Before the Primary: Party Participation in Congressional Nominating Processes

by

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B.A. (University of California, Berkeley) 1998
M.A. (University of California, Berkeley) 1999

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Political Science
in the
GRADUATE DIVISION
of the
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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Spring 2005
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University of California, Berkeley

Spring 2005
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by

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Abstract

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This project systematically investigates party elite participation in congressional pre-nomination politics in 2002. Most research on congressional elections predicts election outcomes by focusing solely on the ambitions and qualifications of the candidates running. That focus on candidates stems from the widely held assumption that because American party organizations are not strong hierarchies, candidates’ decisions to seek their party’s nomination for office are completely independent of partisan influence. I contend that if the party is conceptualized more broadly, as a network of elites, including potential candidates, who are interested in winning partisan competitions, that one can observe interactions between such elites and ambitious candidates that cast doubt on the notion that candidates act completely independent of party. I argue that the more competitive the general election race is expected to be, the more likely partisan elites will unify early around one strong candidate in a primary, effectively stacking the primary voters’ choices in favor of that candidate.

This project develops novel ways of measuring party elite involvement in primary races. It defines two types of party organizational actors: traditional hierarchical
organizations like state and national party committees, and informally aligned elite partisans like officeholders, activists, loyal donors, and loyal partisan interest groups. It then describes measures of the involvement of each of those actors in the campaigns of over 490 primary candidates in 180 races that took place in 2002.

Analysis of these data indicates that although partisan elites do tend to respond to the qualities of the candidates who decide to run for the nomination, they also are more likely to unify around one candidate in races that are more competitive. Ten supplementary case studies show that elites who unify behind one candidate in a primary are almost always concerned about the general election, and not merely following the preferences of primary voters.

The concluding chapter critiques previous efforts to investigate whether “divisive” primaries hurt the party in the general election, and shows that disunity prior to the primary may not have a direct effect on general election outcomes.
Dedication

For Mom and Dad
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Acknowledgments

For their financial assistance, I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Dirksen Congressional Center and the UC Berkeley Political Science Department.

This dissertation has benefited from the helpful advice of a great many people. First, I am indebted to my committee chair, Nelson W. Polsby, for his advice and friendship for the last seven years, and for his personal support for this project. I am also grateful to Eric Schickler for his thorough and extremely helpful comments on the substance of the dissertation, and to Bruce Cain for his attention to this project and his willingness to join my committee late in the game. I also thank John Ellwood for agreeing to join the committee as “a player to be named later.” Many thanks to Rob Mickey for his thoughtful comments and encouragement while I was initially formulating my prospectus. Thanks also to Jonathan Bernstein, David Karol and Seth Masket for helpful conversations about the state of the study of political parties.

I would like to especially thank Terri Bimes for her help in formulating my prospectus and for originally sitting on my dissertation committee. Her professional support and personal friendship were an invaluable part of my graduate school experience, and her encouragement in my decision to become a mother was especially important to me. I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to Judy Gruber for her friendship and especially for sharing her advice about balancing motherhood and an academic career.

This dissertation would be neither complete nor any good without the constant critiques and intellectual support offered by the members of the Graduate Workshop in American Politics. To my unofficial dissertation committee, Justin Buchler, Meg Carne,
Matt Jarvis, Megan Mullin, John McNulty, Keith Smith, and Amy Steigerwalt, I extend my most heartfelt thanks. I have also benefited both personally and intellectually from my friendships with other current and former Berkeley graduate students, especially Kathryn Pearson, Eric McGhee, Brendan Doherty, Melissa Cully Anderson, Darshan Goux, and Jill Greenlee. I am grateful to the Institute of Governmental Studies at Berkeley for providing an infrastructure in which I could meet, learn from, and share my passion for politics with these and many other outstanding and brilliant people. I count the daily teas, biennial election night parties, and countless hours of casual conversation at IGS as some of the best times of my life. Thanks to all who chatted, all who tried to work while others chatted, and all who tolerated my undying support of the Giants. Special thanks to all of the administrative, library and office staff at IGS for their role in helping us become the happiest grad students in the field.

Finally, and of course most importantly, I must thank my family. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Angela Byrne Knudsen and Phil Knudsen. Their countless sacrifices to provide me with a world-class education and their undying support for all of my choices have allowed me to pursue, and realize, all of my dreams. I also thank my brother, Nick Knudsen, my sister and her husband, Lizzie and Brandon Moggio, and Sheila Byrne for their faith in me and for their friendship.

Authors almost by obligation must thank their spouses and children for allowing them the time and freedom to complete a project as long and involved as this one. Never have more thanks been due than those I owe Gerardo Dominguez. Not only has he been my harshest critic, my toughest editor, my most inspiring coach, but he was also my programming tutor, my exam buddy, and my fellow party theorist. I thank
Gerardo most of all for his absolutely honest interest in my studies and in this project. He may be the world’s only astrophysicist who can not only understand, but tell, appropriate jokes about rational choice, V.O. Key, and Dick Fenno, and I’m lucky to have him. He has been an intellectual partner in this project, and I will be forever grateful.

Last of all, I thank Erin for being such a sweet, easy baby, and for sharing me with my work. I wish for you only that you figure out what interests you and pursue it with all your heart. And always remember that you can do anything under a deadline.
Chapter 1
Party Nominations and Party Strength

The party organization’s influence on congressional nominations varies but is generally feeble. Few congressional candidates find opposition from the local party leaders to be a significant handicap; neither is their support very helpful.


Once the party got him, I was evil. I had dinner with one woman who was going to work on my campaign, then she and other people stopped returning phone calls. Staffers wouldn't be hired by me, they were told that the party would view them in disfavor if they worked with me instead of the party favorite. I had to just find a guy I know to run the campaign. Two years ago I even got a call from the former state chair, trying to discourage me from running. Nicely, but still...[The other candidate] told me his life was completely changed after he was recruited. Somebody brought him a list of names and chained him to a desk to make fundraising calls all the time. Nobody brought me a list like that.

--runner-up in a U.S. House 2002 primary, (personal interview)

A political party is an organization whose aim is to control political power by winning elections. A strong party, by that definition, is one that controls to the greatest degree possible any factors that might affect its ability to win as many elections as possible. Political scientists often describe American political parties as weak, in large part because American political parties do not directly control who runs for office under the party label or the platform on which they run, and in that sense lack important controls over the party’s electoral fortunes. Aside from noting that a few state parties do permit party elites to select nominees at nominating conventions, most political scientists assume that because parties cannot legally prohibit candidates from entering primary contests, they are completely unable to influence the nomination process.
There was an era when state party leaders dominated state political parties. In this era, in some states, at some times, party “bosses” could choose who would run for congressional and senatorial offices. At that time, parties were best understood at the state level. But as patronage ceased to be a party resource in most states, as court decisions separated local party bases from the geographic boundaries of congressional districts, as campaign finance laws diminished the financial roles of single individuals in campaigns, and as campaigns themselves became more professionalized and resource intensive, state parties were less able to control candidacies for party nominations for federal office. As state party leaders lost control of nominations, and campaigns became candidate-centered rather than party-centered, political scientists began to see primary campaigns as primarily driven by the choices of strategic candidates. Parties fell off of our radar screen.

But at the beginning of the 21st century, it may not be to state parties but to national parties and to nation-wide networks of party elites that we look for influence over nominations. Several factors have changed the roles that parties play in primaries. First, campaigns have continued to become more resource-intensive as polling, direct mail, television, and professional advice have become more common and necessary to win contested races for state and federal offices. Second, the closeness of the party divisions in the House and Senate after 1994, and the sense that control of the Congress was contested, led to improvements in the already developing institutions of the national political and congressional parties. The national parties, and to some degree state parties as well, have become more and more proficient at raising money, dominating electoral professions, and directing critical resources to the races that are
most hotly contested. The attentions of party insiders at all of these levels of party organization are now directed not only at competitive general elections, but also at the primary elections that precede them. State parties and small numbers of state party elites do not determine who will run, or who will win, nominations for party elections to federal office. But increasingly, federal party officials and loose networks of national, state, and local party elites do influence who runs in contested primary elections, and by directing the resources of other party elites, can profoundly influence party voters’ choices on primary election day.

Certainly it is the case that the candidate-centered nature of the American political system diminishes the potential role that party organizations can play in campaigns. But at the turn of the 21st century, competitive elections bring many elements of the two major party organizations out of the woodwork. When electoral conditions demand rational, strategic responses from the party organizations, they are often capable of delivering such behavior, even despite the many roadblocks the political system puts in their way. Even primary elections, which place the nomination of party candidates formally in the hands of the voters, can be affected by elite partisan maneuverings.

Through its access to useful campaign resources, there are many potential ways a party, either as an official organization or as a coalition of elites who share the party’s goals, can influence the candidate nomination process. Party elites can recruit, discourage, and endorse candidates and provide access to established fundraisers, big money donors and campaign professionals. To the degree that one candidate has closer ties to party insiders and therefore disproportionate access to these resources, they
might significantly alter the primary election landscape. Just because most states’
official party rules say that any candidate can compete in a primary election does not
mean that most primary elections are free-for-alls whose dynamics are most heavily
influenced by the private ambitions of candidates. It is, rather, an empirical question
how often and under what conditions party elites behave as if they were part of strong
parties rather than weak parties.

**Conventional views of political parties in congressional elections**

Political science research tells us a great deal about the ambitions and
motivations of the candidates who seek election to Congress, but very little about how
the political parties affect their rise to power, particularly at the nomination stage. For
the last few decades, political scientists have considered strong parties and party-
dominated campaigns to be relics of the past (Wattenberg 1984). Although that view is
changing, American political parties are still seen as organizationally weak, especially
when it comes to the crucial task of selecting the nominees that will appear on the ballot
under the party label. With the rise of candidate-centered elections during the second
half of the twentieth century, the party’s nomination became a prize that a candidate
could win from primary voters rather than one that was handed out by party elites. As a
consequence, political scientists in this era have emphasized the private ambitions that
govern the public behavior of many candidates for office (Jacobson and Kernell 1983;
This focus on candidates and disdain for parties has been particularly prevalent in research on congressional elections. Since the *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964) decision, congressional district lines no longer necessarily follow county boundaries or other communities of interest, making it imperative for candidates to build their own personal and electoral coalitions rather than relying on local parties whose jurisdictions may cross-cut district lines. In response to the rise in carefully redistricted “safe” seats and the professionalization of political careers (Polsby 1968), congressional elections research in general has focused on the incumbency advantage (Jacobson 2001; Mann and Wolfinger 1980; Mayhew 1974), while congressional nominations research has focused on how candidates themselves decide when and whether to run for office (Maisel and Stone 1997; Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). There have also been a limited number of studies of elite and party recruitment of candidates (Jewel 1999; Kazee and Thornberry 1994; Canon 1993; Maisel et al 1990), but most scholars have emphasized the importance of the personal and professional qualities of the candidates that survive the nomination process, without giving much attention to that process itself (Lublin 1994; Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985). Certainly ambitious candidates are critical actors in the nomination process, but it may also be true that party elites play a more complex role in primary elections than they are usually assumed to play.

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1 John Bibby (1990, 23) expresses this conventional wisdom: “By involving ordinary voters in the selection of party nominees, the direct primary has reduced the capacity of party leaders to control nominations.” Aldrich (1995, 295) says that: “The party as an organization does not centrally control nominations. They are controlled by the strongest and most effective of the candidates’ personal campaign organizations and by those ambitious benefit seekers who head interest groups, PACs, and movements.”
Why there is reason to believe parties influence nominations

While it is true that in most states anyone can run for the party’s nomination for a U.S. House or Senate seat, and that candidates must build their own loyalist coalitions, party organizations and party elites still have important roles to play in the nomination process. First of all, there are still several states with strong party organizations and restrictive party rules that leave the nomination in the hands of attendees at district or state party conventions, or permit party organizations to officially endorse primary candidates (e.g., Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey). Although for the most part formal primary elections are still held in these states, nominations there are often effectively predetermined by the parties.

Even in states that permit truly contested primary elections, party elites may profoundly affect the legitimacy of candidates in the eyes of primary voters. Because primary elections are resource-intensive, candidates that are able to raise the most money are able to hire the best campaign professionals and in turn produce the most effective self-marketing campaigns. But campaign professionals are often party-loyal themselves and will only work for candidates with whom they agree ideologically (Bernstein, 2000). And since lists of party loyal donors are often passed around within the party, only candidates with connections to the party network will be able to get access to wealthy, reliable party donors. In addition, primary voters at the ballot box must choose from a list of candidates within the same party, which means that the most important voting cue, the party label, cannot figure into their decision. Instead, endorsements from groups and individuals who are known to party-loyal primary voters can influence primary voters’ decisions. Therefore, even in states where laws and party
rules keep the party organizations themselves from affecting primary election results, individuals and groups within the party coalition can effectively stack the deck in favor of one primary candidate.

The Party-Involvement Theory of Primary Elections

I argue here that where the party organization faces incentives to stack the deck in favor of one primary candidate, it will do so. In making this argument, I offer a modification to the widely accepted, candidate-centered model of congressional elections. This model posits that candidate-emergence patterns in congressional elections are best explained by considering the incentives that face ambitious, experienced politicians when they are faced with an opportunity to run for Congress. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) famously articulated the notion that experienced, ambitious politicians are risk averse, and will only give up their current position to seek a higher one when they believe they have good odds of succeeding.² For most scholars of congressional elections, this model is sufficient. Indeed, this theory explains both the ease with which incumbents stave off quality challengers and win reelection easily, and national swings in party success in congressional elections.

But the problem with this model is that it assumes that the party organization is completely irrelevant to the process by which its own candidates are nominated. It develops no hypotheses about where, when, or how party organizations should behave in primary elections and does not consider the possibility that under some circumstances, the party may have incentives to shape the candidate emergence or

² Although this argument was articulated before the term limits movement of the early 1990s, and politicians who live in term limits states and who are sure to lose their current office may be more likely to leave their current job for a chance at a better one.
primary election process. It assumes that parties have no resources with which they could accomplish these goals, but does not empirically examine the matter.

Perhaps the reason that the dominant model of congressional elections ignores the party organization is because the outcomes of the vast majority of congressional elections are predetermined by the advantages of incumbency and the gerrymandering of districts. In a race where the party can expect to either win the seat easily, or lose the seat by a large margin, the party as a seat-maximizing entity faces no incentive to attempt to influence who is nominated or how easily they secure that nomination. In races where the outcome can be predicted with virtual certainty more than a year from the general election, it is rational for the party organization to let ambitious candidates and voters determine the outcome of the general election.

However, the party organization does have a vested interest in the outcome of the primary election process in races that are expected to be competitive for both parties in the general election. It is in competitive elections that the party’s central goal, that of winning elected office in order to control the policy agenda of government, is on the line. I argue, therefore, that the pre-primary behavior of both candidates and partisan-minded elites should be affected by the degree to which the general election is expected to be competitive.

In competitive elections, we should expect that the party will try to do everything within its power to make sure that the strongest possible general election competitor wins the primary. It may therefore recruit strong candidates, clear the field for one strong candidate, and/or display unified partisan elite support for one of several primary candidates. My dependent variable of interest will be unified elite support for a
primary candidate, and the goal of this project is to develop measures of such behavior and to test whether competitive elections disproportionately produce it.

**Alternative hypotheses**

There are two clear alternatives to this theory. If we do, indeed, observe partisan elites uniformly supporting one primary candidate, it may be the case that elites are concerned with their own standing in the public eye, and not actively working to improve the party’s fortunes in the general election. It may also be the case that voters are not influenced by any resources partisan elites can offer to candidates, and will make up their minds based on the qualities of the candidates who run, regardless of partisan elite participation. I argue that neither of these alternative hypotheses adequately summarizes the incentives facing partisan elites, and I find that there is evidence to dispute both interpretations.

*The Feedback Loop of Candidate Quality*

The dominant theory of congressional elections tells us that parties are irrelevant to the candidate emergence process because candidates make private entry decisions based on their assessment of their chances of winning the nomination and general election. If we were to observe unified partisan elite support for one candidate, this dominant theory would explain that observation as reflexive elite response to the quality of the candidate who receives their support. In other words, the candidate who is obviously most highly qualified to sit in Congress will draw elite support, just as he or
she draws voter support. The elite support is incidental, since voters will respond to the same candidate qualities and support that person, regardless of elite endorsements.

I argue in Chapter 2 that when a general election is expected to be competitive, partisan elites of all stripes (elected officials, interest group leaders, financial contributors) have strong incentives to make sure that a highly qualified candidate wins the nomination, and has all the resources he or she needs to mount a strong general election campaign. To the degree that these elites perceive that one candidate has the best chance of winning the general election, they have strong incentives to make sure that person wins the nomination with as little rancor as possible. Unified elite partisan support for that person in the primary may be seen as one means to that end. Elites, in other words, may always support the most highly qualified candidate, but they should support one person in deliberately unified patterns in competitive elections. Primary voters, in turn, may then be influenced by the party favorite’s elite endorsements, interest group endorsements, and better-financed campaign. In Chapter 5, I show that even when you control for the objective quality of the candidate, competitive elections promote more unified party support for strong primary candidates than uncompetitive elections do. This indicates that while it is certainly an important factor in elite decision-making, candidate quality is not the only factor that affects their decisions.

*Only back a winner*

The second, related alternative hypothesis is that elites are too risk averse to try to lead primary voters to support a particular candidate, and so when we observe them supporting a candidate it is just because they anticipate that that person is going to win
the primary election anyway. Certainly partisan elites would have short political lives if they did not pay attention to what the voters want. However, even as they take voter preferences into consideration, partisan elites may be wary of the choices that primary voters can potentially make. In a competitive election, they need to be especially sure that a viable candidate wins the nomination. Without systematic public polling of primary electorates, it is difficult to design a study that controls for voter opinion when making the case that elites exercise some judgment about their pre-primary behavior. Instead, through a series of case studies presented in Chapter 4, I show that in competitive elections, elites often do explicitly consider general election strategies, rather than the pre-existing preferences of primary voters, when choosing how to become involved in primary elections.

**Why focus on the Party Organization?**

If in most states, voters formally hold the power to nominate a candidate, why should we look instead at the pre-primary behavior of elite partisans? First, as noted above, the low-information environment that voters encounter in a primary election may prompt them to look for cues from elites about which candidate to support. If most individuals and groups that a voter identifies with support one particular candidate, that may be a powerful influence on that voter’s decision at the ballot box.

Second, and more importantly, the nomination of a candidate has traditionally been one of the most important functions of a party organization. Committed, active participants in party politics will have to work with the nominee in the general election, benefit from his or her popularity on the ballot and in office, suffer from their
connection to a candidate who proves to be a poor candidate or incompetent officeholder, and endure the consequences of the way that person’s prominent connection to the party shapes the way the party and its ideas are framed. For voters, even for committed partisans who choose to vote in a primary election, the decision is merely a “yes” or “no” every two years. Such voters may be only dimly aware of how the candidate behaves in office or how his candidacy or incumbency affects the fortunes of other officeholders. More committed partisans, who volunteer their time and money to campaigns, who hold office under the party label, who work to shape policy as part of the party coalition, have a much greater stake in the outcome of a nomination campaign. They therefore have a great incentive to participate if they fear that the process of nomination or outcome of a nomination campaign could damage their own personal fortunes, or affect the causes in which they invest their personal resources. Because elite elements of the party organization face these incentives to become involved in primary campaigns, and to potentially affect those campaigns and how voters perceive them, we should focus our attention on the party organization, rather than primary voters. What, then, constitutes a party organization?

The Evolving View of Parties as Elite Networks

In order to fully understand the operation and potential influence of modern American political parties it is important to look beyond their official organizations and committees and examine how various actors operate in parties’ informal, network-like structures. Although empirical studies of party organization have focused on the official representatives of the party (Silbey 1990; Herrnson 1988; Cotter et al. 1984), theories of
party structure support a broader definition that includes elite party actors.\(^3\) An emerging literature is attempting to reconceptualize the roles that parties play in elections. These scholars base their approach on the assumption that like everything else in politics, the party structure is more open and fluid now, and more and different individuals, in different roles, can be influential.\(^4\) For example, Schwartz (1990) traces out relationships between Illinois Republicans and shows that a party’s organizational form may be more closely approximated by a network rather than by a hierarchy. An understanding of party coalitions can encompass both the party’s formal hierarchical structures and the loyal big-money donors who support the organization, the activists who staff candidate campaigns, and the highly partisan hired-gun strategists who help party candidates compete for office.

Several scholars have shown that it can be fruitful to consider how elite party participants in “the Expanded Party” (Bernstein 1999) can affect the political process, and particularly the politics of party nominations. Several studies have shown that staff (both campaign professionals and those who work in political or members’ offices in government) are overwhelmingly party loyal and that when they select candidates or members to work for, that can be a signal of party insider support for that person (Monroe 2001; Bernstein 2000; Bernstein and Dominguez 2003). In addition, recent

\(^3\) Schlesinger (1985) and Aldrich (1995) argue that both ambitious office seekers and “benefit seekers” who “hold, or have access to, critical resources that office seekers need to realize their ambitions” and whose “goals depend upon the party’s success in capturing office” (Aldrich 1995, 20) should be included in theories of party organization. Beck and Sorauf (1992, 9-12) also argue that “most structural conceptions see modern parties as broad based organizations that transcend office seekers and officeholders…the activists of the party [are] all those who give their time, money, and skills to the party, whether as leaders or followers.”

\(^4\) For example, the iron triangles of old, which were not formal organizations but were based on close relationships among a select group of elites on congressional subcommittees, in interest groups, and in the bureaucracy, have gone by the wayside. Now a wider population of technocrats and politicos, in a bigger set of institutions, make up the “subgovernment.” It is possible to track the careers and relationships of such people, and indicate that they belong in an “issue network” but it is no longer possible to list the individuals responsible for policymaking on an issue. Heclo (1978, 87-124).
research into the endorsements received by candidates for presidential nominations has shown that candidates who receive support from a broad swath of party elite endorsers are more likely to win the nomination (Cohen et al. 2001).

In the work that follows, I focus my attention on the behavior of both the formal party structure and elite partisan individuals and groups. In examining the formal party organization’s pre-primary behavior toward candidates and campaigns, I consider the support that both state and national party committees offer to primary candidates. Then I also develop measures of the pre-primary behavior of three groups of elites: interest groups that are committed elements of the party coalition, elected and party officials, and party-loyal, large-sum campaign contributors.

Roadmap

Chapter 2 elaborates a theory of partisan involvement in primary elections, and explains why each of three groups of partisan elites should demonstrate unified support for one primary candidate in competitive races. Chapter 3 develops measures of partisan involvement in primary elections, and shows that for each measure, elites are more likely to unify around a primary candidate in competitive than in safe races. Chapter 4 describes ten case studies of particular primary elections and demonstrates that my measures of elite unity reflect real responses to the general election environment, not just an anticipation of primary voters’ preferences. Chapter 5 compares the behavior of elite partisans and ambitious candidates in safe and competitive elections, and presents evidence that both groups respond not just to personal preferences or candidate qualities, but also to the strategic partisan incentives presented by the general election.
Chapter 6 shows that on average, unified party support for a candidate does not seem to help the party win the general election, and concludes with a discussion about why elites may still become involved in primaries, and why it is important that we study that involvement.
Chapter 2

Party Elites in the Candidate Emergence Process: Theory and Hypotheses

Scholars of political parties define parties to be, in their essence, competitive, seat-maximizing entities. Downs called a party “a team seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election” (1957, 25). Schlesinger defined a party as a “group organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office” (1985, 1153). Sorauf says parties are distinguished from other groups by their focus on elections and their stability, not by the coherence of their ideology (1984, 21-22). It is this focus on winning, rather than any particular internal process, that defines a political party. Winning office is its central goal.

As competitive teams, political party organizations perform several functions that help make a democratic electoral process work. They provide a link between voters and elected representatives; they structure ballot choices; they support candidates for office. Key to all of these functions is the fact that party organizations are responsible for nominating candidates to run against the candidates of other parties. In choosing a nominee, the party names an individual, with all of that person’s experience, policy positions, and symbolic characteristics, to represent the party as a whole. Strong party organizations, such as those in Western European democracies, choose these individuals on the basis of their service to the party and their commitment to the party’s programmatic goals, and then are able to withdraw their nomination in the future if the individual goes astray while in office. American political parties, of course, are generally considered to have weak party organizations precisely because of their
tenuous control over the nomination process (Herrnson 1988, 2001; Jacobson 2001; Silbey 1990).

Today, in most states, rank and file party members nominate candidates by voting from a slate of self-selected political entrepreneurs. These primary elections help make modern American parties transparent, democratic organizations, and consequently may increase public faith in the party system. However, even though running the party’s internal deliberations in such a democratic way may be an important goal in itself, under some circumstances it may run counter to the party’s overriding institutional interest in winning elections.

Primary election laws generate intra-party competition for nominations, and sometimes that competition is intense. However, there is scholarly debate about whether such competition benefits or harms the parties’ chances of capturing office in the general election. Some studies have shown that multi-candidate primaries have no effect on the party’s general election fortunes (Geer and Shere 1992) while others suggest that competitive primaries hurt the party (Kenney and Rice 1987) or hurt Democrats more than Republicans (Lengle, Owen and Sonner 1995, Kenney and Rice 1984). Regardless of the evidence, if no one in the party perceives that a highly competitive primary will disadvantage the party, then no one has an incentive to interfere in any way with the primary’s proceedings. If, however, political operatives perceive that a contested primary will put the party at a disadvantage in the competition for office, then they have an incentive to minimize that disadvantage.

How could primary elections hurt a party? There are three types of potential damage a primary election could cause, depending on the tone of the primary contest.
First, primary voters, in response to the personal qualities or appeals of candidates, the involvement of external groups heavily favoring one candidate, or the influence of the campaign itself, may choose to nominate a candidate who is not the strongest candidate to win the general election. Although there is ample evidence that partisan primary voters also want to win the general election and will choose a candidate accordingly (Stone and Abramowitz 1983), primary voters have also selected ideologically extreme candidates (e.g. George McGovern in 1972), and the risk that they would make such a choice may be prominent in the minds of partisan elites.

Second, a primary, like all political contests, can become a nasty battle between candidates. Candidates and their campaigns can accuse each other of various types of illegal, immoral, and just plain unpopular types of behavior. These negative campaigns can then cause two types of problems for the party. First, the charges leveled, whatever their grounding in fact, can affect voters’ perception of the candidate, even if he wins the nomination. The party’s own candidates and activists can therefore damage their eventual nominee in the eyes of general election voters before the other party’s candidate even begins to campaign against him. Moreover, nasty primary battles can become so intense and personal that the activists who aligned themselves with the losing candidate or candidates can refuse to participate in the general election or support the eventual nominee (Miller, Jewell and Sigelman 1988; Stone, Atkeson and Rapoport 1992; McCann, Partin, Rapoport and Stone 1996).

Third, even though not all primary battles are nasty or personal ones, even relatively friendly campaigns cost money and time. While a party’s candidates are competing against each other, the party’s groups and donors may be either taking sides
in the primary or sitting on the sidelines. In the first case, they contribute some of their finite resources to losing campaigns that will not affect the party’s fortunes in the general election. In the second case, when the party’s resource-holders sit out the nomination contest, they lose time in which they could be mobilizing for the general election, and potentially lose a fundraising battle with an opponent who can spend the primary season filling his war chest for the general election. In the meantime, the party’s resources are being spent on the democratic internal workings of the party organization, rather than on mustering an effective campaign against the other party. This use of scarce resources to decide the nomination may not always be in the party’s best interests.

Assuming that the party wants to maximize its chances of winning the general election, how can a party manipulate primary elections to help it achieve that goal? Most research indicates that aside from incumbency, the two factors that have the biggest impact on a party’s chances of winning a general election are the distribution of partisanship in the district and the quality of the nominee (Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Jacobson 2001; Stone and Maisel 1999). Therefore, the party’s first goal should be to gerrymander as many districts as possible to favor the party. In effect, this eliminates the problem of divisive primaries because no matter how heated the intra-party battle may be, the party’s nominee is virtually assured of taking office. Moreover, it eliminates the uncertainty for party elites who care most of all about general election outcomes, allowing them to focus on other candidate characteristics. Although the redistricting process per se will not be treated here, there is ample evidence that state
parties do attempt to create safe seats, in addition to increasing the partisan bias in seats they already control (Swain, Borrelli and Reed 1998; Mitchell 2002).

Once the district lines have been drawn, the party’s next best opportunity to improve its chances in the general election is to ensure that a high quality candidate both seeks and wins the nomination. The party can do three things to make sure that happens. The first is to recruit a strong candidate, the second is to clear the field for a strong candidate (whether or not he or she was recruited) and the third is to provide unified support for one primary candidate (whether or not he or she was recruited or other candidates seek the nomination). Research indicates that parties rarely recruit, but when they do so it is in races that are competitive, and therefore important to the party as a seat-maximizing entity (Kazee and Thornberry 1990, Herrnson 1990). Little research exists to tell us how often the party effectively clears the field for one candidate, and gathering data on the subject would be difficult, as most candidates would prefer to say publicly that their decision not to run was their own, and party insiders who may have discouraged them from running would be unlikely to admit doing so in public, for fear of embarrassing the former potential candidate. Whether or not systematic data exist, however, anecdotal evidence supports the idea that such activities do take place. Again, a party would be most likely to actively discourage candidates from running when it wishes to preserve resources for a competitive general election. Finally, a party can direct all of the resources at its disposal toward one primary candidate, presumably the candidate perceived to have the best chances of winning the general election. Existing research shows that at least in presidential elections, the party establishment does cohesively support one primary candidate in
most races (Cohen et al. 2001). Testing whether and when the party organizations support a single primary candidate in congressional elections is the goal of this project.

