WHEN DO VOTERS REALLY HAVE A CHOICE?
THE EFFECTS OF THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT
ON THE EMERGENCE OF PRIMARY COMPETITION IN THE U.S. CONGRESS

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

While previous research has focused on candidate emergence in congressional elections, there has been very little attention paid to congressional primary outcomes and competition levels. This study examines the nature of congressional primary competition, and the forces that systematically influence the level of competition across districts and over time.

Government responsiveness has been understood to be conditional on the level of effective political competition through elections. However, the largely dominant view is that the primaries do not provide an effective check on government officials. Stylized accounts and the limited scholarly studies generally argue there is very little competition in primaries and that incumbency advantage prevents competition except in an extremely limited number of open seat districts. I report results based on observations of all 870 congressional primaries 1972 through 2002 and all Senate primaries 1998 through 2002. In addition to measuring the number of candidates in each race, I also employ a novel measure of primary competition, the Standardized Divisiveness Score, which accounts for the divisiveness or dispersion of voters due to competition among elites. This comprehensive view of primary competition finds that there are systematically slightly higher levels of competition than expected. Perhaps more importantly, I consistently find substantively high variation in competition levels across time and districts.
Few studies have attempted to explain the emergence of primary competition; instead they generally assume incumbents stifle competition and only open seat races will attract multiple quality candidates. By building a view of primary competition as the aggregate outcome of potential candidates’ decisions to run, my theory expands the potential influences and explanations of primary competition. I argue that the insights of the candidate emergence literature provide a framework to identify the important factors in the electoral environment that lead to competition. In addition, this aggregation model provides specific causal mechanisms by which the electoral environment affects competition. The model examines the effects of redistricting, primary laws, incumbency, district characteristics, size of candidate pool, and political intermediaries such as the party organizations on the level of primary competition. I find that increasingly sophisticated potential candidates take into account a far more complicated “immediate political environment” that drives their calculations (Black 1972). While incumbency status is clearly an important factor in determining the level of primary competition, it fails to explain the vast majority of variance observed. Other forces such as the pressure of a large candidate pool and the resources and information political intermediaries employ as tactics systematically affect whether or not multiple competitive candidates enter the race and provide voters with real choices.

Conceptually, primary competition captures the dispersion of voter support among candidates. As more politically stronger, experienced political elites choose to run, the party electorate will become more divided amongst them. Again tying the concept back to the intended role of the direct primaries, my theory explains when there
will be effective primary competition as measured by the dispersion of voters. Moreover, this research, by shedding light on the forces that shape primary competition, aims to establish clear links between the nature of the electoral process and the responsiveness of government.
To Riann and Sophia
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CHAPTER 1

ADOPTION OF THE DIRECT PRIMARY:
EXPANDING ELECTORAL COMPETITION?

_The American political tradition caps decisions made by popular vote with a resplendent halo of legitimacy. Therein lies a source of strength of the direct primary as an institution._

--V.O. Key jr.

As mass political parties emerged in the early and mid 1800s, corruption, intimidation, political violence, and systematic disenfranchisement were all common practices in the nomination of party candidates. Party nominating conventions and the proverbial smoke filled back rooms were far from democratic institutions. In fact reformers and many early political scientists argued that the party elites, by controlling the set of alternatives, prevented voters from effectively choosing their government representatives (Meyer 1902, Merriam 1908, Beman 1926). The nomination of major party candidates for office through direct elections has been debated, reviewed, reformed and extolled in numerous attempts to provide candidates with V.O. Key’s “halo of legitimacy.” The adoption of the direct primary was argued to be a critical link between the masses of voters and those who “represent” them in government. In the preface to his work, Ernst Meyer argued that the mandatory, statewide legal regulation of direct primaries, “is the citizen’s citadel of right. It is the source of power in government” (1902, iii). By making party nominations elective and relatively open to
party voters, electoral competition among political elites would naturally emerge and “the problem” of party nominations would be solved (Ware 2002).

The notion of competition permeates American political thought and history. From Midwestern Progressives to modern political scientists, effective electoral competition has been viewed as a fundamental mechanism of republican democracy. “Democracy is a competitive political system,” according to E.E. Schattschneider, “in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process” (1960, 138). Schattschneider’s definition of democracy captures the two fundamental aspects of the direct primary and its role in the representative process. In order for them to work as envisioned, direct primaries must be competitive. Secondly, the competition among elites defines the choice set voters have. Without multiple viable alternatives, the direct primary does not meet Schattshneider’s criteria for a democracy. Given its role in the democratic process, it is the purpose of this research to develop a clear understanding of what primary competition means and the forces that influence its emergence.

My goal is to build a theory of primary competitiveness that captures the relationship between voter behavior and the strategies political elites. Electoral competition, I argue, can be understood as a scope of conflict issue. How effective are direct primaries at expanding the scope of conflict to party rank and file? Do voters have real, viable choices? Anecdotal evidence would suggest voters rarely have multiple viable candidates to choose from in primary elections. Conventional wisdom holds that congressional primaries are only competitive when there is an open seat. By systematically measuring competition across a large set of congressional primaries, it is
my intention to provide an extensive view of the level and nature of intra-party electoral competition. Also, I will build and test a theory of primary competition. In an attempt to answer what drives primary competition, my model posits that primary competition is still an elite driven event. It seeks to explain why the designs of democratizing reformers did not result in widely competitive primaries. The strategic entry of potential candidates and the influences beyond voters’ control, I argue, shape the choice set of voters such that the scope of conflict rarely has a chance to expand. In other words, political elites quickly adapted to control the extent of political conflagration within a direct primary system.

The Evolution and Expansion of the Direct Primary

The adoption of the direct primary nationally was a slow process with many starts and stops and national debate along the way. What started as local “experiments” in Pennsylvania\(^1\) and Ohio was slowly introduced by various means in counties across many Southern and Midwestern states. Most direct primary “experiments” up until the turn of the century were promulgated through party rules and generally applied only to local races. In the 1800s only South Carolina used the direct primary in the selection of candidates for Congress. Then between 1899 and 1915 statewide legal mandates for all major offices were rapidly adopted for many Midwestern and Western states. Preceding this period many Southern states’ Democratic Party organizations also established statewide rules. While generally agreed upon, the above account is based on

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\(^1\) The first known application of direct election of party candidates for office occurred in Crawford County Pennsylvania in 1842. The Democratic Party organization of this western Pennsylvania County developed a system that became synonymous with the direct primary. The Crawford County System or Method was the blueprint for most other “experiments” and is very similar to the institutions in place today.
surprisingly little primary documentation, which itself is often contradictory.\(^2\) This lack of a complete historical record in combination with the highly charged political debate many scholars of the time engaged in produces a highly normative, subjective interpretation of the emergence of the direct primary.

As part of their wider political movement to counter the “corrupting influences” of industrialization, urbanization and the concentration of power and money, progressives attacked the traditional party nominating convention or “caucus” as undemocratic and corrupt (Meyer 1902, 55-65). Machine politics prevented rank and file party members from influencing the nomination process, especially in Republican dominated areas of New England and the Mid-west. This, according to progressives, was counter to “popular control” of government. The solution was the direct election of party candidates. Lamar Beman’s 1926 edited volume of turn of the century essays and speeches on the subject clearly outlines the above arguments of progressive reformers. Many contemporary authors writing at the height of the reform movement, such as Charles Merriam (1908) and Ernst Meyer (1902), blurred the line between objective academic analysis and their support of the direct primary reforms. These works suggest that progressives slowly worked to introduce, expand and institutionalize the direct primary. Their efforts were constantly and ferociously fought by party machine stalwarts and only through extreme public pressure did local party committees capitulate. The process was first to apply primaries through party rules and only for

\(^2\) See Alan Ware’s (2002) work for a thorough examination of the primary historical documents available. The dearth of clear, consistent historical records frustrates a clear view of how and who instituted direct primaries. This is especially problematic for the period 1848 through the early 1890s, when much of the records are from reformers advocating changes to the political system and not objective source material.
low-level offices, then slowly build up so many examples of their effective use that the state parties and eventually state legislatures would adopt the direct primary.

In contrast, V.O. Key’s seminal analysis of state parties in the South (1960) reported a very different progression. The direct primary in the one-party Democratic South was advocated by political elites and was adopted very quickly at the statewide level. According to Key, the expansion of the direct primary began in states with the least inter-party competition and spread to those with the most. This was the case because political elites not in the dominant faction of the party had no outlet for competition. Because the general election was a forgone conclusion, elites within the state party organizations championed the direct primary as the “real” election. One important point to make that Key glosses over is the fact that these rules were adopted within the party and were not state laws. This also allowed for systematic disenfranchisement of African-Americans and poor whites through the establishment of party membership rules. In the South, the establishment of the direct primary through party rules was an elite driven change with multiple strategic goals. The implications of Key’s findings suggest that the idealized progressive reformer interpretation of the evolution of the direct primary may not be wholly accurate.

In fact, a modern analysis of the direct primary by Alan Ware (2002) suggests that mass level reform movements had very little to do with the adoption and spread of the direct primary. Looking at party records and legislation from the time period, Ware concludes that direct primary laws were localized, fairly isolated experiments and only

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3 In the South, Virginia and North Carolina had the strongest post-reconstruction Republican Party presence and were the last to adopt the direct primary.
some of these were due to progressive movement agitators. Not until the late 1890s did state legislatures pass mandatory, state administered direct primary laws. Many authors have pointed to LaFollette’s progressive movement in Wisconsin and its 1903 “complete” primary law as the turning point. However, Ware contends that many statewide primary laws had their origins in more limited laws adopted voluntarily by party officials in the 1890s in Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, and Oregon (2002, 110). The geographic dispersion of these earlier laws clearly calls into question the progressive reformers’ interpretation of the evolution and meaning of the direct primary reform. The statewide “complete” direct primary laws of the early 1900s were just a natural extension of these earlier laws. Under Ware’s thesis, the impetus for the direct primary was not competition but rather a necessary institutional change, but one the party elites still intended to control. The implication is that party officials saw the direct primary as a “reform” needed to reduce populist pressures but one that enabled them to still manipulate and control the scope of conflict.

Regardless of reformer’s intentions and the role party elites played in adopting the direct primary, the question for this research agenda remains. Have the direct primaries expanded the scope of conflict over party nominations to the rank and file? In other words, are intra-party elections competitive and do voters have the ability to define the alternatives for the general election stage? This is a critical point in the democratic process; as Schattschneider argued, “the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power. . . . He who determines what politics is about runs the

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4 He cites many examples of local adoption of limited direct primaries in areas with no progressive movement presence, such as Kentucky 1890, Columbus, OH 1898, San Francisco 1899.
country,” (1960, 66). Progressives and scholars who adopted their interpretation of the history of the direct primary argued that the reform of the nominating convention is at the heart of representative government. Further, the failure of the modern system to consistently produce competitive primaries frustrates the ability of the people to control their government. It is the purpose of the next several chapters to build a conceptualization and measure of primary competition for the U.S. Congress; evaluate the extent and variation in primary competition; build a theory to explain, understand and predict competition; and finally test that model across House and Senate primaries.

The Structure of the Book

I apply my questions about the direct primary to the U.S. Congress. In part, this is because the vast majority of individual level candidate emergence research has been at the congressional level. More substantively, my theory deals with strategic candidates operating in an information rich electoral environment. Potential candidates for Congress seem to be an excellent example of this context as well as a rich data source. While the following chapters develop a general theory of primary competition, the measurement and testing is conducted across House and Senate primaries. As I discuss in Chapter 5, I believe the successful application and testing of the model for both congressional and Senate primaries suggests the theory travels well and can be adapted to other levels of elected office.

In Chapter 2, I develop a conceptualization of primary competition that explicitly links mass and elite behavior. I introduce the notion of “negative power” in a democracy to the primary context. Any conceptualization and subsequent measurement of electoral competition, I argue, must capture the ability of voters to “threaten” the
current ruling elite (see Riker 1982). The level of electoral competition is defined by the ability of multiple candidates for office to garner significant proportions of voter support at the polls. Unless challengers can make election day close, or at least force incumbents and “front runners” to respond to their campaigns, ruling elites will not be induced to govern responsively. Secondly, Chapter 2 develops my theory of primary competition as the aggregate outcome of individual potential candidates’ decisions to enter the race. In this way, I argue that primary competition is an elite driven event. Potential candidates evaluate the electoral environment and their decisions define the choice set voters have. The choice set determines the competitiveness of primary elections. Schattschneider’s “scope of conflict” is defined not by the voters but instead by the outcomes of rational actor calculations of political elites. I also begin to widen the traditional understanding of the “relevant political environment” potential candidates consider. This theory identifies the mechanisms by which political intermediaries such as the party organizations can influence the competitiveness of primary by informing the strategic decisions of potential candidates.

In Chapter 3, I operationalize my conceptualization of primary competition by developing a measure of voter dispersion across the choice set of candidates. My measure, the Standardized Divisiveness Score (SDS), captures the level of “threat” the eventual winner perceives as a function of the ability of other candidates to receive votes on Election Day. I report the largest systematic analysis of congressional primary competitiveness to date. All 870 primaries are included from 1972 to 2000. The overall level of competition and trends over time are explored in this section. Secondly, I outline a theory of primary competition based on conventional wisdom interpretations
and assumptions, which focus on incumbency advantage. Based on time-series cross-sectional random effects models of both the number of candidates and the SDS, I find that, while incumbency and prospects in the general election are important strategic factors, they fail to account for the important differences in competition across districts and over time. In addition, the findings suggest potential candidates are becoming more sophisticated over time.

Moving beyond a focus on incumbency advantage, Chapter 4 develops a more general model of the forces that produce effective congressional primary competition. By synthesizing district level findings on competition and our understanding of what drives candidate emergence, the model seeks to explain when there will be effective primary competition. The relationships modeled in Chapter 3 are recast within my theory of competition in addition to a much wider view of the strategic and information environment that may affect potential candidates decisions to run. The expanded theoretical model is tested with 2002 congressional primaries’ data. I find that increasingly sophisticated potential candidates take into account a far more complicated electoral environment, which in turn shapes the level of primary competition. Several forces including pre-primary party activity, candidate pool size and district level heterogeneity are found to systematically influence the emergence of primary competition even when controlling for incumbency and general election chances.

Finally, I move to the Senate in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the general model is adapted to the slightly different a priori understanding of the Senate electoral environment. First, the Senate has, on average, experienced more competitive elections and slightly lower incumbency reelection rates than the House. Secondly, a wide
literature on incumbency advantage in the Senate is leveraged to produce specific new testable hypotheses. The data includes all Senate primaries in the 1998-2000-2002 elections. In this way, I include in the analysis an entire election cycle for the Senate: all 100 seats, all 200 major party nominations. I find that the general model of primary competition is adaptable and performs well in explaining Senatorial primaries. This further supports my argument that aggregate level, primary election outcomes, can and should be understood as a function of individual level strategic candidates’ decisions to enter the race. Both in the House and the Senate, forces and actors in the electoral environment systematically account for the level of primary competition.

This research attempts to address three challenges to our understanding of congressional primary competition. While some research has attempted to build our understanding of elite behavior, the relationship and interaction of elite behavior with voters remains largely unconsidered in the pre-general election literature. A district/primary level of analysis allows me to build a model of election outcomes that incorporates the mechanisms and relationships between political elites and the citizenry. Which leads to the second challenge. Very little is understood about the forces that drive primary competition. By positioning primary competition within the context of individual potential candidates’ entry decisions, I seek to provide a theoretical mechanism that identifies the forces that influence primary competition. Finally, no large-scale attempt to measure the level of competition across a wide range of primaries and time has ever been published. On average, how competitive are congressional primaries and how much variation around that average exists? Surprisingly only very limited studies exist and stylized accounts continue to characterize congressional
primaries as non-events, almost all elections being foregone conclusions without the any room for true competition. An objective of this study is to actually test to see if this account is accurate. Competition among political elites is a fundamental dynamic in a representative democracy. In total, this research attempts to measure and explain intra-party competition at the nomination stage of congressional elections. Without the potential for effective competition, elections fail to tie elite behavior to the voters.
CHAPTER 2

WHY SOME VOTERS DON’T HAVE A CHOICE: STRATEGIC CANDIDATES AND THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

Normative and positive theories alike are centered on the notion that what drives political behavior is the need to compete for votes. This is the basis for foundational theories from voter choice and partisan behavior (Downs 1957) to legislative behavior and organization (Mayhew 1974) to normative theories of liberal democracy (Riker 1982). Democracy works because competition or the potential for it keeps those who govern working for the governed. Likewise, to understand, explain, and predict political outcomes, scholars have focused their theories on the inherent political competition harnessed by democracy. Within this context of the larger political process, I develop below a theory of competition at the nomination stage of the American election cycle.

While much work has been produced on general election competition at nearly every level of government, relatively little attention has been given to the competition over candidate selection. I start by briefly considering the concept and measurement of electoral competition. As a basic concept in the study of politics, a clear conceptualization and measurement has not received much attention. This is especially true of empirical studies. This chapter establishes a concrete basis for measuring and interpreting electoral outcomes in terms of their competitiveness as it relates to its role
in democratic theory. This motivates a model of primary competition as the aggregate outcome of elite driven choices constrained within the electoral environment. Next, I re-consider conventional accounts of primary competition given my model. Finally, I expand the model to the complete electoral environment that informs potential candidates decisions to enter the primaries. My goal is to provide a theoretical understanding of the dynamics that produce competitive primaries, their implications for our understanding of the nomination selection process and its effects on the rest of the democratic process.

The adoption of the direct primary was designed as an additional electoral institution to produce competition. Congressional primaries provide opportunity for either vibrant voter driven electoral competition or a stage at which political elites can constrain and shape the choices voters truly have. While their effectiveness remains intermittent at best, the direct primary and modern caucuses were borne out of a desire to increase competition by adding another layer of electorate choice over who runs the government. Both reform tracks, Mid-western progressives and the Democratic Party in the South, sought electoral *competition* over the nomination for office. The key, reformers argued, was to shape institutions that guaranteed voter choice. While clearly a normative view of direct primaries, the tie between voter choice (electoral competition) and government responsiveness provides the basis for studying primary competition.

**What does competition look like?**

From a normative perspective my interpretation of primary competition and its role in the larger political process is consistent with minimalist liberal interpretations of
This understanding of the democratic process views voting as a necessary mechanism for the selection of ruling elites and NOT as an instrument of the “general will.” Liberal democracy does not demand that the true preference of the voter be placed into power. Rather it only requires that those in power can be removed from power through elections. Authors such as William Riker (1982) argue that elections are effective because they induce the ruling elite to respond to popular opinions or face removal by a, “rather intermittent, sometimes random, and even perverse, popular veto,” (244). Therefore, any institutional or political structures that affect electoral competition among elites also shape the nature of democratic outcomes through the chance of a “popular veto.” Political competition conceptualizes the threat, perceived or actual, that the incumbent is exposed to by the re-election process. Forces in the political process that affect the closeness of elections and the quality of the challengers faced by the ruling elites, in effect, drive the effectiveness of the electoral process. This perspective also provides a framework to build a conceptual meaning of competition within the political process and thus more clearly ties elections to government outputs.

As a general concept primary competition must be placed in the context of the larger political process. Modern congressional elections are two-stage events. Before the general election, potential candidates must capture nomination by one of the two major political parties. The party candidate selection process is defined by the reforms of the direct primary and relative openness of entry for potential candidates and primary voters. Any conceptualization of primary competition, therefore, must incorporate an understanding of the emergence of viable candidates and their ability to attract primary voters. Primary competition, I argue, is the aggregate result of individual decisions of
potential candidates for office. The nature and level of competition depends on the actions of the pool of potential candidates. Competition is the result of multiple potential candidates successfully campaigning for votes. The concept encapsulates both the number of choices voters have but also the viability of those choices.

It is useful to think of competition from the perspective of the voter. Research has demonstrated that many voters seek to avoid “wasted votes” (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1972, Black 1978, and Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde 1992)\(^5\). Multicandidate races are truly multicandidate only if voters perceive two or more candidates as viable. From the voters’ point of view, elections only work if the front-runner, generally the incumbent, has to worry about the candidates behind her. The electorate, as strategic rational actors, votes in order to influence the set of elites who will control the government, not just to go through the motions of participatory democracy. Competitive elections or the threat of them are a necessary condition for effective democracy. By definition, the outcomes of competitive elections are less certain than non-competitive elections. Voters by having the potential (i.e. multiple viable candidates) to remove the current office-holder induce more responsive government. This “negative ideal” according to Riker is dependent on the effective threat of the next election. Given this, electoral competition must be characterized by the ability of multiple candidates to attract significant support in the electorate--in other words, the incumbent must feel threatened by the next election.

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\(^5\) McKelvey and Ordeshook found that as an extension of the theory of the calculus of voting (Downs 1957), many voters based their decision on their preference and their perception of each candidates’ chances of winning. Black (1978) and Abramson et.al. (1992) report empirical evidence of sophisticated voters seeking to avoid “wasted votes,” i.e. voting for a candidate that has no chance of winning.
Competition, especially at the nomination stage, encapsulates the electability of candidates. By this I mean that any attempt to characterize and model competition must also consider the extent to which “official” candidates actually have a chance of winning. The distinction is fairly simple. Consider elections in single party states such as Mexico for most of the 20th century as an extreme example. While technically there was often choice on the ballot, voters knew not to “waste” their votes on any candidates except those from the PRI. Opposition parties in Mexico were analogous to the “sacrificial lambs” or inexperienced candidates in congressional primaries that run without any chance of securing nomination. Again referring to a minimalist understanding of democratic theory, competition is defined by the pressure governing elites face to attract voters.

Some election scholars focus instead on divisiveness, which shifts the concept toward distributions within the electorate instead of the view of the candidates (for example: Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). Multiple viable candidates divide the electorate into electorally competing factions. As viable challengers more effectively divide the electorate, the favorite feels more vulnerable. The electorate is unable to pressure ruling elites without the threat of viable alternatives (i.e. the ability to divide voters’ support enough to threaten their reelection). Competitive elections serve as mechanisms for voters to force the elites into responsive public policy. In direct primaries, competition captures the ability of multiple candidates to attract significant support from the electorate. At the nomination stage, primaries and modern caucuses provide the potential for multiple candidates to directly appeal to the electorate for
support, thus producing another institutional mechanism of electoral competition. The next step is to build an understanding of when effective competition will emerge.

**A model of primary competition**

Surprisingly, very little is known about what shapes primary competition at any level of government. The dearth of research on primary competition may conceal important relationships that affect who wins elections and the effectiveness of our political institutions. This is especially the case for congressional elections, which contrary to the dominant view exhibit non-trivial variance in the nature and intensity of primary competition among the various districts, the two parties and over time. In building my model of primary competition, I start by identifying two distinct mechanisms by which the environment affects the strategic entry of potential candidates and thus primary competitiveness. Secondly, I apply my model to the factors outlined in conventional accounts of primary competition: incumbency, inter-party competitiveness, and decennial redistricting. Finally, I broaden the definition of the “relevant” electoral environment potential candidates evaluate based in large part on the findings of the candidate emergence literature. I revisit the notion of strategic entry given modern campaigns and identify additional factors that affect potential candidates’ decisions. These include national political and economic conditions, candidate pool size, district heterogeneity, and political intermediaries activities.6

Modern congressional and Senatorial primaries, according to most observers, aren’t competitive. Yet, it remains unclear what empirically qualifies as a competitive

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6 The role of political intermediaries has been explored principally by Linda Fowler (Fowler and McClure 1989; Fowler 1993). She argues that the political party organizations and interest groups seek to influence the emergence of candidates in an attempt to shape the nature of primary elections.
election and when they will emerge. The number of unopposed primary candidates and
two candidate races seem to suggest competition is extremely rare. Two examples from
2002 quickly illustrate a more complex and varying nature of congressional primaries.
In the Ohio 3rd district, Democrat Tony Hall retired from a district that had become far
more Republican over the years (Bush won 52% of the district in 2000). Local
Republicans saw the chance they had been waiting for and three experienced, well-
connected candidates entered the race. After a hard fought campaign former Dayton
Mayor, Mike Turner, won with 80 percent of the vote. In contrast, the Senate race in
Tennessee did produce the divided electorates observers expected. Similar to the Ohio
3rd, the incumbent Senator Fred Thompson (R) retired. Notwithstanding Tipper Gore’s
brief consideration to enter the race, almost any Republican would be viewed as the
favorite to replace Thompson. However, only two Republican candidates emerged,
former Governor Lamar Alexander and Memphis Congressman Ed Bryant. While
Alexander had strong national backing, Bryant was an effective campaigner and kept
the race close. Alexander won with 54 percent of the vote. These examples are meant
to illustrate the dynamics that emerge in elections that can be interpreted as effective
competition. More generally, both cases are examples of the highly strategic
environment that regulates the nature of competition within the confines of our electoral
institutions. Primary competition, I argue, emerges from the strategic interaction of
potential candidates, voters, institutional structures and political organizations.

