



"Family Business: Causes and Consequences of Political Dynasties"

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Family Business: Causes and Consequences of Political Dynasties^{*}

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Abstract

I explore the causes of the existence of political dynasties in democratic societies. In particular, I investigate the causal relationship between tenure length and posterior dynastic success. Since tenure length is potentially endogenous in a model of political dynasties, I exploit a natural experiment in Argentina that provides a source of exogenous variation for tenure length. I find that having a longer tenure in Congress increases the probability of having a relative in future congresses. I also find that dynastic legislators have lower performance than non-dynastic legislators.

Keywords: political power; self-perpetuation; elites; legislators, legislative performance.

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1. Introduction

Political dynasties are present in many democratic countries. The Kennedys and the Bushes in the US, the Menems in Argentina, the Nehru-Gandhi family in India, the Aquino and Ortega families in the Philippines, and the Bhutos in Pakistan, are just a few examples. The mere existence of political dynasties, however, does not necessarily reflect imperfections in democratic representation.¹ For instance, the presence of political dynasties may be reflecting the optimal response of voters to the fact that certain families have special talents for political activities.

It is important, then, to explore the causes of political dynasties in order to assess if the presence of political elites may impose a threat to political representation in democratic countries. Do some families have certain characteristics that make them more prone to political success? Or, alternatively, is political power self-perpetuating, in the sense that holding political power for a longer period of time increases the probability that other family members would hold political power in the future?

A first contribution of this paper is to test the hypothesis of self perpetuation; i.e., whether there is a causal relationship between tenure length and posterior dynastic success. This is a difficult task as tenure length is potentially endogenous in a model of political dynasties. To overcome this identification problem I exploit a natural experiment in Argentina that provides a source of exogenous variation for tenure length. With the return to democracy after seven years of dictatorship and the formation of the Congress of 1983, the duration of elected legislators' terms was randomly allocated. I exploit this exogenous variation of the duration of legislators' terms as an instrument for tenure

¹ The need of guaranteeing political competition by banning political dynasties is addressed explicitly in the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, which in its Article 2 states that "The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law."

length. I find that having a longer tenure in Congress increases the probability of having a relative in a future Congress.

This result is not novel. A previous paper by Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder (2009) uses two different instrumental variables strategies to show that having a longer tenure in the US Congress increases significantly the probability of establishing a political dynasty. In a first approach they instrument for whether a legislator's first reelection attempt is successful using the reelection rate of fellow party Representatives in the same state and year. This first approach is likely to violate the exclusion restriction since identification relies on the assumption that an electoral shock affects the probability of having a relative in a future Congress only through its impact on the predecessor's election to another term. In a second approach they use a regression discontinuity design that relies on the outcome of close elections as an instrument for tenure length. The regression discontinuity approach identifies a causal effect under the assumption that winners and losers of close elections have similar (observable and unobservable) characteristics. Identification would be jeopardized if winning a close election depends on personal characteristics that are also correlated with having future relatives in Congress. For instance, selection would arise if corrupt politicians are more likely to win a close election and are also more likely to use their influence to push relatives into office. Besides, the regression discontinuity design only estimates the treatment effect for a small subpopulation of the sample: those politicians that barely win or lose their first re-election attempt. It may be argued that these politicians are likely to be of lower quality than the average politicians.

My paper differs from Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder (2009) in two important dimensions. First, given random assignment the instrument is likely to satisfy the exclusion restriction. Second, the estimation strategy can identify the parameter of interest for all politicians.

A second contribution of the paper is to study the relationship between tenure length and posterior dynastic success in a different institutional setting. Indeed, the institutional setting faced by legislators in the US and Argentina is quite different. Representatives in Argentina are elected through a closed party list at the district level (the country is divided in twenty four electoral districts), and not through a uninominal race at the level of a smaller legislative district, as in the US. The similarity between the results found for the US and the ones reported here for Argentina suggests that self perpetuation of political elites is a phenomenon that arises under different institutional environments.²

A third contribution is to present evidence on the consequences of dynastic power. There is a recent empirical literature on the consequences of concentration of political power on economic development. Ferraz and Finan (2010) find that municipalities in Brazil where political power has been historically concentrated have lower levels of current development. Acemoglu et al. (2008) find that municipalities in Colombia where political power was more concentrated in the 19th century are less developed today. I follow a more micro approach and find that dynastic legislators have lower performance than non dynastic legislators.

