Tenure, Promotion and Performance: The Career Path of U.S. Ambassadors *

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Abstract

We develop a database of the tenure of US ambassadors from sources at the US State Department. We assess the tenure of both political appointees and career diplomats based on four factors: (1) Political factors, such as leader turnover in the US and the host nation; (2) Personal characteristics of the ambassador, such as age and gender; (3) Characteristics of the host nation such as population, wealth, trade and alignment with the US; and (4) Performance measures, such as improvements in US exports, diplomatic alignment and security alignment. US Presidential turnover has the greatest effect on ambassadorial turnover, especially for political appointees. Trade performance (but not diplomatic nor security alignment) increases tenure, but the substantive effects is small, and this and other performance measures do not predict promotion or reassignment to another ambassadorial posting.

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1 The Tenure and Career of US Ambassadors

According to the US State Department, "[t]he mission of American public diplomacy is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world."[1] Here we explore whether ambassadors who achieve these goals retain their posting longer and are promoted or reassigned to another mission. Empirically, high achievement in attaining the stated goals of the State Department has only a tiny effect on tenure and no effect on future career advancement. Instead, the turnover of US diplomats is driven by domestic political change.

The objective of this paper is to introduce a new data source spanning 2,916 US ambassadors from 1779 to 2014 and empirically assess the factors that determine the tenure and career paths of US ambassadors.[2] Our endeavor is primarily an empirical exercise, however, our results speak to important arguments regarding bureaucratic accountability, or rather the lack of such accountability. The State Department and ambassadors are in a classic Principal-Agent (PA) relationship.[3] The State Department dispatches an ambassador to a mission with directions to help implement the US's trade, diplomatic and security goals. As in all cases where a principal tasks an agent to carry out policy, the agent may have different objectives than those of the principal. These differences could be in terms of policy goals or simply the level of effort the ambassador wants to exert.

There are two broad solutions to the PA problem. First, a principal can select an agent with similar policy preferences so that the agent also wants to achieve the principal's goal. About one quarter of US ambassadors are political appointments. Such appointments help solve the divergent policy interests problem since the President can hand pick, subject to Congressional approval, an agent with similar policy objectives. Although such selection solves the policy

[1] Source: US Department of State. Web: `http://www.state.gov/r/index.htm`

[2] For ease of language, we refer to the person who heads a US mission in a host nation as the ambassador. However, it is important to note that ambassador is not always the title of the head of a mission. Other official titles include minister, envoy, or *chargé d'affaires*. The term ambassador is used (incorrectly) throughout this paper to capture all these titles.

[3] There is an enormous economic and political science literature on principal-agent problems. See for instance Jensen and Meckling (1976).

direction problem, political appointments do not necessarily alleviate an ambassador's desire to shirk and some 'cushy' political appointments are seen as rewards for past political service rather than as appointment to a job.[4]

The second means for a principal to control the actions and efforts of an agent is to structure a series of rewards and punishment, such as retention, promotion or firing decisions, to incentivize ambassadors to work hard on the principal's goals. Such incentives are likely to be important to career diplomats not chosen on the basis of political viewpoints or as a reward for past political service. How best to monitor agents is the perennial problem of principals. Lupia and McCubbins (1994) discuss two contrasting approaches from continual monitoring, which they describe as police patrols, to rapid responses to urgent problems –fire alarms. Here we develop performance measures based on US exports, diplomatic relations and security alignment. In particular, we examine the extent to which US exports to a host nation changes, how the alignment of a host nation's voting recording in the United Nations General Assembly changes and how a host nation's alliance portfolio with the US changes over the course of an ambassador's tenure. Additionally, we also examine the onset of militarized interstate disputes between the US and the host nation.

An ambassador who improves trade, diplomatic or security relations between a host nation and the US performs well. In contrast, if relations deteriorate, then the ambassador has failed. Admittedly these measures are a noisy means of assessing ambassadorial performance and many factors beyond an ambassador's control affect trade, diplomatic and security relations. However, the fact that the US sends ambassadors to head up missions suggests the US believes ambassadors have some impact on outcomes. By rewarding success with an extended term or promotion to a more prestigious posting and punishing failure with removal or assignment to a less prestigious posting the State Department provides the right incentives to encourage high effort and adherence to the Presidents's policy goals. Unfortunately in terms of incentivizing ambassadors to fulfill the goal of the US administration, we find little evidence that an ambassador's tenure or career path is improved by good performance on trade, diplomatic or security measures.

[4]See for instance Juliet Eilperin, "Obama ambassador nominees prompt an uproar with bungled answers, lack of ties". *Washington Post*, February 14, 2014. Web: `http://goo.gl/U1YZ6N`. Last accessed: June, 8, 2015.

The bulk of this paper is an empirical assessment of the tenure and career of ambassadors. We consider four broad classes of factors as determinants of ambassadorial tenure: (1) Political factors, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Host nation characteristics, and (4) Performance measures.

1.1 Political Factors

Ambassadors come in two flavors, political appointees who are nominated by the US administration and tend to be drawn from all walks of life, and professional career diplomats, who typically serve in the diplomatic corp for much of their careers. One argument for political appointments is that they are a reward for past political service. As such, we should expect that upon taking office a new President replaces the political appointees of his predecessors and reward those whom he owes favors. If political rewards are handed out as a reward rather than in expectation of performance, then there should be little link between the tenure of such ambassadors and the performance in terms of trade, diplomacy or security. Further, such political appointees are likely to be removed when a successor takes office as the successor wants positions to reward his supporters.

We hypothesize that US presidential turnover is associated with changes in ambassadorial appointees and such effects are likely to be especially strong for political appointees.

Changes in host nation leadership can also precipitate ambassadorial change, although we anticipate political volatility in the host nation to be less salient than changes in US governance. Host nation leader change produces competing effects. On the one hand, given the volatility associated with leader change, the US may desire an experienced hand on the wheel rather than a newly appointed ambassador who is unfamiliar with situations and circumstances. On the other hand, host nation leader change may signal a change of relations with the US and therefore a change in personal might be warranted.

1.2 Ambassador Characteristics

Individual characteristics of ambassadors may affect how long they serve. We focus on the age, career record and gender of individual ambassadors to see the extent to which these

factors affect tenure in office and subsequent career trajectories.

1.3 Host Nation Characteristics

Host nations differ greatly. Some are rich; others are poor. Some are large and other are small. In addition to differences in wealth and population, we examine differences in political institutions and relations with the US on trade, diplomatic and security dimensions.

1.4 Performance Measures

Based on the ideas of bureaucratic accountability, we anticipate that ambassadors who perform well are likely to see their tenure prolonged and subsequent career paths enhanced. Those that fail and preside over deteriorating relations between the host nation and the US are likely to be replaced. Performance is measured on three dimensions: trade, diplomacy relations and security alignment. The trade performance measure is based on changes in the flow of US exports into the host nation. Diplomatic relations are measured using voting similarities between the US and the host nation in the United Nations General Assembly. A shift towards a closer alignment is taken as an indicator of improved diplomatic relations. Security alignments are measured using alliance portfolio measures and the onset of militarized interstate disputes. If the host nation's alignment with the US improves this is taken as a measure of security success. In contrast, if the host nation becomes more distant, or should a dispute between the host nation and the US break out, then this is taken as a sign of poor performance on the security dimension.