Party organizations only have incentives to take sides in primary elections when the outcome of the general election is in doubt. Because of the way the U.S. population is distributed, and the way that House district lines are drawn, the number of truly competitive Senate and House races is actually comparatively small in any given election year. We should therefore expect the parties to become concerned about the potential effect of their nomination process on the general election in only a handful of cases each election year.

If an American political party responds rationally and strategically to its environment, it should become involved in a primary when the outcome of the general election is uncertain, and when who the nominee will be, and what resources that person will have for their campaign, might affect the outcome of the general election. Therefore, the party organization should attempt to conserve its resources for the general election, and if at all possible, avoid a divisive primary, when the general election in a given state or district is perceived to be competitive between the two parties. It should be content with a resource-intensive nomination process when the general election is not anticipated to be competitive between the parties. Therefore we should expect different party organizational behavior in different types of primary election environments, as defined by the anticipated competitiveness of the general election:

As Schlesinger (1985) put it, “The level of organizational effort by each party nucleus is defined by its comparative status: in competitive constituencies, both parties make an effort; in one party dominant constituencies, both parties less effort than in competitive, but loser less than winner. In one party constituencies the effort of the dominant party will be minimal, for the hopeless party a token effort.”
Primary in a party that is favored in a safe seat. When a primary election takes place in a district that is safe for that party, the party has effectively won the general election based on demographics or during the redistricting process. As a competitive, seat-maximizing entity, therefore, the party does not need to ensure that a candidate with any particular set of characteristics wins the nomination, and so does not need to act as a cohesive organization to recruit or uniformly support any candidate in a primary.

Primary in a party that is not favored in a safe seat. When a primary takes place in a district that is perceived to be impossible for the party to win, the party organization should recognize that fact and devote few resources overall to the primary.²

Primary in a competitive district. In competitive districts (either with or without a sitting incumbent), a strong party must consider its chances in the general election, and should attempt to avoid a divisive primary, even if doing so runs counter to norms of a democratic nomination process. In fact, under these circumstances a strong party should probably recruit and clear the field for one strong candidate, so as to not spend any collective resources on the nomination. If multiple candidates do contest the nomination, the party should unify behind the strongest of those candidates, stacking the primary voters’ deck in favor of that candidate by helping that candidate mount the most persuasive primary campaign.

Primary to re-nominate an incumbent. When an incumbent is seeking re-nomination, in most cases the party should support that incumbent, because even if she

² As part of a national effort to force the party to expend resources on general election campaigns a party may attempt to field token candidates in seats that are safe for the other party, but it should not invest scarce resources to campaign in favor of that primary candidate.
is ideologically extreme within the party, her incumbency advantage best serves the party’s interest in maximizing its number of seats in Congress.

Conventional scholarly wisdom holds that party organizations do not become involved in primary election campaigns, even to mitigate the potentially negative effects of a divisive primary. It is true that party organizations operate under state rules that mostly permit open primary election campaigns, regardless of the competitiveness of a given district in a given year. Most state party rules also prohibit the formal endorsement of primary candidates. So it would be easy to conclude that party organizations could not follow these predictions about their behavioral responses to the strategic environment. But that conclusion depends on a fairly narrow definition of the party organization—as its official, state sanctioned committee. What if we expand that definition just a bit?

The easiest way to conceptualize the party as an organization is to consider it to be the formal committee. However, partisan actors who have made commitments to the party over time, and who operate neither exclusively as voters nor exclusively as partisan elected officials should also be considered part of the party organization. Individuals who control resources—like money, expertise, prestige—that are important to the party as a campaigning organization should be considered part of that organization as well. There is support for such a definition in textbook treatments of political parties. Sorauf, in *Party Politics in America* writes:

> In the party organization one finds the formally chosen party leadership, the informally anointed ones, the legions of local captains and leaders, the members and activists of the party—those who give their time, their money, and their skills to the party, whether as leaders or followers,
and who make and carry out decisions in the name of the party. In part, the organization operates through the formal machinery of committees and conventions set by the laws of the states, but in part too, it has improvised its own informal apparatus.

Although most empirical studies of party organization have focused on the official representatives of the party (Silbey 1990; Herrnson 1988; Cotter et al. 1984), a small group of scholars has used a broader definition. For example, Schwartz (1990) used network analysis to trace out relationships between elected and unelected Illinois Republicans and showed that the party’s organizational form more closely approximates a network than a hierarchy. Others have shown that it can be fruitful to consider how elite party participants in “the Expanded Party” (Bernstein 1999) can affect the political process, and particularly the politics of party nominations. Several studies have shown that staff (both campaign professionals and those who work in political or members’ offices in government) are overwhelmingly party loyal and that when they select candidates or members to work for, that can be a signal of party insider support for that person (Monroe 2001; Bernstein 2000; Bernstein and Dominguez 2003). In addition, recent research into the endorsements received by candidates for presidential nominations has shown that candidates who receive support from a broad swath of party elite endorsers are more likely to win the nomination (Cohen et al. 2001).

This project adopts a broad definition of party. In addition to considering whether formal party committees support primary candidates, it also examines the pre-primary behavior of three groups of elite, loyal partisans who give their time, money, and skills to the party. These three groups are elite donors, who give large sums to candidates in that party (and only that party) over time; elected officials, who can
potentially transfer their own experience, contacts, donor lists and popularity to other candidates in their party; and loyal interest groups that pursue a single or group of issues that fall entirely within a party’s stated positions, and exclusively support the candidates affiliated with one party. Donors, elected officials, and loyal groups each have slightly different motivations for behaving as a partisan in response to the partisan strategic environment, and for being worthy of consideration as part of the party organization. Certainly there are other actors who qualify for inclusion in a broad definition of a political party. Activists, campaign professionals (Bernstein 1999, Bernstein & Dominguez 2003), loyal publishers, and paid party staff should also follow these partisan incentives for supporting primary candidates. These other actors, because of the added difficulty of gathering data on their activities, will not be considered in this project.

Voters will also not be considered here. Primary voters may have some greater commitment to the party than general election voters (although that will vary with a state’s primary voting requirements), and they tend to be more interested in politics than the average general election voter. However, even the most loyal voter, if he or she does not regularly participate in partisan politics in other ways, should not be considered to be part of the party organization. While the other actors listed above make material investments in candidacies and in the fortunes of the party, voters are not required to make any such commitment. Members of the party organization regularly invest in its policies, campaigns and candidates, while voters are best understood as consumers of those products (Schlesinger 1984).³

³ Schlesinger argues that voters are choosers among parties, not components of them. “Surely the reasons for voters’ choices are vital to any understanding of party behavior... yet the ultimate test of a party’s
The following sections describe the motivations of donors, endorsers, and partisan groups, and argue that all three groups should be observed to follow the patterns we expect of the party organization itself; namely, to unify around one primary candidate when the general election is competitive. When we observe these three groups of elites unifying around one primary candidate, there could be several causes of that unity. These actors could be responding to direction from a party “boss,” or otherwise taking direct and explicit cues from one or several party leaders. They could also be making strategic partisan decisions on their own. Both should result in the same patterns of behavior, but given that these three sets of actors are independent of each other and of official party leaders, the following sections outline the motivations particular to each group that would encourage them to behave as if they were coordinating or following directions, even though those communications may not actually take place.

**Elite Loyal Partisan Donors**

In the early stages of a congressional candidacy, candidates raise funds by looking first to their personal constituency—friends, neighbors, colleagues—and to people who have contributed to them in their previous bids for elective office. Outside of this personal network, candidates often raise money off of other existing lists of contributors—some rented or purchased from list brokers, some received as aid from

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strength, at least within the electoral context, lies in its ability to win elections, not in its identification among the electorate” (Schlesinger 1984, 377.)
the party itself or from other candidates who support the candidate, and some on loan from interest groups (Brown, Powell & Wilcox 1995).

Previous research has told us that those who give money to political campaigns are more likely to be white, rich, and male (Verba Scholzman Brady 1995; Brown, Powell, Wilcox 1995; Cooper 2003) and that they are, in general, motivated by the same material, purposive, and solidary incentives that prompt other types of political participation (Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995, Cooper 2003). Most donors only give after being asked to give, and the major studies of donors make important distinctions between those who give in response to personal, as opposed to impersonal, solicitations. One major study of donor motivations suggests that some contributors, especially first time contributors, may be motivated more by the social benefits of attending fundraisers or responding to personal solicitations from friends than by interest in the candidate or the election itself. In general they find that those who give large amounts are more likely to give to affect election outcomes (Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995; Cooper 2003).

But not all large-sum donors are either loyal enough to one party or regular enough participants in party politics to qualify as part of the party organization. Some may give to both parties, others may give only to a particular candidate with whom they have a relationship. Only donors who give exclusively to candidates and committees associated with the party in question, and who do so in multiple election cycles, should be considered for status as a partisan elite. If donors are loyal to one party exclusively, even though they may be primarily motivated by the social or material benefits of giving, they must care, or be part of a social network of people who care, about which
party wins the election. If we restrict our gaze to donors who give large sums, and who have given over time, we can assume they are not just giving to a single candidate with whom they are acquainted, but that they have at least some longstanding commitment to the party.

There may be two types of party loyal elite donors. One type of donor is motivated primarily by ideology, and gives loyally to one party out of ideological affinity with its candidates and support for the party’s policy positions. The other type of donor may be motivated by either a material interest in the party’s electoral success or an explicitly partisan, rather than ideological, commitment to the party’s policies.

These three types of elite, loyal partisan donors should, however, respond in similar ways to the partisan demands of the electoral environment.

To illustrate that point, imagine two primary elections, both involving an ideologically extreme candidate and a more moderate candidate. If one primary takes place in a district that is uncompetitive, where the general election is not a factor in donors’ thinking about the primary contest, we would not expect any of these donors to be motivated primarily by partisan considerations. Those for whom ideology is most important can donate to whichever candidate comes closer to their ideal ideological position, and those who have material or other interests in the outcome of the election can donate to whichever candidate they are most closely acquainted or otherwise most prefer. Looking at this primary from the outside, we would expect to see the pool of

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4 Although in theory the ideology of the primary candidate(s) drive the behavior of elite actors, data constraints prohibit me from explicitly addressing the ideological positions of primary candidates in the data analyses that follow in the rest of the dissertation. The argument presented here is intended to illustrate how and why elites may appear to behave in a unified fashion in a primary election. For another theoretical argument on this point, see Noel (2002).
Now let us examine a second primary election, also involving an ideologically pure candidate and a more moderate candidate. This primary, however, takes place in a competitive district. Elite partisan donors in such a race should recognize that they face a higher probability of all of their dollars being wasted on a losing campaign than they would in a safe seat. Collectively, they have an interest in unifying around one primary candidate and conserving their collective resources for the contest that matters more—the general election. This collective incentive works out for donors motivated by each different type of individual incentive. Donors who are primarily motivated by the material benefits of giving—that is, those who expect something in return for their donation—should give money only to the candidate whom they believe is most likely to win the general election. Donors who care most about policy outcomes should also care most that their party’s candidate defeats the candidate of the other party, and also give to the candidate whom they believe is most likely to win the general election. Finally, although some ideologically extreme donors may give to the candidate closest to their ideal point, a fraction of these more extreme donors may give to the candidate most likely to win the general election, since even the moderate candidate in their party is certainly closer to their ideal point than a candidate in the other party. Collectively, then, we should observe more elite donor unity around a single, highly qualified, moderate candidate in a primary in a competitive district, and observe more divided donor behavior in safe seats.
Partisan Elected Officials

Elected officials generally build their public careers more through their own initiative than through ties to their party. Their primary motivation is their own reelection, not their party’s health. But that does not mean that they do not have ties to other elected officials in their party, party officials, loyal donors, activists, and voters. Those ties can be valuable assets to the official herself, or can be liabilities, if her party falls out of favor with voters. Partisan elected officials are especially invested in the party’s stature and reputation because they usually appear next to their party’s label on the ballot. They therefore have an incentive to facilitate a strong showing by their party’s other nominees, especially for high profile races like U.S. House and Senate races. They can do this by supporting high quality candidates for office through public endorsements, sharing of donor lists and contacts, and other forms of private advice.

Why would an elected official endorse a candidate before the primary? Certainly a pre-primary endorsement carries some risks. If an official endorses a losing candidate, the eventual nominee may hold that endorsement against him or her, souring the potential for alliances in government and reciprocal help in future races. The official also stakes his public reputation on his endorsement, and if the candidate he endorses runs a bad campaign or otherwise embarrasses him, it can hurt his professional and public standing. Of course, the stronger the candidate, the less risky the endorsement.

But issuing a pre-primary endorsement also carries the potential for reward. By supporting a candidate early, the endorser has helped the candidate when he or she needed it most, and if the candidate wins the nomination and wins the election, the endorser is then “owed” for his support. If the endorser is ambitious for other higher
office himself, he may expect reciprocal support in future campaigns. There are also potentially partisan rewards to an early endorsement. The endorser may feel he will benefit from seeing his name attached to a “winner.” If the endorser feels his own election might depend on party turnout or party ties in the district, ensuring that a strong candidate gets the nomination can help him win reelection. Even if the endorser’s position is not at stake, he may feel that he will benefit either indirectly or even emotionally from a victory by his party.

So when should we expect to see a partisan elected official endorse a candidate prior to the primary? First, we should expect to see such endorsements when the two individuals have a personal or longstanding professional relationship. In that sense, such endorsements can be seen as an indicator of a candidate’s ties within the party, although such conclusions should be tentative. When there are two candidates vying for the nomination who both have relationships with a potential endorser, that endorser may be more likely to sit out the primary. Second, we should expect to see more endorsements of highly qualified candidates, since such endorsements are less likely to be embarrassing for the endorser. And finally, we should expect that to the degree that elite endorsers are motivated by either the private or public benefits of a party victory in the general election, they will endorse the primary candidate who has the best chance of winning the general election.

Again, let us examine how these incentives play out in two similar races. First, let us hypothesize about endorser behavior in a primary election where there are two strong candidates running, one moderate and one ideologue, in a race where the general election is safe for the party. Here, explicitly partisan considerations do not matter to the
potential endorser. So the endorser may support the candidate with whom he has closer personal ties, or who he believes is more likely to win the primary. If the endorser has relationships with both candidates, he may not endorse at all. On aggregate, then, in safe seats, we expect to see several primary candidates receive at least some endorsements from elected officials within their party.

Now consider a primary election with the same two candidates running, in a race where the general election is anticipated to be competitive between the two parties. Here, partisan elected officials have a stronger incentive to support the candidate who is more likely to make a strong showing in the general election (perhaps the moderate candidate). These elected officials may even conclude that the primary will divide the party establishment too much, resulting in either too many officials sitting on the sidelines, or too many committed to endorsing one candidate or the other, and seek to convince one of the candidates not to run at all. Because all elected officials face these same incentives, overall in such races we should expect to see unified endorsements of one candidate by all or most party elected officials.

Party Loyal Groups

Interest groups are distinguished from parties by their focus on a single policy issue or group of issues and their competition for attention to those issues. Parties, because of their single-minded focus on winning elections, serve as a mechanism for building coalitions and prioritizing different issues at different times. Nevertheless, some interest groups’ portfolios cause them to ally most or all of the time with one of the parties, (for example, EMILY’s List, the Club for Growth, many labor groups) and
these groups can be important players within the party’s coalition. They have likely
developed such affiliations because the policy positions that they (and their members)
care about have been promoted exclusively by just one of the parties over time. The
groups have then come to see the fate of their favored positions to be wrapped up in the
success of that party. Precisely because their main goal is for there to be elected
officials who are sympathetic to their concerns, they promote the election of members
of that party. They may even have members on state party boards, and be involved in
the recruitment of candidates.

These groups can offer several advantages to a candidate that they choose to
support. They can advertise a candidacy to their membership, campaign actively for that
candidate, and donate money to the candidate’s campaign or make independent
expenditures on her behalf. Previous research has recognized that some interest groups’
PACs exclusively support one party, and that these PACs are likely to do so in strategic
ways (Eismeier and Pollack 1986). Eismeier and Pollack found that like all PACs,
partisan PACs are more likely to give to incumbents because incumbents are more
likely to win elections and be a good investment of the group’s money, although unlike
corporate PACs, partisan PACs will also give to challengers in their affiliated party.

Given their close affiliation with the parties, some of these groups should be
expected to give to primary candidates, and we can expect that they should do so
strategically. Unlike donors and endorsers, an interest group’s political motivations are
mostly transparent. First and foremost, they seek to promote public policies that are
favored by their memberships or constituent groups. As group leaders are quick to
point out, they must always place their group’s interest above any party’s interest.
Beyond that, they may consider the election of their party’s candidates to be in the best interests of their group.

Consider again the two elections, the first in a safe seat for the party with which the group is affiliated. Here, again, the group is not faced with any competitive partisan considerations, so can put its interest in its group’s issues first in its endorsement decision. If the two candidates have even slightly different levels of commitment to their issues, many partisan groups will endorse one candidate over the other. From the outside, such races should seem to pit one set of interest groups against another.

Now consider a competitive seat. Here, the group may face competing interests between endorsing a candidate who is slightly “better” on their issues and endorsing a candidate who is more likely to win the general election. Certainly some purist groups may endorse the candidate closer to their ideal position, even at the risk of dividing the party coalition’s support for one primary candidate. But many mainstream groups that are part of a party coalition should prefer to support a candidate who is more likely to win and support most of their issues than to support one who supports them wholeheartedly but is less likely to actually take office. In aggregate, then, we should see partisan interest groups rally around one primary candidate in a competitive election.

In sum, the three sets of party elite actors described here should all behave cohesively in primary elections in competitive seats, and should split their support among several candidates in safe seats. Note that although elites may communicate with each other about whom to support in the primary, such communication is not strictly
necessary for elites to behave cohesively, if they individually respond rationally to the strategic environment.

Candidates

One final set of actors, whose behavior is crucial to understanding the dynamics of congressional elections, must be considered here. Candidates themselves face a more complex and personal set of incentives than the other actors who are considered to be part of the party coalition. But I argue that even ambitious candidates, primarily motivated by their own career goals, will sometimes make decisions in the best interests of their party.

The dominant theory of how candidates come to be on the general election ballot ignores the party organization entirely, and argues that primary voters nominate candidates solely in response to the qualities of the candidates who decide to run. Primary competition is therefore driven by candidate choices. The literature distinguishes between high quality, strategic candidates, and less sophisticated candidates; and consistently has found that candidates who win office tend to have held office before and to behave strategically. Candidates who have held office before have generally been observed to be very risk averse about leaving their current position in order to run for higher office, because as they see it, it is a potential for promotion if they win, but if they lose it could end their career in politics.

The literature on congressional elections is replete with theoretical and empirical studies of how the private calculations of candidates affect the dynamics and outcomes of primary elections. Three key variables in the political environment are said to
condition the strategic thinking of potential candidates, particularly those who are both ambitious and politically experienced. The first variable is the national political environment. If the economy, the popularity of the president, and other less tangible factors seem to indicate that a year will be a good one for a given party, more experienced, strategic politicians in that party will seek the nomination (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). The second variable is the presence of an incumbent. If an incumbent is seeking reelection, most experienced, high-quality candidates will recognize that disadvantage and sit out that election cycle, while more inexperienced candidates may maximize their chances of election by entering the race (Bianco 1984; Banks and Kiewiet 1989). The final variable affecting candidate calculations is the partisanship of the district in question. If reasonable political observers judge that a district is heavily biased toward one party, ambitious potential candidates in that party should be aware of that fact, and accordingly run in that district (Berry and Canon 1993; Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Stone and Maisel 1999). In general, ambitious candidates will choose very carefully whether and when to run for office, and will run when they think it is most likely that they will win.

This candidate-centered theory of how primary election contests evolve dominates the current literature on congressional elections. It implies that party elites play no role in either the candidate emergence process or the primary election campaign itself. It assumes that candidates only consider their own careers, and not the fortunes of their party, when they decide to enter a race. I contend that this picture is too simple. When the party organization has an incentive to become involved in a primary (i.e., in a competitive election) it may attempt to influence the entry decisions made by ambitious
candidates, resulting in very different patterns of primary competition than would take
place without that intervention. So instead of adopting the dominant model of primary
competition, dominated solely by candidates, I offer a modification. I argue that both
candidates and parties should be considered part of the candidate emergence and
primary election processes, and that even ambitious candidates can sometimes take
party needs into account. These two candidate-centered and party-involvement theories
are contrasted in the table below.

Table 2.1: Contrasting theories of candidate and party behavior in primaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Candidate-centered theory</th>
<th>Partisan-involvement theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate behavior</td>
<td>Enter primaries they think they can win</td>
<td>Enter primaries based on taking both personal and party needs into account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party elite behavior</td>
<td>Support a primary candidate only based on the qualities of that candidate</td>
<td>Support a primary candidate based on candidate qualities and strategic environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why should we revise our notions of candidate motivations? Ambitious
candidates share some characteristics with other elements of the party organization,
above and beyond a shared commitment to the same types of policies. Like elected
officials, they may have built, or seek to build, relationships within the party that will be
important to their future careers. Those relationships will almost never be able to
guarantee them a job or a nomination or election victory, but having good relationships
with their fellow partisans will in most cases be an asset rather than a liability. Such
relationships will be more or less of an asset depending on whether the candidates
intend to stay involved in electoral politics in a serious way over time. To the degree,
then, that their standing in the eyes of their fellow partisans matters to them, they will
be more receptive to messages from other partisans about when to run for office, and
more conscious of the effect their entry decision may have on their party’s chances in
the general election.

I return again to two hypothetical districts, a safe district and a competitive
district. How does a highly qualified candidate decide to run in each district? First, he
must assess his chances of winning at the most basic level. If there is a strong
incumbent in the district, he knows that his chances of winning are very small, and he
will not seek the nomination. If there is a vulnerable incumbent, or no incumbent at all,
he can consider running. His eyes then turn to the partisanship in the district. If the
district is safe for the other party, he should not consider running because his chances of
winning are small. If the district is safe for his party, he should assess his support
among the party elite, consult with his allies, and if he judges the time is right for him,
he should run. Such safe primaries should draw multiple highly qualified candidates
who, for the reasons discussed above, divide the party establishment’s support between
them.

Now consider a competitive district. To win this office, the candidate must win
not only a potentially competitive primary but also the potentially competitive general
election. The difference between an open race and one to unseat a vulnerable incumbent
affects the candidate’s perception of his chances of winning. Unseating any incumbent,
even a vulnerable one, will be more difficult for him. As before, the candidate will
assess his support among the party elite, and consult with his allies. This time, however,
those allies face strong incentives to conserve their own resources for the general
election, and may wish to avoid a divisive primary. Depending on his own experience
and ideological position, he may receive strong advice to either run with the full support of the party, or to stay out of the race this time. The candidate himself makes the decision whether to enter the race, but depending on who his allies are, how unified the local party is, and how much he cares what other partisans think of him, he may base his entry decision partially on this partisan advice. In this way, we should expect that the more competitive and difficult the general election is expected to be, the more often we should see only one strong candidate seeking the nomination.

This interaction between party elites and candidates, then, should determine the competitiveness of the primary election. Party elites should respond directly to the anticipated competitiveness of the general election in the district, and candidates should respond both to the anticipated competitiveness of the general election and to the presence or absence of a strong incumbent. In summary:

*If there is a strong incumbent,* few strong candidates should seek the nomination in either party. In races to re-nominate an incumbent, the incumbent’s party will rally around him. In races to nominate an opponent to a strong incumbent, the party will generally not waste its resources on a primary campaign, although it may have some incentive to make sure at least one candidate appears on the ballot.

*In races to nominate an opponent to a vulnerable incumbent,* the party has a strong incentive to select one nominee expeditiously and thereby conserve resources for the general election. Because ambitious candidates are wary of trying to unseat a vulnerable incumbent, and because the party has an incentive to clear the field and discourage heated primaries that could divert party resources from the general election,
we expect only one strong candidate to emerge, and the party to unify around that candidate before the primary.

*In open, uncompetitive seats,* strong candidates should be more eager to run that in incumbent-held seats, depending on the partisanship of the district. In uncompetitive seats that favor the candidate’s party (safe seats), many strong candidates should seek the nomination. In uncompetitive seats that do not favor the candidate’s party, few if any strong candidates should seek the nomination. In either type of uncompetitive seat, elite partisans should respond to their own private preferences in supporting potential nominees.

*In competitive seats,* many strong candidates should be interested in running, but the party has a strong interest in conserving its resources, so here we should expect either only one strong candidate to run, with the backing of the party, or for the party establishment to heavily favor one candidate in the primary, in an attempt to stack the primary voters’ deck in favor of the candidate who is believed to be most likely to win the general election. Either way, we expect to see few strong candidates running and unified party support for them.

In general, I hypothesize that we should be able to observe parties, broadly conceived, taking sides in some primary elections. Free-for-all primaries, totally governed by private candidate preferences, and resulting in divided party establishments, should only be seen in safe seats.

The following chapters attempt to test these hypotheses, and evaluate whether candidates and elite partisans respond rationally to the incentives that face them in different primary election environments. Chapter 3 describes the processes by which I
selected races for study and measured each type of party elite behavior. Chapter 4 examines elite behavior in ten primary elections, and demonstrates that the measures I use to show party unity tap into real communications among elites. Chapter 5 uses the measure of party cohesion developed in Chapter 3 to test whether elite partisans do cohesively support one primary candidate in races that are more important to the party’s general election fortunes, when controlling for candidate quality. Chapter 6 concludes by testing whether elite party unity actually affects general election outcomes.
Chapter 3
Party Elite Participation in Primaries: A Methodology

In order to test hypotheses about how cohesive party elites should be in different primary election environments, it is first necessary to identify those elites and measure their behavior in the pre-primary period. The most prominent prior attempt to systematically identify party elites has been made by Cohen et al. in their book, *Beating Reform* (forthcoming). To study elite cohesion prior to presidential primaries, they searched for all endorsements of presidential candidates that appeared in print news sources. This method allowed them to collect a wide variety of elites into their pool—from governors to movie stars—whom they then weighted to measure the prominence of each endorser and the impact of all endorsements on the nomination process. Their method permitted them to capture into their pool of important partisans a large number of public party activists and interest groups, but not necessarily those behind-the-scenes players whose approval may be important to party insiders but who may not necessarily be well-known enough in the general public to be mentioned in the press. In identifying party elite supporters of congressional primary candidates, I attempt to compile a similar list of public individual and interest group endorsers, but I also make efforts to capture the support of large-sum, partisan donors, and official party organizations. I face, however, a different set of methodological problems than those faced by Cohen et al. because of the differences between the presidential and congressional nomination processes.

How does one draw conclusions about congressional elections when congressional districts are so diverse? More particular to this project, how can one
measure the participation of elites in low-profile elections? The most straightforward approach to the second problem is to study a small number of races in detail and conduct a number of elite interviews, a strategy I employ elsewhere in this project (see Chapter 5). But there are also significant limitations to learning about congressional primaries as a political phenomenon through the study of only three or four districts. Political conditions—from the presence and strength of incumbents to the existence and strength of party organizations—are bound to vary widely across House districts. Different district and state-level party elites may respond very differently to the same political conditions depending on their own state and district institutional rules and political history. In this project I attempt to go beyond case studies of specific races and measure party behavior in several hundred primary races, conducted under diverse conditions. In order to do so it was necessary to go beyond lists of endorsers and use several different measures of elite participation.

In this chapter I describe five indicators and one summary measure of the support primary candidates receive from party organizations and elite members of party networks. Party organizational support for a candidate is measured in two ways: receipt of an official state party endorsement, and receipt of a donation from a national party committee to the candidate prior to the primary date. A candidate’s support from the party network more broadly is measured in three ways. First, I measure the support that each candidate received from Political Action Committees that have demonstrated exclusive loyalty to one party. Second, I count the number of public endorsements each candidate receives. Finally, I include the sum of the donations a candidate receives from an individual who has given large amounts of money exclusively to one party. Not all
party insiders engage in these behaviors, but it is not unreasonable to characterize the people who do engage in these behaviors as being committed to the party and to its future direction. Because of inter-district and inter-campaign variation, these five turn out to be somewhat messy indicators of party support, and are not easily combined into one index that can be used as a dependent variable in statistical analyses. So I employ, in the end, what amounts to a content analysis of the information provided by those indicators, as analyzed by several independent coders. This summary measure captures party support for each candidate in a way that closely resembles the kind of judgment about a candidate that any politically savvy elite might make when looking at that particular race.

