Candidate Emergence in 2002:
The Impact of Redistricting on Potential Candidates' Decisions

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The problem has become so familiar that it hardly bears repeating. But it is so fundamental to American democracy that it must be repeated.[2] Competition in congressional elections—at the district level--has all but disappeared. To be sure, the two major parties compete fiercely for control of the House. But though the Republican have only a 22 seat advantage in the House today, few experts give the Democrats much chance of winning the twelve seats needed to reclaim control.

A twelve-seat swing in a congressional election is not unheard of. In eight of the last twenty congressional elections, the partisan swing has been more than a dozen seats. However, only one of the swings has been in the last ten elections, the Republican landslide win in the election of 1994. In the last five elections, the partisan swing has been between three and seven seats.[3]

Not only do few seats change partisan hands, but few races are close. In recent elections as many as 90 percent of the incumbents seeking reelection have done so with margins of over 10 percent; half of those have won by margins of 30 percent or more. Nearly one in every five incumbents seeking reelection in 2002 faced no major party opposition at all.[4] Various organizations that monitor congressional elections, such as the *Cook Political Report*, the *Rothenberg Political Report*, and the Congressional Quarterly Service's *Politics Daily*, regularly rate races as safe for one party or the other, leaning one way or the other, or with no clear favorite. In the last two election cycles fewer than 10 percent of the seats have been rated as in play by these analysts. With near perfect accuracy, they have been able to predict the winners in approximately 90 percent of the races not only before the votes are cast, but often months before the votes are cast.

Already in the 2004 cycle, with the filing deadline passed in nearly half of the states, we see a similar pattern emerging. *The Cook Political Report* listed only 36 seats in play as of late March 2004;[5] *Politics Today* claims that there are only 29 seats in which one candidate or the other is not clearly favored.[6] As of March 31, 2004, the filing deadline for congressional

candidates had passed in 21 states. Those states together held 214 of the 435 congressional seats. Incumbents are seeking reelection in 202 of those seats; 27 of those incumbents are running without major party opposition, compared to 14 in the same seats in 2002.

As we look to the 2004 electoral season, all eyes have turned to Texas, to see the impact of the redistricting efforts of the Republican party. This is not the place to discuss the politics behind the 2004 redistricting in Texas, where the lines were redrawn two years after new districts had been configured based on 2000 census results. Others at this conference will also discuss the constitutionality of the redistricting process. But from our perspective what is important is the effect on competition. Texas's 32 districts were redrawn to benefit the Republican party, or to redress the gerrymandering that had favored the Democrats two years earlier, depending on whose view you choose to take. The effort was to put Anglo Democrats into seats that they would have difficulty holding and to create solid Republican districts.[7]

One can see the effect of this redistricting on competition the 2004 Texas congressional races in a number of ways, ways that are not all negative, at least not in the short run. Most analysts rate five of the Texas districts as toss-ups. However, they are toss-ups because incumbent Democrats, who have all of the advantages of incumbency aiding their reelection campaigns, have been placed into heavily Republican districts. Two of these—Charles Stenholm in the Abilene-Lubbock seat and Martin Frost in the northwestern Dallas suburbs and Fort Worth—are running against incumbent Republicans in districts heavily favoring the Republican candidates, Randy Neugebauer and Pete Sessions. The others—Max Sandlin in northeast Texas, Nick Lampson in the Beaumont area, and Chet Edwards in central Texas—are running in seats that look so ripe for plucking that the Republican primaries have been heavily contested, with a number of well-funded candidates, some with extensive political experience, seeking the nomination to run against the incumbents in each case. If Republicans win these seats, as was the intention of those drawing the district lines, the districts will be seen as safely Republican for the foreseeable future.

I. The Debate among Political Scientists concerning Redistricting

The decline in congressional competition can be attributed to many factors. Political scientists have long debated the role that redistricting plays in reducing competition. More than three decades ago Edward Tufte argued that the redistricting of the 1960s had the effect of creating districts that were non-competitive; that is, he said that the disappearing marginals that Mayhew had observed were caused by the effect of redistricting in the context of a two-party system.[8] But Tufte's work was soon challenged by those who felt that incumbent behavior had more to do with the decline in competition that did redistricting.[9]

After the first looks at redistricting, academics have focused primarily on two questions. First, many have been interested in whether redistricting contributes to the widely recognized advantage incumbents have in seeking reelection. The argument holds that incumbents in many states gained control of the redistricting process and used it to ensure that they would not be defeated.[10] Others argue that incumbents did not benefit significantly from the redistricting process.[11] Garand and Gross take a different tact, asserting that competition for incumbents had been declining for some time, before the Supreme Court's landmark rulings on redistricting in the 1960s, and thus incumbent advantage could not be explained by their role and influence in drawing district lines.[12]

Another set of political scientists have examined the impact of redistricting on partisan advantage. Again, no consensus has emerged. While most studies conclude that the party in control of partisan redistricting benefits in subsequent elections,[13] others conclude that the advantage is negligible or non-existent.[14] At the macro-level, analysts seem to agree that Republicans have benefited more than Democrats across the nation.[15]

Ayres and Whitman argue that the effect of redistricting is dependent upon who controls the process. If a partisan legislature controls the redistricting process, then the party that controls that legislature benefits—or at least tries to benefit. If the incumbent members of Congress has more influence, then the impact is not so much partisan as incumbent protection.[16] In each case, of course, the impact depends on the skill of those drawing the district lines. The tools of redistricting have become much more sophisticated than during the time when California

Democrats benefited because Phil Burton knew the lay of the political landscape better than did anyone else. While early examples of successful gerrymandering is the stuff of legend,[17] more often than not unsuccessful attempts resulted from lack of tools appropriate for the job, not lack of motivation.