We conduct two sets of analyses. First, we examine the tenure of ambassadors. The results show that political considerations are dominant in determining whether ambassadors retain their job. Personal characteristics appear to have little impact on tenure. Several host nation characteristics affect tenure but the substantive impact of these factors is small. Most depressing in terms of accountability is that performance measures do not appear to influence tenure –and when the evidence (weakly) suggests they do, the impact of these factors is substantively small. In terms of tenure in office, success is not highly rewarded and failure is not strongly punished.

In a second set of analyses we examine the career implications of performance. Here we find even weaker results in terms of accountability. Strong performance as an ambassador does not increase the likelihood that an ambassador is reappointed to another post, nor does it improve the likelihood of a more prestigious posting.

The paper is structured as follows. We discuss the pertinent literatures, following which we discuss the data and methods used. The results section contains a brief description of the data and two different sets of analyses. First, we estimate the tenure of ambassadors based upon political, personal, host nation characteristics and performance measures. Second, we examine the career path of non-political appointees to see if performance leads to promotion to a more prestigious posting, demotion or retirement. Finally we conclude. We provide an appendix with additional robustness checks.

2 Literature Review

There is a well establish body of literature that examines the survival of national political leaders (Bienen and Van de Walle, 1991; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Chiozza and Goemans, 2004; Goemans et al., 2009; McGillivray and Smith, 2008). Prior to the focus on individual leaders, much of the literature examined the duration of cabinet governments in parliamentary systems (Diermeier and Stevenson, 1999; Indridason and Kam, 2005; King et al., 1990). Other themes appear in the government survival literature.

Alt (1975) and Berlinski et al. (2007) examine the survival of individual ministers within British cabinets. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008) examine a similar topic in other parliamentary systems.

Election timing studies examine the duration of parliaments when the date of elections are endogenously chosen (Smith, 2004; Cargill and Hutchinson, 1991). Other scholars look at strategic change in the composition of government between elections. For instance, Indridason and Kam (2008) examines the timing of cabinet reshuffles. These studies tend to focus on the cabinet as a single unit.

Other approaches look at individual ministers and examine how their performance affects whether they remain in cabinet. Within a principal-agent framework, Berlinski et al. (2010)

examine the tenure of leaders in terms of their performance. Dewan and Dowding (2005) look at retention of ministers in response to scandals that harm government popularity. Dewan and Myatt (2008) assess how a constraint on the number of available talented candidates limits a Prime Minister's decision to replace ministers. Dewan and Myatt (2007) assess coordination within the party. In their study of ministerial selection, Dowding and Dumont (2008) stress appointments being based on ministers possessing the requisite skills. Blondel (1991) emphasizes the importance of a minister's willingness to carry out the government's policy agenda, even when it imposes personal costs. Fischer et al. (2012) comprehensively review research on cabinet minister survival.

While the literature on minister turnover is large, it has primarily focused on parliamentary governments. Quiroz Flores and Smith (2011) model minister retention across presidential, parliamentary and autocratic systems. Egorov and Sonin (2011) examine relations between dictators and their viziers. Perhaps most closely related to this paper are works by Francois et al. (2013) and Quiroz Flores (2009). Both these studies show a strong connection between the survival of national leaders and the tenure prospects of individual ministers. Francois et al. (2013) examine ministers within African governments and find that ministers are initially reasonably secure but their risk of replacement increases as the national leader becomes ensconced in power. Perhaps the closest study to that which we perform here is Quiroz Flores (2009). He examines the survival of 7,428 foreign ministers from 181 countries between 1696 and 2004. He contrasts performance, in terms of avoiding disputes and wars (and success in such events if they do occur) with coalition dynamics (which he measures as the tenure of the national leader). Coalition dynamics dominate performance in determining survival.

Our paper is not about ministers, but rather ambassadors. There are many volumes that discuss the selection of and career prospects of diplomats (see for example Jett (2014); Rana (2004)). However, such studies typically have a case study approach. To the best of our knowledge there are no systematic assessments of ambassador tenure or career path.

3 Data

3.1 U.S. Ambassadors

To assemble the appointments and tenure of ambassadors, we relied on information provided by the Office of the Historian, at the U.S. Department of State, which documents the history of U.S. representation abroad.[5] As briefly noted above, it is important to clarify that throughout this paper we will use the term Ambassador somewhat loosely. Our dataset is mainly composed by Chiefs of Missions. Chief of Missions are often the Ambassador but this does not need to be the case. According to the Foreign Affairs Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-465, Section 102(3) (22 U.S.C. 3902)) a Chief of Mission is "[t]he principal officer in charge of a diplomatic mission of the United States or of a United States office abroad which is designated by the Secretary of State as diplomatic in nature, including any individual assigned under section 502(c) to be temporarily in charge of such a mission or office." The data reflect the three classes of diplomatic representation established by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article 14: ambassador or nuncio (accredited to the Head of State); envoy, minister, or *internuncio* (accredited to the Head of State); and *chargé d'affaires* (accredited to the Minister of Foreign Affairs).[6] Having clarified this, for sake of simplicity we will subsequently refer to all Chiefs of Missions as Ambassadors –and conduct robustness checks or clarifications as necessary.

When available, we retrieved the dates of service for each position held by every ambassador, namely the date of entry on duty and date of termination. When one of them was missing, we imputed it with the date of termination of the previous ambassador or with the date of entry of the next ambassador, respectively. Moreover, in some cases, mostly for *chargé d'affaires ad interim* or periods in the late 18th century and early 19th century, dates of service are listed from and to the nearest month. In these cases, we simply assume that the date of event is on the 1st day of that month.

Overall, our ambassador dataset contains 2,916 ambassadors and 4,453 ambassador-appointments

[5] Web: `https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/chiefsofmission`

[6] Although not a signatory, the United States followed Annex 17 to the Congress Treaty of Vienna (March 19, 1815) which established rank and precedence of diplomatic agents (ambassadors, envoys, and *chargés d'affaires*). The Proces-Verbal of the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle (November 9, 1818), recognized ministers resident as an intermediate class between Ministers and *chargés d'affaires*.

spanning from 1779 to 2014. Note that given the availability of other data sources (see below) this number will be reduced in the analyses.

Personal Characteristics We also collected a series of personal characteristics. The key one being career status, which defines whether the ambassador is a *political appointee* (i.e., non-career) or a *non-political* (i.e., career) appointee.[7]

We also were able to compute their age, given the availability of years of birth and death.[8] We also computed the ambassador's gender. To do so, we relied on an algorithm that encodes gender based on names and dates of birth, using either the Social Security Administration's data set of first names by year of birth or the Census Bureau data from 1789 to 1940 (Mullen, 2014). In this way, we inferred the gender for 97.5% of our sample. For the 73 individuals for whom the algorithm failed to predict a gender, we manually coded it based on web searches.

For the purposes of this paper, we excluded ambassadors whose appointment was to Hawaii, Holy See, Texas, Two Sicilies, and International Organizations (IOs).[9] Similarly, across time and geographic regions a given ambassador might be a representative at different countries at the same time. For example, countries such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados have the same ambassador. In these cases, we kept the host country where the ambassador was a resident. For instance in the Caribbean example, we kept Barbados and dropped the other postings. However, this coding decision does not change our results.

