

## **Campaigning for a Job: Obama for America, Patronage, and Presidential Appointments<sup>↑</sup>**

During each presidential election supporters of the different campaigns endorse, raise money, and work for the candidates. A large number from the winning campaign aspire to and will be rewarded with a job in the new administration. Those selected will help implement the president's agenda and manage the day-to-day operations of federal programs and agencies. Because they are selected more for campaign experience than demonstrated competence, these patronage appointees can be the source of scandals and poor management performance. To date, however, we know very little systematically about how presidents decide which campaign supporters to reward with jobs in the new administration. In this paper we examine the fates of 1,113 Obama for America campaign workers to illuminate this understudied side of presidential appointment politics. We find that presidents are more likely to reward early joiners, key campaign officials, and the politically connected with jobs in the new administration. We conclude by explaining how these findings change our understanding of presidential appointments and American politics more generally.

Camille D. Burge<sup>♦</sup>  
Vanderbilt University

David E. Lewis<sup>\*</sup>  
Vanderbilt University

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<sup>♦</sup> Vanderbilt University, 308 Calhoun, VU Station B #351817, Nashville, TN 37235-1817, 615-322-6222, [camille.d.burge@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:camille.d.burge@vanderbilt.edu).

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author: Department of Political Science, Vanderbilt University, 308 Calhoun, VU Station B #351817, Nashville, TN 37235-1817, 615-322-6228, [david.e.lewis@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:david.e.lewis@vanderbilt.edu).

On June 4, 2009, President Obama announced his intention to nominate American music executive Nicole Avant to be United States Ambassador to the Bahamas. Prior to her nomination Avant was Vice President of Interior Music and Avant Garde Music Publishing and active in philanthropic and community affairs.<sup>1</sup> She was one of two Southern California finance chairs for the Obama for America Campaign and raised \$500,000 for the candidate. Neither her official State Department biography nor the White House announcement of her nomination lists specific foreign policy or regional expertise.<sup>2</sup> The appointment of Ambassador Avant highlights both the prevalence and the potential problems associated with the appointment of campaign-connected personnel. Every modern president has selected some personnel for appointed government jobs on the basis of work for the campaign. Sometimes these appointments accomplish the president's policy and political goals but on other occasions they create problems for the president through scandal or incompetence.

Many supporters work for the campaign because they enjoy the excitement of politics. Others join the campaign to curry favor or further a political agenda. Yet, many hope for

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<sup>1</sup> Daunt, Tina. 2007. "A Daughter Follows Her Own Heart," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2007 (<http://articles.latimes.com/keyword/nicole-avant>, last accessed December 7, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For Ambassador Avant's State Department biography see the State Department web site (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/132134.htm>, last accessed December 7, 2009); White House Office of the Press Secretary. 2009. "President Obama Announces Intent to Nominate Key Administration Posts." June 4, 2009 ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/President-Obama-Announces-Intent-to-Nominate-Key-Administration-Posts-6-4-09/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-Intent-to-Nominate-Key-Administration-Posts-6-4-09/), last accessed December 7, 2009).

something more—a meaningful job in the new administration—and hope their dedication to and performance on the campaign qualifies them for just such a position. Which of these campaign workers receive jobs in the new administration? The president’s answer to this question has important consequences for the party, the willingness of persons to continue working for the president or party, and the president’s efforts to implant executive DNA inside the administrative state. Yet, we know very little systematically about how patronage operates in the modern presidency. Studies of presidential patronage are rare after mid-Century since most analyses of presidential appointments focus on presidential incentives to control the administrative state rather than satisfy patronage demands (Lewis 2009). Understanding how presidents make choices about the placement of campaign staff illuminates an understudied aspect of the modern presidential appointments process and an obscure part of current presidential and party politics more generally (Bearfield 2009).

In this paper we examine the fates of 1,113 Obama for America campaign workers from the national and state campaigns as a way of furthering our understanding of patronage in modern presidential politics. Specifically, we examine which campaign workers received appointments in the new administration and why. We find that presidents are more likely to reward early joiners, key campaign officials, and the politically connected with jobs in the new administration. We conclude by explaining how these findings change our understanding of presidential appointments and American politics more generally.

### **Patronage in Presidential Personnel**

Whereas, the giving out of public employment in exchange for campaign work or political support has been an important part of presidential politics for much of the nation’s

history, this topic has received less attention in political science since Mid-Century (Bearfield 2009; Lewis 2009). Political scientists dutifully recorded the emergence of the spoils system, chronicled and advocated its decline, and described its causes and consequences up through mid-Century (See e.g., Fish 1902; Friedrich 1937; Kaufman 1965; Van Riper 1958; White 1948, 1954; Wilson 1887). Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, the direct study of patronage at the federal level has become rarer (Bearfield 2009; see, however, Tolchin and Tolchin 1971). For example, Sorauf (1960, 28) writes, “Very few studies exist of the actual operation of patronage systems across the country...In the absence of specific reports and data, one can only proceed uneasily on a mixture of political folklore, scattered scholarship, professional consensus, and personal judgment.”

There are two key reasons for the decline in scholarly interest in patronage. First, some scholars believe that the era of patronage is over at the federal level. Price (1944), for example, notes a decrease in the number of political appointees and concludes that patronage is on the decline. Sorauf (1960) describes the diminished usefulness of patronage-type workers to campaigns and a decline in the attractiveness of patronage-type jobs to the modern party worker. He argues that the rise in media-based campaigns and increased need for skilled campaign workers decreases the importance of old-style party campaign work for the candidates. According to Sorauf, potential skilled campaign workers increasingly view the jobs accessible through patronage as less attractive relative to jobs in the private sector. He concludes that a “silent revolution” has occurred in patronage. This revolution has been aided by the declining role of the national parties in politics and the transfer of traditional party functions to candidate-centered organizations (Thompson and Brown 1997; Weko 1995).

What Price and Sorauf did not anticipate, however, was that the number of appointments would rise again and that the increase would be in jobs suited to a new style of patronage (Lewis 2008). The old-style party patronage declined only to be replaced by another form of patronage rooted in the president-centered campaign organizations. Indeed, a number of works on presidential appointments describe how factors such as political contributions, work for the campaign, or key connections are important factors in the modern presidential appointments process (Hecllo 1977; Mackenzie 1981; Patterson and Pfiffner 2001; Pfiffner 1996, 140; Tolchin and Tolchin 1971; Weko 1995). Important work also describes the institutionalization of White House offices to manage patronage requests, how presidents respond to patronage pressures, and where presidents prefer to place patronage appointees (Lewis 2008, 28; Patterson and Pfiffner 2001; Pfiffner 1996; Weko 1995). These works importantly confirm the persistence of patronage in modern personnel politics. They do not, however, address *why* and *when* presidents reward some potential appointees with administration jobs with detailed data.