**Strategic Entry and the Electoral Environment**

Much of my theory is based on the simple argument that potential candidates for
Congress are strategic actors. In that, they seek to minimize risk and increase the
likelihood of success. Beyond applying a straightforward rational actor model of candidate emergence (Black 1972) to the district level, my theory incorporates structural constraints and political context to explain the variation in competition across congressional primaries. It is an elite driven model within a broad political context. In the correct conditions, competition will emerge as more potential candidates decide to enter and thus divide the primary electorate. According to Black’s formalization of Schlesinger theory of candidacy (1966), candidate entry can be understood by applying a basic rational actor model:

\[ R = PB - C \]  where,

- \( R \) is the utility of the action or behavior
- \( P \) is the probability of winning office
- \( B \) is the utility of running and holding office
- \( C \) is the cost of running and holding office

As with all applications of the rational actor model, when \( R \) is positive the potential candidate will enter the primary. The theory of candidacy formalized by Black when aggregated to the district level has clear implications for when electoral competition will emerge.

The foundation of individual centered theories of candidacy can be traced to Joseph Schlesinger’s work, *Ambition and Politics* (1966). The utility of such a theoretical approach lies in the fundamental nature of the forces that drive the decision to enter a race. Ambition, according to Schlesinger, is the inherent human instinct that drives individual’s desire to run an elected office. The electoral connection between policymakers and the voting public ensures that individual ambition is turned into
effective democratic governance. “Representative government,” Schlesinger argued, “above all, depends on a supply of men so driven; the desire for election and, more important, for reelection becomes the electorate’s restraint upon its public officials.” (1966, 2) In this context candidacy is seen as a strategy of ambitious political entrepreneurs to forward their personal goals: professionally, on policy dimensions, accumulation of power and influence and so on. Thus individuals’ ambitions drive them to run for office contingent on the strategic calculations of the potential candidates. Simply put, their environment drives potential candidates’ decisions to enter the primary.

Instead of the ubiquitous “political environment” characterization, I shall use “electoral environment” to refer to the institutions, actors and forces in the electorate that engender or constrain the emergence of primary competition for Congress. Following my conceptualization of primary competition, the electoral environment affects potential candidates in two distinct ways. First these factors influence the values potential candidates assign to P, B, and C within the standard rational actor model. Most individuals who consider themselves potential candidates have already made a cost-benefit calculation and determined they want to run for Congress. Assuming every district has several potential candidates who calculate higher benefits than costs, some minimum level of competition should generally emerge each cycle. More explicitly, we should rarely see unopposed primaries or congressional primaries with no candidates. Of course this is not the case. In fact the modal category in every cycle since 1972 has been 1 candidate. The remaining source of variance lies in the probability of winning that the potential candidate calculates before each election cycle. For instance, many
potential candidates wait for a chance to run for an open seat. The formidable advantages most incumbents have at their disposal drive the probability of winning down for potential candidates and therefore cause them not to run. Those who tend to run against incumbents are thought to be of lower quality and therefore have little chance of winning regardless of the incumbent’s status (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989; Abramowitz 1988; Krasno and Green 1988; Adams and Squire 1997). The probability of winning is often understood to drive the timing of running for Congress. At the district level, therefore, this also drives when (if ever) a district will experience competitive primaries.

The level of uncertainty over the values of P, B, and C assigned by potential candidates produces the second type of influence over the level of competition. Potential candidates for Congress are also affected by the confidence they have in their ability to accurately calculate their chances of success. As congressional electoral politics has evolved into an information intensive, candidate-centered process (Herrnson 1988 and 2000, Frantzich 1989, Bullock and Shafer 1997, Jacobson 2003), the level of uncertainty has emerged as an even larger factor. As I discuss below, many institutional factors and political actors affect potential candidates uncertainty over likely campaign scenarios and election outcomes. It is important to distinguish this dynamic from the objective conditions that affect the emergence of primary competition. The distinction produces several important insights and implications for my model of primary competition.

While not within the scope of this research, “non-viable” primary candidates may influence the policy outputs of government through their possible agenda setting as well as the potential for incumbents to co-opt their issues stances. This dynamic, I argue, does not affect the nature of primary competition but potentially could impact the government in the same way as third party candidates are thought to influence presidential races and policies (see Rosenstone, Behr and Lazarus 1996).
competition outlined below. First I provide a re-interpretation of the stylized facts most scholars accept when discussing primary competition. The dominant view assumes primary competition is relatively rare due to incumbency dominance. According to this view, the nomination is only valuable when there is an open seat and therefore better chances of general election success.

Conventional Wisdom of Primary Competition

Congressional election studies have focused on the vast advantages of incumbents and their near complete dominance over the last forty years (Mayhew 1974; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde 2003). In most cycles, only a few if any incumbents lose at the primary stage, and their general election success rates range from 80 percent to as high as 99 percent in the post-war era. Given the trend toward higher incumbent re-election rates most scholars assume that incumbents and challenger primaries are generally full of “sacrificial lambs”\(^8\) and, competitive or not, rarely affect the rest of the political process. The long odds against challengers either within the incumbent’s primary or in the out party’s primary serve to depress primary competition and are consistent with my strategic actor model. However, without systematic study, the singular importance of incumbency in primary competition is an untested claim. In fact, only two other factors have been thought to systematically affect the level of competition over congressional nomination, inter-party competition in the district and opportunities created by the decennial redistricting.

\(^8\) Strategic politician theory, such as Jacobson and Kernell (1983), outlines the characterization of sacrificial lambs. See also David Canon (1993). While individual primaries candidates with no chance of winning may have incentive to stay in the race at the aggregate and system level these “lambs” often mask the true level of competition and rarely result in divisive primaries as defined here.
Before scholars myopically focused in on incumbency, the prevailing view was that the party’s general election chances drove the level of competition over the party’s nomination. In fact general election dynamics often drove the establishment of direct primaries in the first place. V. O. Key (1956) argued that the adoption of the direct primary was a result of regionalism in the party system at the turn of the 19th century. According to Key, the hopelessness of Republican candidates in Deep South states made the general election a foregone conclusion and thus did not offer voters a true choice. As a result political elites and voters alike began to argue for an opening of the nomination process. They sought to democratize the selection of Democratic Party candidates by dismantling the convention system and instituting the direct primary. The lack of inter-party competition produced a need to allow for more direct intra-party competition. Key developed a theory of primary competition based on his interpretation of the historical development of the primary. Intra-party competition harnessed by the primary system, according to this view, is a function of the level of inter-party competition. Key argued that primary competition will increase as the party moves from consistently non-competitive to competitive to dominant in general elections. This view is consistent with my broader understanding of the primary competition as the aggregate result of individual level strategic actors deciding to run within the given political and institutional context. Inter-party competition provides a clear signal for potential candidates as to their likely chances in the general election and thus the relative attractiveness of running in the primary.
As a brief digression, the fact that direct primaries were first established in “strong party” states\(^9\) and not in traditionally “weak party” states suggests a second implication of Key’s theory on the historical development of the direct primary. Contrary to most current views of party strength and relevance, Key’s theory suggests that intra-party competition may be a sign of a vibrant electorally dominant parties. Given the fundamental differences in the context of party competition between the early 1900’s and today, it is unclear how to interpret primary competition as an indicator of party strength or weakness today. As I develop the theory below, current accounts of party adaptation and strategic goals would suggest under certain conditions the parties may attempt to actively inhibit primary competition. And that these activities are most likely to occur when the inter-party competition is at its highest. In essence, modern candidate-centered, incumbent dominated elections may produce a non-linear, convex relationship between inter-party and primary competition where primary competition is lowest in the most partisan balanced districts. This question will be addressed more in the party activity section; for now, let me return to the evidence of the relationship between inter-party and primary competition.

By looking at gubernatorial and state legislative primaries, Key (1956) found that the level of recent inter-party competition was a significant factor in primary competitiveness. As prospects for general election success increase, the intra-party competition for the nomination also increases. Key argued that potential candidates for office use recent election results as a cue for the party’s chances in the next general election.\(^9\)

\(^9\) As early as the 1870s Georgia and Mississippi began to adopt the direct primary. The last two Southern states to introduce the primary system were Virginia and North Carolina, which were the Southern states with the most inter-party competition. However, outside the South there were clearly other factors that accounted for the order in which states moved toward the direct primary many of which concerned the strength of the larger progressive movement (Key, 1956: 87-97).
election. In an era of one-partyism, all potential candidates for office move into the dominant party, and all vie for the nomination that will assure them general election victory. While one-party districts are the extreme, Key argued that a linear relationship exists between inter- and intra-party competition. Given the decline of hegemonic state or regional one-party systems since Key’s work, it is interesting to note that more recent works have also documented this relationship10 (Grau 1981, McNitt 1982, Jewell and Olson 1982, and Jewell and Sigelman 1986, Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). These studies report significant effects of previous inter-party competition on primary competition for state legislative races (Grau 1981), gubernatorial nominations (McNitt 1982) and U.S. Congressional elections (Jewell and Sigleman 1986, Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). Throughout the post-war era, these researchers consistently found evidence at virtually every electoral level of the relationship between a party’s past electoral success and the intensity of primary competition.

Finally, scholars have pointed to the clear spike in primary competition after each census. This is also consistent with my view of primary competition as the result of strategic entry of potential candidates. Under my model, the perceived opportunities created by newly drawn congressional districts illustrate how the electoral environment shapes the emergence of primary competition. This is less a finding in the literature and more an accepted fact based on journalistic accounts.11 Substantially redrawn districts, those that produce new racial, religious, economic and partisan breakdowns are thought

10 I can only find one published result that suggests previous inter-party competition has no impact on primary competition (Breaux and Gierzynski 1991). Their model included both inter-party competition and the number of primary contestants in a model of winner’s vote percentage. The non-significance of the inter-party competition measure is most likely due to the multi-collinearity with the endogenous, number of contenders variable.

11 While little systematic evidence has been published to test this account, several well known cases studies provide counter examples, see Fowler and McClure (1989) analysis of upstate New York.
to provide potential candidates an opportunity to challenge an incumbent. Clearly if the incumbent’s base has been reduced as a percentage of the district’s population, potential candidates that draw support from the newly increased demographic and political groups may have a better chance of winning. While still very popular in his old district, Tony Hall (D) in the Ohio 3rd retired before the 2002 race. One reason for his move was that the Republican controlled redistricting commission significantly increased the proportion of Republicans in Hall’s district. Likewise, Representative Max Sandlin (D), in the Texas 1st district, found himself running for reelection in a newly drawn, heavily Republican district in 2002 (Bush won 64% of the new district in 2000). However, Sandlin did not attract a single primary challenger and went on to win reelection.

As the Sandlin example suggests, these stylized accounts of primary competition may no longer be as accurate or complete models. For instance, the increasingly politicized process of drawing new districts may in fact be providing fewer opportunities. For example in 2002 Illinois state house Republicans and Democrats repeatedly failed to pass a new congressional districting map. Each side attempted to draw districts that favored their party. Speaker of the U.S. House, Dennis Hastert, brokered a compromise map that was designed to protect both parties’ incumbents (Barone and Cohen 2003). Illinois’ redistricting plan serves as an example of the larger national trend toward “incumbent protection programs” (Magleby and Monson 2003, 9). Conversely, several trends in congressional elections and changes in campaign finance laws lead to the expectation that the relatively simple model described above may no longer explain the emergence of primary competition. The electoral
environment has become increasingly complex, candidate-centered, and information intensive. These forces have expanded the list of factors that strategic candidates consider when deciding to enter the primary. Many potential candidates have far less uncertainty over how their new district will break down. The development and increasing use of pre-primary polling and grassroots activities produce great deal of information for many districts’ potential candidates. As potential candidates become increasingly sophisticated, experienced, well funded and well informed, our models of primary competition must incorporate their understanding of the broader electoral environment.

Building a Broader Model of Primary Competition

Because I argue that primary competition emerges as the aggregate result of potential candidates’ entry decisions, much of my expanded model is explicitly derived from the implications of individual level theories of candidate emergence. The principal concept developed in this literature is known as the “opportunity structure.” Michael Mezey (1970) first defined opportunity structure as the “regularity with which each party wins,” the general election and, “the personnel turnover rate among office holders.” Since Mezey’s article, a wide range of factors has been identified in the candidate emergence literature as the “opportunity structure” potential candidates must evaluate before entering into a primary race. Theories of candidate emergence and the quality challenger thesis posit that the political context and electoral structure are the primary factors that influence potential candidates’ decisions to run. As strategic

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12 As discussed in the section on political actors, I hypothesize that certain organizations, focusing on the party legislative campaign committees, have sought to inform potential candidates with exploratory polling (Monson 2002; Magleby and Monson 2004).
rational actors, potential candidates run for office when the conditions suggest their greatest probability of success. These conditions can produce vibrant primary competition or act to stifle the emergence of multiple, competitive primary candidates. In order to clearly understand how the opportunity structure influences the nature of primary competition, it is first necessary to establish the relationship of these forces at the individual level.

Conditions must suggest to potential candidates, as strategic actors, that running for Congress will indeed advance their personal goals. These conditions are both structural and based on the interactions with other political individuals; “ambition theory focuses on ways in which men cooperate—form organizations, coalitions, or factions to serve their political ends.” (Schlesinger 1966, 5) In the end, individual decisions to run for office are driven by ambition, strategic considerations and the electoral conditions in the district. However, it is the “opportunity structure” that determines if running for Congress presents the best chance of attaining one’s goals (Jacobson and Kernell, 1983). Shortly after Schlesinger’s original work, scholars began to apply basic rational actor models of behavior to candidate emergence. Gordon Black (1972) developed the first formal model that captured Schlesinger’s notion of strategic candidates. Building on Downs’ economic theory of democracy, several scholars have attempted to build a general model of the decision to participate. Black’s model posits that potential candidates choose to run if the benefits from the office, discounted by the probability of winning are greater than the costs of running.\footnote{\textit{U}(O) = PB - C + D where \textit{U}(O) is defined as the utility of running for office. P is defined as the probability of winning. B is defined as the benefits from holding the office.}

Many authors have
developed refinements of Black’s work but the general relationship has maintained.\textsuperscript{14}

The implications of this model are clear; potential candidates heavily base their decision to run for office on their perception of the probability of winning, in addition to their personal benefits and costs. The literature quickly turned to a focus on the factors that influence a potential candidate’s perceived chance of winning, the opportunity structure.

For my purposes here, I define the opportunity structure as the political and formal or institutional considerations that engender or inhibit candidate emergence and possibly more importantly quality candidate emergence. These factors define the perceived chances of success for any potential candidate. Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell (1983) introduced another layer to our understanding of individual level effects on the nature of primary competition. Their quality challengers thesis stated that quality challengers time their run for Congress to coincide with the most favorable contextual conditions. Quality challengers are viewed as a subset of potential candidates. They consist of those politically ambitious individuals with particular acumen and foresight. Generally, quality challengers are identified as those who have held or currently hold elective office\textsuperscript{15} (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989; Jacobson 2001).

Jacobson and Kernell argued that the national conditions, most importantly the

\begin{itemize}
  \item [14] Most notably Riker and Ordeshook (1973) proposed the inclusion of a “duty term” (shown in the preceding note), while David Rhode (1979) modeled the decision to run as a “risk-taking” model of behavior, based on progressive ambition. Canon (1993) differentiated “experience seekers” from “ambitious amateurs.”
  \item [15] Abramowitz (1988) employed two measures of challenger quality, experience (a four-level ordinal variable based on previous elective office) and celebrity. Adams and Squire (1997) developed a measure of quality by ranking the level of office currently held and then multiplying by the percentage of the state’s population that the office represented. The most nuanced and sensitive measure of challenger quality to date was developed by Krasno and Green (1988); they created an eight-level variable based on the characteristics of the office held and several measures of name recognition, education, celebrity, and occupation.
\end{itemize}
economy, affected the emergence of quality challengers. In good economic times, the party of the President is expected to fare well in elections and therefore potential quality challengers of the President’s party choose to run.

Beyond national economic and political conditions, several other forces have been hypothesized to affect the emergence of strong candidates: the presence of an incumbent (Grau 1981 and Rice 1985); size of challenger pool (Adams and Squire 1997); district level political forces (Krasno and Green 1988); preemptive incumbent spending (Goldenberg et al. 1986; Epstein and Zemsky 1995); incumbent war chests (Goodliffe 2000) and party organizational strength (Canon 1990; Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985). These results have clear implications for a general theory of primary competition. Specifically, opportunity structure influences on quality challengers may in the aggregate fundamentally shape the level of competition for a party’s nomination. In other words, not only does the opportunity structure influence the number of candidates generally who run but it also influences the quality of those that choose to run. How close the primary outcome is depends in large part on the number of candidates running but also whether there is more than one viable candidate in the field. As the number of viable, “quality” candidates enter a race, the level of competition in terms of the dispersion of support will increase. While the “opportunity structure” concept encapsulates much of the electoral environment that shapes primary competition, the model also includes several forces in the electoral environment unique to the primary election level of analysis.

The heterogeneity of a district’s population has been shown to affect the level of primary competition (Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). As a crucial element of the electoral
environment, district heterogeneity provides sources of electoral support and therefore is a key factor in each potential candidate's decision. The social, political and economic structure of an electoral district shapes the underlying factions within the population that produce elite opinion leaders. These district level characteristics function as a baseline influence on the number and ideological positioning of potential candidates. Much like inter-party competition, the socio-economic structure of a population is slow to change but produces profound effects on the nature of politics. However, in contrast to the influence of party competition on potential candidates, these district characteristics produce potential candidates through their elevation of opinion leaders. The direct primary provides yet another layer in the structure of modern democracy for fundamental or “latent” groups to exert their influence on politics. District characteristics are an excellent predictor of the number and size of factions within a population. It is advantageous to consider district characteristics as a means of including both active and latent groups within the district. The realized or potential groups’ opinion leadership are considered potential candidates due to their natural bases of support. Once district characteristics help define the candidate pool, factors such as inter-party competition cue these political elites in their decision to run at any one particular time. In this way district characteristics such as the social, economic, and political structure produce potential candidates and provide the latent mass based factions within the electorate necessary to win nomination and eventually general elections.

While several studies have included some measure of the socio-economic structure of districts, only two studies have focused on district characteristics in
determining levels of competition. Unfortunately the relevance of Leo Snowiss’1966 study is limited due to his use of Chicago districts at a time when Chicago represented the epitome of machine politics. Notwithstanding the study’s limitations, Snowiss found that district characteristics were a key factor in the level of control the machine had over nominations to Congress. In general, Snowiss found that the social and economic make-up of a district had a direct impact on the types of candidates nominated in Chicago and the nature of the process for their selection. Most important for my purposes is the finding that district characteristics, even in a machine era system, have a substantive impact on the nature of electoral competition. In a much more recent and methodologically satisfying work, Paul Herrnson and James Gimpel (1995) developed and tested a model of primary divisiveness\textsuperscript{16} for the 1984 congressional primaries. They found that demographic and geographic characteristics account for a significant proportion of the variance in primary competition across congressional districts in both political parties. Interestingly, they report evidence that Democrats are more affected by district characteristics and recruitment efforts but Republicans respond more to strategic factors such as incumbency and party competitiveness in the district. These studies find evidence suggesting the nature of primary competition reflects underlying latent social and political structure fault lines within the district.

The uniqueness of this set of factors lies in its position in the causal model. As outlined above, researchers who focus on district characteristics have argued that other factors are endogenous to the social, political and economic structure of a district’s

\textsuperscript{16} They use a trichotomous variable of the number of candidates (1, 2, 3 or more) and in a second model they used an Index of Diversity score for the proportions of votes received by each candidate as their indicators of primary competition.
population.\footnote{However, this theoretical view of the relationship has never been tested empirically in order to measure the endogeneity of other factors. Snowiss (1966) and Herrnson and Gimpel (1995) both argue that district characteristics drive other relevant factors and thus directly and indirectly influence primary competitiveness. Although neither of these studies empirically test this assertion.} My intent is to remain skeptical toward this strong theoretical claim.

Instead, I propose a single stage model of primary competition, treating the other factors in the model as exogenous. As part of the electoral environment, heterogeneous districts provide more opportunities to win and thus increase competition among elites representing different latent interests. Potential candidates evaluate the latent and active demographic, geographic and political groups within their district. As heterogeneity increases more potential candidates see an opportunity to mobilize and win over just enough groups within the party’s base to win the nomination. Thus, as district heterogeneity increases, my model suggests primary competition increases.

Finally my expanded model of primary competition incorporates the increasing activities of political actors as part of the electoral environment. Political actors, party organizations, grassroots efforts, political consultants, PAC’s and interest groups have all increased their pre-primary activity. It is my argument that much of this activity is designed to influence the primary process. Specifically they attempt to determine which potential candidates enter the primary. Several studies have documented the increased efforts in recruitment and de-recruitment of congressional candidates (Herrnson 1988 and 2000, Frantzich 1989, Monson 2002). While many types of actors are certainly part of this trend, most evidence points to the party organizations.

Most factors in the opportunity structure and district heterogeneity affect the perceived probability of success. In contrast, the party organizations have focused most of their pre-primary activities on informing and screening potential candidates. The
hypothesized goal of this party activity is to reduce the uncertainty over their strategic calculations. Scholars have built a consistent set of findings that suggest the party organizations have altered their strategies and re-engaged in the primary process. Generally this is viewed as part of the larger process of party adaptation since the 1970s. At the national, state and local level the party organizations have become centralized, professional, stable organizations (Herrnson 1988). Party adaptation and innovation have been found at every level of the party organizations. The national committees have steadily introduced sophisticated service strategies (Franztich 1989), media studios (Herrnson 1986, 1988), and campaign fundraising (Sorauf 1992, 1998), which all suggest strategic allocation of funds designed to produce quality competitive candidates. State organizations have followed close behind the national committees (Gibson et al. 1983, Cotter et al 1984, Bibby 1998). Even at the local level there is clear evidence of party adaptation and revitalization (Gibson et al 1985, Frendreis et al. 1990, Beck et al. 1997). Evidence of county, state and national committee revitalization all points to candidate service activities designed to train, inform, and provide resources to potential and current candidates for office. Frank Sorauf has argued that the rapidly developing national legislative campaigns committees’ primary responsibility is the, “nurturing of its legislative candidates,” (1998, 227). Much of the changes and growth in the parties seems focused on “nurturing” candidates for Congress with the clear

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18 John Aldrich (1995) has developed the most extensive theoretical approach to understanding the massive changes in the structure of the political parties. His research suggests that the party-in-government and the party-as-organization have strategically adapted to modern campaign and have developed a new “party-in-elections” branch. The party-in-elections wing of the party is designed to provide services and training to candidates and potential candidates for office instead of focusing their electoral efforts on mobilizing party identifiers.
implication of producing clear-cut favorites, thus reducing primary competition before it even begins.

A growing set of findings demonstrate that the parties have steadily increased the range of tactics and their use designed to prepare potential candidates for campaigning for Congress. By training, informing, and networking potential candidates, the parties both increase the quality of the candidates but also serve to signal other potential candidates not to run. In addition, preferred potential candidates can rely on the far greater resources and organizational strength of the party organizations. This enables the parties to offer a unique set of resources designed to decrease preferred candidates’ exposure to primary competition and thus produce stronger candidates for the general election. V.O. Key first identified the critical role resources play in affecting the nature of primary competition.19 He argued that the party “leadership core must possess the means to make challenge” of the preferred party candidate “unrewarding” (1956, 124). The modern congressional campaign requires enormous financial and human resources. The parties have altered their tactics to provide essential services to preferred candidates. The parties provide seed money (Biersack, Herrnson and Wilcox 1993). They provide professional staff, training and political consultants (Aldrich 1995). The loop-holes created in the campaign finance laws have

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19 Key was specifically describing the explanation for why some pre-primary convention state systems seemed to work while others did not. While these pre-primary conventions are less important today, the point is still valid in today’s election process. “Party candidates” in the primaries do not hold a commanding place over other “outsider” candidates for nomination unless the party organizations back up their support. Party resources are also necessary to make running against their candidate too much of a risk.
resulted in ever increasing avenues to funnel “soft money” to candidates,\textsuperscript{20} in-kind transfers, national and state level congressional campaign committees, issue ads, voter mobilization efforts (Herrnson 1998). The parties are able to direct PAC resources to candidates (Bibby 1998). In an era of modern media campaigns, the parties have established “in house” radio and television recording studios for their congressional candidates (Herrnson 1988). Service to candidates, or more specifically the promise of service to prospective candidates, is a powerful tool the parties have developed to influence individual’s decision calculus. The parties seek to alter the perceptions of prospective candidates’ prospects against the opposition and also offer tangible ways to reduce the costs of running for office. This service role has provided the party leadership and organizational branches the opportunity to influence the nature of primary competition through their selective disbursement of these resources.

Conventional wisdom states that the party organizations wait for the primary process to select party nominees and then the organizations identify “opportunity” districts and candidates where their resources can make the difference in maintaining or picking up congressional seats. While the above findings only suggest that the parties may have the ability to promise resources for the general election to preferred candidates, other findings clearly point to innovations in party tactics for providing tangible resources \textit{before} the primary. These innovations are designed to strengthen preferred candidates and limit primary competition. As early as 1986, Paul Herrnson reported evidence of increasing recruitment and derecruitment activities designed to

\textsuperscript{20} Obviously, McCain-Feingold will have a limiting impact on soft money, at least until new loop-holes are identified. I am interested in hearing thoughts on how this may affect my research now or in the long run.
identify the “best” candidate to run and then clear the primary field of any potential competition. Herrnson has also reported over a decade’s worth of research chronicling the rise of the legislative campaign committees (1986, 1988, 1998, 2000). The LCC’s according to Herrnson and others (see Sorauf 1998) have focused on developing potential candidates for office and then providing the necessary contacts to effectively campaign for Congress. LCCs hold candidate-training colleges; and provide advising services, contacts with national polling and consultant firms and links to fundraising along with promises of material support during the general election campaign. Herrnson’s research provides the most comprehensive view of the level and variety of pre-primary activities that the parties are engaged in, yet it is not exhaustive.