Table 1 shows summary statistics for ambassadorial appointments, divided into political appointees and career appointees. The first section of the table examines the number of ambassadorial appointments held by each individual diplomat. For both political and career appointees the median number of appointments held is one. A comparison of the mean number of appointments suggests career diplomats receive more postings than political appointees

[7] Career appointees hold the Foreign Service Officer status. We use non-political appointee, career appointee and Foreign Service Officers interchangeably.

[8] We faced some instances where the information reported exhibit mistakes. An example is the case of Charles Beecher Warren, who despite dying in 1936 appears to hold an appointment in Bahrain between 1989 and 1993. See `https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/warren-charles-beecher`; last accessed June 1st, 2015. We dropped observations with similar irregularities from our data.

[9] IOs and U.S. Offices in IOs include ASEAN, AU, EU, IAEA, ICAO, NATO, OAS, OECD, OSCE, UN, UNAFA, UNESCO, UNIDO, USOARN, UNEO and UNVO.

(1.83 vs 1.51). The second section of table 1 examines the number of career years that each ambassador holds as a head of mission. This section also reports the number of ambassadors who died in office. Such events are more common in political appointees than career diplomats (174 vs 37). However, this difference is largely explained by temporal differences. Prior to 1904 all ambassadors were political appointees and during this time the mortality risk was higher. The final section of table 1 examines the duration of each individual appointment as an ambassador (such appointments form the unit of analysis for our hazard models).

[Table 1 about here.]

3.2 Other data

Political Turnovers We code both U.S. presidential turnovers and foreign (host) country leader turnovers. To do so, we rely on leader survival data from the Archigos database (Goemans et al., 2009) updated by Arias et al. (2015) from 1840 to 2013.

Host Country Variables We analyze three types of host country variables, namely political, economic and security related.

In regards to political variables, besides host country leader turnover, we include a measure of democracy. We rely on Polity IV (2013 version) data from 1800 to 2013 (Marshall et al., 2013). We use the cumulative polity score (*Polity2*) and, to aid interpretation, we standardize it to be between 0 and 1, going from least to most democratic.

For economic variables, we mainly rely on data from the Penn World Tables (version 8.0) from 1950 to 2011. We include standard controls for wealth and market size, namely GDP per capita (Ln, in 2005 US constant dollars) and Population (Ln). For robustness, we also used the same variables from the Maddison Project from 1820 to 2010 (Bolt and van Zanden, 2014) obtaining the same results.[10] We also control for the total volume of dyadic trade between the US and the host country (i.e., Imports plus Exports (Ln)). For this, we use the COW dyadic trade flows (Barbieri et al., 2009) from 1870 to 2009 which we converted to 2009 US constant dollars.

[10] Not reported here, but available upon request.

Finally, we use a battery of security related variables from the Correlates of War dataset. First, *Ally* represents a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the US and the country of appointment have any type of alliance, 0 otherwise.[11] We also include a measure of *Security Affinity*, namely τ_B scores which measure alliance portfolios and their similarity. Finally, we complement these measures of alliance with *UN Voting Affinity* data from 1946 to 2012 (Bailey et al., 2015). This is an affinity index that ranges from -1 (least similar interests) to 1 (most similar interests), based upon 3 types of voting outcomes, namely approval, disapproval, and abstention.

Performance Measures Building upon a subset of the host country variables, we construct performance measures on three dimensions: trade, diplomatic relations and security alignment. For trade, we construct the variable Δ *US Exports* which measures the change in US Exports (in logged terms) from year $t-1$ to t. For diplomatic relations, we coded Δ *UN Voting Affinity* so to analyze the yearly change in UN voting alignment. Finally, for security alignment, we analyze two variables, namely the change in the alliance portfolio, using Δ *Security Affinity* (τ_B), and the variable *New MID*, which takes the value of 1 if a militarized interstate dispute occurs between the US and the host country, 0 otherwise.

Summary statistics are presented in table 2.

[Table 2 about here.]

3.3 Analyses

Two sets of analyses are presented. The first set examines the tenure of ambassadors, both political and non-political appointees. The second set examines the career path of career appointees.

To analyze the tenure of ambassadors, we estimate Cox proportional hazard models. The event we model is the removal of a given ambassador from their appointment. The hazard rate, $h(t)$, represents the conditional probability of being removed at time t, conditional on

[11] COW alliance types contains three, namely defense pact, neutrality pact and *entente*.

having survived up to that time, and is specified as follows:

$$h_{i,a,b}(t) = h_0(t)e^{\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}\beta+\epsilon_{i,a,b}} \tag{1}$$

where the hazard rate is a function of a baseline hazard function $h_0(t)$ and observed covariates, $\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}$. Here, $\mathbf{X}_{i,a,b}$ represents a vector of covariates for ambassador i, country a (US) and country b (host) and where $h_0(t)$ is estimated non-parametrically using the observed time of ambassador removal. The advantage of the Cox model is its flexibility as it does not constrain $h_0(t)$ to take any particular functional form. The covariates operate multiplicatively on $h_0(t)$, shifting the expected risk of ambassador removal proportionally up or down depending on the values of the independent variables and β. For instance, positive coefficient values imply that an increase in the given covariate is associated with an upward shift in the hazard function, $h(t)$ – i.e., an increase in the risk of being removed from the appointment.

In the analyses reported we treat people who died in their final year as ambassador or the year following their final year as censored events. The immediacy of death following such events suggests that poor health or mortality curtailed an ambassador's tenure, rather than a decision to replace them. Although not reported here, the determinants of those people who died in office are straightforward, namely age increases the vulnerability of ambassadors to dying while in office and death becomes less likely over time, possibly due to improvements in health care.[12] We include controls for year and year^2 (normalized to calendar year minus 1900 to avoid large magnitude covariates), although we do not report these temporal controls.

Following our analyses of ambassadorial tenure we will turn to assess the career path of career diplomats. In particular, we ask, following the completion of a term as ambassador, what are the probabilities of *promotion* to a more prestigious ambassadorial appointment, appointment to a *similar* ambassadorial position, *demotion* to a less prestigious posting, or *retirement* (meaning the ambassador does not receive another posting).

[12]Some analysis show the impact of political appointee increasing the risk of death in office. However, these effects disappear once controlling for year. There were no career appointments prior to 1904, tenure were longer in that period and people tended to die younger.

4 Ambassadorial Tenure

4.1 Basic Statistics

The diplomatic workload of the US State Department has grown greatly over the history of the US. Figure 1 shows the number of ambassadorial appointments the US had over time. During the 18th Century the US had an average of 5 ambassadorial appointments. During the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries this average grew to 31, 109, and 169, respectively.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Initially, all ambassadors were political appointees and this remained the pattern until 1904. As the number of missions to be staffed grew, the US increasingly relied on professional (career) appointees. Figure 2 shows the proportion of career ambassadors. Today, about three quarters of all US missions are headed by a career diplomat rather than a political appointee. Figure 2 also shows the average length of tenure over time. Prior to 1800, the average ambassadorial tenure was over 4 years, reaching over 10 years at the beginning of the 19th Century. During most of 19th Century tenures oscillated between about 2 and 4 years. Following the Second World War average tenures have settled to around 2 years. Transport time and the bureaucratization of the diplomatic service probably account for many of these trends. Prior to air and motorized travel it could take many months for an ambassador to reach his posting.

