

From Political Pathways to Legislative Folkways: Electoral Reform, Professionalization, and Representation in the U.S. Senate

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Abstract

The Seventeenth Amendment transferred responsibility for selecting senators from state legislatures to voters. Scholars argue that voters' ability to sanction performance *ex post* altered senators' legislative activities. I focus on voters' *ex ante* screening of senators. Using original data on senators' political experiences, I show that direct elections increased the professionalization of pre-Senate careers. I then use sequence analysis methods to identify career paths to the Senate. Pre-Senate career paths help explain which senators received important committee assignments. These findings challenge claims that direct elections had minimal effects on the Senate's composition and that recruitment is unrelated to legislative behavior.

Keywords

Congress, political careers, sequence analysis, Seventeenth Amendment, committee assignments

Throughout the post–World War II era, the Senate has been dominated by professional politicians, many of whom have logged decades inside the chamber. Scholars have suggested that senators' extensive political experience is partly responsible for traditional Senate norms or “folkways,” such as courtesy and institutional patriotism (Matthews 1960). However, such professionalism has not prevented the erosion of these norms in recent years. Indeed, both scholars and practitioners agree that the Senate is more dysfunctional today than perhaps at any time in its history. For example, the ideological gap between the two parties has grown and the Senate is more polarized now than at any point since Reconstruction (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Scholars have also observed a divergence between the views of senators and their constituents (Bafumi and Herron 2010), as well as escalating levels of obstruction and partisan warfare (Lee 2009; Smith 2011; Theriault 2013). These aspects of the contemporary Senate have compromised its ability to function and undermined its representation of the electorate.

While scholars continue to debate the causes of the Senate's dysfunction, some prominent elected officials and reform organizations have concluded that the Senate's long-serving incumbents are to blame. Professional politicians, they argue, do what is best for their career rather

than what is best for the country. To remedy this problem, these officials and organizations have called for changes to the rules by which senators are selected and the Senate is operated. One such reform, the repeal of the Seventeenth Amendment, would radically alter how senators are selected. Instead of being directly elected by voters, senators would once again be chosen by state legislatures. Such a change would require a constitutional amendment, but if successful, it would alter the Senate's composition and, potentially, its operations dramatically.¹

How might such a change influence who is elected to the Senate and how senators behave in office? Would the repeal of the Seventeenth Amendment result in fewer professional politicians in the Senate, as many reformers hope? Empirical studies of the Seventeenth Amendment are needed to address these questions and are especially relevant in an era where large changes in the rules governing how senators are selected are being considered. In light of this, it is not surprising that scholars have recently

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shown great interest in the Seventeenth Amendment's effects on senators' legislative activities (Gailmard and Jenkins 2009; Meinke 2008). These studies focus on one aspect of the switch to direct elections—the replacement of state legislatures with statewide electorates as principals responsible for sanctioning senators' performance, *ex post*.

I focus on a different aspect of the switch to direct elections—the elimination of state legislatures' power to *ex ante* screen senators, that is, recruitment. Specifically, I examine how the switch to direct elections changed senators' previous political experiences and how these changes contributed to changes in legislative activity. Using original data on the political experiences of senators serving between 1868 and 1944, I demonstrate that direct elections led to an increase in the political professionalization of pre-Senate careers.² That is, after the Seventeenth Amendment, senators spent more time in public office before reaching the Senate. To illustrate the importance of changes in senators' political experiences, I then analyze whether differences in the content of pre-Senate career paths help explain which senators received assignments to the Senate's most valued committees—a critical outcome that shapes senators' legislative activities and influence. To this end, I use sequence analysis methods developed to study DNA sequences to identify the major career paths to the Senate during this period. I find that career paths that conferred extensive legislative expertise helped some gain access to the Senate's top committees—positions where senators could effectively represent their state's policy interests. This relationship remained strong after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted, even as valued assignments were distributed more widely to the Senate's more professionalized membership.

These results have implications not only for debates about the Seventeenth Amendment but also for how we understand the link between institutions and political professionalization. Indeed, the switch to direct elections offers a unique opportunity to examine the effects of institutional design on political recruitment and representation. Although based on historical data, my findings illustrate how changing *ex ante* screening mechanisms can influence who becomes senators and how they and the Senate function. In doing so, they challenge previous claims that direct elections had minimal effects on the Senate's composition and that political recruitment is unrelated to legislative behavior. Whether more professionalized senators would alleviate the Senate's unrepresentative quality and inability to function is difficult to say. What this study does suggest is that voters tend to prefer professional politicians and those with specialized expertise are best equipped to adapt to the Senate's folkways. Proposals for reforming the Senate must account for both empirical realities.

The Seventeenth Amendment, Political Experience, and Committee Assignments

In the decades following ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment, a consensus emerged that this radical change had registered little impact. Writing in 1906, Haynes observed how a succession of graft and bribery scandals involving aspiring candidates and state legislatures had reduced public confidence in the Senate and indirect elections in particular. When the amendment was finally passed by a reluctant Senate and sent to the states in 1912, proponents of direct elections for senators looked forward to a sea change in representation and responsiveness. Three decades later, Haynes commented on the naive predictions of revolutionary change (Haynes 1938, 1040–1043). Haynes's observations were later confirmed by others (Daynes 1971; Riker 1955), who found that the Seventeenth Amendment had little effect on senators' political experiences or legislative activities.

For a while, these impressions were the last words on the Seventeenth Amendment. In recent years, however, scholars have renewed their attention to its myriad effects. Several studies examine the impact of direct elections on Senate turnover (Wawro and Schickler 2006). Others focus on senators' legislative activities. Bernhard and Sala (2006), for example, argue that senators facing reelection contests shifted their ideological positions to better appeal to statewide constituencies. Inside the chamber, Meinke (2008) finds that directly elected senators engaged in more visible activities such as roll call participation and bill introduction. Schiller (2006), in contrast, argues that senators engaged extensively in such activities to broaden their popular base of support well before the Seventeenth Amendment. Gailmard and Jenkins (2009) find that senators' roll call records were more responsive to statewide electorates following the Seventeenth Amendment.

These studies of senators' legislative activities focus on how the switch to direct elections altered the *ex post* sanctioning mechanisms for disciplining unsatisfactory performance. That is, senators changed their behavior because voters, rather than state legislatures, were responsible for punishing their performance. Scholars have paid less attention to *ex ante* screening mechanisms, that is, how the switch to direct elections changed the political experiences of senators and whether these changes contributed to changes in legislative activity. The little research that does examine the relationship between the Seventeenth Amendment and senators' political experiences finds that the effects were minimal (Brandes Crook and Hibbing 1997; Daynes 1971).