If one looks at the body of literature as a whole, one sees certain patterns. First, there is concern about incumbent protection as a result of redistricting; democratic theorists worry that incumbents in truly safe districts will be less responsive to their constituents and changing views among the electorate. Second, there is concern over partisan advantage. One party's domination of the redistricting process can result in a significant advantage in post-redistricting legislatures through successful partisan gerrymandering. Third, scholars clearly have recognized that the impact of redistricting depends on who controls and is influential in the process, on the extent of the changes that are necessitated by shifts in population, and on the political will of those involved. Fourth, scholars have noted the disconnect between intentions and results. Both because of candidate campaign efforts, particularly those of incumbents whose districts have been broken up, and because of inexact information used in efforts at partisan redistricting, the electoral results were not always what the line drawers had envisioned.

To a large extent, the caveats about the impact of redistricting remain true, with the one notable exception that political cartographers are now equipped with more sophisticated tools than they have ever before had at their disposal. With GSI technology both more sophisticated and less expensive with each successive cycle, political gerrymandering is becoming a more and more exact science.[18] And ample anecdotal evidence leads us to believe that this increased sophistication can lead to "improved" results for partisan gerrymanderers.[19]

II. The Impact of Redistricting on the Supply of Strong Candidates

Our concern is less with the impact of redistricting on incumbent or party advantage and more with the impact on competition itself, the topic that drew Tufte to this topic originally. Has redistricting, particularly as practiced in the most recent cycle, contributed to a drop in competition in congressional elections (and presumably in state legislative elections as well)? We are

concerned with one particular aspect of the impact of redistricting on competition, the role that it has played in candidate emergence.

We are concerned that knowledge of the tools available to political gerrymanderers and the skills with which they use those tools, and impressions of the ways in which those tools and skills will be used has had a deterrent effect on potential candidates (PCs) for office. We have chosen the term "candidate emergence" as opposed to "candidate recruitment" purposively. There is ample evidence that national parties are heavily involved in recruiting candidates for federal office.[20] There is also ample evidence that potential candidates consider many factors in addition to national party recruitment efforts and that the national parties (and even state and local parties) do very little recruiting at all in many districts.[21] "Candidate emergence" implies a process that includes candidate recruitment, by any of a number of political actors, but also includes decision calculations by potential candidates based on a number of other factors, personal and political. Our concern is with the role that redistricting has played in the decisions by potential candidates for the House of Representatives either to—or not to—seek that office.

Because the Texas redistricting in 2004 was done so recently with such an open political agenda, it is instructive for viewing how redistricting might be seen to have an effect on candidate emergence. In the districts drawn to the Republicans' advantage in which the seat is currently held by a Democrat (districts 1, 2, and 17), far more than the normal number of candidates entered the "out party" primary to run against an incumbent than is normally the case. In two of those districts six candidates filed in the Republican primary; in the other, three.[22] That is because that nomination is seen to have more political value than is the norm for nominations to run against an incumbent. In seven other districts, however, no candidates emerged, even though some were recruited, to run against incumbents. The nominations were not seen as valuable, at least they were not seen as valuable enough to give up whatever a potential candidate might have to sacrifice to run.[23]

In Texas, in 2004, one might assume that the redistricting battle that dominated the political scene for months might well have had an impact on candidate emergence. One can imagine that potential candidates watched carefully as the lines were drawn to see how their

futures might be affected. But what about potential candidates in other states? According to the *Cook Political Report*:

> Another trouble spot for the Democrats is the spotty nature of their recruiting efforts. Republican freshman incumbents who won close races in 2002, or who sit in marginal districts, . . . lack serious (or in some cases any) Democratic opponents. Democrats were unable to get their first (or second, or third for that matter) choice in the open PA-15 seat . . . . To be fair, Republicans have not exactly run the table on recruiting either. . . . Republicans have also seen some of their top-flight candidates say no, ...[24]

We do not know the extent to which redistricting played a role in strong potential candidates' decisions to resist party recruitment efforts. We do believe, however, that the lack of strong candidates is a problem and that it is worthwhile to determine the extent to which redistricting plays a role in their reaching decisions not to run.

III. The Candidate Emergence Study

The Candidate Emergence Study was begun in 1997 with two goals in mind: first, as a purely academic study, to explore decision-making by those who might seek to run for the United States House of Representatives; and second, to determine if there were structural elements in the electoral process that systematically worked to deter competition. We took as our starting point that high quality candidates for office serve democracy better by allowing for the discussion of policy alternatives and that the weakness of candidates for the House of Representatives in many districts, defined as their inability to reach voters with their message, was a weakness in our representative system. Our goal was not to encourage particular candidates to run for office but rather to determine if qualified candidates existed in districts in which none was running and, if so, to ascertain why some individuals ran for office and others did not.[25]

The methodology used in identifying candidates for the current study mirrors that we used successfully in the study of potential candidates in the 1998 election; a subset of the respondents in our current data set are drawn from that first study, which represented a pioneering means of identifying potential candidates for office, whether they eventually chose to run or not.

In the summer of 1997, we conducted two surveys, designed to examine the decision

making of potential candidates for the 1998 congressional elections. The first, the Informant Survey, was sent to a sample of political activists in a random sample of 200 congressional districts. Our goal was to find ten Democratic and ten Republican activists in each district, individuals who were likely to be knowledgeable about congressional races but not likely to run themselves. We drew our sample from 1996 convention delegates and a listing of county chairs.[26] We asked these activists to give us information about the district and the incumbent and then to list for us up to four individuals who they felt would be strong candidates for the House of Representatives, whether those individuals had ever been mentioned as a candidate or not. We also asked a series of questions about why those individuals were thought to be strong potential candidates. Later we polled the 1400 PCs named by our informants for whom we could locate usable addresses, repeating questions about the district and the incumbent and then asking a longer series of questions about the PCs themselves.[27] In the Potential Candidate Survey, we asked questions about the partisan composition of the district as one of the factors that might encourage or deter a PC in thinking about a race for the House.