**Research Design and Sampling**

This research examines, in detail, 150 congressional and 24 senatorial primary races that took place in the Democratic and Republican parties in the year 2002. Because the 2001-2002 cycle immediately followed the reapportionment and redistricting which took place after the 2000 census, and therefore featured newly drawn districts, districts without incumbents, and redrawn district lines that strengthened and weakened party tendencies, there were more interesting primaries than might normally be the case during a given election cycle.\(^1\) The 2002 cycle was also historically atypical in that it was widely perceived in the year prior to the election that

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\(^1\) In the end the number of new members elected to the House and Senate (64) was the same as were newly elected in the year 2000, and lower than the number of new members elected in all but one election years since 1970. The number of retirements (26 in the House, 6 in the Senate) is about average, and the number of seats open due to redistricting is higher than in years not ending in –2. (Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin, 2002, Tables 2-7 and 2-8). Because this was a year following a redistricting, there were also some districts in which two incumbents were forced to face off against each other, but since these races are so rare (a handful per decade), they were excluded from these analyses.
partisan control of both the House and Senate were up for grabs, which probably increased party activity in competitive districts. Additionally, the 2002 election was unusual because of the President’s high post-9/11 approval ratings, and because of the national war setting and emphasis on security, either of which may have affected the behavior of ambitious candidates (Brody 1991). Overall, though, the atypical features of the year 2002 benefit this research project. Because of the post-2000 redistricting, there were a large number of vulnerable incumbents, newly drawn seats, and open seats in 2002, and hence a large number of potentially important primaries in which to look at party elite participation.

Since my goal is to investigate the range of party elite behaviors in primary elections, I look at races where party notables have an incentive to become involved. To the degree that ambitious politicians and their personal qualities govern the dynamics of primary elections, it is important to include as many races as possible that are potentially attractive to high quality candidates. As noted in Chapter 2, not all primary elections are equally attractive to ambitious politicians. Most primary races in any given year take place in districts where a strong incumbent runs in one party or the other. Because challengers rarely win these races, rational and ambitious politicians will refrain from running until the incumbent appears legitimately vulnerable or retires. Party elites and donors will almost always support a strong incumbent in their own party and save their resources rather than trying to unseat one in the other party. Because districts featuring strong incumbents create primary contests that are uninteresting to both candidates and party insiders, I exclude those races from my study. This means that the universe of races I examine is a very different one from the districts
upon which most congressional elections scholars have focused their attention, which mostly feature strong incumbents.

I did not randomly select races to study in 2002. I deliberately chose to include all primary races for House and Senate seats that could conceivably attract qualified candidates and party attention. The first set of races I chose to include in my dataset took place in states and districts in which the incumbent had retired or sought higher office. In 2002, 26 House seats and 4 Senate seats were open due to retirement, resulting in 60 primary races (one per major party per seat). There were also 17 newly apportioned and redistricted House districts, and 34 primaries in them. There were, of course, no new Senate seats (Gaddie and Bullock 2000).

Although none of these “open” races featured an incumbent, the partisan races for their nominations were not all equally attractive. Some took place in districts and states that were essentially safe for one party and un-winnable for the other, and others took place in states and districts that were widely anticipated to be highly competitive in the November election. Because I included all of these types, the dataset contains variation in how attractive each primary race was to potential participants.

In addition to open seats, I included primary races for seats that were held by incumbents who were perceived to be vulnerable. These races might also be expected to attract high quality candidates and party resources, especially in a year when control of the Congress was uncertain. There were 32 House districts and 8 Senate seats in which the incumbent was running for reelection but was perceived to be vulnerable in the year prior to the election. The dataset includes the 40 primaries featuring these potentially
vulnerable incumbents (who were mostly shoo-ins for their party’s nomination), and 40 primaries in parties that were trying to unseat them.

I identified new and open seats and vulnerable incumbents using the Cook Political Report ratings that were available in December, 2001 and February, 2002. I used the Cook report because it takes into account more than just registration figures and prior vote data for that seat. It also takes into account scandal and incumbent ineptitude, the state legislature’s intent when redrawing district lines, and other hard-to-quantify information that might be known to political insiders who are making real-time decisions about candidacy and support. It is also a comprehensive and fairly up-to-date list of retirements, and it would be difficult to compile a list of incumbent and non-incumbent seats early in an election year without using a similar source. It is not essential to my analyses that the Cook ratings be completely accurate predictors of the final general election outcome. Since all the of the critical decisions I am studying take place many months before the general election takes place, I am only concerned that the Cook ratings give a reasonable estimate of how decisionmakers thought about these races in the months before the primary election.

So my dataset includes a total of 43 open House seats, 26 of which were open due to incumbent retirement, and 17 of which were open due to reapportionment and redistricting. In addition, 4 Senate seats were open due to incumbent retirement. Thirty-

\[\text{Cook’s ratings of district competitiveness were remarkably good predictors of general election outcomes. Of the races in my sample that Cook rated “likely” or “safe”, 97% were won by the party he predicted. 89% of “leaning” races were won by the predicted party, and 65% of them were won by less than 56% of the vote in November, indicating that he was right about who would win, and in many cases right that it would be a close election. 77% of tossup races were won by the Republican candidate, although these were close too, with more than 60% of them won by less than 56% of the vote. Of the 51 House candidates who won with less than 56% of the vote in November, 2002, 41 (80%) were on his list of potentially close races nine months before the general election. Magelby and Monson (2003) conducted a study of soft money in congressional elections that also sampled competitive districts for study using the Cook ratings.}\]

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two House and eight seats featured an incumbent who was perceived to be vulnerable in the year prior to the primary. Table 3.1 lists the districts and states in which the primaries in this dataset were located. Note that only 33 of 50 states had primaries that met these criteria. The states that are included represent enough diversity in size, geography, and political institutions to capture any between-state variation in primary dynamics.
Table 3.1: Districts included in 2002 primary election sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open due to retirement</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama 03</td>
<td>Ohio 17</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona 02</td>
<td>Ohio 03</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado 04</td>
<td>Oklahoma 04</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida 13</td>
<td>Pennsylvania 18</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois 05</td>
<td>South Carolina 03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana 02</td>
<td>South Dakota AL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 02</td>
<td>Tennessee 04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine 02</td>
<td>Tennessee 05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan 10</td>
<td>Tennessee 07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire 01</td>
<td>Texas 05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey 05</td>
<td>Texas 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico 02</td>
<td>Utah 01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina 01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open due to reapportionment and redistricting</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona 07</td>
<td>Georgia 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona 01</td>
<td>Georgia 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California 21</td>
<td>Iowa 05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California 39</td>
<td>Michigan 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado 07</td>
<td>North Carolina 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida 24</td>
<td>Nevada 03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida 25</td>
<td>Pennsylvania 06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia 3</td>
<td>Texas 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas 04</td>
<td>Minnesota 06</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California 18</td>
<td>Missouri 06</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut 02</td>
<td>North Carolina 08</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida 05</td>
<td>North Dakota AL</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida 22</td>
<td>New Hampshire 02</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa 01</td>
<td>New Jersey 07</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa 02</td>
<td>New Jersey 12</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa 03</td>
<td>New Mexico 01</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa 04</td>
<td>Nevada 01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana 08</td>
<td>Oklahoma 03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana 09</td>
<td>Pennsylvania 04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas 03</td>
<td>Pennsylvania 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky 03</td>
<td>Utah 02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky 04</td>
<td>Washington 02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 08</td>
<td>Wisconsin 02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota 02</td>
<td>West Virginia 02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Primaries       | 150                | 24                            |
I also used the Cook ratings to code districts for the anticipated competitiveness of and party advantage in the general election. Cook’s ratings are Tossup, Safe, Likely, or Leaning to one party or the other, but I simplified Cook’s coding scheme. My definition of a “safe” seat is one that Cook rates as either a “safe” or “likely win” for a party prior to a state’s filing deadline. My definition of an “impossible” seat is one that Cook rates as “safe” or “likely” for the opposite party. In most analyses, I use a broad definition of “competitive” seats—including both Cook’s categories of “Tossup” and “Leans to one party”, although I do code for both leaning and tossup races.

Table 3.2 below shows the number of primary races that were selected to be in this dataset, organized by the anticipated competitiveness of the race. Note that some of these primaries, those featuring vulnerable incumbents seeking their own party’s nomination and those in districts that are “impossible” for the party to win in November, are unlikely to be as attractive to party elites and high quality candidates as the others (although there are notable exceptions in 2002).3

3 In two competitive races, California’s 18th Congressional district and New Hampshire’s U.S. Senate race, the incumbents (Gary Condit and Bob Smith, respectively) were perceived to be liabilities rather than assets to the party. In Condit’s case the party establishment rallied behind his primary opponent, and in Smith’s case the party establishment was split between him and his challenger, John Sununu. Both incumbents lost their primaries, and their replacements won the general election.
Table 3.2: Number of Included Primary Races by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticipated General Election Characteristics</th>
<th>Open (no incumbent)</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent (out-party)</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent (in-party)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe (Party will win general election)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11 D, 16 R)</td>
<td>(18 D, 14 R)</td>
<td>(14 D, 18 R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive (Either party could win general)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16 D, 16 R)</td>
<td>(18 D, 14 R)</td>
<td>(14 D, 18 R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible (Party will not win general)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16 D, 11 R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senate</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>(4 D, 4 R)</td>
<td>(3 D, 5 R)</td>
<td>(5 D, 3 R)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Districts and states featuring strong incumbents were excluded, as primaries in these districts would be unattractive to both high quality candidates and party elites who might wish to influence who wins the nomination. Competitive districts are those rated as “tossup” or “lean” in the Cook Political Reports.

I obtained lists of candidates in each of these 174 primary races from the websites of the Secretaries of State of the relevant states. For each candidate, I found campaign contact information on the websites of the Secretaries of State, state and national parties, and individual campaigns, although in rare cases contact information was entirely unavailable. For the vast majority of candidates, I was able to find at least some biographical information. There were a total of 413 House candidates and 71 Senate candidates that were listed by Secretaries of State as having filed for the primary ballots in sampled races.

In the following pages, I describe the data I gathered about each candidate’s support from party elites.
Organizational Support

State Party Endorsements

State party organizations influence the selection of nominees for federal office when party rules and state laws permit the party organization to issue candidate endorsements at conventions that take place instead of or prior to primaries. Some state parties officially endorse candidates, and confer ballot access advantages on the chosen candidate, in addition to advertising the party’s preference to primary voters. I measure each state party’s endorsement rules using Jewell and Morehouse’s (2000) reporting of state party practices. According to Jewell and Morehouse (2000, 106), both parties in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, North Dakota, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico permit official pre-primary endorsements. In these states, parties legally endorse candidates at a pre-primary nominating convention, and the winner, and in some cases a runner-up, get preferred ballot positioning, or exclusive access to the ballot. Other state parties (the Massachusetts Democrats and Republicans, Minnesota Democrats and Republicans, Delaware Republicans, and in some cases California Democrats) permit endorsements, but those endorsements do not have ballot-access implications. I also found that in 2002, both party organizations in New Jersey and North Dakota officially endorsed primary candidates.

The significance of these endorsements should be that fewer candidates actually appear on the primary ballot in races where endorsements take place. Official endorsements might also lead to higher quality candidates. In my sample of primary races, 27 races (23 House, 4 Senate) took place in states with strong endorsement rules.

---

4 The states in my sample that issued or potentially issued formal endorsements were Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Connecticut, New Jersey, Minnesota, and North Dakota.
These official endorsements seem to dampen the overall number of candidates who run in a primary and to result in more races where a candidate runs unopposed.

Table 3.3: Primary race differences, by state party endorsement rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average number of candidates who seek nomination</th>
<th>Average number of elected candidates in race</th>
<th>Proportion of races where one candidate is unopposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official party endorsements</td>
<td>2.0*</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No official endorsements</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=172. * means average difference between groups is statistically significant, p<.05 on a one-tailed test.

Of the 27 races in states with strong endorsement rules, 15 (55%) were uncontested. In contrast, in states with no state party endorsement procedures, only 52 out of 145 races (or 36%) were uncontested. The Table above shows that there is a small but statistically significant difference in the average number of candidates who appear on primary ballots in states with and without endorsement procedures. Official endorsements do not seem to affect the average number of candidates on the primary ballot who have prior elected experience. So although state parties with strong pre-primary endorsement procedures can avoid a contested primary more than half the time, they do not seem to draw different numbers of previously elected (and potentially high quality) candidates into the race than state parties without such procedures.

National Party Committees

State parties are not the only ones that can play favorites in a nomination campaign. The national party committees (specifically the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the National
Republican Congressional Committee, and the National Republican Senatorial Committee) are also involved in recruiting primary candidates and actively take sides in a sizeable number of contested primaries. I measure national party support as the amount of money each candidate received from one of these party committees prior to the primary date, according to Federal Election Commission records. Almost all incumbents received at least some money from a national party committee, but a large fraction of non-incumbents did so as well.

In a large minority (48%) of 2002 primary races where an incumbent was not seeking renomination, one candidate in the primary received money from one of the national party committees. This is especially true for Senate races, where the national senatorial committees gave to one candidate in 88% (14 of 16) primary races. In more than two-fifths of non-incumbent House primary races (43%) one Democratic primary candidate received a donation from the DCCC.\(^5\) About 40% of these party donations are easily explained by the fact that only one candidate was running in the primary. But that still leaves 38 races (8 Senate, 30 House) where the national party committees took sides in a multi-candidate primary.

One factor that seems to make party committees more likely to give money to one and only one candidate in a contested primary is the anticipated competitiveness of the general election. Twenty-five of the 38 races in which the national party donated to one candidate took place in races that the Cook report labeled tossup, ‘lean to’, or ‘lean against’ in the year prior to the primary. Although this is expected, it is also the case

---

\(^5\) The DCCC and NRCC seem to employ slightly different strategies. In 19 of 57 (33%) non-incumbent House Republican primaries, the NRCC gave money to one primary candidate, while in the other 38, no money was given. On the Democratic side, the DCCC gave no money in 17 (30%) of races, gave money to one candidate in 32 (52%) of races, and gave small donations to several candidates in 12 (18%) of races.
that in 8 safe seats and 5 seats that should have been guaranteed losses for the party, the
national committee donated to one candidate in the primary anyway. Table 4 shows the
breakdown of race types where only one candidate receives money from a national
party committee.

Table 3.4: Primary Races Where A Single Candidate Receives Money from a National Party
Committee (by Race type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>Open, Safe for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Impossible for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Competitive</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Non-Incumb. Party</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Incumbent’s Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of contested primaries where the national party committee has a favorite</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Percent of all races of that type)</td>
<td>(29%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
<td>(39%)</td>
<td>(56%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=172 primary races, both House and Senate

Overall, national party committees are far from shy from becoming involved in
primary contests. In more than a third of Republican contests and more than half of
Democratic contests, the national party committees favor a single primary candidate
with a donation (and potentially other help, advice, and contacts) prior to the primary
election date. As would be expected, they are more likely to do so when the race is
more important to the national party’s fortunes in Congress: when the race is an open
seat that is competitive for both parties, or when a party is nominating someone to
challenge a potentially vulnerable incumbent.
Participation by the Informal Party Network

Beyond the official party organization there are other ways that the party network might attempt to influence the outcome of a primary election. Donors who regularly participate in fundraising drives for party candidates (and who may be active in the party network in other ways) can donate large sums of money to the campaign, simultaneously increasing the campaign’s resources and its legitimacy among other party insiders. Groups that often affiliate with the party and are likely to be influential with primary voters can issue public endorsements of candidates and contribute funds to them. And party activists and officeholders can issue personal endorsements. For each candidate in the dataset, I collected data intended to measure each of these types of party support.

Individual Elite Donations

Some wealthy citizens habitually give to campaigns, and some of those habitual givers are extremely partisan. These large-sum, loyal partisan donors should be considered part of the party network because they make tangible investments in the political parties over time, and because through fundraising events and fundraising networks they are likely to come into contact with other loyal partisans. Although their motivations are difficult to study without individual-level survey data, the behavior of these donors can be measured. Like other elements of the party network, these wealthy party insiders can be shown to distinctly take sides in primary elections.

---

6 Cooper (2003) found that large donors likely to be solicited personally, rather than through impersonal direct mail.
I identify “Party Loyal Donors” who give “serious” (over $200) money to party coffers over time. In their 1995 survey of contributors who gave over $200 in the 1988 presidential election, Brown, Powell, and Wilcox find that there is a pool of habitual donors who give large amounts of money to political candidates. They say that “even though there is defection from and especially recruitment to this pool, at any point in time the great majority of those who give serious money have contributed before and will do so again” (30). Their survey indicated that in 1988, 95% of contributors had given money before, and 94% had given more money to one party than the other.

I define Party Loyalty to be a consistent pattern of giving, over time, to candidates in the same party.\(^7\) Assuming that candidates would attempt to tap into this pool of stable, partisan donors, I used the Federal Election Commission databases to identify all of the individual donors to each of the candidates in my sample.\(^8\) For each contributor, I tabulated the amount of money he or she gave to the 2002 primary candidate, as well as the amount (and recipients) of any money that donor contributed in the 1999-2000 election cycle. For each donor that appears both in the 2002 and in the 2000 databases, I then compare the committees to which he or she contributed in 2000 to the 2000 FEC Committee File. If the committee he or she contributed to is listed as a ‘Democrat’ or ‘Republican,’ I then code that donor as having contributed to one of the

---

\(^7\) I do not consider donors who only give to one primary candidate in the current election cycle to be “Party Loyal” because although they may become consistent donors later on, there is no way to tell whether before the primary the candidate sought their support because of their party ties or because of their personal connections to the candidate. Certainly many donors to a primary campaign may have a personal relationship with the candidate, but the support of such people is unlikely to signal to other donors and elites that the candidate has support from the party network. Donors who have given “serious money” to party candidates or committees in the prior election cycle are more likely to have been brought to the candidate’s attention because of prior party donations.

\(^8\) I separated contributions by whether they were labeled as intended for the “Primary” or “General” election. Forty-one candidates had no committee at all and thirty-three had more than one. Fifty candidates had at least one committee but did not receive any contributions over $200 so did not have any donors who appeared in the 2002 FEC Individual Contributors database. So the contributors whose donations are analyzed here gave to only 324 of the 415 candidates.
Donors who gave exclusively to one party are coded as “Party Loyal.” I then tally the amount of money each candidate received from Party Loyal donors.

Using this technique, I find that 30,208 unique individual donors gave both to a primary candidate in 2002 and to at least one committee or candidate in 2000. Of the donors who gave to at least one partisan candidate or committee in 2000, 88% were Party Loyal. In total, these donors gave $2,210,363 to primary candidates in my sample.

More than two-thirds of the candidates in this study received at least one Loyal Party donation, but relatively few received more than a handful of them. Table 3.5 shows the number of candidates who received contributions from Loyal Party Donors, the number they received, and the percent of candidates in each category who won their primary elections. One noteworthy feature of the table is that it appears that a greater fraction of the candidates who received more than ten Loyal Party Donations won their primaries, which may indicate either the higher quality of the candidates who receive multiple Loyal Party Donations, the utility of receiving Loyal Party Donations, or both.

---

9 Of the 9,862 committees in the FEC’s 2000 Committee File, 1,385 are listed as affiliated with the Democratic Party, and 1,829 with the Republican party. Certainly some candidates and party committees have escaped this designation. Several DCCC non-federal account committees and some dozens of active candidates are not designated as “Dem” or “Rep” in the file. Future work will take this into account, as well as coding all committees for party loyalty based on their donation patterns.

10 An alternative measure would be to rate party donors by the percent of all their contributions that go to one party. Since most donors meet a stricter standard (100% of the identifiable contributions go to one party) I use that simpler and stricter cutoff point here.

11 By electronically matching exact names and zip codes, I risk two sources of error. The first is that multiple people with the same name in the same zip code will be coded as being the same person. If in one zip code, Mary Smith gives exclusively to Democrats and a different Mary Smith gives exclusively to Republicans, the name Mary Smith will be coded as “Not Party Loyal.” Additionally, some donors may give multiple donations for which they report either different zip codes or different names, and so even though Mary Smith and Mary L. Smith may be the same person, her donations may be divided among what the computer considers to be “different” people. There is no reason to believe that this measure would bias the number of observed Party Loyal Donors in ways that would help my theory.

12 An additional 6,972 donors only gave money to committees in 2000 that were not labeled by party affiliation. Some of these committees may be party-loyal interest group committees, a greater number of donors than captured here may qualify as party loyal in future analyses.
This difference is statistically significant in a one-way ANOVA test. Twenty-seven percent of candidates who received fewer than ten Party Loyal Donations won their primaries, while 66% of candidates who received more than ten Party Loyal Donations won their primaries, (p<.001).

Table 3.5: Number of candidates in selected 2002 primary races receiving party loyal donations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Party Loyal Donations Received</th>
<th>Number of candidates receiving</th>
<th>Percent who won primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-100</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101+</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly some candidates receive a great deal of Loyal Party donor support, and others receive very little. But rather than focus on the raw number of Loyal Party Donations each candidate received, I have developed a measure of a candidate’s relative ability to tap into the funds that loyal big-money donors in the party network make available in the candidate’s primary race. For each candidate, I totaled all of the Loyal Party Money (in sums over $200) contributed to all candidates in the candidate’s primary race, and then calculated the percent of all Loyal Party Money contributed in that race that the candidate received.

It is important to ask, however, whether measuring a candidate’s ability to raise money from party loyal donors is just an indicator of his or her overall fundraising prowess. Indeed, the Pearson’s correlation between the percent of Loyal Party money in the race that the candidate receives and the percent of all of the large donations in the race received by the candidate is .803. However, overall fundraising prowess and the ability to raise funds specifically from individuals who have given significant amounts
of money to the party in the past are conceptually distinct, if probably closely related, candidate skills.

Table 3.6 below shows that there are many cases in which one candidate is the distinct favorite of the individual Loyal Party Donors who give in that primary race. Overall, individual partisan donors seem to play favorites in about a third of all primary races where there is some doubt about whether the party will win the general election. In safe seats, these loyal partisan donors seem to split their loyalties in almost every race. This indicates that Loyal Party donors may be participating in primary elections in patterns that are rational for the party, not just in haphazard, candidate-centered ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Loyal Group endorsements and Party Loyal PAC contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are many ways in which interest groups and ideological groups of various kinds participate in the electoral process. They can donate money through a Political Action Committee, they can endorse candidates, they can supply mailing lists or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6: Number of House Races in Which One Candidate Receives all of the Party Loyal Money Contributed by individuals in the Primary (by Race type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>Open, Safe for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Impossible for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Competitive</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Non-Incumbent’s Party</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Incumbent’s Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of races (excluding unopposed)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races in which one candidate gets 100% of PL money</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>5 (35%)</td>
<td>10 (37%)</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>25 (27%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2002 sample. Excludes races where one candidate runs unopposed.
volunteer campaign workers, and they can make independent expenditures on behalf of a candidate. For each candidate in 2002, I collected both group and individual elite endorsements through a campaign survey, and collected loyal partisan group donations by searching FEC records. As will be discussed below, the PAC donations provide a cleaner measure of partisan support than the group endorsements because they can be collected from the FEC without relying on survey respondents, and their partisanship can be measured more precisely.

I collected, along with individual elite endorsements, all group endorsements of primary candidates in my sample, as reported to me by the campaigns themselves. Endorsements, like other aspects of political campaigns, are ephemeral. Cohen et al (2001) successfully collected press reports of endorsements of presidential nomination campaigns, but congressional primaries have far lower profiles, and it is difficult to search local, often rural, press sources for any large number of campaigns. In addition, many endorsements are made public only in campaign advertising, while others are made public only right before the primary election, in order to have maximum impact in the press and public. Consequently, I collected endorsements directly from the candidates themselves. I attempted to contact the candidate at least two times, always including a phone call the day after the primary election. Most candidates and staff

13 There are two problems with searching for congressional endorsements in press sources. Rural press sources are hard to search in great number, while urban newspapers are unlikely to cover congressional races in depth.

14 Through trial and error early in the primary season (which stretched from March 5 to September 21, 2002) I determined that prior to the primary, candidates and their campaign workers were too busy to talk to me. I had better luck reaching people in the day or two following a primary election, after the excitement had died down but before the campaign office had been dismantled. When I could not track candidates down on the telephone, I used all other means at my disposal, including email, faxes and letters sent through regular mail. I explained the academic purposes of my research and asked for a complete list of the endorsements they had received from groups and individuals. Many candidates had endorsement lists on their webpages. Early telephone interviews, however, suggested that about half the
were very helpful: I was able to get official lists of endorsements from 55% of the candidates who ran in the selected primary races. I accepted at face value any list the candidate gave me, and included in my database all the names that they included as endorsements. Table 3.7 lists the number of races and candidates in each race type that responded to my survey.

**Table 3.7: Number of primary endorsement survey respondents by primary race type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Type</th>
<th>Percent of candidates responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open, Safe for Candidate’s Party</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Impossible for Candidate’s Party</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Competitive</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent, Non-Incumbent Party</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent, Incumbent’s Party</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I received a higher response rate to my endorsement survey from more well-organized, more successful campaigns. I was more likely to get a response from those who won their primaries because they were more likely to have professional staffs and offices that were easy to contact successfully, and because they had offices and staffs for longer periods of time after the primary was over. I was able to collect endorsements from 56% of candidates who lost their primary, and 65% of candidates who won. Table 3.8 (below) shows the characteristics of survey respondents compared to the whole sample.

---

time the candidate had received at least some endorsements that were not listed on the webpage. So when there was a web-based list available, I asked the campaign whether this list represented a complete list of the endorsements the candidate had received, and only included in my analysis endorsements for which I was able to receive verbal confirmation.
The candidates who responded to my survey appear to be a fairly representative sample of the universe of 2002 primary candidates, aside from a small bias towards primary winners, which occurs because they continued to have campaigns and staffs for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.8: Representativeness of respondents to endorsement survey</th>
<th>Frequency overall (percent of all candidates)</th>
<th>Frequency in sample (percent of all respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Won primary</td>
<td>171 (35%)</td>
<td>108 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>39 (8%)</td>
<td>19 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-elected</td>
<td>194 (40%)</td>
<td>122 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. elected</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town elected</td>
<td>18 (3%)</td>
<td>14 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big city elected</td>
<td>11 (2%)</td>
<td>7 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>15 (3%)</td>
<td>11 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State legislature</td>
<td>77 (16%)</td>
<td>50 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>8 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>49 (11%)</td>
<td>29 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>2 (.5%)</td>
<td>1 (.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected experience</td>
<td>207 (43%)</td>
<td>129 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent in the primary</td>
<td>136 (28%)</td>
<td>79 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is competitive</td>
<td>287 (59%)</td>
<td>161 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is guaranteed loss</td>
<td>66 (13.5%)</td>
<td>33 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is guaranteed win</td>
<td>132 (28%)</td>
<td>75 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>238 (49%)</td>
<td>128 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>247 (51%)</td>
<td>141 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>71 (14.6%)</td>
<td>39 (14.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>269 (55%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
more days after the election and so I was able to complete more successful follow-up calls. In the whole universe of House and Senate candidates I studied, 314 (65%) won their primary. Of those for whom I have endorsements, 161 (60%) won their primary. In the whole sample 39 (8%) were incumbents, while of my respondents 19 (7%) were incumbents. In the whole sample 77 (16%) were state legislators, of my respondents, 50 (18%) were state legislators. On the basis of these and other similar descriptive statistics, I cautiously assume that my response rate is not significantly biased toward candidates who received endorsements.

The following table lists the general types of the 1,434 group endorsements that were received by candidates in my sample. They were coded both using the title of the group and, when available, the Federal Election Commission’s coding of that group’s political action committee, as listed in Congressional Quarterly’s *Federal PACs Directory*.

Table 3.9: Group endorsement types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of endorsements</th>
<th>Percent of all endorsements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor union</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue group</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade association</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party-affiliated</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In collecting these group endorsements, I relied solely on the campaign’s reports, and given the vast number of groups, and the vague way they are reported, two problems emerge. It is unclear, for example, whether a candidate who reported receiving an endorsement from the Communication Workers of America was actually
endorsed by the national union, a state council, or a local, and many times the staffer with whom I spoke did not distinguish them. It would have been prohibitively laborious to contact each of the 1400+ groups in order to determine whether an endorsement was issued, and if so, from which level of their organization. It also would have been very time consuming to search for the past endorsing behavior of those groups, to test whether they had a long-term commitment to one party or not. So while it is possible to say which candidate received the most group endorsements in the race, or the most labor endorsements in the race, it is not easy to tell which candidate received the most endorsements from groups that are closely-enough linked to a political party to be meaningful to either party elites or primary voters. These candidate-reported group supporters will prove to be most useful in telling stories about particular races than in looking at broad patterns of behavior across primary environments.

Classifying a group as partisan or non-partisan is both difficult and controversial. Cohen, et al. chose to include Labor in the Democratic party’s umbrella, and the National Rifle Association in the Republican party, for the purposes of examining party elite influence over presidential nominations. They do so with good reason, but do not entirely address the question of exactly how one would tell if an interest group is or is not part of the party coalition rather than just ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’. In employing a second measure of partisan-group support, I attempt to be more rigorous in classifying groups as partisan or nonpartisan.