The ability to formally or informally endorse primary candidates provides another effective tool in limiting primary competition. While fairly infrequent at the congressional level, numerous studies have shown that the limited use of the pre-primary endorsement effectively lowers the level of primary competition especially for state legislative races (Kunkel 1998, Jewell and Olson 1982, Jewell 1982, and Grau 1981) but also gubernatorial primaries (Jewell and Morehouse 1996). Even this riskiest of tactics has been increasingly used in congressional primaries. Nine states’ party organizations have a formal role in the congressional nomination process including pre-primary conventions and eight more states’ organizations perform informal roles (Maisel et al. 1998). As reported in a March 2002 New York Times article, the National Republican Congressional Committee and National Republican Senatorial Committee were for the first time in twenty years endorsing primary candidates in crucial districts.
These endorsements were designed to limit challenges from within the party (Berke, 2002).

Finally, exploratory polling has been developed as a key tool in convincing preferred candidates to run. Perhaps more importantly it has been used to decrease competition by informing other potential candidates of the hopelessness of their chances. Paul Herrnson reports the widespread use of “recruitment surveys to show potential candidates the possibilities of waging competitive races,” (2000, 102). For the 2002 cycle, Quinn Monson’s interviews of LCC staff found that the Hill committees shared exploratory polling data in all Senate races and over 40 competitive House races. Monson found that, “exploratory polling is used for both recruitment and field clearing purposes” (2002, 17). Taken together these findings suggest the political party organizations have developed various means of influencing the level of primary competition through their pre-primary activities.

Political intermediaries like the party campaign committees perceive an opportunity to further their general election strategies and their future policy goals through targeted primary campaign activities. Limiting a favored candidate’s exposure to attack in the primaries is perceived among the political elites as a potential difference maker. Systematically, the negative impact of divisive primary campaigns on general election success is a consistent finding within the literature. In short, the parties seek to limit primary competition when the weakening effects of that competition may make the difference in general election success or failure. The literature has produced mixed empirical results of the relationship between divisive primaries and general election outcomes (Bernstein, 1977). More recently, systematic studies have generally found
that stiff primary competition hurts the eventual nominee’s chance of victory and margin of victory. Whether studying the House (Born 1981), the Senate (Bernstein 1977, Kenny and Rice 1984) or presidential elections (Kenney and Rice 1987), primary competition seems to decrease general election success. 21 Kenny and Rice report that running unopposed in a Senate primary raises the general election vote by 7.5 percent vis-à-vis winning only 50 percent in a contested primary. Both winning the general election and the margin of victory are of primary concern for the party leadership. Thus it is conceivable that the party organizations would attempt to limit divisiveness in targeted districts in order to increase the likelihood of winning the seat and safeguarding it for future elections cycles by removing it from the “marginal” category.

Even absent clear empirical evidence of the relationship between divisive primaries and general election outcomes, the paranoia of congressional incumbents and especially their party leadership is well known. Because party leaders worry that primary divisiveness creates vulnerable nominees, those leaders orchestrate efforts designed to reduce primary competition. I hypothesize that the pre-primary activities described above constitute a concerted effort to strengthen preferred potential candidates and limit the competition they encounter within the party. The nature of modern campaigns has produced an opportunity for party organizations to provide essential information and services to potential candidates for Congress. In the very districts where uncertainty over the general election outcome would increase primary competition, certain actors such as the party organizations attempt to reduce uncertainty

21 Richard Born (1981) found that divisiveness only hurts incumbents while Kenney and Rice (1987) found that the effect of divisiveness is conditional on the level of competition in the opposition’s primary. Regardless the bulk of evidence support the general relationship.
in the primary. The Democratic and Republican legislative campaign committees target such districts so as to depress primary competition and thus increase chances of general election success.

I believe a model of primary competition emerges based on the implications of strategic actor theories of candidacy. The electoral environment, broadly defined above, drives potential candidates’ decisions to run. The relationship is observed in two distinct dynamics. First the many factors such as incumbency, candidate pool size, district and heterogeneity affect the calculation of the P, B, and C terms for each potential candidate. This directly affects the number of candidates that choose to enter a primary. Secondly, forces and political actors affect the uncertainty potential candidates have over their strategic calculations. Uncertainty is tied to potential candidates’ quality and sophistication. Certain institutional factors may increase the number of candidates; however, many of them will be unviable, inexperienced political amateurs. Therefore, these forces generally do not increase the actual competitiveness as measured by the threat these challengers pose to the incumbent. Taken together, these dynamics account for the emergence of primary competition as an elite driven process within the electoral environment.

Conclusion

Throughout American history politicians, parties, and reformers have sought the creation of elections that allow voters real choice over who governs. In theory, the direct primary serves as an institutional electoral structure specifically designed to produce competition. Because the nomination process moved out of party elites’ hands and into voters’ hands, competition over the nomination has the potential to affect the
rest of the electoral and governing process. While this was the ideal set forth by reformers, most observers criticize the modern primary process for its lack of competition. Congressional primaries to an even greater extent than general elections are understood to be incumbent driven. In the vast majority of districts, incumbency advantage leaves little or no chance for challengers. Given this perception, the literature has been almost devoid of analysis regarding the nature of primary competition.

Yet there remains no large-scale systematic study of the true level of congressional primary competition. Consequently little is understood about the forces that influence intra-party competition. To understand these forces, first a systematic empirical test of the stylized accounts of primary competition is required. In the next chapter I report the trends in congressional primary competition from 1972 to 2000 and test the simple model implied by the conventional wisdom explanations. Those findings suggest a non-trivial amount of competition regularly plays out in congressional primaries. Secondly, the stylized account of primary competition fails to explain variation in congressional primaries over time and across districts. This demonstrates the clear need to test a fully specified theory of primary competition that I have detailed above.

The nature of primary competition, I argue, is a direct result of the openness of candidate entry and the candidate-centered, money and information intensive nature of modern campaigns. I hypothesize that a more sophisticated potential candidate pool bases their calculations on a more complex and wider electoral environment. In chapters 4 and 5, I test this model for the 2002 House and the 1998-2000-2002 Senate
primaries. I find that an increasingly complex electoral environment systematically influences the strategic calculations of potential candidates and their uncertainty over those calculations. The need to win votes in this environment is the basic dynamic harnessed by democratic institutions. The ability of the direct primary as an electoral institution to produce effective competition should be understood as a product of the interaction of strategic candidates within the opportunity structure and forces that shape candidate entry.
CHAPTER 3

CONVENTIONAL ACCOUNTS OF CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY COMPETITION: SYSTEMATIC EVIDENCE 1972-2000

Recent theories of congressional elections have focused on the strategic environment surrounding the major party candidates’ campaigns. Incumbent advantage, strategic challengers, national tides, party support, and campaign fundraising have all been studied as key factors in the outcome of elections. Surprisingly this literature has failed to address the endogenous nature of general election campaigns, in that they are constrained by the outcomes of nomination contests. Primaries, especially congressional primaries, have been largely ignored. Presumably this is due to our comfort with assumptions about the lack of competition, dominance of incumbency, and the irrelevance of the political parties themselves. All of these assumptions may in fact fail under systematic scrutiny.

The level of intra-party competition is a critical piece of the electoral process. Conventional wisdom argues that because incumbency is so dominant an influence in congressional elections very little can be gained by investigating the fairly low levels of competition over nominations. The apparent electoral dominance of incumbents suggests that political elites should rarely choose to run for Congress. And when they
do it can be easily explained by incumbency factors. Yet we consistently witness widespread, vibrant and often contentious competition in congressional primaries. The variation and range in primary competition is a puzzle that has received virtually no systematic treatment. I seek to investigate the factors that engender or restrain competition for office through the direct primary system. I develop a baseline or “conventional wisdom” model of primary competition. I find that between 1972-2000, primary competition demonstrates some of the characteristics suggested by the baseline model most scholars assume but that the model fails to account for large differences across districts and time. “Opportunity structure” factors such as incumbency, redistricting and general election prospects are statistically significant factors. Yet these results also show that conventional explanations fail to demonstrate significant substantive impacts on the level of competition. Trends over the period show some overall decline in competition not accounted for by convention wisdom and fail to explain the wide variance in competition especially in open seat races.

Primary competition can be understood as the observable outcome of the pool of potential candidates’ decisions to run for office. My theory, developed in Chapter 2, employs the leverage of existing rational actor theories of candidacy to inform a model of the conditions necessary for intra-party competition. Competition in direct primaries is a function of the strategic decision making of political elites, i.e. potential candidates for Congress. The concept effectively ties the “relevant” electoral environment to elite behavior and the choice set primary voters are presented. It is not enough to consider

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22 Strategic politicians theory (Jacobson and Kernell 1983) provides the most developed theory of how this process works. Quality candidates wait until the sitting incumbent retires or becomes vulnerable due to scandal etc. This point of view expects very little variation in competitiveness in incumbent and challenger primaries. Data reported here directly challenges this expectation.
the number of “official” primary candidates. In terms of the democratic process any theory of competitiveness must also tap into the viability of candidates. Voters, as strategic actors, behave in such a way as to influence the set of elites that will control the government. Electoral competition represents the diversity of choices but also their ability to attract significant support from the population. A single, strategically well-placed, candidate with the resources to garner the vast majority of support, who campaigns against a few “sacrificial lambs”, does not make for a competitive election. Modern campaigns, shaped by increased candidate-centeredness, mass media attention and democratizing reforms in the nomination process, produce the conditions necessary for meaningful primary competition. What has yet to be examined in any large scale systematic empirical study is the effectiveness of the U.S. direct primary system to produce competitive primaries.

**Measuring Primary Competition**

Conceptually, primary competition captures the dispersion of voter support among candidates. As politically stronger, experienced political elites choose to run, the party electorate will become more divided amongst them. This definition of electoral competition is derived directly from the role elections are thought to play in the larger democratic process, as discussed previously (Riker 1982). Electrical competition refers to the threat current officeholders face from potential challengers. The ability of multiple candidates to attract significant levels of voter support indicates

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23 Minimalist liberal interpretations of democracy view voting a necessary mechanism for the selection a ruling elite and NOT as an instrument of the “general will.” Authors such as William Riker (1982) argue that elections are effective if they induce the ruling elite to respond to popular opinions or face removal. As such, the institutional and political structures that create or depress competition among elites are crucial to understanding the nature of democratic outcomes through elections.
the objective “threat” the winner of the election is likely to perceive. The divisiveness
of the election is especially important at the primary stage. Even when there are
multiple candidates, primaries are often characterized as devoid of true competition.24
There are many examples of eight, nine, or even 10 individuals officially running in a
primary, yet a foregone winner ending up with 70 or 80 percent of the vote. Therefore I
propose a measure of competition that is more accurate and sensitive than the traditional
“number of candidates” operationalization.

Voter dispersion amongst candidates is an effective way to tap the divisiveness
of a race and account for hopeless or frivolous candidates on the ballot. Conceptually,
competitiveness refers to the viability of voters’ choices. As more viable candidates
enter a primary, the dispersion of voters become more even. Paul Herrnson and James
Gimpel (1995) employed such a technique in their examination. Their measure is
calculated by the equation:

\[ D = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{K} p_i^2 \]

\( D \) = dispersion of votes
\( p_i \) = the \( i^{th} \) candidate's proportion of votes
\( K \) = the set of all candidates in the primary

24 The quality challenger/strategic candidate findings in the congressional elections literature suggest that
most incumbents are able to ward off serious challengers before the campaign begins. While they may
still face opponents in the primary and general election these are generally low-quality candidates who do
not pose a serious electoral threat (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989; Cox and Katz 1996;
Hetherington et al. 2003).
Because D is dependent on the number of categories (in this case candidates), this measure cannot be compared across primaries.\textsuperscript{25} I provide a correction for the Herrnson and Gimpel measure, the Standardized Divisiveness Score:

\[
SDS = \frac{K}{K-1}(D)
\]

This simple correction standardizes the measure of dispersion based on the number of candidates. The SDS operationalization provides a refined, more precise measure, which is sensitive to the number of candidates and allows for easy comparison across districts. As the votes become evenly dispersed amongst the candidates, the SDS measure goes to 1. For example in a district with two candidates and a 60-40 percent vote, the SDS is .96; whereas in a primary with three candidates and a 60-20-20 percent split the SDS is .84.\textsuperscript{26} My SDS measure accurately calculates the first district as more competitive. Appendix Table A.1 provides several examples of the difference between D and SDS across different competitive circumstances. SDS provides a continuous scale that is highly sensitive to the number and viability of candidates.

\textit{Evidence of Competition 1972-2000}

Armed with effective measures of competitiveness, I compiled official election returns for all Congressional primaries from 1972-2000. This data set of approximately 13,000 Congressional primaries represents the most complete, systematic attempt to measure and analyze Congressional primary outcomes in the literature. While case studies and more limited quantitative analysis have provided glimpses of the level and

\textsuperscript{25} As $K \to \infty$, $\max(D) \to 1.00$. For example if $K=2$ and the votes were evenly dispersed $p_i = .5$, $D = .5$ but if $K=3$ and voters were evenly dispersed $p_i = .33$, $D = .67$.

\textsuperscript{26} Herrnson and Gimpel’s D scores would be .48 and .56 respectively. SDS correctly places the first district as more competitive while the D computation obscures the true relative competitiveness of these two example districts.
nature of primary competition, the results reported below provide a definitive picture over the last thirty years. Expectations of virtually no competition, especially in incumbent races, are not supported; there is also more variance across districts and primaries than conventional accounts would suggest occurs. In addition, over the time period reported, competition has not decreased. In general, competition levels have remained steady and suggest that even in incumbent and challenger primaries there is measurable and systematic variance in competition across races.

(Figures 3.1 & 3.2)

Longitudinal trends are reported in Figures 3.1 and 3.2. Overall, results show only a slight downward trend in the 1980s followed by a sharp increase both in the number of candidates and the average SDS in 1992. Seat/primary type has been understood to be the most influential factor in determining the emergence of competition. Therefore the figures also show the trends between incumbent, challenger and open primaries. This substantiates part of the conventional wisdom; it is clear that open races both attract more candidates and produce elections with more evenly dispersed vote support. While primaries with an incumbent typically range between 1.5 and 2 candidates on average, open seat primaries on average attract between 2.5 and 4 candidates. The SDS trends show an even greater difference. Incumbent primaries are consistently very low compared to challengers and open seats. The open seat districts’ SDS averaged above .50 for every election cycle except 1990 in comparison incumbent primaries never averaged above .30 for any cycle. Overall and within each seat type a slight general downward trend occurs through the 1970s and 1980s for both measures. Surprisingly 1982 redistricting did not produce the expected jump in competition.
However the 1992 results indicate a clear increase in competition. The early 1990s produced the highest levels of competition for the entire period studied but quickly reverted and trended downward toward pre-1992 levels for all types of primaries.

(Tables 3.1 and 3.2)

Considering the longitudinal trends as well as the differences between types of primaries27 several findings immediately call into question stylized accounts of primary competition. In general, the data reported in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that the average primary is not very competitive (less than two candidates and a SDS score that translates into the winner receiving approximately 90 percent of the vote). However, the overall results also provide evidence of substantial variance in competition across districts. In all three timeframes, the standard deviation in the number of candidates is well above one and indicates a larger than expected proportion of primaries do experience some level of competition. As the conventional accounts accurately predicted, moving from incumbent to challenger to open seat primaries substantially increases the expected level of competition. The mean number of candidates range from 2.83 to 3.44 for open seat across the time periods compared to 1.37 to 1.5 for incumbents running for reelection. Contrary to these expectations, incumbent races demonstrate substantial variation in competition across districts, which is marginally lower than the variance observed in open seat primaries. So while the baseline (average number of candidates) is clearly lower for incumbents, there remains substantial variance within each type of primary that requires explanation.

(Table 3.3)

27 The categorical definitions for primary types are outlined later in the chapter and in Appendix Table A.2.
In fact, looking at the distributions in more detail uncovers a clear pattern of competition for substantially larger proportions of primaries than pervious studies suggest. In the three decades studied, the lowest percent of incumbents to attract at least nominal competition in their own parties’ primary is 26 percent and in the 1970s that increases to nearly one-third. Comparing the incumbent primaries to challenger and open seats does support the incumbency advantage literature. Nearly 40 percent of challenger primaries have at least two candidates and between 68 and 77 percent of open seat primaries experience some level of competition. Even this rather blunt indicator of competition at once supports the claim that incumbency is an important factor but also clearly demonstrates that significant variance is left unexplained. In addition, this evidence begins to demonstrate the limitations of looking just at the number of candidates. While the distributions suggest higher proportions of primaries have challengers, it is unclear how competitive these race truly are.

The results of the Standardizes Divisiveness Score calculations reported in Table 3.2 offer a more granular and accurate picture of the level of competition by incorporating the viability of these multiple candidates into the analysis. When considering the differences between the types of primaries, the SDS results indicate that the level of uncertainty (as measured by the variance in competition) is fairly similar for incumbent and open seat potential candidates in the 1970s and 1990s. The exception in the 1980s results suggests that simultaneously incumbents experienced less systematic variance and open seat primaries saw higher variance. While the reasons for this shift are unclear, the empirical evidence form the 1980s aligns more convincingly with conventional wisdom accounts than in the 1970s and 90s. More generally Table 3.2
clearly shows that incumbents experience less competitive primaries but moving a single standard deviation away from the expected SDS translates into a race where within party challengers can attract approximately 20 percent of the vote away from an incumbent. Overall, the results challenge conventional accounts, in that there is measurable competition especially in open seat and challenger races. It is clear incumbency matters but it is not the whole story. So given more competition than first thought, why are some primaries more attractive to competitive candidates while others do not produce multiple choices for voters?

**Testing the Conventional Wisdom**

Popular accounts argue that congressional primaries are generally foregone conclusions. According to this view, incumbents and unstoppable frontrunners in challenger and open seat races are rarely, almost never, vulnerable to defeat. Competitive races, according to these stylized accounts, only occur in a handful of open seat races or when an incumbent is vulnerable due to scandal or other idiosyncratic events. Only under fairly obvious conditions will potential candidates for Congress enter a primary. Candidate entry has long been understood as a strategic decision of ambitious political entrepreneurs. Joseph Schlesinger argued that this ambition is what makes democracies work (1966). In developing his theory of candidate emergence Schlesinger set the stage for scholars to focus in on the critical mechanisms in the “opportunity structure” that affect potential candidates’ entry decisions. The extensions and refinements of Schlesinger’s work concentrated on a baseline set of considerations which signal the probability of success for potential candidates.
One reason why this literature expects few competitive primaries is the dominance of incumbents in Congressional elections (Mayhew 1974; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde 2003). Since 1950, well over 90 percent of House incumbents who run for reelection win and Senate reelection rates are just slightly lower (Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin 2002). Obviously the prospect of running against an entrenched incumbent either at the primary or general election stage greatly reduces the perceived chances of victory. In fact this thinking seems to dominate the conventional wisdom on primaries as purely incumbent driven events. A threshold level probability of winning the election is viewed as a minimum condition for candidates to enter the race and therefore competitive primaries to emerge. This leads to the first testable hypothesis based on the conventional wisdom of primary competition.

\[ H_{1a} : \text{Incumbents’ primaries attract the fewest primary candidates.} \]

\[ H_{1b} : \text{Incumbents’ primaries produce the lowest levels of primary SDS.} \]

When an incumbent runs for reelection, even relatively unsophisticated potential candidates will calculate that their chances of success are so low that entering the race is pointless. Therefore, in the vast majority of primaries there will be no challenge within the incumbent’s party and few if any potential candidates would view the opposition party’s nomination as attractive (given virtually no chance to win in the general election). As a corollary, this suggests that challenger primary competition levels should fall between incumbents and open seat races.

\[ ^{28} \text{This is evident even in the systematic extensions of candidacy theories. Quality challenger studies uniformly argue that the strengthen of a sitting incumbent is crucial to predicting when quality challengers will run for office, see Jacobson and Kernell (1983), Grau (1981), and Rice (1985).} \]
Consistent with Schlesinger’s theory but pre-dating it, V.O. Key (1956) found that potential candidates gravitated to the party with the best chance of winning the general election. In an era of one-partyism, all potential candidates for office move into the dominant party and all vie for the nomination that will assure them general election victory. Sometimes regardless of ideological contradictions, the competitiveness of the party in recent general elections, Key found, drove most or all potential candidates into one party’s primary. A party that dominates a geographical region, such as the Democrats in the post-war South, would experience highly competitive primaries while the Republican would rarely both to hold a primary. More generally, Key’s findings suggest that, as prospects for general election success increase, the intra-party competition for the nomination also increases.

\[ H_{2a} \]: As general election competitiveness increases, the expected number of candidates increases.

\[ H_{2b} \]: As general election competitiveness increases, the expected SDS increases.

This view is consistent with my broader understanding of the primary competition as the aggregate result of individual level strategic actors deciding to run within the given political and institutional context. As noted previously, updated scholarship looking at a broad range of elections has also documented this

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Key argued that the adoption of the direct primary was a result of regionalism in the party system at the turn of the 19th century. According to Key, the hopelessness of Republican candidates in Deep South states made the general election a foregone conclusion and thus did not offer voters a true choice. Key developed a theory of primary competition based on his interpretation of the historical development of the primary. Intra-party competition harnessed by the primary system, according to this view, is a function of the level of inter-party competition.
relationship. It seems Key’s insight into Southern politics equally applies to the “opportunity structure” driving primary competition more generally.

Finally, redistricting has been identified as a key factor in candidate entry. By changing the political, demographic and social make up of a district, redistricting is another indicator of perceived chances of success. The uncertainty associated with newly drawn district lines should increase potential candidates’ willingness to enter the race.

\[ H_{3a} : \text{Newly redrawn districts will increase the expected number of candidates.} \]

\[ H_{3b} : \text{Newly redrawn districts will increase the expected SDS.} \]

These hypotheses are consistent with recent findings at the individual level as well. Marc Hetherington and his colleagues (2003) have found that quality challengers are far more likely to enter a congressional primary early in a redistricting cycle and that political conditions have their greatest impact in election cycles closest to redistricting. At the nomination stage, redistricting is expected to attract more and higher quality candidates thus increasing the aggregate competitiveness of primary races.

The scholarly literature suggests a conventional wisdom of primary campaigns dominated by incumbents with very little interesting or systematic variance. The following multivariate analysis attempts to build on the descriptive findings presented earlier to test three basis relationships widely accepted as comprehensive drivers of primary competitiveness. This “baseline” theory expects a positive relationship between the type of primary race (incumbent, challenger and open) and the level of

\[ \text{30 Inter-party competitiveness has been found to significantly affect primary competition in U.S. elections ranging from state legislative races (Grau 1981) to Congressional races (Jewell and Sigleman 1986; Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). A party’s past electoral success attract more potential candidates and thus increases the likelihood of competitive intra-party nomination contests.} \]
competition. Secondly, as inter-party competitiveness moves from hopeless to evenly matched to dominant, primary competition is expected to increase. The model also includes how recently each congressional district has been redistricted. This controls for any spikes in uncertainty that would lead to more willing candidates entering the primary. Finally, the empirical model controls for party, in order to identify any differences among the types of candidates attracted by the two major party organizations.

**Data and Methods**

My analysis is based on a data set I built from election data archives. The information necessary to develop these measures is readily available for the last thirty years through the *America Votes* series produced by Congressional Quarterly. The coding for both measures of competition as well as all the covariates was taken from this archive. For the multivariate analysis, I separate the data into three panels (N=870, t=5, Nt=4350). This is necessary due to congressional district reapportionment that follows each census. I treat them as separate panels because many states lose/gain districts. But even those that do not, generally must adjust district lines to account for population shifts. Therefore it would be inappropriate to treat the Alabama 6th in 1992 as the same observation as the Alabama 6th in 1990. Redistricting essentially creates all new districts and they must be treated as such. In addition, the panel nature of the three data sets requires time-series cross-sectional regression techniques. For both measures of primary competition I report random effects models, otherwise known as “error component” models, which estimate an individual constant term for each 

...
heteroskedascity inherent in the data structure.\textsuperscript{31} The model specifications are further explained below.

In addition to \textbf{seat type} the multivariate models contain several measures of key baseline and strategic factors hypothesized to influence primary competitiveness. \textbf{Party} is included as an important control factor. For much of the time period under study research shows the Republicans have been more aggressive in providing innovative resources to preferred candidates. By including a dichotomous party measure, I can test the implication that Republicans are less likely to experience intra-party divisiveness. Looking at the longitudinal trends may also allow some insight on the national tides hypothesis.\textsuperscript{32} The model includes a count variable panel for \textbf{the number of election cycles since reapportionment}. This should capture the uncertainty often associated with reapportioned districts. As more elections are held in a district, the partisan and ideological leanings become known quantities for potential candidates. It has also been argued that potential candidates are most likely to challenge incumbents in a redistricting year.

Finally, the \textbf{general election total vote percentage} is included. This is interpreted as an indicator of the baseline inter-party competitiveness. As discussed above, party competitiveness in a district is likely to directly influence potential candidates’ willingness to run. As general election chances increase, more potential candidates may be willing to enter the primary. Simply, the party nomination becomes more valuable as probability of winning the general election increases. In most cases,

\textsuperscript{31} This technique produces an error term with three components adjusting for within and between group error correlations. See Greene (chapter 14, 2000) for a general treatment of random effects models.

