (since higher-quality candidates are more likely to win nominations and offices), making it harder to detect whether seniority per se weighs in the nomination decision. Our analyses deal with this through RD designs.

However, RD designs mainly help if q_i is a fixed characteristic of each candidate i . If instead q_{it} varies over time, and represents the human capital i has accrued as of time t , then human capital and seniority will be positively correlated. Each term that a politician serves in a particular office will both increase their seniority and develop their skills as a politician. It is thus harder to tell whether nominations are awarded based on skills or on seniority. We return to this issue in Section 5.

More broadly, one could argue that incumbent re-nomination norms emerge naturally as conventions: incumbents are expected to defend their current spots in equilibrium and thus potential challengers are deterred from competing for those spots. Some parties might choose to recognize incumbent re-nomination norms formally, further entrenching them.³ For our purposes, it does not matter whether incumbent re-nomination norms arise purely spontaneously or are also reinforced by explicit rules. However, the quantitative methods we use to detect seniority systems complement qualitative approaches, such as examining the written rules (if any) governing a party's nomination process.

³These norms emerge in a manner similar to property rights. For example, Sugden (1986) argues that when states recognize and enforce property rights, they may help clarify the possession rule, and make the equilibrium more stable, but the state is not necessary to create property in the first place.

Even when written rules exist and are available to scholars, a question remains as to how strictly they are followed; our methods can answer that question.

3. The Office and Nomination Hierarchies in Norway

Having described an abstract hierarchy in a closed-list system, we introduce the case of Norway, upon which our empirical analysis will focus. As do 40 of 43 European countries, Norway uses a form of party-list PR to elect national parliamentarians. By focusing on the Norwegian case, we hope to contribute a set of techniques useful in identifying whether seniority systems are in place, as well as to discuss some of the substantive issues that such systems raise.

3.1 *Main features of our empirical case*

Like many European countries, Norway's political hierarchy has directly or indirectly elected officials at several levels: local, intermediate, and national. Near the top of Norway's office hierarchy lies the *Storting*, a unicameral parliament with 169 members elected for four-year terms using closed-list PR. Still higher lies the government, consisting of the Prime Minister and other members of the *Statsråd* (Council of State, or cabinet). The number of cabinet ministers has varied, depending on the number of parties in the governing coalition; the most recent cabinet, formed in January 2020, includes 20 members.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are the local councils (*kommunestyre*) with, on average, 25 members elected for four-year terms. Local elections are staggered, so that they occur two years before (or after) parliamentary elections. Based on suggestions from parties, each local council elects various intermediate officers: a mayor (*ordfører*), a deputy mayor (*varaordfører*), and an executive board (*Formannskapet*) (all of whom are elected councilors). Municipalities are small (the median population is 4,000, the average 10,000) but have the responsibility for key welfare services, such as child care, schooling,

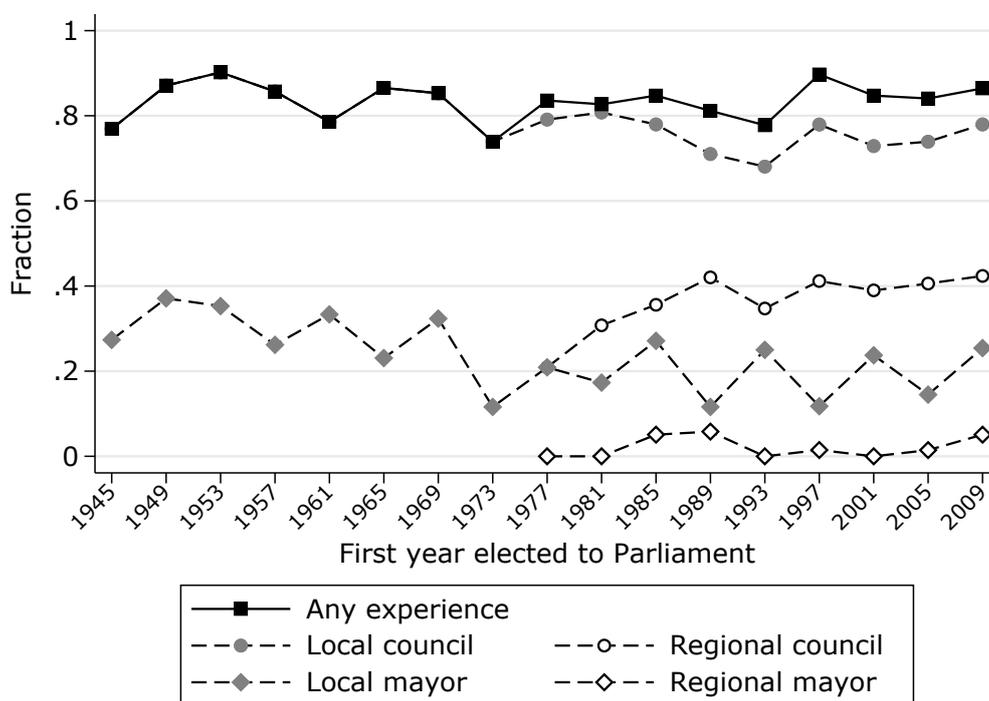
and elderly care, and employ about 17% of the labor force. As a result, local office is perceived to be an important stepping stone to the national arena.

Norway also features a set of regional councils, existing as a component of sub-national government. However, regional governments do not feature as part of our main empirical analysis, for a number of reasons. First, they have much more limited responsibilities and employ a much smaller fraction (2%) of the labor force. The majority of social services and public goods provision are provided by local councils, making regional politicians relatively weak and their job less prestigious. Second, and relatedly, regional elections in Norway are often seen as "second-order" elections that both the media and voters perceive as much less important (e.g. Ervik, 2012; Johansson and Mortenberg, 2013). As serving in a regional council is a source of experience and potentially skill, we include this information in our descriptive figures. But we focus primarily on analyzing seniority progression from local to national office.

Figure 1 demonstrates that a high proportion of first-time parliamentarians have prior experience in either local or regional office. Most political careers begin at the local or regional level, with relatively few beginning at the parliamentary level. Candidates that have experience from both sub-national offices tend to start their career at the local level (see Appendix Figure A.1).

If we look at first-time cabinet members, the descriptive pattern is also consistent with seniority-based promotions, as demonstrated by Figure 2. For example, among the individuals promoted to cabinet for the first time in the 1980-2009 period (N=136), 74% were previously elected to a feeder office (local or regional council, or mayor). Typically, decades have elapsed between the start of a politician's career and their first-time promotion to cabinet, as illustrated by the thin line in the kernel density plot of Figure 2. The vertical line at zero represents first-time promotion to cabinet; for example, -8 means that the candidate first was elected to local office 8 years before being promoted to cabinet for the first time. The thicker lines in Figure 2 illustrate that there is typically also a considerable time-lag from first-time running (winning) in national elections and promotions to

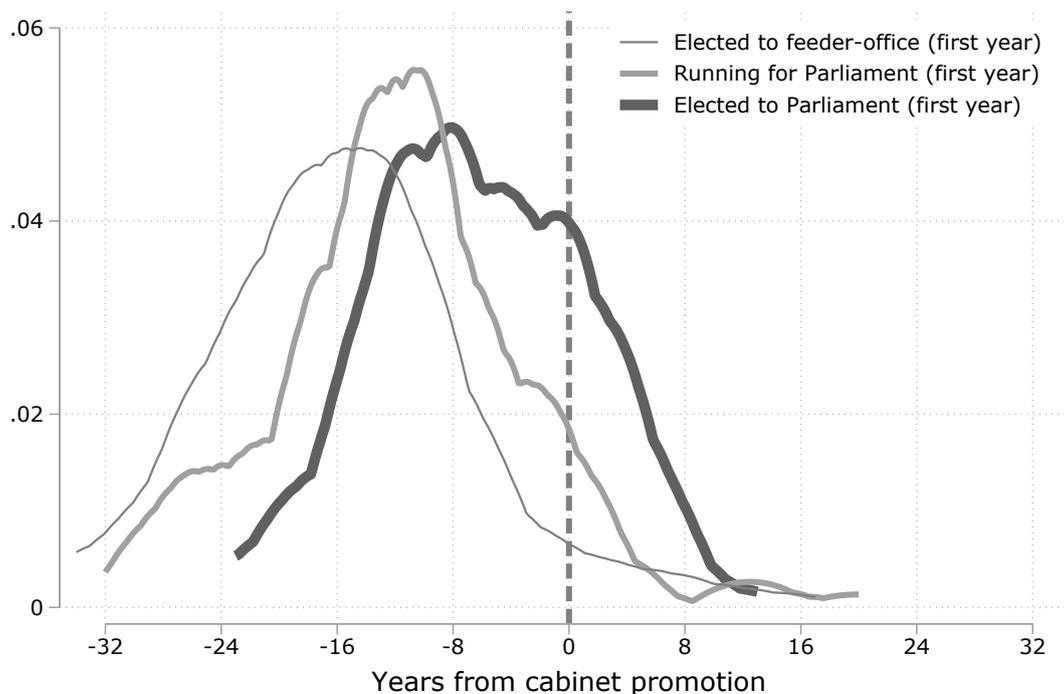
Figure 1: Fraction of candidates with political experience from local and regional office before entering Parliament for the first time



Note: Sample is restricted to candidates winning a seat in parliament for the first time in the 1945-2009 period ($N=1,077$). Appendix Table A.1 give the number of observations by election year. Direct elections for the regional office are first held in 1975.

cabinet. Among the candidates promoted to cabinet in the 1980-2009 period, 88% ever run for parliament and 74% are ever elected.