[Figure 2 about here.]

We now turn from descriptive statistic of ambassadorial tenure to systematic analyses of the determinants that lead to ambassador turnover.

4.2 Cox Proportionate Analyses of Ambassadorial Tenure

Table 3 examines the survival of 3,752 ambassadors. The Cox proportionate hazard analyses contain 13,923 ambassador-host-nation-year units of observation. 222 of the observations were censored. This censoring occurs for two reasons; either the ambassador is still serving in the last year for which we have data or we coded the observation as censored because of

ambassadorial death (As described above, this was coded as dying in the year or the year following leaving office). These analyses are intended to include as many observation as possible –the earliest observation is from 1800. Hence the analyses include relatively few independent variables. In contrast, the hazard analyses in table 4 include more covariates. Those analyses allow us to test more determinants of ambassadorial tenure, but at the cost of lost observations. Since most of the covariates are only available for the post-war period the analyses, table 4 contains fewer observations (between 6,591 and 5,644 depending data availability).

[Table 3 about here.]

The impact of political factors such as the nature of appointment (political vs career) and political turnover in the US and host-nation are best seen graphically. Figure 3 plots the predicted hazard faced by ambassadors based on estimates from model 1 in table 3 under different contingencies. The left hand panel examines career appointees; political appointees are shown on the right. In both panels the base-case of no political change in either the US or the host nation is shown by the solid black line. Comparing these solid lines across the panels illustrates that both career and political appointee face similar risks, although consistent with the significant negative coefficient on the political appointee variable in model 1, the risk is slightly lower in the political appointee panel.

[Figure 3 about here.]

The dotted lines in figure 3 show the risk faced by an ambassador following presidential leader change in the US. Both career and political appointees show an elevated risk of replacement after presidential change. However, as anticipated, the magnitude of the risk change is vastly larger for political appointees than career diplomats, the effects being around 35% increase and 300% increase, respectively. Throughout all analyses, the impact of US presidential change dominates all other factors in determining ambassadorial tenure.

The dashed lines show the predicted hazard associated with leader turnover in the host-nation. Statistically, these dashed lines are indistinguishable from the base-case and, in the right panel, virtually visually indistinguishable too. Within analyses containing a broad sample of ambassadors and few covariates, political turnover in the host nation has little impact

on ambassadorial tenure. The dash-dot lines examine the impact of political change in both the US and the host-nation and these are likewise statistically indistinguishable from the impact of US turnover alone.

Model 3 in table 3 replaces US Presidential turnout with changes in the party of the President. For instance, the transition between Presidents Reagan and Bush in 1989 is coded as no change; but the change from Bush to Clinton in 1993 is coded as a presidential party change. The results shown in model 3 show a similar pattern to those in model 1. The appendix contains an analogous graph (figure A1) for model 3 and the patterns exhibited are very similar to those seen in figure 3.

The negative coefficients on the democracy variable in the models in table 3 suggest that ambassadors are about 16% less likely to be replaced when serving in a democracy rather than an autocracy. The variables Age and Female are personal characteristics of the ambassador. The estimates in models 1 and 3 suggest these variables have little impact of ambassadorial tenure.

The basic Cox model makes no assumption about the shape of the baseline hazard function $h_0(t)$. However it does assume that hazard rates are proportional across units, i.e. that changes in covariate values shift the hazard function up or down, but do not affect its shape. We test these assumptions using Grambsch-Therneau and Harrell's rho tests. We failed to reject the null for most variables, however, the tests indicate that the proportionate hazard (PH) assumption is violated for the political appointment variable and its interactions with the turnover variables and ambassador age. Model 2 introduces corrections to account for these violations of the PH assumption. Specifically for those variables that fail the PH assumption test, we include an additional variable that is the interaction of the problematic variable and time t. The results, displayed as model 2, show only the non-interacted version of the variables. It should perhaps come as no surprise that the proportionate hazard assumption is rejected for the political appointee variable since the US political tenure is based on a 4 year election cycle and most political appointments are made at the beginning of the term. Hence, the ambassador's tenure in office is correlated with turnover in US presidents. Additionally, as we saw in figure 2, the average length of tenure has declined over time and the proportion of political appointees has also declined, such that, in the data, long tenures are

disproportionately likely to be political appointees. Similarly, actuarial survival has greatly increased over time.[13] As seen in model 2, corrections to control for non-proportionality leave the results substantively similar.

To examine the impact of host-nation characteristics and performance measures, table 4 includes additional covariates. Unfortunately, data availability means a substantial loss of observations. Model 4, 5 and 6 contain different measures of ambassadorial performance. The impact of political factors and personal factors are similar to those seen in the previous analyses. Age and gender have no discernible effect on ambassadorial tenure. The largest substantive effect is US political turnover, particularly for political appointees. Figure A2, in the appendix, illustrates these results and is the analogous graph to figure 3. If anything, it provides stronger support for our findings.

[Table 4 about here.]

Based on the estimates in model 4, table 5 shows the effect of changes in the combination of independent variables on the percentage change in the hazard rate (mean effects and 95% confidence intervals).[14]

[Table 5 about here.]

US Presidential turnover has similar substantive effects to those described in table 3: circa 43% increase in risk for non-political appointees and 298% increase in risk for political appointees. However, differences emerge from the earlier analyzes with respect to the impact of host-nation turnover. For political appointees the mean estimate is that host-nation leader turnover reduces the deposition risk by 21%, however, this difference is not statistically significant as the 95% confidence interval includes 0. Host-nation leader turnover increases the risk faced by non-political appointees by about 33%. Host leader turnover significantly affects

[13] In the subsequent analyses in table 4 UNGA voting affinities also violated the proportionality assumption.

[14] To these estimate these substantive effects, we rely on simulations of 10,000 draws of the estimated beta and variance-covariance matrices, and calculate the percentage change in the hazard as follows:

$$\%\Delta h(t) = \frac{exp(\beta X_2) - exp(\beta X_1)}{exp(\beta X_1)} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

where X_1 is the value of the variable before the change (e.g., Political Appointment $= 0$) and X_2 is the value after the change (e.g., Political Appointment $= 1$).

the career of non-political appointees, but to a smaller extent than US leader change. The impact of US leader change for political appointees is vastly greater than all other effects.

Host-nation characteristics affect tenure, although to a much lower degree than political effects. The level of democracy has no discernible effect on tenure. The analyses suggest tenures are longer in larger (high population) and richer (high GDP per capita) nations. However, these effects are not large. One standard deviation increase from the mean in wealth reduces the risk to tenure on the scale of 25%. In model 5, trade, measured as the logarithm of the sum imports and exports between the US and the host-nation, appear to slightly increase the hazard ambassadors face, but trade is not statistically significant at conventional levels in the other models. The negative coefficient estimates on the UN voting affinity variables suggest ambassadors have shorter tenures in friendly nations, that is, in those nations that vote similarly to the US in the UN General Assembly. The coefficient estimates on security alignment (measured as the τ_B alliance portfolio measure) or alliance variables suggest that the host nation's security alignment with the US has little impact of ambassadorial tenure.