The lack of evidence linking the Seventeenth Amendment to pre-Senate political experiences is

puzzling. Brandes Crook and Hibbing (1997) argue that a record of public service ought to attract voters to a greater degree than state legislators. The limited size of state legislatures facilitated particularistic exchanges between Senate candidates and state legislators before direct elections (Schiller, Stewart, and Xiong 2013). Under this system, professional politicians—those who make their living from politics and have spent much of their working lives in public offices—enjoyed few advantages. Changing to a system where senators had to win the support of statewide electorates, however, ought to have favored politicians with experience in appealing to voters. This was likely to be especially true in states with direct primaries, where candidates assumed greater personal responsibility over campaign strategy and organization (Ware 2002). A strong record of public service was more likely to resonate with voters than one's personal popularity with party elites.

In explaining the weak evidence for the Seventeenth Amendment's effects on senators' political experiences, scholars have cited practices like the public canvas, whereby Senate incumbents publicized which state legislative candidates supported their reelection. Such pre-election coordination might have induced state legislatures to choose senators who were in tune with voters' preferences (Riker 1955; Stewart 1992). If voters were already getting the senators they wanted, then scholars should observe no change in senators' experiences. This explanation is difficult to reconcile with the widespread public dissatisfaction that fueled the campaign for direct elections. Nor can it account for the accumulating evidence of changes in senators' legislative activities.

Another possibility is that there are meaningful differences in the types of senators selected by state legislators and voters but that existing measures of political experience have failed to detect them. Indeed, the few studies that consider pre-Senate political experience use crude measures of it. For example, Brandes Crook and Hibbing use a four-valued variable indicating whether senators held no public office, a local-, a state-, or a federal-level office (Brandes Crook and Hibbing 1997). Such measures, which capture neither the amount of public service nor fine-grained differences in the content of pre-Senate careers, do not offer ideal tests of the causes (or consequences) of political experience.

Even if a link between the Seventeenth Amendment and pre-Senate political experiences could be established, it is unclear how changes in senators' political experiences might affect their legislative activities. Scholars have long recognized the absence of evidence linking political recruitment to legislative behavior (Matthews 1984). In particular, little research examines whether senators' political experiences affected their committee assignments before and after the Seventeenth Amendment.³

This is unfortunate given the importance of committee service to the ability of senators to effectively represent their state's policy interests (Canon and Stewart 2001; Schiller 2000). As Sinclair (1998, 277) writes, "the distribution of valued committee positions provides the single best observable indicator of the distribution of influence in Congress."

In this study, I use original data on pre-Senate careers to overcome deficiencies in existing measures of political experience. These data reveal that the political experiences of senators did change with the switch to direct elections. These changes are consistent with the theory that voters used *ex ante* screening to realize their preferences for professional politicians. To determine whether changes in senators' political experiences affected their legislative activities and influence, I use sequence analysis techniques to identify the main pathways to the Senate. The results of this analysis indicate that differences in senators' office-holding activities can be reduced to a small number of pre-Senate career paths. Senators whose career paths conferred extensive legislative expertise were more successful in gaining access to the Senate's top committees. This relationship remained strong after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted.

Hypotheses

My predictions about the effects of the Seventeenth Amendment on pre-Senate political experiences can be stated simply. In general, I expect the Seventeenth Amendment to increase the professionalization of pre-Senate careers. The rationale for this prediction is two-fold. First, it is likely that professional politicians will be better vote-getters than amateurs (e.g., those with no political experience). Indeed, scholars have found that candidates with experience in elective offices do better in congressional elections than candidates who lack such experience (Carson and Roberts 2005). Candidates who have held an elective office have experience running campaigns. They are also likely to be better known than candidates who have never held public office. The value of these attributes is magnified in statewide contests, where name recognition, organization, and campaign skills are crucial.

Second, as Brandes Crook and Hibbing (1997) argue, it is likely that voters were more favorably disposed to professional politicians than were state legislators. It is perhaps easy to see why state legislators might prefer less experienced politicians. Professional politicians are more likely than amateur politicians to have established independent bases of political support. Such politicians might be tempted to follow their own office and policy goals rather than faithfully represent the preferences of state legislative majorities (Gailmard and Jenkins 2009).

Why might voters prefer more professional politicians? One reason stems from the environment that produced the Seventeenth Amendment. Reformers took advantage of lurid stories of cozy relationships between special interests and state legislatures to galvanize support for direct elections (Haynes 1938; Schiller, Stewart, and Xiong 2013). To voters, professional politicians might have been a welcome change compared with the wealthy and, in some instances, corrupt senators elected by state legislatures. Another reason that voters might prefer professional politicians is that experience can act as a cue for future effectiveness (Fearon 1999). Voters have less capacity to monitor the effectiveness of senators than state legislatures. Lacking more specific information, voters might have taken a senator's resumé as a signal of likely success inside the Senate.

As Riker (1955) points out, however, some states were already electing senators in statewide popular elections prior to passage of the Seventeenth Amendment. Indeed, the amendment merely applied reforms adopted by individual states to all Senate elections. Even after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted, there were exceptions to this uniformity. In cases where a Senate incumbent failed to serve out his or her term, some states allowed governors or state legislatures to appoint a successor. Thus, many senators after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted were appointed rather than elected. Because I believe direct elections, rather than passage of the amendment, is the mechanism driving pre-Senate professionalization, I expect the relationship between direct elections and professionalization to be even stronger than the relationship between the Seventeenth Amendment and professionalization.

Although voters might expect professional politicians to be more effective advocates, the relationship between pre-Senate professionalization and senators' legislative activities and influence is not straightforward. One might predict that experienced senators, such as Alben Barkley, a former judge and representative from Kentucky who Matthews (1960) calls an exemplar of the professional politician, would be well-equipped to gain entry to the Senate's centers of power. However, the Senate attracts many experienced politicians who are unable to mount a successful Senate career. Herbert Lehman, for example, served four terms as Governor of New York. Lehman became well-known for opposing McCarthyism, but he achieved few legislative successes and retired after one term, frustrated by the Senate's procedures and norms.

These examples suggest that the content of pre-Senate experience might be as important as the amount of time spent in office. Indeed, as I show below, the content of the pre-Senate career varies substantially among senators with similar amounts of experience. What types of pre-Senate experience might translate into successful Senate

careers? I predict that the most beneficial experiences are those that help new senators adapt to the "folkways" of the Senate. Specifically, senators with considerable legislative experience will have greater awareness of the committee system and will be more effective at lobbying for good assignments. Such experiences might also serve as a signal of competence to those making assignments. In this regard, extensive service in the U.S. House should be particularly beneficial. Former House members have had an opportunity to observe the Senate's internal norms and are likely to be known by other senators. Extensive service in a state legislature should also be helpful. By implication, senators with little or no political experience have none of these advantages and will be less likely to receive coveted committee posts.