I more fruitfully measure group participation in primaries, and the party loyalty of groups, by focusing on PAC contributions to primary campaigns. I rate the party loyalty of groups based on the number of donations they made in the 2000 election
cycle to candidates of each of the parties. As with individual contributions to candidates, I electronically searched the Federal Election Commission database for all PACs that donated to candidates on my candidate list prior to their 2002 primary. I then collected all of the donations that those 2,361 PACs made to candidates in the year 2000, and tabulated the percentage of those donations that went to candidates of each party. Only those groups that are loyal to the party over time should be considered part of the party’s infrastructure, and therefore a partisan cue to voters or a mechanism by which party elites express preferences in primary elections. Deciding where the cutoff point should be to classify a group as ‘party loyal’ is somewhat arbitrary. The following analyses will code only PACs that gave 100% of their 2000 donations to a single party as party loyal. Table 3.10 shows the variation in loyalty across PACs that gave to primary candidates in 2002. Over three hundred Political Action Committees gave exclusively to one party’s candidates in the 2000 election cycle. It also shows that many more PACs gave predominantly to Republicans than gave predominantly to Democrats, although PACs that gave the majority of their money to Democrats were less likely to give much money to the other party.

Table 3.10: Number of Political Action Committees that are Party Loyal at various levels of loyalty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAC gave</th>
<th>To Democrats</th>
<th>To Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59% of 2000 contributions:</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Universe is 2,361 Political Action Committees that gave to a 2002 primary candidate selected for study. 609 Political Action Committees that gave to 2002 primary candidates did not give to any candidates for federal office in the 2000 election cycle that reported a party affiliation to the Federal Election Commission.
Four out of ten of the primary candidates studied here did not receive any contributions from Political Action Committees, while 105 (20%) of the candidates received all of the donations from (100%) Party Loyal PACs that were handed out in their primary race. These candidates who receive more contributions from Party Loyal PACs were significantly more likely to win their primaries. Ninety-five percent of the candidates who received all of the Party Loyal PAC contributions distributed in their primary race won the primary, while only 19% of those candidates who split Party Loyal PAC contributions with other candidates won.

As with party loyal individual donors and national party committees, Party Loyal PACs seem more likely to significantly favor one candidate when the race environment makes the race in question more important to the party.

Table 3.11: Number of House Races in Which One Candidate Receives all of the Money Contributed by Party Loyal PACs in the Primary (by Race type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>Number of races in which one candidate gets 100% of Party Loyal PAC money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open, Safe for Candidate’s Party</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Impossible for Candidate’s Party</td>
<td>5 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Competitive</td>
<td>10 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent, Non-Incumb. Party</td>
<td>20 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent, Incumbent’s Party</td>
<td>7 (78%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2002 sample. Excludes races where one candidate runs unopposed.

As with contributions from Party Loyal Individual donors, it appears that fairly frequently one candidate is the ‘favorite’ of the PACs that are closely associated with the party establishment.
Individual Elite Endorsements

Anyone can offer advice and money to a candidate for public office. But public figures can offer, in addition to their own expertise, contacts, and private resources, a public statement of support and association. These public endorsements by party, religious, community, political figures, groups, newspapers, and celebrities can grant a campaign a real—but hard to quantify—advantage. Endorsements bestow upon candidates the dual benefits of indicating to the endorser’s allies and supporters that a given candidate is worthy of their consideration and of acting as a cue to voters. Particularly in primary campaigns, where the party label does not serve as a cue to voters on the ballot, endorsements can increase voters’ likelihood of voting for that candidate.

Why would an elite endorse a candidate? Based on my conversations with endorsers and campaign participants, it seems that as with most acts of political support\(^{15}\) a person is more likely to endorse a candidate if he or she is asked to endorse. So candidates are more likely to receive endorsements if their campaign strategists feel that it would be beneficial to the campaign to seek endorsements and to publicize them. A second factor that makes an elite more likely to endorse is whether he or she has some kind of prior professional or personal relationship with the candidate. This is not a prerequisite—some less-well-known candidates take the opportunity during the early stages of a campaign to introduce themselves to movers and shakers in a district or state, and to woo such people with their charm, issue positions, and other political assets. But whether the candidate-endorser relationship is longstanding or only as old as

\(^{15}\) For example, contributors are more likely to give money when asked (Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995).
the candidacy, a list of elite endorsements is a signal that a candidate has sought to build
ties to established party officeholders and participants in party affairs in the district or
state.

When are party elites unlikely to endorse a candidate? Certainly a public
endorsement puts one’s personal and professional reputation on the line, and so
candidates who are not serious, who are completely incapable of winning either the
primary or general election, or who become embroiled in scandal are less likely than
other candidates to receive endorsements. In addition, because personal relationships
are often the basis of endorsements, if more than one candidate in a race has a
longstanding relationship with a particular endorser, that endorser is likely to sit out the
primary and avoid taking sides between his or her allies. One aide to a high-ranking
state official told me that although the official was perfectly happy to endorse a
candidate in a primary where the candidate’s opponents were party outsiders, that
official never would have considered endorsing in a different race that featured two
longtime party insiders.

From the candidates for whom I was able to obtain endorsement lists through
my survey, it is possible to draw some quick conclusions. Three types of primary
candidates were particularly unlikely to have received any endorsements before the
primary. The first group is candidates who frequently run for office, sometimes in many
different states, and who have no real chance of winning. That such people would not
attract public statements of support is not surprising. The second group that did not
often receive any endorsements includes candidates who are unopposed in their race for
the party nomination. One-third (11 of 34) of the unopposed House candidates whose
campaigns agreed to speak with me reported that they had not received any endorsements because they did not face primary opposition and were focused more on the general election. Several incumbents, particularly those whose primaries were early in the year, did not even have regularly staffed campaign offices until after the primary election was over. And the final group of candidates includes those who are nominated or assured of nomination through party conventions or private meetings. Thirty percent of these candidates (8 of 26) reported that they did not receive any endorsements. Because these candidates did not need to mount primary campaigns of any consequence, they did not ask for or advertise public statements of support until their general election campaigns began. They certainly won the support of party elites, but through a less public process than endorsements. So candidates who received at least some endorsements were generally at least marginally viable candidates who were not assured of selection by the party and who faced at least some potential primary opposition.

In all, 2,683 individuals endorsed candidates in my sample, and 138 candidates, or 51% of my survey respondents, received at least one individual endorsement. Table 3.12 lists the total number of endorsements that were given by elites in various categories. It shows that few high-level elected officials become involved in primaries, but that local and state legislative officials are often called upon to support congressional primary candidates. In total 85 candidates (42%) received no individual endorsements at all.
Table 3.12: Endorsements received by primary candidates in House races, by endorser position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endorser</th>
<th>Total number of endorsements made</th>
<th>Number of candidates who received at least one endorsement of that type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not elected*</td>
<td>1492</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State legislature</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide elected</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All entries are current or former elected officeholders from whom a 2002 primary candidate reported receiving an endorsement.
* The vast majority of these were private citizens, and 55% of these endorsements from private citizens were received by only 3 candidates who chose to advertise community members who supported them. None of these three won their primary.

Cohen et al. measure party insider support by weighting endorsements by the resources the endorser is likely to empart to the candidate. In their study, they weight governors’ endorsements heavily, and endorsements like Michael Jordan’s mother’s endorsement of Al Gore very lightly. In the context of a presidential election, when statewide and national name recognition may be influential, it may make sense to assign ‘importance’ to different categories of party elites a priori. In congressional races, however, there may be cases in which endorsements from private citizens or small town mayors might be more influential over voter decisions than support from state legislators, and other cases where state legislative endorsements may be consequential. Rather than developing a weighting scheme for endorsements, I attempt to solve this problem using a more comprehensive approach, combining all other measures of party activity with the specific individual endorsements a candidate receives to reach a conclusion about who, if anyone, the participating partisans favored in a given primary race.
Summary Measure of Party Elite Cohesion

I have collected data on five indicators of party elite support for each primary candidate: official state endorsement, national party contribution, percent of donations received from party loyal donors, percent of donations received from party loyal PACs, and individual elite endorsements received. If the party establishment supports a candidate, the preponderance of the data collected on that race should clearly indicate that support. After struggling with various measures of elite cohesion I was unable to develop a satisfying quantitative way to tally these contributions and endorsements, in part because it is difficult to devise point schemes that accurately reward a candidate for receiving endorsements from “her home state US senator and a majority of mayors in the state” or “32 local officials, 1 party official, and several leaders in the ethnic community of the district.”

The Democratic and Republican primaries in Oklahoma’s 4th district offer good examples of the difficulties in “tallying” endorsements, while highlighting the importance of the information endorsements can provide. In the Democratic primary, Darryl Roberts, a former state senate majority leader, received 90% of the money from loyal partisan PACs, 62.5% of the donations from loyal partisan individuals, and $250 from the DCCC, but did not respond to my survey, and so I had no information on his endorsements. His opponent, Ben Odom, an attorney with no prior elected or party experience, received endorsements from State House Majority leader Deeny Hillard, U.S. Representatives Brad Carson (D-OK) and Steny Hoyer (D-MD), State Senator Cal Hobson, and “Oklahoma DA of the Year” Dean Christian. Without taking endorsements into account, it might look like the party was unified behind Senator Roberts, but the
endorsements help paint a picture of a slightly more divided Oklahoma Democratic party.

On the Republican side, Tom Cole, a former Oklahoma Secretary of State and Chief of Staff to the RNC, received no donations from partisan individuals, but did receive 94% of the party loyal PAC money (12 donations), and endorsements from the retiring U.S. Representative in the district, J.C. Watts, Oklahoma U.S. Representative Wes Watkins, Oklahoma Governor Keating, Oklahoma GOP National Committeemen Lynn Windel and Bunny Chambers, Corporation Commissioner Ed Apple, eight state representatives, and two state senators. One of his opponents, Marc Nuttle, a former executive director of the NRCC, received all the party loyal individual contributions made in the race ($6000), 6% of the party loyal PAC contributions, and endorsements from former state party chair Steve Edwards, Republican campaign specialist Ed Rollins, former Reagan administration official Ed Meese, State Labor Commissioner Brenda Roneaux, “small business advocate Terry Neese,” and economist Milton Friedman. Here, the money picture seems to suggest a divided party, but the endorsements suggest otherwise. Although both candidates sought and received support from elements of the state and national parties, it seems like more important elements of the party (e.g., the governor, the retiring member from the district in question) stood behind Mr. Cole. Although reasonable political observers will follow such reasoning, it is difficult to design a weighting scheme to capture such subtle judgments.

In addition to the difficulty of assigning values to endorsements, I also face the difficulty that no single indicator of party cohesion I have measured adequately operationalizes the concept of party elite cohesion. If there are in fact multiple
categories of party elites, and if it is not appropriate to say in advance which of these elites are most important in every congressional race, party elite cohesion must be measured based on all of these indicators. The idea that party elites would cohere around a “favorite” prior to a primary, and that such cohesion could be observed by other elites, means that the concept itself would be measured in the real world as the result of a subjective process. A potential candidate or potential donor in the Oklahoma 4th, for example, would probably be aware of at least some of the endorsement and donation activities in that race and develop from that awareness an impression that the Oklahoma Republican establishment supports Mr. Cole. Adequately measuring party elite cohesion as it would be measured by observers on the ground is a difficult task to do objectively.

Therefore, I compute party elite cohesion in two different ways: objectively and subjectively. First, I for each candidate, I calculate a standardized score on each of five variables: the amount of money the candidate raised from national party committees, the percent of endorsements received from elected or party officials, the percent of endorsements received from groups, the percent of party-loyal PAC money received, and the percent of party-loyal individual donations received. I then sum these standardized scores, and code for whether the candidate received the highest standardized score in his or her race. The problem with this measure is that it calculates that there is, in fact, a party favorite in every race, whereas neutral observers would tend to say that if the party is closely divided, even if one candidate has an overall edge in partisan support, that there is not a “favorite” in the race.
I solve this dilemma by relying on independent analysis by seven coders, all of whom have at least Master’s Degrees in political science, and all of whom are familiar with, but uninvested in, this research agenda. I provided each coder with information on national party donations, party loyal individual donations, party loyal group donations, individual endorsements, and the total sum of large donations each candidate raised, and asked that they code whether “the party” had “a favorite” in each race, and who that favorite was. Their readings of the data I have collected should mimic the process by which party operatives and interested political observers would judge whether there was a “favorite” in a primary.

I made the final judgment about how each race would be coded, and the following table shows the correlations between my evaluations and those of the other coders. In 82% of races, coder decisions were unanimous. In an additional 13%, only one coder disagreed with the final decision. In only four more races (5% of the total) two or more coders dissented from the final coding for that race. In the races above, the Democratic primary was labeled a “not party favorite” race, and the Republican primary was labeled a “party favorite” race. These were among the few races where coders were roughly evenly split in their coding, and where my judgment was important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coder 1</th>
<th>Coder 2</th>
<th>Coder 3</th>
<th>Coder 4</th>
<th>Coder 5</th>
<th>Coder 6</th>
<th>Coder 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 Coders were only given information on the 82 races in which no incumbent was seeking reelection. In those incumbent races, the incumbent was presumed to be the party favorite except in two cases: Rep. Gary Condit was not coded as the party favorite when he sought renomination in the California 18th—his opponent Dennis Cardoza was coded as the favorite in that race. In the New Hampshire Senate race, neither John Sununu nor incumbent Senator Bob Smith were coded as the favorite.
This overall rating of whether elite and institutional partisans coalesce around one candidate in a primary encompasses and closely relates to the candidate’s success in raising money from national party committees \(r=.596\), party loyal individuals \(r=.720\), and party loyal Political Action Committees \(r=.815\). It correlates less well with the raw number of individual partisan elite endorsements a candidate receives \(r=.222\), but takes into account subtle evaluations of endorsements in the specific context of each race.

More importantly, the subjective ratings correlate very highly with the objective rating that asks whether a candidate received the highest standardized score on all five party cohesion variables (Pearson’s \(R^2 = .752\)). In no case did the coders say that the favorite in the race was a different candidate than the one who received the highest standardized score on the party cohesion variables, even though they did not have that standardized score available to them. They rate 120 races as having a party favorite, and 60 as not having a party favorite. This judgment seems a more reasonable measure of the frequency with which partisan elites really unify prior to a primary election.

Table 3.14 (below) shows logit estimates for whether a candidate was coded as being a party favorite or not, as predicted by each of the measures of pre-primary party support discussed here, and controlling for the amount of money the candidate raised and for whether the candidate is the highest elected officeholder in the race. As would be expected, all four key measures of partisan support (national party donation size, percent of all party loyal individual donations received, percent of all partisan PAC contributions received, and percent of partisan elite endorsements received) are
significant predictors of whether a candidate was ultimately coded as a party favorite.

Candidate quality is not a significant predictor of whether the candidate was coded as a party favorite, as it should not be, since that information was not provided to coders.

Table 3.14: Logit predictions of whether party will visibly support a candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient (S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of money received from national party</td>
<td>.001** (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of all individual partisan donations received</td>
<td>.023 ** (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of partisan PAC contributions received</td>
<td>5.01** (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of party or elected individual endorsements received</td>
<td>.015* (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of group endorsements received</td>
<td>.186 (.606)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of money raised</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate holds highest elected office of any primary candidate</td>
<td>.448 (.474)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-6.18** (.737)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-2 Log Likelihood: 137.206

For each measure of party insider support for a candidate, it was observed that the more important victory in the race was to the party, the more likely the partisan elites were to unify around one primary candidate. That pattern holds again here, when examining the proportion of each primary race type where elites are coded to favor one primary candidate. Again, there is most likely to be a party elite favorite in races where vulnerable incumbents are seeking renomination, and in races where the opposing party is selecting a candidate to challenge that incumbent. And again, as shown in Table 3.15 (below) the party is least likely to have a favorite in a seat that is safe for that party.
although in almost a third of safe seats, the party can be observed to heavily favor one candidate over the others.

Table 3.15: Total House and Senate races where one candidate is coded as party favorite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open, Safe for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Impossible for Candidate’s Party</th>
<th>Open, Competitive</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Non-Incumb. Party</th>
<th>Vulnerable Incumbent, Incumbent’s Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number (and percent) of House races in which one candidate is coded as the party favorite</td>
<td>9 (37%)</td>
<td>6 (42%)</td>
<td>15 (56%)</td>
<td>14 (67%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number (and percent) of Senate races in which one candidate is coded as the party favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (66%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2002 sample. Excludes races where one candidate runs unopposed.

In this chapter, I have developed a novel way of measuring the pre-primary behavior of party elites in congressional elections, and shown that in many cases, party elites are unified rather than divided in primaries. In the next chapter, I discuss ten primary elections in detail. These case studies indicate that the measures described above reflect the behavior of elites on the ground.
Chapter 4
Candidate-Party Interactions in the Pre-Primary Period:
Evidence from Case Studies

Chapters 3 showed that party elites frequently unify around candidates, when it is rational for a strong party to do so. But the results presented so far do not show whether partisan considerations actually motivated elites to support one particular candidate, or whether the cohesion we observe merely reflects the existence of private relationships or some other nonpartisan pre-primary decision-making process. In fact there are good reasons to expect that party considerations may not be foremost on the minds of elites who become involved in primaries. Elite political actors have strong incentives to “back no losers” (Schlesinger, 1984; Rakove 1975). So elites’ decisions to endorse or donate money to candidates may reflect their opinions that a given candidate will definitely be elected by primary voters rather than representing an attempt to stack the deck from which partisan voters will choose on primary election day. If this were the case, it would suggest that party networks do not influence nominations, even when they appear to be involved in them. It would imply that party leaders are merely anticipating voters’ decisions rather than trying to influence them, and therefore their apparent involvement cannot be an indicator of party organizational strength or cohesion.

Although there is ample evidence that under certain circumstances party elites unify behind one primary candidate, it is impossible to tell from that observed unity itself whether party elites are motivated by personal or partisan considerations. Statistical analysis of the large dataset described in previous chapters cannot tell us whether party elites interact with or influence each other, or tell us what motivates them to participate in a primary.
To shed light on these issues, this chapter presents several case studies, based on press accounts of pre-primary activity as well as interviews with candidates, party leaders, and endorsers. These case studies provide evidence that party elites and potential candidates do interact explicitly, both prior to the primary filing deadline and prior to the primary itself. They show that when we observe elite unity around a primary candidate, that unity reflects actual ties and real communication among partisan elites and between partisan elites and candidates. They do not show, however, one distinct pattern of elite communication. It is not the case that all observed elite cohesion reflects a process by which elites anoint a candidate and push other potential candidates out of the race, although there are several cases where this is so. Nor is it the case that all observed elite unity reflects automatic individual elite responses to a high quality candidate. There is, at times, a far more complex mixture of quality candidates soliciting support from partisan elites while elites respond to both district and candidate characteristics and cues from other elites about whom to support in the primary and how strongly to do so. In some cases candidates drive the process, while in others the interaction seems to be initiated by party elites, but in either case both sets of actors are important to how partisan resources are distributed in the primary election. And there is considerable evidence that the resources that are distributed do tell a story about party cohesion in a given district.

The Cases

This chapter describes ten 2002 primary elections. These were the Republican and Democratic primaries in the Texas U.S. Senate race, and the Republican and Democratic primaries in each of the following House races: the Texas 5th district, the Texas 25th
district, the Maryland 2nd district, and the Maryland 8th district. I chose these cases based on three criteria.

The first criterion was to select pairs of cases that fell into different types of primary election environments but took place in the same states. Since state party culture may be a determinant of party elite behavior, I limited my study to two states that had multiple primary races in my sample. I then chose at least one competitive, open race and one other type of race in each state, so that I am able to compare the effects of state party culture across race types and the effects of race types in different state environments.

The second criterion was that I limited my choices to only those states with weak party rules. There are several states that permit the political parties to select their nominees at conventions or to make official endorsements of them, but processes of elite support under such conditions are fairly well understood. Such cases would not shed light on how and why elites favor or do not favor particular primary candidates over others when candidates can unilaterally decide to enter the nomination contest.

A third criterion for my case studies was convenience. I deliberately chose congressional races that were accessible from a major airport without too much driving. This criterion may have excluded some interesting races, for example the Democratic and Republican primaries South Dakota’s at-large House seat, but left me with plenty of diverse, interesting states to study.

For each selected primary election, I studied elite behavior in detail, using two different methodologies. The first methodology was in-depth interviewing. For each primary race, I attempted to interview the candidates themselves, at least one party official in the state or district, and a few supporters of each candidate—endorsers from
my lists of endorsements, representatives of interest groups that became involved in or conspicuously stayed out of the race in question, and donors to the leading candidates. While many candidates, endorsers, and their staffs were extremely helpful and accommodating, there were still many others with whom I would have liked to have spoken, but who were unavailable for an interview. I supplemented my interviews with a second source of information: a broad scan of local and national press sources about each of the races in question. Local press reports on primary races have the added benefit of often having been written by experienced and well-established political reporters who are able to report the conventional wisdom about each race at the time of publication.

Ten Primary Elections, in Brief

The first six primaries I will discuss took place in Texas in March of 2002. Texas primary law provides for an initial primary election and then, if no candidate receives 50% of the vote, a runoff between the top two vote-getters. Two of the six primaries described here resulted in runoffs, the dynamics of which will be described in the context of each case. All six primaries were in open seats, but they varied in their anticipated competitiveness in the general election. The first was the open, competitive race for retiring U.S. Senator Phil Gramm’s U.S. Senate seat. The second was the potentially competitive but “likely Republican” Dallas-area seat (TX-5) that had been vacated by Representative Pete Sessions’ decision to run in a neighboring district. The third was the safe Democratic seat in the Houston area that came open when Representative Ken Bentsen resigned to run for the Senate (TX-25).
The second four primaries took place in two Maryland congressional districts. One district was open and the other was held by an incumbent widely perceived to be vulnerable in the general election. The first, open district, (MD-02), largely north of Baltimore, was considered to lean Democratic by registration. But this district had been held by a popular incumbent Republican, Rep. Bob Ehrlich, who decided to forego reelection in order to run for governor, and so was considered competitive by both parties. The second, incumbent-held district (MD-08) was a strongly Democratic suburban Washington district that was held by a liberal Republican, Rep. Connie Morella. Maps of all of these districts are available in the public domain at nationalatlas.gov.

The following table lists the *Cook Political Report*’s rating for each district, the candidates who appeared on the primary ballot for each race, the winner of the primary, and the winner of the general election.
Table 4.1: Primary Races, Ratings, and Winners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Cook Rating</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Won Primary</th>
<th>Won General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>Leans Republican</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>John Cornyn, Lawrence Cranberg, Douglas Deffenbaugh, Bruce ‘Rusty’ Lang,</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(competitive)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dudley Mooney, Victor Morales, Ron Kirk, Ken Bentsen, Gene Kelly, EdCunningham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05</td>
<td>Likely Republican</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Jeb Hensarling, Dan Hagood, Mike Armour, Phil Sudan, Fred Wood</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(not competitive)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Ron Chapman, Bill Bernstein, Wayne Raasch</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Safe Democratic</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Tom Reiser</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(not competitive)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Chris Bell, Carroll Robinson, Paul Colbert, Steven King</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Tossup</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Connie Morella, Lloyd Sprague</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(competitive)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Chris Van Hollen, Mark Shriver, Ian Shapiro, Deborah Vollmer, Anthony Jaworski</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>Tossup</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Helen Delich Bentley, Scot Michael Young</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(competitive)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C.A. ‘Dutch’ Ruppersberger, Oz Bengur, Kenneth Bosley, Brian Davis, James DeLoach</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following pages, I present some basic details about the evolution of each primary contest, before moving on to discuss similarities and differences between them.
**Texas Senate: Republican Primary**

Although Texas was a Democratic stronghold for more than a century after the Civil War, Republicans have made significant gains there since 1980. In the 2000 general election, President George W. Bush won 59% of the vote, to Al Gore’s 38%. In 2003, the Governor and all other statewide elected officials were Republicans, as were 88 of the 150 members of the state House, 19 of 31 of the members of the State Senate, and 15 of the 32 members of the state’s Congressional delegation.¹ Despite this increasingly Republican dominance of state politics, both Republicans and Democrats felt that when Phil Gramm retired from the Senate in 2001, there was a legitimate chance that the state could elect a Democrat to replace him. Democrats were prepared to fight hard for the seat, especially given the embarrassment they suffered when their last incumbent Senator² was beaten badly by now-Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. Republicans knew to anticipate a serious fight for Graham’s replacement. In the words of one Texas Republican party operative, “Texas is a conservative state, but not necessarily a Republican state.”³ With both state and national operatives watching this race, activists and participants on both sides anticipated that the race would be competitive right up until the end (Susswein 2004d).⁴

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¹ *Politics in America* p. 947. This was before the mid-decade redistricting that increased the Republicans’ share seats in the Texas congressional delegation.

² Bob Kreuger, appointed by Gov. Ann Richards to fill Lloyd Bentsen’s seat when Bentsen moved into the Clinton administration

³ Jennifer Lustina, campaign manager, Cornyn for Senate, interview by author, tape recording, Austin, TX, 4 Aug 2004.

⁴ As it turned out, the race was not that close on Election Day. National tides and President (and Former Texas Governor) Bush’s popularity may have affected this outcome. Texas Democrats suffered losses in almost every key position, and national Democrats didn’t fare much better. Neither national nor state Democrats could have known this early in the year, and both Republicans and Democrats behaved as though the election would be close right up until the last few weeks.
When we examine a primary election that takes place in a state or district where the general election is anticipated by most observers to be a competitive one, as was the case for the Texas Senate seat, we would expect both parties to rally early around one candidate, and to try and keep other candidates out of the race, in order to conserve resources for the general election. In the Republican primary race, those expectations were borne out. The Republican nominee, Attorney General John Cornyn, faced only token opposition for the nomination, and was supported by the Republican party establishment.\(^5\) Table 4.2 (below) lists his party support compared to that of his four opponents.

The entries in each column are derived from data collected on 180 primaries in 2002, as described in Chapter 3. “Key endorsements” are an excerpt from the lists of endorsements gathered from the campaigns themselves prior to the primary date. “Money from party loyal donors” presents the total amounts raised from individual donors who appear in FEC records as having given to the candidate and exclusively to candidates of the same party in the 2000 election cycle. “Money from Party Loyal PACs” presents the amount of money raised from PACs that gave exclusively to one party in the 2000 election cycle. “Party Favorite” represents the summary of all of these measures, as confirmed by coders who independently reviewed the data on each candidate.

\(^5\)Aside from physicist and first time candidate Lawrence Cranberg, I was unable to find biographical information on any of Cornyn’s opponents.
Table 4.2: Candidates for the Texas Republican U.S. Senate Nomination in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>$ from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornyn</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>President Bush, fmr. President Bush, Sen. Gramm, Sen. Hutchison</td>
<td>$961,619</td>
<td>$17,500 from NRSC, contributions from 31 other GOP-loyal PACs</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deffenbaugh</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mooney</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen above, Cornyn was able to monopolize party support in the primary by avoiding stronger challengers, which he accomplished through an iterative process where his early entry and efforts to woo party insiders then solidified party support for him and convinced party insiders to keep the field clear for him. The party then helped him prepare for the general election long before the voters ratified its choice in the primary election.

Several factors probably helped Cornyn avoid a seriously contested primary. First, he benefited from the strategic calculations of his potential challengers, and second, he benefited from party insiders’ behind-the-scenes efforts to convince those potential challengers to stay out of the race. His campaign manager says that “as soon as he had made his decision to run, he got on the phone to the big money people in each city and said, ‘I don’t know who else is in, but I’m in, and I want to count on you.’”

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6 Jennifer Lustina, interview by author, tape recording, Austin, TX, 4 Aug 2004.
outreach effort paid off. Other potential entrants into the race, including Land Commissioner David Dewhurst and Congressmen Joe Barton and Henry Bonilla, faced an already committed party establishment when they started searching for support. Both Congressmen made strategic choices to avoid contesting for the nomination after having seen Cornyn’s alliance develop.

Dewhurst stayed out of the race due to both strategic calculations and elite pressure. Dewhurst and Texas Supreme Court Judge Greg Abbott, who had both declared their intent to seek the Republican nomination for Lieutenant Governor when Cornyn jumped into the Senate race, were able to avoid competing against each other when Cornyn’s Attorney General spot opened up for Abbott. This allowed both Abbott and Dewhurst to seek their nominations uncontested by other Republicans. That easy primary for the Lieutenant Governor’s race probably made Dewhurst’s Senate ambitions seem much less attractive to him, especially given that the post is a powerful one in Texas. There were, additionally, widespread rumors in the Texas political establishment that Dewhurst also received pressure from party insiders aimed at deterring him from running against Cornyn.  