To assess the impact of performance, table 4 includes changes in US exports to the host-nation, changes in United Nations General Assembly voting affinities, changes in security alignments and the onset of militarized disputes. The stated goals of US ambassadors are to improve trade and political relations so improvements on these measures represent ambassadorial success. The negative coefficient estimates on the Δ U.S. Exports variable indicates that an increase in US exports to the host-nation increases tenure. However, the effects are only weakly statistically significant and are substantively small. As seen in table 5, increasing exports by a factor of 2.7 times, an enormous increase, reduces the risks ambassadors face by only 11%. The variable Δ UN Voting Affinity, that measures changes in voting affinities between the US and the host-nation, is included in model 4 and 6. Model 5 and 6 include variables measuring changes in security alignments between the US and the host-nation, Δ Security Alignment (τ_B). Model 5 and 6 include a dummy variable relating to the onset of a new Militarized Interstate Dispute. Neither changes in diplomatic alignment, security alignment or dispute onset appear to significantly affect tenure.

While ambassadors appear to retain their posting longer if they improve US exports, the magnitude of this effect is very small. To reduce their risk of removal by 10% our estimates

suggest an ambassador needs a two to three fold increase in US exports. Ambassadors appear to have to perform spectacularly well to make even a modest increase in their tenure.

Overall, the analyses reveal that the dominant factors affecting ambassadorial tenure are political. US Presidential turnover is by far the strongest determinant of the risk ambassadors face, and this risk is especially high for political appointees. We find no evidence that the personal factors of age and gender affect tenure, beyond the caveat that older ambassadors are more likely to die in office (and we have treated these events as censored observations). Host-nation characteristics affect tenure, but only modestly. Perhaps most disappointingly for concerns about bureaucratic accountability, the relationships between tenure and measures of performance are extremely weak.

To analyze the robustness of these findings, the appendix contains additional results. In particular, table A1 and figures A3 and A4 examine career and political appointees separately. Table A2 contains analyses using the parametric Weibull model. Table A3 contains Cox models with shared frailty based on host nation. Such models can be thought of as equivalent to including country-specific random effects. Finally, the appendix also includes analyses excluding observations according to the role of the head of mission (removing *chargé d'affaires* and keeping only ambassadors). In all cases, these additional analyses produce substantively similar results.

However, before we dismiss the importance of performance, we need to consider the career implications of success. Even if good performance only weakly improves tenure, it might strongly improve an ambassador's chance of gaining another, perhaps more prestigious, posting. It is to such career considerations that we next turn.

5 Ambassadorial Career Considerations

Table 6 summarizes the fate of career diplomats when they leave an ambassadorial posting. The unit of analysis is an ambassador leaving a posting. Since some career diplomats hold up to 8 postings, the same individual may represent multiple observations. We exclude political appointees from this portion of the analysis since their expectation of remaining in a diplomatic posting is much lower and they are expected to return to their former profession.

There are 2,035 ambassadorial terms for which we have data, of these 1,341 appointments end in retirement, which we take to mean that the individual ambassador does not receive another ambassadorial appointment. 694 appointments end with the individual being appointed to head another mission. An ambassador's next job might be more prestigious (*Promotion*), a similar ranking (*Similar Job*), or a less prestigious job (*Demotion*).

[Table 6 about here.]

Defining which posting are ranked as more or less prestigious is not a trivial task, and presumably there are many idiosyncratic features that make one assignment more attractive to an individual than another. Here we base promotion or demotion on an objective ranking of nations based on population size and wealth (per capita GDP). We argue large wealth nations are the most important to the US and therefore constitute the more prestigious postings. To capture this, we create a *Host Nation Rank*. For each year we rank order all the nations from smallest to largest and assign each nation a score due to its percentile ranking. We repeat the same exercise with respect to wealth and assign a Host Nation Rank as the average of these two percentiles. We regard the next appointment as a promotion if the subsequent host nation has a Host Nation Rank score that is 15 or more percentile points higher than the existing posting. A demotion is coded as a 15 point decline.[15]

Given their performance on the current job, we ask if a career ambassador gets another ambassadorial posting, and, if so, whether that posting is a promotion, a demotion or a similar position. We start with the simple question of whether an ambassador is reemployed as an ambassador. Table 7 presents logit analyses of whether an ambassador receives another posting. The models include the personal factors of ambassadors (age and career years of past ambassadorial experience), host nation characteristics (democracy and Host Nation Rank) and performance measures. Ambassadorial tenure varies. Therefore rather than examine the total change in performance scores over an ambassador's tenure we measure them as the yearly average performance (with the exception of the occurrence of a new MID, which we code as any dispute onset during the ambassador's posting).

[15]The results we present are relatively insensitive to the 15 point cutoff and we obtained similar results with smaller or larger cutoffs.

[Table 7 about here.]

Unsurprisingly, old ambassadors are more likely to retire than their younger contemporaries, as evidenced by the negative coefficient on age. Experience appears to count for relatively little. Although the coefficient estimates on career years are positive, they are small and only significant in a single analysis. The host nation characteristics of democracy and Host Nation Rank appear to have no impact on the probability of a subsequent job. Turning to the impact of performance measures, these appear to either have no impact or the opposite of the hypothesized effect. According to model 7, an ambassador who improves US exports is less likely to receive another posting. Shifts in UN Voting Affinity appear to have no impact on the prospects of another posting. With respect to security relations, an improvement in security alignment or avoidance of the onset of a dispute reduce, rather than improve, an ambassador's prospects for another posting.

Contrary to the expectation of bureaucratic accountability arguments, those ambassadors with the best performance measures are the least likely to receive another ambassadorial appointment. However, before dismissing the idea that good performance is rewarded, we further dissect future employment by Promotion, Similar Job or Demotion.

Table 8 contains multinominal logit analyses that, against the base-case of retirement, assess the probabilities of Promotion, Similar Job and Demotion. Model 10 focuses on assessing performance in terms of US export growth, model 11 assess performance with measures of improvements in UN Voting Affinity. Finally, model 12 looks a security based measure of performance. Across all three models, Host Nation Rank shows a consistent pattern. Ambassadors currently in high ranked nations are more likely to be demoted; while those in low ranked nations are more likely to be promoted. We should not be surprised by these results. An ambassador in a highly ranked nation cannot be promoted by our measure as there is nowhere more prestigious to go. Similarly, those in low ranked states cannot be demoted further. As with the analyses seen in table 7, age makes another appointment less likely at any rank.

If ambassadors are rewarded for good performance then we would expect positive coefficients on the *Avg. Δ U.S. Exports, Avg. Δ UN Voting Affinity* and *Avg. Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)*

variables in the Promotion and Similar Job equations. Such a result would indicate ambassadors who improved trade, diplomatic or security relations would be rewarded with another comparable or better job. The results do not support this hypothesis. Most of the performance coefficients are insignificant and the significant coefficients in the Similar Job and Promotion equations indicate better performance reduces career prospects.