Figure 2: Kernel density plots describing cabinet members political career



Note: Sample is restricted to candidates being promoted to cabinet for the first time in the 1980-2009 period (N=136). We base the kernel density plots on individuals that respectively ever are elected to a feeder office (N=104), ever are running for national office (N=120), and ever are winning a seat in parliament (N=101).

3.2 Research Questions

In our main empirical analyses, we investigate the extent to which Norway's main parties advance their members through a nomination hierarchy. To clarify our research questions we rely on Figure 3. Our first research question (**RQ1**) is whether winning a local council election (for the first time) improves a candidate's chance of advancing at the local level. We are primarily interested in the candidate's chances of winning the prestigious mayoral position, but we also consider future election to the executive board / deputy mayor. As being listed first on the local list of a large party is virtually the only way to become

mayor, our first question is similar to asking whether local winning boosts a politician's chance of being put at the top of their party's list.

The second research question (**RQ2**) is whether those who become mayors are more likely to be placed on their party's parliamentary list (in either a hopeless or safe spot). As with RQ1, this concerns what we have called seniority progression. The third research question (**RQ3**) is whether those who are elected to parliament (for the first time) are more likely to secure a winnable spot in the next election, as an incumbent re-nomination rule would dictate. Finally, we also consider how winning a seat in parliament affects a candidate's chances of ever being promoted to higher office (**RQ4**); we focus on a cabinet position, common to all parliamentary systems, as well as a top-level bureaucratic post specific to the Norwegian case.

Our research questions cover some of the more important and commonly traveled steps in the Norwegian office hierarchy. Collectively, they suffice to address the overarching questions motivating our study: do seniority systems regulate the allocation of nominations in closed-list systems, and how could we tell if they did, both in general and in the specific case of Norway?

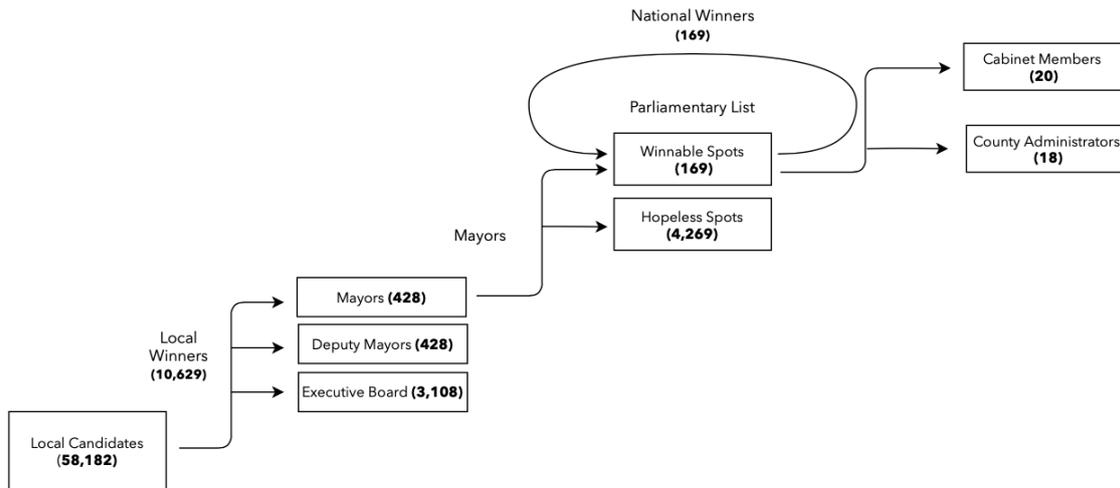
3.3 Parties, nomination procedures and electoral rules

Local, regional, and national elections in Norway are all dominated by seven political parties, which can be classified as belonging to the left-leaning socialist camp (Labor Party; Socialist Left Party) or the right-leaning conservative camp (Center Party; Christian Peoples' Party; Liberal Party; Conservative Party; Progress Party).⁴

At the national level, candidate nominations and rank positions are determined within each election district by dues-paying party delegates at nominating conventions (Valen

⁴The Center Party has in recent years sided with the left-wing parties at the national level. We do not address inter-party differences in this study, and our analysis focuses on the main parties in Norway, which have been established for a significant period (only at the very end of our sample do newer parties enter, at which point the Greens and Reds began to win parliamentary seats as well). Using survey data of local council members, we plot main parties' average left-right positions by county in Appendix Figure A.2.

Figure 3: Illustration of the Norwegian nomination hierarchy



Note: The figure illustrates the Norwegian nomination hierarchy, emphasizing steps relevant to our empirical application. Numbers in parentheses reflect the number of candidates/seats/positions/spots available in the 2015 local government election or 2017 national election. The number of cabinet positions vary within each administration; to be consistent with our sample, here we use the size of the cabinet for 2015.

et al., 2002). The nomination procedure has been characterized as closed (Narud and Valen, 2007). In Section 5, we present original data showing that only 5% of spots on main party lists were contested in the most recent national election. At the local level, the nomination procedures are somewhat more open. For example, Christensen et al. (2008) conduct an analysis of 43 nomination processes and find some disagreement in about half of them.

At the local level, a nomination committee is typically established by the party organization to recruit candidates for the election list. The committee typically proceeds as follows (Ringkjøb and Aars, 2010):

1. Ask current incumbents if they want re-election
2. Ask previous candidates if they want re-nomination
3. Ask local party members if they would like to run
4. Ask other party sympathizers if they would like to run

The first rule suggests that incumbent re-nomination is the norm at the local level.

The final party ballot is usually decided at a nomination meeting, typically open to all local party members. Parties have the possibility to give certain candidates an increased

share of the poll (25% of the total number of votes received by the party ($PartyVotes$)). Candidates with such a pre-advantage are listed at the top of the ballot paper in boldface.⁵

Voters may cast personal votes for candidates on any party list. Together with candidates' pre-advantage status, the number of personal votes yields the personal poll that forms the basis of the within-party distribution of seats.⁶

$$Poll_{il} = \begin{cases} PersonalVotes_i & \text{if } i \text{ has no pre-advantage} \\ PersonalVotes_i + 0.25 \cdot PartyVotes_l & \text{if } i \text{ has a pre-advantage for list } l \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

Not surprisingly given the formula just explained, pre-advantage status is often decisive for the within-party allocation of seats, giving parties substantial control over who gets elected. Thus, even at the local level, Norwegian parties can offer two types of nomination – a pre-advantaged spot at the top of the list; and a non-advantaged spot at the bottom of the list. List position on the regional and national lists is even more determinative of a candidate's chances.

⁵Parties can choose not to give any candidates a pre-advantage. The maximum number of candidates a party can give a pre-advantage (max) is determined by the local council size (CS):

- $11 \leq CS \leq 23 \implies max = 4$
- $25 \leq CS \leq 53 \implies max = 6$
- $55 \leq CS \implies max = 10$

This restriction is not binding for most party lists. In our sample, the median number of candidates with a pre-advantage is 2. CS , which must be an odd number, is chosen by the previous local council (within the first three years of the election period), but the minimum council size (CS_{min}) depends on municipality population size (pop):

- $pop \leq 5,000 \implies CS_{min} = 11$
- $5,000 < pop \leq 10,000 \implies CS_{min} = 19$
- $10,000 < pop \leq 50,000 \implies CS_{min} = 27$
- $50,000 < pop \leq 100,000 \implies CS_{min} = 35$
- $100,000 < pop \implies CS_{min} = 43$

⁶The poll also decides which candidates become deputy councilors. This means that candidates who just miss out on a council seat become their party's first deputy councilor. This person will substitute for indisposed regular councilors from their own party at local council meetings (Fiva and Røhr, 2018).