My paper is related to an important body of literature documenting the presence of political dynasties all around the world (see, for example, Imaz 1964; Camp 1982; Hess 1997). More generally, my work is also related to the literatures on the link between wealth and posterior political power (Rossi 2011), on the link between political power and posterior wealth (Querubín and Snyder 2011), on the persistence of political elites (Mosca 1939; Michels 1911; Acemoglu and Robinson 2008; Asako et al. 2010), and on legislative careers (Scarrow 1998; Diermeier, Keane, and Merlo 2005; Padró I Miquel and Snyder 2006; Mattozzi and Merlo 2008).

² In a recent paper, Querubin (2011) uses a regression discontinuity approach based on close elections to study the effect of entering office on the probability of having future relatives in office in the Philippines. His findings are in line with those in Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder, but the magnitude of the effect is larger.

The rest of the paper is as follows. Section 2 describes the electoral system in Argentina, introduces the natural experiment, and presents the data. Section 3 reports the econometric model and the results. Section 4 concludes.

2. Argentine electoral system, natural experiment, and data

Argentina is a federal republic consisting of twenty four legislative districts: twenty three provinces and an autonomous federal district. The National Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Deputies (i.e., the House) and the Senate. This study focuses on the House.

The electoral system in Argentina is closed-list proportional representation. In this type of system voters can only vote for political parties as a whole and thus have no direct influence on the party-supplied order in which party candidates are elected. This implies that candidates have two distinct constituencies, one are the voters that determine the party's vote share and thus seats allocated to parties, the others the party leaders that determine the candidate's position on the list. In this type of systems political careers typically take place within parties. That is, a member rises through the party ranks based on leader assessments. In general, members are asked by the party authorities to rotate, which explains the much lower reelection rates found in Argentina compared to that in candidate-centric systems like in the US. As documented in Molinelli, Palanza, and Sin (1999) and Jones et al. (2007), the careers of Argentine legislators are short and most of Argentine legislators spend just a single term in Congress. For instance, during the 1983-2001 period the average deputy served only one term in office, and only 20 percent of incumbents were reelected. In our sample period, the reelection rate for the legislators entering Congress in 1983 was 26 percent.

The candidate names do appear on the ballot. In Argentina, making it into the party list depends strongly on the standing of the legislator among constituents, as this

determines the load of votes the legislator brings to the party list –a feel for which is obtained in the primaries. This explains why in Argentina legislators remain very much interested in appearing active in the eyes of constituents even under a party list system. Then, dynasties in Argentina may reflect a combination of voter and party choices.

Natural experiment

At the time of the return to democracy after seven years of dictatorship, on December 10 of 1983, all 254 deputies entered Congress at the same time. In Argentina deputies have four-year terms and the Constitution requires the renewal of half the chamber every two years. In order to get the staggered renewal mechanism going it was necessary to allocate half of the representatives elected in 1983 to two-year terms. The allocation of two- and four-year terms in this foundational Congress was done through a well documented random assignment. In order to assign terms, the 254 House representatives were first divided into two groups of 127 representatives each. The allocation of individual legislators into the two groups was done at the level of the party-district delegation, which implies that all districts and political parties were, whenever possible, proportionally represented in each group. The procedure for the random allocation of terms, set by the *Comisión de Labor Parlamentaria* (the equivalent of the Rules committee in the US) involved dividing the representatives in two groups of equal size. Each party-district delegation apportioned an equal number of its members to each group. In the case that a party had an odd number of representatives from one district the imbalance was corrected with the analogous surplus from another district where the party also had an odd number of representatives. The lottery draw was performed during a public legislative session in January 1984.³

Data

³ This natural experiment is also exploited in Dal Bó and Rossi (2011).

The database has information for all House representatives that entered the Congress of 1983. The database was constructed based on official registries of the Congress, on the *Directorios Legislativos* published by CIPPEC, and on personal communications with members and staff of the legislature.

Political power is measured by *Total Tenure*, a variable recording the total number of years the legislator served in Congress (until 2008, either in the House or in the Senate). As instrument for tenure length I use a dummy variable (*Four-Year Term*) that takes the value of one for those legislators which were randomly assigned to an initial four-year term and zero otherwise.