Data and Measurement of Pre-Senate Political Experience

The original data used in this study consist of complete career sequences for individuals who began their Senate careers between 1868 and 1944. My primary source is the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, which describes the background and accomplishments of members of the U.S. Congress. I focus on the 1868–1944 period, a formative era that saw the adoption of direct elections and emergence of the modern Senate (Matthews 1960; Ripley 1969). For the 832 senators who began service in this period, I collected information on their office-holding experiences and merged this with data on their service activities (e.g., committee assignments; Canon, Nelson, and Stewart 1998), constituency characteristics, and institutional settings.

The procedures used to assemble the sequence of public and private offices held by each senator encompassed three steps. In step 1, biographical information was transferred from the *Directory* to a database file. Each office that a senator held was entered, with start and end dates recorded for each instance of public service. In step 2, public offices were further assigned one of twenty values from a typology of local, state, and federal offices (see the online appendix at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>). Each office type was given a letter code to distinguish it from other types. In step 3, the sequence of offices was constructed by assembling an "office-year string" for every office in the pre-Senate career. Each string consists of a letter code for the office repeated once for each year the office was occupied. The office-year strings were then concatenated to form a final career sequence.

This original dataset of career sequences enables me to calculate more precise measures of pre-Senate professionalization and conduct more detailed analyses of the content of pre-Senate careers than existing studies. To

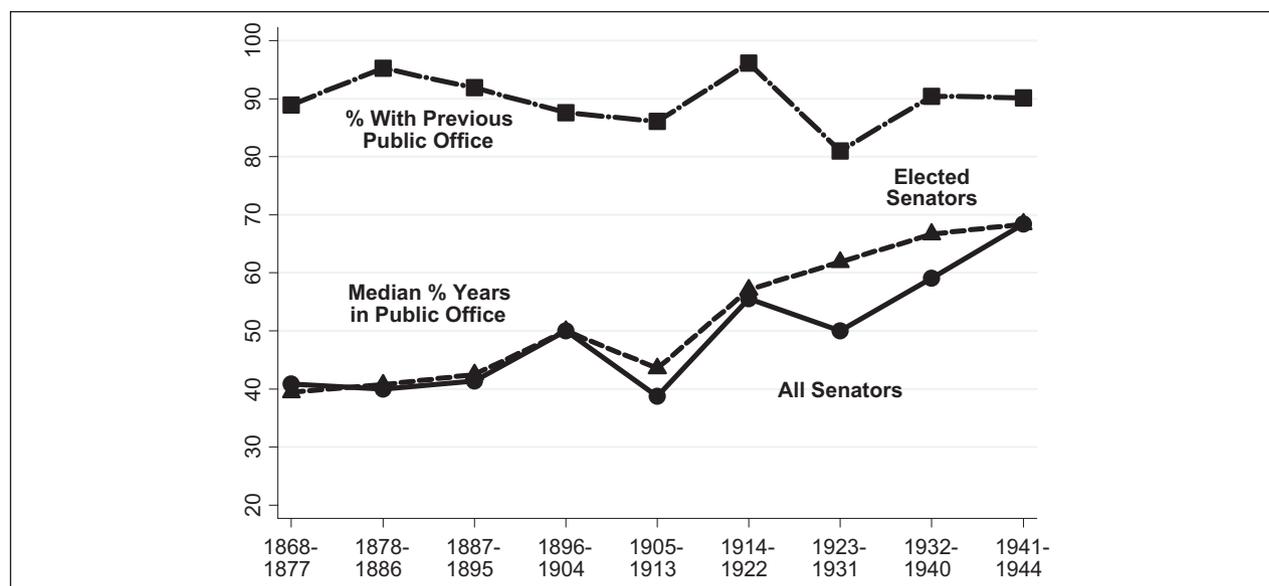


Figure 1. Share of senators holding previous public office and pre-Senate professionalization by era.

measure pre-Senate professionalization, I calculated the proportion of pre-Senate career years spent in public office—equivalent to the number of years spent in public office divided by the total number of years in the pre-Senate career.⁴ This variable captures differences among senators in their political experiences, with large proportions indicating high levels of professionalization. I use this measure as the dependent variable in my analyses assessing the impact of the Seventeenth Amendment on political professionalization.

The benefits of more precise measurement are illustrated in Figure 1, which plots senators' office-holding experiences across nine intervals from 1868 to 1944. The dash-dotted line shows the share of senators that held any public office before reaching the Senate. This measure, a widely used indicator of experience, changes little. In contrast, the solid line, which plots the median level of pre-Senate professionalization using original data, shows that political experience was increasing. The trend depicted by the dashed line, which plots the same measure for senators elected by state legislatures or voters, is more pronounced. The median elected senator spent 40 percent of pre-Senate career years in public office at the start of the period. By the end, the median elected senator was spending 67 percent of these years in public office. Both lines indicate that much of this increase occurred after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted.

Pre-Senate Career Paths

To test my predictions about how changes in the content of pre-Senate careers will affect senators' committee

assignments, I use sequence analysis to identify the major career paths that senators followed to the office. I use these career paths as independent variables in my analyses that assess the effects of political experience on senators' legislative activities and influence.

Sequence analysis refers to a body of methods that take whole sequences of events as units of analysis, rather than treat each event as an individual data point. They are well suited to assess differences among complex sequences of events—in this case, office-holding events—and have been used in many applied settings (Macindoe and Abbott 2004). Specifically, sequence analysis uses an optimal matching algorithm to measure the difference (i.e., distance) between pairs of sequences in a dataset. For each pair, the algorithm uses two operations to transform one sequence into the other. The first, *replacement*, involves replacing one element with another element. The second operation, *insertion-deletion*, involves inserting or deleting an element from a sequence. In general, two sequences that require many operations to transform one into the other are more different (i.e., further apart) than two sequences that require few operations.

The process used to calculate differences between pairs of sequences can be illustrated by comparing the pre-Senate careers of George Hoar and Tasker Oddie, displayed in Figure 2. The Hoar sequence combines two stints in the state legislature (“RR” and “RR”) and eight years in the U.S. House (“HHHHHHHH”). The Oddie sequence includes two years as district attorney (“UU”), three years in the state legislature (“RRR”), and four years as governor (“GGGG”). As Figure 2 shows, ten operations are needed to transform the Oddie into the

George Frisbie Hoar (R-MA)										
R	R	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S
φ	U	U	R	R	R	G	G	G	G	S
Tasker Oddie (R-NV)										
G = Governor; H = House; R = State Legislative; S = Senate; U = State Law Enforcement										
Step 1: Insert element R										
Step 2: Replace element U with R										
Step 3: Replace U with element H										
Step 4: Replace R with H										
Step 5: Replace R with H										
Step 6: Replace R with H										
Step 7: Replace element G with H										
Step 8: Replace G with H										
Step 9: Replace G with H										
Step 10: Replace G with H										

Figure 2. Alignment of pre-Senate career sequences for two U.S. Senators.