In 1999 we went back into the field, seeking to reassess our findings and asking questions about the impact of changes in context that had occurred in the ensuing two years, including but not limited to changes in the levels of trust toward and prestige of governmental institutions as a result of the Clinton impeachment imbroglio. For this 2000 wave of the Candidate Emergence Study, we returned to the districts from which we had had responses to the previous wave.

Finally in 2001, we returned to the field once more, again building on our panel, but also increasing the size of our sample by over-sampling in districts deemed likely to be competitive. Of course, as we were in the field in the summer sixteen months before the 2002 election, we had only rough estimates of which districts were likely to be competitive come Election Day. We relied on best guesses from Stuart Rothenberg of the *Rothenberg Political Report*, Amy Walter of the *Cook Political Report*, and Rhodes Cook of the *Rhodes Cook Newsletter* in selecting our districts. In this third round, we surveyed in 154 congressional districts.[28] For this analysis we rely totally on this third set of surveys.

As in the past, our potential candidate pool was made up of PCs whose names came to us through one of those responding to our Informant Survey and all state legislators whose districts overlap with the congressional districts in which we are exploring potential candidate decision making. In 2002, we also drew potential candidates from published web sources, and we permitted informants to designate themselves as potential candidates. We mailed to 4562 PCs (after adjusting for bad addresses) and received 1537 responses, a response rate of 33.5%.[29] Over half of these respondents (58%) express an attraction to a career in the U.S. House, precisely the type of individuals we wish to study to understand the effects of redistricting—politically involved citizens and office holders who harbor some ambition for a House seat. In this paper we seek to understand the effect of redistricting on the factors that influence the decisions of this sub-group of ambitious respondents (n = 735), as they consider whether to run for the House in 2002. [30]

The 2002 survey included specific questions about redistricting so that we could better understand how the redistricting process and outcomes affected potential candidates' perceptions of their districts, their chances of winning and, ultimately, their interest in running. We asked potential candidates to estimate the effects of redistricting on the composition of their U.S. House district and prospects for candidate from each party. Because some states were still in the process of redistricting at the time of the survey, we also asked respondents how certain were of about the district changes. Finally, we asked potential candidates to indicate whether the uncertainty surrounding redistricting discouraged them from running for the House. These data form the core of analysis in this paper and allow us to explore ambitious potential candidates view the redistricting process during the time that they are considering whether to run for the House.

IV. The Impact of Redistricting on Potential Candidates

PC Perceptions of the Impact of Redistricting

We begin this analysis by noting that there is a great deal of variation among potential candidates in terms of how they view the redistricting process. At the outset, we note that these views are subjective and based, in part at least, on partisan differences (see Table 1).

Republican identifiers tend to see district changes as favoring Republicans, while Democrat identifiers see changes as favoring Democrat candidates.

Table 1. Views of the Effects of Changes in Boundaries on Candidates in Respondent's District

	All Respondents	Republican Respondent	Democrat Respondent
Favors Republicans	43%	53%	34%
Toss-up	27%	28%	25%
Favors Democrats	31%	19%	41%
number of cases	735	346	386

But it is important to note that these perceptions are based on much more than partisanship. Within partisan categories, there is variation at the state, district, and individual levels. That is to say, at the first level, that respondents in different states—presumably with different political histories and with different redistricting processes—view the process differently. Beyond that, there is variation among the perceptions of respondents from different districts within the same state and even among individual respondents from the same district. By changing district lines, the redistricting process creates uncertainty, taking some voters out of a district and bringing new voters in. The impact of these changes cannot be known in concrete detail until after an election is held. But we hold that perceptions of the effect of these changes are important, as PCs decide whether or not they might run. Some PCs are more optimistic that others about the impact that the very same changes are likely to have on electoral prospects in a district. And their decisions, we hold, are based more on these perceptions than on eventual realities.

Our data do show, however, that PCs based their perceptions in part at least on the process that is followed in their states. Table 2 shows that PCs in states in which the Republicans control the legislature expect the changes to be more favorable to Republicans, and those in states in which the Democrats control the legislature expect changes to favor the Democrats.

Table 2: PC perception of Boundary Changes, by partisan control of legislature

		States with Republican Legislature	States with Democratic Legislature
Legislature controls process			
	Favorable to Republicans	61%	25%
	Toss-Up	24%	33%
	Favorable to Democrats	16%	44%
number of cases		249	196
Commission or Court controls process			
	Favorable to Republicans	48%	33%
	Toss-up	19%	30%
	Favorable to Democrats	33%	37%
number of cases		73	61

Most notably, the expectation of partisan effects are stronger among PCs in states where the process is controlled by a partisan legislature than in states where redistricting is controlled by a commission or the courts.[31] For example, 61% of PCs in states in which a Republican legislature controls the redistricting process see boundary changes helping Republicans, as compared to only 48% when the process is controlled by the courts or a commission. Democrats were expected to fare much worse in Republican controlled states when the process is controlled by the legislature. Only 16% believed that changes in their districts would favor Democrats in states redistricted by the legislature, while 33% of those in states with non-partisan redistricting processes saw Democrats as gaining ground in their districts.