To characterize political dynasties I create a dummy variable, *Post-Relatives*, that takes the value of one if the legislator has a relative entering Congress after him or her, and zero otherwise. Approximately nine percent of House representatives have relatives entering future congresses.

The database includes information on the age (as of November 1983) and gender (a dummy variable that takes the value of one for males) of legislators, and a set of dummy variables for political party and electoral district.

The database also includes six objective measures of individual legislative effort/performance for House representatives in the period December 1983 to December 1985 (floor attendance, committee attendance, number of committee bills in which the legislator participated, number of times the legislator spoke on the floor, the number of bills introduced by the legislator, and the number of those bills that were approved). Using these measures of legislative effort or performance, I follow the procedure used in Kling, Liebman, and Katz (2007) to construct an index at the legislator level (*Performance*).

Finally, I construct a variable, *Slackness*, to capture “political weight.” Under the party list system, the degree of political weight depends on how high up in the party ticket

a legislator finds herself. I use a legislator's placement in the party list plus the number of representatives in the district in order to assess her political weight at the time of being elected into the House.⁴

Although the duration of terms was randomly assigned, it is useful to examine whether, *ex post*, legislators' characteristics are balanced between the different groups. As shown in Table 1, there are no statistically significant differences in observables across the two groups of legislators according to a difference in means test, suggesting that the randomization was successful in ensuring orthogonality between covariates and treatment assignment.⁵

Table 1 anticipates the main results of the paper. The first row reports the first-stage estimates, which indicate that total tenure in the House is 35 percent higher for those representatives originally assigned to the long track compared to those assigned to the short track. Given the closed-list proportional representation system in Argentina, a potential concern would arise if "unlucky" legislators (those receiving two-year terms) were compensated by their parties and re-nominated in the following election. Even though the reelection rates were higher for legislators in shorter tracks (29 percent against 22 percent, the difference is statistically not significant), the first-stage estimates confirm that, on average, those legislators awarded longer initial terms ended up having longer tenures in Congress.

The second row in Table 1 reports the reduced-form estimates. The proportion of House representatives with posterior relatives in Congress is 19 percent higher for those

⁴ More specifically, I define *Slackness* as $(1 - \text{Order}/\text{Size})^{0.5}$, where *Size* is the total number of legislators that entered the House representing the district and *Order* is the position in which the representative entered the House in her district.

⁵ Similar conclusions are obtained from a regression of the probability of being randomized into the four-year term group on the set of individual characteristics. As expected given randomization, the pre-treatment characteristics are individually and jointly not significant predictors of eligibility status. All results mentioned but not shown are available from the author upon request.

assigned to the long track. These reduced-form estimates indicate an effect that is important but not very precisely estimated.

3. Econometric model and results

I estimate the following regression model for the probability of having relatives in Congress in the future:

$$Post - Relatives_i = \alpha + \gamma Total Tenure_i + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where γ is the parameter of interest, X_i is a matrix of legislators' characteristics, and ε_i is the error term.

As discussed above, *Total Tenure* may be endogenous in a model of political dynasties due to unobserved family characteristics, thus potentially biasing OLS estimates. To address this problem I report Two Stage Least Squares (2SLS) using the randomly allocated term variable as instrument for *Total Tenure*.

Table 2 presents estimates on the relationship between tenure length and the probability of establishing a political dynasty in Congress. In column (1) in Table 2 I report OLS estimates of equation (1). In this model *Total Tenure* has a positive and significant coefficient suggesting a positive correlation between total tenure in Congress and the probability of having relatives entering the Congress later: an extra year of tenure increases 1.8 percentage points the probability of having a posterior relative in office. Results from the OLS specification provide evidence that is consistent with the hypothesis of self perpetuation. The fact that legislators with longer tenures are more likely to have relatives in future congresses, however, could arise due to unobserved family characteristics. To address this endogeneity concern, in column (2) I report 2SLS estimates of equation (1). Again, instrumental variable estimates indicate that being in Congress for a longer tenure has a positive impact on the probability of having a relative in future congresses, though the coefficient is no longer significant at the ten percent

level. I perform a Hausman test and I cannot reject the hypothesis that tenure length is exogenous in the model of political dynasties (p-values equal to 0.77 and 0.97 in the models without and with controls). The very high p-values associated to the Hausman test suggest that the impossibility to reject the null is not arising from lack of statistical power, and indicates that OLS is the correct (more efficient) specification.