A second reason for the decline in patronage-focused research is that scholars have understandably turned their attention toward how presidents use appointments to secure control of the bureaucracy rather than satisfy patronage demands (Moe 1985; Weko 1995). The increased delegation of policymaking authority to the executive branch and the increased expectations of presidential leadership have created an environment where presidents have strong incentives to use appointments to control administrative policymaking. The weakening ties between president and party allow for fewer constraints on the president's ability to use appointments for this purpose. While presidents have assumed greater control over the appointed positions of government and used these positions to assert greater control over the departments and agencies of government, most scholars would agree that patronage continues to play an

important role in presidential personnel. What is harder to discern, however, is how much of a role and when these concerns trump other factors in appointment decisions.

In what follows, we try to help fill this gap by examining the pathways from the election campaign to the administration. We explain some of the key motivations for presidential patronage and, given these motivations, which campaign supporters are advantaged in the personnel process. We then synthesize this discussion into three testable hypotheses.

### **Presidents and Campaign Supporters: Why and Which Ones?**

There are a number of reasons why modern presidents reward campaign supporters with jobs in the new administration beyond ideological kinship. Presidents reward campaign personnel, surrogates, and donors with jobs because it is an inducement for future work for the president in the next campaign (or for the sitting vice-president if the president is in a second term). For example, many campaign staffers work in appointed jobs only to return to the campaign during the next election season. The distribution of appointed jobs to campaign supporters also induces work for the party more generally. Presidents know that the prospect of an appointed position is an important reason why people join campaigns. As George Washington Plunkitt (Riordan 2004 [1904], 25) famously explained, “Men ain’t in politics for nothin’. They want to get something out of it.”

Presidents also reward campaign supporters because work for the campaign is an important indicator of loyalty to the president. Upon assuming office new presidents are required to fill close to 4,000 positions in a short period of time (Pfiffner 1996). Work for the campaign, particularly over a long period of time, is a way that presidents and their staff gain information about the loyalty of the pool of potential appointees. An important component of the president’s

ability to deliver on electoral promises from abortion policy, to economic recovery, to foreign policy is their ability to control the administrative state that drives and implements these decisions. They want people who craft, implement, or publicize key public policy decisions in the bureaucracy to do what the president wants them to do. Work on the campaign provides important information about how people will behave in office.

More generally, when presidents publicly reward those that have sided with the president, this encourages other political actors to side with the president in other contexts. If legislators, key administration officials, or groups witness the president publicly rewarding supporters or protégés of supporters with key jobs, it communicates that there are benefits associated with supporting the president's views and program. Alternately, if these same actors see the president's supporters overlooked in patronage distribution, this diminishes their incentive to back the president.<sup>3</sup>

*Who is most likely to join the President in Washington?*

These three motivations for appointing campaign supporters to administration jobs provide insights into which persons are most likely to get appointments in a new administration.

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a frequent complaint from party officials is that presidents have overlooked the party in the distribution of patronage. Presidents have interests that do not always coincide with the party and often use patronage not to reward party faithful but to build support for the president and the president's policy and political goals. They often accomplish this through the distribution of patronage to persons or groups outside the party. For good examples see Scroop 2006 and Spencer 1996 who detail this tension in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Administration. See Thompson and Brown 1997, Tolchin and Tolchin 1971, and Weko 1995 more generally.

Some people affiliated with the campaign will have several factors working to their advantage while others will have few. The first group of job aspirants that have an advantage are those supporters that have been with the candidate the longest. During the early stages of the campaign, when there are multiple viable nominees, candidates create a platform and structure their campaign organization, often with little money and less certainty about election outcomes. Polling at these early stages is a poor predictor of eventual outcomes. Individuals that join the campaign early demonstrate loyalty to the candidate in a costly way that merits special reward. James Farley, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Postmaster General and patronage chief famously sought to reward Democrats who were "FRBC" or "For Roosevelt Before Chicago" (Scroop 2006, 84; Spencer 1996, 29). Similarly, President Kennedy sought evidence of support before the convention in Los Angeles as a measure of loyalty. Tolchin and Tolchin (1971, 255) explain that,

Loyalty was at a premium in the Kennedy patronage-dispensing procedure; and if a candidate could offer strong evidence that he had supported Kennedy before the party's nominating convention in Los Angeles, his chances of federal employment were increased.

Joining the campaign early credibly signals a level of loyalty and commitment to the candidate/president that is hard to signal without such work. Rewarding early joiners to the campaign has two benefits for presidents. First, rewarding them with appointments induces others to similarly prove their loyalty by working hard even during uncertain times. This generates better election machinery for the president and his party moving forward. Second, picking people who worked for the candidate early is an easy shortcut for presidents interested in choosing loyalists to drive the president's policy agenda in the departments and agencies. The advantage held by early joiners can be summarized in the following hypothesis:

*H1: Supporters who joined the campaign early are more likely to be offered a job in the new administration than supporters who joined the campaign late.*

Of course, some campaign supporters contribute more to the president's success than others. Early joiners to the campaign are not necessarily the most helpful. The second group that has an advantage is comprised of those persons who are perceived to have contributed most to the campaign's success. Discerning which supporters are responsible for success or failure is difficult but some general patterns apply. Presidents are likely going to give more credit to persons higher in the hierarchy, whether staff, donors, or endorsers. They are also likely to reward persons that were influential in delivering key states and states where the candidate did better than the previous candidate from their party.<sup>4</sup> For example, the New Jersey GOP complained publicly in 1969 because state GOP leaders believed their state had not received an appropriate amount of patronage.<sup>5</sup> State leaders expected to be rewarded since New Jersey was the only northeastern state won by Nixon.<sup>6</sup> The president's desire to reward the persons most responsible for their election can be summarized in a second prediction about which staff members will be rewarded with jobs.

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<sup>4</sup> Some presidents have also distributed patronage strategically to help make states competitive in the next election. For example, President Coolidge was advised to select more appointees from the west as a means of advancing the interests of the Republican Party in this region that was crucial in the previous election. Henning, Arthur Sears. 1924. "Coolidge Asked to Look West for Appointees." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 16, 1924, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Tolchin and Tolchin 1971, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, staff who presided over successful elements of the campaign, whether a particular portfolio on the national campaign or a state where the campaign performed well, may also be attractive appointees since they have demonstrated some level of competence that will serve them well in an appointed position. We will discuss this in more detail below.