Hoar sequence. Aside from the insertion of “R” in step 1, all of the operations are replacements. Steps 2 to 3 replace “UU” with “R” and “H,” steps 4 to 6 replace “R” with “H,” and steps 7 to 10 replace “G” with “H.” Using similar procedures, the algorithm generated distances for all pairs of my 832 senators (345,696 pairs!). These distances capture differences in senators’ office-holding activities and form the raw material for cluster analysis programs designed to recover relevant groups in data.

I analyzed these distances using Ward’s hierarchical clustering method (Ward 1963). The procedure began with each of the 832 pre-Senate careers in its own cluster or group. Pre-Senate careers were then successively joined until a single cluster with all 832 careers was reached. At each joining of one pre-Senate career or group of careers with another, Ward’s method minimizes the “information loss” that results. This is achieved by forming groups where distances within the group are small and distances between the groups are large. To determine the number of groups, or career paths, in my dataset, I considered fit statistics for nineteen possible clustering solutions (see the online appendix). These fit statistics suggest that the seven-group solution best describes the data.

The results of the sequence analysis, which partitioned the 832 pre-Senate careers into seven career paths to the Senate, are described in Table 1. These paths suggest that pre-Senate careers are distinguished both by differences in the types of public offices held and the amount of time spent in public service. The first path, labeled *Amateur*, consists of 132 individuals who reached the Senate with little or no political experience. Three other paths, labeled

Legislator, *State Legislator*, and *U.S. House*, identify senators who reached the office after stints in mostly legislative offices. Two paths, *Executive* and *Judge*, describe pre-Senate careers dominated by state executive and judicial offices. Finally, a heterogeneous group, labeled *Administrator*, identifies individuals who became senators following stints in administrative and law enforcement offices at different levels of government.

These seven pre-Senate career paths differ in the number and type of public offices held by individuals and the extent of pre-Senate public service. As Table 1 shows, the mean number of offices ranges from 0.51, for *Amateur*, to 4.05, for *Judge*. The fourth column indicates the percent within each path that held elective office before reaching the Senate. This measure of experience, though frequently used by scholars, does a poor job of accounting for pre-Senate political experiences. Former legislators and state executives all held elective office while less than one-quarter of amateurs did. About half of former administrators and 70 percent of judges did so. Thus, a binary measure of pre-Senate experience obscures differences both within the group of senators who never held elective office and among those who did so.

The fifth and sixth columns of Table 1 report the number and percentage of pre-Senate career years spent in public office. The latter is my measure of pre-Senate professionalization. Apart from those in the *Amateur* category who spent little time in public office, those following the *Legislator* path spent the least whereas those following the *Judge* path spent the most time in public office. Like the binary measure, however, a simple calculation of years spent in public office obscures important

Table 1. Description of Pre-Senate Career Paths.

Career path	N	Offices occupied	Elective office	Years public service	% Years public service	Description	Sample career
Amateur	132	0.51	21.21	0.53	17.96	Few offices or none	S
Legislator	142	2.57	100.00	5.30	43.79	Short, state legislative or U.S. House	RRS
Administrator	237	3.02	59.07	9.59	50.04	Local, state, or federal administration, law enforcement	AAAAS
Executive	95	2.83	100.00	7.56	53.79	Governor or statewide elected	GGGS
Judge	40	4.05	72.50	17.15	65.50	State or federal judicial	WWWWWWWS
State Legislator	46	3.02	100.00	13.82	70.42	Long, state legislative	RRRRRRRS
U.S. House	140	3.26	100.00	15.19	71.33	Long, U.S. House	HHHHHHHHHS

Numbers in the third through sixth columns are cluster means. S = Senate; R = State Legislative; A = State Administrative; G = Governor; W = State Judge; H = House.

differences. For example, senators following the *Administrator* and *Executive* paths spent similar amounts of time in public office, but the types of offices (local, state, and federal vs. state only, appointed vs. elective) they occupied differ markedly.

Overall, both measures reveal important differences in pre-Senate political experiences. These differences have been ignored by scholars, mostly because the data needed to uncover them have not been readily available. That senators following the *Amateur* path have the lowest rate of previous elective office-holding and pre-Senate professionalization and senators following the *State Legislator* and *U.S. House* paths score high on these indicators attests to the validity of the constructs used in this study. Stated differently, the pre-Senate professionalization and career path constructs converge with other measures of political experience where they ought to theoretically. Thus, I use my measure of pre-Senate professionalization—the proportion of pre-Senate career years spent in public office—to test my hypotheses about the effects of direct elections. In the analysis of senators' committee assignments, I use dummy variables for the *Amateur*, *State Legislator*, *U.S. House*, *Executive*, and other paths to test my hypotheses about the effects of pre-Senate political experience.

Research Design and Data Analysis

To assess the effects of electoral reform on pre-Senate professionalization, I use a before-and-after quasi-experimental design with the Seventeenth Amendment as a treatment (comparing untreated pre-Amendment observations with post-Amendment treated observations). My

dependent variable is the proportion of pre-Senate career years spent in public offices. This variable captures important differences among senators in their pre-Senate political experiences, with large proportions indicating high levels of professionalization. Because it is likely that an individual's status (i.e., public or private) in one year is related to his status in other years, I use an extended beta-binomial model. This model accounts for potential "group" effects across years within individual careers and is appropriate where the dependent variable is a proportion summarizing the outcome of individual trials that are not necessarily independent (King 1989).

My main independent variable is a dummy variable, *Seventeenth Amendment*, that identifies individuals who began serving after ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment. Unfortunately, this variable imperfectly captures the electoral mechanism I believe is responsible for increasing pre-Senate professionalization. Following ratification, most senators reached the office by winning a statewide popular election. Others, however, were appointed. Moreover, even before the Seventeenth Amendment, some states were electing senators in popular elections. Thus, I also run a model replacing *Seventeenth Amendment* with two dummy variables. *Direct Election* identifies individuals who reached the Senate by winning a binding statewide popular election.⁵ *Appointed* indicates those appointed to fill vacancies left by senators who failed to serve out their term.

Of course, other factors likely contributed to professionalization during this period. To minimize the threat to validity posed by alternative explanations, I assembled two control groups—House members and state governors serving between 1868 and 1944. Specifically, I compiled

complete pre-House and pre-gubernatorial career sequences for these groups and calculated the proportion of years spent in public office. The House members are a useful control group because they served contemporaneously with the senators in my dataset and, thus, were exposed to these other factors. However, they ought to have been less affected by the Seventeenth Amendment. The governors are a useful control group because they have the same statewide constituencies as senators but should also have been minimally affected by the Seventeenth Amendment.