The finding that OLS estimates are consistent is encouraging from the possibility of replicating the exercise in other settings where a natural experiment is not available. The cohort analyzed in this paper, however, is a very peculiar cohort, so there is a potential caveat here in terms of external validity.

The models in Columns (3) and (4) include *Age*, *Male*, *Slackness*, and *Performance* as controls. *Age*, *Male*, and *Slackness* are pre-treatment characteristics. Given random assignment of treatment, including legislators' pre-treatment characteristics as controls in the regression model is not necessary for consistency but it may reduce standard errors. *Performance* is not a pre-treatment characteristic. As documented in Dal Bó and Rossi (2011) and as shown in Table 1, longer terms are associated with higher legislative performance. A potential concern then would arise if legislators awarded with longer terms in the foundational Congress of 1983 ended up having more relatives entering the legislature in the future not because of the extra number of years they stayed in Congress but because of the higher performance induced by the longer terms, thus violating the exclusion restriction. As suggested by the estimates in column (3), this is not the case: *Total Tenure* in the OLS specification has a positive and significant coefficient, and its value is similar to the one obtained in the models without controls. Interestingly, legislative performance is not a significant predictor of success in transferring political power to other family members.

Even though the 2SLS estimates reported in column (4) are smaller and not significantly different from zero, they remain statistically not significantly different from the OLS estimates according to a Hausman test. In both the OLS and 2SLS specifications all the included controls are individually and jointly not significant. This result, together with the result from the Hausman test, indicate that the preferred (most efficient) specification is the one reported in column (1)—OLS without controls.

Columns (5) to (7) present additional robustness checks. Similar results are obtained when I use an alternative probit specification, when I compute the total number of years in Congress since 1983, and when I include the set of party and district dummies as additional controls.

Finally, to check that pre-treatment dynastic characteristics of the legislators are not driving the results, I constructed a dummy variable (*Pre-relatives*) that takes the value of one if the legislator has a relative that entered Congress before him or her, and zero otherwise. Given the lack of appropriate historic information on the legislature prior to the return to the democracy in 1983, this variable might be subject to some measurement error (I was able to document 5.5 percent of legislators with previous relatives in Congress). Taking this caveat into account, having previous relatives in Congress is not correlated to term assignment (a p-value of 0.58 for a test of difference in means) and, as shown in column (8), the main results do not change substantially when I include *Pre-relatives* as an additional control. In particular, *Total Tenure* remains positive and significant. In this specification, having previous relatives in office is an important predictor of the probability of having relatives entering a future Congress, a result that is in line with previous evidence from the US.

Overall, the results indicate that having a longer tenure in Congress increases the probability of having relatives in future congresses thus providing evidence in favor of the

hypothesis of self perpetuation of political power. The OLS estimates of *Total Tenure* indicate that five additional years in office (the average term for current Argentine legislators) increases the probability of having a relative in future congresses by approximately eight percentage points. These results are similar to the ones presented in Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder (2009) for the US, who estimate that staying in office for more than one term doubles the probability that a legislator will have a relative entering Congress in the future.

Consequences

There are still important questions that need to be answered. Do political dynasties really matter? For instance, do dynastic politicians have a lower performance than non dynastic ones? There is a small and recent literature that has focused on the consequences of concentration of political power on economic development (Ferraz and Finan 2010; Acemoglu et al. 2008). Here I took a more micro approach, and explore the behavior of dynastic legislators *vis a vis* non dynastic ones in terms of their legislative performance.

To explore the link between dynastic power and legislative performance I use the extended database (legislative activity between 1983 and 1995) to compare the performance of legislators with and without previous relatives in politics. Columns (1) and (2) in Table 3 present evidence on a negative relationship between being a dynastic legislator and the index of performance obtained from the principal component (which accounts for 62 percent of the total variance) of the two measures of legislative performance available (the number of bills introduced by the legislator and the number of those bills that were approved). Columns (3) to (6) report the models for the two individual metrics of performance. In the two cases, the negative coefficient on *Pre-Relatives* suggests that dynastic legislators have a lower performance than non dynastic ones. The magnitudes of the differences are important (though not always very precisely

estimated: the p-values are around 0.12 for the index of performance and around 0.20 for the individual metrics, when standard errors are clustered at the legislator level. The p-values are much lower for un-clustered standard errors). Non dynastic legislators present 12.4 percent more bills than dynastic ones. The proportion of bills approved to bills presented is 37.1 percent higher for non dynastic legislators.