[Table 8 about here.]

6 Conclusions

Using data from the US State Department we create a database of the tenure and career path of US ambassadors. We consider four categories of variables (1) Political, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Host-nation characteristics, and (4) Performance measures, and examine how these factors affect ambassadorial tenure. To our knowledge, there are no similar previous studies.

Political factors are by far the most important determinants of tenure. In particular, turnover in the US Presidency makes ambassador replacement much more likely. For non-political appointees, a change in the presidency increases the deposition risk by about 40%; for a political appointee the comparable figure is an increase of about 300%. Turnover within the host-nation government also increases the risk of deposition for career appointees, although not for political appointees.

The personal characteristics of ambassadors have little impact on tenure. Similarly, host nation characteristic have only small effects. The analyses suggest longer tenure for ambassadors in large wealthy nations who are aligned against the US at the United Nations. However, these effects are substantively small.

Bureaucratic accountability arguments suggest that bureaucrats should be rewarded for good performance to incentivize them to work hard. We test these ideas in the context of US ambassadors by examining if improvements in US exports, diplomatic relations and security alignments improve tenure and career prospects. The analyses suggest that improvements in the level of US exports reduce the risk of ambassadorial replacement but that the reduction

is substantively extremely small. Improving diplomatic or security relations appears to have no effect on tenure.

To assess whether there is a link between performance and career, we examined the extent to which performance measures affected whether a career diplomat was given another posting and, if so, was the posting to a more or less prestigious host nation. The results of logit and multinomial logit models suggest performance does not improve reappointment or promotion prospects, and actually appear to harm them. Political factors seem far more important than performance in determining the tenure and career prospects of US ambassadors.

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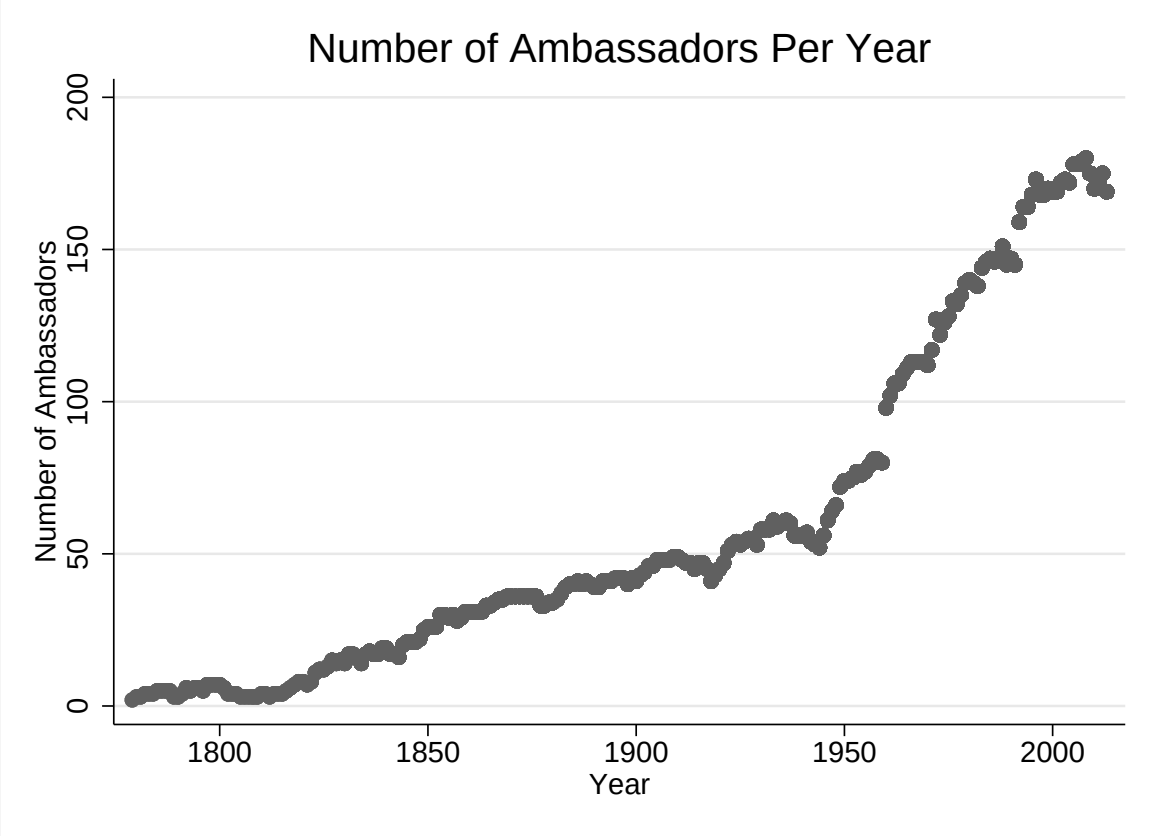