To further control for other factors that might affect professionalization, I include several covariates. The variable, *Party Advantage*, measures the statewide electoral advantage of each officeholder's party.⁶ Presumably, large advantages gave some greater opportunities to serve in public office. Similarly, I use state and local revenue data (Sylla, Legler, and Wallis 1995) to identify states with high levels of government spending (see the online appendix). In these states, the steady stream of government jobs created by high spending might have made serving in public office easier. *Pre-1840 State* identifies states that joined the union before 1840. Scholars have used this as a proxy for the strength of party organizations (Ware 2002). These states might have had a greater number of experienced politicians. *Age at Entry* denotes age upon reaching the Senate, House, or governor's office. Because my models account for the length of careers leading to these offices, this variable assesses whether careers that begin later in life are less professionalized. *South* identifies officeholders from the eleven states of the former confederacy while *Republican* controls for differences in partisanship. Finally, I include *Trend*, which takes the value 0 for those whose first year of service was 1868, 1 for 1869, 2 for 1870, and so forth. This variable accounts for any systematic increase in professionalization due to other factors.

Political Experience and Committee Assignments in the Senate

To investigate whether differences in the content of pre-Senate political experiences affected senators' ability to achieve influence, I developed two models of the Senate committee assignment process. Specifically, I created two dependent variables. The first, *Big Four*, takes the value 1 if a member received an assignment in a congress to one of the four prestige committees—Appropriations, Commerce, Finance and Rules—and 0 otherwise. Scholars have identified these as the most sought-after committees in this period (Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989). The second, *Top 10*, takes the value 1 if a senator served on any of the ten best committees, and 0 otherwise.⁷

My main independent variables are dummy variables describing the pre-Senate career paths related to my hypotheses. *U.S. House*, *State Legislator*, and *Amateur* identify senators with extensive legislative experience and those with little or no experience, respectively. I compare the success of these senators in attaining valued assignments with each other and to senators following three other paths (the omitted category). I also examine senators following the *Executive* path, a group with many ex-governors. While I do not have hypotheses about the Executive or omitted paths, they offer an interesting contrast to senators with extensive legislative experience and those with little or no experience. I also include the *Seventeenth Amendment* variable to test for the effects of this change in how senators are selected. After ratification, committee assignments might have become a more valuable asset. To assess whether the Seventeenth Amendment's effects were different for different groups of senators, I interact my four dummy variables describing pre-Senate career paths with *Seventeenth Amendment*.

I include several variables to account for other factors affecting senators' assignments. Previous research indicates that the Senate committee assignment process is highly constrained. The most important constraint is the seniority system. Once on a committee, senators are rarely removed involuntarily, and the senator with the longest committee tenure typically becomes the committee's chair. Senators with seniority are given special consideration in the assignment process. Other factors aside, a senator is more likely to receive a good assignment the longer he or she serves. In my models, *Seniority* takes the log transformation of congresses served.

A second source of constraint is turnover in committee personnel. With senators holding near property rights to committee posts, new assignments can only be given where vacancies occur. Senators serving in periods of high turnover have a better shot at a coveted assignment. I created a variable, *Vacancies*, that counts the seats vacated by departing members of a senator's own party. In the first model, *Vacancies* counts own-party Big Four vacancies. In the second, *Vacancies* counts own-party Top 10 vacancies. Finally, a third constraint is the practice of assigning senators from the same state to different committees (especially if they are from the same party) to prevent any state from dominating a committee (Schiller 2000). The variable *State Other* counts the number of Big Four and Top 10 seats held by the state's other senator.

Following past studies of Senate committee assignments, I also include controls for senators' personal characteristics and the constituencies they represent (Arnold 2001; Canon and Stewart 2001; Sinclair 1988). These include a variable to assess each senator's party loyalty on roll call votes.⁸ *Age* denotes the age of each senator during the congress of record. *Lawyer* identifies senators

Table 2. Extended Beta Binomial Models of Pre-Congressional and Pre-Gubernatorial Professionalization.

Independent variables	House		Governor		Senate					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Age at entry	-0.021	(0.001)	-0.038	(0.004)	-0.028	(0.004)	-0.027	(0.004)	-0.027	(0.004)
Party advantage	0.004	(0.001)	0.005	(0.002)	0.007	(0.002)	0.007	(0.002)	0.008	(0.002)
Pre-1840 state	-0.037	(0.045)	0.215	(0.083)	0.241	(0.089)	0.246	(0.089)	0.230	(0.089)
South	0.118	(0.052)	-0.016	(0.116)	-0.151	(0.122)	-0.141	(0.122)	-0.165	(0.122)
Seventeenth Amendment	0.159	(0.067)	0.047	(0.136)	0.304	(0.149)				
Direct election							0.351	(0.136)	0.547	(0.092)
Appointed							-0.024	(0.124)	0.096	(0.108)
High revenue	0.087	(0.041)	0.191	(0.088)	0.005	(0.096)	-0.000	(0.096)	-0.003	(0.097)
Republican	0.059	(0.037)	0.122	(0.082)	-0.035	(0.089)	-0.026	(0.089)	-0.037	(0.089)
Trend	0.008	(0.001)	0.009	(0.003)	0.004	(0.003)	0.005	(0.003)		
Constant	0.374	(0.122)	1.303	(0.282)	0.795	(0.275)	0.706	(0.275)	0.756	(0.275)
Gamma	0.309	(0.009)	0.307	(0.018)	0.317	(0.020)	0.315	(0.020)	0.318	(0.020)
Log likelihood	-35,058.34		-9,701.51		-8,940.72		-8,937.43		-8,939.35	
Pseudo R ²	.140		.134		.137		.138		.137	
N	4,802		1,007		832		832		832	

DV = proportion of pre-House, pre-governor or pre-Senate career years spent in public offices. Numbers are extended beta-binomial coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Boldface = $p < .05$ level (two-tailed).

who had private-sector experience as an attorney—a valuable asset for lawmakers—before reaching the Senate (Canon and Stewart 2001). I also include *Trend* to account for any systematic increase in the probability of being assigned to an important committee due to other factors during this period.⁹

To appropriately model the effects of senators' political experiences, I restrict my analyses of the Senate committee assignment process in three ways. First, I exclude senators who began service before 1868 or after 1944. Thus, only the 832 senators for whom I have detailed measures of pre-Senate political experience are included. Second, I limit my analyses to senators serving in their first eight congresses. If pre-Senate experience matters in this process, it is likely to matter earlier rather than later in a senator's career. That is, due to the seniority system, every member who serves long enough will be assigned to an important committee. Far fewer senators achieve these assignments in the first part of their Senate career. Finally, I start my analyses with the forty-ninth congress (1883), when the Senate adopted its current rule of making assignments for entire congresses (Canon and Stewart 2001).