\textsuperscript{32} While most studies of voter behavior find little influence of national conditions in congressional elections, Jacobson and Kernell (1983) found that potential candidates time their run for Congress with favorable conditions including presidential approval and economic indicators.
researchers have used past electoral party performance averaged over the three most recent cycles to measure inter-party competitiveness. This is impossible with congressional races due to redistricting. Only the last two elections in a redistricting cycle (five elections) have enough electoral history to measure past performance in this way. As an alternative, I use the percent won in the general election for the same cycle as my measure of inter-party competitiveness. Obviously this occurs after the primary; however, this is less of a causal issue than it first appears. From a purely statistical point of view, the validity can be tested as a proxy measure of recent inter-party competitiveness in the district. I compared the general election percentage with the previous 3-cycle average for 1978, 1980, 1988, 1990, 1998, and 2000. All six elections show a very strong relationship and highly statistically significant correlations ranging from .780 to .860.\textsuperscript{33} Clearly this is a valid proxy measure and thus can be used to indicate the level of the statistical relationship. However, I argue that it can be interpreted in a much more substantive way. Potential candidates for Congress are generally politically astute individuals. Often they have campaign experience and information on voter turnout and party support. These political elites are able to estimate the probability of general election success given the political conditions in their district. I believe the current cycle’s general election result may be a more accurate indicator of the perceived chances of success than the three election average used in the literature. According to the expectations of the conventional wisdom, these four covariates should provide ample leverage to predict and explain the emergence of primary competition.

Multivariate Results TSCS Models

Testing these hypotheses is a fairly straightforward process. As discussed above, I treat each redistricting cycle as a separate data set and regress both my measures of primary competition. I first report the results of the estimation of the number of candidates. For this regression, two fundamental characteristics of the data must be taken into account. First this is count data and therefore it is inappropriate to be estimated with linear regression techniques. Optimally I would estimate a Poisson regression technique but as with most models the Poisson’s equidispersion assumption inappropriately constrains the ratio of the conditional mean to conditional variance. Therefore I estimate a negative binomial regression model, which allows for overdispersion in the dependent variable. The panel nature of the data set presents a second set of considerations for appropriate estimation of the model. This requires that I correct for heteroskedasticity in the error term due to both error correlation over time within a district but also error correlation across districts. A random effects model provides the solution by estimating an additional error component, which estimates individual specific constant terms randomly distributed across cross sectional units, in this case $u_i \sim \beta$. This model produces consistent estimates with efficient standard errors but does present several problems in terms of substantive interpretation.

The results reported in Table 3.4 are for all three panels. It is important to first note the tests for panel effects and equidispersion. The alpha statistic calculates the ratio between the conditional mean and variance. The null hypothesis of equidispersion

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34 J. Scott Long (chapter 8, 1997) and William H. Greene (chapter 19, 2000) both provide discussion of the breakdown in linear regression assumptions when modeling count data.
35 All models and tests were estimated with STATA 8.1.
is rejected at the p< .001 level for all three panels. Clearly the negative binomial is more appropriate than the Poisson distribution. Secondly, the model produces a Likelihood Ratio test of the model fit between a pooled regression and the random effects panel estimates. Again this test is significant across all three panels, demonstrating the need to treat the data as panels. These tests suggest the models have been correctly specified and estimated.

(Table 3.4)

All three models of the number of candidates are statistically significant. The Wald test is essentially a joint probability test for the significance of all the regression coefficients combined. It is fairly unsurprising to find that a model with an Nt = 4350 is statistically significant. Likewise the fact that individual coefficients are statistically significant provides relatively little insight into their actual impact on the number of potential candidates that decide to enter a primary. The non-linear nature of the coefficients prevents straightforward interpretation, but I can glean some interesting findings from a comparison across the panels. First, the statistically significant difference between Democrats and Republicans evident in the 70s and 80s disappears in the 90s panel. The party coefficient is indistinguishable from zero for the 1990s, suggesting that either the Democrats were able to reduce their intra-party competition or the Republicans experienced increased competition.

(Figures 3.3 and 3.4)

As figures 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate, it appears both trends were occurring. The Democrats experienced considerable declines, especially in open seat races. During the same period Republican primaries saw a definite surge in the average number of
candidates. Again this is most notable for open seat races. Absent more detailed
information it is difficult to know, but general trends in Republican emergence in the
South and increased centralized involvement by Democratic national committees most
likely account for these results.

Another temporal trend offers light into the increasingly strategic behavior of
potential candidates. The 1970s is the only panel where the time from last
reapportionment is not statistically significant. In the 80s and 90s the cycle
immediately following redistricting saw the highest number of candidates enter the
primaries. I believe this points to better informed, more strategic potential candidates,
who base their decision to run on an increasingly complex understanding of what
influences their probability for success. Finally, as expected, seat type and inter-party
competitiveness in the general election are consistently significant forces. One obvious
limitation to this analysis is the lack of marginal effects or discrete change estimates.
Due to the random effects model specification there is no existing straightforward
means of calculating these substantive interpretation tools.

I do report one rather blunt technique to evaluate the substantive significance of
the model. By using the regression coefficients I am able to estimate a predicted count
for each observation. In table 3.5, I compare the prediction to the actual observed
number of candidates. This provides a rough measurement of the model’s ability to
accurately predict the number of candidates.

(Table 3.5)

\[ \hat{y}_i = e^{\hat{\beta}x_i} \]

This is easily calculated by the equation, see Greene (2000).
Each row reports the average and standard deviation in predicted count by observed count. For instance, in the 1970s model the average prediction for all the primaries with three observed candidates is 2.03. This means that the model on average under predicts competition by nearly a full candidate. Clearly the model under predicts the number of candidates for primaries that produce the highest level of competition. This is true across all three decades for all races with 3 or more candidates. The model seems to be particularly inaccurate in predicting the highest levels of divisiveness. The average under prediction worsens as the number of observed candidates increased as does the standard deviation. This further suggests that the model does not account for large amounts of systematic variance. I argue that while preliminary and rather blunt, these findings strongly call into question the validity of the baseline model. The baseline seems to fail specifically where it is most important, accounting for high levels of competition. The second measure of competitiveness and its regression further bring into focus the inability of the conventional explanations to account for variance in primary competition.

Due to its continuous nature, the Standardized Divisiveness Score can be regressed using traditional linear estimation. However, the statistical model still must correct for the inefficiencies created by heteroskedasticity in the panel structure of the data. For this reason, I again estimate a random effects model which estimates an individual constant for each $y_{it}$, where the new error component is randomly distributed (Gaussian) across cross sectional units.\(^{37}\) A straightforward application of Generalized Least Squares reported in Greene (2000) produces consistent coefficients with efficient

\[^{37}\] I conducted the Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier test for random effects. For all three models the null of zero variance in the random effects error component is rejected at $p<.001$. 

61
standard errors. Therefore the results reported in Table 3.6 can be interpreted as the linear relationship between changes in the covariates and expected change in SDS.

(Table 3.6)

Several changes over the three panels are consistent with results for the first model. The Democrats experienced significantly more competition in the 70s and 80s. While marginally still statistically significant, by the 1990s the substantive impact of party had greatly reduced and even switched signs, suggesting Republicans experienced slightly more competition on average. The “panel” coefficient again reveals that potential candidates have become more strategic over time. The coefficient gained substantive and statistical significance through the time period. As Figure 1 graphically demonstrated the 1990s especially produced a strong downward trend in competition as the redrawn districts came into political focus. Taken together these two findings suggest that potential candidates in both parties are becoming more strategic and possibly better equipped to make the decision to run.

Statistically the conventional wisdom explanations of incumbency and perceived general election chances are significant across all three panels. This is not too surprising given the amount of data points. However, when considering the substantive impact of these two factors it seems the baseline model produces more of a mixed bag. Across the panels, the substantive impact of inter-party competition appears weak. Moving from a 50 percent performance to running unopposed (100 percent of the general election vote), on average, would increase the expected SDS score by .1 in the 70s and 80s panel and .15 for the 1990s. This is roughly equivalent to the difference between observing a primary vote split 85-15 (SDS = .51) and a vote split 80-20 (SDS
This result challenges the argument that chances at the general election stage have such a large impact on the level of competition. As the example demonstrates, better general election chances produce marginally closer primaries on average but the substantive difference can have little impact on the nature of competition. In contrast the seat type variable clearly impacts the expected SDS across all three panels. Moving from an incumbent’s primary to an open seat primary increases the expected SDS by .476, .460, and .522 respectively. This is a substantively impressive relationship. Again the meaning can best be shown by an example case. In the 1970s, a typical incumbent primary with three candidates may produce election returns of 80-10-10, for an SDS of .51. Holding everything else constant, removing the incumbent would increase the expected SDS by .476. This is equivalent to a vote split of 40-30-30; obviously seat type has a substantial impact on the level of primary competition. These results support the conventional wisdom in that incumbency clearly affects the level of primary competition; however, they also demonstrate the failure of this overly simplistic view to account for significant variance in competition.

While the relationships between these theoretically motivated covariates and competition have been quantified by my analysis, the most important result of the study lies in the models’ lack of predictive power. The average predicted count reported in table 3.5 demonstrates consistent under prediction of candidates. Likewise the GLSE model of SDS does a very poor job in accounting for variance. The overall $R^2$ never reaches .20 for any panel. Clearly the vast majority of variance in SDS cannot be accounted for by these covariates. Additionally, treating each primary as a single observation and averaging the model for a “between groups” estimate of the variance
explained actually produces even less leverage ($0.101 \leq R^2 \leq 0.176$). It is highly unlikely that this is just “random noise,” but in this account there are no other theoretically linked covariates that can aid in explaining the bulk of the variance in the level of competition. The strong assumptions of the conventional view of primaries seem to be totally inappropriate. While baseline factors are unmistakably associated with level of primary competition, they fail to account for the vast majority of differences in competition across districts and over time.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to build a theory of primary competition based on the widely held accounts and stylized notions of Congressional elections. Primary competition, I argue, should be conceived of as the aggregate result of political elites’ strategic decisions. As conditions become more favorable, more potential candidates enter the race and more viable candidates emerge. This dynamic increases the level of competition over the nomination. Conventional interpretations suggest most candidates base their decisions on the status of the incumbent and on their party’s chances in the general election. My analysis demonstrates this is a gross oversimplification. In fact these baseline factors are probably just that; they produce the conditions necessary for competition. Other contextual factors and political actors then affect potential candidates, who identify these necessary conditions.

Potential candidates are more aware of and affected by the larger political context. In the next chapter, I attempt to establish how new forces are increasingly involved in influencing the candidacy decision of potential candidates and thus the level competition. A more complex “opportunity structure” as well as increased activity by
“political intermediaries” (Fowler 1993; Fowler and McClure 1989) influence potential candidates far more than conventional accounts suggest and therefore are critical to understanding the emergence of competitive primaries. Specifically, I argue that the party organizations’ legislative campaign committees have developed strategies and tactics to influence candidate entry decision in targeted races. Most of the evidence suggests that it is in the party’s best interest to limit primary competition in order to present a “protected” preferred candidate for the general election. Pre-primary activity of the parties, designed to affect the strategic calculations of potential candidates, represents a new factor in the political context distinct from the traditional opportunity structure. Primary competition therefore may be systematically depressed in a district where the party organizations have actively engaged one potential candidate and demobilized potential spoilers.

The simplified view of primary competition fails to account for substantively significant variance in primary competition. Clearly other forces are systematically driving the level of competition. These forces are part of the larger election context and may bring leverage to other aspects of the political process. Because the level of competition is a manifestation of all potential candidates’ strategic decisions to run or not, intra-party competition and its antecedents provide new context and leverage in understanding general election outcomes, party and interest group activity, voter engagement in general elections and congressional behavior. As such, expanding our theoretical and empirical investigation of the forces that produce competition over the

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38 Systematic studies have generally found that stiff primary competition hurts the eventual nominee’s chance of victory and margin of victory. Whether studying the House (Born 1981), the Senate (Bernstein 1977, Kenny and Rice 1984) or presidential elections (Kenney and Rice 1987), primary competition seems to decrease general election success.
nomination will provide a more nuanced understanding of the larger electoral process and its outputs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Primaries</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.708</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger Primaries</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat Primaries</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1
Variation in the Number of Candidates In Congressional Primaries by Seat Type
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.387</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.299</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>.328</td>
<td>.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2
Variation in Standardized Divisiveness Score For Congressional Primaries
By Seat Type
### Congressional Primaries 1972-1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seat</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{%i}$</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1277</td>
<td>99.89</td>
<td>910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>32.26</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Congressional Primaries 1982-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seat</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{%i}$</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1392</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>27.84</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Congressional Primaries 1992-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seat</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{%i}$</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1384</td>
<td>99.95</td>
<td>955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>26.37</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3
The Distribution of the Number of Candidates
Table 3.4
Number of Congressional Primary Candidates
Random Effects Negative Binomial Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970s Beta (SE)</th>
<th>1980s Beta (SE)</th>
<th>1990s Beta (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party</strong></td>
<td>.283** (.031)</td>
<td>.174** (.029)</td>
<td>-.038 (.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel</strong></td>
<td>-.001 (.008)</td>
<td>-.032** (.009)</td>
<td>-.071** (.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Election</strong></td>
<td>.010** (.001)</td>
<td>.011** (.001)</td>
<td>.012** (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seat Type</strong></td>
<td>.487** (.017)</td>
<td>.446** (.019)</td>
<td>.515** (.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>13.99 (99.24)</td>
<td>14.40 (51.99)</td>
<td>14.84 (84.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wald test ~ \chi^2</strong></td>
<td>1027.52**</td>
<td>703.93**</td>
<td>1151.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alpha</strong></td>
<td>.066**</td>
<td>.032**</td>
<td>.073**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LR test vs. pooled model</strong></td>
<td>123.6**</td>
<td>26.38**</td>
<td>147.72**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.915</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5
Mean Predicted Number of Congressional Primary Candidates by Observed Number
**Table 3.6**  
Standardized Divisiveness Score For Congressional Primaries  
Generalized Least Squares Random Effects Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970s Beta (SE)</th>
<th>1980s Beta (SE)</th>
<th>1990s Beta (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party</strong></td>
<td>.136** (.015)</td>
<td>.101** (.014)</td>
<td>-.030* (.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel</strong></td>
<td>-.004 (.004)</td>
<td>-.016** (.003)</td>
<td>-.042** (.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Election</strong></td>
<td>.002** (.000)</td>
<td>.002** (.000)</td>
<td>.003** (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seat Type</strong></td>
<td>.238** (.009)</td>
<td>.230** (.009)</td>
<td>.261** (.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-.260** (.028)</td>
<td>-.235** (.028)</td>
<td>-.197** (.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R² Within</strong></td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R² Between</strong></td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R² Overall</strong></td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wald test ~ χ²</strong></td>
<td>744.45**</td>
<td>669.64**</td>
<td>1087.51**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  
** p<.001
Figure 3.1 Average Number of Candidates in Congressional Primaries 1972-2000
Figure 3.2 Average Standardized Divisiveness Score
Congressional Primaries 1972-2000
Figure 3.3 Trends in the Number of Candidates, Democratic Primaries 1972-2000
Figure 3.4 Trends in the Number of Candidates, Republican Primaries 1972-2000
CHAPTER 4

EXPANDING THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT: WHAT POTENTIAL CANDIDATES REALLY WORRIED ABOUT IN THE 2002 CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARIES

Nowhere was the relationship between strategic entry of potential candidates and electoral competition more evident than the Colorado 7th in 2002. The Colorado 7th was a new district added based on the 2000 census. After state party leaders failed to find a compromise, a federal judge chose the state Democrats’ districting plan (Sanko and Ames 2002), creating an open seat in a highly competitive district. Prospective candidates in both parties saw this as an ideal chance to win a congressional seat. In a heated Republican primary, former state party chair Bob Beauprez pulled out a tough victory over three other experienced candidates with 38 percent of the vote. Former state senate Minority Leader Mike Feeley held off District Attorney Dave Thomas 56-44 percent for the Democratic nomination. The general election was the closest in the nation; Beauprez won the seat by 121 votes (Barone and Cohen 2003). The entry of multiple “quality” candidates in the Colorado 7th illustrates the impact of the electoral environment on the level of primary competition. In this chapter, I expand the scope of the “electoral environment” beyond conventional wisdom accounts to include many of the “opportunity structure” factors that have been shown to affect individual level candidate entry decisions.
In congressional elections the voters do not determine the closeness of a race directly. Rather, as the candidate emergence literature (Schlesinger 1966; Black 1972; Maisel and Stone 1997) and the quality challenger thesis (Jacobson and Kernel 1983; Bond et al. 1985; Krasno and Green 1988; Hetherington et al. 2003) have found, strategic candidates determine the competitiveness of general elections. Potential congressional candidates evaluate national conditions (Jacobson 1989), other likely candidates (Black 1972; Jacobson and Kernel 1983), personal qualities (Stone et al. 2004), their party’s competitiveness (Key 1956; Jewell and Sigelman 1986), district demographics (Herrnson and Gimpel, 1995), and incumbent status (Kazee 1983; Jacobson 1987; Stone and Maisel 2003). Aggregated to the district level, all of these individual-level factors account for the emergence of electoral competition or the lack thereof. While this seems a straightforward extension of these works, rarely have researchers examined district-level outcomes as a function of the strategic environment on which potential candidates base their decisions to run.

Moving beyond the over-simplified model implied by conventional accounts, this chapter outlines a theory of congressional primary competition as an elite driven process within the context of an increasingly complex electoral environment. Prospective congressional candidates have become increasingly sophisticated, well-informed and strategic (Fowler 1993; Monson 2002; Stone and Maisel 2003). This suggests that forces in their electoral environment frame their decisions to run and, therefore, influence the level of competition for the party nomination. In a sense the candidates’ campaigns and voters’ behavior only indirectly determine the level of competition. Because potential candidates are more sophisticated, experienced, and
better informed, they are more accurate in assessing the likelihood of being competitive given the conditions in the district.

In contrast to conventional wisdom on primary competition, the implications of extending individual level findings to a district level theory suggests that a far more complicated set of forces influence primary competition. While it is certainly the case that incumbency advantage presents a formidable barrier for most potential candidates, a substantial number of districts still observe some level of competition. In 2002, 30 percent of congressional primaries (250 out of 856) had at least two candidates. In addition, non-trivial variance in the level of competition can be found among those primaries with multiple candidates. Stylized accounts that assume competition is rare and that incumbency and perhaps general election chances fully explain the emergence of primary competition are shown to be overly simplistic. My model of primary competition identifies several forces that have a significant impact on the level of competition for party nomination to Congress. These findings suggest that institutional factors and a growing set of political actors are able to influence the competitiveness of the choices voters have in congressional primaries.

**The Determinants of Candidate Entry**

While stylized accounts of primary competition focus almost exclusively on incumbency (Jacobson 1987; Jacobson and Dimock 1994; Cox and Katz 1996), the candidate emergence literature has developed a more comprehensive view of the factors that potential candidates evaluate. The candidate emergence literature provides a framework to identify the important factors in the political environment that lead to competition and the mechanism by which that environment affects competition.
Theories of candidacy have been framed by Schlesinger’s foundational work on ambition as the inherent human instinct that drives political elites’ behavior (1966). Formalized by Black (1972) as a standard rational actor model, candidacy is seen as a strategy of ambitious political entrepreneurs. Thus, individuals’ ambitions provide the basic theoretical motivation for candidate emergence contingent on the strategic calculations of potential candidates.

Most studies of candidate emergence focus almost entirely on individual-level personal characteristics and perceptions to the exclusion of wider institutional and environmental factors. At the individual level, Linda Fowler (1993) has criticized this myopic understanding. She argued that recruitment theory based on ambition alone removed potential candidates from their political, social and institutional environment and neglected contextual and structural forces. Fowler has stressed the need to re-examine the decision processes of potential candidates, specifically the intermediary role of political elites. Ambition is still the fundamental motivation for candidacy but that motivation interacts with the electoral environment in shaping the decision to run.

At the district level, Fowler’s critique of the candidate emergence literature provides important implications for my theory of congressional primary competition. By expanding the definition of the electoral environment, two distinct mechanisms for primary competition emerge. First, the electoral environment provides the data for potential candidates’ decision calculi. As conditions suggest higher probability of winning, more candidates will enter the primary. Through their influence over potential

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39 For example, traditional qualitative approaches such as Thomas Kazee (1994) as well as the large scale Candidate Emergence Study (Maisel and Stone 1997, Stone and Maisel 2003, Stone et al. 2004) focus on potential candidates self-perceived “winability.” This is also a common theme in gender studies of emergence (see Sanbonmatsu forthcoming; Fox and Lawless 2004).
candidates’ decisions these forces shape the nature of primary competition. While I test a broad range of possible “politically relevant forces” (Hetherington et al. 2003), this does not move beyond the “winability” questions highlighted in candidate emergence studies. A second type of influence revolves around the confidence potential candidates have in their assessments of the electoral environment. The electoral environment does not provide perfect signals for prospective candidates to evaluate; there is always some error in their perceptions. I hypothesize that candidates receive noisy or imperfect signals. Sources of information within the electoral environment may systematically impact potential candidates’ levels of uncertainty. The systematic emergence of primary competition, I hypothesize, may be influenced by potential candidates’ perception of the uncertainty around the likely campaign dynamics.

The ability of potential candidates to obtain information about their district, other potential candidates, and likely support from voting blocks and politically active groups greatly enhances their decision-making. Modern elections have become information intensive events. Political actors such as the party organizations have sought to reduce uncertainty before the primary campaigns begin as a way to shape their outcomes (Aldrich 1995; Herrnson 1988 and 2000; Sorauf 1998; Monson 2002). Absent clarifying information, even the most politically astute and experienced potential candidates are unable to eliminate significant levels of uncertainty over their strategic calculations. Therefore, more primary competition is expected in districts where potential candidates exhibit greater uncertainty over the likely election outcome. Specifically uncertainty leads to more potential candidates entering the race even when the district conditions do not provide much chance of winning.
For example, scholars have found a spike in quality challengers after congressional redistricting (see e.g. Hetherington et al. 2003). This is consistent with an increase in the overall uncertainty potential candidates have about the election. Newly re-drawn districts may weaken incumbents, consolidate previously divided voter blocks or significantly alter the partisan balance of a district. The increased willingness of potential candidates to run in redistricting years suggests that without any electoral history re-drawn districts produce a particularly “noisy” signal. The evidence of an effect on primary competition, however, is at best mixed. Referring back to Figures 4.1 and 4.2, overall a slight general downward trend occurs through the 1970s and 1980s for both measures of primary competition. This is consistent with findings of an increasingly sophisticated and well informed potential candidate pool, suggesting potential candidates are reducing their uncertainty and choosing to run only at the optimal time (Monson 2002; Stone and Maisel 2003; Magleby and Monson 2004). Surprisingly in 1982 and 2002, redistricting did not produce the expected jump in competition. The 1992 redistricting, however, displays a clear increase in competition. The early 1990s produced the highest levels of competition for the entire period studied but quickly reverted to the expected downward trend. The lack of a spike in primary competition in 1982 and 2002 suggests that candidates are increasing their ability to accurately measure the electoral environment. Notwithstanding the competition of the early 1990s, redistricting may no longer produce systematically higher level of uncertainty.

40 This could be due to the idiosyncratic nature of the 1992 cycle. Specifically, the House overdraft scandal produced a spike in open seat and vulnerable incumbents (Jacobson and Dimock 1994).
The relationship between prospective candidates’ uncertainty and primary competition is wholly untested. In addition, it specifies a new potentially powerful mechanism that “political intermediaries” (Fowler 1993) have developed in order to shape primary competition and likely election outcomes. I propose that several other actors may be intentionally influencing potential candidates’ assessments of their electoral environments. The role of uncertainty, I argue, can account for many of the examples in which “sacrificial lambs” or non-serious candidates overwhelmingly lost to a prohibitive favorite. This view of primary competition produces a series of testable hypotheses about the relationship between the electoral environment and the level of primary competition.

First, the stylized accounts of primary competition can be re-interpreted as part of my larger theoretical approach. The hypotheses tested in Chapter 3 are not challenged by my theory of primary competition but the mechanisms that create the relationships are slightly different. Clearly the presence of an incumbent affects potential candidates’ probabilities of winning and greatly reduces their uncertainty over the likely outcomes (McNitt 1982; Kazee 1983; Jacobson 1987; Jacobson and Dimock 1994; Cox and Katz 1996; Stone and Maisel 2003). This extends directly to expectations of primary competitiveness.

\[ H_{1a} \colon \text{Open-seat contests attract the most primary candidates.} \]

\[ H_{1b} \colon \text{Open-seat contests produce the highest levels of primary SDS.} \]

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41 Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data analyzed here, the redistricting hypothesis cannot be tested (all congressional districts had just been re-drawn for the 2002 elections. In addition, the mixed empirical results presented thus far as well as my expectation of growing potential candidate sophistication suggests redistricting may no longer have as significant effect on primary competitiveness. The increased sophistication and information technologies potential candidates have at their disposal would lead me to expect a weakening effect of redistricting on potential candidates’ uncertainty levels.
In addition, my expanded theory hypothesizes a distinction between challenger primaries (the out-of-power party’s nomination contest to challenge the incumbent in the general election) and incumbent primaries.

\[ H_{2a} \] : The expected number of candidates is indistinguishable for challenger and incumbent primaries.

\[ H_{2b} \] : Challenger primaries produce higher SDS than incumbent races.