A third factor that might have helped Cornyn avoid a contested primary was his close relationship to the Bush administration. He had been friends with President Bush when Bush had been governor of Texas, and the President’s political adviser Karl Rove had directed Cornyn’s primary run for Attorney General. Cornyn’s campaign manager had also worked for Rove. How much advantage those relationships might have given

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7 Ken Kramer, Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter Director, interview by author, tape recording, Austin, TX, 4 Aug. 2003. See also Herman (2001), which describes the Republican efforts to clear the field for Cornyn. It notes: “Mark Sanders, a GOP consultant [who] helped presort the field [said] ‘we don’t need to see family fights. Voters don’t like it. The money people especially don’t like it.’”
him in fundraising and locking up early support is hard to assess. Cornyn received National Republican Senatorial Committee support prior to the primary, and prominent Republicans like President Bush attended fundraisers for his campaign prior to the primary. Although his prior relationship with the President may have attracted White House attention earlier than in other Senate races, it is probably the case that other similarly situated Senate candidates would have received those same types of support.8

Glancing at Table 4.2, it seems that given the money raised and endorsements gathered by the candidates for the Republican primary, Texas party elites were unified early on about their U.S. Senate nominee. The details described here support that interpretation of the data. Republican party elites in Texas and elsewhere did develop a consensus early on that Cornyn should be the nominee, and that he should not have to face tough opposition for the nomination. Both state and national Republicans seem to have had their eyes on the potentially competitive general election as they made these decisions. Cornyn’s “quality” as a statewide elected official, his own ties within the party, and his efforts to solicit and monopolize party support early, probably all made that elite consensus easier to obtain, but the fact that Cornyn was a part of the process does not diminish the significance of the finding that in this case, easily observable elite unity reflects a real behind-the-scenes consensus around his candidacy prior to the involvement of any primary voters.

8 In fact, six of the eight non-incumbent Republican Senate candidates who were running in competitive races in 2002 received pre-primary support from the NRSC, even though there were other candidates in their primaries.
Texas Senate: Democratic Primary

Texas Democrats faced similar strategic calculations about the Senate seat, which we would expect to have led many party leaders to want to conserve general election resources by avoiding a hotly contested primary. The Democrats’ nomination battle, however, was much messier than the Republicans’. The table below shows that two prominent candidates split the party establishment, and a third candidate with little establishment support actually came in first in the initial primary voting (although he lost the runoff). Three major candidates ran for the nomination: Houston Congressman Ken Bentsen, Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, and Victor Morales, a schoolteacher who had run a spirited campaign as the Democrats’ nominee against Phil Gramm in 1996, and had a great deal of grass roots support. Other candidates included Gene Kelly, a retired military lawyer, and Ed Cunningham, an attorney who endorsed Kirk prior to the primary.
Table 4.3: Candidates for the Texas Democratic Nomination for the U.S. Senate, 2002

| Candidate | % Primary vote | Key endorsements | $ from exclusively party loyal individual donors | Number of contributions from party loyal PACs | Party Favorite rating?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morales</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirk</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Former governors Ann Richards, Mark White, Preston Smith; Former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros; Congressmen Frost, Johnson, and Sandlin, 40 state representatives, 35 Texas mayors</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentsen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Former Governor Dolph Briscoe, Former Senator Bentsen, six current and six former members of Congress (D-TX), chair of Congressional Hispanic caucus, Democratic consultant Jack Martin, 19 local officials from south Texas</td>
<td>$844,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunningham</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ultimately the private entry decisions of the three major candidates drove the dynamics of the primary, especially as Kirk and Bentsen were each able to win considerable support from the party establishment. But anecdotally, and seen somewhat in endorsements, Austin and Washington insiders made a concerted effort to secure the nomination for Kirk.

Kirk had been an aide to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, a lobbyist for the city of Dallas, director of the state General Services Commission, Secretary of State, and Mayor of Dallas. Through those professional positions as well as through his personal charisma,
Kirk had made many allies in state party circles (Susswein 2002b). When Gramm announced his retirement, he immediately made discreet efforts to build support in the party. He recalls,

> There were a lot of people that said if you run we are with you lock, stock and barrel...I had visited with a number of people in Congress, a number of other folks...because I knew if I did run it was going to be a very tough uphill fight...and I didn’t need to waste any more energy than I had to on a Democratic primary. So, beginning in September or October I began to cover the waterfront at least talking to people within the Democratic establishment to let them know of my interest and tried to get as many commitments as I could.9

He did build a great deal of support and secured a large number of endorsements (see Table 4.3). He also benefited from a campaign strategy that drew both national and statewide attention to his candidacy by referring to the Texas Democrats’ Senate-Governor-Lieutenant Governor ticket as the “Dream Team” if it were to include an African-American (Kirk), a Latino (gubernatorial candidate Tony Sanchez) and a white man (lieutenant governor candidate John Sharp).10 The Dream Team idea was not a strategy of the Kirk campaign but rather of some national and statewide Democrats (including Texas AFL-CIO President Joe Gunn), who believed the racially diverse ticket would help turn out Latinos and African Americans and help the party win statewide offices in November.11

Ultimately, although prominent state and national Democrats supported his candidacy, I was unable to uncover evidence of serious efforts to deter Congressman Ken

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9 Mayor Ron Kirk, interview by author, tape recording, Dallas, TX, 5 Aug 2003.
10 See Susswein and Herman (2002).
11 See Herman (2002). Kirk responds to the Dream Team idea a bit disdainfully. He says, “if you look at the demographics of the Democratic ticket, a multi-ethnic ticket would certainly be more appealing than not. But if I didn’t have the record I had and the performance as Secretary of State, just finding a black guy to put on the ticket wouldn’t have made it a Dream. The Dream was, man, can we get the mayor of Dallas to run. Here’s a guy who’s won with bipartisan support in arguably one of the most conservative regions of the state...I cannot refute it enough that my being black made it a Dream Team, because if it was a real Dream Team we would have had a woman at the top of the ticket.” Kirk, interview.
Bentsen (nephew of former Senator Lloyd Bentsen) from also seeking the nomination. Bentsen’s solid record in Congress,\textsuperscript{12} his close ties to Democrats in the Houston area (he was a former Harris County party chair) and his family ties to east and south Texas helped him create his own strong base of support, and divided statewide elites enough that the primary became a seriously contested battle (Susswein 2002a; 2002d).

Bentsen and Kirk decided to run out of long-term personal ambitions to sit in the U.S. Senate.\textsuperscript{13} The third candidate in the race, Victor Morales, ran as an outsider candidate, and although efforts were made to dissuade him from running for the nomination and drawing progressive primary voters away from the more credible general election candidates, he was only too happy to deny the establishment its prize. Leaders in the Latino community repeatedly appealed to him not to run, and Morales recounts, “They were angry at me. They said, ‘who do you think you are?’”\textsuperscript{14}

Despite his lack of elite support, Morales’ Hispanic surname and the positive name recognition he had earned running against Senator Graham in 1996 made him sufficiently popular with primary voters to allow him come in first in the primary and to eliminate Bentsen from the runoff. Morales did particularly well in areas of the state with many Latinos, while Bentsen did well in the Houston area and rural northeast Texas, and Kirk did well in his home areas of Dallas and Austin. Morales edged out Kirk for first place in the primary with 34% of the primary vote, Kirk received 32%, and Bentsen was eliminated from the runoff with just 26% of the vote. Once Bentsen was out of the picture, the party establishment (including Bentsen himself and some of his key

\textsuperscript{12} He was extremely well-liked in his district, especially by organized labor. (Dale Warthum, President, Harris County Labor Council, interview by author, 4 Oct 2002).
\textsuperscript{13} Ron Kirk, interview; Eddie Aldrete, political consultant and former Communications Director, Bentsen for Senate, interview by author, 4 Aug 2003. See also McNeely 2001.
\textsuperscript{14} Victor Morales, former Senate candidate, interview by author, telephone, 30 March 2002.
supporters) rallied even more firmly behind Kirk, and he won the runoff against Morales handily, 60% to 40%.\(^{15}\)

Party elite support in this primary was decidedly split, perhaps due to an inability to agree on who the best general election candidate would be. National and many prominent Texas Democrats supported Ron Kirk, in the hopes that he would be a strong general election candidate because of his good ties to business and his potential symbolic value as an African-American candidate. But Bentsen had his own basis for party support in his many family connections, and there was no real consensus statewide that an African-American at the head of the ticket would raise voter turnout enough to do better in the general election than a white man might. It seems clear that Morales never had a chance at the nomination, because national and state party leaders considered him to be too poor a candidate to run in a competitive general election. In this case, theoretical predictions about party behavior are not borne out because the private entry decisions of the two strongest candidates prevented the party from unifying around one candidate prior to the primary. Even with the failure to unify, however, Texas and national Democrats at least attempted to stack the deck for Kirk over Bentsen, and succeeded at stacking the deck in favor of Kirk over Morales in the runoff, thereby demonstrating an explicit attempt to manipulate the primary voters’ potential choices.

\textit{Texas 5}\(^{th}\): Republican Primary

Texas’ 5\(^{th}\) Congressional district encompasses a geographic area that meanders from Dallas county, including large parts of the eastern suburbs of the city of Dallas,

\(^{15}\) One report notes, “Former Lieutenant Governor Barnes… has been working with the DSCC and touting Kirk to potential contributors in such places as Philadelphia and New York” (Susswein, 2002d). See also Susswein 2002e.
through parts of ten rural counties, stretching almost to the Bryan-College Station area in central Texas. It is a largely Republican district, having voted overwhelmingly (62%) for George W. Bush in 2000, but it encompasses some Democratic areas east of Dallas and some rural, African-American counties farther south.\textsuperscript{16} Cook rated it a ‘likely Republican’ seat in late 2001, but both parties and many other observers treated the race as a borderline competitive seat (Gamboa 2002, Jeffers 2001).

This district came open in 2001 when its then-occupant, Congressman Pete Sessions, saw that it had been redistricted to include the sprawling area from Dallas to Bryan, and decided to run for (re)-election in the new, neighboring 32\textsuperscript{nd} district, which was much more compact and even more firmly Republican. As an open seat, both national and state Democrats felt that it could be a close race and potentially winnable for the party. Local Republicans were wary of the money that national Democrats would pour into the seat but felt good about their chances in the district.

As a potentially competitive seat we would expect to see the national or state Republican parties attempt to direct the course of the primary election in this district. Indeed, Table 4.4 (below) shows that there was a large degree of unity apparent among party insiders who became involved in the primary. This was not a case, however, when party elite unity was directed by the elites themselves due to their concern about the competitiveness of the general election. Instead, it was the leading candidate himself who rallied the party network to its apparent consensus, demonstrating the powerful advantage that party ties can bestow on a primary candidate even when the establishment itself is uninterested in intervening preemptively in a primary race.

\textsuperscript{16} CQ’s Politics in America 947.
Several candidates, somewhat evenly matched, ran in this Republican primary. None of the candidates had strong ties to the local party, but each had advantages. Jeb Hensarling, the eventual winner, had been a staffer to Senator Gramm, Executive Director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, an entrepreneur, and a utility executive who worked for the Wileys, a prominent Dallas Republican family. His main weakness was that he could potentially be seen as an overly ambitious carpetbagger.

Mike Armour, a retired navy captain, executive coach and minister, had extensive ties to the Church of Christ Community. Dan Hagood, an attorney, a commander in the army reserves, was able to raise a great deal of money for his campaign, and received the endorsement of the *Dallas Morning News*. Phil Sudan, an attorney, had been the Republican nominee in the 2000 election to run in the 25th district against then-Congressman Bentsen. Computer analyst Fred Wood also ran.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hensarling</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Senator Gramm, Congressman Bonilla, Railroad Commissioner Mathews, 11 state reps, 21 local officials</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hagood</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$3,750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armour</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>$5,250</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hensarling eventually won the primary handily because he sought and won the support of local and national partisan elites and because he used those endorsements well in his campaign. He was able to raise money and build credibility early on because of his national party ties. His former employer, Phil Gramm, actively campaigned for him and recorded several radio spots supporting his candidacy. His campaign manager, C.P. Henry, describes his partisan ties this way:

We had a couple of events at the Wiley home, and tapped into that crowd. I think a lot of it was [Hensarling’s] contacts. He had worked with Jim Francis, who’s major behind the scenes here and the Wileys are big here. When they get behind you with their support, you see their names on a financial letter, you see Fred Meyer’s name—who is now chairman of the Texas for Bush effort, who’s known presidents all the way back to Ford—he had these people behind him. But the NRCC didn’t really help him as much as he thought it would. 17

Hensarling also reached out to local elected officials and asked explicitly for their support. Many of these local relationships were initiated in the months before the primary. Dallas County Commissioner Jim Jackson says, “I knew him—not well—but he came and visited with me and had an interview, if you like. I asked him questions about his background and what his positions were and why he thought he could win.”18 Jackson then went onto endorse him very early in the process. Henry describes how Hensarling built bridges to local party elites and then used those relationships to win over primary voters:

We didn’t have any precinct chairmen who were really for us when we started out. The first thing you do is get in there and start calling the precinct chairmen…We then had a four-color precinct [mailer] that said ‘Your Republican precinct chair [so and so] is supporting Jeb Hensarling.’ And we did that for every precinct. …We sent out a letter from Phil Gramm to every [voter]. We did a [County Commissioner] Mike Cantrell

17 C. P. Henry, former Hensarling campaign manager, personal interview, Dallas, TX, 6 Aug 2003.
18 Jim Jackson, Dallas County Commissioner, personal interview, Dallas, TX, 6 Aug 2003.
Observers of this race would notice a great deal of partisan elite unity around Hensarling’s candidacy. In this case, the candidate himself recognized the potential resources held by party elites and sought to build ties within the party in order to persuade primary voters to support him. Hensarling’s ties to party elites certainly helped him raise money, gain credibility with local Republican voters, and win a competitive and potentially difficult primary election. Why did Republican elites in the 5th district not behave more proactively, perhaps developing their own cohesiveness surrounding Hensarling’s candidacy? One potential explanation is that none of the candidates had close ties to local elected or party officials, and so there were no natural alliances to draw elites into the race. A second explanation is that local Republicans simply did not view this race as potentially competitive in the general election, even though the Democrats did. Local Republicans who might have led the effort to direct the primary remained confident about their party’s chances even when the national Republican party came to feel nervous enough about the district to pour resources into Hensarling’s campaign, including an appearance by the President, as the general election drew closer. In that sense, the state and local Republicans may not have behaved as if the general election were competitive because they did not perceive it to be so.

\(^{19}\) Clayton P. Henry, personal interview.
Texas 5th: Democratic Primary

The Democrats, on the other hand, did see the district as competitive, and so demonstrated partisan cohesiveness early on in the election cycle, as would be expected in a competitive race. Democrats saw this newly redistricted seat, open after Sessions’ move to the 32nd, as a potential pickup for the national party, and so focused immediately on the general election, recruiting a strong candidate early and making every effort to clear the field for him. Table 4.5 (below) shows the overt evidence of that party cohesion.

Table 4.5: Candidates for the Democratic nomination for the Texas 5th District, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapman</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$4,250</td>
<td>$250 from the DCCC; donations from 6 other loyal Democratic PACs</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernstein</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raasch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Democratic primary in the 5th, both the national and local Democratic networks rallied very early behind a recruited candidate. As soon as Sessions announced his intention to run in the 32nd, one state Democrat says, “we did a recruiting trip and found a candidate from that area, who had lived in Dallas all his life and who actually lived in the part of the district that was rural. So we thought he might be a good candidate. He’d been elected judge for about 25 years.”\textsuperscript{20} He also happened to share the

\textsuperscript{20} Personal interview, anonymous.
name of a popular radio DJ in the Dallas area, and Democrats hoped that name recognition would help him in the general election.\footnote{It turned out that the shared name might have backfired on the Democrat, when Hensarling’s campaign got the radio DJ Ron Chapman to publicly endorse the Republican for the general election.}

That retired judge, Ron Chapman, had been a fixture in the Dallas Democratic party for many years. He does not describe his entry into the race as recruitment, but rather as “more of an evolution of thought processes and being encouraged to run [by] former Congressman John Bryant, John Poland [who had run against Sessions], [Congressman] Martin Frost,” and others.\footnote{Former Judge and U.S. House candidate Ron Chapman, interview by author, telephone, 8 Aug 2003.} Despite the encouragement, he waited to announce his entry until State Senator David Cain had decided to seek reelection rather than run in the 5\textsuperscript{th} and he could be assured the primary would not be difficult.

Once he announced his candidacy, Chapman was aided in his primary election efforts by the DCCC and local Democrats, who helped him begin to raise funds, and actively discouraged challengers for the nomination.\footnote{Although I made several attempts to get endorsement lists from his campaign prior to the primary and during the general election, no list was ever provided. Even speaking to Chapman and his campaign manager did not yield lists of pre-primary endorsements, as they reported that although some endorsements were certainly received prior to the primary, they were not made public in any systematic way as there was no real primary contest.} His two primary opponents, social worker Bill Bernstein and teacher Wayne Raasch, both felt that the efforts they made to reach out to their contacts in the local party establishment were rebuffed. One opponent reported that a high-ranking state party official politely asked him not to run in this primary.\footnote{Personal interview, anonymous.} The other said that local unions would not permit him to compete for their endorsements.\footnote{Personal interview, anonymous.}

In the end, neither the money primary nor the final vote totals were close. In fact, Chapman did not run much of a primary campaign, or advertise endorsements, focusing
instead on raising money for the general election. This lack of a primary campaign makes it difficult to see overt evidence of the party’s pre-primary support for Chapman, but the story of the party’s support for him is not hard to uncover. In this case, what little cohesiveness is clearly evident reflects strong, real efforts by the national, state, and local parties to manipulate the outcome of this primary so that the party might make its strongest possible showing in the general election. The Democrats in the Texas 5th, then, behaved exactly as we would expect them to, given their view of the potential competitiveness of the general election.

Texas 25th: Democratic Primary

The top-down nature of the primary in the competitive 5th district contrasts sharply with that in the 25th, a district that was widely regarded to be safe for the Democrats. The 25th is an urban district on the southern and southeastern sides of the city of Houston. It has a large union base and a great deal of racial diversity, with a population that is 36% White, 23% African-American, and 34% Hispanic. The district leans strongly Democratic, although George Bush received 48% of the vote in 2000.26

The district came open when Congressman Bentsen decided to seek the nomination for the U.S. Senate seat, and not to run for reelection. In a safe seat like the 25th, we would expect to see an intra-party free-for-all in the party that had been guaranteed a victory during the redistricting process. Party leaders have little incentive to manipulate a primary race when the winner of the general election, whoever he or she is, is likely to be a Democrat. That hypothesis is borne out in the 25th district Democratic primary. The Democratic voter base in the district had been protected, even strengthened,

26 Politics in America, p. 1000.
in the 2001 redistricting, and so the race drew little national or statewide attention. At the local level, several prominent elected officials decided to seek the nomination. Table 4.6 shows that the three candidates who had held public office were able to raise enough money and marshal enough endorsements to divide the support of the party elites who became involved in the race.

Table 4.6: Candidates for the Democratic Nomination in the Texas 25th District, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Houston Mayor Lee Brown, former Houston mayor, state rep., Harris County AFL-CIO dual endorsement with Colbert</td>
<td>$16,700</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Former state party chair Clara Caldwell, several out-of-state DLC-affiliated members of Congress, several prominent community and religious leaders</td>
<td>$6,250</td>
<td>$250 from the DCCC plus 4 other Dem-loyal PAC contributions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colbert</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$11,400</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the four candidates possessed advantages. The candidates were Houston City Councilmembers Carroll Robinson and Chris Bell, Former state legislator and consultant Paul Colbert, and attorney Stephen King. Robinson had personal relationships with some national Democrats that garnered him some endorsements and helped him to raise money. He also had a significant base among African-Americans in the district. Bell had run in 2001 for mayor of Houston, and lost, but had ultimately endorsed the
Democrat who became mayor. Bell’s mayoral campaign had created significant levels of name recognition among voters, and his support for the eventual mayor had earned him good will and a reciprocal endorsement in the 2002 primary. Bell also had a good relationship with the Harris County AFL-CIO and earned a dual endorsement in the primary, along with Paul Colbert. Colbert had been a state legislator several years prior, a position that also earned him good standing with organized labor, but he had been out of elective office for several years and did not have the same name recognition that Bell did. King, an attorney, had no political experience, but had a full enough bank account to pour several hundred thousand dollars into his campaign. Although Bell, Colbert, and Robinson drew on their own political and party ties for support in the primary, many elite partisans remained neutral in the primary in the face of several qualified candidates.

Bell and Robinson made it into the runoff, where Bell won 54% to 46%. Bell’s victory in the runoff was largely attributed to the name recognition he had built up during the prior Fall’s mayoral campaign, and the support he received from organized labor. Robinson did well in both the primary and the runoff among African-American voters, but was unable to overcome Bell’s other advantages.

In the Democratic primary in the 25th district, there is no overt evidence of party elite cohesion around one candidate, and no evidence upon further study that any concerted effort was made to develop it. Rather, several qualified candidates emerged and ran from their own bases of support. This is exactly the primary dynamic we expect to see in a party nominating a candidate to run in a safe, uncompetitive general election.
Texas 25th: Republican Primary

Since the 25th district was seen by most observers to be one that Republicans would be unlikely to win, we would not expect strong candidates to seek their party’s nomination, and we would not expect party elites to become heavily involved in the primary race. As expected, in the Republican primary in the 25th district only one sacrificial lamb decided to run, and party elites generally ignored the race. Tom Reiser, a wealthy owner of an insurance company who had spent considerable personal resources seeking the nomination in the 25th in 2000, ran unopposed in the primary. As expected, he lost the general election. He received very little support from party sources when he was seeking the nomination, although since he was unopposed, what little partisan support there was in the race went to him.

Table 4.7: Candidates for the Republican Nomination in the Texas 25th District, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reiser</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maryland 8th: Republican Primary

The Republican primary in Maryland’s 8th district was uninteresting for different reasons. Maryland is a strongly Democratic state, having voted 56% to 40% for Gore in 2000, although it did elect a Republican governor in 2002.

The eighth district encompasses part of Montgomery county, including the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and part of Prince George’s county, both located in southern Maryland. Its major industry

27 Politics in America, p. 454.
is government employment, and is heavily Democratic, having voted 66% to 31% for Gore in 2000. Its Democratic voter base was strengthened even more during the 2000 redistricting, a deliberate move by Democratic officials in Annapolis to oust the district’s Republican incumbent.

Congresswoman Constance Morella, a liberal Republican, was targeted early by Maryland Democrats. Given the balance between the Democratic voter base and her incumbency advantage, both parties considered her district to be a “tossup.” The general election was expected by all to be highly competitive. In a primary race such as hers, we would expect that party to support her wholeheartedly, protecting her from having to spend any resources on a primary election. As expected, her status as a popular incumbent in sync with her district meant that no credible Republicans emerged to challenge her, and the national Republican establishment rallied to her side long before the primary, helping her to raise money for the general election. Table 4.8 shows some of her primary support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morella</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>President Bush, US Chamber of Commerce, NARAL, Planned Parenthood, League of Conservation Voters</td>
<td>$10,850</td>
<td>$5000 from NRCC, 66 other GOP-loyal PAC contributions</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprague</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Candidates for the Republican Nomination, Maryland 8th District, 2002
*Maryland 8th: Democratic Primary*

Given the anticipated competitiveness of the general election in this district, we might expect the Democratic party to settle early on one strong nominee, and conserve resources for the general election. This would seem to be especially important since in Maryland the general election follows just a few weeks after the September 10 primary. But despite national attention to this district, and a strong impulse within the party to make sure that Morella was defeated in the general election, there was no real party elite effort to control the primary ballot and conserve party resources for the general election. The dynamics of this race seem to have been governed entirely by the entry decisions of ambitious candidates. The partisan support each received depended on their personal relationships within the party, and not on any broader attempt within the party to form a consensus on one candidate. Table 4.9 shows that there was no obvious elite cohesion around one particular primary candidate.
Three high-quality candidates announced they would seek the nomination more than 16 months before the primary election date, each with a different set of advantages.

The first to announce was Ira Shapiro, a former Clinton administration trade official who had worked for the Mondale and Clinton campaigns and had longstanding ties to prominent national Democrats. His greatest advantages were his policy expertise and his relationships with prominent national policy experts, many of whom endorsed him publicly. The second candidate was Mark Shriver, a nephew of Senator Edward Kennedy with deep family roots in Maryland, who had been a state Delegate since 1994. His

Table 4.9: Candidates for the Democratic Nomination in the Maryland 8th District, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from exclusively party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Van Hollen</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>President of Maryland State Senate, 20 local elected officials, 7 state reps, 3 local party officials, several local interest group leaders</td>
<td>$39,750</td>
<td>$650 from the DCCC plus 18 other Dem-loyal PAC contributions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shriver</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Speaker of Maryland General Assembly, 9 state reps, 2 local elected officials, Maryland AFL-CIO, Maryland Federation of Teachers, 24 other groups</td>
<td>$139,913</td>
<td>$250 from the DCCC plus 21 other Dem-loyal PAC contributions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shapiro</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Former Vice President Mondale, 18 former administration officials, 4 local group heads, 2 national group officials, 7 Members of Congress from other states, assorted economic policy experts</td>
<td>$57,750</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vollmer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaworski</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kennedy family background helped him secure labor support and a great deal of money from national groups and individuals outside the district (Becker and Balz 2002; Becker 2001; Hulse 2002). The third (and eventual winner) was Christopher Van Hollen, a 12-year veteran of the Maryland legislature from Montgomery County (4 years as Delegate, 8 years as state Senator) who had also been a former staff member to the governor of Maryland and a staff member to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His advantage was that his record in Annapolis had produced a loyal cadre of local environmental, education, and gun control activists, who despite wariness from national organizations were willing to support him at the grassroots level (Becker 2002a). Local Sierra Club activists, for example, were unable to convince the national organization to become involved in the contested primary, but members of its local executive board did individually endorse Van Hollen and advertise those endorsements to their members.28

All three candidates were able to raise competitive amounts of money and to solicit endorsements from prominent individuals who might be persuasive to District 8’s active, informed Democratic voter base. As Steve Jost, Van Hollen’s campaign manager put it, the three candidates “split the money primary and split the endorsement primary.”29

In the end, the primary battle was so tightly fought that six weeks before the primary date House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, DCCC Chair Nita Lowey and Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer wrote letters to each campaign telling them not to go too negative during the primary campaign and to maintain some Democratic unity for unseating Morella in the general election (Becker 2002c). Despite the warning, some

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28 Personal interview, anonymous.
barbs were exchanged between the candidates during the primary contest, although that negativity did not prevent the Democratic nominee (Van Hollen) from being able to unseat Morella in the general election. The primary race was essentially a tossup, whose outcome may have been significantly affected by the *Washington Post’s* endorsement of Van Hollen right before the primary date.\(^{30}\)

Despite the high stakes in the general election, there was no elite consensus on a primary candidate, and no obvious effort to achieve it. There was some delayed recognition by national party elites that a highly divisive primary could hurt the party’s fortunes in the general election, but no concerted effort to shape the primary. Perhaps this is because there was no consensus on who would be the strongest general election candidate. In some sense this lack of consensus on a candidate must be driven by the fact that at least three of the candidates probably would have been strong challengers to Morella, especially given the registration in the district. In addition, all three had declared their intentions to seek the nomination in the very early months of 2001, when the district looked fairly safe. They declared their candidacies long before state or national Democrats knew how popular the President would be in the fall of 2002, or how competitive the general election might become.

*Maryland 2\(^{nd}\): Democratic Primary*

Before we begin to think that the Maryland Democratic establishment cannot unify when it should, it is important to note that in a primary race just two hours to the north of the 8\(^{th}\) district, the entire state establishment rallied around one strong candidate who was running against a party outsider.

Maryland’s 2nd congressional district is located around and to the north of the city of Baltimore, and stretches both north and south along Chesapeake Bay. It is a largely urban and suburban district, and the Democrats in Annapolis redistricted it in 2000 to become significantly more Democratic. Bush received 55% of the district’s vote as the district was drawn in 2000, but would have received only 41% of the vote as it was redrawn in 2001. With that new registration balance, the district was considered to be a potential pickup for Democrats, even though Republicans had held the seat for more than 15 years.

The second district came open when Congressman Bob Ehrlich looked at his new district lines and registration figures and announced that he was running for governor of Maryland. The state Democrats who weakened his party’s registration in the district had in the process drawn his home, and the house of another potential candidate, Ellen Sauerbrey, into a neighboring district. It was widely believed that the district lines were drawn explicitly for Democratic Baltimore County Executive C.A. “Dutch” Ruppersberger, the eventual Democratic nominee. The conventional wisdom about the race was that it was a winnable Republican seat, but that the Democrats would have a registration advantage. In such a race, considered by both parties to be competitive in November, we would expect both parties to become involved in the primary in order to ensure that the general election candidate would be a strong one, and in order to not

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31 Politics in America. P. 751.
waste party resources on a divisive primary. Table 4.10 shows that there was, in fact, considerable partisan unity around one candidate prior to the primary.

Table 4.10: Candidates for the Democratic Nomination in Maryland’s 2nd District, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengur</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosley</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeLoach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one elected official, Ruppersberger, was ever mentioned as a Democratic candidate. Prominent members of the Democratic establishment, including Baltimore Mayor Martin O’Malley and U.S. Senators Barbara Mikulski and Paul Sarbanes, endorsed him and were on hand at his announcement speech. Party leaders like Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi held fundraisers for him prior to the primary. And the DCCC publicly backed him as early as July, more than two months before the primary (Davenport 2002e; 2002d; Green 2002b).