Of course, it is possible that the partisan bias apparent in Table 1 are driving some of the results in Table 2. Table 3, however, presents an OLS model of the change in boundaries that controls for the partisanship of the respondent as well as the type of redistricting process in the state. The dependent variable is the full seven point response scale from asking respondents about the effect of redistricting on candidates in their district. The scale ranges from strongly favor Democrats (-3) to strongly favor Republican (+3). Party identification is scored on a 5 point scale with higher values indicating a stronger identification with the Republican party. The redistricting context is captured by several variables in the model: whether or not the redistricting

process is controlled by the legislature, the party of the legislature, and an interaction between legislative party and legislative redistricting. If partisan redistricting processes are conditioning the perceptions of potential candidates, we should find the interaction effect significant, and the main effects insignificant. In other words, it is the condition of legislative redistricting *combined with* the party of the legislature that produces the expectation. Clearly, Table 3 shows such and effect.

Table 3: PC Perception that Redistricting Favors Republican Candidates

	B (SE)	Sig
Party Identification of PC	.138 (.03)	***
Party Control of Legislature (Democrat = -1, split = 0; Republican = +1)	.180 (.14)	
Legislature Controls Redistricting Process	.071 (.163)	
Party Control X Legislative Control	.445 (.158)	**
Court controlled redistricting	.193 (.211)	
Constant	-.209 (.167)	
Number of cases	728	
F	21.28	***
Adj. R2	.1224	

**p<.01, *** p<.001

For the study of the effect on candidate emergence, one important factor is how the PC sees redistricting impacting on the chances an incumbent has to win re-election. PCs are more likely to run if they see the incumbent has having been hurt by redistricting; less likely if the redistricting process creates a new seat more favorable to the incumbent. Table 4 shows that partisan effects are important.

Table 4. PC Perceptions that Redistricting Favors Incumbent Party,
in States with Legislative Redistricting

	Republican Incumbent	Democrat Incumbent
Republican Controlled Legislature		
Favors Challenger Party	7%	57%
Toss-up	30%	11%
Favors Incumbent Party	63%	33%
	165	80
Democrat Controlled Legislature		
Favors Challenger Party	36%	15%
Toss -Up	30%	36%
Favors Incumbent Party	34%	48%
number of cases	87	101

This table demonstrates that PCs clearly expect different effects of district boundaries in districts with Democratic House incumbents as compared to those with Republican House incumbents, in those states in which the redistricting process is partisan. Only 7% of PCs in Republican held House districts believe that boundary changes will favor challengers, as compared to 57% of PCs in Democratic held House districts. By contrast 63% expect redistricting to favor incumbent Republicans and only 33% to favor incumbent Democrats.[32]

Surprisingly, we find less expectation of partisan outcomes in states in which the Democrats control the legislature. PCs in states with a Democrat legislature see clear partisan outcomes. Only 36% of those in Republican held districts expect changes to favor challengers. As many as 15% expect changes favorable to challengers in Democrat held districts. A smaller percent of PCs in Republican held districts see changes as favorable to the incumbent, 34% as compared to 48% in Democrat held districts.

While the magnitude of difference is smaller in Democrat states, the pattern is identical: PCs expect the party controlling the legislature to reward incumbents from its own party. Although this finding is not surprising, the implications should not be overlooked. Partisan redistricting processes create a set of expectations about outcomes, and those outcomes condition the decision to run in important ways.

Perhaps most important is that changes affect potential candidates' estimates of the incumbents' chances of winning. The survey asked potential candidates to estimate the chances an incumbent would win the nomination if he or she should seek it, and the general election should he or she win the nomination. These judgments about electoral prospects are in response

to seven--point scales, ranging from “Extremely Unlikely” through “Toss Up” to “Extremely Likely.” We have scored the items on seven-point scales to conform to subjective probability scales to make the results easily interpretable.[33]

Not surprisingly, the average estimate of incumbent chances is quite high -- .78. However, PCs in districts where boundary changes favor the incumbent party estimate incumbent chances as .82 while those in districts where changes are expected to favor challengers estimate incumbent chances at .70. The difference is both statistically significant ($p<.05$) and substantively significant. As the next section will show, incumbent chances figure heavily into potential candidates’ estimates of their own chances of winning.

Perceptions of Chances of Winning as a Result of Changes in District Boundaries

Potential candidates are strategic politicians.[34] One important factor in their determining whether or not they will run is whether or not they think that can win. Table 5 explores how changes in district boundaries affect PC perceptions of their chances of winning. Here, we use a dichotomous measure to indicate whether the changes in district boundaries are seen as favorable to candidates from the PC’s own party. We measures chances of winning by asking the chances that the PC would win the nomination if he/she chose to run in 2002, and the chances that the PC would win the general election if he/she won the nomination. We use the same seven point answer scale, rescaled as a pseudo-probability as described above.

Table 5. Effects on PC’s Chances of Winning by Perception of Impact of Redistricting

District Boundary Changes Favor:	Chances of winning Nomination	Chances of winning General Election	Overall chances
Opposite Party	.49	.32	.19
PC Party	.30	.68	.20

We find that district boundaries have the opposite effects on PC assessments of their chances of winning the nomination and the chances of winning the general election.[35] When boundary changes favor the opposite party, the chances of winning the nomination are higher. When boundary changes favor the PC's own party, the chances of winning the nomination are seen as .19 lower. The opposite occurs at the general election stage. As potential candidate chances go up in the general election stage, they go down in the nomination stage, because PCs expect a stronger intra-party competition for the nomination. However, once the nomination is secured, the chances of winning the general election are much higher. Candidates from the party that is not favored by the redistricting process see themselves as more likely to win the nomination because the nomination is less valuable and fewer people seek the nomination since the general election chances are lower.