*H2: Supporters who contributed most to the campaign's success (in reality or perception) are the most likely to be rewarded by the new administration.*

In every administration there are a number of persons that must be placed because of political connections. These priority placements are rewarded with jobs less for their performance or loyalty to the president and more for the political benefits associated with giving them appointments.<sup>7</sup> For example, during the Nixon Administration, the patronage operation placed candidates into categories from “U” to “Z” where “U” indicated “failure to appoint would result in adverse political consequences to the administration” and “Z” indicated “applicant not compatible with the Nixon administration and should not be appointed to public office.”<sup>8</sup> Appointments are a scarce resource and presidents want to use them efficiently to the greatest political benefit. One measure of the political value of a candidate is the extent to which the person has important or extensive political connections. One three-time Republican appointee described the campaign-like nature of seeking an appointed job, saying, “For every position, there are countless numbers of people wanting the job. The more allies you can bring to the table, the better chance you have.”<sup>9</sup> The president’s supporters can have connections to other members of the administration, key members of Congress, influential donors, etc. The more influential and numerous the connections a person has, the better their chances for getting a job.

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, presidents will take into account whether selecting specific persons will incur notable political costs.

<sup>8</sup> See Tolchin and Tolchin 1971, 256.

<sup>9</sup> Tahmincioglu, Eve. 2008. “Boss Barack: So You Want a Job in the New Obama Administration? Here’s How to Go About it.” *Newsweek*, November 12, 2008 (on-line

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/168694>, last accessed March 9, 2010).

The importance of the political value in any appointment, as measured by connections, can be summarized in the final hypothesis:

*H3: Presidents are more likely to reward supporters with greater political connections than supporters with lesser political connections.*

Job seekers in the new administration will often be stronger on one or two dimensions (worked early for the candidate; from prominent Democratic family) but weaker on a third dimension (worked in a safe state for Obama). Altogether, however, early work for the candidate, demonstrated success on the campaign, and significant political connections enhance the job prospects of campaign supporters.

### **Data, Variables, and Methods**

To test these competing expectations for which campaign supporters are most likely to get appointments, we focus on one specific type of supporter—those that worked for Obama for America. We gathered data on all top-level persons working for the Obama for America campaign from 2007-2008. We obtained this information from Democracy in Action, a non-partisan, non-profit organization sponsored in part by George Washington University's Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet (<http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2008/about.html>).<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2008/cands08/obamamain.html>, last accessed on June 18, 2009. One researcher in particular, Eric M. Appleman, was responsible for collecting data on the presidential campaigns “to provide a framework for citizens to follow the presidential campaign, to point people to the best available resources and information on the campaign, and to present original reporting and photography on the campaign”

(<http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2008/about.html>). According to Appleman, he collected the data

data used in this paper reflects campaign organization information collected and revised as of June 19, 2009. To our knowledge it provides the most detailed and accurate account of the Obama for America organization over time.

Data collection proceeded in three stages. In the first stage we gathered the names, campaign positions and biographical information for the staffers listed on the Democracy in America website.<sup>11</sup> Altogether there were 1,113 people who worked for the campaign. Of these, 317 worked for the national campaign in jobs ranging campaign manager and senior advisor to individuals working on blogs, scheduling, and advance. There were 797 people who worked in state organizations. Some individuals served in several capacities, working in multiple states or on the national and state level. The largest recorded state organization was in Missouri, with 73 members and the smallest states were Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Utah and Vermont with 1 member each. Most states generally had a state director, political director, communications director, media director and field director.

In the second stage, we used biographical information to code each staff person according to their background education, work, and political experience. The authors agreed upon all

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from a variety of sources, including conversations with many people involved with the campaign, conversations with people who tracked the campaign, individual online research, and media accounts. The complete list is available from the authors.

<sup>11</sup> The data used in this paper comes from the link entitled “General Election”. The General Election link was composed of the national and state-by-state organization of Obama for America.

coding rules prior to implementation.<sup>12</sup> Of the 1,113 persons, biographical information was available for 706.

In the final stage, we collected data on which appointees were given jobs in the new administration using data collected by Horton and Lewis (2010). Of the 1,113 campaign staff, 138 had been appointed to the Obama Administration as of October 9, 2009. This represents 12.40% of all appointees named by the Obama Administration (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). This percentage under-represents the number of persons from the campaign that obtained jobs in the new administration since many people worked for or on behalf of the campaign that were not on the campaign's payroll.

**[Insert Table 1 here.]**

#### *Key Independent Variables*

The competing motivations for patronage appointments listed above are early work for the campaign, performance of the staff member in delivering votes for the candidate, and political connections. To measure early support for the candidate we include a variable coded 1 if the staffer worked for the Obama for America campaign in 2007 and 0 if the joined the campaign in 2008.<sup>13</sup> Of the 1,113 staffers, 194 (17%) were on the campaign's roster in 2007. Our

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<sup>12</sup> The data and codebook are available from the authors.

<sup>13</sup> Initially, the Pre-Primary/Early list on the Democracy in Action website was used to denote staffers involved in the campaign as of 2007. Once those individuals were coded, the researcher used the staffer's announcement date (usually at the beginning of the biographical information) to assess the time at which individuals joined the campaign. The announcement date was used unless otherwise stated in the biographical information that the staffer was involved in the campaign earlier. Campaign staffers that worked on the Iowa caucuses, held on

expectation is that staffers who joined the campaign earlier are more likely to be rewarded with a job in the administration. This pattern is confirmed in the bivariate case. While 12% of all campaign staffers received jobs by October, 2009, 25% of those working for the campaign in 2007 received jobs ( $p < 0.00$ ). We also include an indicator for whether or not a staffer worked for the President's Senate staff or Senate campaign. Of the 1,113 staffers, 15 (1.35%) worked either on Obama's staff or campaign for Senate. Staff members who have longer connections to Obama should be more likely to receive jobs in the new administration and in the first cut this appears to be true since 47% of this group received jobs in the new administration ( $p < 0.00$ ).

To measure the performance of the staff member during the campaign we include a measure which is the difference between the percentage of the two-party vote won by President Obama and the percentage won by John Kerry in 2004.<sup>14</sup> Our expectation is that staff members working in states that voted in higher percentages for Obama in 2008 than for Kerry in 2004 are more likely to be rewarded with jobs.<sup>15</sup> On its face this looks like a reasonable expectation since

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January 3, 2008, were coded as working for Obama in 2007. Individuals that previously worked in Obama's Senate office were also coded as Obama 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Source: CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/president/>; <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/president/>, last accessed March 10, 2010).