3.4 *Local election data*

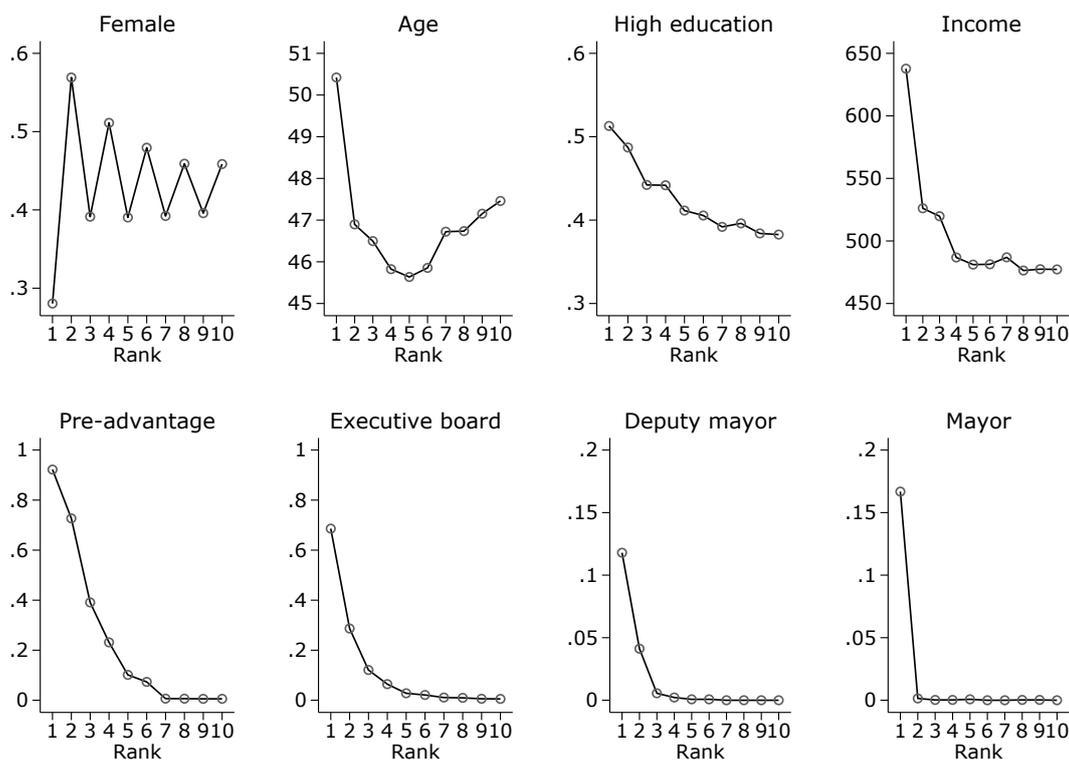
Our local election dataset consists of all 187,000 candidates running for municipal office in 2003, 2007 and 2011. However, we exclude candidates running for party-independent local lists and minor lists that (almost) never win national office (27,000 observations), as well as candidates running for lists that fail to win any seat in the relevant local council (4,000 observations). This is our baseline sample. In addition, we impose separate sample restrictions on the datasets that we use to analyze RQ1 and RQ2: (i) The councilor analyses excludes observations with missing data on personal votes (14,000 observations) and cases involving ties between two candidates (which are broken by the initial ranking on the list) (700 observations) ($N=142,617$), (ii) The mayoral analyses excludes all candidates running for office in municipalities using direct elections for mayor (12,000 observations), candidates that previously ran for national office (8,000 observations), and lists where the elected mayor is not in the top-ranked position (319 observations from 13 lists) ($N=140,830$).

Figure 4 provides some descriptive statistics on how the rank on a party's local list relates to candidate background features (top row) and local electoral outcomes (bottom row) using our baseline sample. In the top row, on the far left, we see that women get less than 30% of the top spots on parties' lists. The sawtoothed pattern suggests that some parties are alternating, listing a man in first spot, a woman in second spot, and so on. The next column in the top row shows that the first-ranked candidates on local lists are, on average, several years older, with age generally declining with list rank. A similar pattern holds for education and income, which is highest for the top ranked candidates and declines with rank.

The bottom row of Figure 4 shows that the fraction of candidates that (i) have a pre-advantage (ii) enter the executive board, and (iii) become deputy mayors, monotonically decrease with list rank. The bottom-right panel shows that each party's mayoral candidate is at the top of the list (in our sample). Thus, while not all first-listed candi-

dates win (only the one whose party or bloc wins the most votes), it is virtually the case that only first-listed candidates win. This feature is useful for identifying the returns to winning mayoral office.

Figure 4: Candidate background (top-panel) and local election outcomes (bottom panel)



Note: The sample is limited to candidates in the top-ten positions for the main party lists running in the 2007-2011 period. We exclude candidates running for lists that fail to win any seat in the current election ($N=40,549$). We exclude the 2003 election, due to missing information about candidate background characteristics. Candidates' background characteristics are measured in the election year. Candidates with more than upper secondary education are classified as highly educated. Income is measured in constant (2015) NOK 1000 in the election year and is truncated at NOK 5,000,000.

3.5 National election data

Our national election data set covers the universe of candidates participating in Norwegian national parliamentary elections in the postwar era (53,911 candidate-list-year observations). Our baseline data come from Fiva and Smith (2017), which we supplement with information on key outcome variables: cabinet membership, bureaucratic posts, and

administrative data on private income.

In our analyses of RQ3 and RQ4, we focus on candidates running for one of the seven main parties in the 1953-2013 period (N=26,868). In this period the district structure and seat allocation method have been stable.⁷ In 1989, Norway introduced a two-tier system, where first-tier seats are allocated proportionally to parties within each district based on party vote shares, and second-tier seats are given to parties that are under-represented at the national level once the first-tier seats have been allocated.⁸ Our RD analyses isolates the causal effect of winning a first-tier seat on future outcomes. Because some bare losers towards the end of our sample period win second-tier seats, our estimates should be interpreted as intention to treat estimates.⁹

4. Main Results

4.1 *Seniority Progression: From Councilor to Mayor*

We first address RQ1, or whether winning local council office for the first time improves a candidate's chances of advancing at the local level. Following Fiva and Røhr (2018), we implement a within-list RD design, where we compare outcomes for candidates who are next in line to win a seat for party list l , to the last candidate winning a seat for the same list. To construct the forcing variable, we sort candidates based on their $Poll_{il}$ (see Equation 2) to get their within-list rank, R_{il} . The *Win Margin* (standardized by party votes for list l) is then given by:

⁷Seats are allocated with the Modified Sainte-Laguë method. Districts correspond to the borders of Norway's 19 regions (*fylker*), although Bergen was a separate district until 1973.

⁸To be awarded second-tier seats, parties need to obtain 4 percent of the national vote. In the 1989-2001 period, there were eight second-tier seats (5% of the total number of seats). From 2005, there are 19 second-tier seats (11% of the total number of seats).

⁹The first-stage RD estimate is 0.84 (SE: 0.03).

$$WinMargin_{il} = \begin{cases} \frac{Poll_{il} - Poll_l^{S_l+1}}{PartyVotes_l} & \text{if } R_{il} \leq S_l \text{ [elected candidates]} \\ \frac{Poll_{il} - Poll_l^{S_l}}{PartyVotes_l} & \text{if } R_{il} > S_l \text{ [non-elected candidates]} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

Fiva and Røhr (2018) document that a candidate who barely wins a seat in the local council has about a 9 percentage points (43%) higher probability of being elected in the next election compared to a candidate who just misses out on a seat on the same party list. They find that incumbents tend to advance in the party hierarchy and obtain safer ballot positions in future elections, which is what ultimately leads to electoral success. Here, it's worth noting that incumbency advantage in local politics is not driven by voter response to popular candidates via personal votes; Fiva and Røhr (2018) find instead it is driven by re-nomination in safe spots. This is in line with existing evidence from the Nordic countries showing that incumbents are more likely to be re-nominated in, and win, future elections. Studies which focus on municipal elections in Denmark and Finland estimate an incumbency advantage of 3-13 percentage points (Dahlgard, 2016; Kotakorpi et al., 2017).