To get a better sense of how the PCs view the effects of boundary changes on their chances of winning, we run a multivariate OLS model using the joint chances of winning the nomination and general election (overall chances of winning the seat) as our dependent variable. (See Table 6.) We control for several key factors such as the party of the potential candidate relative to the incumbent, the quality of the potential candidate, the prospects of the incumbent, and whether the seat is open or in a safe district.[36] Even after controlling for these factors, we still see a positive, significant effect of redistricting. Potential candidates who view boundary changes as favorable to their own party view their chances as somewhat higher. Of course, the overall effects are larger than those represented by the coefficient because redistricting works indirectly through influencing incumbent chances as well. We also note in this table, however, that a district with a non-competitive partisan balance has a negative effect on the chances of winning. This reflects the fact that PCs understand that they must clear two hurdles—a primary and a general election—in order to secure a seat in the House and that the chance of clearing both of those hurdles is easier in a competitive district than in one with partisan imbalance, even if that imbalance favors their party.

Table 6. OLS Regression: Potential Candidate Chances of Winning

	B	Sig
Redistricting favors PC party	.010	*

		(.006)	
PC strength as campaigner		.052 (.01)	***
PC named in media as prospective challenger		.115 (.021)	***
PC and incumbent in same party		-.033 (.021)	
PC assessment of incumbent chances		-.112 (.035)	***
Open seat		.083 (.032)	**
Non-competitive district balance		-.033 (.02)	*
Constant		-.052 (.064)	
	Number of cases	542	
	F(7, 534)	15.73	***
	Adj. R square	.16	

*** p<.001 ***p<.01 *p<.05 one-tailed tests

The effects of redistricting on chances of winning are important because chances of winning are closely related to the decision to run. Table 7 shows that the average chances of running in 2002 increases dramatically as chances of winning increases. Potential candidates who assess their chances of winning as less than 1 in 5 are very unlikely to run while those who assess their chances as better than 50/50 are nine times more likely to run, on average. Multivariate analysis indicates that the redistricting effect works indirectly to influence chances of running through the chances of winning. We found no evidence of a direct effect of district boundary changes on potential candidate chances of running. This is not surprising, however, since district boundaries define the competitive context.

Table 7: Ambitious PCs Chances of Running Given their Chances of Winning

Chances of running

Chances of winning less than .20 n=502	.04
Chances of winning between .20 and .50 N=150	.16
Chances of winning greater than .5 n=86	.36

Uncertainty over Boundary Changes and Discouragement from Running

Finally, we explore how the uncertainty over district boundaries influences potential candidates. Redistricting introduces a great deal of uncertainty into the strategic calculus. Although we show that PCs form expectations about the outcome of redistricting based on the redistricting process, the degree to which they are certain about these changes varies quite substantially. To what degree does this uncertainty discourage potential candidates from becoming actual candidates? We can directly assess this question using data from our survey. Among the questions in a battery seeking to understand the influence of various factors on the decision to run, we ask respondents to indicate whether uncertainty over redistricting would influence their interest in running for the U.S. House. Respondents were given four categories: "makes no difference," "somewhat discourage," "discourage" or "strongly discourage." Nearly one in five responded that uncertainty over redistricting would discourage them from running to some degree.

In Table 8 we explore the factors that cause discouragement in more depth. Of course, uncertainty can have more or less of an effect depending on the context of the redistricting. PCs who perceive district boundaries as favorable are less discouraged by uncertainty due to redistricting. However, our central question is how the process affects PCs. Since there was wide variation in where states were in the redistricting process at the time of our survey, we asked PCs to indicate how certain they were of the boundaries in their district at that time. They could indicate that they were "certain," "pretty sure," or "not at all certain" of the "2002 House boundaries in [his/her] district." Slightly more than half (51 percent) of ambitious PCs were

certain about their district boundaries, while 32 percent were pretty certain. Approximately one in six (17 percent) were not at all certain. Not surprisingly, most of those in the latter two categories (71 percent) completed the survey prior to the completion of the redistricting process.

Notably, Table 8 shows that those who are more uncertain of the district boundaries are more likely to be discouraged from running for the House. Thus, as the redistricting process drags on, and as PCs are left unsure of where the boundaries will be drawn, they become discouraged from entering the process at all. Running for the House as a non-incumbent is a risky business in the best of circumstances. It becomes even more so when one has to make the decision about whether or not to run without knowledge of where the district boundaries will fall.

We also controlled for PC chances, whether or not a PC holds an elective office, and district context. Each is potentially important. PCs who view their chances of winning as high have undoubtedly already taken the various possible district configurations into account when they make that assessment. PCs who hold elective office might be more risk averse if they do not know the extent to which the district in which they might run overlaps with their current district. Potential candidates who reside in an open seat district may feel less concerned about uncertainty over redistricting because their chances are greater when the seat is open, regardless of the nuances of district boundaries, than they would be if an incumbent were seeking reelection.

As Table 8 demonstrates, two of these factors do not contribute to discouragement in a statistically significant manner. Neither PC chances of winning nor whether or not the PC holds elective office has the effect on discouragement that we envisioned. However, the chances a PC will be discouraged is by uncertainty over redistricting are lower for those expecting open seat races. The implication of that finding, in addition to the one hypothesized above, might well be that uncertainty levels the playing field in an already competitive situation. The implications from this table are clear—that candidates in open seats are less discouraged by the process than others, but that both the uncertainty created by the process and the perceptions of how the redistricting process will come out have significant impact on whether or not ambitious candidates are discouraged from running.