Figure 1: Number of Ambassadors Per Year

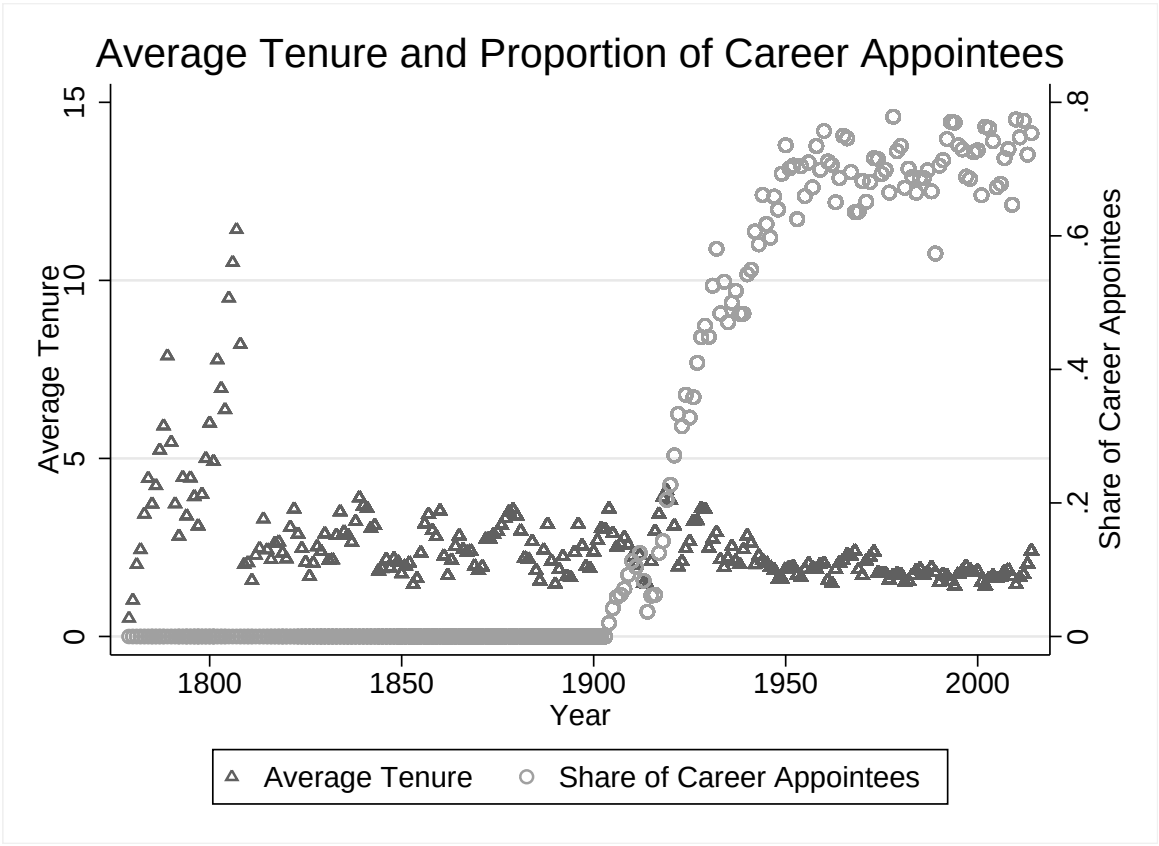

Figure 2: Average Tenure and the Proportion of Career Appointments

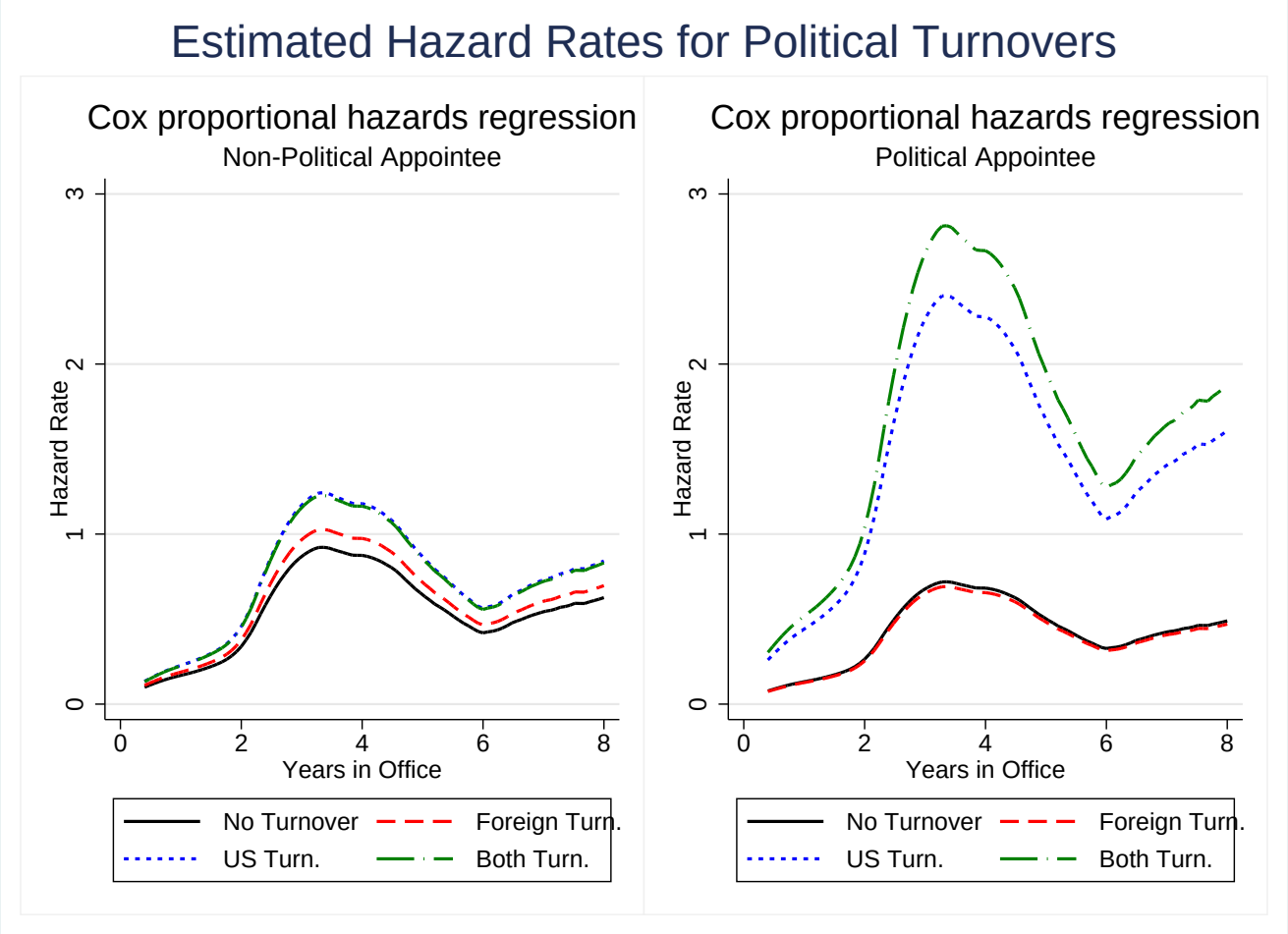

Figure 3: Effect of US and Foreign Leader Turnover on Ambassadorial Tenure

Table 1: **Summary Statistics of Ambassadorial Terms and Number of Positions Held**

Summary Statistics	Political Appointees	Career Appointees
Number of Appointments Held		
Observations	1669	1440
Mean	1.51	1.83
Median	1	1
Max	9	8
Career Years		
Observations	1669	1440
Mean	4.25	4.67
Median	3.13	3.47
Max	33.9	28.3
Died in Office (Number)	174	37
Ambassadorial Appointments (Years in Office)		
Observations	2057	2351
Mean	2.79	2.60
Median	2.47	2.66
Max	27.7	21.2

Table 2: **Summary Statistics**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Political Appointee	0.48	0.5	0	1	16509
U.S. Presidential Turnover	0.12	0.325	0	1	16661
Foreign Country Leader Turnover	0.138	0.345	0	1	16661
Age	54.124	8.021	24	86	16298
Female	0.089	0.285	0	1	16661
Democracy	0.519	0.351	0	1	14707
Population (Ln)	1.937	1.727	-3.144	7.189	8606
GDPpc (Ln)	8.335	1.289	5.287	11.824	8605
Trade [M+X] (Ln)	5.317	2.476	0	13.16	11287
UN Voting Affinity	-0.088	0.417	-1	1	9846
Security Affinity (τ_B)	0.11	0.343	-0.451	1	10772
Ally	0.191	0.393	0	1	16661
Δ U.S. Exports	0.06	0.498	-6.67	7.242	10822
Δ UN Voting Affinity	-0.011	0.166	-2	2	9660
Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)	0.004	0.105	-1.015	1.015	10640
New MID	0.008	0.089	0	1	11033