In our analysis, we focus on re-nomination in the next election, and promotions to leadership positions in the next election term. Figure 5 provides the results. Incumbents and non-incumbents run again in the subsequent election at about equal rates (Panel A). However, incumbents are about 4 percentage points more likely to be awarded a “head start” than are non-incumbents (panel B), and about twice as likely to be promoted to leadership positions in the next election term (Panels C and D).¹⁰

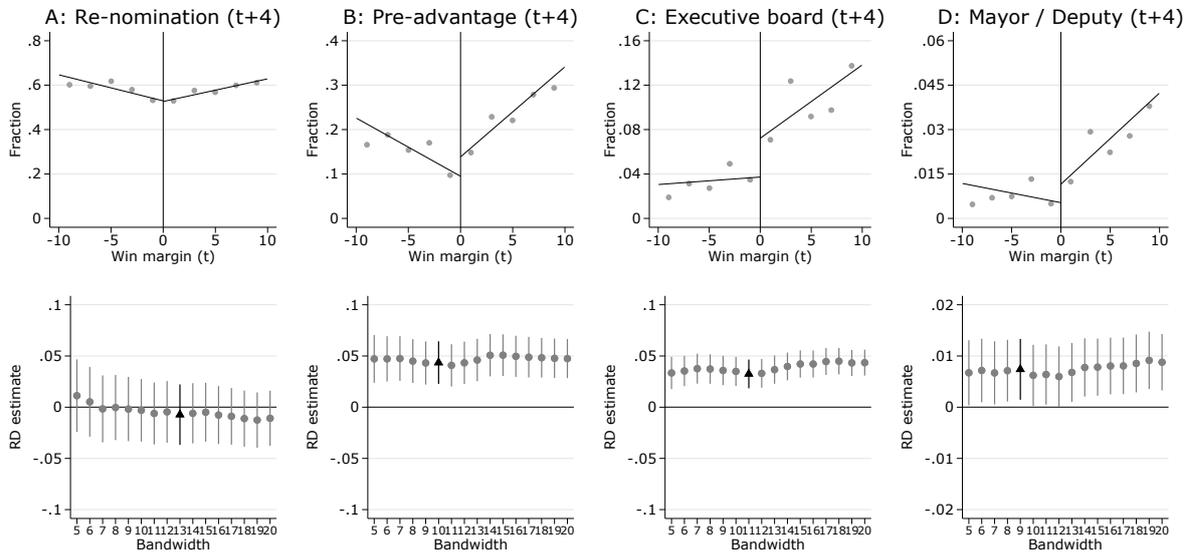
We should stress that these analyses do not condition on candidates seeking re-nomination. While the RD design makes it straightforward to estimate the effect of winning unconditional on running, estimating the conditional effect would require addressing selection into future candidacy (Anagol and Fujiwara, 2016). We examine un-

¹⁰Because there are so many more local councilors than seats in parliament, one neither expects nor finds a big effect of local winning on service in parliament (as we show in Appendix Figure A.4).

conditional effects in all our analyses and discuss the merits of that approach in the section on parliamentary lists.

Our within-list RD design rests on the implicit assumption that candidates do not have *precise* control over election results. If this assumption is satisfied, then winners and losers of close elections should be comparable *ex ante*. In the appendix, we demonstrate that pre-advantage status in the *current election*, as well as other pre-determined characteristics, are indeed balanced at the cut-off (Appendix Figure A.3).

Figure 5: Analysis of RQ1: Seniority progression at the local level



Note: The top panels display standard RD plots using a bandwidth of 10 percentage points. Separate linear lines are estimated below and above the discontinuity using the underlying data, not the binned scatter points. The solid vertical line represents a zero win margin, indicating the transition from barely missing out on a seat to barely winning. Each dot represents a binned average for 1 percentage point intervals. The baseline sample consists of all candidates running for municipal office for the main parties in the 2003-2011 period ($N=160,546$). We exclude candidates running for lists that do not win any seats (4,000 observations), candidates where we lack information about personal votes (11,000 observations), and cases with ties between two candidates (which are broken by the initial ranking on the list) (700 observations). The final sample is restricted to candidates which are next in line to win a seat or first in line to lose a seat, and the vote margin is less than 10 percentage points ($N=8,136$). The bottom panels display the RD estimates and 95% confidence intervals as a function of the bandwidth chosen. The black triangles correspond to the point estimate from the optimal bandwidth chosen by the Calonico et al. (2014) algorithm, as obtained by the `rdrobust` module in Stata.

4.2 Seniority Progression: From Mayor to Parliamentary List

In this section, we explore our second research question, RQ2, which is the direct link between the intermediate and national levels. Here, we analyze whether getting elected as mayor leads to future national success. We estimate the “mayoral effect,” using the following specification:

$$Y_{rpmdt} = \gamma_{pdt} + \beta_r + \lambda_r \text{Mayor}_{pmdt} + u_{rpmdt} \quad (4)$$

Here Y_{rpmdt} represents a future electoral outcome for the candidate ranked r for party p in municipality m belonging to parliamentary district d at time t . We consider three outcome variables: (i) ever running for national office (Run), (ii) ever winning national office (Win), and (iii) accumulated days served as an MP or deputy MP as of March 2019 ($Days$). As in the previous section, we do not restrict attention to those seeking re-nomination. The model controls for party-district-year fixed effects (γ_{pdt}) and rank fixed effects (β_r). u_{rpmdt} is an error term.

The coefficients of primary interest are $\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_R$ where R is the maximum rank on a list. Mayor_{pmdt} is a dummy variable capturing whether party p in municipality m of district d at time t wins the mayoralty. In our sample, all candidates that become mayor are listed in the first position ($r = 1$). The parameter λ_1 therefore isolates the effect of becoming mayor by comparing outcomes for mayors to outcomes for other first-ranked candidates running for the same party in the same parliamentary district in the same election year (in a different municipality).

It is not obvious that estimates based on Equation (4) will capture the causal effect of becoming the mayor on the outcomes of interest. Party lists that win the mayoralty might differ from party lists that do not win, in many respects that might matter for candidates’ future political careers. Estimates of $\lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_R$ will be informative in this regard. Any list-specific factor that benefits all candidates on a list will produce positive values for all the λ ’s. If λ_1 is larger than the other λ ’s, then this suggests that becoming

mayor improves a politician’s future outcomes.

Figure 6 presents the results. The first row plots averages for lists with and without the mayor, by list rank of the candidate (we restrict attention to the first ten spots on each list; 62,000 observations). The left column (“Run”) shows that first-ranked candidates who become mayor are about 15 percentage points more likely to run for parliament than first-ranked candidates who do not become mayor. In contrast, candidates ranked lower than first get no benefit from their party winning the mayoralty. So, the “mayoral boost” benefits only the mayor, not the other candidates on his/her list. The second column shows about a 2.5 percentage point boost in winning parliamentary office for mayors. Finally, the third column shows that mayors spend about 6 times more lifetime days in parliament than do first-ranked candidates on lists that do not win the mayoralty.

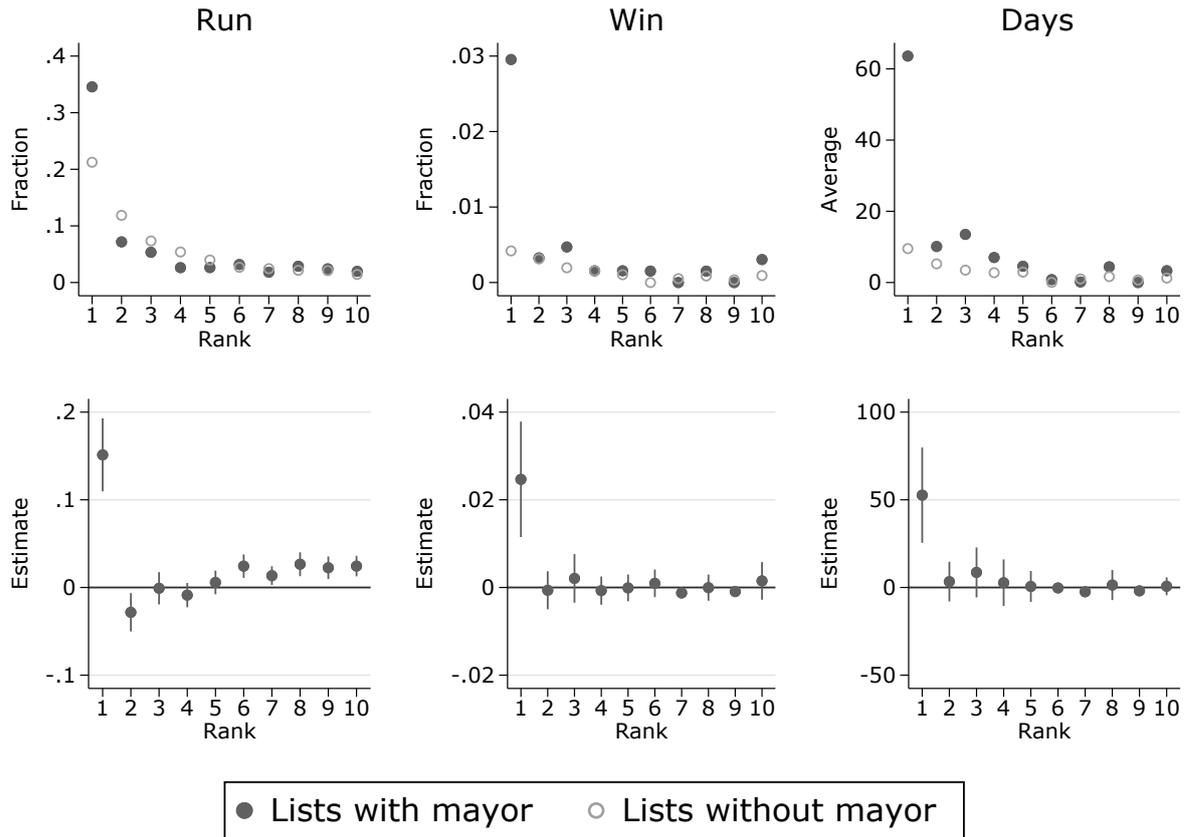
In interpreting these results, the reader should keep in mind that, in any given year, there are about 11,000 local councillors chasing only 169 seats in parliament. These numbers naturally limit the size of any seniority progression effects. In the top ten listed candidates, the baseline probability of running for parliament is 0.056, the baseline probability of winning a parliamentary seat is 0.002, and the average number of days served in parliament is 4. The effects reported above look relatively large when judged against these baselines.