Table 8. Ordered Probit Model, Discouragement because of Uncertainty over Redistricting

Redistricting favors own party		-.109 ***
		(.034)
Uncertainty over district boundaries		.357 ***
		(.074)
PC holds elective office		-.010
		(.124)
Open seat		-.328 *
		(.196)
PC chances of winning		.106
		(.224)
μ1		1.382
μ2		1.945
μ3		2.450
	number of cases	603
	Chi-square	37.91 ***

V. Conclusions

The Candidate Emergence Study began nearly eight years ago out of a desire to understand decision-making by those who might consider running for the United States House of Representatives and out of a concern about the lack of competition in House elections. We felt from the beginning that we had a good understanding of the factors that enter into potential candidate decision making, but we did not know the ways in which those factors—personal and strategic considerations—worked as potential candidates reached decisions about their candidacies. We also did not know whether structural aspects of the electoral process could be altered in such a way as to improve chances that better qualified candidates would run for office. Finally, while all of us working on this project have agreed from the beginning that better qualified candidates would run better campaigns, we were less certain whether better campaigns, while valuable in their own right, would necessarily lead to more competition.

In this paper, we examine one aspect of the electoral environment, the process of redistricting that follows the decennial census. We feel that this perspective is important,

because the process of redistricting is one of the few aspects of the electoral environment that can be changed, in this case through legislation at the state level. We view the effect of the process through the lens of potential candidates; for their decisions determine the supply of quality candidates who run for the House.

We begin this concluding section by noting that any change in redistricting process will have an impact only in some states, some of the time. Clearly states with only one congressional district do not have to worry about the redistricting process. States with a small number of districts that does not change after a reapportionment generally see only minor changes in district boundaries.[37] Similarly states with limited population movement see limited change.[38] The process of redistricting has the most potential impact in those states that gain or lose seats as a result of reapportionment and/or in states with significant population shifts. These factors need to be kept in mind as our conclusions are reviewed.

First, potential candidates view the redistricting process as what it is in most states, a quintessentially political process. Parties that control redistricting try to draw districts that favor their party; potential candidates understand this. This finding is particularly true for states in which the legislature controls the redistricting process and Republicans control the legislature, but it holds to a lesser degree in states with partisan redistricting controlled by the Democrats and even, in terms of perceptions, in states in which neither party controls the process.

Further, we note that PCs see redistricting as favoring incumbents of the party that controls the legislature. Considering the number of states in which redistricting has only minor impact because of the number of seats involved, the extent to which this finding holds is impressive. Our PCs generally see their districts as leaning heavily toward one party or the other. These perceptions are essentially an evaluation of the impact of previous efforts at redistricting. As a result, candidates in the party in power see that victory in a primary will be difficult; PCs in the minority party see that, while they might have an easy time gaining a nomination, victory in a general election would be much harder.[39] That is to say, PCs see their chances of winning as best in tightly competitive districts, more so even than in districts favoring their own party, and

past redistricting, in areas where it can play such a role, has led to the existence of few competitive districts.

When looking at current redistricting, PCs see the process as hindering their chances of winning. They are discouraged to run by many factors, including the uncertainties created by redistricting. This discouragement works in at least two ways. First, they assume that the change, whether it helps their party or not, is going to create an environment that is less competitive in a partisan sense. That would hurt their chances of winning whether they were in the majority party (and would have to run either against an incumbent or, if the seat were open, against a strong field of challengers who assume that the winner of the primary will win the general) or the minority party (and they would likely lose a general election, even if nomination were easily won). Second, they are uncertain about the specific political effects of the redistricting, certainly as the process is going on but even in the immediate, but electorally untested, aftermath of a new map's adoption.

Any reform proposal, in this area or any other, depends on the normative views of the reformer. In our case, we favor competitive elections in which each party nominates a qualified candidate who can make his or her views and qualifications known to the electorate. If one accepts that value, then the current redistricting processes in use in most of the states fail. They are dominated either by political parties or by incumbents; neither of these actors favors more competition. Parties want to reduce the number of seats in which they must wage expensive campaigns. Incumbents do not want to lose. Both goals argue for establishing the largest number of safe seats.[40]

We believe that a redistricting process that takes power away from those who have a clear incentive to restrict competition would have a most beneficial impact on the electoral process. From our perspective, the mechanism would be to encourage more highly qualified candidates to think seriously about running for the House—or at the very least, it would not discourage them from running. Were such a process in place in more states, fewer candidates would be discouraged by the partisan make up of the district; fewer would be discouraged by concern for the impact of redistricting. We fully understand that a reform of this type would have

minimal effect (at least for congressional elections) in many states. We also are not so naïve as not to see the political difficulty in reforming the redistricting process in this manner in many states.

However, there are relatively few institutional changes that can truly affect competition in American elections. The quality of our democracy is called into question when 99 percent of the incumbents seeking reelection gain reelection, 20 percent of them without any competition whatsoever, only 10 percent of them in competitive races. If we truly believe in the democratic principles we profess, it is important to take on the battles necessary to make congressional elections more competitive and able to reflect changes in the views of the electorate.

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[2] Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

[3] Alan I. Abramowitz, and Brad Alexander, "Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections: Evidence from the 2002 Midterm Election," Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Portland, OR, March 11-13, 2004.

[4] While a few of those running without major party opposition did face primary opponents, most of that opposition was token. Essentially these representatives knew at the time of their states' filing deadlines—in some cases nearly a year before the election—that they would be returned for another two years in November.

[5] "2004 Competitive House Race Chart," *The Cook Political Report,* March 30, 2004, accessed at http://www.cookpolitical.com/races/report_pdfs/2004_house_competitive_chart_march3.pdf .

[6] CQ, Politics Daily, April 2, 2004

[7] The 2004 Texas gerrymander is a classic example of the "stacking and cracking" method of gerrymandering, identified by Bruce E. Cain, *The Reapportionment Puzzle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), albeit with a racial twist in this case.