It is worth noting that if the campaigns take note of cases where a state responded particularly effectively to a charge from McCain, this might not show up in the vote percentages.

<sup>15</sup> We have also estimated models that include this measure squared since we had no expectation about whether the relationship between relative performance and the probability of getting a job was linear or non-linear. In these models we could not reject the null hypothesis that the inclusion of the interaction did not improve the fit of the model.

no staff members from states where Obama did worse than Kerry received jobs in the new administration as of October 2009 (Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana). We also include an indicator for whether a state was a swing state in 2004 to account for the fact that work in these key states may influence the president's perception of a staffer's contribution.<sup>16</sup> Our expectation is that staffers working in pivotal states are more likely to be rewarded with jobs. We also include an interaction since improved performance over Kerry is most important in battleground states.

We include measures of the extent of a campaign worker's political connections since workers with stronger and more extensive connections provide presidents greater political benefits if appointed. We measure the extent of a worker's political connections several different ways. We include a variable for whether a campaign worker has worked for a higher level administration appointee prior to their work on the campaign. For example, if an Obama for America staffer previously worked for Hillary Clinton or Ken Salazar they would be coded with a 1.<sup>17</sup> We include indicators for whether or not the person has previously worked for a federal level political official (appointee or elected official) or state level political official (appointee or elected official). So, if a person worked for a member of Congress or a state legislator they would be coded with a 1 on the respective variable. We include measures for whether the person has ever worked as an employee of the state or national Democratic Party and whether a staff member previously worked for an interest group such as the American Association of Retired

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<sup>16</sup> Source: Shaw (2006). We include 2004 swing states since whether or not a state is considered swing in 2008 is endogenous to campaign activity and organization.

<sup>17</sup> This excludes those campaign staffers who worked for Obama prior to his run for the presidency.

Persons (AARP), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), or Emily's List. Finally, we include a count of the number of campaigns a staff member has worked on previously. Our expectation is that staffers with more political connections are more likely to get a job since, *ceteris paribus*, the political value of giving a job to a well connected staffer is greater than giving a job to a staffer with limited connections and visibility. In one specification we also include a count of the number of different types of connections a campaign staffer has with the expectation that a greater number of connections is correlated with a higher probability of a job. On average persons who received jobs had 1.41 connections compared to 0.74 for those without a job ( $p < 0.00$ ). This is preliminary evidence that a greater number of political connections may enhance the job prospects of campaign supporters.

### *Controls and Methods*

Since other aspects of a campaign worker's background are correlated with the key variables of interest and could influence the probability of appointment, we include a number of controls. Specifically, we include controls for the person's position in the campaign, including work for the national campaign, work as a state director, state political director, and state communications director. Our expectation is that persons higher up in the campaign organization are more likely to be named to jobs in the administration. While the biographical information for campaign staff is limited, we also include measures for the level of education (0-HS; 1-BA; 2-Masters level; 3-higher) and previous management experience in the not-for-profit or private sector.<sup>18</sup> Our expectation is that higher levels of demonstrated competence will increase the

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<sup>18</sup> We had hoped to code for previous public management experience but none of the campaign staffers had significant prior public management experience.

probability of a job in the administration since patronage-type appointees with demonstrated credentials are easier to place (Lewis 2008).

We estimate a series of logit models since the dependent variable is dichotomous. We report robust standard errors clustered on state since observations drawn from the different parts of the campaign organization are not independent. Since there are several measures of some of the key concepts, we estimate several models, varying the specification to evaluate the hypotheses using the different measures. There was one notable outlier state and that was Hawaii, President Obama's birth state. President Obama did 18 percentage points better in the two-party vote in Hawaii than Senator Kerry. This is more than 3 standard deviations higher than the next highest state in terms of campaign performance. The Hawaii cases (2) were excluded from model estimation because they were both outliers and influential.<sup>19</sup>

## **Results**

Model estimates are included in Table 2 and fit the data well. The models correctly predict between 84%-88% of the cases. Substantively, the models suggest President Obama rewarded campaign supporters with jobs in the new administration and he did so predictably. In the first eight months of his administration, the president and his personnel staff rewarded supporters who came out early for the president, played a key role in the election effort, and had important political connections.

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<sup>19</sup> We have estimated a series of models that include the Hawaii cases and they produce substantively similar results except that the difference in two party vote percentage variable must be accompanied by a squared term to account for Hawaii. These estimates are included in Appendix A.

**[Insert Table 2 here.]**

Importantly, campaign staffers who worked early for the campaign were more likely to be rewarded with a job. Consistent with past presidential practice of rewarding those “for Roosevelt before Chicago” and “for Kennedy before Los Angeles”, President Obama and his personnel office were more likely to give staffers from the campaign jobs if they worked for the campaign in 2007, before the delegate selection process. They were also more likely to give jobs to staffers who had worked on the president’s Senate staff or Senate campaign. The coefficient estimate on the variable accounting for work for the campaign in 2007 is significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests in all three models and suggests that early workers for Obama are 6-7% more likely to get a job. Given that the overall probability of getting a job is 12%, a 6% increase is a 50% increase in a campaign staffer’s job prospects. The coefficient indicating work for Obama’s Senate staff or campaign is positive and marginally significant ( $p < 0.056$ ;  $p < 0.08$ ) in two of the three models and indicates that such work increased the probability of an administration job by 7-9%. The long-time Obama staffer who worked both for Obama prior to his run for the presidency and the campaign has more than twice the chance of getting an administration job than other campaign staffers ( $6\% + 7\% = 13\%$ ). This is important empirical evidence that early supporters of the president’s campaign are systematically more likely to be rewarded by the president once in office, in this case with jobs. The benefits of rewarding early supporters include inducing future work for the candidate and the fact that early work for the campaign is an important indicator of loyalty to the president.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It is unclear whether early work for the campaign or duration of work on the campaign is more important. Presumably, some persons join the campaign early only to leave to return to other pursuits (e.g., jobs, graduate school) while others join the campaign later but stay for a longer

The estimates indicate that the president also rewards staff according to how much they contributed to the election victory although the estimates are somewhat imprecise. The coefficients reflecting performance relative to Kerry in 2004 are positive and significant at the 0.10 level in two-tailed tests in all three models. Substantively, they show that working in a state like California or Montana, where Obama did better than Kerry by 7 points, as opposed to a state like Arizona or Kentucky, where Obama only bested Kerry by 1 point, increases a staff member's chances of getting a job by 18 percentage points (Figure 1). As Figure 1 suggests, however, staffers working in battleground states are more likely to get jobs than staffers working in other states with the possible exception of staffers working in states where Obama did 9-10 points better than Kerry. These results suggest that the president is more likely to reward staff most visibly responsible for electoral success.<sup>21</sup>

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period of time. These data do not let us disentangle which person would be more advantaged in the job process. I thank Leslie Esbrook for pointing this out.