4. Conclusions

I find evidence of a positive relationship between legislators' tenure length and the probability of establishing a political dynasty in Congress. The estimates indicate that five additional years in office (the average term for Argentine legislators) increases the probability of having a relative in future congresses by approximately eight percentage points. This figure is similar to the one previously reported for the US, a result that suggests that the self perpetuation of political elites arises in different institutional contexts.

I also show that dynastic legislators have a lower performance than non dynastic legislators. This can provide a micro foundation to the previous finding in the literature that a higher political concentration is associated to a lower economic development.

The evidence presented here suggests that exogenous shocks to political power (as the one provided by the random allocation of terms in the foundational Congress of 1983 in Argentina) can have long lasting effects in terms of the composition of the future political class. The findings are of importance as they help to understand the determinants of political success and the composition of the political class stressing the importance of dynamic effects.

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Table 1. Summary statistics by term assignment

	Short track	Long track	Difference of means
Total Tenure	4.126 (0.313)	5.551 (0.292)	-1.425 [0.001]
Post –Relatives	0.079 (0.024)	0.094 (0.026)	-0.016 [0.657]
Performance	-0.013 (0.046)	0.270 (0.057)	-0.282 [0.000]
Age	51.024 (0.929)	50.299 (0.957)	0.724 [0.588]
Male	0.969 (0.016)	0.945 (0.020)	0.024 [0.357]
Slackness	0.590 (0.024)	0.635 (0.025)	-0.045 [0.201]
Majority Party	0.504 (0.045)	0.512 (0.045)	-0.008 [0.901]
Minority Party	0.441 (0.044)	0.433 (0.044)	0.008 [0.900]
Small Block	0.055 (0.020)	0.055 (0.020)	0.000 [1.000]

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses; p-values from a t-test of equality of means are shown in brackets. The long track corresponds to a four year term. The short track corresponds to a two year term. The number of observations is 254, 127 in the short track and 127 in the long track.

Table 2. Total tenure and posterior relatives in office

	Post-Relatives							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Total Tenure	0.018 (0.022)	0.011 (0.650)	0.019 (0.024)	0.007 (0.867)	0.012 (0.007)	0.017 (0.017)	0.021 (0.057)	0.017 (0.026)
Age			0.001 (0.656)	-0.0002 (0.962)	0.001 (0.646)	0.0002 (0.527)	0.001 (0.923)	0.002 (0.282)
Male			-0.085 (0.422)	-0.098 (0.395)	-0.075 (0.456)	-0.110 (0.436)	-0.084 (0.132)	-0.035 (0.712)
Slackness			0.015 (0.824)	0.038 (0.712)	0.027 (0.687)	0.039 (0.815)	0.015 (0.528)	-0.018 (0.788)
Performance			-0.011 (0.789)	0.006 (0.932)	-0.005 (0.884)	-0.008 (0.718)	-0.015 (0.854)	-0.020 (0.571)
Pre-Relatives								0.343 (0.010)
	Hausman (p-value): 0.77		Hausman (p-value): 0.97					
Method	OLS	2SLS	OLS	2SLS	Probit	OLS	OLS	OLS

Notes: p-values from robust standard errors are in parentheses. The coefficients on *Total Tenure* in the probit model in column (5) correspond to marginal effects at the mean of the independent variable. Column (6) shows results computing the total number of years in Congress since 1983. The model in column (7) includes political party dummies and district dummies. The number of observations is 254.

Table 3. Consequences of dynastic power

	Performance		Bills introduced		Bills ratified	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Relatives	-.0193 (0.035) [0.129]	-.0198 (0.032) [0.127]	-0.939 (0.081) [0.233]	-0.911 (0.084) [0.223]	-0.057 (0.140) [0.203]	-0.063 (0.117) [0.206]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Number of legislators	651	649	651	649	651	649
Number of Observations	2638	2632	2638	2632	2638	2632

Notes: p-values from robust standard errors are in parentheses; p-values from standard errors clustered at the legislator level are in brackets. The controls are *Age*, *Male*, and the set of party dummies. All regressions are estimated by Ordinary Least Squares and include year dummies and district dummies.