Challenger primaries often suggest little chance for general election success and therefore few candidates are expected to enter the primary. However, when competition does emerge in a challenger primary, it should be far closer than in incumbent primaries. This is often due to the fact that similarly “low quality” potential candidates are fighting over the challenger party nomination.

The party’s chances at the general election stage are clearly still a relevant factor in potential candidates’ entry decisions. V.O. Key’s finding (1956) of a relationship between inter-party competitiveness and the emergence of intra-party competition is consistent with my model.

\[ H_{3a} \] : As general election competitiveness increases, the expected number of candidates increases.

\[ H_{3b} \] : As general election competitiveness increases, the expected SDS increases.

Inter-party competition provides a clear signal for potential candidates as to their likely chances in the general election and thus the relative attractiveness of running in the primary. In this way a district’s historical general election competitiveness affects potential candidates’ decisions to enter but also provides information to reduce uncertainty over the likely election outcomes.
Beyond incumbency and general election chances, the “opportunity structure”
defined in the candidate emergence literature is expected to extend its influence to
state politics,” defines the opportunities potential candidates have to run for Congress.
A series of both structural/institutional and political forces have been studied as part of
the opportunity structure. First, prospective candidates must evaluate the political,
economic and social make-up of the district, including likely bases of support in the
primary electorate. This of course is conditional on the attractiveness of other likely
candidates but also the relative size of the groups likely to support the candidate. At the
district level, Paul Herrnson and James Gimpel (1995) found that as a district becomes
more heterogeneous primary competition is more likely to develop. This finding is
consistent with my theory of congressional primary competition. Heterogeneous
districts provide strategic candidates potential blocs of voters. If the primary electorate
is likely to be divided amongst many different blocs then the threshold for being
competitive to win the nomination is lowered. In other words, district heterogeneity
opens the opportunity structure to many potential candidates.

\( H_{4a} \): As district heterogeneity increases, the expected number of primary
candidates increases.

\( H_{4b} \): As district heterogeneity increases, the expected SDS increases.

The effects of district heterogeneity may be found only in political parties that are
themselves heterogeneous. Herrnson and Gimpel found that district heterogeneity
increased competition in Democratic primaries but had no effect on Republicans.
Recent efforts by the Republican Party to broaden its appeal to new socio-economic
groups suggest these differences may be diminishing. This is an example of a more
general debate as to the nature of potential candidates vis-à-vis the two major parties.
Several findings suggest that there are significant differences in the “relevant political
forces” that Republican and Democratic potential candidates consider. I believe
analysis at the district level can provide important insight into this relatively
understudied subject. As I outline below, tests of the relative impact of forces in the
opportunity structure and activities of political intermediaries provide further leverage
on the general theory of primary competition.

Individual-level theories of candidacy have consistently found the size of the
candidate pool directly affects the likelihood of a potential candidate entering the
primary. For example, Adams and Squire (1997) found that the size of the candidate
pool positively affected the likelihood of a quality challenger emerging. This can be
extended to district-level expectations over primary competition.

\[ H_{sa} : \text{As the potential candidate pool size increases, the expected number of primary candidates increases.} \]

\[ H_{sb} : \text{As the potential candidate pool size increases, the expected SDS increases.} \]

Larger candidate pools produce more and higher quality candidates, thus producing
more effective competition over the party’s nomination. While a straightforward
extension, it is unclear whether this relationship is actually consistent with my model of
primary competition. More competitors reduce the chances of nomination for any one
potential candidate. From a strategic candidate model, the size of the potential
candidate pool can be viewed as a barrier to entry and may actually depress
competition.
Finally, I consider one potential political intermediary’s role in primary competition. Consistent findings show that the party organizations have become increasingly active in candidate recruitment and training well in advance of the primary season. This strategic and tactical shift in the party organizations, I argue, is part of much larger trends in party adaptation (Aldrich 1995). These efforts are clearly designed to accomplish two goals. First the parties, especially the legislative campaign committees, are pro-actively identifying potential candidates and preparing them to run. Frank Sorauf has argued that the LCCs primary responsibility is the “nurturing of its legislative candidates” (1998, 227). Secondly, the party organizations have attempted to reduce the uncertainty over likely primary and general elections. For recruitment and “field clearing” purposes the parties have begun to inform and provide resources to targeted potential candidates. The party organizations share exploratory polling numbers to recruit and de-recruit candidates (Monson 2002; Magleby and Monson 2004). The parties provide seed money (Biersack, Herrnson and Wilcox 1993); professional staff, training and political consultants (Aldrich 1995); soft money and in-kind transfers (Herrnson 1998) and funnel PAC money (Bibby 1998). Through the information and services the party organization provide to potential candidates, they have become influential intermediaries in the electoral environment.

Party actions are expected to influence the strategic calculi of their preferred candidates as well as any “wild cats” who are considering challenging the party organization’s choice. If these tactics are effective, the districts where party organizations are active in the pre-primary are less likely to experience effective competition over the party’s nomination.
When party organization is active, the expected number of primary candidates = 1.

When party organization is active, the expected SDS = 0.

Party organization endorsements and state party conventions are explicit examples of the party organizations tactics that clearly affects both the strategic calculations of potential candidates but also their uncertainty. National party and LCC endorsements in contested congressional primaries are still rare; however, many of the state party organizations formally or informally endorse candidates for Congress on a regular basis (Maisel et al. 1998). Numerous studies have shown that the use of the pre-primary endorsement effectively lowers the level of primary competition especially for state legislative races (Kunkel 1998; Jewell and Olson 1982; Jewell 1982; and Grau 1981) and gubernatorial primaries (Jewell and Morehouse 1996).

Party organization activities not only objectively strengthen one candidate but also influence the perceived chances for other prospective primary candidates. Attending a LCC candidate training session or acquiring the services of a consultant or polling firm tied to the LCC or state organization serves as a clear signal to other candidates to stay out of the primary. Anecdotal evidence suggests the party organizations have been increasingly effective at targeting districts and anointing “party candidates” before the primary campaigns begin (for instance Berke 2002). More sophisticated, well-informed candidates make candidacy decisions based on an increasingly complex electoral environment. Potential candidates are faced with longer campaigns, more aggressive media, well-financed special interests, and an electorate

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42 In a clear shift in strategy, the NRCC and NRSC began targeted endorsements for primary candidates in districts where easy primaries were seen as critical to the committee’s preferred chances in the general election, according to the New York Times (Berke 2002).
with ever increasing sources of political information, views and analysis. These trends coupled with changing structural factors (e.g. the direct primary itself, voter registration and campaign finance laws) but also political elites working as intermediaries produce a far more challenging electoral environment than potential candidates from 50 or 100 year ago needed to evaluate. The party organization’s expanding tactics illustrate the effects of this environment both on the actual decision calculus of potential candidates and on their levels of uncertainty. Large-scale systematic analyses are required to test these relationships and in turn explain what drives the level of congressional primary competition.

Data and Methods

The analyses reported here are based on 856 congressional primaries from 2002.\textsuperscript{43} The data for the 2002 congressional primaries comes from a variety of sources. Appendix Table A.3 provides an overview of the measurement specification and sources for each of the explanatory variables. Before moving to the estimation techniques, I must briefly address several key operationalization issues. My measure of district heterogeneity is based on the technique designed to capture district population diversity as a source for voting blocs. The index is taken from Herrnson and Gimpel (1995) whose formula is:

\[ A_w = 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{V} \sum_{k=1}^{P_j} \frac{Y_{kj}^2}{P_j} \]

where:

- \( V \) = number of variables
- \( P_j \) = number of categories of the \( j^{th} \) variable
- \( Y_{kj} \) = proportion of population within the \( k^{th} \) category for the \( j^{th} \) variable

\textsuperscript{43} Only Louisiana’s seven congressional districts were omitted due to their unique primary run off system.
For the calculation of the index, I included race (White, African American, Hispanic and other), the urban rural split, and job type (white, blue, and grey collar). As the index score increases, a district can be interpreted to be more evenly dispersed (or more heterogeneous) among these politically salient populations. In this way, a single measure provides a good indicator of a district’s ability to support multiple candidates.

Secondly, I employ the districts’ party vote share in the 2000 presidential election as a measure of inter-party competitiveness. While a three-election average of the congressional general election is optimal, due to the changing of district lines in the 2001 redistricting, this is not advisable. Instead I employ the same information readily available to potential candidates in 2002. After each state adopted new district boundaries, the presidential vote for the new district was commonly available and is often used as a indicator of partisan strength (for example Cook’s Political Report). This measure is designed to tap the attractiveness of the nomination in terms of potential candidates’ perceived general election chances.

The size of the candidate pool is another factor in the electoral environment which requires careful measurement. First I include the ratio of the number of seats in the state legislature to the number of congressional districts in the state. As a state-level measure, this is designed to capture the average number of experienced politicians who could run for Congress in a district. However, recent trends to limit the careers of state legislators have, in some states, produced a substantial increase in experienced potential candidates looking for attractive races. I therefore include a dummy for state legislative term limits that had taken effect by 2002, meaning at least one cohort of state legislators was unable to run for reelection to the state assembly.
Finally, data measuring district or state level party activity across 870 primaries is not readily available. Therefore I employ an admittedly rough indicator of the ability of state organizations to influence potential candidates’ decisions to run. As discussed above many state party organizations, either through conventions or their legal role in the primary process, endorse congressional candidates. Some state party organizations have adopted informal procedures within the state committees to endorse primary candidates, while the remaining states’ parties still play no pre-primary role in candidate selection. I use this classification to measure the role of party organizations as influential intermediaries and sources of information for potential candidates. Obviously this is a less than optimal measure but does allow for initial testing of the hypotheses.

The multivariate models estimate the effects of the electoral environment on two different measures of primary competition. Due to the data generating process for both measures, traditional linear regression techniques are inappropriate. A linear model produces inefficient, inconsistent and biased estimates for count data (Long 1997; Long and Freese 2003). Therefore, I estimate a Poisson regression model for the number of candidates in each district. Poisson maximum likelihood regression estimates the conditional impact of covariates on a dependent variable given the specific data generating process (i.e., the non-normal probability density function of the dependent variable). Model diagnostics tests confirm that this most basic count model is the
correct specification.\textsuperscript{44} This suggests a Poisson regression model produces consistent estimates with unbiased standard errors (Cameron and Trivedi 1986).

The standardized divisiveness score is internally continuous and bounded at 0,1. The bounded nature does not necessarily prevent the use of ordinary least squares; however, the substantial censoring of SDS at the lower limit produces heterogeneity in the error terms that must be corrected (Long 1997). In this case, 606 observations out of 856 are censored at 0. In these observations, only 1 or no candidate ran thus producing SDS=0. The highly skewed nature of the distribution prevents consistent estimates from a linear model. Tobit regression model addresses the inconsistent estimates of the OLS model by nesting a probit model for censored observations within the linear estimate of the observed values of y (Sigelman and Zeng 2000).\textsuperscript{45} Thus the model combines the information of the probability of being censored with the linear relationship of uncensored data to estimate the influence of covariates on y. The Tobit regression estimates the probability of being censored as well as consistent linear coefficients on the latent, uncensored continuous dependent variable. This allows for easy interpretation of the relationship between electoral environmental factors and the intensity of competition as measured by the SDS.

\textsuperscript{44} For all three samples estimated, the ratio of the conditional variance to the conditional mean did not demonstrate overdispersion in the data. I failed to reject the null hypothesis, alpha = 0, at the p<.05 level for each model (see Long and Freese 2003).

\textsuperscript{45} Sigelman and Zeng (2000) caution against the over use of Tobit models where censoring has not actually occurred. In my application, the data generating process clearly incorporates a censoring function. Once the probability distribution of the level of competition reaches a threshold point the observed value will be censored at zero, the absence of competition. The Tobit model is the most efficient model by explicitly nesting the probability of competition emerging within the estimate of the level of competition (i.e. Tobit models the threshold point within the distribution of the level of competition).
Explaining Competition in the 2002 House Primaries

Throughout my analysis I again report results both in terms of the number of candidates and Standardized Divisiveness Score developed in chapter 3. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 update the longitudinal trends in indicators of competitiveness over the time period to include 1972-2002. Trends are graphed for all primary races, and incumbent, challenger and open primaries separately. The inclusion of the 2002 data continues to support the conventional wisdom of incumbent dominance; it is clear that open races both attract more candidates and produce elections with more evenly dispersed vote support.

(Figures 4.1 & 4.2)

In 2002, primaries with an incumbent averaged less than 1.5 candidates; in contrast, open seat primaries on average attract nearly 3.5 candidates. The SDS trends show an even greater difference. Incumbent primary divisiveness is consistently very low compared to challenger and open seat races. The open seat districts’ SDS, in 2002, averaged above .64. As expected, the 2002 incumbent primaries averaged far lower competition scores (.14 SDS). Incumbent and opens seat trends matched 1992’s spike in competition after nationwide district reapportionment and redistricting based on the 2000 census. However, due to a drop in challenger primary competitiveness, overall primary competition did not significantly increase in 2002. Again, while generally supportive of the stylized notions of congressional primaries, the trend analysis further

\[ SDS = \frac{K}{K-1} \left( 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{K} p_i^2 \right) \]

where \( K \) is the set of all candidates, \( p \) is the proportion of votes for each candidate.
suggests that there is more going on than incumbency advantage alone can account for in explaining when competition will emerge.

Similar to the trend analysis in Chapter 3, further examination of the distribution of primary races in 2002 clearly challenges a myopic view of the relevant electoral structure. At the same time these results point to a greater degree of competition and variance across primaries than previous theories would expect. Table 4.1 reports the average number of candidates and the average SDS by the incumbent status of the primary.

(Tables 4.1 and 4.2)

Consistent with conventional accounts, open-seat races averaged significantly higher competition than incumbent or challenger races. Open seats also averaged far higher levels of voter dispersion among the candidates as measured by SDS. However, two results in Table 4.1 suggest that the incumbency dominance view does not tell the whole story. First, challenger primaries on average include fewer candidates than incumbent primaries. This difference is significant at the p<.01 level. However, challenger primaries resulted in a statistically higher mean SDS than incumbent primaries (p<.05). This suggests that on average fewer potential candidates are willing to run for the nomination of the out party than are willing to run in the incumbent’s own primary. But when there is competition in the challenger primary, the divisiveness tends to be higher than the expected competition for the incumbent. I believe two dynamics may account for this. Incumbents may tend to draw more amateur and ideologically extreme challengers within their own primaries, thus driving down the average SDS, while simultaneously out-of-power primaries attract similarly
experienced and qualified candidates and thus drive up the SDS. This difference is also indicated in Table 4.2, which reports the distribution of primaries in terms of the number of candidates they attract. The percent of incumbent and challenger primaries that have at least two candidates (SDS > 0) is almost identical, 25 percent for incumbent and 22.5 percent for challengers. After accounting for the number of candidates, the SDS results clearly demonstrate that challengers are producing statistically significantly greater competition.

In addition, Table 4.1 demonstrates that regardless of primary type, there is non-trivial variance in the level of competition. Consistent with conventional expectations, the variance in the number of candidates monotonically decreases from open seat to challenger to incumbent primaries. While this is also true of the more sensitive SDS measure of competition, the difference is substantively far less. In other words, challenger primaries display similar amounts of variance in SDS to open-seat races, and incumbent primaries demonstrate only slightly less. For incumbent primaries, moving from -1Sd to +1Sd yields from SDS = 0 to SDS = .431, nearly half the range of the measure. This indicates that wide differences exist across districts even within incumbent and challenger primary types. Taken together the substantial variance in primary competition and the trends in average competition across different incumbency status primaries clearly call into question the stylized accounts of primary competition. In order to test the full model of primary competition, I move to multivariate analyses.

(Table 4.3)

Table 4.3 reports the results of the Poisson regression model of the number of candidates in the 2002 congressional primaries. The model is estimated for all
primaries and then separately for Republican and Democratic primaries. In all three cases the model performs well and is statistically significant. In terms of standard information criteria, the model seems a substantial improvement over the null. Both the Akaike Information Criterion (Akaike 1973) and Bayesian Information Criterion (Raftery 1996) model fit statistics compare nested models against the non-nested regression.\textsuperscript{47} As AIC goes to zero the model fit increases. The more negative BIC statistic the better model fit. This approach is similar to the likelihood ratio test reported and suggests a robust model. Finally I report Cragg and Ulher’s $R^2$ which norms the maximum likelihood $R^2$ by its maximum. This provides a model fit directly comparable to linear proportional reduction in error measures.\textsuperscript{48} Across all three Poisson regressions, Cragg and Ulher’s $R^2$ ranges from .293 to .311 establishing that the model accounts for substantial variance in the number of candidates.

As discussed above, the number of candidates is a rather blunt measure of election competitiveness. Even so several hypotheses are supported. Inter-party competitiveness is statistically significant overall and within each of the parties, as are dummies for open-seat races and a control for Southern primaries. Also, district heterogeneity and primary law openness significantly increase the expected number of candidates in Democratic primaries while the size of the candidate pool increases the number of candidates in Republican primaries. These results provide clear evidence

\textsuperscript{47} Following Akaike (1973), $\text{AIC} = \left\{ -2 \ln \hat{L}(M_k) + 2P \right\}/N$ where $\hat{L}(M_k)$ is the likelihood of the model and $P$ is the number of parameters. Following Raftery’s derivation of the Bayesian criteria (1996), $\text{BIC} = D(M_k) - df_k \ln N$, where $df_k$ is the degrees of freedom associated with the deviance in the model.

\textsuperscript{48} See Long and Freese (2003, chapter 3) for further discussion of various model fit statistics for categorical dependent variables.
that electoral environment factors, controlling for incumbency, systematically impact the emergence of primary competition.

In fact, the finding that the dummy for challenger primaries is not statistically significant refutes the conventional view of primary competition but is consistent with the hypotheses implied by my model. Controlling for other forces in the strategic environment, there is no statistically significant difference in the expected number of candidates in incumbent versus challenger primaries. The support for hypothesis 2 calls into question the convention that the type of primary determines primary competition. Alternatively, the null finding can be interpreted as evidence of the inability of the number-of-candidates measure of primary competition to accurately capture the true level of competition. Comparing the Poisson model results to those of the SDS model provides further basis for employing a more sensitive measure of electoral competition. In addition, the SDS model allows for a more substantive interpretation of the relationships between the electoral environment and primary competition.

(Table 4.4)

Similar to the Poisson regression, Table 4.4 reports the LR test, AIC, and BIC test for model fit against the nested-models. The model is statistically significant and the information criteria reports strong improvement. Because the model actually estimates the linear relationship between the Xs and a latent y*, any proportional reduction in error measure must also account for the underlying data generating process. McKelvey and Zavonia’s $R^2$ specifically measures variance explained in the latent y* (Long and Freese 2003, pp.92). The $R^2$ ranges from .185 for all primaries to .245 for the Democratic sub-sample. The model does not account for a much variance as the
Poisson model but does provide far more leverage on the substantive relationships between the electoral environment and an accurate, sensitive measure of competition.

For the complete set of observations, several relationships become more focused. Controls for southern primaries and the openness of the primary are significant in the expected direction. In addition to the positive relationship with inter-party competitiveness and open seat races, both the candidate pool size and the challenger dummy variable are positively related to the SDS. On average we would expect a .333 increase in SDS for challenger primaries. While still relatively small compared to the expected difference in open seat races (1.198), the SDS model clearly supports the hypothesis that challenger primaries may not produce more candidates due to potential candidates’ unwillingness to run against incumbents in the general election. But when there are at least two candidates, they are typically competitive with one another. Similarly the SDS model results demonstrate that candidate pool size does drive competition; however, its effect is relatively small. A 10 to 1 ratio of state legislative seats to congressional districts results in only a .04 increase in the expected SDS. In general, these results provide strong evidence that opportunity structure forces systematically influences the level of congressional primary competition.

Party activity measured in terms of the role of the state organization in pre-primary endorsements strongly supports the hypothesis that political elites and organizations may be systematically influencing the emergence of primary competition. Moving from a state where the party has no ability to endorse primary candidates to a state with formal conventions or legal roles decreases the expected SDS by .272, equivalent to one full standard deviation. Controlling for incumbency and other
“opportunity structure” forces, these results demonstrate that party activity or even just the threat of party activity can greatly diminish intra-party competition. Table 4.5 summarizes the expected relationships and the results across all six models. The full observation model results support a theory of primary competition as an extension of the effects of the electoral environment on potential candidates’ strategic decisions to enter the primary.

Finally, what also emerges is a clear pattern of differences between Republican and Democratic primary competition. It seems that Republicans are affected systematically by “opportunity structure” factors such as candidate pool size. Both term limits and increases in the candidate pool size significantly increase the expected SDS for Republicans but have no statistical effect on Democrats. More state house Republicans seem to want to move up than similarly situated Democrats leading to greater intra-party competition. Conversely Hypothesis 4 (district heterogeneity) is supported only by the analysis of the Democratic primaries. This is consistent with Herrnson and Gimpel’s (1995) findings. The interpretation suggests that Democrats are more likely to run and produce more competitive primaries in districts with diverse and evenly matched potential voting blocs. Republicans do not view this as critical to their electoral chances and, therefore, are not affected by district heterogeneity.

Surprisingly, only the Democratic primaries are significantly influenced by party activity. Most studies of party organizations have found a consistent Republican advantage in organization, money, and activity levels. Even so, potential Democratic candidates seem far more affected by their party’s ability to endorse primary candidates. Formal party roles in the nomination process dramatically reduce the predicted number
of candidates and the expected SDS. In fact moving from no role to the formal
collection/legal endorsement states decreases expected SDS by .560, over half the
range of the measure and nearly two full standard deviations. At the same time the
effect on Republicans is indistinguishable from zero. Clearly this counter intuitive
finding and the other differences between Democratic and Republican primaries present
new questions about the electoral environment and how it affects the emergence of
competition. The differences between Republicans and Democrats in the 2002
primaries require further testing by expanding the analysis to include more political
intermediaries’ activities and more election cycles. In future research, better measures
across more election cycles will provide even greater leverage on the relationship
between the electoral environment and primary competition and the substantive
differences between the political parties’ potential candidates.

Conclusion

Conventional wisdom finds that congressional primary competition is rare due
to incumbency advantage and the lack of competitive two-party districts. However,
only anecdotal and case study evidence has been rendered to support this view few, if
any, large-scale studies of congressional primaries exist. Building on Chapter 3’s
comprehensive empirical view of thirty years of congressional primary data, I have
expanded both the theoretical and empirical model of intra-party competitiveness. In
this chapter, I developed a model of primary competition as the aggregate result of
potential candidates’ strategic entry calculus, shaped by a broadly defined electoral
environment. The structural and political forces that shape potential candidates’
decisions and their uncertainty over those decisions, I argue, drive district-level
electoral competition. This model represents a novel synthesis of district level findings with extensions of individual level theories of candidate emergence and the increasing role of political intermediaries. Analysis of 856 congressional primaries in 2002 provides substantial leverage in testing the hypotheses implied by my model of primary competition. The findings largely support the claim that a broad set of electoral environmental factors affects the level of competition in congressional elections through their systematic impact on potential candidates’ decisions to run.

My findings suggest that voters have very little control over the level of electoral competition, especially in the primaries. Obviously this statement has normative implications. If William Riker is correct and democracy’s power is purely negative power constraining the policies of the ruling elites through threat of removal, then the primary process generally fails to achieve this goal. More problematic, the emergence of effective competition is only indirectly tied to voter behavior. Instead electoral competition emerges only when multiple elites (prospective candidates) determine a priori that their chances for success are high enough or when uncertainty over their chances obscures the true likely outcome. The electoral environment determines these calculations and, as my results demonstrate, institutional structures and political forces heavily influence potential candidates’ perceptions, almost independent of voters. Unlike the conventional accounts of primary competition which merely bemoan incumbency advantage and the lack of true choices, my results present a far greater challenge. Schlesinger argued that, “representative government above all depends on a supply of men so driven; the desire for election and more important, for reelection becomes the electorate’s restraint upon its public officials” (1966, 2). Can
electoral competition that is so clearly driven by the a priori strategic calculations of potential candidates still produce their intended restraint on our elected officials?