He was not the only potentially strong candidate, however. Oz Bengur, a wealthy investment banker who had formerly been an aide to the Democratic governor of Maine and a representative to the Democratic National Committee from Maine, also decided to
run for the nomination. He says that he “was originally told that the Democratic party wasn’t going to support [Ruppersberger] and was going to stay pretty neutral. But my coming in from the outside, sort of galvanized support for him. I don’t think that made a big difference in terms of the vote, but it helped make the perception that he was the anointed guy.” Bengur had considerable support from the Turkish-American community and from his own business and political contacts, but he had no real ties to the local party establishment.

There were active efforts made to encourage Bengur to get out of the race. Bengur recalls,

> At the time they said they had a good chance of taking Congress and they knew that Dutch had some weaknesses and they didn’t want them exposed. I said I wasn’t trying to hurt the party. He never made me any specific offers or anything….there really wasn’t anything [they could have offered me]. Maybe if Clinton still had been president an appointment to something. Politics is what can you do for me. If there’s nothing you can do for me, then forget it.

In the end the primary was not close. Ruppersberger won 50% of the vote while Bengur captured 36% and the few other lesser candidates who sought the nomination split the rest of the vote. The party’s choice, who also happened to be the candidate with the best name recognition, most experience, and closest ties to local and state Democrats, won.

We expected in this type of primary to see overt signs of party elite cohesion, and as seen on Table 4.10, we do. We also expected that such cohesion would reflect real communication between partisan elites, which appears to be the case. Partisan elites may

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33 Three other lesser known candidates also sought the nomination. They were Kenneth Bosley, a farmer and the Democratic nominee in 1998 and 2000, James DeLoach, a *Baltimore Sun* distributor who ran three times in the 1990s, and Brian Davis, a computer technician (Hsu and Davenport 2002).

34 Oz Bengur, former House candidate, interview by author, Baltimore, MD, tape recording 11 Aug 2003.

35 Oz Bengur, interview.
have had Ruppersberger in mind for the district before the lines were even finalized, and they rallied to make sure he won the primary against a wealthy opponent. In the process they helped him raise and conserve resources for the general election, which was expected to be competitive.

*Maryland 2nd: Republican Primary*

In that same district, we would expect Republicans to face similar incentives to avoid a costly primary and conserve resources for the general election. In accord with those expectations, we do, in fact, observe elite cohesion that is very explicitly motivated by such general election concerns. Table 4.11 shows that the most obvious indicators of elite cohesion indicate unified support for the eventual primary winner. Such indicators only hint at the whole story, however, because the eventual winner was essentially guaranteed a primary victory, and so did not run a significant primary campaign.

**Table 4.11: Candidates for the Republican Nomination in Maryland’s 2nd District, 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>% Primary vote</th>
<th>Key endorsements</th>
<th>$ from party loyal individual donors</th>
<th>Number of contributions from party loyal PACs</th>
<th>Party Favorite rating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bentley</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Rep. Ehrlich, US Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>$1,750</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Maryland and national Republicans took the race in the 2nd district seriously, at least early in the year (Green 2002b). The seat had been held by Republicans since the early 1980s and despite the Democratic redistricting, they felt that it could still be a Republican seat. In response, the Republican party engaged in a highly cohesive and even
public effort to select one nominee prior to the primary filing deadline. The NRCC took the lead, along with some prominent Maryland Republicans, including then-incumbent Ehrlich. One insider describes the early view this way:

The Washington Republican party, NRCC types, and Bob Ehrlich and folks like that were saying ‘we’re all speaking with one voice, we need to hold this seat and we are not going to do it if we spend the first six months of the campaign beating up on each other as Republicans. We need to be behind one person from the beginning all the way through.’

To achieve that goal, Ehrlich asked the three leading potential contenders, Helen Delich Bentley, who had represented the 2nd district in Congress from 1985 until 1994, Ellen R. Sauerbrey, former gubernatorial candidate and former minority leader in the House of Delegates, and Delegate James F. Ports, Jr., not to announce their candidacies until the NRCC had conducted polling to decide who the best general election candidate would be (Davenport 2002a). That polling indicated that Bentley, although 78 years old, had positive name identification with the greatest number of district voters. As she put it,

The party…wanted a good candidate who they thought could win. I told them I was not going to go through one of the hard right attacks from the party. I was the only Republican who still lived in the district. I would not have gotten in the race if there had been a primary. Period. And they knew all that and it was up to them.

The other candidates who were interested “received some pressure from the NRCC and the state party not to run.” Sauerbrey publicly announced that she would not run for the nomination on April 17 (Davenport 2002b). Bentley went on to win the nomination with 80% of the primary vote, the other 20%

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36 Michael Kosmas, interview.
37 Former Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley, interview by author, tape recording, Towson, MD, 11 Aug 2003.
38 Personal interview, Maryland Republican party official.
having gone to a little-known candidate. She then lost the general election to Ruppersberger, 54% to 46%.\footnote{She attributes this loss to the Republican Party’s neglect of her general election campaign. She argues that once it became clear that the party would maintain control of the House, the NRCC failed to come through with the resources she had been promised. Personal interview.}

The maneuvering prior to the filing deadline for the Republican primary in this district is perhaps the most overt example of exactly the type of competitive, election-oriented partisan communication that undoubtedly goes on in other races, though rarely so publicly. Republican leaders explicitly chose a nominee, cleared the field for her, and then backed her strongly prior to the primary and helped her prepare for the general election.

**Do partisan elites influence primaries?**

Previous chapters have developed a theory that argues that the anticipated competitiveness of a general election should affect party elite behavior prior to a primary. Based on those arguments, we would expect that in races that both parties perceive to be potentially competitive in the general election, there should be more party unity prior to the primary, and in the races that both parties to perceive to be a guaranteed win for one party, there should be less observed party unity prior to the primary. Moreover, if we are to make any claims that party elites attempt to influence primary outcomes, that observed unity should be explicitly partisan in nature—in that it is formed in order to deliberately promote one particular candidate for the general election. And if we are to make claims that such explicitly partisan unity shows that party networks approximate the behavior of strong traditional party organizations, that unity should indicate the presence of real relationships and communication among a network of partisan elites. The data presented
in Chapter 3, and summarized in the tables throughout this chapter, indicate that in most
cases, we do observe partisan elite unity when we expect to do so. Table 4.12 below
shows that all of the primaries featured the expected amount of observed party unity,
given their electoral environments, except for the Texas Senate Democratic primary, and
the Maryland 8th Democratic Primary.

**Table 4.12: Expected Outcome and Party Favorite Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Race</th>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>Party Unity expected</th>
<th>Expected level of Party Unity observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas Senate (R)</td>
<td>Open Competitive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Senate (D)</td>
<td>Open Competitive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas 5th (R)</td>
<td>Open Competitive/Lean Republican</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas 5th (D)</td>
<td>Open Competitive/Lean Republican</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas 25th (R)</td>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas 25th (D)</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 2nd (R)</td>
<td>Open Competitive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 2nd (D)</td>
<td>Open Competitive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 8th (R)</td>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent in the primary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland 8th (D)</td>
<td>Vulnerable Incumbent in the other primary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See Chapter 3 for definition of party favorite coding.

The more detailed stories told above also indicate that in seven of the eight cases
where the data indicates partisan elite unity, that unity demonstrates the partisan
motivations that we would expect to find there. In four, the party perceived the general
election outcome to be in doubt, and it responded by unifying around (and in at least two
cases—the Texas 5th Democratic primary and the Maryland 2nd Republican primary—

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40 The Texas Republican Senate primary, the Texas 5th Democratic primary, the Maryland 2nd Republican primary, and the Maryland 2nd Democratic primary
explicitly recruiting) the candidate that they felt would be most competitive in the general
election. In another, (the Maryland 8th Republican primary), partisan elites rallied early in
the election cycle around a vulnerable incumbent, just as would be expected. In the Texas
25th Republican race, they ignored the candidacy of a person who had virtually no chance
of winning, as would be expected. In the Texas 25th Democratic race, they let ambitious
candidates fight for the nomination among themselves, as they had every incentive to do.
Moreover, in each of these cases, there is at least circumstantial evidence that elites
communicated with each other, as well as with potential candidates.

In one race, we expected to and did observe elite unity, but it is of a slightly
different type than we expected to see. In the Republican primary for Texas’ 5th district,
Republican leaders did not perceive the same level of general election competitiveness as
the Democrats did, and so did not become proactively involved in the primary. However,
many of them were recruited into supporting one strong candidate, and so we observe
elite cohesion for that candidate. Here, though, the cohesion we observe as a result does
not reflect party-based, inter-elite communication as much as it reflects communication
between the candidate himself and each individual elite.

There are two races, though, where the expected degree of elite unity is not
observed: the Texas Democratic Senate primary, and the Maryland 8th Democratic
primary. There are several similarities between these races, the most obvious of which is
that in both cases it is the Democratic party that fails to unify when a rational party might
be expected to do so. This may reflect the sentiment, widely held within the party, that
primary voters alone should determine who wins the party’s nominations. It may also
reflect the old saw that the Democratic party is just less well-organized than the
Republican party. Or it may be a coincidence that the two such exceptions detailed here happen to take place in Democratic primaries, especially since the analysis that follows in Chapter 5 does not uncover any broad tendency for Democrats to be less sensitive to competitive electoral environments than Republicans.

Another major similarity between these two exceptional races is that in both cases, the party establishment became divided because more than one previously elected, ambitious candidate, with an extensive, independent base within the party, decided to seek the nomination. These two examples, exceptions from the whole population of the races I studied, support the candidate-centered theory of primary elections. It is worth noting that even given the presence of two such candidates, a large faction of Texas and national Democrats did appear to attempt to manipulate the course of the primary race by heaping endorsements and campaign funds on Ron Kirk. In both the Texas and Maryland cases, the candidates’ ties to other party elites proved to be useful campaign resources for them. But ultimately, it seems that once such highly connected, qualified candidates decide to run for the nomination, the party network may have missed its best chance to create unity within its ranks and thereby attempt to influence the outcome of the primary in an explicitly partisan way.

So in at least seven of ten of these case studies, expectations about partisan elite behavior are borne out. In none of these cases does it seem like the majority of the elites who supported the candidates were simply hedging their bets and supporting the candidate they knew would win the primary anyway. Although the pre-primary polling by Republicans in the Maryland 2nd district indicates that elites are sensitive to voters’ predilections, and that information guides them even when they are trying to manipulate a
primary outcome. In general, though, the hypothesis that observed elite unity actually masks a causal arrow pointing from voters to elites does not appear to be supported.

What can be concluded about whether partisan elites actually influence primary outcomes? Without data on how endorsements are interpreted by voters, of course, it is impossible to show that party elite participation actually does influence voters. But the evidence presented here strongly suggests that partisan elites do behave in ways consistent with an attempt to influence primary outcomes when it would be rational for a party to do so. Organizationally, that attempt appears to originate in different nodes of the party network at different times, although the strongest and clearest efforts to manipulate primary outcomes seem to be generated at the national level. Based on these case studies, it seems that national party organizational efforts and candidate-party relationships play a major role in affecting the dynamics and outcomes of primaries, while state party culture does not appear to explain when or whether elite partisans are able to unify, or unify in the manner we would expect them to.

Avoiding a costly primary begins with the recruitment process and with the willingness of party leaders actively to dissuade potential challengers to the recruit. One set of actors that seem to be increasingly prominent in that early pre-filing deadline candidate selection process is the set of traditional hierarchical organizations at the national party committees: the NRSC, NRCC, DSCC and DCCC. An official at the National Republican Senatorial Committee confessed that that national arm of the Republican party routinely engages in recruitment and deterrence efforts. He says:

    Recruiting and de-recruiting is a tandem thing. You do some research, who the right candidates are, their past voting performance, where they’re from, then test polls, and test pushes. Part of the research is to identify the candidates and their influence groups, then you can get them to go
convince them not to run. The [chosen] candidate [then] gets research, fundraising help.\textsuperscript{41}

In the races examined here, the national party organizations seemed to take the recruitment lead in the Maryland 2\textsuperscript{nd} Republican race, where the NRCC recruited Bentley and cleared the field for her, and in the Texas 5\textsuperscript{th} Democratic race, where the DCCC along with local and state Democrats recruited Chapman and then helped him win the primary against weak opponents. In Morella’s effort to be renominated, the NRCC also helped her out early, although since one function of the NRCC is to protect vulnerable incumbents, the national party’s involvement in her primary was not unexpected.

State parties do not seem to have been engaged in recruitment to the same degree as the national parties, although surely that may differ in different states. In one race examined here, the Maryland 2\textsuperscript{nd} Democratic primary, Dutch Ruppersberger’s ambitions were supported by Maryland governor Glendenning, who helped make sure the new district lines were favorable to him and helped quietly clear the field of other ambitious politicians. Maryland Democrats at various levels then unified behind Ruppersberger publicly when the party outsider Bengur decided to contest the nomination.

It does not seem that state parties played primary-dominating roles in these few congressional races, or that differences between the state parties account for the patterns of elite unity we observe here. The Texas Republican party responded quickly and cohesively to a strong candidate’s emergence in the Senate race and the Texas 5\textsuperscript{th}, although it did not direct the course of the race in the 5\textsuperscript{th}. The Texas Democratic party was involved in recruiting a candidate in the 5\textsuperscript{th} district, although not in the Senate race.

\textsuperscript{41} Anonymous, interview by author, Washington, DC, 13 Aug 2003.
The Maryland Democratic party dominated the pre-primary process in one competitive election (the 2nd) but not the other (the 8th).

The state parties do seem to have played two key roles: manipulating the redistricting processes that gave rise to the new district lines surrounding the districts studied here, and serving as support structures that can be called into action by outside forces. As networks of elites, they are available to be mobilized, but they do not unify consistently in response to electoral circumstances. Rather, they appear to unify in response to leadership from prominent individual elites, national parties, or through an interactive process involving candidates and elites.

Texas and Maryland lack laws or party rules that might prohibit the entry of any ambitious candidate into a contest for the party’s nomination. Therefore the private ambitions of candidates can be a major factor in how nomination contests play out. The degree of party elite cohesion observed in each of these races seems to depend on the degree to which elites allow the private ambitions of candidates to dominate the primary process, which in turn depends largely on the perceived competitiveness of the general election. In the two most prominent races where the parties had an incentive to unify around one candidate early, but failed to do so (the Democratic primaries for the Maryland 8th and Texas Senate seat) it was the private ambitions of highly qualified candidates that drove the patterns of candidate entry, which in turn divided the party establishment. In each of these races, two highly qualified elected officials expressed an interest in running (Shriver and Van Hollen in the Maryland 8th and Kirk and Bentsen in the Texas Senate race) and probably would not have been dissuaded from running given the rare opportunity to run for a winnable seat in Congress. In addition to the temptations
of higher office, these individuals were prominent enough and had strong enough ties within their parties that their initial efforts to seek private support from their colleagues effectively divided the party establishment. In similar races where one elected, insider candidate vied for the nomination against a party outsider (the Maryland 2nd Democratic primary, or the Texas 5th Democratic primary), the party was able to rally cohesively around the insider candidate. These examples may indicate that once more than one high-quality candidate with significant party ties declares an intention to run for a particular party nomination, the party may have missed its best opportunity to avoid a divisive, expensive primary. In the rest of the races examined here, elites seem to respond to the electoral environment, rather than merely to candidate interest in the nomination, as they unify in expected ways and even actively discourage some potential candidates from seeking the nomination.

This dissertation attempts to measure the degree of party elite unity in primary elections using a variety of observable indicators. The few cases described here support the notion that those measures of elite unity are actually tapping into real phenomena. In most of these ten primaries, when objective measures indicated that there seemed to be cohesion among party elites around one candidate, the detailed facts of the case bore that supposition out. A qualification derived from the Republican primary in the Texas 5th is that just because we observe elite cohesion does not mean that consensus on the candidate was driven by the elites, although in most cases observed unity reflects the processes we expect it to. Objective measures of elite cohesion must be seen to be indicators of support for the candidate among members of the party network, whether sought by the candidate or bestowed by elites. In both cases, however, it continues to
make sense to say that party elites display more unity around a primary candidate under some electoral conditions than others. This chapter has also shown that when partisan elite unity is observed, it most often reflects a strong, partisan response to those conditions.
Chapter 5
How Party Elites and Ambitious Candidates Respond to Anticipated General Election Competitiveness

The nomination of a particular candidate is an important determinant of the party’s fortunes in a given electoral unit. It is curious, then, that most work on congressional primary elections focuses on the candidate, rather than the party. Political scientists have found that candidates with more political experience are more likely to win their party’s nomination, and so when they have studied congressional nomination contests, they have focused on the circumstances that cause such high quality candidates to run at all (Banks and Kieweit 1989; Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Canon 1990; Herrmson and Gimpel 1995; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Because of this focus on the entry decisions of high quality candidates, the party’s role in nomination contests themselves is rarely treated as the principle subject of analysis.¹

To the degree that partisan elites uniformly support a particular primary candidate, the congressional elections literature would explain that support as an elite response to “candidate quality.” Most political scientists would argue that partisan elites do not influence either candidates or voters, but rather respond, just as voters do, to the personal characteristics of the candidates that choose to seek the nomination. Therefore, the reasoning goes, if we observe that most elites are supporting one candidate, it must be because that candidate is the “best” candidate and most likely to win the primary anyway. According to this view, the party network cannot be said to influence primary elections. Although these are perfectly reasonable hypotheses, they assume that partisan

¹ Exceptions include the limited number of studies that focus on party recruitment of candidates (Herrmson, 1990; Kazee and Thornberry 1990; Maisel, Fowler, Jones and Stone 1990; Keyes and Tobin 1979.)
considerations are irrelevant to the candidate emergence process, and that partisan actors do not uniformly contribute significant resources to one primary candidate.

Although certainly each candidate’s private decision to enter a congressional primary is a critical factor in determining the outcome of a congressional nomination contest, the analysis presented in this chapter suggests that primary election dynamics are determined by a more complicated set forces than just the private calculations of differentially qualified candidates. Under some electoral circumstances, regular investors in each party share a perception that their collective partisan goals may be at stake in the November election, and such perceptions shape their participation in primaries. These elite participants then choose to become involved in pre-primary candidate emergence and resource allocation processes, thereby affecting candidates’ decisions and resources and limiting the menu of options from which primary voters have to choose. Both the status of the incumbent in the state or district and the collective wisdom about the potential competitiveness of the general election affect the potential for these types of elite pre-primary activities.²

This chapter provides evidence that although the party network does, naturally, support higher rather than lower quality candidates, it is more likely to do so in unified ways in races that are important to the party. Moreover, when motivated by competitive partisan concerns, partisan elites are capable of making distinctions among candidates with similar backgrounds in order to cohesively support a candidate whom they believe will make the best showing in the general election. Specifically, this chapter shows that

² Recall that the anticipated partisan importance of an election tracks closely with the amount of partisan unity observed. For example, only one-third of the contested primaries in safe seats were characterized by significant, unified party support behind one candidate, whereas two thirds of contested primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents featured significant party support for one candidate.
elites unify in partisan ways above and beyond what might be expected simply due to
the qualities and decisions of the candidates themselves.

In the first section below I describe the predictions that the candidate-centered
theory and my party-involvement theory make about the patterns of candidate
emergence and party support we should observe in primary elections. The following
sections proceed to test these hypotheses about 1) candidate emergence, 2) elite unity,
and 3) the dynamic interactions between the two.

Hypotheses: The effects of primary election environments on ambitious candidates
and partisan elites

Theories of candidate emergence that focus on the private decisions of
ambitious candidates predict that 1) candidates should respond only to their chances of
winning a seat in Congress, and not to notions of what might be good for the party, and
2) elites should support the highest quality candidate when one is present in the race. In
contrast, I argue that 1) candidates’ entry decisions should be based on both private and
partisan incentives and that 2) elites should cohesively support a primary candidate in
response to competitive partisan electoral conditions in addition to candidate quality.
Table 5.1 reiterates the predictions developed in Chapter 2. It lists the key distinctions
between the candidate-centered and party-involvement theories and the differences in
candidate emergence and party support patterns they suggest.
Table 5.1: Expectations about primary election dynamics, given candidate-centered and party-centered approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate-centered theory</th>
<th>Partisan involvement theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate behavior</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partisan involvement theory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter primaries based on perceived ability to win election to</td>
<td>Enter primaries in response to both perceived likelihood of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>victory and strategic partisan environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elite behavior</strong></td>
<td>Should unify in response to strategic partisan environment in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should show unified support only in races where one candidate</td>
<td>addition to candidate quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of distinctly high quality is running</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the two theories make different predictions about the types of candidates who should run, and the level of elite support they should receive prior to a primary, they can be tested with the data collected for this project and described in Chapter 3. This analysis is most interested in primaries in which party elites may have an incentive to become involved in the nomination process and which interest ambitious candidates. Since the key dependent variable in this study is the degree of elite unity observed in primary races, the discussion below will focus on the three types of primaries where elite behavior is most interesting. I set aside primaries in which incumbents (vulnerable or not) are seeking re-nomination, since partisan elites only rarely fail to unify around incumbents. I also ignore primaries in open districts when redistricting has made it extremely unlikely that the primary winner will go on to win the general election (open, “impossible-to-win” seats). I focus, therefore, on:

- primaries in incumbent-held districts where the out-party is nominating a candidate to run against that vulnerable incumbent,

- primaries in safe, open districts,
primaries in open districts that are perceived to be competitive for both parties in the general election.

The first type of race that meets those criteria is a primary race in which a party is nominating a candidate to challenge a vulnerable incumbent. In these races, ambitious candidates may be put off by the challenge of unseating an incumbent, but they may also make these calculations in consultation with party elites, who may attempt to direct the candidate’s focus away from the risk of running a difficult race. Elites in this party, facing a general election against an incumbent who probably has a sizeable war chest and strong party support, face strong incentives to clear the field for one candidate and to help that candidate form a strong campaign early in order to conserve resources for the general election battle to come. Elites may therefore communicate with potential candidates and discourage challengers to the chosen frontrunner. It may be difficult in such cases, without additional research, to tell whether candidates stay out of the race in response to the perceived risk to their careers, or whether an absence of primary competitors is due to elites’ efforts to rally around one candidate and dissuade others from seeking the nomination. At least, we expect to see elites unifying around one strong candidate early, and few other candidates emerging to contest the nomination.

There are several additional types of primary environments in which no incumbent is running in either party in the general election. These open seats fall into two categories: those that are not anticipated to be competitive in the general election (and therefore not important to the party as a seat-maximizing entity) and those for
which the general election outcome is perceived to be in doubt (and therefore are important to the party as a seat maximizing entity).

In the first category, an open seat in which the general election is not anticipated to be competitive between the two parties, I focus here on primaries in the party that are favored by the partisan bias of the district, rather than primaries in the party that has only a minimal chance of winning the seat. Safe, open primaries take place in districts that are either newly apportioned or redistricted, or in which the incumbent has retired or moved on to higher office, but the population characteristics and district lines heavily favor one party over the other. For the favored party, these primaries in “safe,” open seats are unimportant to the party as a seat-maximizing entity because the seat is already safely in its grasp. There is no need for elites to be concerned that a divisive or costly primary battle would hurt the party’s chances in the general election, because winning the primary is tantamount to winning the general election. These primaries should attract many strong candidates, because there is no incumbent advantage to overcome, and because there is in fact no real inter-party competition at all (Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Stone and Maisel 1999).

Elites will only become involved in the primary to the degree they are motivated by personal connections with the candidates or other private factors. Since the general election was won for one party during the redistricting process, there is no need to unify around one primary candidate in response to explicitly competitive, partisan motivations. We would expect, then, to see elite support to be often divided among several candidates, and when we see party unity it should reflect a response to the “quality” of the candidate in question. So in primaries in safe, open seats we expect that
many strong candidates will emerge and party elites will not unify for partisan reasons. This may manifest itself as a greatly reduced tendency toward elite unity prior to a primary.

The final type of primary election examined here takes place in a district that is open, but is expected by both parties to be competitive in the general election. Primaries in such districts should draw more ambitious candidates because there is no incumbent, and therefore one major obstacle to winning the seat is absent. They should also, however, prompt elites to unify early around one candidate, in order to conserve resources and goodwill for the general election. It is in these races that we expect the greatest tensions between candidate ambitions and elites’ competitive, partisan concerns. Here, we expect to see several potentially strong candidates emerge, while elites choose one candidate around whom to unify prior to the primary.

These three primary types offer several opportunities for comparisons that shed light on whether only the risk perceptions of ambitious candidates drive the nomination process. If traditional views of candidate emergence and success are correct, we should see that candidates enter primaries solely based on their perceived prospects for winning the seat, and elites should only support one candidate in a unified way when there is a clear “best” candidate in the primary. If parties are more involved in the pre-primary process, however, we should see that ambitious candidates decide to run in primaries in patterns that show a response to both risk and to partisan motivations, whether in the candidate’s mind or in the candidate’s communications with partisan elites. We should also see that elites unify in support of primary candidates especially often in races that are important to the party, even when there is not an obvious frontrunner.
We can test these hypotheses by examining different patterns of candidate and elite behavior in the three primary types described above. Two of these types of primaries, those to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents and those in open-competitive seats, are important to partisan elites because they take place in districts that are anticipated to be competitive in the general election. Because challenging an incumbent, even a vulnerable one, is a risky career move, ambitious candidates may be less willing to run, while in open-competitive races they should be more willing to do so. This distinction gives us the opportunity to see the effects of candidate risk perception on their emergence patterns, holding elite partisan interest in the race somewhat constant. The candidate-centered theory argues that there should be a big difference between the number of candidates who run to challenge vulnerable incumbents and the number who run in open seats, and that elite support should divide among the number of high quality candidates running. The party-involvement theory argues that if ambitious candidates also respond to partisan considerations, they should not overpopulate primaries in open, competitive seats, so we should therefore see candidate emergence and party-support patterns in open-competitive seats that are very similar to those in primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents.

The other major contrast is between open-competitive races and open-safe races. Both types should be at least somewhat attractive to ambitious candidates, while only competitive races should be important to elite partisans. Here, the candidate-centered theory would predict that candidate-emergence and party-support patterns in all open seats should be the same, regardless of the strategic importance of the seat to the party. The party involvement theory argues that open-safe seats should feature primaries with
many highly qualified candidates and elite disunity, but that open-competitive seats should feature only one, party-supported, high-quality candidate. Table 5.2 below summarizes these hypotheses.

Table 5.2: Expected Primary Dynamics in three primary environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open-safe</th>
<th>Open-competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong candidates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate-centered theory</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan-involvement theory</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party elites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate-centered theory</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Unify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan-involvement theory</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Unify</td>
<td>Unify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ambitious candidates’ responses to primary election environments**

If candidates respond only to their chances of winning the election, and not to (their own or others’) partisan preferences that the primary race be settled early, we should see that the number of high quality candidates in a given primary race decreases as the expected difficulty of winning the general election increases, regardless of partisan considerations. This means that there should be more high quality candidates running in each safe seat primary than run in each open-competitive primary, and more high quality candidates running against each other in each open-competitive primary than in each vulnerable-incumbent primary. We should observe similarities in candidate emergence patterns in both types of open seats and a big difference between open seats and seats featuring incumbents, since taking on a sitting incumbent may be perceived as an extremely risky career move for an ambitious politician.
If, on the other hand, candidates respond to partisan incentives in addition to their perceived chances of winning election, we should observe big differences between types of races with similar value to ambitious candidates but different value to party elites. If we assume that the biggest deterrent to ambitious candidates is having to run against an incumbent, then open-safe seats and open-competitive seats should be somewhat equally attractive to ambitious candidates. We should therefore observe the biggest difference in candidate emergence patterns between open and incumbent-held seats. Open seats do not come along very often, and ambitious pols who want to move up to the House (or Senate) may find an open seat very attractive, even if the general election for a competitive seat may be expected to be more difficult to win than in a safe seat. The main difference between open-competitive seats and open-safe seats is that safe seats are relatively unimportant to competitive-minded elite partisans while competitive seats are important to partisan elites. So if fewer candidates, especially fewer ambitious candidates, emerge to run in any given competitive seat than do so in any given safe seat, some portion of that difference may be due to partisan considerations, rather than merely a response to the perceived risk seeking the office.

Table 5.3 reiterates these hypotheses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open-safe</th>
<th>Open-competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate-centered theory</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan-involvement theory</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from 2002 provide ample evidence that candidates respond rationally to their chances of winning the general election. First, fewer candidates, on average,
choose to seek their own party’s nomination as a general election victory becomes more unlikely. As outlined in Table 5.4 (below), one more candidate, on average, runs in safe, open races than runs in competitive, open races.\(^3\) Almost two more candidates run in open, competitive primaries than run in primaries to nominate an opponent to a vulnerable incumbent.\(^4\)

### Table 5.4: Number of candidates in House and Senate primary races, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open-Safe (S.D.)</th>
<th>Open-Competitive (S.D.)</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ave. number of candidates</td>
<td>4.89 (2.5)</td>
<td>3.77 (2.2)</td>
<td>2.03 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The raw number of candidates running in a primary, however, is only a crude indicator of the attractiveness of that primary to the ambitious, highly qualified candidates who really interest scholars of congressional elections. The real question is whether “high-quality” candidates respond to the primary environment the way we expect them to. Congressional elections scholars have often had to deal with the importance of “candidate quality” to election outcomes, and so several reputable measures of the election-worthy personal qualities of non-incumbent political challengers exist. Two of the most prominent among them are Jacobson and Kernell’s (1983) simple yet powerful dichotomous measure of whether a candidate has previously held political office, and Green and Krasno’s (1988) graduated measure of a

\(^3\) That difference is statistically significant at \(p<.05\) in a one-way ANOVA test.