The second row of Figure 6 plots the λ_r coefficients, for $r = 1, \dots, 10$, along with 95% confidence intervals. As can be seen, the only consistently significant effects are those comparing mayors to other first-ranked candidates.¹¹ In Appendix Table A.2, we also show results when adding further controls. We find that (i) younger candidates, as well as (ii) those candidates that receives a larger share of the personal votes cast for his/her party, are more likely to continue to national politics. However, controlling for these factors, leaves the estimated “mayoral effects” basically unaltered.¹² In sum, this

¹¹Second-ranked candidates belonging to the same list as the mayor seems to be *less* likely to run for future national office (while the opposite holds for lower-ranked candidates on the same lists). These spillover effects are likely to materialize when parties use seniority-based progression rules, and have a desire to geographically balance the ticket. Geographic balancing in list-based PR is a widely documented phenomena (see e.g. Gallagher and Marsh, 1988).

¹²Norwegian municipalities vary dramatically in population size, from small islands with a few hundred

Figure 6: Analysis of RQ2: Seniority progression from mayor to national politics



Note: The top-row displays averages of Run, Win, and Days for lists with and without the mayor, by list rank of the candidate. The second row provides estimates of $\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_{10}$ based on equation (4). The sample is restricted to candidates ranked in position 1 – 10 for one of the seven main parties in the 2003-2011 period ($N=61,689$). We exclude candidates that previously ran for national office, municipalities with directly elected mayors, and lists where the elected mayor is not in the top-ranked position. Standard errors are clustered at the party-parliamentary district-year level (398 clusters).

provides evidence that seniority based selection is at work.

4.3 *Incumbent Re-nomination and Re-election*

Next, we address RQ3, and examine whether those who are elected to parliament for the first time are more likely to secure a winnable spot in the next election. Figure 7 provides RD plots for re-nomination overall (left-hand plot), re-nomination in winnable spots (central panel), and (re-)election at the next general election held in year $t+4$ (right-hand plot) for candidates running for one of the seven main parties in Norway during the 1953-2013 period.¹³ We limit the RD analysis to candidates less than 5 percentage points away from the seat threshold in the current election, who neither previously won a seat in parliament nor came close to doing so (i.e., came within the 5-percentage-point window), and who never served as a cabinet minister.

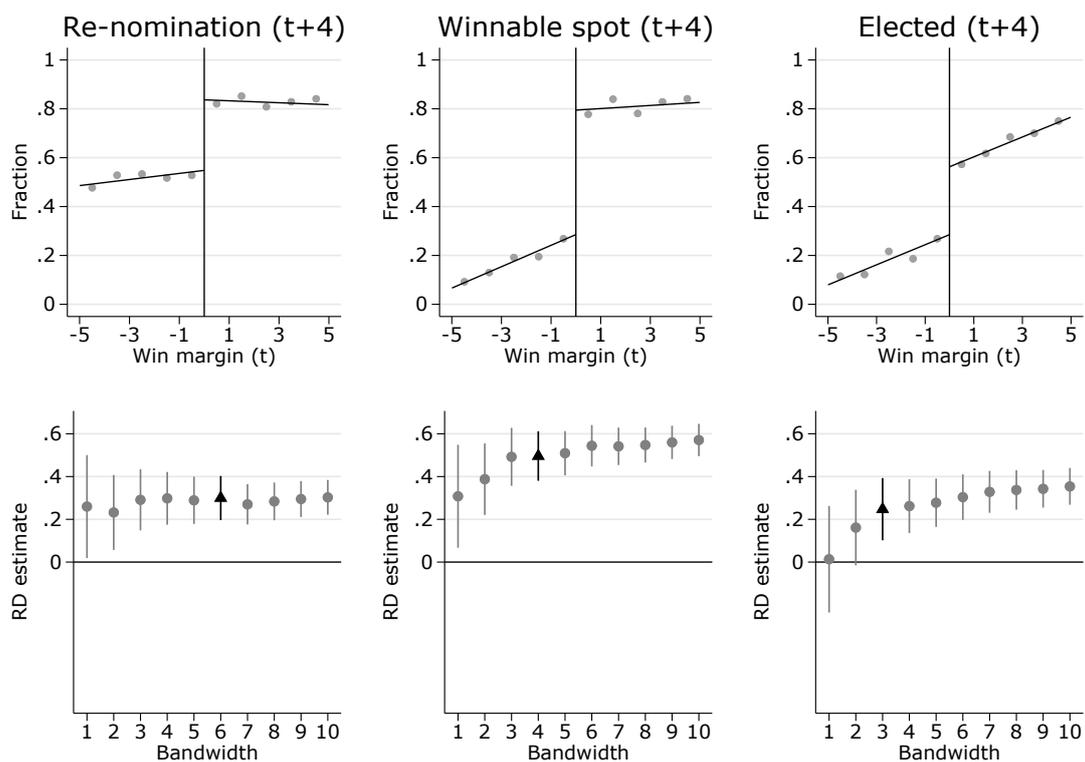
As in the previous two sections, we do not condition on candidates seeking re-election, following recent practice in the literature (e.g. Dahlgaard, 2016; Hyytinen et al., 2018b). The problem with conditioning on rerunning is well explained by De Magalhaes (2015, p.114), who notes that “runners-up who rerun are disproportionately those that foresee doing better in the next election.” Thus, even if all bare losers and all bare winners are balanced by the RD design, the bare losers who rerun need not be comparable to the bare winners who rerun.

The left-hand panel of Figure 7 shows that narrowly elected candidates are about 25 percentage points more likely to win re-nomination than narrowly losing candidates. Even more strikingly, the narrowly elected candidates are more than twice as likely to get

inhabitants to relatively large cities with some hundred thousand inhabitants. In Appendix Figure A.5 and A.6 we estimate “mayoral effects” separately for municipalities with below and above median population size (4,480 inhabitants). We do not find any clear evidence that seniority progression varies with municipality size.

¹³For this analysis we build on the RD framework of Fiva and Smith (2018). In short, to construct the forcing variable, we identify candidates who are either next in line to win a seat, or first in line to lose a first-tier seat, and measure the distance to the seat threshold using the metric proposed by Folke (2014). Under multi-member PR elections, the number of seats a party wins depend on the vote counts of all parties. This makes it essentially impossible for parties and candidates to know ex ante where the seat thresholds are going to be. It is therefore unsurprising that there is no bunching of observations around the threshold (Appendix Figure A.7) and that pre-determined covariates are balanced (Appendix Figure A.8).

Figure 7: Analysis of RQ3: Incumbent re-nomination and re-election



Note: The full sample covers national election candidates running for one of the seven main parties in the 1953-2013 period. We define a winnable spot as a position on the ballot that would secure a seat in parliament if the election outcome was as in the previous election. We limit the RD analysis to candidates that are less than 5 percentage points away from the seat threshold in the current election, that never previously won a seat in parliament or was close to doing so (i.e. within the five-percentage window), without any experience from cabinet ($N=985$). Separate linear regression lines are estimated to the left and right of the discontinuity using the underlying data, not the binned scatterpoints. The bottom panels show how the RD estimate varies as a function of the bandwidth chosen. The black triangles correspond to the point estimate from the optimal bandwidth chosen by the Calonico et al. (2014) algorithm, as obtained by the rdrobust module in Stata.

re-nominated in a winnable spot, than narrowly losing candidates (central plot).¹⁴ This provides clear evidence for the use of incumbency re-nomination rules.

In our theory, incumbents should benefit not just from a higher probability of securing re-nomination in their current list spot (incumbent re-nomination), but also from a higher probability of advancing up the list, should spots become open (seniority progression). Our RD analysis of election in year $t + 4$ (given in the right-hand panel of Figure 7) provides an estimate of how winning in year t affects a candidate's probability distribution across list ranks.