The results presented here have clear implications for our understanding of candidate emergence, voter behavior and the effectiveness of our election process. In large part these results support much of the findings of the candidate emergence and strategic politician theories at the individual level. Case study approaches such as Linda Fowler’s work and limited surveys of potential candidates such as Maisel and Stone provide the individual level insight into the thinking and logic of potential candidates. The strength of my approach is to tie elite behavior and the forces that influence them to voters and democratic outcomes. Both approaches can be leveraged to identify the relevant electoral environment potential candidates evaluate. At the aggregate (primary) level, the effects of these environmental forces can be systematically modeled and their effects on outcomes made clearer. Another advantage of the aggregate, electoral competition, approach is the relative transportability of the model. In the next chapter, I adapt the model to a new representative institution, the U.S. Senate.
Figure 4.1 Average Number of Candidates in Congressional Primaries 1972-2002
Figure 4.2 Average Standardized Divisiveness Score
Congressional Primaries 1972-2002
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>SDS</th>
</tr>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>.849</td>
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<td>3.49</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.244</td>
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Table 4.1
Variation in 2002 Congressional Primary Competition by Incumbency Status
Table 4.2
Distribution of the Number of Candidates In 2002 Congressional Primaries by Incumbency Status

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
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<th>Challenger</th>
<th></th>
<th>Open Seat</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i}$%</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i}$%</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i}$%</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i}$%</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td>210</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>(.004)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.110)</td>
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<td>.112*</td>
<td>.073</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.053)</td>
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<td>(.059)</td>
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<td>.003*</td>
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<td>(.002)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.005</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.002)</td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(.118)</td>
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<td>1.11**</td>
<td>1.10**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>277.47**</td>
<td>148.34**</td>
<td>142.67**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.299</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>428</td>
<td>428</td>
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</table>

Table 4.3
Number of Congressional Primary Candidates in 2002 Poisson Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Primaries</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Heterogeneity</strong></td>
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<td>-.168</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(.736)</td>
<td>(.654)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2000 Presidential Vote</strong></td>
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<td>.024**</td>
<td>.022**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.004)</td>
<td>(.006)</td>
<td>(.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td>-.032**</td>
<td>-.370*</td>
<td>-.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.105)</td>
<td>(.153)</td>
<td>(.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Law Openness</strong></td>
<td>.107*</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.049)</td>
<td>(.071)</td>
<td>(.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Role in Nomination</strong></td>
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<td>-.280**</td>
<td>-.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.057)</td>
<td>(.086)</td>
<td>(.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.389**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.096)</td>
<td>(.138)</td>
<td>(.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.002</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(.002)</td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td>(.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Term Limits x Candidate Pool Size</strong></td>
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<td>.004</td>
<td>-.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td>(.005)</td>
<td>(.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenger</strong></td>
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<td>.227</td>
<td>.625**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.106)</td>
<td>(.160)</td>
<td>(.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Seat</strong></td>
<td>1.198**</td>
<td>1.216**</td>
<td>1.245**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.123)</td>
<td>(.181)</td>
<td>(.165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
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<td>-2.440**</td>
<td>-1.917**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.290)</td>
<td>(.548)</td>
<td>(.358)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>137.9**</td>
<td>90.48**</td>
<td>79.40**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| McKelvey and Zavonia’s \( R^2 \) | .185 | .245 | .211 |
| AIC                            | 1.402 | 1.290 | 1.487 |
| BIC                            | -4522.757 | -1992.661 | -1908.315 |
| \( \chi^2 \)                  | 606 censored obs | 315 censored obs. | 291 censored obs. |

Table 4.4
Standardized Divisiveness Score  In the 2002 Congressional Primaries
Tobit Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *\( p<.05 \), **\( p<.01 \) (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesized Relationship</th>
<th>Expected Sign</th>
<th>All Primaries</th>
<th>Findings Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open seats and SDS</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seats and NC</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger primaries and SDS</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Null</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger primaries and NC</td>
<td>No relationship</td>
<td>No relationship</td>
<td>No relationship</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Election Competitiveness and SDS</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Election Competitiveness and NC</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Heterogeneity and SDS</td>
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<td>Null</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Heterogeneity and SDS</td>
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<td>Null</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Null</td>
</tr>
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<td>Candidate Pool Size and SDS</td>
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<td>Null</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size and NC</td>
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<td>Null</td>
<td>Null</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party Activity and SDS</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Activity and NC</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Null</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5
Summary of Hypotheses and Findings The Electoral Environment Model of Primary Competition, Standardized Divisiveness Score and Number of Candidates
CHAPTER 5

PRIMARY COMPETITION IN THE U.S. SENATE 1998-2002

Compared to House elections very little is known about Senate primaries. Few conclusions can be drawn from the small amount of systematic data on the Senate. One consistent finding implies Senate elections are fundamentally different than their House counterparts. Often scholars report divergent findings when comparing the House and Senate (for example Fenno 1982; Krasno 1994). Senate elections are generally viewed as more visible, intense campaigns, tied more closely to national trends and policies than House races. These differences, according to most interpretations, directly impact Senators’ behavior, the nature of Senate elections and their outcomes. The purpose of this chapter is first to evaluate the evidence of chamber electoral differences at the direct primary level. Secondly I apply my model of primary competition as the aggregate result of strategic candidate decision making to the Senate. I find that Senate primaries are only slightly more competitive than the House. Additionally, the electoral environment exhibits a direct and substantial influence over the strategic decision of potential candidates similar to the House findings. The results support a view of Senate elections as elite driven events. Specifically, incumbent status, state characteristics and the activity of the state party organizations significantly affect candidate entry and thus the level of competition in Senate primaries.
A priori, Senate primaries are expected to be far more competitive than their House counterparts. The literature has consistently found Senate incumbents to be far more likely to experience close general elections (Hibbing and Brandes 1983; Abramowitz 1988; Squire 1989); hard fought, intense campaigns (Westlye 1983, 1991; Krasno 1994); and significantly higher probability of defeat (Jacobson 1992). In the post war era, 12.5 percent of Senate incumbents who ran for reelection lost (Ornstien, Mann and Malbin 2000). Over the same period House incumbents lost only 8 percent of the time. Senators have consistently lost at a higher rate than House members but the patterns of incumbent defeat have changed dramatically over time. From 1946 to 1978 only a handful of election cycles produced successful challengers. But in those years when challengers did win, an extremely high percentage of challengers won.49 Since 1978 a far more consistent pattern has emerged where a few Senate incumbents have lost reelection bids in each cycle. On average 17 percent of Senate incumbents lost reelection compared to 6 percent in the House during this period (1978-1998). A far higher proportion of Senators are losing reelection bids, but even this obscures the perceived vulnerability among Senate incumbents.

From the perspective of both incumbents and potential challengers, vulnerability can best be captured by the incumbent’s performance in the last general election (Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Krasno and Green 1988; Stewart III 1989; Kranso 1994). Applying the standard 60 percent threshold for marginal incumbents to the House and Senate provides even stronger evidence of the higher vulnerability of Senators. In the

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49 During this time period, it appears incumbents were vulnerable due to national cycles or anti-incumbency sentiments throughout the country. Several years proved very dangerous for incumbents before 1978; these included 1946 (13 lost), 1948 (10), 1958 (10), 1966 (4), and 1974 (4). Since 1978 every cycle has produced losing incumbents but in far smaller numbers.
period 1956-1998 over 70 percent of House incumbents met this threshold. In contrast only 47 percent of Senate incumbents won with over 60 percent of the vote. This translates into a majority of Senate incumbents having electoral targets on their backs. Potential challengers in Senate elections are more likely to enter the race due to perceived electoral weaknesses, which are far more common among Senators than their House colleagues. In addition to their relative weakness, the length of term and relatively few Senate seats produce greater pressure on the pool of potential Senate challengers to enter the race almost regardless of other electoral environment factors. However, many factors such as ballooning campaign costs and likelihood of experienced primary competition may counteract these influences. An empirical question to be addressed is whether the structure of Senate elections and incumbent vulnerability does in fact induce higher levels of competition at the primary stage.

**Evidence of Vibrant Primary Competition**

For the purposes of analyzing Senate primary competition, I employ the same indicators as reported in the analysis of the House. Both the number of candidates and the Standardized Divisiveness Score for each primary are considered. I quickly focus the analysis on the SDS results due to that measure’s ability to compare a fine-grained indicator of competitiveness across elections with different numbers of candidates. This becomes especially important for Senate primaries where nearly half the races have between two and five candidates. Similar to the House analysis, the first step is to provide a picture of the average level of primary competition and the variance of

\[ \text{SDS} = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \sum_{i=1}^{K} p_i^2\right) \]

produces the largest effect for primaries with relatively few candidates. Since Senate primaries rarely exceed five candidates, unlike the House, the SDS correction even greater empirical leverage.
competition across states. In order to include observations for all Senate seats, I report findings based on all 1998, 2000, and 2002 Senate primaries.\textsuperscript{51} In total, 196 Senate primaries are included in the analysis.

(Table 5.1)

As reported in Table 5.1, over 50 percent of the 196 primaries studied have nominal competition, that is 2 or more candidates received at least one vote. Clearly the Senate attracts potential candidates more often than claimed by stylized accounts of the Congress in general. However, competition is not ubiquitous in Senate primaries and varies systematically. Incumbency status produces the first obvious relationship to level of primary competition. Only 33.3 percent of primaries that include an incumbent have at least 2 candidates. Compared to challenger primaries (65.5 percent) and open seats (75 percent), incumbents rarely face intra-party challengers. Looking at “crowded races” reinforces the important differences based on incumbency status. As expected a far higher percentage of open seat races have five or more candidates. Interestingly, this is also true to a lesser extent for challenger primaries. These results provide initial evidence of the critical role of incumbency status within the electoral environment.

(Table 5.2)

Across the three election cycles reported here, Senate primaries produced on average higher competition than did the House primaries and a substantial amount of

\textsuperscript{51} Louisiana’s seats (up in 1998 and 2002) are the only excluded primaries. Senate elections are subject to the same single primary/run-off system as House races in Louisiana and therefore are unable to be compared with the other 98 Senate races. In addition, two special general elections are not included in the analysis. After Paul Coverdell’s death in 2000, Zell Miller was appointed to fill the seat until the fall elections, which he won. The other excluded special election occurred in Missouri in 2002. Jean Carnahan was appointed to her husband’s seat after the 2000 general election. In 2002 she ran to complete the term but lost to Republican Jim Talent. Due to their unique circumstances, the primaries for these special Senate elections are not included in the analysis.
variation. This result is consistent within each of the incumbency status categories. Distribution characteristics for both the number of candidates and the SDS measure of competitiveness reinforce this view. As expected the average number of candidates increases monotonically from incumbent to open seat primaries. Just as informative, the variance in the number of candidates also increases from incumbent to challenger to open seat primaries. While a bit less clear to interpret, the SDS distributions produce further evidence of relatively high levels in primary competition as well as wide variance across observations. The standardized divisiveness score results show that challenger primaries are slightly more competitive than open seats. One possible explanation for this result centers around the increased pressure large candidate pools produce on the primary process. This hypothesis is further developed in the multivariate analysis. In general, the SDS results suggest challenger and open seat primaries are on average highly competitive. Two conclusions can be drawn. First, Senate primaries produce measurable and substantively important competition. In addition, there is wide variation in the level of competition even within incumbency status categories. The general theory of primary competition I have proposed presents a strong theoretical account to explain the variance in Senate primary competition beyond incumbency status. Before extending my theory of primary competition to the Senate, it is instructive to consider the theories and empirical evidence of why Senate incumbents are more vulnerable.

**Theories of Senate Incumbent Vulnerability**

Senate incumbents are hardly an endangered species, yet in comparison to their House counterparts they are far more likely to face electoral threats. Senate
incumbents’ relative vulnerability has dominated the previous literature on Senate elections. While relatively understudied, Senate election research has produced a consistent set of findings, which clearly establishes challenger quality as the principal factor influencing Senate incumbents’ success (Krasno 1994; Westlye 1983, 1991; Hinckley 1980; Abramowitz 1988; Stewart III 1989; Lublin 1990; Squire 1989, 1991, 1992; Shields et al. 1995). The influence of challenger quality on general elections suggests that the outcomes of the nomination stage have a huge impact on the nature of Senate elections. The literature’s focus on incumbent vulnerability in theories of Senate elections produces directly applicable implications for primary competition. By focusing on vulnerability, these researchers have identified the strategic factors that produce potential candidates’ perceptions of opportunity and increased probability for success. These factors are tied very closely to the pre-primary, electoral environment, which I have shown drives strategic entry and thus primary competition in the House.

Scholars have identified three forces that may lead to systematically higher perceptions of incumbent vulnerability in the Senate vis-à-vis the House.52 Challenger quality, constituency characteristics and institutional factors all have to a lesser or greater extent been shown to systematically affect incumbents’ ability to fend off challengers.

Institutional Factors

Several structural features of the Senate have been hypothesized to hinder incumbents’ ability to maintain strong electoral support back home. Statewide districts,

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52 See Krasno (1994) for a comprehensive review of this literature. While I borrow his classification of factors, I propose a different interpretation of these findings. I argue that institutional and constituency factors may lead to more and higher quality candidates entering the Senate race which generally will produce a high quality challenger from the primary process. Krasno dismisses these factors and instead focuses on general election challenger quality as an exogenous factor independent of institutional and constituency considerations.
6-year terms, as well as a larger emphasis on national policy, according to some scholars, make incumbents more vulnerable to challengers. However, these popular interpretations of Senator vulnerability have found only mixed support in systematic analyses. Regardless of the actual direct relationship between institutional factors and general election outcomes, the research and pundits’ arguments illustrate the importance of perceived vulnerability at the candidate emergence and primary election stage. Across Senate primaries, political elites, especially the pool of potential candidates, view these institutional factors as potential mechanisms of voter frustration with the incumbent. This expectation or mere perception, I hypothesize, leads to increased primary competition due to the increased willingness of potential candidates to enter the race in the first place; although this visibility does not seem to inhibit Senate incumbents from running for reelection. From 1998 to 2002 (a full cycle of all 100 seats), 86 sitting Senators ran for reelection. I would suggest that the same aspects of the job that make them targets also makes keeping the job so attractive.

Compared to members of the House, these institutional factors make Senators far more visible in between elections. Their heightened profile is tied to their role as policy makers. Because there are only 100 Senators and only two in each state, voters are generally far more aware of Senators’ positions on policy debates vis-à-vis House members (Wright and Berkman 1986). A lengthy voting record produces ammunition for opponents and opportunities for potential challengers. In the context of intra-party elections, challengers often attack incumbent’s party loyalty or ideological commitment citing their lengthy, high profile voting records. In addition, Senate campaigns tend to attract more media attention due to the fact that they are statewide elections. This
increased coverage helps challengers close the information gap critical to their electoral success (Abramowitz 1980; Hinckley 1980; Hibbing and Alford 1982; Hershey 1984; Wright and Berkman 1986; Squire 1992). Simply put, voters know more about Senate candidates, both incumbents and challengers (Abramowitz and Segal 1992; Jacobson 1992). When voters have information about both candidates, incumbency and other heuristics have far less influence. This general expectation produces another opportunity for potential challengers and a mechanism for increased primary competition across Senate primaries.

In contrast to the increased exposure in the media, the institutional framework Senators face also serves to limit the amount of personal contact with voters. Less direct contact with the electorate has been shown to weaken incumbents’ electoral chances (Fenno 1982; Hibbing and Brandes 1983; Jacobson and Wolfinger 1989). Because they serve a statewide constituency, Senators have a much more daunting task than House members in terms of meeting voters face-to-face. For most Senators, making the Rotary Club meeting circuit is not an efficient campaign strategy. The inability to communicate directly with a large proportion of likely voters provides another “opportunity” for potential challengers.

The visibility of Senators combined with their legislative workload may produce divergent expectations among the electorate. Often the job of a representative is characterized in terms of “bringing home the pork.” In contrast several studies have found that voters view Senators as responsible for setting national policies (Fenno 1982; 53 While most studies have found visibility to produce a net loss for Senate incumbents, more recent work based on systematic individual level survey data challenges these findings (Westlye 1991; Krasno 1994). For example, Todd Shields and his colleagues (1994) found that contact and media exposure did not influence voters’ likelihood of supporting the incumbent based on the 1988-1990 Senate NES data.)
Abramowitz 1980 and 1988; Kuklinski and West 1981; Uslaner 1981; Hibbing and Alford 1982; Hershey 1984; Abramowitz and Segal 1986). Incumbent House members are evaluated based on local issues and constituency service but Senators face reelection by defending controversial positions on national issues. “Because candidates are more visible in Senate elections,” according to Gerald Wright and Michael Berkman, “policy plays a larger role” in influencing voter choice (1986, 584-585). While this conclusion only finds mixed support in systematic analyses, the perceived importance of voting records led Indiana Senator Dick Lugar, a long-time foreign relations policy wonk, to quip, “there’s no such thing as a safe incumbent.”

Finally, these relationships seem to be amplified for Senators with long tenures. Several studies have found that tenure in office increases incumbent vulnerability in the Senate (Fenno 1982; Tuckle 1983; Abramowitz 1988; Squire 1989; Jacobson and Wolfinger 1989; Hibbing and Alford 1990). This is a fairly counterintuitive finding given the strengthening of incumbency advantage over time in the House. For Senators however, long highly visible voting records combined with perceptions of being a “Washington insider” disconnected from the state provides increased opportunities for potential challengers. Alternatively intra-party challengers can use the incumbent’s record to challenge their party loyalty. Taken together, the empirical findings, however mixed, suggest that the unique institutional features of the Senate increase the perceived vulnerability of incumbents.55 This alone provides a strong basis to expect more

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54 Again the literature is not unanimous in this finding. Notable exceptions include Krasno (1994), Westlye (1991) and Barbara Hinckley (1980). Hinckley found no differences, “in expectations about the job of Senator as against Representative” (458). If voters evaluate Senate and House incumbents on the same basis then the policy role of Senators would not produce increased primary competition.

55 Again, I stress only the perception of vulnerability. In part because that is all my theory requires but also due to the various null findings of systematic effects discussed.
primary competition. While these institutional factors are expected to produce higher levels of primary competition across all Senate races, both the literature exploring constituency factors and challenger quality begins to identify the conditions in the electoral environment that may drive differences among Senate primaries.

Constituency Factors

Constituency characteristics make up the second set of factors commonly viewed as barriers to incumbent electoral safety. Most Senators have far larger and more diverse constituencies than House members. These constituency characteristics pose a challenge to incumbents and opportunities for potential challengers. It is simply more difficult to represent effectively the population of New York compared to North Dakota. According to most accounts, incumbency advantage in congressional elections is based on personal contact with voters, constituency service, and representing district interests (Fenno 1978; Jacobson 2003). For Senators from populous states, this is a nearly impossible task (Hibbing and Brandes 1983). The relationship between constituency size and Senate incumbent vulnerability produces clear implications for primary competition. If incumbents from larger states are more vulnerable at the general election stage, then primary competition should increase with constituency size as well.

A variety of studies have found a clear relationship between constituency size and incumbent success. Scholars have modeled incumbent mean vote shares (Hibbing and Brandes 1983; Nice 1984), individual incumbent vote shares (Abramowitz 1988), incumbent margin of victory (Lee and Oppenheimer 1997), constituents’ contact with and expectations of incumbents (Hibbing and Alford 1990; Oppenheimer 1996). Based
on analysis of all Senate races 1914-1994, Lee and Oppenheimer estimate, “that as state population increases by one million, the margin of victory in Senate elections decreases by 1.295%” (1997, 12). This seems to provide a clear basis for expecting more populous states to produce more competitive general elections and primaries. However, several null findings are reported based largely on post-war Senate incumbents and using the number of congressional districts as an indicator of constituency size (Lublin 1990; Westlye 1991; Krasno 1994). I argue this set of results identifies a two-stage process. The candidate pool size (measured as the number of congressional districts) only indirectly affects general election outcomes through the type of candidate that emerges from the primary process. Secondly, the conflicting results point to a measurement issue for models of Senate general elections.

Constituency size in the Senate is nearly perfectly collinear with the number of congressional districts in the state. Most studies have used the number of congressional districts as a measure of constituency size. This is a problematic choice. Most scholars define the pool of potential Senate candidates as all statewide officeholders and the state’s congressional delegation (Squire 1989, 1991; Adams and Squire 1997; Copeland 1989). Models of Senate general elections are unable to distinguish between population affects on incumbents’ strengthens and the effects of a larger candidate pools producing higher quality challengers. In fact Squire (1989) includes size of pool and size of population in models predicting quality of Senate challengers and challenger vote percentage. While not definitive, moving to the primary stage can at least provide a more direct test of the relationship between candidate pool size, measured as the
number of congressional districts, and election competitiveness, i.e. incumbent vulnerability due to higher probability of challenger entry.

The heterogeneity of a state’s constituency has been examined as a second characteristic that may produce more vulnerable Senate incumbents. Similar to the findings on House primary competition, electorate heterogeneity has been hypothesized to increase Senate election competition due to incumbent vulnerability. The empirical evidence for this hypothesis is far more limited than the evidence of population size effects. Politically relevant diversity is normally thought to produce political differences, factions within the electorate and thus more competitive elections. However, studies of Senate incumbent vulnerability (Westlye 1983, 1991; Krasno 1994) and House-Senate general elections (Bond 1983) produce no support for the hypothesis. Again, I argue that this result may in fact obscure an important influence constituency characteristics have on Senate elections. I hypothesize that state heterogeneity may indirectly affect general election outcomes through its impact on strategic calculations of potential Senate candidates. Parallel to the House, I argue that heterogeneous states provide opportunities for challengers. Both population size and heterogeneity have been attributed to the relative vulnerability of Senate incumbents. These findings are consistent with my theory of primary competition. Constituency characteristics such as size and diversity are potentially informative signals of the opportunities to run for the Senate regardless of incumbent status.

Challenger Quality

The most thorough and convincing studies of Senate incumbent vulnerability have found that challenger quality is the greatest predictor of general election outcomes
and voter behavior. According to these accounts, challenger quality can be defined by previous office experience (Squire 1989, 1991, 1992; Squire and Smith 1996). Several scholars have found experience indirectly affects election outcomes through its influence on challenger fundraising (Abramowitz 1988; Stewart III 1989; Squire 1989) and increased visibility (Westlye 1983, 1991; Sheilds et al. 1995), while others have argued a direct relationship (Lublin 1990; Krasno 1994). A common misspecification among all of these studies is the treatment of challenger quality as exogenous to the system.\footnote{Stewart III (1989) is the only real exception. In his work, vote percent is modeled as a two-stage, sequential process where pre-campaign expectations drive challenger campaign fundraising which in turn drives election results. This specification, however, still ignores the larger endogeneity issues surrounding the outcomes of the primary process.} This is generally due to the focus on incumbent vulnerability in Senate election studies. Treating the quality of the challenger as independent from the electoral factors that predict general election outcomes produces serious theoretical and methodological issues. Given the influence of challenger quality, the outcomes of the primary process and the forces that drive them are critical to developing a complete understanding of the Senate elections.

Only a handful of studies by Peverill Squire and his colleagues attempt to model the probability of a quality challenger in Senate elections. Looking at both aggregate election outcomes (Squire 1989 and 1991) and individual level surveys (Adams and Squire 1997), they found that incumbent characteristics and public opinion did not systematically affect the likelihood of a quality challenger emerging from the primaries. Squire found that candidate pool size and state population characteristics predict the emergence of quality challengers. Instead of treating the challenger as given, these results produce direct implications for expectations of Senate primary competition. In
addition, Squire’s findings give credence to my argument that constituency characteristics and the opportunity structure indirectly affect Senate general election outcomes through their impact on the primaries.

A final consideration in Senate elections has been characterized as “campaign intensity” (Westlye 1983, 1991). Challenger quality effects are found to exert the strongest influence in hard fought, intense campaign with high media attention. Mark Westlye argued that challenger effects are conditional on intensity because, “candidates must be known before they can expect to attract votes on the basis of their own merits” (1991, 12). Intense campaigns are required for voters to become informed; once voters have information about both candidates they are less influenced by incumbency and party identification. Similarly, Krasno (1994) found that Senators are more vulnerable because they are more likely to be involved in intense campaigns and not institutional or constituency factors. Both accounts imply that more intense Senate campaigns produce more informed voters who are then able to evaluate both candidates based on issues and personal attributes.

The conclusions of this literature suggest that campaign intensity interacted with challenger quality drives incumbent performance at the general election stage. However, I argue that institutional and constituency factors may still play an essential role. These factors fall within the electoral environment conceptualization of forces that shape candidate entry and therefore the nature of nomination elections. Thus the strategic electoral environment, partially defined by constituency and institutional factors, influences incumbents, the quality of challengers they face, and the intensity of
the campaigns both at the primary and general election stages. Essentially the nature and outcomes of the general elections are endogenous to the primaries. Initial support for this can be found in the Abramowitz (1988) and Campbell and Sumners (1990) empirical models of Senate election outcomes. Both analyses contain controls for primary competition and divisiveness. According to these authors, competitive primaries produce competitive general elections. A more complete analysis of the forces that influence the level of primary competition will provide preliminary evidence to evaluate this claim as well as additional insight into the sources of Senate incumbent vulnerability.

Incumbent vulnerability in the Senate suggests that the electoral environment more often produces favorable conditions for potential candidates. In addition, the greater resources and experience of most potential Senate candidates reduces their uncertainty over the evaluation of the electoral environment compared to House candidates. The consistent findings of the Senate elections literature offer an insight into the conditions potential candidates focus on when deciding to run for the Senate. Senate elections are seen as elite driven events to a greater extent than House races. According to Jonathan Krasno, “strategic challengers, motivated both by their chances of victory and the high value of a Senate seat,” more often (than potential candidates for the House) evaluate their decision calculus favorably and therefore, “end up creating a situation where Senators are more vulnerable to defeat,” (15, 1994). This implies that the emergence of primary competition in the Senate is even more attuned to the

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57 For example, Lublin (1994) finds some initial support for an indirect effect of electoral environmental factors on incumbent success. He found that economic conditions, president’s party and presidential approval all affect the probability of a quality challenger emerging from the primaries. Consistent with the literature, challenger quality was the primary explanatory variable for incumbent vote in Lublin’s model for 1952-1990 Senate incumbents’ vote share.
electoral environment and provides a strong theoretical basis for applying my general theory of primary competition to the Senate.