Table 3: **Cox Proportional Hazards Estimates: US Ambassador's Tenure**

	Presidential Turnover (PH correction)		Presidential Party Turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political Appointee	-0.249***	0.193**	-0.234***
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.098)
U.S. Presidential Turnover	0.299***	0.420***	
	(0.060)	(0.117)	
U.S. Party Turnover			0.340***
			(0.065)
Foreign Country Leader Turnover	0.108	0.015	0.102
	(0.069)	(0.082)	(0.068)
Political Appointee × U.S. Turnover	0.910***	1.20***	
	(0.095)	(0.181)	
Political Appointee × Foreign Turnover	-0.148	-0.084	-0.090
	(0.110)	(0.118)	(0.104)
Political Appointee × U.S. Turnover × Foreign Turn.	0.320	0.318	
	(0.216)	(0.167)	
U.S. Turnover × Foreign Turnover	-0.121	-0.136	
	(0.151)	(0.167)	
Political Appointee × U.S. Party Turn.			1.340***
			(0.108)
Political Appointee × U.S. Party Turn. × Foreign Turn.			0.116
			(0.247)
U.S. Party Turn. × Foreign Turn.			-0.109
			(0.176)
Age	-0.003	-0.009*	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Female	0.051	0.225***	0.068
	(0.052)	(0.056)	(0.052)
Democracy	-0.173***	-0.226**	-0.173***
	(0.049)	(0.111)	(0.050)
Observations	13923	13923	13923
# of subjects	3752	3752	3752
# of failures	3530	3530	3530

Robust standard errors clustered at the ambassador level in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4: **Cox Proportional Hazards Estimates**

Presidential Turnover	(4)	(5)	(6)
Political Appointee	-0.164**	-0.110	-0.105
	(0.080)	(0.080)	(0.083)
U.S. Presidential Turnover	0.341***	0.350***	0.356***
	(0.076)	(0.082)	(0.084)
Foreign Country Leader Turnover	0.229***	0.248***	0.277***
	(0.085)	(0.093)	(0.096)
Political Appointee × U.S. Turnover	1.094***	1.055***	1.016***
	(0.151)	(0.167)	(0.168)
Political Appointee × Foreign Turnover	-0.461***	-0.475***	-0.538***
	(0.167)	(0.171)	(0.181)
Political Appointee × U.S. Turnover × Foreign Turnover	0.665**	0.648*	0.792**
	(0.327)	(0.344)	(0.363)
U.S. Turnover × Foreign Turnover	-0.439**	-0.327	-0.493**
	(0.197)	(0.218)	(0.228)
Age	-0.006	-0.006	-0.009*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Female	0.034	-0.041	-0.045
	(0.095)	(0.108)	(0.111)
Democracy	0.107	0.026	0.090
	(0.078)	(0.089)	(0.089)
Population (Ln)	-0.081***	-0.134***	-0.104***
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.029)
GDPpc (Ln)	-0.105***	-0.183***	-0.146***
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.036)
Trade [M+X] (Ln)	0.007	0.061***	0.027
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.025)
UN Voting Affinity	-0.339***		-0.249***
	(0.077)		(0.093)
Security Alignment (τ_B)		-0.025	-0.082
		(0.215)	(0.229)
Ally		-0.093	0.037
		(0.151)	(0.171)
Δ U.S. Exports	-0.092	-0.144**	-0.135*
	(0.064)	(0.072)	(0.073)
Δ UN Voting Affinity	-0.065		-0.048
	(0.168)		(0.175)
Δ Security Alignment (τ_B)		0.315	0.346
		(0.525)	(0.513)
New MID		-0.090	0.114
		(0.405)	(0.460)
Observations	6591	5958	5644
# of subjects	1879	1684	1606
# of failures	1713	1534	1453

Robust standard errors clustered at the ambassador level in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5: **Percentage Change in the Hazard of Ambassador Removal For Different 'Marginal Effects' (Model 4)**

Change in Observed Covariate	$\%\Delta h(t)$	95% C.I.
Political Appointee	-9.6%	[-23.2%,6.2%]
US Turnover (Non-Political Appointee)	43.1%	[21,1%,68.5%]
US Turnover (Political Appointee)	298.6%	[195.7%,423.9%]
Foreign Turnover (Non-Political Appointee)	32.4%	[9.7%,58.9%]
Foreign Turnover (Political Appointee)	-21.9%	[-43.3%,4.8%]
1 SD Δ GDP (Ln)	-24.1%	[-34.2%,-13.3%]
Δ US Exports	-11.5%	[-22.9%,0.9%]
1 SD Δ in Δ UN Voting Affinity	-.7%	[-6.2%,4.9%]

Note: We consider a 1 unit change in US exports, 1 unit on the logarithm scale –i.e., approximately 2.7 times increase.

Table 6: **Career Path of US Foreign Service Officers (career ambassadors)**

	Retirement	**Another Job**	*Total*
Retirement	1,341	0	1,341
Demotion	0	84	84
Similar Job	0	390	390
Promotion	0	220	220
Total	1,341	694	2,035

Table 7: **Logit Model: Are Career Ambassadors Appointed to Another Ambassadorial Position?**

	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Another Job	Another Job	Another Job
Age	-0.161***	-0.148***	-0.178***
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.018)
Career Years	0.052*	0.020	0.037
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.033)
Host Country Ranking	0.002	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Democracy	-0.007	-0.086	0.155
	(0.196)	(0.189)	(0.225)
Avg. Δ U.S. Exports	-1.297***		
	(0.365)		
Avg. Δ UN Voting Affinity		2.238	
		(1.376)	
Avg. Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)			-2.292**
			(1.000)
Max. New MID			1.241***
			(0.468)
Observations	1232	1304	984
Log-Likelihood	-731.30	-787.91	-574.06

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 8: **Multinomial Logit: Promotion, Demotion, Similar Job or Retirement**

	(10) Trade	(11) UN Affinity	(12) Sec. Alignment
Demotion			
Host Nation Rank	0.048***	0.053***	0.050***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Democracy	0.142	-0.150	0.273
	(0.448)	(0.429)	(0.494)
Age	-0.156***	-0.124***	-0.184***
	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.039)
Career Years	-0.015	-0.055	-0.014
	(0.070)	(0.067)	(0.075)
Avg. Δ U.S. Exports	-0.471		
	(0.825)		
Avg. Δ UN Voting Affinity		-0.261	
		(3.351)	
Avg. Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)			-4.158
			(2.574)
Max. New MID			0.281
			(1.115)
Similar Job			
Host Nation Rank	0.012**	0.009*	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Democracy	-0.213	-0.320	-0.052
	(0.234)	(0.229)	(0.274)
Age	-0.135***	-0.126***	-0.151***
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.021)
Career Years	0.034	0.007	0.020
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.039)
Avg. Δ U.S. Exports	-1.315***		
	(0.432)		
Avg. Δ UN Voting Affinity		2.284	
		(1.682)	
Avg. Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)			-2.482**
			(1.239)
Max. New MID			1.285**
			(0.510)
Promotion			
Host Nation Rank	-0.039***	-0.046***	-0.043***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Democracy	0.259	0.364	0.492
	(0.321)	(0.316)	(0.364)
Age	-0.208***	-0.192***	-0.219***
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.026)
Career Years	0.096**	0.055	0.086
	(0.047)	(0.050)	(0.053)
Avg. Δ U.S. Exports	-1.523***		
	(0.587)		
Avg. Δ UN Voting Affinity		2.128	
		(2.142)	
Avg. Δ Security Affinity (τ_B)			-1.632
			(1.502)
Max. New MID			1.416**
			(0.671)
Observations	1205	1275	960
Log-Likelihood	-1074.78	-1141.52	-854.20

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$