[8] Edward R. Tufte, "The Relationship between Seats and Votes in Two-Party Systems," *American Political Science Review* 67: 540 (1973); he was commenting of the effect noted in Mayhew's seminal 1974 article, David Mayhew, "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals," *Polity* 6:295 (1974).

[9] See, for example, John Ferejohn, "On the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review* 71: 166 (1977).

[10] See, for example, Charles S. Bullock, III, "Redistricting and Congressional Stability, 1962-1972," *Journal of Politics* 37: 569 (1975).

[11] Charles S. Bullock, III, "The Inexact Science of Congressional Redistricting," *Political Science and Politics* 15: 431 (1982) discusses how intensions do not always lead to results. See also Amihai Glazer, Bernard Grofman, and Marc Robbins, "Partisan and Incumbency Effects of 1970s Congressional Redistricting," *American Journal of Political Science* 31 : 680 (1987), Janet C. Campagna and Bernard Grofman, "Party Control and Partisan Bias in 1980s Congressional Redistricting," *Journal of Politics* 52: 1242 (1990).

[12] James C. Garand and Donald A. Gross, "Changes in the Vote Margins for Congressional Candidates: A Specification of Historical Trends," *American Political Science Review* 78: 17 (1984).

[13] See Alan I.Abramowitz, "Partisan Redistricting and the 1982 Congressional Elections." *Journal of Politics* 45: 767 (1983); Bruce E. Cain, *The Reapportionment Puzzle*; Gary King, "Representation through Legislative Redistricting: A Stochastic Model," *American Journal of Political Science* 33: 787 (1989); Richard G. Niemi and Laura Winsky, "The Persistence of Partisan Redistricting Effects in Congressional Elections in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Politics* 54: 565 (1992); Gary W. Cox and Jonathan Katz, "The Reapportionment Revolution and Bias in U.S. Congressional Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 43: 812 (1999).

[14] Glazer, Grofman and Robbins, "Partisan and Incumbency Effects"; Campagna and Grofman, "Party Control and Partisan Bias"; John D. Cranor, Gary L. Crawley, and Raymond H. Scheele, "The Anatomy of a Gerrymander," *American Journal of Political Science* 33: 222 (1989); John W. Swain, Stephen A. Borrelli, and Brian C. Reed, "Partisan Consequences of the Post-1990 Redistricting for the U.S. House of Representatives," *Political Research Quarterly* 51: 945 (1998); Ronald E. Weber, Harvey J. Tucker, and Paul Brace, "Vanishing Marginals in State Legislative Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16: 29 (1991).

[15] Andrew Gelman and Gary King, "Enhancing Democracy Through Legislative Redistricting," *American Political Science Review* 88: 541 (1994); Cox and Katz, "The Reapportionment"; Gary W. Cox and Jonathan Katz, *Elbridge Gerry's Salamander: The Electoral Consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[16] Q. Whitfield Ayres and David Whiteman, "Congressional Reapportionment in the 1980s: Types and Determinants of Policy Outcomes," *Political Science Quarterly* 99: 303 (1984).

[17] Cranor, Crawley, and. Scheele, "The Anatomy of a Gerrymander."

[18] See Kimball Brace's contribution to this volume.

[19] For an excellent review of this entire literature, see Michael McDonald, "The Loss of Competitive U.S. House Districts Through Redistricting," Unpublished manuscript, George Mason University, March 24, 2004

[20] Paul S. Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Thomas A. Kazee and Mary C. Thornberry, "Where's the Party? Congressional Candidate Recruitment and American Party Organizations," *The Western Political Quarterly* 43: 61-80 (1990); L. Sandy Maisel, "American Political Parties: Still Central to a Functioning Democracy?" in Jeffrey Cohen, Richard Fleisher, and Paul Cantor, eds., *American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001); L. Sandy Maisel, Cherie Maestas, and Walter J. Stone, "The Party Role in Congressional Competition," in L. Sandy Maisel*, ed., The Parties Respond: Changes in American Parties and Campaigns,*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002; Walter J. Stone, Sarah Fulton, L. Sandy Maisel, and Cherie Maestas, "Prospects, Money, Candidate Entry and Vote Share in U.S. House Elections: What's Causing What?" paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Portland, OR, March 11-13, 2004.

[21] L. Sandy Maisel, *From Obscurity to Oblivion: Running in the Congressional Primary.* 2d ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Linda L. Fowler and Robert McClure, *Political Ambition: Who Decides to Run for Congress (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Linda L. Fowler, *Candidates, Congress, and the American Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

[22] In the 202 districts in which an incumbent is seeking reelection in 2004 for which the filing deadline has passed as of March 31, the total number of candidates who filed to run in the major party challenging the incumbent was 209. In 27 of those districts no one filed as a major party opponent of the incumbent; in the other 175 districts, the average number of candidates seeking the nomination to oppose an incumbent was under 1.2.

[23] The cost of running can be measured in many ways—time, money, lost opportunity, political capital, etc.

[24] "2004 House Overview," *The Cook Political Report,* February 24, 2004, 1.

[25] L. Sandy Maisel and Walter J. Stone, "The Politics of Government-funded Research: Notes from the Experience of the Candidate Emergence Study," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, December 1998, available online at http://www.apsanet.org/PS/dec98/maiselstone.cfm

[26] We originally also added to our sample political journalists and political scientists living in the district who studied American politics. After our pretest we eliminated the journalists from the sample because a number of those polled raised ethical concerns about their participation. We eliminated the political scientists because a high percentage of our colleagues pleaded ignorance of real world decision making in their home districts.