To explain, let z_t denote the win margin at t and $p_{r,t+4}(z_t)$ be a candidate's probability of securing list rank r at time $t + 4$, conditional on their lagged win margin. Let $w_{r,t+4}$ be the probability of winning, if nominated at rank r at time $t + 4$. We view candidates who fail to secure any re-nomination as receiving a rank 0 that confers a probability $w_{0,t+4} = 0$; and denote their probability of receiving that position by $p_{0,t+4}(z_t)$. A candidate can end up in rank 0 through death, voluntary withdrawal from electoral politics, or by seeking but failing to secure a spot on the list. Otherwise, they receive a position $r \in 1, \dots, R$.

Given the notation just introduced, the unconditional probability of winning at time $t + 4$ can be written $\sum p_{r,t+4}(z_t)w_{r,t+4}$. Our RD recovers the change in $\sum p_{r,t+4}(z_t)w_{r,t+4}$ at the discontinuity ($z_t = 0$). This change summarizes how winning affects a candidate's chances of securing list rank 0, 1, ..., R , while weighting each position by the candidate's probability of winning a seat given that position. The more that winning depresses $p_{0,t+4}$, raises the probability of re-nomination in the same list position, and improves the chance of securing a better list position, the larger the effect of winning at t on winning at $t + 4$ will be. Thus, an unconditional analysis of winning allows us to assess the combined effects of incumbent re-nomination and seniority progression. The right-hand panel of Figure 7 shows a clear discontinuity in the probability of winning a seat in the next general election (as in Fiva and Smith (2018)).

¹⁴We define a winnable spot as a position on the ballot that would secure a seat in parliament if the election outcome was as in the previous election.

4.4 *Obtaining Higher Office*

Parties that regularly win power at the national level are in a position to allocate cabinet portfolios and other high offices. Do Norway’s seven main parties incorporate such offices into their seniority systems? To investigate this question, we look at promotion to a cabinet position (the highest post behind prime minister), and promotion to county administrator (*fylkesmann*), a top-level bureaucratic post (RQ4).¹⁵

Figure 8 provides our RD analysis. The dependent variables are dummies that take a value of one if the individual was *ever* promoted to a cabinet position or a top-level bureaucratic post, respectively, in their career. In line with our expectations regarding seniority, we find that narrowly winning a seat in parliament roughly doubles candidates’ chances of obtaining a cabinet position in the future. The RD estimate for county administrator is negative, but not statistically significant. Our findings may be related to the differences in prestige for the two types of offices. While cabinet promotions should be considered an apex of a political career, county administrators are often used as a “retirement post”. Becoming a county administrator is also a much rarer event. In our sample period, there are only 19 positions in the country and appointees often remain in office for decades.

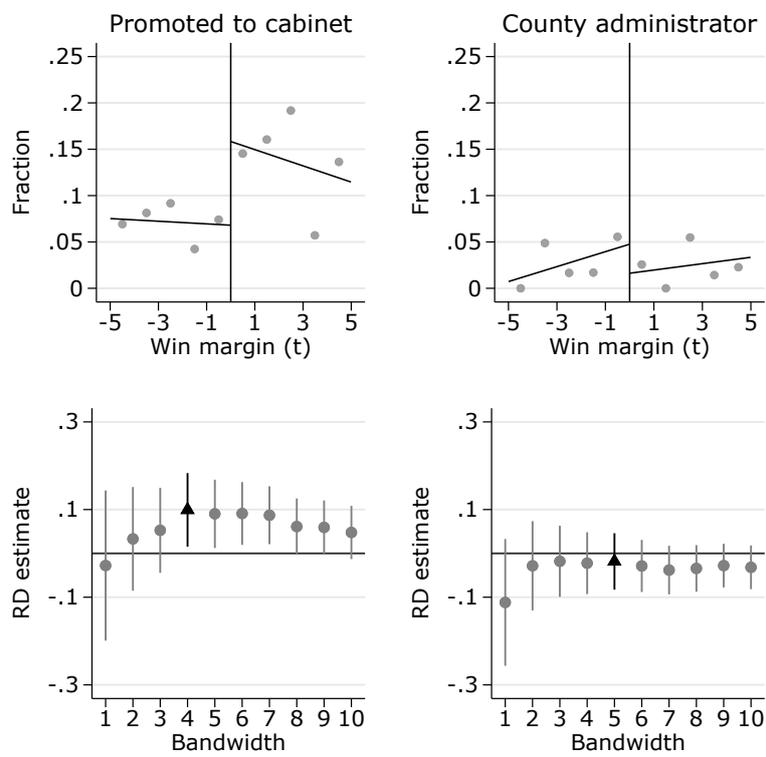
5. Seniority versus Skills

We have shown that re-nominations in Norway’s office hierarchy are consistent with the hypothesis that the main parties operate under seniority systems. The research designs used in Section 4 effectively ensure that time-invariant candidate characteristics relating to baseline skill are netted out.¹⁶ However, it remains possible that politicians develop

¹⁵A county administrator is the national government’s representative in each county. They perform different administrative tasks on behalf of the ministries and have financial oversight of the municipalities.

¹⁶For example, Appendix Figure A.3 show that bare losers and bare winners in local elections are about equally likely to have higher education. Appendix Figure A.8 show that candidates just missing out and just winning a seat in parliament are comparable in their previous occupation. While we rely on white-collar vs. the rest, Fiva and Smith (2018) use more fine-grained occupation categories and come to the same conclusion. There is also no difference in terms of the preadvantage parties give candidates,

Figure 8: Analysis of RQ4: Seats in parliament and higher offices



Note: See figure 7.

their human capital each time they serve a term in office, and that parties award nominations based on accrued human capital, rather than seniority per se. As in labor economics, retention or promotion based on accrued human capital is difficult to distinguish from retention or promotion based on seniority (Altonji and Shakotko, 1987; Topel, 1991).

One way to distinguish between skill-based and seniority-based nominations is to recall the RD estimates from Section 4.3, where we found a significant incumbency advantage. For human capital accumulation to explain those results, narrowly elected new incumbents must establish large skill advantages over barely losing candidates during their first term in office. We explore the plausibility of “rapid” skill acquisition in section 5.2, in particular by considering mid-term substitutes for deceased MPs.

Another way to distinguish between skill-based and seniority-based nominations is to leverage data on intra-party competition for nomination spots. We take this approach in section 5.1.

5.1 *Intra-party Competition for List Nomination*

One option is to investigate how competitive a party’s nominations are. Since safe spots on a closed list virtually guarantee a seat in parliament, those working in the Schattschneiderian (1942) tradition would expect them to be contested. As Ranney (1981, p.103) puts it, “the most vital and hotly contested factional disputes in any party are the struggles that take place over the choice of its candidates...” We thus collected original data on competition for spots in the 2017 election, coding intra-party contests using both newspaper coverage of the nomination meetings and information we gathered from contacting local party organizations. We have 1,955 candidate-level observations, of which 93 were contested.

In the 2017 election, we find that 15% of winnable spots were contested (see Appendix Figure A.9). In contrast, about 75% of “open” nominations in the US House are typically contested (Boatright, 2014, p. 118). We view the level of competition in Norway, which

which could indicate differential ability, across bare winners and losers.

Table 1: Intra-Party Competition over Nomination

| | | LOSER | | | |
|--------|--------------|-------|-------|--------------|-----|
| | | No | Entry | Intermediate | Top |
| WINNER | No | 18 | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| | Entry | 4 | 9 | 3 | 4 |
| | Intermediate | 4 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| | Top | 1 | 4 | 6 | 9 |

Note: Data comes from an original survey of nomination meeting newspaper coverage and contact with party organizations. $N=1,955$ candidate-level observations, and 4 races where losing candidate data was missing are excluded, leaving 93 cases listed documenting intra-party competition. The diagonal represents head-to-head seniority matchups, across four categories: No: no previous elective office, Entry: previous experience at the local level but no higher, Intermediate: previous experience as mayor or regional councilor but no higher, and Top: previous experience as an MP or minister.

is clearly well below that in the US, as too low to be consistent with a model in which all winnable nomination spots are subject to open competition.

We also find that, when a fight over a nomination spot occurs, it typically involves two contestants who have similar experience with holding elective office. If we classify candidates into four strata—(1) no previous elective office, (2) previous experience at the local (entry) level but no higher, (3) previous experience as mayor or regional councilor (intermediate) but no higher, and (4) previous experience as an MP or minister (top) – we find that contestants for nomination spots are from the same category of seniority in 47% of the cases (Table 1). The relative rarity of contests, as well as the consistent tendency for contestants to be matched in terms of a crude proxy for seniority, are both consistent with the parties having fairly well understood “career paths” that help sort out who has the best claim to open nominations. Unfortunately, the matching pattern just described could arise either because parties have well-understood “career paths” or because candidates of similar seniority have accrued similar human capital (including office-holding experience). So, we need to explore the issue of skill acquisition more carefully.