Results

Direct Elections and Pre-Senate Professionalization

The results of the before-and-after quasi-experimental design support my hypotheses about the effects of the

Seventeenth Amendment and direct elections. Table 2 displays the results from five models of professionalization. The first three assess the effects of the Seventeenth Amendment and my covariates on the levels of professionalization among incoming senators and my control groups of House members and governors. Consistent with my hypothesis, the coefficient for *Seventeenth Amendment* is positive and significant in the Senate model, and its effect is substantively meaningful. For example, a non-Southern Republican at the median of *Party Advantage* (52.87 percent) and length of career (18 years) could be expected to spend 9.5 years in office prior to the Seventeenth Amendment. This same senator could be expected to spend an additional 1.35 years in public office before the Senate after the Seventeenth Amendment. This increase, about 14 percent above the pre-Seventeenth Amendment baseline, reflects a sizable uptick in senators' office-holding activities.

As expected, the effect of *Seventeenth Amendment* is minimal for House members. The coefficient is positive, but its substantive impact is small. A House member with a profile like the senator considered above could be expected to spend an additional 0.71 years in public office as a result of the Seventeenth Amendment. This increase is about half the size of the effect for the Senate and likely reflects the increasing value of House service (see the online appendix).¹⁰ Similarly, the effect of *Seventeenth Amendment* is not significant for governors. The effects of the Seventeenth Amendment on a governor with a profile like the senator above amount to just 0.20 additional

years in public office. Overall, these results indicate that, contrary to previous research, the Seventeenth Amendment did affect pre-Senate professionalization. Political experience increased abruptly for senators, but House members and governors were substantially less affected.

My other two models of pre-Senate professionalization, which separate senators into three groups—those elected by state legislatures, those elected by voters and appointees—show that the relationship between direct elections and professionalization is even stronger than the relationship between the Seventeenth Amendment and professionalization. The coefficient for *Direct Election* is positive and significant. A non-Southern Republican at the median of *Party Advantage* and length of career could be expected to spend an additional 1.54 years in public office (a 16 percent increase) after the switch to direct elections. When I drop *Trend*, which is not significant in my Senate models and is likely influenced by direct elections, the effect is even larger. This same senator could be expected to spend an additional 2.39 years in public office as a result of the switch to direct elections. This increase, about 26 percent above the pre-direct elections baseline, is the largest effect in the model. This change translates into an extra term or two in the House, state legislature, or local office. For many, it might entail winning additional elections and reflects senators making greater investments in their political careers.

The coefficients for *Party Advantage* and *Pre-1840 State* suggest that differences in electoral advantages and the activities of state party organizations were also significant predictors of pre-Senate professionalization. Changing *Party Advantage* from 48.54 to 61.80 percent (from the 25th to 75th percentiles) adds 0.49 years of public service. Senators from pre-1840 states spent 1.03 more years in public office than senators elsewhere. The level of government spending does not appear to affect pre-Senate professionalization, although its effects on House members and governors are substantial. Similarly, neither Republicans nor Southerners are any more professionalized than other senators. The negative significant coefficient for *Age at Entry* indicates that senators who begin their political careers at more advanced ages tend to have less professionalized pre-Senate careers overall.

Pre-Senate Careers and Committee Assignments

The results of my analyses of Senate committee assignments support my hypotheses and show that senators following career paths that conferred extensive legislative expertise were more successful in gaining access to the Senate's top committees. This relationship remained

strong after the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted, even as valued assignments were distributed more widely to the Senate's more professionalized membership. Table 3 contains the results of my two committee models. Consistent with my hypothesis, those in the *Amateur* category were less likely to receive a coveted committee assignment whereas those in the *U.S. House* and *State Legislator* categories were more likely to receive such assignments. To illustrate the effects of differences in pre-Senate political experiences before and after the Seventeenth Amendment, I convert the coefficients in Table 3 into first differences and, in Figure 3, predicted probabilities.

Senators who followed the *U.S. House* and *State Legislator* career paths were more likely to be assigned to a Big Four committee before the Seventeenth Amendment, as Figure 3a shows. The probability was .12 for those in the *U.S. House* and .14 in the *State Legislator* categories, versus .01 for those in the *Amateur* category. These differences are large, in absolute terms—only the impact of *Seniority* and *Seventeenth Amendment* are larger—and relative to the baseline probability of assignment (.07). Overall, the chance that a senator in the *U.S. House* category would receive a Big Four assignment was 71 percent greater than the chance of a senator in the omitted (Other) category; the chance of a senator in the *Amateur* category was 86 percent smaller.

Following ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment, senators across the board were more likely to receive a Big Four assignment. Nonetheless, the advantages enjoyed by those with extensive legislative expertise remained, as Figure 3b shows. Whereas a senator in the *Amateur* category had a .12 probability of receiving such an assignment, senators following the *U.S. House* and *State Legislator* career paths had probabilities of .25 and .23, respectively. The persistence of these significant differences suggests that the content of the pre-Senate career continued to shape senators' ability to achieve influence after the switch to direct elections.

The advantages of those with extensive legislative expertise are also evident in Figure 3c, which shows the probability of being assigned to a Top 10 committee before the Seventeenth Amendment. Whereas a senator in the *Amateur* category had a .09 probability of receiving such an assignment, senators following the *U.S. House* and *State Legislator* career paths had probabilities of .20 and .15, respectively. These differences are statistically significant. Overall, the chance that a senator in the *U.S. House* category would be assigned to a Top 10 committee was 33 percent greater than the chance of a senator in the omitted category; the chance that a senator from the *Amateur* category would receive such an assignment was 66 percent smaller.

Table 3. Logit Models of Senate Committee Assignments.

Independent variables	Big Four		Top 10		Changing		Changes probability of			
					From	To ^a	Big Four by		Top 10 by	
Seniority (Log)	0.813	(0.143)	0.658	(0.083)	3	5	.052	(.025, .087)	.080	(.054, .109)
Vacancies	0.007	(0.013)	-0.006	(0.004)	4/13	11/29	.003	(-.008, .017)	-.012	(-.032, .006)
State other	-0.301	(0.101)	-0.132	(0.054)	0/1	2/5	-0.017	(-.033, -.005)	-0.018	(-.032, -.003)
Loyalty	0.037	(0.079)	0.061	(0.055)	-0.21	0.59	.001	(-.006, .011)	.006	(-.005, .018)
Amateur	-1.682	(0.737)	-0.587	(0.287)	No	Yes	-0.054	(-.094, -.011)	-0.060	(-.109, -.002)
U.S. House	0.627	(0.397)	0.362*	(0.218)	No	Yes	.055*	(-.012, .144)	.053*	(-.009, .120)
State Legislator	0.733	(0.463)	-0.024	(0.305)	No	Yes	.072*	(-.011, .188)	.000	(-.071, .085)
Executive	0.225	(0.487)	0.626	(0.251)	No	Yes	.020	(-.045, .117)	.101	(.017, .194)
Seventeenth Amendment	0.221	(0.373)	0.458	(0.219)	No	Yes ^b	.087	(.036, .139)	.208	(.149, .266)
Seventeenth × Amateur	1.313	(0.800)	0.310	(0.367)	No	Yes ^b	.048	(-.011, .125)	.151	(.069, .244)
Seventeenth × U.S. House	-0.040	(0.462)	-0.462*	(0.269)	No	Yes ^b	.185	(.104, .280)	.187	(.117, .261)
Seventeenth × State Legislator	-0.301	(0.603)	0.509	(0.421)	No	Yes ^b	.158	(.053, .283)	.325	(.189, .456)
Seventeenth × Executive	-0.158	(0.624)	-0.230	(0.325)	No	Yes ^b	.099	(.004, .228)	.302	(.197, .404)
South	-0.489	(0.235)	-0.167	(0.123)	No	Yes	-0.025	(-.049, -.002)	-.019	(-.048, .010)
Age	-0.016	(0.010)	-0.003	(0.006)	50	62	-.012	(-.030, .002)	-.005	(-.025, .012)
Lawyer	-0.176	(0.190)	0.305	(0.111)	No	Yes	-.010	(-.034, .014)	.044	(.013, .079)
Trend	0.040	(0.015)	0.040	(0.009)						
Constant	-3.218	(0.598)	-2.424	(0.383)						
Log likelihood	-888.82		-1,550.39							
Pseudo R ²	.094		.096							