**Why Primary Competition Emerges in the Senate**

Given the political experience, acumen and information of most potential Senate candidates, the implications of candidate emergence and strategic candidate theories produce strong expectations as to when Senate primary competition will emerge. As with House elections, the electoral environment provides the data potential candidates evaluate as well as the signal “noise” which produces uncertainty over the likely outcomes. Potential Senate candidates, being more politically experienced, skilled and well-funded base their decisions on more accurate calculations of their chances. This dynamic is expected to produce an even tighter relationship between the electoral environment and primary competition.

As with the House, it is expected that incumbent status is a large factor in the emergence of primary competition. The results of the House analysis clearly substantiate the convention that potential challengers, especially quality challengers, wait for an open seat to run.

\(H_{o}^{a}:\) Open seat contests attract the most primary candidates.

\(H_{o}^{b}:\) Open seat contests produce the highest levels of primary SDS.

Open seat races should attract the most candidates with very similar election prospects. In contrast, challenger and incumbent primaries produce divergent expectations. When an incumbent runs against a challenger within her own party, there is by definition a large gap in experience and often in terms of campaign skills. On average this produces lopsided primaries with very little divisiveness in the primary electorate. By contrast,
competition in challenger primaries is generally between similarly experienced candidates and therefore will on average produce competitive races.

\[ H_{2a} : \text{The expected number of candidates is equal for challenger and incumbent primaries.} \]

\[ H_{2b} : \text{Challenger primaries produce higher SDS than incumbent races.} \]

While these relationships are certainly expected to hold for the Senate, the 6-year term and only two seats per state may put pressure on the potential candidate pool. The lack of opportunities to run due the structure of the Senate may weaken the relationship between incumbent status and primary competition. Since potential candidates only have a handful of chances to make their run, they may be far more willing to go up against incumbents than potential House candidates.

The “opportunity structure” for potential Senate candidates includes one important difference from the House. Senate incumbent vulnerability studies suggest that tenure in office actually increases the likelihood of tough general election challenges (Abramowitz 1988, Squire 1989, Jacobson and Wright 1989). The mechanism for this relationship stems from perceptions of incumbent vulnerability due to visible voting records and isolation from the state. The 6-year terms and policy focus of Senators provides potential challengers campaign “opportunities.” Since primary competition is directly a function of the number of potential candidates that see opportunities, incumbent tenure should actually increase the competitiveness of the primaries in both parties.

\[ H_{3a} : \text{As incumbent tenure in office increases, the expected number of primary candidates increases.} \]

\[ H_{3b} : \text{As incumbent tenure in office increases, the expected SDS increases.} \]
This expected relationship further serves to weaken any incumbency advantage influences in terms of preventing competition before challengers even enter the primaries.

Perhaps even more so for the Senate, political elites’ ambition for office remains the fundamental mechanism for primary competition. As such the likelihood of general election success is expected to be a crucial calculation for potential candidates. Inter-party competition is hypothesized to drive the level of primary competition. If there is no hope for the party at the general election stage then the nomination becomes virtually worthless and far fewer candidates will enter the primary.

\begin{align*}
H_{aa} & : \text{As general election competitiveness increases, the expected number of candidates increases.} \\
H_{ab} & : \text{As general election competitiveness increases, the expected SDS increases.}
\end{align*}

Statewide, political elites view the outcome of the most recent presidential election as the best indicator of state party competitiveness. Specific to Senate general election outcomes, the party’s most recent presidential nominee’s performance has been found to drive the party’s Senate nominee’s vote percentage (Campbell and Sumners 1990; Adams and Squire 1997). The perceived probability of winning in the general election indicated by previous presidential vote signals the value of the nomination and therefore drives the willingness of potential candidates to enter the race.

Two constituency characteristics, which have mixed empirical support in the incumbent vulnerability literature, may directly affect the level of primary competition. The first is population size. As discussed above, interpretation of the effects of constituency size on incumbent vulnerability remains unclear. Several scholars have
argued larger populations hurt incumbents’ ability to connect with voters and maintain support across various political factions within the state (Hibbing and Brandes 1983; Oppenheimer 1996; Lee and Oppenheimer 1997). However, the null findings of Lublin (1990), Westlye (1991) and Krasno (1994) call into question a direct effect. I argue that population size affects Senate elections through the increased candidate pool size and the pressure it produces. This is especially the case at the primary stage. The level of primary competition is conditional on the environmental factors that influence strategic candidates. Hypothesis 6, therefore captures expectations based on the progressive ambition of lower office holders and not the finding that large population states generally have highly vulnerable incumbents.

\[ H_{5a} : \text{As the potential candidate pool size increases, the expected number of primary candidates increases.} \]

\[ H_{5b} : \text{As the potential candidate pool size increases, the expected SDS increases.} \]

The analysis reported here cannot definitively distinguish pool versus population size effects. However, at the primary stage any significant effects of the number of congressional districts can be tied theoretically to pool size far more easily. For this reason, the empirical model is designed to test the effects of pool size (congressional districts plus the number of statewide officeholders) and not the constituency size.

According to my theory of primary competition, constituency heterogeneity directly affects potential candidate’s entry decision. This dynamic should hold in Senate primaries. A constituency that is diverse along politically relevant dimensions produces more potential candidates and the electoral basis for more challengers to enter.
$H_{ha}$: As state heterogeneity increases, the expected number of primary candidates increases.

$H_{hb}$: As state heterogeneity increases, the expected SDS increases.

Much like the House, potential Senate candidates evaluate the electorate for potential sources of support. Heterogeneous electorates not only produce more potential blocs of voters but also imply a candidate needs a smaller proportion of voters to win. Given their more experienced, better informed and independent natures, potential Senate candidates are likely to evaluate closely the division within the electorate as a basis for entering the primaries.

Senate candidates are generally viewed as more independent from the parties. Results in the previous chapter clearly establish the party organizations as influential forces in shaping House primaries. But given the financial independence of most Senate candidates, this relationship may not be as strong for Senate primaries. I have hypothesized that the party role is mainly one of signaling potential candidates. The signals are two-fold; they serve to identify “party candidates” but also to inform potential candidates of the electoral environment. The party organizations’ informational role is designed to reduce uncertainty over the likely outcome. This strategy is extremely effective for the generally less experienced and informed House pool. Senate primaries provide a much tougher test of the parties influence over nominations. Nonetheless, the ability to inform and signal potential candidates is a potentially powerful tool.

$H_{ja}$: When party organization is active, the expected number of primary candidates = 1.

$H_{jb}$: When party organization is active, the expected SDS = 0.
In the context of the theory of primary competition, the party organizations activities are designed to serve as influential “political intermediaries” (see Fowler 1993; Fowler and McClure 1989). Parallel to the House campaign committees, both parties have developed extremely active and well-funded Senate campaign committees (Monson 2002, Magelby and Monson 2004). Combined with state party endorsements and grassroots support, the party organization tactics are designed to limit primary divisiveness in order to produce the strongest possible general election candidate (Herrnson 1988, Sorauf 1998, Maisel et al. 1998). The information rich environment of most potential Senate candidates provides opportunities and challenges for political intermediaries, such as the party organizations, who attempt to shape the primary process. What remains to be developed and tested is the ability of political intermediaries to influence individual decisions of highly independent, well informed elites such as potential Senate candidates.

A final theoretical expectation is a specific outgrowth of the existing literature’s focus on incumbent vulnerability in the Senate. For challenger and incumbent primaries, the party’s previous vote percentage for that seat may provide an important signal about the current officeholder.

\[ H_{sa} : \text{As previous Senate vote percent decreases, the expected number of primary candidates increases for incumbents.} \]

\[ H_{sb} : \text{As previous Senate vote percent decreases, the expected SDS increases.} \]

Several studies of incumbent vulnerability have found a systematic relationship between the incumbent’s performance in her last election and the closeness of the reelection race (Bond et al. 1985; Stewart III 1989; Krasno and Green 1988; Westlye 1991; Krasno
Of course, the reverse of hypothesis 8 is expected for challenger primaries. If an incumbent barely won reelection last cycle (i.e. the out-party’s vote was relatively high), I expect high competition in the challenger primary, due to perceived incumbent vulnerability. Extending the vulnerability findings to the primaries, it is expected that incumbents who barely won election 6 years ago will attract more and higher quality challengers. Explaining primary competition for challenger and incumbent Senate primaries may be driven to a much larger extent than House elections by the perceptions of incumbent vulnerability.

The specific expectations outlined above are derived from a theory of primary competition as a function of strategic potential candidates’ evaluations of the electoral environment. Combining the aspects of the electoral environment common across all types of elections with the especially significant role incumbent vulnerability seems to play in Senate elections produces a set of hypotheses that capture the essential electoral “context” that have been identified by studies of candidate emergence and recruitment (see Fowler and McClure 1989; Fowler 1993). Linda Fowler provides the most developed argument at the individual level for infusing theories focusing on political ambition and personal calculations with an understanding of the influencing forces in the electoral environment. Linda Fowler and Robert McClure found that the decision to run for Congress “required both an extraordinary level of personal political ambition and a local environment that allowed these aspirations to be directed toward Congress,” (224, 1989). According to this view, emergence is a function of individual motives and

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58 This finding at the general election stage is not consistently found. Specifically, Adams and Squire (1997) argue that potential challengers and incumbents do not value six year old election results as informative of any current electoral conditions. Similar to Campbell and Sumners (1990), they argue that the most recent presidential election is a far more relevant and useful signal of Senate incumbent vulnerability.
district characteristics. When extended to the primary level, conditions in the electoral environment will systematically drive the number and quality of potential candidates that choose to run for the Senate and thus drive the level of primary competition. The pool of potential Senate candidates is generally viewed as a highly experienced, professional, well-funded and well-informed set of political elites. The level of primary competition is expected to be highly sensitive to the conditions in the state and the level of uncertainty over the conditions affect over likely outcomes. The analyses reported here are designed to test the influence of specific aspects of the electoral environment on the level of Senate primary competition across all states and conditions.

**Data and Methods**

The analyses reported here are based on 196 Senate primaries from 1998, 2000, and 2002. The data comes from a variety of sources. Appendix Table A.4 provides an overview of the measurement specification and sources for each of the explanatory variables. The analysis employs most of the same indicators as for the House however; moving to the Senate requires several operationalization changes for existing concepts and additional variables for concepts unique to the Senate environment.

Two covariates, which are included in restricted models for incumbent and challenger primaries, are designed to account for strategic indicators specific to incumbent vulnerability. Incumbent tenure and Incumbent vote have been shown to drive general election outcomes for Senators. **Tenure** is captured by the year the incumbent first won election to the Senate. Some scholars have argued that the incumbent’s performance in the last election is a key indicator of vulnerability. As part

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59 Again only Louisiana’s primaries were omitted due to their unique primary run off system. In addition to the excluded cases: Georgia 2000 and Missouri 2002.
of the electoral environment, perceived vulnerability is hypothesized to be a driving force in primary competition. Therefore, the model includes the party’s vote percentage in the most recent general election for the incumbent’s Senate seat.\textsuperscript{60} This is designed to capture the incumbent’s most recent signal of electoral strength and conversely whether potential candidates perceive vulnerability.

In addition to previous general election vote, I also measured the effects of incumbent’s party distance as an indicator of incumbent vulnerability. I measured party loyalty as the incumbent’s distance from their party median on the DW-NOMINATE score for the current Congress. The previous measures of vulnerability centered around the district general electorate’s relationship with the incumbent. The party distance measure expands the concept of vulnerability to include within party considerations. I hypothesized that vulnerability may be most relevant within the incumbent’s primary. This measure was designed to capture the vulnerability of incumbents due to voting records seen as no longer in line with the party, however, the results are completely consistent with the previous two measures of vulnerability and therefore party distance was not included in the final reported analyses.

Conceptually distinct from the incumbent’s previous vote, state level inter-party competitiveness measured by state presidential vote is hypothesized to influence the

\textsuperscript{60} As discussed previously, incumbent performance in her last election may not provide a valuable signal to potential candidates. Two studies (Campbell and Sumners 1990; Adams and Squire 1997) report that the most recent presidential election effects far outweigh the incumbent’s previous performance. Without individual data from potential candidates it is impossible to determine which electoral results they focus on and how they are interpreted (as incumbent vulnerability or party strength), however this analysis can test their relative impacts on primary elections.
attractiveness of the party’s nomination independent of incumbent status. For the 1998 and 2000 Senate primaries, the state vote in the 1996 presidential election is reported. For the 2002 primaries, the 2000 presidential vote returns provide potential candidates with the best indicator of the partisan strength in the state and therefore a baseline value of the nomination.

Moving the analysis to the Senate required redefining the candidate pool. The size of the candidate pool for the Senate is measured as the number of congressional districts plus the number of statewide offices in the state government. This is designed to capture the number of electorally experienced potential entrants. Electorate heterogeneity is measured with the same technique as the House. As with the House measure, the state’s politically relevant demographic groups include race, urbanicity, and employment categorizations. Due to a change in data collection and reporting in the Almanac, percent white, blue and grey collar is not included in the calculation for the 1998 observations. This difference does not appear to substantively affect the measure’s distribution or its statistical relationships in the multivariate analysis.

Because I employ two measures of primary competitiveness, two different regression techniques are required. Again I report the results of Poisson regressions on the number of candidates and Tobit regressions on the SDS in order to account for the

---

61 While I argue presidential vote is clearly distinct from the incumbent’s previous vote, the statistical relationship is a potential statistical issue. The correlation is significant at p<.01, but is not substantively strong enough to produce estimation pathologies (\( \rho = .525 \)).

62 The index function is defined as: \( A_w = 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{V} \sum_{k=1}^{P_j} \frac{Y_{kj}^2}{P_j} \) where: \( V \)= number of variables; \( P_j \) = number of categories of the \( j^{th} \) variable; \( Y_{kj} \) = proportion of population within the \( k^{th} \) category for the \( j^{th} \) variable.
censored nature of the measurement technique.\textsuperscript{63} The results test the relationships between electoral environmental factors and two conceptions of competition.

**Testing the Model: Senate Primaries 1998-2002**

The results from multivariate regressions on the number candidates provide initial leverage and suggest some important differences between House and Senate races. However, the number of candidates is a particularly blunt measure of competition. For this reason the bulk of the analysis focuses on the SDS regression models. As a far more sensitive and accurate indicator of electoral competitiveness, these results provide the best basis for testing the implications of my theory. The results strongly support the theory and identify statistical and substantive relationships between characteristics of the electoral environment and the level of Senate primary competition.

*The Number of Senate Primary Candidates*

The analysis of Senate primaries has been largely left to political pundits and a few highly exploratory, qualitative studies of one or two elections (for example, Fenno 1992 and Magleby and Monson 2004). My systematic analysis of all Senate primaries in three election cycles moves beyond this dearth of data and has established that on average these primaries are somewhat more competitive than House races. In addition, Senate challenger and open seat primaries exhibit substantial variance in competition levels. The multivariate analysis seeks to test the hypotheses relating the electoral environment to the level of primary competition across a large set of observations. Initially, I estimate a model of the number of primary candidates as a function of the electoral environment in the State. Table 5.3 contains the Poisson regression analysis

\textsuperscript{63} See model specification discussion in chapter 4 for further details.
for the 196 primaries (1998, 2000, 2002) and a restricted model of incumbent and challenger primaries, which includes characteristics of the incumbent expected to signal vulnerability.

(Table 5.3)

As expected, incumbent status has a large substantive impact on the expected number of candidates. Moving from an incumbent primary to either a challenger or open seat race significantly increases the expected number of primary candidates. The statistical and substantive significance of the challenger coefficient refutes the expectations in hypothesis 2a and implies that potential Senate candidates in the out party are far more willing to enter the primary. This is actually more congruent with the incumbent vulnerability literature than with candidate emergence studies. For the out party, Senate incumbents are not viewed as invincible and therefore present less of a barrier than House incumbents.

Surprisingly, candidate pool size and party activity are the only other covariates that produce statistically significant coefficients. There is no support for hypotheses 3, 4, 6, or 8. Based on these results, indicators of incumbent vulnerability do not influence the number of candidates; inter-party competitiveness does not produce a statistically significant effect; and electorate heterogeneity does not seem to increase the number of candidates. Adding the incumbent characteristics (tenure and previous election performance) does not affect the overall model results and are not themselves statistically significant. These findings hold even when I break down the sample between Republicans and Democrats.

(Table 5.4)

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As Table 5.4 demonstrates, the party differences so evident in House primaries do not appear in the Senate. Pre-primary party activity produces a slightly stronger negative impact, while being a challenger drops from statistical significance for Republicans. Previous election results are NOT driving the number of primary candidates. Incumbent status, candidate pool size and the level of party activity are the largest and most consistent influences. This implies that potential Senate candidates are less swayed by cycle to cycle considerations. Instead, certain states (i.e. states with large congressional delegations and numerous state government officials along with inactive party organizations) consistently produce more competitive Senate primaries. Only incumbent status has a larger systematic impact on the expected number of candidates. This conclusion is consistently supported for both Democrat and Republican sub-samples even when additional incumbent characteristics are included.

Based on the count model results, the strongest influence on the number of candidates flows from fairly stable electoral environment characteristics. It is possible that this obscures the relationship of more fluid indicators on the actual competitiveness of the primaries. The Tobit regression model of the standardized divisiveness score, which provides a more accurate measure of competitiveness, tests this interpretation.

*The Competitiveness of Senate Primaries*

Thus far, competition has been modeled as the number of primary candidates; this specification seems to capture a threshold condition in the electoral environment that produces at least two candidates. Therefore these results can be directly related to the candidate emergence literature. However, this does not necessarily capture the actual competitiveness of a primary. Conceptually, electoral competitiveness generally
refers to the closeness of the vote. In liberal democratic theory, competitiveness can be thought of as the electoral pressure produced by challengers on elites currently in power. It is therefore necessary to employ a measure of the dispersion of voters across candidates as an indicator of the closeness or competitiveness of the election. As previously discussed the SDS is an appropriate measure but due to its bounded nature requires a nested regression technique. Reported in Table 5.5 are the results of a Tobit regression model on SDS. Comparing the estimates for all observations to the results, once I include incumbent vulnerability indicators and drop the open seat observations, produces no substantive differences. Consistent with the count model results, the SDS regression suggests that incumbent vulnerability does not drive primary competitiveness for the incumbent or the out party. In general, the Tobit model’s results are comparable to the count model and suggest the factors driving candidate emergence similarly drive the competitiveness of primaries. It seems the quantity and quality of primary candidates are driven by many of the same aspects of the electoral environment.

(Table 5.5)

The straightforward interpretation of the coefficients is another clear advantage of the Tobit regression model. Tobit coefficients are the estimated linear effects in x on the expected value of the observed y. In other words, the coefficients reported in Table 5.5 are the estimated change in SDS (0.0 to 1.0) given a one-unit change in x holding all other covariates constant. Several key hypotheses are strongly supported by this data. The challenger dummy variable is statistically significant and produces the largest substantive impact. Moving from incumbent to a challenger primary increases the expected SDS by .678. This is slightly greater than the difference between a two-
candidate race with vote split 90-10 versus a vote split 60-40. All other environmental factors held constant an incumbent primary on average produces a landslide where a challenger primary would be highly competitive. The open seat coefficient suggests a similar increase in competitiveness. In one sense, this is consistent with stylized accounts of primary competition as a function of incumbency status. However, the Senate primaries analyzed in this study clearly show that challenger primaries produce the highest expected competition and not open seats. In addition, counter to conventional accounts several other aspects of the electoral environment systematically drive the level of primary competition.

One premise of this work has been that potential candidates for office consider a wide range of factors in the electoral environment. These are hypothesized to include traditional “opportunity structure” factors that influence the strategic candidates evaluations of their electoral chances. Beyond these forces, I have argued that modern electoral politics includes a set of political intermediaries that seek to influence the decisions of potential candidates through their offers of resources and information. The party organizations, I argue, are the principal architects of this tactic. Specifically I hypothesize that state party organization’s role in the pre-primary endorsement/convention process provides effective signals to potential candidates. Party organizations may limit intra-party divisiveness and primary competition by using their role (legal or informal) in the nomination process to signal potential candidates. The analysis suggests that the state party organization’s ability to signal their preferred candidate effectively decreases competition for Senate nominations. Moving from a state with no party pre-primary role to a state with formal endorsements or conventions
substantially decreases predicted SDS. The expected decrease is equivalent to the
difference between a two-candidate 70-30 spilt versus a three-candidate race with a 90-
5-5 vote distribution.

In addition to party activity, several politically relevant contextual factors are
statistically significant predictors of SDS. Both candidate pool size and state
heterogeneity are positively related to SDS, while the dummy for southern states
demonstrates a statistically significant negative relationship. The overall ability of the
model to account for variance in primary competition and the effects of pool size,
heterogeneity, party activity, and being in the South supports the theory that primary
competition is largely a function of a broadly defined electoral environment. These
aggregate findings, I argue, support an interpretation of the primary process as elite
driven. Essentially voters only indirectly affect the outcome of nomination contests
through their role in certain aspects of the strategic environment potential candidates
evaluate before entering an election. Further, this interpretation produces individual
level expectations about potential candidates’ decisions processes. While I am unable
to test individual level hypotheses here, by splitting the observations into Democrats
and Republicans I am able to begin to examine whether the electoral environment
affects the aggregate decision outcomes across types of potential candidates.

(Table 5.6)

Parallel to the analysis reported for the House, Table 5.6 identifies several
important differences between Democrats and Republican. For Democrats, challenger
primaries produce an expected effect on competition even greater than for the overall
model and the Republican sub-sample. The on average increase in expected SDS for
Democratic challenger primaries is equivalent to the difference between a two-
candidate race with a 90-10 vote and a four-candidate race with a 30-25-25-20 vote
split. Clearly Democratic challenger primaries produce highly competitive, often multi-
candidate, races. This relationship holds for both specifications of the model and
supports that view that incumbent status is the dominant factor in determining primary
competition. Yet, even controlling for this substantial influence on SDS, pool size and
party activity retain their statistical significance. In fact, both coefficients produce
slightly larger impacts than the estimates for all primaries. Surprisingly, the state’s
electoral heterogeneity fails to reach statistical significance. This is exactly opposite
from the House findings. Senate Democrats are tied less to traditional concerns of past
electoral performance and building coalitions of voters to support their candidacies.
Instead, the pressure of large candidate pools, rare open seat races and the ability of
state parties to signal preferred candidates seems to drive Democratic primary
competition.

The same basic patterns emerge in the regression estimates for Republican
primaries with a few important distinctions. Incumbent status and party activity remain
the strongest influences on SDS. However, the challenger coefficient is substantially
lower for Republican. In fact, the restricted model results estimate that the expected
effect of moving from a no party role state to a legal/convention state has almost twice
as large an effect as moving from incumbent to challenger primary all else being equal.
For Republicans, the party’s ability to signal their preferred nominee has a relatively
larger impact on SDS than any other factor. This is consistent with popularized views
of Republican Party discipline and party organization strength vis-à-vis the Democrats.
Two other differences begin to outline potential lines of study for how different types of candidates and nomination processes are affected by different factors in the electoral environment. Counter intuitively, Republican primaries are not affected by the more strategic elite focused factors such as pool size and inter-party competitiveness. Instead electorate heterogeneity is positively related to SDS at the .05 level. These findings may have more to do with Republicans’ majority status than attributes of the organization or the candidate pool. It remains for future work to further develop theories and tests of the mechanisms, which produce difference between Democrats and Republicans and the role of majority status in the emergence of primary competition.

Neither Republicans nor Democrats seem to be systematically affected by incumbent vulnerability or inter-party competitiveness. In addition to the measures of incumbent vulnerability reported in the final model, I tested for the affects of incumbent’s voting record. The distance from the party median in Senate DW-NOMINATE scores was not significant for any of the models presented here. Incumbent voting records do not seen to systematically affect the likelihood of competitive intra-party challengers. This reinforces the conclusion that potential Senate candidates view each Senate election cycle as a potential opportunity and are not as concerned with incumbency advantages or their own party’s strength in the State. The patterns in competition over the party nomination suggest potential Senate candidates evaluate their chances independent of past elections in the state. In future work the fluidity of Senate elections, seat swings, and incumbent vulnerability should be studied as theoretically important influences on incumbents (electoral and policy) and challengers’ behavior and strategies.
Although open seat primaries still attract high on average primary competition, challenger primaries produce the highest expected SDS. In the multivariate analysis, the influence of the challenger dummy variable in conjunction with statistical insignificance of the incumbency vulnerability indicators implies that potential Senate candidates are not as choosy as their House counterparts. In the face of fewer opportunities to run due to fewer seats and six-year terms, potential Senate candidates do not wait to run against a weak incumbent or in an open seat race.

**Conclusion**

The empirical findings suggest that Senate primaries experience marginally more competition than their House counterparts. Because potential Senate candidates are generally more sophisticated, experienced and well-informed, I hypothesized a stronger relationship between aspects of the electoral environment, their entry decisions and thus primary competitiveness than those observed in House primaries. While not directly tested, the multivariate analyses strongly support the conclusions that Senate primary competitiveness can be understood as a function of several key factors in the pre-primary electoral environment. Incumbency status, potential candidate pool size, and party activity all impact the competitiveness of Senate primaries. Whereas, institutional factors such as fewer Senate seats and 6-year terms drive potential Senate candidates to discount some “timing” influences that affect the House primaries. Incumbency vulnerability and inter-party competitiveness do not seem to affect entry decisions and thus the competitiveness of primaries.