<sup>21</sup> One potential complication in this analysis is that the Obama for America campaign could have sent the very best staff to the battleground states. The fact that staffers in battleground states have a higher probability of getting a job could relate to their performance in a key state or the fact that more competent staff were put into battleground states in the first place. Is it competence or performance that drives personnel selection? To evaluate this further we estimated a model only on states that were battleground states for both Kerry and Obama. Presumably Kerry would make the same choice as Obama and examining states that were pivotal for both is one way to try to hold competence constant. In this model staffers in states that showed improved performance over Kerry were significantly more likely to get jobs than staffers in other states. The model is included as Model 4 in Appendix A.

**[Insert Figure 1 here.]**

Obama for America staff with more political connections are also more likely to get appointed positions. The coefficient on the count of the number of different types of connections in Model 3 is significant at the 0.05 level and indicates that each additional connection increases the probability of a job by 3% (Figure 2). Of course, a count of the connections a staffer has to other political actors is not a measure of the depth or importance of a connection but it is useful to see that a greater number of connections increases the probability of a job in the administration. The connections that seem to be the most influential are work for federal officials and high profile interest groups. The coefficient on work for another federal political official such as an appointee or member of Congress is significant at the 0.10 level ( $p < 0.07$ ) and is estimated to increase the probability of a job by 8%. The coefficient on work for an interest group is significant at the 0.05 level and estimated to increase the chances of a job in the administration by 20%. The estimates also suggest that previous campaign work increases the chances that a campaign staffer gets a job by 1-2% per campaign. Interestingly, we could not reject the null that work for the political party or a higher level appointee has no influence on the probability of getting a job, although the coefficient on the latter is larger. The fact that work for the Democratic Party does not improve one's chances for a job is interesting and highlights the changing nature of patronage politics in America. Whereas the party was the primary recipient of patronage at the national level for most of the nation's history, this is no longer the case. The national party has largely been supplanted by the personal campaign organizations of the presidents. The distribution of patronage reflects this change.

**[Insert Figure 2 here.]**

The finding that a greater number of connections increases the chances of a job raises an interesting question of theory and interpretation. Appointees with a greater number of connections also have longer resumes on average. This implies that a greater number of connections may also be an indicator of competence in some form. This makes disentangling the influence of competence and connections in the appointments process difficult. If a greater number of connections is a measure of competence, however, it is probably a particular kind of competence—political competence. Those campaign staffers with more extensive connections do not necessarily have more policy expertise or management experience. In fact none of the 706 bios available for these campaigns staff provided any information of notable previous public management experience. Campaign staffers are more likely to have experience in public relations, networking, and political strategy which is distinct from the kind of competence academics, the press, and the American public are concerned about during the appointments process. If appointees from the campaign are going into jobs as speechwriters, public affairs officials, and legislative liaisons it is worth asking what competence means in this context. Should we consider political competence more important than more traditional forms of competence such policy expertise or public management experience?

Coefficient estimates from the model controls shed additional light on the presidential appointments process. They indicate that persons higher in the campaign hierarchy and persons with more demonstrated competence were more likely to be given jobs in the new administration. Officials from the national campaign (as opposed to the state campaigns) were significantly more likely to receive jobs. While 12% of campaign workers were given jobs overall, persons working for the national campaign had a 40% chance of getting a job. For those campaign staff working in the state Obama for America offices, communications directors were

significantly more likely to get jobs than other campaign staff. The coefficients on the indicators for state director or state political director were positive and suggest substantively a 2-8% increase in the probability of getting a job but we could not reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients were 0. Interestingly, communications directors were almost as likely to get a job in the new administration as staffers from the national campaign. This may reflect the increasingly important role that campaign communicators play in elections and the transferability of such skills into political work in the agencies as legislative liaisons, public affairs officials, and speechwriters. More generally, however, the fact that persons higher in the campaign hierarchy are more likely to be rewarded with jobs helps confirm other data which indicates that presidents are more likely to reward supporters who contributed more to their campaign's success. Persons in the national campaign organization and high in the state-by-state organizations presumably deserve more credit for the success of the campaign than other supporters.

While the data available on campaign staff is limited, the evidence we have about competence suggests that persons with more demonstrated background experience have an advantage in the appointments process. Specifically, persons with higher levels of education are significantly more likely to get a job. For example, a person with a masters level education is about 4% (i.e., 16% vs. 12%) more likely to get a job in the first six months than someone with a bachelors degree. Interestingly, however, previous management experience in the private or not for profit sector does not increase the probability that a staff member gets a job. In fact, the coefficient on private sector experience is negatively correlated with the probability of getting a job. These results together suggest that campaign staff with better demonstrated credentials may have an advantage in the scramble for jobs although private sector experience is less valuable

than other kinds of expertise. It is possible, however, that those staff with previous management experience may have other careers they can easily return to after the campaign.

In total, the evidence from both the key variables and the controls suggest that patronage continues to play an important role in the presidential appointments process. The era of patronage is not over but it has taken a new form (Price 1944; Sorauf 1960). Presidential patronage appears to be focused more on rewarding the personal campaign organization of the president rather than the national party (Thompson and Brown 1997). The Obama White House rewarded early joiners, important campaign officials, and the politically valuable more than other staffers. Notably, presidents also find it easier to place persons with stronger demonstrated credentials. The pattern of favoring candidates with campaign and political credentials as well as competence is consistent with what we know about past presidents and is an important confirmation of previous research (Hecl 1977; Mackenzie 1981; Patterson and Pfiffner 2001; Pfiffner 1996, 140; Tolchin and Tolchin 1971; Weko 1995). This new evidence helps explain which of these factors is important and how important they are relative to other factors.

## **Discussion**

These findings raise two key issues concerning the relationship between presidents and campaign supporters and suggest avenues for future research. The first issue is the generalizability of the findings about campaign staffers to presidential supporters more generally. Campaign staffers are only one type of supporter. The population of supporters also includes prominent endorsers, major donors, and affiliated volunteers or advisors. The dynamics of reward that characterize the appointments process for campaign staffers probably apply to rewarding other supporters. As George Washington Plunkitt's earlier claim suggests, campaign

supporters of all types hope to get something out of their involvement with the campaign. Presidents have an interest in rewarding important supporters even if the reward is not a job. Presumably, presidents are also most likely to reward supporters *outside* the campaign who endorse early, make a key contribution, or provide the most political value.