5.2 *Party-Specific Assets*

Some readers might worry that serving one term in office affords a unique opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and personal contacts that will be relevant to earning re-nomination or promotion. This would be analogous to the literature showing that re-nomination of incumbents in the European Parliament depends on skill acquisition, seniority held constant (Wilson et al., 2016; Frech, 2016; Hermansen, 2018).

In order to address these concerns, we introduce a conceptual distinction that clarifies what our estimand is. The skills that are most likely to improve a politician’s nomination and advancement are all party-specific (i.e., non-transferable to other parties). For example, knowing the rules of party A’s nomination process and cultivating relationships with those in party A who influence nominations are both directly relevant to re-nomination and promotion (when those processes are competitive). But knowing party A’s rules and selectors does not help win nomination in another party, which will have different rules and selectors. Other examples of party-specific assets include contacts with donors, activists, and leaders who can offer “revolving door” opportunities at the end of one’s career.

An important feature of all these party-specific assets is that, to the extent they are valuable, they help tie politicians to their parties and make de-selection more effective as a disciplinary tool. They are akin to bonds that can be collected only if the politician remains in his or her party. Thus, we think of the relevant estimand for our analysis as the sum of all the party-specific assets a member has that improve his or her future re-nomination and promotion prospects. (In our earlier model, s_{it} now represents a combination of i ’s seniority ranking as of t and i ’s other party-specific assets, such as knowledge of party influentials, as of t .)

The remaining inferential threat can be stated as follows. Perhaps local councilors in their first terms acquire transferable assets (q_{it}), such as knowledge of how the council operates or of how inter-governmental fiscal transfers are handled, and these transferable

assets confer a sharply larger advantage in securing re-nomination or future leadership positions. One response is as follows. If transferable assets such as those just described are highly valued by party nominators and uniquely accessible to incumbents, then incumbents should be able to sell their services to the highest bidder at each election. We should observe both party switching and overt competition for nomination slots.

Yet we see neither in Norway. As noted above, visible competition for parliamentary nominations is rare. Moreover, even though the ideological distances among adjacent parties are small (see Appendix Figure A.2), party switching at both the local and national level is extremely rare. For example, only 13 of 1,108 Norwegian MPs (1%) ever switched among main parties during their parliamentary careers over the postwar era. Meanwhile, among the 9,517 local councilors and 397 mayors elected for one of the main parties in 2003, only 80 councilors and 1 mayor run for a different party in the next local election (see Appendix Figure A.10).

Further, we can test an asset-based explanation directly by exploiting exogenous, within-term changes of elected representatives – via substitute MPs. If non-specific assets drive politicians’ ability to secure nominations and promotions, then substitutes who replace MPs late in a parliamentary term should have little time to learn on the job and thus little advantage over other losing candidates.

In order to investigate whether this expectation holds, we identified all substitutes for MPs who died in the period 1953-2013 (the sample period used in section 4.3 and 4.4). From this initial sample, we subtracted substitutes who had previously been elected to parliament, as well as those who entered parliament so late that the parliamentary lists had already been decided. This left us with a sample of 32 substitutes with no previous electoral success who entered prior to list finalization due to a plausibly exogenous event (the death of their predecessor).¹⁷

These substitutes entered parliament at widely varying times, from 21 days after the start of the session to 1,233 days after. For purposes of analysis, we split the sample at

¹⁷Other studies that rely on accidental death to improve causal inference include Hirano (2011) and Faccio and Parsley (2009).

the median into 16 who entered “early” (within 716 days from the start of parliament) and 16 who entered “late” (717 or more days after). In Figure 9, we show these two groups of substitutes compared to other deputy MPs, and to all winning candidates, in terms of their probability of being nominated at the next election, their probability of securing a winnable spot at the next election, and their probability of re-election.¹⁸ As can be seen, the early and late substitutes are indistinguishable from one another, and also from the winning candidates, in terms of nomination; all three groups had about 80 percent chance of securing nomination at $t + 4$, significantly higher than the baseline group of 6,542 deputies that did not replace an MP that died in office.

In terms of winnable spots at $t + 4$, the early and late substitutes are again indistinguishable from each other. While both groups have a discernibly lower probability of landing a winnable spot at $t + 4$ than do winning candidates (at t), the difference is not very large substantively (about 15 percentage points). Moreover, both groups of substitutes are much closer to elected candidates than to deputy MPs that did not replace MPs dying in office.

Finally, the early and late substitutes are again more similar to MPs than to other deputy MPs in their re-election rates. While the two groups of substitutes do differ, the difference is opposite to what one would expect under a human capital story, as the early substitutes (who have more time to acquire skills) have a lower re-election rate.¹⁹

The late substitutes had relatively little time to acquire on-the-job skills before their parties made their nomination decisions. For example, four of them entered parliament within six months of the March 31st date at which lists have to be finalized. Since district

¹⁸On each seat-winning list, candidates next in line to be elected are designated as deputy MPs. The number of deputies from such lists equals the number of seats won plus three. As a consequence, some deputy MPs will spend some days in parliament due to the illness of the sitting MP or sit for longer periods on parliament when the MP above them is promoted to cabinet (which is incompatible with retaining a seat in parliament in Norway).

¹⁹A reviewer wondered whether, when MPs died after long illnesses, their substitutes might have prepared themselves, and perhaps even performed parliamentary tasks, before they were formally appointed. Although we have no direct evidence of anyone performing parliamentary tasks before their formal appointment, we did identify seven cases of “long illness” and remove them from our analyses. Some of these seven hardy Norwegians were working right up until their death, so not all long illnesses were viewed as incapacitating. In any event, our results with substitutes for long-ill MPs removed remain basically the same (see Appendix Figure A.11).

parties start their nomination processes well before March 31st, these four had well less than half a year to acquire a skill advantage over their rivals for nomination. To explain our findings in terms of non-specific human capital, then, one would have to argue that substitutes learn very quickly.

All told, we think that the rarity of visible competition for nominations, the rarity of party switching, and the fact that substitutes who enter parliament late in the term have much better outcomes than other deputy MPs are all inconsistent with the hypothesis that the acquisition of non-specific human capital drives nomination decisions. Nor does it seem plausible that the patterns we have documented are driven by party-specific assets such as knowing the party’s selectors and selection rules. Any candidate, winning or losing, can read the party’s nomination rules and cultivate relationships with party activists, leaders and selectors. Thus, the only plausible explanation for the patterns we have documented is that winning Norwegian candidates accrue seniority within their respective parties, which then enhances their re-nomination and progression prospects.²⁰

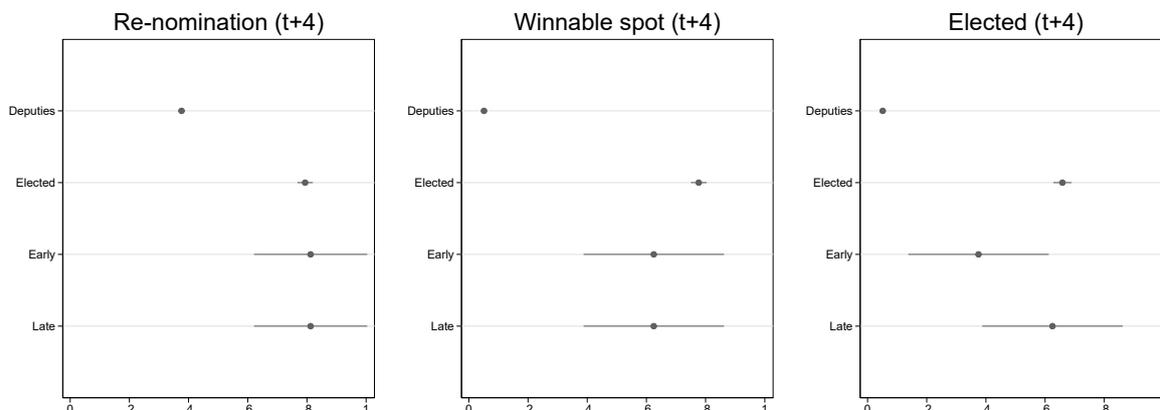
6. Economic Returns to Office

Our notion of a hierarchy of nominations and offices includes the possibility of post-political “revolving door” employment (Blanes i Vidal et al., 2012; Geys and Mause, 2013; Bertrand et al., 2014). Estimating the returns to office requires comprehensive data on politicians’ wealth, which can be challenging to obtain; however, we are able to exploit detailed Norwegian data on politician income, at both the national and local level, and across time. In this section we look at the returns to office across the nomination hierarchy, and when they accrue, as an indirect way to explore whether such employment opportunities are common in Norway.