\(^4\) This difference is highly statistically significant.
“candidate’s political quality” and other personal assets. Both measures have virtues. The simpler measure has not only proven to be robust in many studies (Lublin 1994; Herrnson 1998), it is also easy to use when testing simple hypotheses and showing general patterns across races. The Green and Krasno measure, on the other hand, preserves the most information about each candidate, and is therefore more useful for testing more complex hypotheses. Because each measure has advantages, I use one or both when appropriate.

These ambitious candidates also respond to the difficulty of winning the general election as expected. Table 5.5 shows the number of primary races in which zero, one, two, three, or four elected officials chose to seek the nomination. It shows that when there is an incumbent in the race, strong challengers are deterred, whereas when the race is open, more candidates emerge to seek the nomination. Note that in more than half of open-safe seat primaries, two or more high quality candidates contest the nomination.

---

5 Green and Krasno code challengers this way: If the challenger has held political office, he or she gets a base score of (+4). To that they add (+1) if the office is a high one (state senator or official of a large city), (+1) if the person is currently an officeholder, (+1) if the person has run for Congress before, and (+1) if the person is a celebrity through athletics, family connections, etc. A challenger who has held political office before can therefore have a score of 8 total points. If the challenger has NOT held office before, they start with a base score of 0. To that they get (+1) if the candidate has previously run for office, (+1) if the person has previously run for Congress, (+1) if the person has held public nonelective office like district attorney, (+1) if the nonelective office is judged by the coder to be high status, (+1) if the person has previous political party connections or has been a political staffer, (+1) if the person can be judged to have been employed in a professional position, and (+1) if the person is a celebrity. A non-elected challenger could therefore score up to 7 points. For more detail on their coding scheme, see Green and Krasno (1988) Appendix A.

6 Sufficient data to code “candidate political experience” or “candidate quality” was available on most of the candidates who ran in races selected for study in this project. For a small number of candidates, only vague or seemingly incomplete biographies were available. For these candidates, I coded “candidate political quality” with the information available, leaving 61 candidates with insufficient information for coding. There are twenty additional cases where it was simply unclear whether the candidate had held previous elected office, and so there are twenty additional “missing data” points on the “elected/not elected” measure. For all of these candidates on whom insufficient background information was available, the average primary vote share is 8% (S.D. = 8.7), and so mostly these are candidates who do not significantly affect primary outcomes, and their absence from the dataset should not pose significant analytical problems.
while in almost two-thirds of open-competitive primaries, only one high quality
candidate appears on the ballot.

Table 5.5: Number of primary races featuring a given number of previously elected candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of previously elected candidates in primary:</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three +</th>
<th>(Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Percent of all races of that type)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary races, by type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Safe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(11%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Competitive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5%)</td>
<td>(63%)</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
<td>(17%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-party in</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competitive incumbent seat</td>
<td>(32%)</td>
<td>(48%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6 shows the average number of high quality candidates who seek the
nomination, by primary type. Table 5.6 also shows the average difference between the
highest candidate quality score and the second highest candidate quality score of all
candidates in the race, and the number of races where two candidates are “tied” for
having the highest candidate political quality score in the race. The average difference
in candidate political quality scores is about half the size in safe races than it is in
competitive and vulnerable incumbent races. This means that on average, there are a
greater number of candidates of similar quality running against each other in safe races,
and that in competitive races there tends to be one candidate who is much stronger than
the rest of the field. The fact that safe seats feature hotly contested primaries between
highly qualified candidates, while competitive seats do not offers additional support to
the party-involvement theory’s predictions about candidate-emergence.
Table 5.6: Number of high-quality candidates in House and Senate primary races, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Safe</th>
<th>Competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ave. number of candidates with elected experience (S.D.)(^7)</td>
<td>2.04 (1.34)</td>
<td>1.53 (1.01)</td>
<td>.88 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. difference between “candidate political quality” score of highest quality and second highest quality candidate (S.D.)</td>
<td>1.52 (2.08)</td>
<td>2.97 (2.01)</td>
<td>2.83 (2.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races where two candidates tie for having the highest political quality score (percent of races of that type)</td>
<td>13 (48%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As predicted by both theories, of the three race types, safe seat primaries are the most attractive to higher quality candidates, and most frequently feature multiple high quality candidates running against each other. Safe primaries are most likely of the three types to draw large numbers of high quality candidates into a contested primary. The average safe primary features two candidates with previous elective experience.

Slightly more than half (14/27) of all safe primary races include two or more such high-quality candidates running against each other. Only about a third (11/27) feature a single strong, previously elected candidate running in the primary. An extreme example of this tendency toward heavily contested primaries took place in the Democratic

\(^7\) Term limits and runoff elections might be expected to encourage a larger number of currently elected officials or otherwise ambitious candidates to seek the nomination, since in the case of term limits they are forced out of their old job and have only limited opportunities to move “up” to the next level, and in the case of runoffs they face at least some incentive to come in second or third in the race (Berry and Canon 1993). Although term limits and runoff states do more generally produce a higher number of elected candidates in each race, this is on average uniform across race types and so does not seem to affect the dynamics studied here.
primary for Tennessee’s 5th district. In that district, a total of ten Democrats, including five elected officials, sought the nomination (including former Congressman Jim Cooper, two Nashville metro city council members, a state representative, a county sheriff, a social worker, a graduate student, a lobbyist, and two others). More typical of safe seat primaries was the 2002 Republican primary in Iowa’s 5th district, in which two state senators, the state house speaker, and a businessman sought the nomination.

In support of the party-involvement theory, fewer high quality candidates, on average, run against each other in any given competitive-open primary, and in fact a majority (25/40) of these primary races only feature one strong, previously elected candidate. Candidate emergence patterns in these races are not the same as in the open-safe races, and it may be plausibly argued that they are more similar to primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents than they are to safe seat primaries. In any particular instance in open-competitive races, there are some primaries with many high-quality candidates, like the Democratic primary for Maine’s 2nd district in 2002, where four state senators (including the president of the state senate), an aid worker, and a college professor competed for the nomination; but many more less competitive primaries like the Democratic primary for Nevada’s 3rd district, where only a single experienced candidate (a Clark (Las Vegas) County Commissioner) and a politically inexperienced candidate (a Merchant Marine sailor) sought the nomination.

In primaries to nominate a challenger to an incumbent, it is far more rare to see multiple high quality candidates competing against each other. Only 20% (8/40) feature several previously elected candidates vying for the nomination, while almost half (19/40) of these races feature only one previously elected candidate. A third (13/40) do
not feature any of those strong candidates. Examples from 2002 include the Republican primary in the Nevada 1st, where a Las Vegas city councilwoman ran against a bus driver and the Democratic primary in the Iowa 2nd, where pediatrician Dr. Julie Thomas ran unopposed.

These patterns are consistent with the party-centered theory of candidate emergence in primaries. As predicted by theories of ambitious candidate behavior, it is clear that ambitious candidates respond to the deterrent effect of the presence of an incumbent in the race. For example, fewer previously elected candidates choose to run in primaries to nominate opponents to vulnerable incumbents than in open, competitive seats. In primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents, even average quality candidates are more likely to run unopposed than are candidates of high quality in safe seat primaries, which may indicate either candidates’ aversion to taking in incumbents, or partisan rallying around one potential candidate, or both. If we assume that in both open-competitive seats and primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents, party elites are at least somewhat equally interested in preserving resources for the general election, at least some of that difference in candidate emergence patterns between those two race types may be due to ambitious candidates’ differential perceptions of risk in those two races.

At the same time, there are significant differences between the patterns of candidate emergence in open-safe seats and open-competitive seats, where the presence of an incumbent is not a deterrent. A candidate in a safe district is far more likely than a candidate in a competitive district to face multiple high-quality opponents for the nomination. Primaries contested by two or more high quality (previously elected) candidates...

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8 All differences are statistically significant in a one-way ANOVA test, p<.05.
candidates are most common in safe seats (which are unimportant to the party) and less common in competitive seats (which are important to the party). High quality candidates in competitive seats are also more likely than high quality candidates in safe seats to run unopposed. This may indicate that in competitive seats, candidates are responding to implicit or explicit partisan demands that the primary race remain uncompetitive in order to preserve the party’s resources for the general election.

**Patterns of partisan elite unity in primaries**

A second test of the party-involvement theory is to ask whether partisan elites uniformly support one primary candidate when it might be important for the party to avoid a contested or divisive primary. To test that hypothesis, I use the summary measure of elite cohesion developed in Chapter 3. Table 5.7 reiterates the hypotheses that the competing theories offer about the behavior of party elites in different types of primaries. Recall that the candidate-centered theory argues that elites should only respond to candidate quality, and so in seats likely to feature multiple, high-quality candidates, we should most often see elites divide their support. So we should see the greatest similarities between open seats, and differences between open and incumbent-held seats. The partisan involvement theory argues that elites should respond to the strategic environment in addition to candidate quality, so in competitive seats that are important to the party we should see a similar pattern of elite unity, while that pattern should differ from a pattern of elite disunity observed in safe seats.
Table 5.7: Expected Primary Dynamics in three primary environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party elites</th>
<th>Open-safe</th>
<th>Open-competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate-centered theory</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Unify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan-involvement theory</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Unify</td>
<td>Unify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In support of the party involvement theory, party elites do, in fact, unify around one primary candidate in races where the general election is competitive between the parties. Table 5.8 shows the proportion of each race type in which elites show unified support for one primary candidate. Using the summary “party favorite” measure, Table 5.8 shows that elites tend to unify least often in safe seat primaries, statistically significantly more often in competitive, open primaries, and most often of all when nominating a challenger to a vulnerable incumbent.

Table 5.8: Number of races where the party has a favorite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Safe</th>
<th>Competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of races in which party elites unify</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.49)</td>
<td>(.48)</td>
<td>(.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Standard deviations in parenthesis).

In open-safe primaries, which should be relatively unimportant to partisan elites, party elites generally do not unify around one primary candidate. Elites unified around one candidate in only about a third of the 2002 races (10 out of 27). An example of a typical safe seat primary was the 2002 Democratic primary in Illinois’ 5\text{th} district, in which eight candidates sought the nomination, and two of them, former White House
aide Rahm Emanuel and lawyer Nancy Kaszak, effectively split party support. Emanuel
drew endorsements from Mayor Daley of Chicago, former Senator Paul Simon, and a
variety of state and local politicians. Kaszak drew predominantly local Chicago-area
support, but also received a great deal of campaign help from such loyal Democratic
organizations as Emily’s List. Labor’s involvement in the primary was effectively split
between the two candidates, with the UAW and several locals supporting Kaszak and
the AFL-CIO supporting Emanuel. The primary was close and divided loyal
Democratic partisans at all levels, but this was to be expected, given that the district was
perceived by all to be a safe Democratic district.

It is worth noting that of the ten safe seat primaries where party elites did unify,
eight of these took place in safe Republican seats, while only two took place in
Democratic seats. This means that in half (8 of 16) of all safe Republican primaries,
party elites unified around one candidate, while they did so in less than 20% (2 of 11) of
similarly safe Democratic primaries. Such partisan differences are not visible in any
other type of primary race, which may indicate an important difference in the two
parties’ approach to primary elections. Both parties may respond to the strategic
incentives of a competitive race. In the absence of those incentives, Democrats may see
the primary election process as an opportunity for a free-for-all debate over the
direction of the party, Republicans may generally prefer a more orderly, behind-the-
scenes process.9

Competitive seats, on the other hand, were extremely likely to feature strong
party unity around one high-quality candidate. This tendency was equally present in

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9 This has also been shown to be a pattern among Republican and Democratic elites during the
presidential nomination campaigns. See Bimes and Dominguez 2004.
both parties. In contrast to safe seats, where elites unified in only a third of races, in open-competitive primaries, elites expressed unified support for one candidate in almost two-thirds (26/40) of the races. Two examples of typical competitive district primaries were the Republican primaries in the Alabama 3rd and the Michigan 10th. In the Alabama 3rd, State House Minority leader Mike Rogers was endorsed by retiring incumbent congressman Bob Riley, U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, and Majority Leader Tom DeLay. Rogers also raised the vast majority of money contributed in the race by party-loyal individual donors and Political Action Committees. The other candidates, Jason Dial, son of a former state politician and director of a non-profit organization, and Jeff Fink (biography unknown) attracted no endorsements and far less party-loyal money. Seven other competitive seat primaries (5 House, 2 Senate), including the Republican primary for the Michigan 10th district, featured strong party support for a single unopposed primary candidate. In the Michigan race, Secretary of State Candice Miller ran unopposed and received money from the NRCC and literally pages upon pages of endorsements from local and state officials.

Even in these competitive districts, there were still twelve House and two Senate primaries in which the elites did not unify as expected. Two such primaries were the Democratic and Republican primaries in South Dakota’s at-large congressional district. On the Democratic side, Stephanie Herseth, a lawyer from a distinguished South Dakota political family, Rick Weiland, a former regional FEMA Director and aide to Senator Daschle, former State’s Attorney Dick Casey, former State Senator Denny Pierson, and former State Treasurer Richard Butler all competed for the nomination, and split the party money that was donated in the race. Herseth received several endorsements from
state legislators, but partisan elites largely refrained from taking sides in the primary. On the Republican side, former Governor Bill Janklow squared off against former U.S. Senator Larry Pressler, former State House Speaker Roger Hunt, former Ambassador Burt Tollefson, and former Commissioner of Schools and Public Lands Tim Amdahl. Janklow raised the most money from party-loyal individual donors and Political Action Committees, but there was no clear favorite in the race. In both of these examples, several potentially high-quality candidates sought their party’s nomination, and party elites did not publicly take sides as prominently as in some other competitive races. It may be worth noting that South Dakota is a state with both runoffs and term limits, both of which may encourage elected officials to more willingly declare their candidacy for an open seat.

In primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents, many (eleven House and four Senate) primary winners were heavily supported by their parties during the pre-primary period because they ran unopposed. But even when multiple candidates sought the nomination, there were clear party favorites in 18 out of 25 of the remaining races. Some of these, like the Republican primary in the Nevada 1st, featured only one high-quality candidate. In that district, Councilwoman Lynnette Boggs-McDonald won considerable pre-primary support from the party establishment, including endorsements from Nevada’s sitting Governor and Republican U.S. Senator, in her race against bus driver Alfred Ordunez. In others, though, the party establishment supported one high-

10 These campaigns were unwilling to share their lists of endorsements with me.
11 Term limits and runoffs affect 8 of the 13 competitive races where more than one elected candidate seeks the nomination, but they also affect similar proportions of races in the other categories, so do not produce systematic differences in the primary dynamics among race types in the 2002 sample. A larger sample over multiple years might show a stronger effect on the number of quality candidates who enter primaries.
quality candidate even in the presence of another. In Iowa’s 1st District Democratic primary, for example, the party recruited a wealthy former mayor (and former Republican), Ann Hutchinson, and supported her with DCCC contributions and partisan elite endorsements over former Democratic Congressman Dave Nagle and another candidate.

Partisan elites tend to unify when it would be most favorable to their party to do so. But to what degree are these patterns of elite unity driven by the number of high-quality candidates who choose to run in the primary? Although these data show that elites unify cohesively around one candidate prior to the primary, and that they do so more often when the race is important to the party, they may still be responding to the quality of the candidates who choose to run.

**Elite unity and candidate quality**

Certainly it is the case that regardless of how one measures candidate quality, most of the candidates around whom elites rally are of measurably higher quality than their competitors. Table 5.9 (below) shows that the vast majority of candidates (55 of 69, or 80%) who receive party support have political assets that cause them to have candidate political quality (CPQ) scores of four or higher. These favored candidates also tend to be the most obvious candidates to receive elite support. Over 85% of the 55 “party favorite” candidates who held CPQ scores of four or higher had held higher ranking political offices than their primary opponents. Over 90% of all party favorite candidates (62/68) have the highest candidate political quality score, or are tied for the

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12 Recall that a CPQ score of 4 indicates previous elective experience, or four characteristics that are political assets.
highest candidate political quality score, of any candidate in their race. But we would not expect partisan elites to deliberately support candidates who are untested and inexperienced in politics, or less experienced than their competitors, especially in races that are important to the party.

Table 5.9: Elites rally around high quality candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Candidate has Political Quality Score of Less than 4</th>
<th>Candidate has Political Quality Score of 4 or greater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate is party favorite</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate is not party favorite</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=323 candidates in non-incumbent races that are potentially winnable for the party, excluding 40 candidates for which candidate political quality coding was impossible.

When they rally around one primary candidate, partisan elites support “high” quality candidates the vast majority of the time. Table 5.10 (below) indicates that in most cases in every race type, the party favorite is a high quality candidate of some kind. The subtle trend toward partisan support of lesser quality candidates in races that are more important to the party may be at least partially due to the decreased presence of risk averse, high quality candidates in those races.
Table 5.10: Elites rally around high quality candidates in all race types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number (percent) of races with party elite unity around one candidate</th>
<th>Safe (37%)</th>
<th>Competitive, Open (65%)</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat (83%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of races</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of Races with a Party Favorite</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorite has elective experience</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(90%)</td>
<td>(73%)</td>
<td>(66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite has political quality score of 4 or higher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(60%)</td>
<td>(85%)</td>
<td>(70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite is highest or tied for highest quality candidate in race (using Green and Krasno measure)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(85%)</td>
<td>(94%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So certainly there is support here for the candidate-centered theory’s argument that elites support high quality candidates. But the candidate-centered and partisan-involvement theories both acknowledge that elite partisans should support high quality candidates, while still making different predictions about exactly who should be supported and under what circumstances. The candidate-centered theory argues that elites of all types should only risk their own reputations and resources to support a candidate who is an obvious frontrunner and high quality candidate. Therefore, according to that theory, when there is no single candidate who dominates the rest, we should not observe elite unity. The partisan involvement theory, on the other hand, argues that while elites should unify around strong candidates, and do so most often in partisan environments, we should see significant violations of the “single strong candidate” rule.
Therefore, if elites unify around primary candidates for partisan reasons, in races that are important to the party we should see 1) more unity around one strong candidate, 2) unity around one strong candidate in races with multiple strong candidates, 3) unity around low candidates, and 4) unity around low quality candidates when a high quality candidate also seeks the nomination.

A first test of these two competing hypotheses is to ask whether, when only one strong candidate emerges to seek the nomination, elites visibly unify around that candidate. In 19 vulnerable-incumbent-challenger primaries, 25 open-competitive primaries, and 11 open-safe primaries, only one previously elected candidate seeks the nomination. Table 5.11 (below) shows the fraction of these primaries in which the party elites demonstrated unified support for that strong candidate prior to the primary. Although the differences between the groups fall just below the conventional levels for tests of statistical significance, there are nonetheless large differences between race types.

Table 5.11: Pre-primary party unity in races where only one previously elected candidate seeks the nomination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race type</th>
<th>Open-safe</th>
<th>Open-competitive</th>
<th>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of races where only one elected candidate runs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of races with observed party unity</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of races of that type</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all of these races were in Republican districts.
Table 5.11 shows that elites unify in only half of the safe primaries in which only one strong candidate runs, but they unify in almost two-thirds of open-competitive seats and more than four-fifths of vulnerable incumbent seats. The differences are even larger when you look only at Democratic party primaries—in these, none of the single elected candidates running in safe seats draw unified party support, while more than half of such candidates do in both open-competitive and vulnerable incumbent seats. The candidate-centered theory of elite support offers no explanation for these patterns, while the partisan-involvement theory attributes such differences to partisan elites’ differential perceptions of the importance of the general election in each race type.

A second test of the two sets of hypotheses generated by these theories is whether party elites take sides and unify around one candidate when multiple candidates with strong backgrounds seek the nomination. The candidate-centered theory would predict that this would not occur, while the partisan-involvement theory predicts that such unity should be observed in races that are important to the party. Unfortunately, there are only a small number of races in each category (35 total) in which several highly qualified candidates seek the nomination. Again, however, the pattern supports the partisan-involvement theory in that a greater proportion of races that are important to the party feature party unity, even when more than one strong candidate seeks the nomination.13

13 Similarly, there are 24 races in which two candidates tie for having the highest candidate political quality score. These races are most common in open-safe races (13 races), and less common in competitive-open (6) or vulnerable incumbent (5) races. There are party favorites in similar numbers of the three race types, but in a smaller proportion of the competitive races. Party elites unify in 3/13 (23%) of safe races, 2/6 (33%) of competitive races and 3/5 (60%) of vulnerable incumbent races.
Table 5.12: Pre-primary party unity in races where several elected candidates seek the nomination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race type</th>
<th>Number of races with multiple elected candidates</th>
<th>Number of races with observed party unity</th>
<th>Percent of races of that type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-safe</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-competitive</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next test of these two hypotheses asks whether party elites ever unify around weak candidates. If elites are solely motivated by candidate quality, they should not pool their resources behind a weaker-than-average candidate, while if they are also motivated by partisanship, they should seek out and support one candidate, strong or not, when it is important to the party to avoid a contested primary.

Although elite support does tend to flow to the highest quality candidate in a race, the exceptions are telling. There are fourteen cases where the party favorite has a low political quality score (less than four). Six of these, all in primaries to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents, won their party’s nomination without any opposition. In these six cases, the party establishment rallied early and completely around one candidate who was perceived to be able to have the potential to unseat the incumbent, even though that candidate had not been previously elected to office. Of the remaining eight weak candidates who faced at least some opposition, two ran in vulnerable incumbent primaries, three took place in competitive primaries, and two were in safe (Republican) primaries. Here, the fact that party unity around lower quality candidates is so rare makes it difficult to distinguish between open-safe and open-
competitive seats. It is worth noting that of the fourteen cases where the party favorite is of lower than average “quality,” a majority of those cases took place in races in which the party faces its strongest incentive to support one candidate early on in the pre-primary process.

A final test is to ask whether party elites ever unify around a lower quality candidate than is available to them in the primary field. Again, elite cohesion around a lower level elected candidate is rare, but occurs only in races that are important to the party, in this case in five open-competitive races. When there is at least one elected candidate running, the party rallies around a candidate who is not the highest elected official in the race in zero open-safe races, one vulnerable incumbent race, and five open-competitive races.

Party elites would not have to rally around lower quality candidates. The fact that they do so even in the absence of a traditionally strong candidate, and that they do so most frequently in races that are important to the party, suggests that their support is not merely an automatic response to the quality of the candidates running. The patterns in which candidates emerge, and in which elites unify, indicate that explicitly partisan considerations drive at least some proportion of unified elite participation in primaries.

There’s more to pre-primary partisan support than candidate quality

In this final section, I develop a model to predict which races will feature partisan support, and demonstrate that the partisan environment is a more powerful predictor of elite unity than is candidate quality alone.
Does candidate quality account for unified partisan support in a primary?

A candidate’s political quality is, by itself, a good predictor of whether a given candidate will receive unified partisan support prior to a contested primary. This is not surprising, given that elites should be predisposed to support stronger candidates rather than weaker ones. A bivariate logit model (not shown) indicates that a candidate with a political quality score of 0 should have a 0% chance of being a party favorite, a candidate with an average political quality score should have a 12% chance of being a party favorite, and a candidate with a high political quality score, a six, should have a 62% chance of being a party favorite.

If the hypotheses laid out in this project are correct, though, candidate quality alone does not determine pre-primary partisan support. In fact, we expect that high quality candidates should, all else being equal, be more likely to receive party support, but high quality candidates should also be increasingly likely to receive party support in races that are important to the party (i.e., when the party is nominating a challenger to a vulnerable incumbent or a candidate to contest a competitive, open seat).

We might also expect that a state party’s general level of organization (measured as David Mayhew’s Traditional Party Organization score)\(^\text{14}\) should, all else being equal, make party elites more likely to unify around a particular candidate.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Mayhew attempted to rate the strength of each state party’s organization based on its historical patterns of behavior. Unfortunately the measure itself, although based on all available evidence, tends to focus heavily on urban machines in some states, perhaps overestimating the strength of the state party organization as a whole. That said, measuring state party strength is an extremely difficult endeavor, and there are no flawless measures of the concept.

\(^{15}\) Buchler and LaRaja (2002) find that the degree to which a state party is well-financed and organized affects the likelihood a party will contest an election, the quality of its candidates, and the party vote share in the general election for house districts.
Finally, it may be possible that some Republican candidates, all else being equal, receive unified partisan support, perhaps due to that party’s more cohesive tendencies. This may be especially true for Republican races in safe seat primaries. Recall that about half of the Republican primaries in safe seats feature unified party support for one candidate, while fewer than 20% of Democratic races feature unified party support. This pattern is only apparent in safe seat primaries, not in primaries that are competitive between the two parties.

The logit model presented in Table 5.13 was run on the 107 races that have been discussed in this chapter. The dependent variable is whether the race features a party favorite (coded 1) or not (coded 0). The independent variables are:

1) the candidate political quality score of the highest qualified candidate in the race, which will test whether the level of political quality of the field, by itself, contributes to whether there is a party favorite.

2) a dummy variable for the type of race (primary to nominate a vulnerable incumbent, competitive-open race, safe-open race). The safe-open race is the excluded category.

3) The Traditional Party Organization score for the state in which the race takes place.

4) whether the primary race takes place in the Republican party.

All of the variables in this model have signs that go in the expected direction, although perhaps because of the limited sample size, only races to nominate challengers to vulnerable incumbents meet the conventional test for statistical significance. The model correctly classifies 64% of the races, including 78% of races that feature unified
party support in the primary. This is a large improvement over the model that only included candidate quality as a predictor of party unity around a candidate.

Table 5.13: Logit coefficients predicting whether a candidate will receive unified party support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient (S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Political Quality (CPQ)</td>
<td>.242 (.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPQ * primary to nominate challenger to vulnerable incumbent</td>
<td>1.40* (.651)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPQ * competitive open primary</td>
<td>.748# (.560)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate is Republican running in a safe seat</td>
<td>.391 (.486)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Party Organization score (1-5)</td>
<td>.176 (.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.28 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-103.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The model predicts 64.2% of the cases correctly. * indicates p<.05, # indicates p<.2.

Table 5.14 shows the likelihood that a candidate with a given CPQ score will be a party favorite, in a state with an average party organization (TPO) score. The absolute level of candidate quality of the highest quality candidate does change the odds that a given race will feature party unity. But race type is also still a significant factor in predicting party unity.
Table 5.14: Likelihood of a primary race having a party favorite, given the candidate quality score of the highest qualified candidate in the race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Quality Candidate (CPQ=0)</th>
<th>Average Quality Candidate (CPQ=3.57)</th>
<th>High Quality Candidate (CPQ=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-safe district</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-competitive district</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-party in competitive incumbent seat</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

This chapter has provided evidence that primary elections are not all created equal. Although it may be the case that partisan elites do not play a unified role in most primary elections in every congressional election cycle, that fact may be due less to the “decline” of the parties than to the ability of incumbents to manipulate the incentives of potential challengers, and to partisan redistricting that creates safe seats that are uninteresting to elite partisans (or at least to Democratic elite partisans). In those subset of congressional districts and senate races that are competitive, however, there is some evidence here that both candidates and elite partisans behave quite differently than they do in other primary race types.

Certainly partisan elites are more likely to support candidates who have more political assets. But contrary to the dominant hypothesis in the discipline, they seem increasingly likely to do so when the outcome of the primary may affect the party’s general election fortunes. Candidate quality alone does not appear to account for the elite unity noted in this chapter. Rather, the partisan importance of the general election, in combination with the qualities of available candidates, seems to increase the likelihood that partisan elites will cohesively support a candidate in a primary. The data
gathered on the 2002 primary elections has helped show that partisan elites do unify in primaries, and do so around logically qualified candidates and under circumstances important to the party.
Chapter 6
The Importance of Considering the Role of Elites in the Primary Process

The previous chapters have demonstrated that partisan elites do behave in ways that stack primary voters’ decks in favor of a particular candidate, and that they do so most often when the election is most important to the party. This chapter will ask whether such interventions actually help the party in the general election (they don’t seem to) and will explore why elites behave this way when the evidence does not show that it helps their cause to do so. I conclude by discussing why we should take seriously the roles that elites may potentially play in the primary election process and what we gain by considering the behavior of elites who are not formally part of the party organization.

Does Elite Intervention in the Primary Help the Party in the General Election?