A key way that campaign staffers differ from the larger population of supporters, however, is that campaign staffers may be more likely to prefer a job in return for their work. Prominent endorsers in Congress or campaign donors, for example, are more likely to have a job and prefer some other form of reward. Presidents also give out smaller rewards such as invitations to White House events, trips on Air Force One, or symbolic mementos. More importantly, presidents give out larger rewards such as special access to policymakers or unusual favor in distribution of contracts or grants. This study suggests that the factors that influence the distribution of jobs and will also influence the distribution of other government goods and services. In this way the study of presidential patronage highlights something more fundamental about presidents and American politics. A fruitful line of future research could examine whether those supporters who do not seek jobs are more likely to be rewarded by other means.

Second, it is worth considering whether findings from the Obama Administration are generalizable to modern presidents more generally. The presidential personnel process has changed dramatically in the last fifty years as national parties have declined and personal candidate-centered organizations have become more important (Thompson and Brown 1997; Van Riper 1958; Weko 1995). Presidents have built up personnel staffs and asserted greater control over the filling of appointments down to the lowest level (Lewis 2008; Mackenzie 1981; Pfiffner 1996; Weko 1995). President Obama assumed office on the tail of these emerging trends and changes continue. President Obama's transition was characterized by greater demand for

jobs than any previous modern president and his personnel operation was more technologically sophisticated than any of his predecessors. Given the changing role of the national parties, the fluctuating demands for appointed jobs, and the continually changing personnel process, it is perilous to generalize to past or future presidents. It is hard to imagine, however, how the general desire to reward early joiners, those most pivotal to the campaign, and the best connected would not influence all presidents. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, future research could help illuminate how generalizable these findings are and how they relate to the location and prestige of jobs to which presidential supporters are named.

Future research might not only take up questions of generalizability but also tackle what jobs these supporters got and why those jobs and not (Lewis 2008). It is interesting to note that of the 138 who got jobs in the first months of the administration, five were nominated for Senate-confirmed positions (under secretary, assistant secretary, attorney general), 20 had high level management positions (director, assistant secretary) for public affairs or legislative relations positions, 63 received staff jobs (Schedule C; confidential assistant, chief of staff, deputy press secretary), and the remainder was named to jobs in the White House or related agencies. Campaign staffers were appointed to different types of positions at different levels within different agencies. Some agencies employ several former campaign staffers and some none. Yet, we know very little about what explains this variation.

## **Conclusion**

Ambassador Avant had three factors working in her favor for appointment. She was an early supporter of President Obama, she played a visible and important role in the campaign by raising a significant amount of money, and she was well connected in philanthropic and

Democratic circles. What worked to Ambassador Avant's advantage also influences the fate of other presidential supporters. Through an examination of the fates of 1,113 Obama for America campaign staffers, this paper has helped illuminate an understudied part of the presidential personnel process. It has illustrated key factors that determine who gets rewarded in the political process. It has shown that presidents reward supporters in predictable ways by rewarding supporters who declare their decision early, supporters who make an important and visible contribution, and the politically connected.

Choices to place campaign supporters into appointed positions have consequences for policy and government performance. Campaign staff received positions throughout the White House and executive branch. They will influence policy, craft the administration's message, and direct agency operations. Presidents try to satisfy patronage demands by placing persons selected for these reasons into positions where they will do the least harm for performance. This is an imperfect process, however, since it is hard to predict which positions will become important and lower level appointees can gain significant informal power. Numerous anecdotes concerning cases like FEMA and an emerging literature on the relationship between appointees and performance suggests patronage appointments hurt federal management. The possibility of such an outcome highlights the importance of understanding this part of the appointments process.

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**Table 1. Obama for America Campaign Staff: Summary Statistics**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Job in Administration	1,113	0.12	0.33	0	1
<i>Early for Obama</i>					
Work for Obama in 2007	1,113	0.17	0.38	0	1
Obama Staff	1,113	0.01	0.12	0	1
<i>Contribution to Election Victory</i>					
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry	1,113	5.11	2.23	-6	18
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry^2	1,113	31.05	27.32	0	324
Battleground State	1,113	0.42	0.49	0	1
<i>Political Value: Connections</i>					
Connection to Higher Appointee	706	0.08	0.27	0	1
Worked for Appointed or Elected Federal Official	706	0.15	0.36	0	1
Worked for Appointed or Elected State Official	706	0.08	0.25	0	1
Worked for Democratic Party	706	0.22	0.42	0	1
Number of Previous Campaigns	706	0.55	1.10	0	8
Worked for an Interest Group	706	0.05	0.23	0	1
Number of Connections	706	0.85	1.14	0	5
<i>Controls</i>					
National Office	1,113	0.28	0.45	0	1
State Director	1,113	0.05	0.21	0	1
Political Director	1,113	0.04	0.19	0	1
Communications Director	1,113	0.03	0.17	0	1
Education Level	706	0.94	0.74	0	3
Not for Profit Management	706	0.09	0.28	0	1
Private Management	706	0.21	0.41	0	1

**Table 2. Which Campaign Staffers Get Obama Administration Jobs? ML Estimates of Factors Influencing Selection**

Variable	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Early for Obama</i>						
Work for Obama in 2007	0.68**	0.19	0.62**	0.22	0.49**	0.20
Obama Senate Staff (Campaign or Legislative)	0.81*	0.42	0.20	0.28	0.54*	0.31
<i>Contribution to Election Victory</i>						
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry	0.14*	0.08	0.19*	0.11	0.18*	0.10
Battleground State	1.20	0.85	1.90*	1.05	1.70*	0.99
Difference in Percent*Battleground State	-0.14	0.14	-0.24	0.16	-0.22	0.15
<i>Political Value: Connections</i>						
Connection to Higher Appointee			0.23	0.20		
Worked for Appointed or Elected Federal Official			0.61*	0.33		
Worked for Appointed or Elected State Official			0.49	0.35		
Worked for Democratic Party			-0.33	0.31		
Worked for Interest Group			1.28**	0.49		
Number of Previous Campaigns			0.15**	0.04		
Number of Connections					0.27**	0.13
<i>Controls and Constant</i>						
National Office	2.25**	0.35	1.96**	0.42	1.96**	0.40
State Director	0.80	0.52	0.19	0.53	0.23	0.52
Political Director	1.02**	0.37	0.50	0.36	0.51	0.35
Communications Director	2.78**	0.46	2.26**	0.56	2.27**	0.53
Education Level			0.34**	0.12	0.32**	0.13
Not for Profit Management			-0.41	0.37	0.12	0.19
Private Management			-0.51**	0.13	-0.47**	0.12
Constant	-4.29**	0.72	-4.65**	0.69	-4.55**	0.87
Number of Cases	1,111		704		704	
Percent Correctly Predicted	88.30%		84.66%		84.80%	

Note: Dependent variable is whether or not campaign staffer got job in the Obama Administration. Excludes cases from Hawaii, Obama's birth state. \*\*significant at the 0.05 level; \*significant at the 0.10 level in two-tailed tests. Standard errors adjusted for clustering on states.