DV = 1 if assigned to a Big Four/Top 10 committee. Numbers in left columns are logit coefficients with clustered standard errors in parentheses. Numbers in right columns are first differences with critical intervals in parentheses. The probabilities of assignment when Seventeenth Amendment is set to "No," and other variables to their medians, are .07 for Big Four, and .15 for Top 10. Boldface = $p < .05$ (two-tailed). * = $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

^aValues are 25th and 75th percentiles.

^bFirst differences change Trend from fifteen to thirty-two as well as Seventeenth Amendment and pre-Senate career paths. $N = 2,742$.

The Seventeenth Amendment had similarly positive effects on assignments to the Senate's Top 10 committees, as Figure 3d shows. There was, however, a greater leveling with respect to these committees than for the Big Four committees. Whereas former House members were more likely and amateurs less likely to receive such assignments before the Seventeenth Amendment, there were no statistically significant differences between these and other senators in the probability of receiving a Top 10 assignment afterward. Those in the *State Legislator* and *Executive* categories were still more likely than those in the *Amateur* category to receive a Top 10 assignment.

What explains the democratization of the committee assignment process? Previous work identifies several moments when less senior senators pressed their colleagues to open up the process. But it offers few explanations for the timing of these episodes or why more senior senators acceded to this important change. One possibility is that the Seventeenth Amendment, which increased pre-Senate professionalization and made senators more

responsible for their electoral fortunes, made previous levels of inequality unsustainable. With senators answerable to voters rather than party elites, relegating large numbers of senators to inconsequential committees suited neither senators' individual goals nor parties' collective goal of winning a Senate majority.

The results in Table 3 also support the portrayal of the Senate committee assignment process as incredibly constrained. Not surprisingly, *Seniority* has large effects. Changing this variable from three to five congresses increases the probability of receiving a Top 10 assignment by .08. The same change generates a .05 increase in the probability of a Big Four assignment. The negative and significant coefficients for *State Other* suggest that serving beside a well-placed senior senator had its drawbacks. Changing *State Other* from the 25th to 75th percentile (0–2 Big Four seats, 1–5 Top 10 seats) changes the probability of assignment by -.02. The number of vacancies is not a significant predictor of committee assignments. Similarly, party loyalty, region, age, and legal

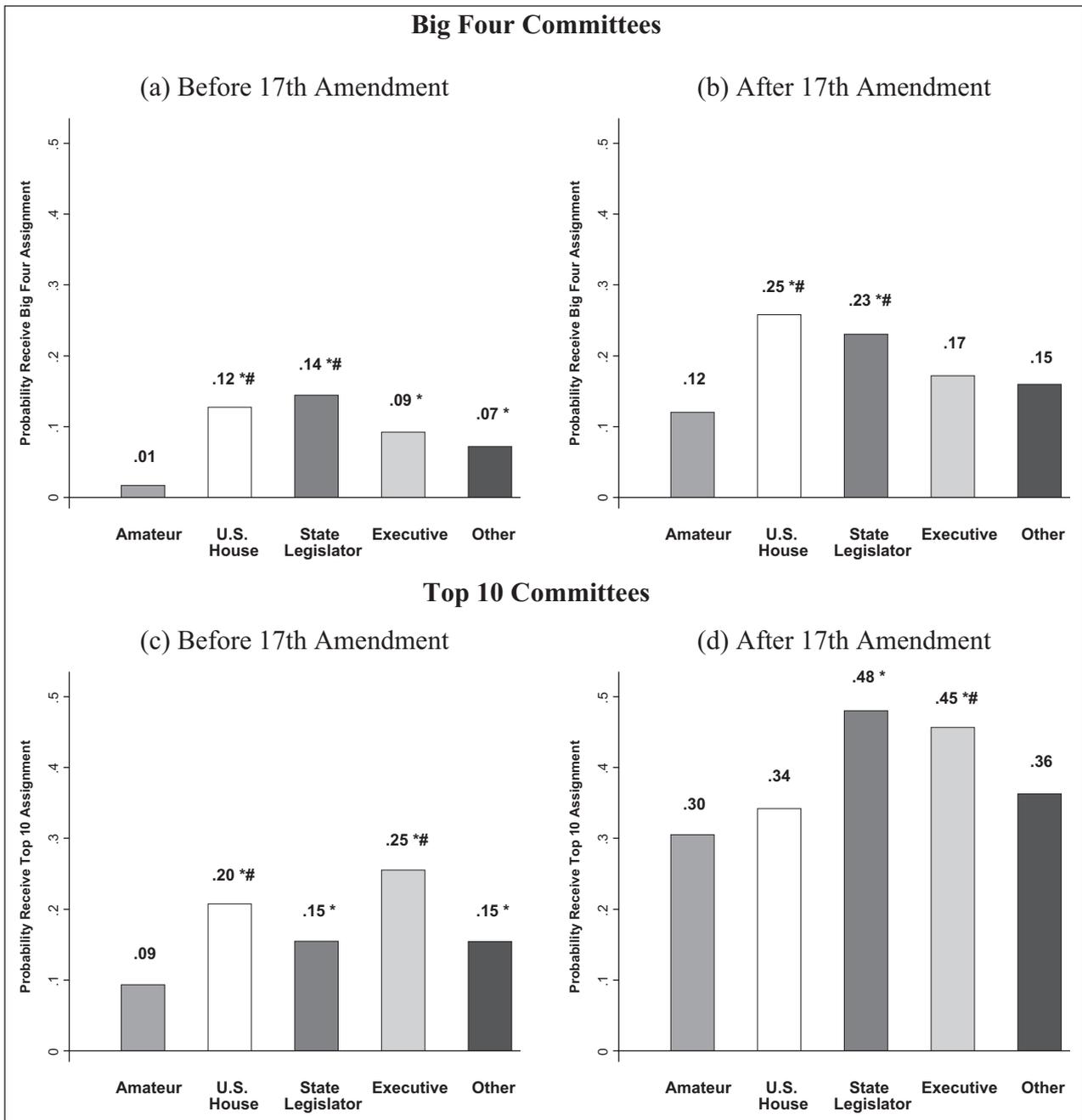


Figure 3. Political experience and Senate committee assignments. Bars indicate predicted probabilities from the “Big Four” and “Top 10” models in Table 3. *Difference with amateur is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed). #Difference with other is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed).

experience were not major determinants of senators’ assignments.