Clearly, at least some party officials do believe that the nomination should be in the hands of the party elite rather than those of primary voters, and do try to limit primary competition accordingly. Research shows that that parties recruit candidates (Kazee and Thornberry 1990, Herrnson 1990) and I have shown in previous chapters that coalitions of elites often heavily favor one candidate, even in contested primaries. Anecdotal evidence also shows that party leaders attempt to minimize the uncertainty associated with contested primaries. The former Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Terry McAuliffe, strongly opposed a drawn-out presidential primary election process (Stone 2004). He actively encouraged states to “frontload,” or to move their Democratic primaries earlier in the presidential election year, in order to create a process that favored the candidate who had the most establishment support during the year prior to the New
Hampshire primary. Most of all he favored frontloading because a frontloaded system minimized the opportunities for Democrats to fight with each other rather than against President George W. Bush. Of course, that idea doesn’t just hold sway with Democrats. An informant at the National Republican Senatorial Committee said that the committee was actively involved in selecting primary candidates and “clearing the field” for them. He told me, “You gotta look at the [incumbents or recruited senate candidates] that have potential primaries and see that they don’t…[by doing research] to identify the [potential] candidates and their influence groups, then you can get them to go convince them not to run.”1 In addition to limiting primary competition, party leaders also attempt to limit the negativity of some primaries. In the Maryland 2nd district’s Democratic primary in 2002, six weeks before the primary date House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, DCCC Chair Nita Lowey and Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer wrote letters to each campaign telling them not to go too negative during the primary campaign and to maintain some Democratic unity for unseating the incumbent in the general election (Becker 2002).

Although some elite actors try to limit the competitiveness of primary elections in order to reduce any risks they may pose to the party’s general election fortunes, political scientists have not been uniformly able to substantiate the claim that divisive primaries are actually a threat to the party’s general election chances. So political scientists have not been able to show that the elite strategy of intervening to prevent a “damaging” primary election is an effective one. This inconclusiveness stems from two faults with the current research. First, previous work has inadequately conceptualized and measured “divisiveness.” Second, previous work has ignored the strategic decisions made by

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1 Personal Interview, name withheld.
parties that make it less likely that divisive primaries can, in the aggregate, affect general election outcomes.

*Previous Work*

Researchers have examined, separately, the effects of divisive primaries on both congressional and presidential elections. Even though the presidential primary system poses different challenges than primary elections at other levels, scholars have used the same pair of strategies to reach conclusions about both systems. The first design involves surveying party activists, usually in order to determine whether their behavior changes as the result of participating in a primary on the losing side. The second type of study uses statistical analysis of election data to ask whether primary candidates who faced more competitive primaries are more likely to lose the general election. In both types of analysis, and in both types of primary systems, scholars have reached somewhat mixed conclusions.

Proponents of both approaches argue that the question they are trying to answer is whether participating in a multi-candidate, “divisive” primary makes the partisans who support losing candidates so biased against the winner that they abstain or defect when it comes time to support their party’s nominee in the general election. It is difficult, though, to read both elite and voter focused studies as addressing the same issue, since they focus on fundamentally different populations within the party, whose “dividedness” would affect the outcome of the general election through different mechanisms. They both argue that because some partisans don’t support the eventual nominee in the primary, that those partisans might not support him or her in the general election—but
they base that argument on two entirely different groups of participants, who have made different commitments to the party, and whose support for the nominee would have different consequences and different potential affects on the outcome of the race.

The elite surveys argue that activists who could otherwise supply their labor to the winning candidate may choose not to do so, and that because elite labor and support is finite, abstention by some might hurt the party’s chances of mobilizing as many voters as it otherwise could in the general election. Although the lack of participation by some activists during the general election seems unlikely to affect general election outcomes, if it were generally found to be the case that highly competitive primaries caused elite allies of the losing primary candidates to sit out the general election, that could have a big enough effect that both academic researchers and party leaders might worry about it. This effect might be magnified if the elites who participate are habitual or at least repeated participants in electoral politics, since they build skills over time that may be a source of capital the party will want to tap into during the general election.

At the congressional level, one early elite behavior study (Johnson and Gibson 1974) showed that three-quarters of the activists who worked for a losing primary candidate in a congressional race were less active in the fall campaign. More recent work by Miller, Jewell and Sigelman (1988) showed a somewhat smaller effect. At the presidential level, the elite behavior studies have generally shown that activists who participate in divisive primaries, and work for a losing candidate, are not turned off from party activity in the future. Recent studies by Stone, Atkeson and Rapoport (1992) and McCann, Partin, Rapoport and Stone (1996) find that working for any presidential
primary candidate makes an activist more likely to work for the party in the fall campaign.

The statistical analyses, on the other hand, argue that because a candidate has won the nomination with a relatively small percentage of the primary vote, that the candidate has therefore not won over a sufficient number of the party’s most loyal voters during the first phase of the election cycle, and that therefore partisan voters who did not support the candidate in the primary may not vote for him in the general election. This line of reasoning is based on a conception of primary voters as entirely candidate-oriented, rather than as both candidate supporters and party supporters. The proponents of these arguments claim that voters develop an in-group bias toward supporters of their primary candidate, and that such ties are strong enough to overcome the in-group ties to their political party in the general election. Given that few voters turn out to vote in primaries, and that these voters tend to be both loyal partisans and highly interested in politics, it seems implausible that they would be so affected by their candidate’s loss in the primary that they would abstain or defect in the general election, especially a competitive election.

These statistical analyses of congressional elections are now somewhat dated and have not reached a definitive conclusion about whether a divisive primary hurts the nominee in the general election, although there is some indication that House candidates are not affected while Senate candidates are. The earliest significant study (Born 1981) indicated that in congressional elections, primary divisiveness does not affect general election outcomes. Kenney and Rice (1984) then studied Senate and gubernatorial elections, and found that especially for Senate candidates and Democrats, a divisive
primary did hurt in the general election. Kenney again found in 1988 that Senate candidates, but not House candidates, were negatively affected by a divisive primary, especially when the opposing party did not face a divisive primary.

The statistical analyses of presidential election results have also been somewhat inconclusive, although the most recent work indicates that the primaries may not affect the general election. Kenney and Rice (1987) found that controlling for state party strength, incumbency, the presence of minor party candidates, and whether a state’s primary took place in the south, that presidential candidates who faced a more difficult primary season tended to lose the general election. Later work, though, by Lengle, Owen, and Sonner (1995) found that only Democrats were disadvantaged, and by Atkeson (1998) found that with added controls for the national nature of a presidential election, no candidates tended to be especially disadvantaged by a long primary season. The modern presidential nomination process poses, because of its sequential, national, high-profile nature, potentially different problems for candidates and party elites than congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial races do. It is the general election consequences of congressional primaries that are my focus here.

A major problem with this body of literature is that neither of the dominant research designs adequately measures the “divisiveness” of the primary or fully considers the consequences of their operationalization for congressional elections. The surveys of elite activists just assume that any primary election is “divisive” of the party, and they focus on whether those elites who work for a losing candidate are less likely to support the eventual nominee. Implicitly, here, all contested primaries are “divisive” of the party establishment. At the presidential level, that seems a reasonable assumption, since high-
profile candidates draw long-time activists and party insiders to work for them, and so the population of long-term participants in party politics is by definition “divided” by such campaigns. At the congressional level, though, that assumption may not hold, since even though many candidates may run, it may be the case that the party establishment disproportionately supports one candidate, while the others draw their support from friends, family, and other candidate-loyalists, who because they are not long-term participants in the party, may or may not continue to participate in party politics, with little effect on the party organization in the general election. So although activist behavior may be a reasonable measure of the degree to which a party is divided in the primary it may not be as good a measure at the congressional level as at the presidential level.

Statistical analyses of general election outcomes operationalize divisiveness as some version of the margin of victory of the nominee. Early studies (Bernstein 1977; Born 1981, Kenney and Rice 1984; Lengle, Owen and Sonner 1995) operationalized the divisiveness of a primary using the nominee’s margin of victory (or coded it for whether the nominee received a majority or supermajority of primary votes). Later studies, hypothesizing that a divisive primary will be more damaging if one party has a divisive primary while the other side does not, have used as their dependent variable the difference between one nominee’s primary vote percentage and the other nominee’s primary vote percentage. On this measure, differences closer to zero are hypothesized to have a smaller effect on the general election outcome.

Unfortunately, using the margin of victory in the primary, whether or not it is considered relative to the other nominee’s margin of victory, does not offer a good test of whether the party may be disadvantaged in the general election, for several reasons. First,
as noted earlier, the assumption underlying the use of this measure is that voters who care
enough about the party to vote in the primary, but not enough to participate in other ways,
will under normal circumstances be so turned off by the party’s primary that they will
refuse to support the nominee in the general election. Again, this assumption
underestimates the importance of party identification in voting for congressional races,
(particularly open races). It presumes that a primary where one candidate receives a
relatively small fraction of the total votes cast is not just a contested primary election, but
one that was so polarizing that voters developed closer attachments to their candidate
than to their party. More seriously, though, it is simply not a reliable measure of the
degree to which one candidate faces a unified or divided party or partisan electorate.

First of all, it is hard to believe that divisive primaries hurt a party because a large
number of the primary voters who support losing candidates abstain or defect in the
general election. In addition to research showing the influence of partisanship on voting
behavior (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996) one reason that contention is problematic is that
primary vote totals can be extraordinarily small in relation to the number of voters in a
state or district, or even to the number of people who vote in the general election. For
example, U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss won 61% of his Republican primary in 2002,
against two difficult competitors who attacked him from the right of his party. This
means that 39% of his partisans voted against him, and he only received 300,371 votes in
the primary. But in the general election, he received 1,017,352 votes. If large numbers
of primary voters abstained, there were clearly enough Republican voters in the general
election pool to provide Chambliss with a victory.
Second, the margin of victory itself can often be no more than an indicator of how many candidates ran in a primary race, regardless of how serious most of them were. In a bivariate regression, for every additional candidate who runs, each candidate’s primary vote total goes down by 9 percentage points, and the Adjusted R\textsuperscript{2} of the model is a healthy .48. The presence of both high and low quality candidates in a primary can reduce the eventual nominee’s primary vote share, even when he wins the primary by a sizeable margin. For example, in the Colorado 7\textsuperscript{th} in 2002, businessman Bob Beauprez was supported by many Republican elites, including current and former Republican US Senators, and went on to win the general election in a competitive district. Despite his considerable elite support, he only won 38% of the primary vote, because he had four primary opponents (the Colorado Lieutenant Governor, a staffer to the governor, and another candidate who had not previously held elective office). Figure 1 plots the number of candidates in a primary by the winner’s primary vote and shows the strong relationship between the two.

An additional problem with using the measure preferred in more recent work, the relative margins of victory of the Democratic and Republican nominees, is that the differences between the two nominees may be unrelated to the actual divisiveness of the primaries themselves. For example, if one candidate wins his primary with only token opposition (receives 99% of the primary vote) and the other wins his primary with only marginally less token opposition (receives 69% of the primary vote), the difference between them is a huge 30%, but neither really faced a primary where the bulk of primary voters were opposed to them. In another race, a difference of thirty percentage points between a hotly contested 40% winning percentage and an easy 70% winning
percentage could indicate a real difference in the dividedness of the two parties that might signal a disadvantage for one candidate in the general election. Similarly, with a difference in margins of zero, both candidates could receive 100% of the primary vote, in which case neither faced a divisive primary, or both candidates could receive 60%, but one faced several token opponents, while the other battled it out to victory over a well-financed opponent in a negative campaign. In sum, the current measures of the divisiveness of a primary do not adequately capture the factors relevant to a campaign that might lead a candidate to suffer during the general election because of what happens in the primary.

**Hypotheses**

I hypothesize that we should *not* observe an effect of divisiveness on general election outcomes, but for very different reasons that are usually offered in this literature. The question here is whether a candidate whose party was divided by the primary election fares worse in the general election than a similar candidate whose party was not divided in the primary. In general, previous research on this issue has argued that a very divisive primary can create an in-group bias among supporters of losing primary candidates that then prevent them from either working on behalf of, or voting for, the nominee. I argue here that for the vast majority of primary elections, that may be contentious but that do not result in unusually vociferous mudslinging, we should *not* expect to see the divisiveness of the primary affect the general election, for two reasons. First, given years of research showing the importance of party identification in determining voters’ decisions in all elections, including congressional elections (Miller
and Shanks 1996; Jacobson 2001), and given the importance of partisanship to most activists and even hired political professionals (Bernstein 2000), the partisan nature of the general election should trump candidate-loyalty that is developed during the course of a primary election. Second, and somewhat conversely, party elites may believe that any contested primary has the potential to become unusually divisive, and may at any rate expend resources that would be better used if saved for the general election. Elites may therefore strategically work to avoid divisive primaries precisely where they may affect the general election, reducing our potential to observe the divisiveness of a primary affecting the outcome of a general election.

In previous chapters, I have shown that in seats that elites anticipate to be competitive for both parties, party elites are likely to express unified support for one highly qualified primary candidate, even when several qualified candidates seek the nomination. They do so in these primaries because it is only in competitive seats where the party’s main goal, that of winning elections, is on the line. In districts that are safe for one party or the other, there is no need to minimize the risk of a divisive primary, because the outcome of the general election is assured, and so other party goals, such as ensuring a participatory nomination process involving all relevant interests and factions, may be pursued. I have also shown that in districts that elites perceive to be safe for one party, they are far more likely to have competitive, potentially divisive primaries between several high-quality candidates. Based on that research we can expect to only rarely see the party divide in competitive seats. If one party does divide in the primary in a competitive seat, and the other party does not, the one that is divided might be disadvantaged in the general election. But because in a competitive seat both parties have
an incentive to avoid a divisive primary, we should not generally observe that
circumstance. Both parties should unify around one primary candidate in a competitive
seat primary, and in fact as the race gets more important to both parties, and more
difficult for the challenger party to win (i.e. trying to seat a vulnerable incumbent) we
should not expect to see a divisive primary on either side. These hypotheses are
summarized below.

**Hypotheses**

*H1: We should observe divisive primaries most often in seats that are safe for one party.*

*H1a: Both parties should follow this logic, making it extremely rare to see a competitive
seat primary where one party might be disadvantaged by a divisive primary.*

*H2: If one party unifies and the other party divides, the divided party should do worse in
the general election than it might otherwise be expected to do.*

*H3: On average, divisiveness of the primary should not affect general election results.*

**Results**

Table 6.1 gives the distribution of races included in this analysis from the 2002
sample, excluding the four primaries where two incumbents sought their party’s
nomination. Recall that ratings of the race’s general election prospects are based on the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>Uncontested</th>
<th>Contested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House</td>
<td>Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is safe for the party</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is guaranteed loss for the party</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is competitive, no incumbent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race to nominate challenger to vulnerable incumbent</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is to re-nominate vulnerable incumbent</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the incidence of divided parties in primary elections.

These results support *H1* since in 60% of safe elections the party has a divisive primary, while the proportions are reversed in competitive elections, where only 40% of parties have divisive primaries. The difference would be even larger if we included primary elections where one candidate runs unopposed, since these disproportionately take place in competitive seats. It is also worth noting that elites divide in a primary far more often in House races than in Senate races.
Entries are 95 multi-candidate, non-incumbent primary elections in 2002. Competitiveness is measured as the *Cook Political Report* rating of the race 10 months prior to the general election, when many elites and candidates make entry and support decisions. Uncompetitive general elections are those rated by Cook as “safe” or “likely” for one party. Competitive general elections are those rated as “tossup” or “leaning” to one party.

*H1a* tells us that we should expect that both parties, facing the same incentives to minimize any potential divisive effects of a primary in competitive races, should try to minimize the divisiveness of primaries in those races. Therefore in most cases we should expect to see a party divided by a primary is when the seat is safe for one party—and even then it is only the party that is guaranteed to win the seat that will attract enough candidates to potentially divide the party. So we should only rarely expect to see both primaries in a race dividing their respective parties, and in the most competitive primaries we should often expect to see both parties unify around one primary candidate. That is the pattern that is evident in Table 6.2. In most districts, and especially in most competitive districts, both parties unified around one primary candidate. In only 35% of the districts studied in 2002 did only one of the two parties face a divisive primary.
Table 6.3. Relative number of cases where one party divides while the other unifies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both primaries divisive</th>
<th>Only one primary divisive</th>
<th>Neither primary divisive</th>
<th>Total races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Safe</td>
<td>8 (30%)</td>
<td>14 (52%)</td>
<td>5 (19%)</td>
<td>27 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, competitive</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td>8 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (38%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary to nominate opponent to vulnerable incumbent</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>5 (16%)</td>
<td>24 (78%)</td>
<td>31 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, competitive</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary to nominate opponent to vulnerable incumbent</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=82 races.

Previous work has not noted this strategic behavior, either in theory or with measures of divisiveness, and so has not correctly estimated the effects of divisive primaries on election outcomes. Whether or not primaries objectively affect the outcomes of elections, elite actors clearly behave as if they do, and that behavior affects the outcomes that we observe. Table 6.3 (below) shows, first of all, that the conditions of the primary are highly unlikely to affect the outcome of a race in a district that heavily favors one party or the other, but it may affect the outcome in races that are more difficult to win, such as those where a challenger party is taking on an incumbent. The incidence of truly divisive primaries in races where they could affect the outcome is so rare, though, that it is difficult to draw conclusions from them from so few cases.
Table 6.4: General election losses when only one party’s primary is divisive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of races where</td>
<td>Percent of all races of that type where the divided party loses the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only one party’s primary</td>
<td>general election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is divisive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, Safe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, competitive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary to nominate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opponent to vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incumbent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, competitive</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One way to test the hypothesis is to examine those races in competitive seats where only one party was divided, and see whether the divided party received a much smaller share of the two-party vote in the 2002 general election than it did during the 2000 presidential election.² The result of such an analysis is that having a divided primary does not appear to significantly affect general election results. If you limit your sample to the sixty primary winners who ran in a race where one party unified and the other party divided, the difference between the 2000 and 2002 performances of the unified and divided parties is essentially zero. For the divided party, the average difference between 2000 presidential result (est.) in district and 2002 primary result is −1%, and for the unified party, the average difference between the 2000 result and the 2002 result is about 0.³ The exception may be that when a party is trying to unseat a...

² Due to redistricting, there are no actual 2000 presidential election results for the House seats that were contested in the 2002 primary. But the online edition of the Almanac of American Politics includes estimates of the 2000 presidential vote for each district as “estimated by Polidata, from political databases used in the 2001-2002 redistricting cycle in a number of states.” [http://nationaljournal.com/pubs/almanac/2004/gtouse.htm#people](http://nationaljournal.com/pubs/almanac/2004/gtouse.htm#people), accessed 3/11/05.

³ Mean proportion of the vote for the party without a favorite is -.01 (st. dev. .067), mean for the party with a favorite is -.0013 (st. dev. 073).
vulnerable incumbent, having a divisive primary while the incumbent is re-nominated without a contest seems to hurt the challenger in the general election.

Table 6.4 presents a logit analysis of these data that similarly shows that there is no effect of divisiveness on the general election outcome, when the partisan bias of the district is taken into account.\(^4\) In this model, a Democratic nominee’s chances of winning the general election are heavily influenced by the partisan bias of the district and by the quality of the candidate, to a lesser (almost significant) degree by spending in the general election, and not at all by the relative divisiveness of the Democrats’ primary. The results are very similar for Republicans.

\(^4\) I analyzed the data using both OLS (dependent variable is percent of general election vote) and logit (dependent variable is a win/loss in the general election). Regression is a difficult tool to use here because there is clearly reciprocal causation (anticipated general election outcomes affect the events in the primary election, and the primary affects the general election). But I do not use two-stage least squares analysis because I cannot conceive of an exogenous variable that could affect the general election but not the primary as well.
Table 6.5: Logit analysis, Does the Democratic Nominee win the General Election?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient (S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats faced unified primary, Republicans divided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.773 (.885)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.656* (.179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem. percent of two-party general election spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.0 (5.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Political Quality Score&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1* (2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-13.3 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 Log Likelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=85 races. The model correctly predicts 86% of the cases. * signifies p<.05.

<sup>a</sup> Candidates were rated using the Green and Krasno (1988) measure of political quality, which ranges from 0 to 8.

If this finding is generally true, then if elites are unifying in primaries to avoid being directly hurt in the general election by the divisions within their party in the primary, it seems they are engaging in a sub-optimal strategy. On the other hand, they could still perceive it to be an optimal strategy if there are other benefits to unifying around one candidate in the primary, such as securing the nomination for a strong general election candidate who might not otherwise win the primary vote.

<sup>5</sup> Green and Krasno code challengers this way: If the challenger has held political office, he or she gets a base score of (+4). To that they add (+1) if the office is a high one (state senator or official of a large city), (+1) if the person is currently an officeholder, (+1) if the person has run for Congress before, and (+1) if the person is a celebrity through athletics, family connections, etc. A challenger who has held political office before can therefore have a score of 8 total points. If the challenger has NOT held office before, they start with a base score of 0. To that they get (+1) if the candidate has previously run for office, (+1) if the person has previously run for Congress, (+1) if the person has held public nonelective office like district attorney, (+1) if the nonelective office is judged by the coder to be high status, (+1) if the person has previous political party connections or has been a political staffer, (+1) if the person can be judged to have been employed in a professional position, and (+1) if the person is a celebrity. A non-elected challenger could therefore score up to 7 points. For more detail on their coding scheme, see Green and Krasno (1988) Appendix A.
Discussion

The results here cannot definitively answer the main question that motivates this line of research. There are simply too few cases in the current, one-cycle, sample to adequately test whether a divided party is doomed in the general election. But the current discussion improves on the existing literature in several ways. First, measures used in current statistical analyses of primary results across years should be recognized to be, at best, proxies for the real concept of interest, the degree to which the party divides in a primary. The margin of victory received by the nominee in the primary election is heavily influenced by the number of primary candidates who run, regardless of the viability of such candidates, or the true unity or disunity of party elites. Moreover, the difference between the primary margins of the two nominees who compete in the general election is unlikely to capture the real effect of a divisive primary, since it does not take into account the true ease with which either candidate wins their primary. This is really an exceptionally bad measure of whether one party is divided and the other party is not, and future researchers should take great caution in using it. Both measures are highly correlated with a more direct measure of primary divisiveness, but they do not capture the subtleties of party cohesion that a more detailed measure can. On the other hand, they do have the advantage of being easier to collect over several election cycles, and so may continue to be useful in testing hypotheses in future work, as proxies for the real concept of interest.

The existing literature has failed to acknowledge the degree to which the strategic behavior of party elites may affect the incidence of divisive primaries. In an era of mass campaigns, political elites hold many resources relevant to the conduct of primary
campaigns, and partisan elites can and do strategically use those resources to affect
voters’ decisions. Focusing attention on the voters themselves and election outcomes
misses this intervention. Whether or not divisive primaries do, in fact, affect election
outcomes, elites certainly behave as if they do, and that behavior causes them to work to
avoid divisive primaries precisely where they might affect the outcome of a race. Further
work that recognizes the strategic activities of the party organization is needed to
definitively answer this question. It may be the case, though, that the reason the divided
party is disadvantaged is not that the primary campaign itself is hurtful, but rather that the
district conditions that produced the rarity of a competitive congressional race, or the
party conditions that caused the elite to fail to prevent a competitive primary under such
uncertain conditions also caused the party to lose the general election. Future work on the
subject of primary divisiveness needs to take greater account of the strategic decisions by
candidates and party participants that produce divisive primaries in the first place.

If some scholars prefer to conceptualize primary divisiveness as a phenomenon
of the electorate and not the elite, they should consider abandoning election results as a
measure of divisiveness. A better avenue for research would be to investigate what about
some primary campaigns might so divide the primary electorate as to make a general
election harder to win. Proper measurement of the characteristics of a primary that would
cause such a reaction would entail a focus on the campaign itself, the negativity of
advertising, participation by outside groups, degree of ideological divide between
candidates, media focus on exceptional charges against one or more candidates, etc. If
voters are to be so separated from their partisan leanings by a primary election that it
affects their behavior in the general election, whatever about the primary causes that
reaction is unlikely to be captured by a simple vote margin, and the dynamics that produce that type of reaction deserve further exploration.

Conclusions

American mass parties are composed of identifiers in the electorate, partisan elected officials in government, and individuals and groups who invest in the maintenance of the party over time. Since Key first formulated these divisions, political scientists have divided their research accordingly. Voting behavior in the electorate and the behavior of elected officials in legislature and executives have been given ample attention in the political science discipline. Unfortunately, political party organizations, malnourished in society as a whole, are also painfully understudied by political scientists.

The best comprehensive treatment of political parties in the states is David Mayhew’s *Placing Parties in American Politics* (1986). In that book, he examines all of the previously published historical and political science treatments of local and state political parties, and tries to use those sources to categorize the historical strength of state parties. Although an important effort, Mayhew’s study also shows us that studies of urban political parties dominate the literature, and his conclusions about state parties, heavily based on those urban party studies, have led scholars to oversimplify the origins, nature, and changes in non-urban political parties over time. Just because urban machines may not be as prevalent as they once were does not mean that they have disappeared (Wolfinger 1972), or more importantly, that what happened in urban machines tells us much about how American political parties operate in the absence of a machine. If we did have a better historical record, we might not feel that the parties we currently observe,
which are characterized by factions, competition among potential leaders, and considerable regional and even local variation in structure, are inherently weaker than parties were during the mid-20^th^ or even 19^th^ centuries.

Surely, changes in the institutional structures surrounding parties (the availability of patronage jobs, the legal mechanisms for nominating candidates, the court’s current rulings on what types of gerrymanders are permissible) affect party organizational structure. Exactly how such changes affect party organization and behavior, and how those behaviors then affect officials, their coalitions, and the policies that they enact are the types of questions political scientists are uniquely qualified to ask and answer. Yet even good descriptive studies of national and state party organizations are rare, and of local parties even rarer.⁶ Beyond the national conventions and the behavior of the party’s congressional committees, we simply do not know what American political parties are up to, how they differ in form, how state and local conditions affect them, or how they affect local political conditions. We struggle with the relationship between ideology and party outside the Congressional context. We do not know how to conceptualize and identify factions, or how to look for their effects on party structure, strength, and behavior. We assume that local political history importantly impacts local and state party structure, but have not rigorously studied these relationships. We also lack systematic contemporary data on party organizational strength and behavior at the local, state, and national levels. This study finds that the electoral environment influences the behavior of elite partisans and candidates. But it also finds that there are some open, safe seat primaries where the Republican party rallies around one nominee before the primary, and several competitive seat primaries in both parties where elites fail to do so. Local or state partisan conditions

may explain that variation, but at the present time, there is neither an accepted measure of those conditions nor the data with which to develop it. It is for these reasons that it is important to expand scholarly inquiry into the nature and functions of the American political parties.

Political scientists’ study of American parties is greatly in need of empirical and theoretical research of all types. Certainly the literature could benefit from further detailed studies of formal party committees and organizations. But the decentralized nature of American political parties demands that such inquiries be only part of a broader consideration of the Democratic and Republican party coalitions. If political parties do serve to negotiate between interests and set policy and political priorities, a broad range of elite actors, not all of whom hold party office, must be involved in those decisions. The opinions of primary voters and the attitudes of party identifiers in the mass electorate will by necessity weigh on the decisions of those elite actors, but it is the activities of those who actually become involved in party politics who affect the structure and behavior of party organizations. Elite partisan actors, whether they be party officials, volunteer activists, elected officials, large donors, partisan campaign professionals, or leaders of outside but partisan loyal groups, determine the party’s electoral and political strategies. Until we more systematically investigate their behavior, relationships, communications, beliefs, and other characteristics, the party organization remains a black box. We can observe its behavior in the political system, sometimes rational, sometimes not, but cannot really understand it.

Social network analysis, most prominently used by sociologists and students of
business, provides one tool that might help political scientists come to terms with the true organization of the American political parties. Schwartz (1990) used these techniques to map relationships between different levels of the Illinois Republican party, but its use in party studies is only in its infancy. Social network analysis involves collecting data on the relationships between various actors, and then geometrically modeling those relationships. Such analysis can help identify factions, leaders, brokers, and other key players in the party organization, and might help political scientists explain some party organizational decisions.

This study has hopefully demonstrated that party organizational behavior can be best understood by looking at the behavior of both formal and informal actors in the party. Collection of such data is time-intensive, but with broader application of these methods, simple but subtle measures of party elite activity may emerge. There are too many interesting questions about party behavior that can be addressed by an expanded focus on the party organization for this literature to go untended in the coming years.
Figure 1. Non-incumbent party nominees’ primary vote, by number of candidates in the primary race.
Figure 2: Nominees’ primary vote by party support

Note: Dependent variable is the percent of the primary vote each nominee received. Independent variable is the sum of each candidate’s standardized score on five variables (presence of a state party endorsement, share of national party money received, share of endorsements received, share of partisan group money received, and share of partisan individual contributions received).
Figure 3: Primary winners’ party favorite status by percent of primary vote received

Note: Dependent variable is the percent of the primary vote each nominee received. Independent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the candidate was rated the “party favorite” in the race. Circle size reflects number of cases at each point.
Figure 4: Republican nominees’ relative primary margin compared to their relative party unity status

1=Safe Republican Primary, Democratic primary is divisive
0=All other categories of primary environments

Note: Dependent variable is the percent of the primary vote each nominee received minus the percent of the primary vote his opponent received. Independent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the candidate’s primary was unified while his opponent’s primary was divisive. Circle size reflects number of cases at each point.
Figure 5: Democratic nominee’s relative primary margin compared to their relative party unity status

Note: Dependent variable is the percent of the primary vote each nominee received minus the percent of the primary vote his opponent received. Independent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the candidate’s primary was unified while his opponent’s primary was divisive. Circle size reflects number of cases at each point.
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Appendix
Texas 5th Congressional District

Map from