Figure 1. Estimate Impact of State Electoral Performance on Probability of a Job in the Obama Administration

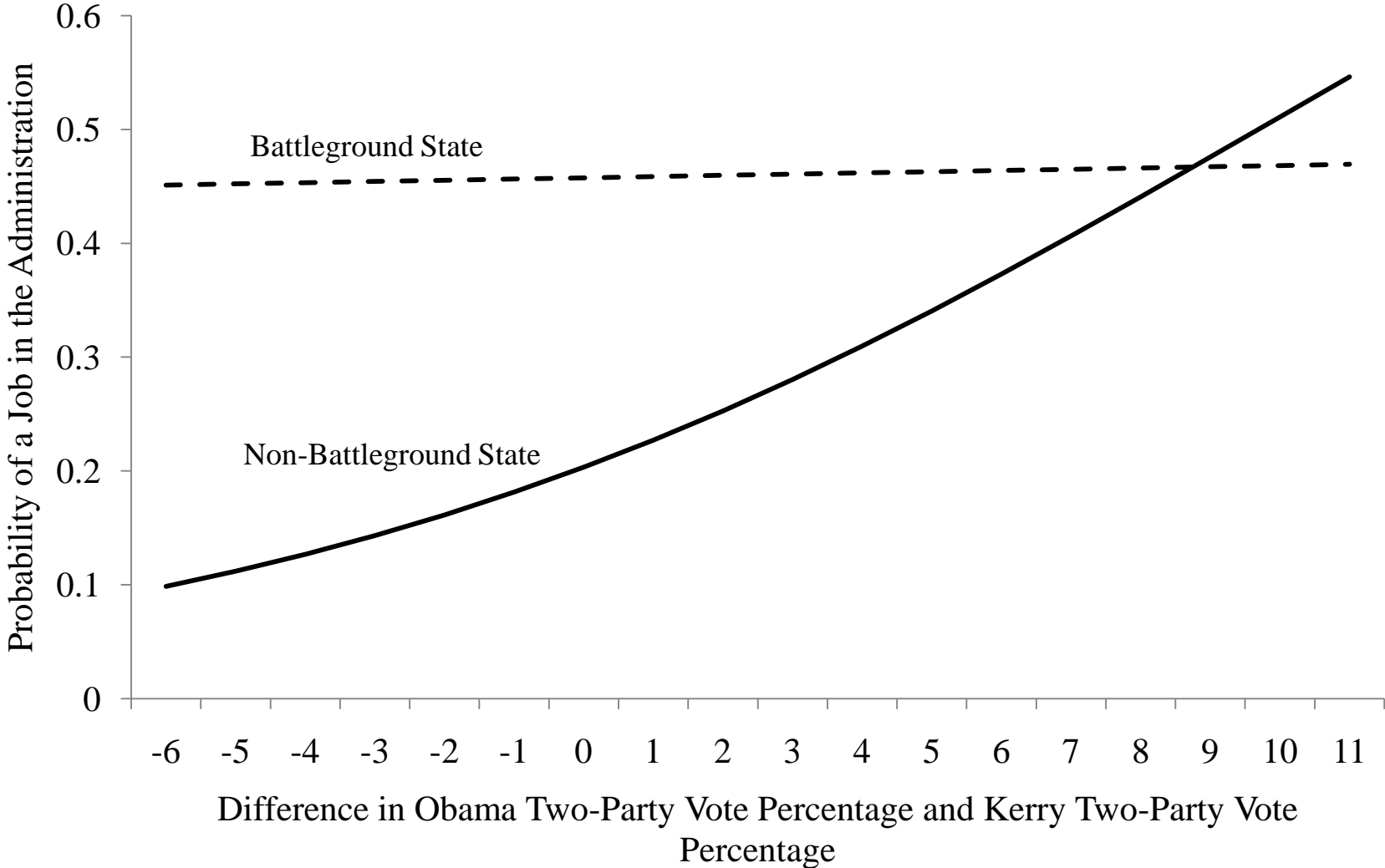
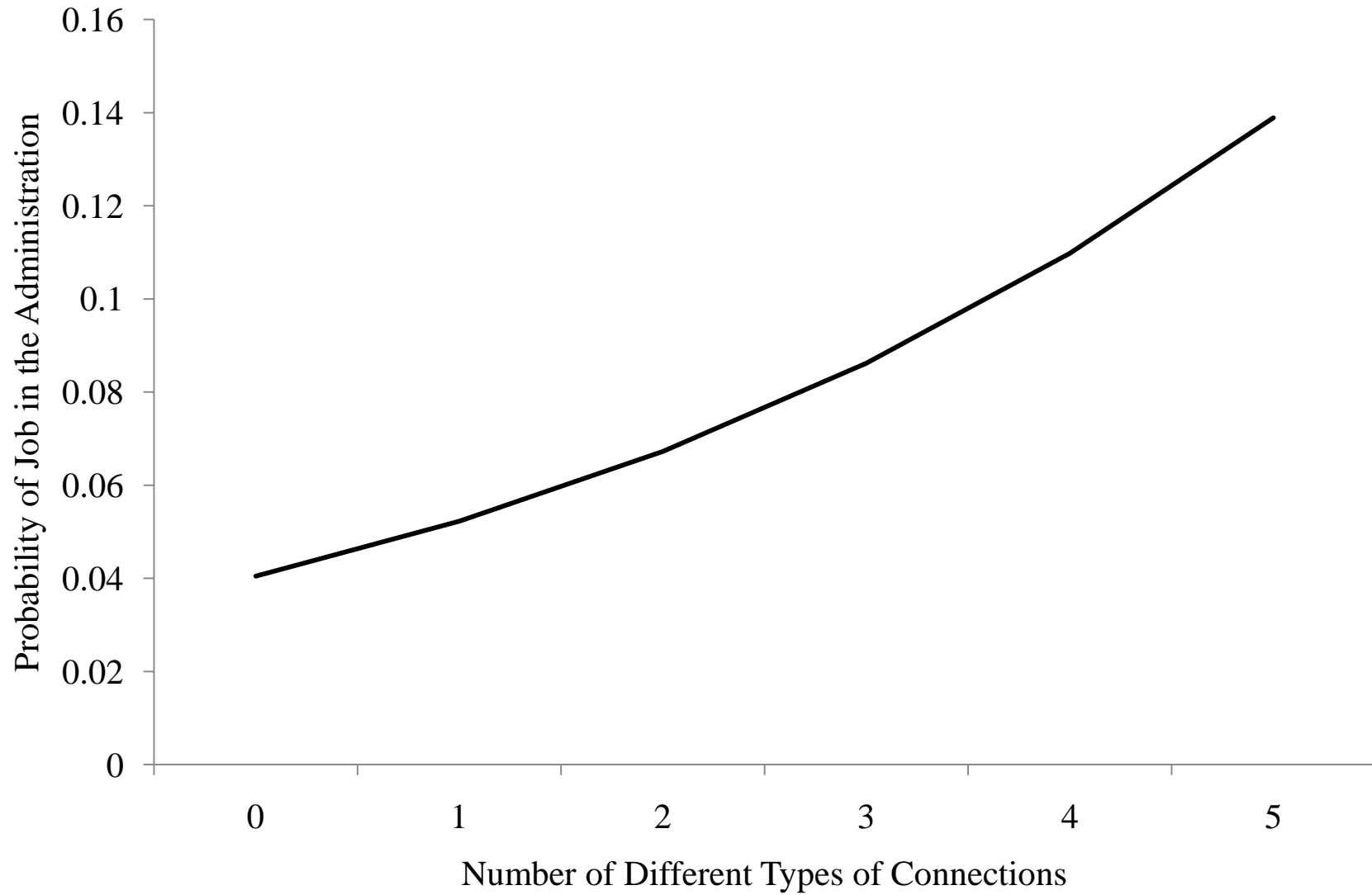