Two key differences from the House results provide important insight into Senate elections. First, challenger primaries experience the highest average competition
levels, NOT open seats races. This contradicts the candidate emergence literature and suggests that the potential Senate candidates are as not constrained by incumbency advantage when projecting to the general election stage (incumbents still rarely experience intra-party challenges). Future work should examine this further as a comparative case to evaluate the larger impact on voters and electoral outcomes when incumbency matters less. Secondly, the separate analyses by party provided no significant differences between Republican and Democratic primaries. One explanation for this finding lies in the greater independence of potential Senate candidates. Yet, the party organization’s role in the nomination process is incredibly strong. Of the 7 open seat primaries with only one candidate, 4 were in states with legal endorsements/conventions and another was from Ohio, which allows informal party endorsements. When and why Republican and Democratic races differ requires much more development and analyses.

Extending my theory of primary competition beyond House races represents a crucial test for the generalizability of the model and the overall notion that the electoral environment systematically affects potential candidates’ decisions. At the aggregate level, this implies that the nature of electoral competition and outcomes is an elite driven process, which voters only indirectly influence through their role in the strategic environment calculations of potential candidates. The goal of this chapter was to apply the theory to Senate primaries and test the model’s ability to incorporate institution specific forces from the electoral environment. Senate incumbent vulnerability provided a lever to identify several possible strategic factors for Senate potential candidates not evident in the House. For the Senate like the House, incumbency matters
but incumbent vulnerability does not appear to drive primary competitiveness.

Incumbents are vulnerable at the general election stage because they fail to restrain out party potential candidates from entering the race. The fact that the general theory of the “relevant” electoral environment driving strategic candidate entry and thus competitiveness has proven to be adaptable to the Senate further supports the notion that electoral outcomes are truly elite driven events.
Table 5.1
Distribution of the Number of Candidates In Senate Primaries by Incumbency Status
1998-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Open Seat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i1}$</td>
<td>$f_i$</td>
<td>$c_{i2}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.071</td>
<td>.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>2.234</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.819</td>
<td>.362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2
Variation in Senate Primary Competition by Incumbency Status 1998-2002
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Restricted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>.546**</td>
<td>.457**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.117)</td>
<td>(.154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>.641**</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.144)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Tenure</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-- (.006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.006)</td>
<td>(.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
<td>.021**</td>
<td>.022**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.004)</td>
<td>(.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Heterogeneity</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>1.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.606)</td>
<td>(.747)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
<td>-.328**</td>
<td>-.308**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.076)</td>
<td>(.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate General Election Vote</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>-.335*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.132)</td>
<td>(.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Law Openness</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.061)</td>
<td>(.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.293</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.434)</td>
<td>(.782)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>74.28**</td>
<td>58.77**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cragg and Uhler’s $R^2$</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>-338.57</td>
<td>-264.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3
Number of Senate Primary Candidates: 1998, 2000, 2002
Poisson Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.540** (.176)</td>
<td>.637** (.246)</td>
<td>.563** (.162)</td>
<td>.116 (.229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>.596** (.218)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.716** (.192)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>.007 (.011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.010 (.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Tenure</td>
<td>.017 (.011)</td>
<td>.017 (.014)</td>
<td>-.005 (.009)</td>
<td>-.002 (.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>-.271* (.110)</td>
<td>-.229 (.120)</td>
<td>-.422** (.110)</td>
<td>-.389** (.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
<td>.020** (.007)</td>
<td>.019* (.008)</td>
<td>.018** (.006)</td>
<td>.023** (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Heterogeneity</td>
<td>1.211 (.872)</td>
<td>1.19 (.10)</td>
<td>.913 (.830)</td>
<td>1.79 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
<td>-.422** (.110)</td>
<td>-.389** (.123)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate General Election Vote</td>
<td>.007 (.011)</td>
<td>- .002 (.010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>.134 (.185)</td>
<td>-.081 (.232)</td>
<td>-.350 (.198)</td>
<td>-.639* (.264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Law Openness</td>
<td>-.041 (.087)</td>
<td>.019 (.103)</td>
<td>.120 (.086)</td>
<td>.160 (.099)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.083 (.726)</td>
<td>-2.13 (.136)</td>
<td>.150 (.562)</td>
<td>1.80 (.102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>34.43**</td>
<td>23.20**</td>
<td>50.04**</td>
<td>51.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cragg and Uhler’s $R^2$</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.396</td>
<td>3.433</td>
<td>3.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>-88.535</td>
<td>-58.781</td>
<td>-89.664</td>
<td>-71.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4
Number of Senate Primary Candidates by Party: 1998, 2000, 2002
Poisson Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Primaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>.678**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>.605**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Tenure</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
<td>.014**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.014**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Heterogeneity</td>
<td>1.097*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.685*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.526)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.658)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
<td>-.280**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.298**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.063)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate General Election Vote</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.285*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.375*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Law Openness</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.052)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.060)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.698</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.372)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.693)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>78.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70.11**</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-556.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>196</td>
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<tr>
<td>(censored)</td>
<td>164</td>
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Table 5.5
Tobit Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
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<td>Standard Error</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>.796**</td>
<td>(.157)</td>
<td>.797**</td>
<td>(.217)</td>
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<td>Open Seat</td>
<td>.563**</td>
<td>(.204)</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incumbent Tenure</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>(.111)</td>
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<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
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<td>(.006)</td>
<td>.021**</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
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<td>State Heterogeneity</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>(.793)</td>
<td>1.121</td>
<td>(.964)</td>
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<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
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<td>(.098)</td>
<td>-.325**</td>
<td>(.109)</td>
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<td>(.009)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
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<td>South</td>
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<td>(.177)</td>
<td>-.309</td>
<td>(.213)</td>
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<td>(.076)</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>(.086)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>(.631)</td>
<td>-.568</td>
<td>(1.082)</td>
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<td>$\chi^2$</td>
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<td>1.63</td>
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<td>N (censored)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>(47)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>(41)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6
Tobit Regression Model

Note: entries are maximum likelihood estimates and their associated standard errors. *p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed)
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“The people are powerless if the political enterprise is not competitive... without this opportunity popular sovereignty amounts to nothing.

--E.E. Schattschneider

The emergence of the direct primary represents a critical reform in the electoral process; one designed to increase competitiveness and give voters more influence over the government. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s advocates of the direct primary sought to break the power of party bosses and in the one-party South provide a mechanism to challenge ruling factions within the Democratic party. The nearly universal adoption of direct primaries for federal elections by the 1920s fundamentally altered the relationship between competing elites and the masses of voters they hoped to “represent” in government. Applying the work of E.E. Schattschneider, reforms such as the direct primary represent a failure of ruling elites to control the “scope of conflict” (1960). Schattschneider argued that, “the control of the scale of conflict has always been a prime instrument of political strategy,” (1960, 8). Competitive primaries mean that the scope of conflict now includes voters\(^64\) and not just the party organization leadership. When candidates perceive competition at the primary stage the “original

\(^{64}\) It is worth noting that, especially in the primaries, the definition of “voters” can be constrained by election laws. In addition, the set of likely voters can be influenced by the campaign strategies of candidates, parties and other political intermediaries.
contestants” in Schattschneider’s theory (the party leadership) lose control over the process and its outcomes. The potential for competitive direct primaries requires candidates’ strategies to adapt and focus on attracting primary voters.

The mechanisms I just described capture the essence of what William Riker (1982) outlined as the electoral threat governing elites must perceive in order for democracies’ “popular veto” to be effective. Direct primaries and their competitiveness are a key step in the election of ruling elites. The outcome of the nomination stage obviously affects the nature of competition and voter choice at the general election stage but also the governing process in our modern democracy. Conventional wisdom and any first glance at recent Congressional elections would suggest the process does not produce the kind of competition reformers had envisioned or at a level to induce responsive political elites seeking to avoid Riker’s popular veto. However, very little systematic analysis exists to measure or explain primary competitiveness. Instead most research has focused on candidate emergence (for example: Fowler and McClure 1989; Jacobson 1989; Maisel and Stone 1997). This line of research, while critical to building our wider understanding of elite behavior, generally fails to place candidate emergence and primary competition in the larger electoral environment.\footnote{As I have noted elsewhere, this is Linda Fowler’s principal critique of the candidate emergence literature (1989). She argues that scholars have attempted to understand and predict the entry decisions of potential candidates in apolitical vacuum almost devoid of electoral context.} My research has attempted to measure congressional primary competitiveness, build a theoretical model of primary competition, and test its implications across a large scale set of observations.
Summary of Findings

This research moves our understanding of congressional primaries forward in several substantive ways. Beyond the basic findings of the empirical analyses, the project has attempted to build a conceptualization of electoral competition that explicitly ties elite and mass behavior in a way to provide leverage on the nature of our democracy. Given popular accounts of undefeatable incumbents, no real competition, and the power of interest groups in the legislative process, my conceptualization and measurement of competition, informed by a specific normative view of republican democracy, challenges some of the critiques. My analyses indicated higher than expected competition levels, especially for the SDS measure. Potentially more indicative of the “threat” competing elites perceive is the consistently high variance in competition levels across parties, districts and over time. At the same time, the findings suggest voters are not directly driving primary competitiveness. The larger electoral environment including the re-emerging role of political intermediaries is largely shaping primary competition. The choices voters have at the primary stage are influenced by the electoral environment to the extent that voters more often than not do not drive the competitiveness.

These findings are built upon what I see as three fundamental contributions of this research to the study of candidate emergence, congressional elections, and political elites’ behavior. First, the development of a comprehensive district level theory is a task long overdue. Modeling the level of primary competition at an aggregate (district)
level avoids many of the pitfalls of individual level candidate emergence studies. More substantively, a district level theory effectively builds into the conceptualization and modeling a specific view of the democratic process and provides insight into the mechanisms by which voters can and cannot affect the legislative process. The development of the Standardized Divisiveness Score (SDS in Chapter 3) is directly tied to the notion that competitive elections produce viable choices for voters and only under these conditions do ruling elites consider the impact of legislative behavior on their next re-election campaign. In other words, the district level theory and measurement of primary competition captures the ability of voters to actually threaten Riker’s popular veto and thus influence the legislative behavior of the ruling elite.

Secondly, my theory and analysis widens the myopic view of the electoral environment most scholars focus on when studying candidate emergence. For instance, this research represents the first systematic wide scale analysis of the influence of political intermediaries. Linda Fowler (1993; Fowler and McClure 1989) has argued that the ambition of potential candidates is often tempered or flamed by the tactics of political intermediaries such as the party organizations. However, when attempting to measure this kind of influence, candidate emergence scholars have generally ignored this influence or been limited to case study approaches (see Kazee 1994).

In addition, my expansion of the “relevant political environment” potential candidates consider has identified two distinct mechanisms that influence their decisions to run and thus the competitiveness of the primary. Beyond the rational actor calculations of costs, benefits and probability of success, my theory includes the

66 This includes but is not limited to selecting on the dependent variable, i.e. only observing those potential candidates that choose to enter the primary (see Maisel and Stone 1997, Maisel et.al. 1998).
uncertainty potential candidates experience when measuring the electoral environment. Uncertainty at the individual level, I argue, is a major driver of the variance in primary competition. As potential candidates gain in sophistication and information the likely election outcomes become clearer. Potential candidates therefore can be systematically affected by the information available to them about the electoral environment. The role information plays and who controls the information suddenly becomes an enormously important factor when explaining the emergence of competition. This dynamic is wholly missing from most individual level candidate emergence studies and represents a shortcoming in the existing literature to empirically test the implications of the entire rational actor model developed by Black (1972).

Finally, the data that was collected and analyzed for this project is the largest systematic study of congressional primaries, I am aware of, to date. The analysis includes nearly 14,000 congressional and senatorial primaries over a 30 year period. The measures observed include a wide range of theoretically driven environmental factors that previously have not been systematically tested. The empirical data allows for analysis of competition over time, across all states, and tests both conventional explanations and my theory. In chapter 3, I report the longitudinal trends in primary competition across all 870 districts from 1972 to 2000. The SDS measure is found to be a far more sensitive and accurate measure of electoral competition than the standard, number of candidates, approach. The longitudinal data found a slight decline through the 1980s, a sharp jump in 1992, followed by another downward trend. While overall competition scores suggest, on average, incumbents and front-runners do not experience

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67 Louisiana was excluded from the analysis for part of this time frame after their adoption of a non-partisan two-stage run-off election system.
close races, across all three decades House primaries demonstrate wide variation in the level of competition. The high variance in SDS implies that many ruling elites may perceive potential threats even though on average the threat level is relative low. This finding leads me to expect that uncertainty over their rational actor calculations may be even more influential given the relatively high fluctuations in real, observed primary competition levels.

In the multivariate analysis, I tested the stylized accounts and standing perceptions of what drives competition: incumbency advantage and prospects at the general election stage. Although these forces do influence the level of competition, the analysis uncovered that they do not effectively explain the variance in competition and consistently under estimate competition levels. These findings establish that more than the status of the incumbent influences political elites and that other electoral forces can affect the entry decisions of potential candidates. Therefore, these wider electoral forces may seek to control the scope of conflict and election outcomes.

In chapters 4 and 5, I build on my theory of primary competition as the aggregate outcome of individual potential candidate’s decisions to run and test this model for the 2002 congressional primaries and the 1998-2000-2002 senatorial primaries respectively. The House primary results further suggest far more than incumbency status affects the level of competition. While the expected number of candidates is actually lower for challenger primaries, the expected SDS is higher than for incumbents. This suggests that when there is a choice in out-party primaries, voters are more likely to have multiple viable candidates than when incumbents face an intra-party challenger. The multivariate models report some surprising differences between
Democrats and Republicans in terms of what drives primary competitiveness. As I discuss below, the differences between the parties require further research but begin to suggest that different types of candidates or perhaps different types of primaries are affected by different parts of the electoral environment. For example, Democrats seem to be far more sensitive to the potential activity of the state party organization than Republicans. At the same time Republican potential candidates appear far more cognizant of and affected by the size of the potential candidate pool.

In the Senate chapter, I was able to leverage the literature on the relative vulnerability of Senate incumbents to develop several more tests around the “opportunity structure” potential candidates evaluate. As expected, competition levels are on average higher in the Senate but so too is the variance around those expected values. Senators experience more competition and that level of competition can vary dramatically from one primary to the next. Incumbency status is a primary driver of Senate primary competition but the state party’s role in the nomination process has just as large an impact according to the analysis. This is true for both Republicans and Democrats. Voter-centric considerations such as state heterogeneity and the openness of the primary election laws do not systematically affect primary competition. These findings strongly suggest that primary competition is an elite driven event. Political elites and intermediaries have large systematic influence over how many candidates run and whether they are viable, competitive. Voters, I would argue, are largely presented with choices so extensively shaped by other considerations as to have almost no ability to enforce Riker’s popular veto.
Implications for Future Work

This research has effectively established the utility of developing district level theories and empirical unit of analysis when studying pre-general election dynamics. This is not to say that individual level work should be abandoned. If fact, only by leveraging individual level theories of candidate emergence was I able to develop a more complete understanding of the electoral environment and the casual mechanisms that drive the aggregate level outcomes: primary competition. Future work should proceed along both lines and inform one another. Specifically, the work of Maisel and Stone’s Candidate Emergence Study provided ground breaking individual level data on potential candidates’ perceptions of the electoral environment and the likelihood of running for Congress. The CES effectively avoided selecting on the dependent variable and identified the pool of potential candidates, although limited to just a handful of states. Expanding this type of design to more primaries is a critical next step. Maisel and Stone’s focus on self-assessment of potential candidates provides insight on psychology of candidate emergence. Their work clearly speaks to what aspects of the electoral environment are influential and what resources, sources of information and pressure points potential candidates consider.

While it is crucial that individual level research expands on the systematic observation approaches in the Candidate Emergence Study, the case study approaches of Linda Fowler (1993) and Thomas Kazee (1994) may be best suited to investigate and isolate the nature of the relationship between potential candidates and political intermediaries. This is a clear limitation of my work. Future efforts will need to design studies that quantify and systematically observe a much wider range of political
intermediaries’ pre-primary actions and strategies. Candidate emergence case studies, I believe, should inform such designs. As the candidate emergence line of research progresses, the findings and implications must be considered at the district level. Marc Hetherington and his colleagues (2003, 2004) have been pursuing similar questions focused on redistricting that build on and tie into many of the candidate emergence findings. Their work is prime example of leveraging implications to inform both lines of research. Individual and district level research ask and answer different questions but also can inform each other. Future research must work to make these connections more explicit and effective. In this way we may be able to build a seamless understanding from the psychology of candidate emergence straight through to the choice set voters have at the general election stage.

The apparent differences in the Democratic and Republican primaries presents a second more focused line of study that should be investigated. The analysis of House primaries consistently found differences in the aspects of the electoral environment that affected Republicans and Democrats. Two immediate questions focus on why this difference exists and is it maintained or even strengthen when better and more diverse measures of political intermediaries’ activities are included? One hypothesis is that this result is actually driven by majority status. The Republican majority in 2002 had far different strategic concerns than the minority Democrats. While certainly worth investigating, I believe the more likely explanation rests on the differences both in the types of potential candidates each party attracts and the type of primary voters they compete over. With more election cycles and measures of the electoral environment, these results could speak to how candidates identify their relevant political environment,
which may systematically differ between the parties, by region, or political culture of the state. It is another example of how district level findings can inform individual level findings and vice versa.

Finally, future research must investigate the role of political intermediaries in pre-general election politics. The strategies, tactics and affects of these intermediaries may have significant impact on the competitiveness of elections and the tie between voters and candidates for office. As my findings demonstrate, even with rather blunt indicators the activities of party organizations have a large systematic impact on the level of congressional and senatorial primaries. Increasingly party organizations have sought to affect the emergence of intra-party competition. However, many elections studies have assumed that the organizations’ role have become, “constrained and marginalized.” Stephen Frantzich argues “the party organizations accept the nomination process with fatalism,” (1989, 130). In stark contrast, many party organization scholars have documented a fundamental shift in the party strategy and an increased willingness to insert themselves earlier and earlier into key campaigns. While party organizations at all levels have increased their candidate service activities, the Legislative Campaigns Committees have emerged as the principal “nurturers” of preferred candidates (Sorauf 1998, 227). The services and information the party organizations provide preferred or targeted potential candidates serves to strength those candidates but also to clear the field of any potential intra-party challengers. This strategy amounts to reducing the scope of conflict at the primary stage so that voters have less influence over election outcomes.
I believe one focus in future research should be on these increasingly aggressive tactics of the party organizations, however, the larger set of political intermediaries should also be investigated in future work. The current study only included measurement of one aspect of one branch of the party organizations. This is to say nothing of the potential impact of interest groups, political action committees and external political consultants. Both individual level research on candidate emergence and district level primary competition studies can no longer ignore the resource and information roles these extra-constitutional organizations play in the election process.

**Electoral Competition in Democracies**

“Democracy,” according to E.E. Schattschneider, “is a political system in which the people have a choice among the alternatives created by competing political organizations and leaders” (1960, 138). This definition of Democracy identifies two fundamental questions that drove this research project. To what extent do political elites actually compete for voters’ support? Secondly, to what extent do voters’ influence the choice set of alternatives created by competing political elites? By building on individual level theories of candidate emergence and aggregating to the district level, primary outcomes, I sought to identify the forces that influence the competitiveness of primary elections. I was able to systematically test the influence of “opportunity structure” forces, voter centric indicators and begin to measure the role of political intermediaries. My findings suggest that the a priori strategic calculations of potential candidates are in large part driven by institutional structures (incumbency advantage) and political intermediaries (party organizations’ role in the nominating process). This has clear implications for how we view, understand and predict general
election outcomes and consequently the make-up, behavior and policy outputs of the legislative process.

I began this chapter by pointing to the adoption of the direct primary as a fundamental widening of the democratic process, one that expanded the scope of conflict to the voters and at the candidate selection stage. Democratizing the party nomination process is conditional on the effectiveness of political institutions to engender effective elite competition over voters. “A belief in the corrective efficacy of competition,” according the V.O. Key jr., “permeates American political thought” (1956, 11). How does the primary process stack up to this measuring stick? Initially my findings, of higher than expected variance in competition, suggest a healthier system than conventional wisdom would suggest. However, when the influence of incumbents’ status and political intermediaries is considered, it would seem that in many cases voters only have the option of multiple viable candidates--true competition--when political elites allow the scope of conflict to widen. The emergence of primary competition is systematically affected by forces and actors completely outside of the voters’ control.
APPENDIX A

MEASURES AND DATA SOURCES
APPENDIX

MEASURES AND DATA SOURCES

The following tables provide greater detail around the measurement of variables included in the analysis throughout the research. The first table addresses the differences in Herrnson and Gimpel’s D score versus my SDS measure of competitiveness. The examples here demonstrate that by taking into account the number of candidates running, the SDS measure provides a more accurate indicator that can be compared across election with different numbers of candidates. The final three tables provide brief descriptions and source information for the covariates of primary competition tested in the analysis chapters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothetical Primary Result</th>
<th>Herrnson and Gimpel’s D</th>
<th>Standardized Divisiveness Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 candidates 60-40 vote split</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 candidates 70-30 vote split</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 candidates 60-30-10 vote split</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 candidates 50-40-10 vote split</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 candidates 50-25-25 vote split</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 candidates 30-25-25-20 vote split</td>
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<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 candidates 60-20-10-10 vote split</td>
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<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 candidates 70-20-8-2 vote split</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.62</td>
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Table A.1
Measuring Congressional Primary Competitiveness
Illustrative Examples of D and SDS
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
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<td>General Election</td>
<td>Range 0 to 100</td>
<td>General election vote percentage for current cycle’s congressional race</td>
<td><em>America Votes 1972-2002</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Democrat (1)</td>
<td>Party of the primary race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Range 0 to 4</td>
<td>Number of election cycles since redistricting. NOTE: Some states were</td>
<td><em>America Votes 1972-2002</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EG: 1972 (0)</td>
<td>required to redistrict more than once every ten years.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1974 (1)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1976 (2)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978 (3)</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1980 (4)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seat Type</td>
<td>Incumbent (0)</td>
<td>Incumbency status as it relates to the “type” of primary</td>
<td><em>America Votes 1972-2002</em></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Challenger (1)</td>
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<td>Open (2)</td>
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Table A.2
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<tr>
<td>District Heterogeneity</td>
<td>Range 0 to 1.0</td>
<td>Summary statistic of voter heterogeneity based on economic class, urbanicity and race</td>
<td>Almanac 2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 Presidential Vote</td>
<td>Range 0 to 100</td>
<td>Congressional District vote for Party’s Presidential candidate</td>
<td>Almanac2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
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<td>South</td>
<td>Non-southern (0) Southern (1)</td>
<td>11 States of the Old Confederacy</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Law Openness</td>
<td>Closed (0) Modified/ Semi-Open (1) Open (2)</td>
<td>Voter access to primary</td>
<td>America Votes 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
<td>None (0) Informal/ party rules (1) Formal/legally binding (2)</td>
<td>State party use of pre-primary conventions or endorsements</td>
<td>Maisel et al (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Limits</td>
<td>No (0) Yes (1)</td>
<td>State Legislative term limits that affected incumbent state legislators in 2002</td>
<td>Almanac2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
<td>Range 2.26 to 212</td>
<td>Ratio of State legislative seats to congressional districts</td>
<td>Almanac2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>No (0) Yes (1)</td>
<td>Incumbent in other party’s primary</td>
<td>America Votes 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat</td>
<td>No (0) Yes (1)</td>
<td>No incumbent in either primary</td>
<td>America Votes 2002</td>
</tr>
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Table A.3
Measurement and Sources For Chapter 4
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<td>State Heterogeneity</td>
<td>Range 0 to 1.0</td>
<td>Summary statistic of voter heterogeneity based on economic class, urbanicity and race</td>
<td><em>Almanac 2004</em> Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>Range 0 to 100</td>
<td>State Vote for Party’s Presidential candidate in most recent election.</td>
<td><em>Almanac 2000</em> to 2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Non-southern (0)</td>
<td>11 States of the Old Confederacy</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Law Openness</td>
<td>Closed (0) Modified/ Semi-Open (1) Open (2)</td>
<td>Voter access to primary</td>
<td><em>America Votes</em> 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Role in Nomination</td>
<td>None (0) Informal/ party rules (1) Formal/legally binding (2)</td>
<td>State party use of pre-primary conventions or endorsements</td>
<td>Maisel et al (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Pool Size</td>
<td>Range 4 to 62</td>
<td>Number of congressional districts plus number of statewide offices in the state.</td>
<td><em>Almanac 2000</em> to 2004 Barone and Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Tenure</td>
<td>Range 58 to 96</td>
<td>Year the sitting incumbent first won the Senate seat</td>
<td><em>America Votes</em> 1998-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Vote</td>
<td>Range 13 to 77</td>
<td>Percent of vote Party’s Senate Candidate received in last election</td>
<td><em>America Votes</em> 1998-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>No (0) Yes (1)</td>
<td>Incumbent in other party’s primary</td>
<td><em>America Votes</em> 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat</td>
<td>No (0) Yes (1)</td>
<td>No incumbent in either primary</td>
<td><em>America Votes</em> 2002</td>
</tr>
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Table A.4
Measurement and Sources for Chapter 5
BIBLIOGRAPHY