First, we consider the economic returns to holding a local office. At this level, the

²⁰To the extent that MPs have advantages in cultivating party selectors, some portion of the effects we document will not be due to incumbent re-nomination and seniority progression norms but instead to the acquisition of party-specific contacts.

Figure 9: National-level re-nomination, overall and in winnable spots, by four categories



Note: This figure displays the fraction re-nominated (left-hand panel), the fraction re-nominated in a winnable spot (center panel) and the fraction elected (right-hand panel), and corresponding 95% confidence intervals, by four categories: Deputies that did not replace an MP that died in office ($N=6542$), elected candidates ($N=933$), deputies that replace MPs that die early in their election period (below the median; $N=16$) and deputies that replace MPs that die late in their election period (above the median; $N=16$). We exclude five deputies promoted less than six months before the next election because they are promoted after the lists for the next election must be ready. The sample is limited to candidates that never previously won a seat in parliament.

expectations of the potential financial value of political office are less clear – in Norway and many other countries, being a local politician is a part-time position held concurrently with other sources of income (Djankov et al., 2010). In line with previous studies from the other Nordic countries (Kotakorpi et al., 2017; Berg, 2018a), we find no evidence that winning a seat in the local council affects future individual incomes (Appendix Figure A.12).

What about the economic returns to winning an intermediate post? Appendix Figure A.13 display the results from a difference-in-differences research design for mayoral candidates participating in the 2011 local election. In 2011, when mayors enter office towards the end of the year, their income jumps up. In the years with “full treatment” (2012-2014), mayors get an income boost of about NOK 200,000 (USD 22,000) per year. Unless they are re-elected, mayors leave office towards the end of 2015, and their income fall back in 2016-2017 (Appendix Figure A.14). These results not only contribute to the larger literature on returns to office, but demonstrate the present value of even

intermediate steps in the nomination hierarchy.

Finally, we can consider the economic returns to office at the national level in Norway using the same estimation framework as in section 4.3 and 4.4. In Appendix Figure A.15, we document substantial returns from serving in the national parliament. In the years following an election, elected candidates get an income boost of about NOK 150,000 per year.²¹ This result joins a larger literature that generally finds positive returns to holding a national office across a number of different countries.²² As in the case of the intermediate post, these income effects appear to only last during the candidates' tenure in office, like in Finland and Sweden (Kotakorpi et al., 2017; Berg, 2018b).

7. Are Seniority Systems Stable?

A natural question about seniority systems concerns their stability. Will central party leaders honor seniority, even in cases where doing so requires promoting less skilled candidates (Hollyer et al., 2018)? Will party members who participate in the nomination process at the local level honor seniority?

As regards the latter question, McKelvey and Riezman (1992) suggests a positive answer. If local nominators believe that their party operates according to a seniority system, then they will value having local candidates with higher seniority. As between two otherwise identical local candidates, the one with more seniority will be expected to progress into the cabinet (or other high offices) faster than the one with less seniority. Thus, seniority per se becomes a reason for local nominators to prefer a candidate over his/her intra-party rivals.

²¹It is difficult to compare the magnitude of the returns to office for mayors and MPs directly; mayoral candidates are probably more diverse than parliamentary candidates and the time period is different. Further, some marginal first-tier losers will win second-tier seats or serve as deputies and receive partial treatment, making comparisons difficult (i.e., our MP estimates are intention-to-treat estimates). In an unpublished paper, Willumsen (2011) use a fuzzy RD to circumvent some of these issues. His findings suggest that there may be substantial returns to office event after the parliamentary career has ended, though his income data is only for 2006-2008.

²²For example, see Peichl et al. (2013) in Germany, Eggers and Hainmueller (2009) in the UK, Fahey (2018) in the US Florida state legislature, or Querubin and Snyder (2013) and Diermeier et al. (2005) in the US Congress.

What about central party leaders? In the short run, they might prefer a nomination procedure in which they could nominate whomever they wished. However, such a system would deprive them of the ability to make credible long-term commitments to their followers, thereby weakening the party. Thus, if leaders have long enough time horizons, they should honor any commitments they make to decide nominations on the basis of seniority. It is also worth reviewing the benefits to seniority systems, which would incentivize their use. What benefits might political leaders accrue by building seniority systems? Although it is beyond the scope of the current essay to fully discuss them, we can mention some prominent possible benefits—which help to motivate our study.

First, seniority procedures avoid internecine fights for nominations. Safe spots on closed lists are very valuable and, were they awarded via some open competition, internal party factions would strive to win them (Cross and Katz, 2013; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988). Seniority systems are one way to lessen such competition, which may be unproductive for the party as a whole.

Second, promises of future safe nominations (and hence office payoffs) can induce candidates given safe list spots to exert current campaign effort. This is an important effect since such candidates otherwise have negligible incentives to campaign hard. Cox et al. (2020) elaborate on this point focusing especially on seniority-based promotions into cabinet positions, and a similar logic applies to the connection between seniority-based allocation to prominent committees.

Third, seniority systems can stabilize parties' memberships. Those who contemplate leaving would have to sacrifice their seniority (or negotiate to have it honored by their new party). Consistent with this observation, we have shown that Norwegian politicians very rarely switch parties. Stable membership, in turn, is key for building durable and institutionalized parties (Hazan and Rahat, 2006).

Fourth, promises of future safe nominations (and hence office payoffs) can induce incumbents to vote with their party. Many scholars have noted that threats of deselection can induce voting cohesion (e.g. Kam, 2009). Such threats should be particularly potent in

systems in which nomination is tantamount to election; and party leaders exert centralized control over nominations. On the other hand, any factor that reduces the central party leadership’s control over nominations should reduce the price in effort and loyalty that it can demand. For example, dual mandates make a party “less liquid,” in the sense that the expected flow of valuable nominations it has to allocate shrinks, which in turn reduces politicians’ incentives to invest in party institutions (Cirone, 2019).

Fifth, to the extent that seniority is weighed more heavily when the party makes nominations to higher offices, entry is increasingly restricted. In a purely meritocratic system, senior politicians would have no intrinsic advantage over either their juniors or “populists” (who build a career in the private sector and then seek a party’s nomination). In a seniority system, in contrast, both juniors and populists face a barrier to entry that grows with the importance of the office they might seek. As do all barriers to entry, the barrier to competition for a party’s nominations should increase the rents that senior politicians can extract from their offices, especially when nomination is equivalent to election. That said, rent extraction will obviously depend on how “good standing” is defined in each party—who defines the party’s legislative position to which loyalty is demanded, who judges whether the electoral effort exerted by nominees is adequate.

Given the variety of benefits that building seniority systems might afford to party leaders, it would seem plausible that many would have considered them. We have provided initial evidence that Norwegian parties appear to operate via seniority procedures. If seniority systems are to be put on the scholarly agenda, it will be important to further bolster our ability to detect them and to explore their systemic effects.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have hypothesized that parties in closed-list electoral systems have significant incentives to build seniority systems to allocate nominations and offices among their members; and have begun to provide a suite of tools that could be used to identify

when such systems are in place. Given that a large proportion of advanced democracies operate under closed-list proportional representation, if we are correct that many parties in such systems use seniority in allocating their valuable list spots, then the absence of any mention of such systems in standard surveys (e.g. Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Norris, 1997) would suggest a significant gap in the existing literature.

Our approach to identifying the existence of seniority systems also intersects with an extensive literature that examines incremental moves in political careers—does a politician get re-nominated (static ambition), and does s/he get promoted (progressive ambition)? Our work also contributes to a large literature on incumbency effects. Numerous studies have documented a significant incumbency advantage in the US and other majoritarian settings, in terms of both an increased vote share and higher probability of winning the next election.²³ And while this question has been addressed in candidate-centered systems, prior findings from candidate-centered environments are very different than those in closed-list electoral systems. In this context, we raise an important question: why does incumbency predict re-nomination and promotion? Our answer is that it is important to consider how seniority systems, both seniority progression rules and incumbent re-nomination norms, help to prioritize prior experience holding political office.

Our findings open up a number of interesting avenues of inquiry, yet to be explored. For example, it is possible that there might be inter-party differences in how seniority systems operate. The value of seniority promotion should be constant across parties of all ideological shades, however, there could be interesting variation across parties in their usage due to historical circumstances, internal party organization, or the age of the party. If parties in new democracies adopt seniority procedures, there could be interesting spillover effects to other groups in the system, regarding early professionalization or discipline. Finally, our results also demonstrate the need for more data collection and surveys for parties, specifically about internal party norms, re-nomination procedures specifically for incumbents, and to what extent party elites consider seniority, across cases. It would

²³See Lee (2008), Fowler and Hall (2014), Erikson and Titiunik (2015), Eggers and Spirling (2017) among many others.

also be useful to collect more information on to what extent voters respond to cues about seniority, or how lists reflect seniority progression, in the electoral arena.

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