Figure 2. Estimated Impact of Campaign Staff Political Connections on Probability of Getting a Job in the Obama Administration



## Appendix A Which Campaign Staffers Get Obama Administration Jobs? Alternative Specifications

Variable	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Early for Obama</i>								
Work for Obama in 2007	0.68**	0.19	0.63**	0.23	0.50**	0.21	1.11**	0.53
Obama Senate Staff (Campaign or Legislative)	0.81*	0.42	0.22	0.27	0.55*	0.30	1.02**	0.52
<i>Contribution to Election Victory</i>								
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry	0.26*	0.15	0.23*	0.14	0.24	0.15	1.02**	0.52
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry^2	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.11**	0.05
Battleground State	0.36	0.37	0.46	0.37	0.38	0.38		
<i>Political Value: Connections</i>								
Connection to Higher Appointee			0.29	0.20				
Worked for Appointed or Elected Federal Official			0.61*	0.33				
Worked for Appointed or Elected State Official			0.44	0.36				
Worked for Democratic Party			-0.34	0.32				
Worked for Interest Group			1.23**	0.48				
Number of Previous Campaigns			0.14**	0.05				
Number of Connections					0.27**	0.13		
<i>Controls and Constant</i>								
National Office	1.98**	0.28	1.61**	0.34	1.64**	0.33		
State Director	0.80	0.52	0.21	0.53	0.27	0.53	-0.48	1.18
Political Director	1.01**	0.38	0.53	0.37	0.54	0.36	1.30**	0.67
Communications Director	2.71**	0.45	2.22**	0.56	2.22**	0.53	3.01**	0.46
Education Level			0.34**	0.12	0.32**	0.13		
Not for Profit Management			-0.37	0.37	0.13	0.20		
Private Management			-0.50**	0.13	-0.46**	0.12		
Constant	-4.18**	0.67	-4.13**	0.69	-4.15**	0.71	-5.32**	1.15
Number of Cases	1,113		706		706		387	
Percent Correctly Predicted	88.32%		84.56%		84.70%		92.25%	

Note: Dependent variable is whether or not campaign staffer got job in the Obama Administration. \*\*significant at the 0.05 level; \*significant at the 0.10 level in two-tailed tests. Standard errors adjusted for clustering on states. Models 1-3 include Hawaii cases. Model 4 is estimated using only states that were battleground states prior to 2004 and prior to 2008.

**Appendix B. Which Campaign Staffers Get Obama Administration Jobs? ML Estimates of Factors Influencing Selection**

Variable	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Early for Obama</i>								
Work for Obama in 2007	0.68**	0.19	0.63**	0.23	0.50**	0.21	1.11**	0.53
Obama Senate Staff (Campaign or Legislative)	0.81*	0.42	0.22	0.27	0.55*	0.30	1.02**	0.52
<i>Contribution to Election Victory</i>								
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry	0.26*	0.15	0.23*	0.14	0.24	0.15	1.02**	0.52
Difference in Percent for Obama and Kerry^2	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.11**	0.05
Battleground State	0.36	0.37	0.46	0.37	0.38	0.38		
<i>Political Value: Connections</i>								
Connection to Higher Appointee			0.29	0.20				
Worked for Appointed or Elected Federal Official			0.61*	0.33				
Worked for Appointed or Elected State Official			0.44	0.36				
Worked for Democratic Party			-0.34	0.32				
Worked for Interest Group			1.23**	0.48				
Number of Previous Campaigns			0.14**	0.05				
Number of Connections					0.27**	0.13		
<i>Controls and Constant</i>								
National Office	1.98**	0.28	1.61**	0.34	1.64**	0.33		
State Director	0.80	0.52	0.21	0.53	0.27	0.53	-0.48	1.18
Political Director	1.01**	0.38	0.53	0.37	0.54	0.36	1.30**	0.67
Communications Director	2.71**	0.45	2.22**	0.56	2.22**	0.53	3.01**	0.46
Education Level			0.34**	0.12	0.32**	0.13		
Not for Profit Management			-0.37	0.37	0.13	0.20		
Private Management			-0.50**	0.13	-0.46**	0.12		
Constant	-4.18**	0.67	-4.13**	0.69	-4.15**	0.71	-5.32**	1.15
Number of Cases	1,113		706		706		387	
Percent Correctly Predicted	88.32%		84.56%		84.70%		92.25%	

Note: Dependent variable is whether or not campaign staffer got job in the Obama Administration. \*\*significant at the 0.05 level; \*significant at the 0.10 level in two-tailed tests. Standard errors adjusted for clustering on states.