[27] We followed parallel procedures for the two surveys. All surveys were conducted by mail. The Informant Survey was sent early in the summer of 1997. The Potential Candidate Survey was mailed using a rolling sample where PCs were contacted within two to three months of the filing deadline in their states. In each case we sent an approach letter to each respondent explaining the purpose of the study, followed immediately by a questionnaire packet included a self-addressed stamped envelope. One week after the survey packet was mailed, we sent reminder postcards. Within about a month after the first mailing, we sent a second packet to all of those who had not responded.

The Informant Survey had a response rate of 43% and yielded 1399 unique Potential candidates in 192 of our 200 sampled districts. The PC Survey had a response rate of 32.3%, with 452 usable responses. We have explored potential response bias by comparing informant-generated data on PCs who did respond with data on those who did not respond, with reassuring results. See Walter J. Stone and L. Sandy Maisel, "The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning: Potential U.S. House Candidates' Nomination and General Election Chances," *Journal of Politics* 65 (November) 951-977, for a more detailed discussion of the survey methodology in the first round of surveys.

[28] The district sample for the 2002 survey was created by creating a "likely competitiveness" index based on the assessments of our expert observers of congressional elections and selecting 43 districts based on that index (all of the districts identified by more than one expert and one-in-five of those identified by only one expert); we then drew a one-in-two sample from districts in which we had previously surveyed, a set of district that itself was randomly chosen. Based in this selection procedure, we sought to survey in 154 congressional districts. The difficulty of drawing a sample of congressional districts while redistricting is in progress was highlighted for us by the fact that 34 respondents (less than 1% of our original pool) responded that they were answering about a district not in our sample; While some of these may have erred in answering our question, our assumption, because we were surveying a highly informed political elite, is that the district lines had been redrawn from the time we identified them as potential informants and the time they responded to our survey so that they no longer lived in one of the districts in our sample. In each of these districts we surveyed political informants chosen from convention delegates and county chairs, as we

had in earlier waves (see Stone and Maisel, "The Not-So-Simple Calculus"; we also surveyed up to six business leaders and six labor leaders in each district as a supplemental pool of informants. Finally, we ask each informant to identify others in their district who might be good informants (a snowball sample), and we surveyed those so identified.

[29] For the 2002 PC Survey, our overall response rate was 33.5% (1537 of 4532). The PCs came from various sources—state legislators representing constituencies within our sample districts (29% response rate), those identified by the informants we surveyed (40% response rate), PC respondents to our previous surveys, i.e. our PC panel (55% response rate), informants who identified themselves as potential candidates (58% response rate), those identified through Web sources as likely to run (51% response rate).

As in our 1998 and 2000 surveys, a majority of those we surveyed (59/3%) and a majority of our respondents (53.4%) were state legislators, included in the list of PCs because more candidates for Congress come from the state legislatures than from any other single source. But most state legislators do not run and most candidates come from other sources. Nearly 20% of our PC respondents were individuals identified from our 2002 Informant Survey, a percentage that would be increased in we added in those in our panel originally identified in this manner; two-thirds of those PCs would not have been picked up from any other source, a testament to the success of the method we use to identify strong potential candidates who do not enter the process through other easily recognized paths.

[30] We are also interested in how district conditions and changes affect ambitions for office, but that is beyond the scope of our analysis in this paper.

[31] States with redistricting commissions include Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Washington. States with redistricting settled by the courts include Colorado, Mississippi, Texas, Wisconsin, South Carolina, and New Mexico. Information on redistricting process was drawn from the National Council of State Legislatures redistricting website: www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/elect/statesites.htm

[32] We note that, if those drawing the boundaries are following the most common theories regarding partisan gerrymandering, those who see Democrats as gaining even though Republicans control the process may well have the same expectations as those drawing the lines. One strategy is clearly to pack the districts of some incumbents in the other party with their partisan followers in order to leave fewer of that party for the other districts.

[33] We have coded the item extremes .01 ("Extremely Unlikely) and .99 ("Extremely Likely), and the midpoint .50 ("Toss Up"). The two categories on either side of .50 are equidistant between the extreme and the mid-point. The coding we have adopted is inevitably a rough approximation of the underlying subjective probabilities that we are attempting to measure. It has the virtue of producing data that are readily interpretable and consistent with the verbal cues we gave respondents in the question wording. However, caution must be exercised when interpreting the results. In order to distinguish between the theoretical probabilities of interest and these subjective "pseudo-probabilities," we refer to them as "electoral prospects" or "chances." They are not estimates of the probabilities of the events described in our questions, but they can capture relative differences in the subjective prospects of incumbents and potential candidates.

[34] Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Election (* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Gary C. Jacobson, "The Marginals Never Vanished: Incumbency and Competition in Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1952-1982," *American Journal of Political Science* 31: 126-141 (1987).

[35] This is similar to the finding we demonstrate in Stone and Maisel, "The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning."

[36] We asked potential candidates to assess the partisan balance of their district prior to the 2002 redistricting on a 5 point scale. Districts which lean clearly toward one of the parties are coded as 1 while the remaining are coded as 0.

[37] States with smaller populations tend to be politically homogeneous in any case. Of the twelve states with either one or two congressmen, eight (if one includes the somewhat idiosyncratic Vermont) have congressional delegations all from one party; two of these states have split Senate delegations and the other two have senators from one party and House member(s) from the other—in the somewhat odd case of Maine, two Republican senators and two Democratic congressmen.

[38] It should be noted, however, that changes in the redistricting procedure could well be reflected in changes in the procedure used for redistricting state legislatures as well, in which case they would be as important for these states as any others.

[39] See Stone and Maisel, "Not-So-Simple Calculus."

[40] This argument holds for those states in which a court or some other body intervenes if the partisan bodies are unable to reach agreement, presumably because of partisan balance among those making the

decisions. The reversion to a non-partisan decision maker is a matter of the political circumstance of the moment, not of a commitment to competitive elections as a goal.