Overall, my results offer strong evidence that pre-Senate political experiences help explain which senators received important committee assignments. Political experience matters most for Big Four committees, the chamber’s most coveted posts. These results also testify

to the usefulness of the pre-Senate career paths identified by sequence analysis. These measures outperform other indicators of political experience (see the online appendix). These results are impressive given the nature of the committee assignment process. Even after accounting for seniority and seats occupied by a state’s other senator, pre-Senate career paths are significant. These

effects persisted after the Seventeenth Amendment, when committee seats were distributed widely to the greater number of experienced politicians seeking to advertise their policy achievements.

Conclusion

The results above affirm that two relationships predicted by theory, but for which empirical evidence has been lacking, were operating in the pre–World War II Senate. The first relationship, between the Seventeenth Amendment and pre-Senate professionalization, indicates that the switch to direct elections was a major factor shaping pre-Senate careers. The second, between pre-Senate career paths and assignment to important Senate committees, demonstrates that senators' political experiences contributed to their legislative activity and influence. Both sets of findings are at odds with previous scholarship, which finds that the switch to direct elections had minimal effects on the composition of the Senate, and that previous political experience matters little for behavior in office (Brandes Crook and Hibbing 1997; Daynes 1971; Matthews 1984).

Why are my findings different? One difference, I argue, lies in how past studies measure pre-Senate political experiences and the more comprehensive data and measurement techniques used here. Rather than rely on summary indicators that can obscure as much as they reveal about senators' political experiences, I assembled complete office-holding sequences for every senator and used sequence analysis methods to (1) calculate the number and proportion of pre-Senate career years spent in public office and (2) identify the main career paths to the Senate. My argument is not that these are perfect measures of political experience but simply that they better capture the main distinctions in how members of the Senate reached this important office.

Although my results are at odds with previous work on the effects of the Seventeenth Amendment on pre-Senate careers and the effects of political experience on legislative behavior, they are consistent with recent studies of the effects of direct elections on senators' legislative activities. The Seventeenth Amendment changed the strategic environment for senators, who altered their roll call voting and bill introduction practices (Bernhard and Sala 2006; Gailmard and Jenkins 2009; Meinke 2008). Presumably, these changes reflected senators' desires to appeal to the mass publics who now controlled their electoral fates. My results support the additional claim that the kinds of senators that state legislators and voters wanted were different. Theoretically, there is reason to expect that voters would use their ability to *ex ante* screen senators to realize their preferences for particular types of Senate candidates. Given voters' low capacity to monitor

incumbent senators' performance, using experience as a cue to select good agents makes sense.

My results indicate that voters were, indeed, more likely to favor the office-based professional politicians described by Matthews (1960). To voters, such individuals might have seemed like a breath of fresh air compared with the wealthy and, in some instances, corrupt candidates selected by state legislatures. My results also suggest that voters' intuitions about the relationship between political experience and legislative performance were not unfounded. Overall, this new breed of officeholder proved to be a more effective advocate inside the Senate. Given their past experiences, many senators reached the office already acquainted with legislative "folkways." And they used this knowledge to gain access to positions where they could best represent their states' policy interests.

That voters favored professional politicians after the Seventeenth Amendment does not mean that voters will always do so or that greater political experience is a panacea. Today, both houses of Congress and many state legislatures are dominated by professional politicians. Nonetheless, public confidence in these institutions has slipped. In the minds of many, professional politicians are responsible for the problems plaguing these bodies. Reformers have advocated legislative term limits as an antidote to political professionalization. Several reform organizations and prominent elected officials have even called for repealing the Seventeenth Amendment. In an age where anti-politician fervor reigns mostly unchecked, it is worth recalling the effects that past and present institutional configurations have had on the composition and functioning of the Senate.

Future work can further aid our understanding of the interplay between institutional design, political recruitment, and legislative performance. For example, improved data on senators serving after World War II can shed light on whether pre-Senate career paths have changed and, if so, whether these changes have fueled legislative behavior that exacerbates the Senate's unrepresentative quality and inability to function. Studies of other legislatures can reveal whether institutional changes have registered similar effects on professionalization elsewhere and the conditions under which differences in political experience will affect legislative behavior. To that end, the approach described in this study, including the use of sequence analysis, can help scholars to develop better measures of political experience and, hence, informative analyses of its causes and consequences.

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Notes

1. Senator Mike Lee called the Seventeenth Amendment "a mistake," an opinion shared by Texas Governor Rick Perry, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, and other prominent officials (Greenblatt 2014).
2. Political professionalization is the extent to which a political system is populated by those who make their living from political activity (Weber [1919] 1948). It should not be confused with legislative professionalization (bodies with unlimited sessions, extensive staff, and high salaries).
3. Previous research emphasizes seniority (Bullock 1985), electoral and partisan considerations (Arnold 2001; Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Sinclair 1988), and formal rules (Davidson 1990). The studies that examine political experience find modest effects (Canon and Stewart 2001; Matthews 1960).
4. I mark the first year spent in public office as the start of the pre-Senate career. Those who reach the Senate without first occupying a public office have a proportion of zero.
5. Dubin (1998) provides a list of popular elections for the Senate where the decision of the voters was binding on the state legislature before the Seventeenth Amendment was adopted.
6. To measure the statewide electoral advantage of each senator's party, I calculated a twelve-year moving average of the two-party vote for governor in each state and year (see Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1999).
7. The Top 10 committees are Agriculture, Appropriations, Commerce, Finance, Judiciary, Foreign Relations, Military Affairs, Naval Affairs, Post Office and Roads, and Rules (Haynes 1938).
8. I standardize loyalty by party and congress. Senators in their first congress have scores of zero. My results do not change if I exclude senators in their first congress (see the online appendix at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>).
9. For example, in 1904, Nelson Aldrich agreed to award each Republican senator at least one important assignment. Furthermore, in 1921 and 1946, the Senate abolished a large number of committees. Members of abolished committees were reassigned to committees that remained.
10. The effects on senators who did and did not serve in the House are similar. The positive effect for House members

likely reflects the effects of ballot and primary reforms (MacKenzie 2014).

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