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A Promise Fulfilled? Open Primaries and Representation

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Academics and political practitioners alike have long concerned themselves with the representativeness of primary electorates. Hoping to moderate the ideological extremity of primary voters, state parties have increasingly adopted more open primary eligibility rules. This article explores the extent to which open and modified-open primaries actually attract a more representative electorate than their closed counterparts. Using state-level exit poll data from 1988 through 2000, we compare the ideological, age, and income representation of primary electorates with general election voters. We find that open primaries result in the ideological convergence of the parties' primary electorates, although the extent of this convergence is contingent upon the candidate choices within individual election years. Notably, open primaries are responsible for the inclusion of younger participants in both parties' primaries. While reformed primary structure may weaken party control over the nomination process, it clearly results in more moderate and more representative primary electorates.

The elevation of such minorities to power within the nominating process—through the smallness of total participation and its bias . . . may affect more than the capacity of the party to wage political war. At times the swings of partisan sentiment are enough to throw into office the most improbable sorts of characters who have won nominations through the vagaries of the primary.

V. O. Key, *American State Politics: An Introduction* (1956, 166).

Even before the introduction of the McGovern-Fraser presidential nominating reforms in 1972, academics and political practitioners alike wrestled with the questions of nominating procedures, the representativeness of primary electorates, and their implications for democracy. Strong party proponents, like Key, worried that primaries dilute party influence over nominations and thus impede party discipline and effectiveness in governing.¹ Others have contended that the biases inherent in primary electorates (the overrepresentation of some groups and the underrepresentation of others) deprive minority groups of their democratic voice. Beyond the scholarly debates surrounding the direct primary, political

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¹For an alternative point of view, see Reiter 1985 and DiClerico and Davis 2000.

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parties and their operatives have voiced pragmatic concerns regarding the types of candidates that primaries tend to favor, suggesting that they often produce ideologically extreme candidates who are not always attractive to more moderate, general election voters.

Questions regarding the role of primaries in the nomination process have only become more significant as the number of presidential primaries has escalated in recent years. The U.S. has seen not only a dramatic increase in the number of state primaries, but also a growth in the variety of primary types. Open primaries (those open to all registered voters regardless of party) and modified-open primaries (including various combinations of same-party registrants, independents, and unaffiliated voters) have become more prevalent over the past 30 years, while closed primaries (open only to same-party registrants) are on the decline. While changes in primary eligibility rules were often enacted in the hopes of attracting more ideologically moderate primary voters, most were implemented with very little empirical evidence that they actually achieve these intended goals.

Research has been conducted on the more general question of primary voters and their “representativeness” (Crotty and Jackson 1985; Geer 1988, 1989; Keeter and Zukin 1983; Key 1956; Lengle 1981; Norrander 1989b; Ranney 1972). Comparatively little attention, however, has focused on the various primary forms and whether open primaries indeed produce more representative and ideologically centrist voters than their closed counterparts (but see Geer 1986; Hedlund, Watts, and Hedge 1982; Norrander 1989a). Simply put, as states increasingly move toward more inclusive nominating procedures, is there any evidence to suggest that these expanded eligibility rules actually mobilize different kinds of voters with discernably different preferences? We aim to provide insight on how rules changes in the primary system may facilitate or undermine a more representative nomination process.

Using exit poll data from 113 primaries over the past four presidential elections cycles (1988 through 2000), this article explores the relationship between the various primary types and their respective voters. Our general hypothesis is that open and modified-open primaries can facilitate more diverse primary participation and, in particular, can minimize ideological differences between primary electorates and their general election “party following.” Nonetheless, the extent to which primary rules result in a more representative primary electorate is conditioned by the nature of the primary candidates within each party and their respective ideological diversity.

We compare the ideological, age, and income characteristics of primary voters versus general election voters for a sample of Republican and Democratic primaries in these election years. Controlling for election-specific effects as well as the competitiveness and timing of individual primaries, we indeed find evidence that reformed primary structures influence the composition of the electorate. Much as the reform architects intended, open and modified-open primaries attract more ideologically centrist and more demographically representative primary electorates. We also look in greater depth at crossover voting in relation to dif-

ferent primary structures. Using a pooled data set from the 2000 primaries, we find substantial evidence that open and modified-open primaries result in higher levels of crossover voting and primary electorates that differ significantly from voters in closed contests. Finally, noting that “representativeness” is one value among many in a democracy, we conclude this work with a discussion of primary reform and its impact on the strength and viability of the American party system.

Primary Reform

The contemporary nomination reform movement, marked by the McGovern-Fraser Commission report *Mandate for Reform* (Democratic National Committee 1970), removed control over nominations from state and national party elites and placed this power squarely in the hands of the voting public. These Democratic party reforms invalidated all state convention, primary, and caucus procedures that were not open to rank-and-file party members and replaced these procedures with two acceptable methods of delegate selection—the party primary and the open caucus.² One of the unintended consequences of McGovern-Fraser reforms was an enormous surge in the number of state party primaries (Patterson 1993). Prior to the reforms, Democrats in two-thirds of the states used elite-run state conventions to choose convention delegates. In the post-reform era, over three-fourths of the states use primary elections to choose delegates, and over 80% of convention delegates are selected in these primaries. This is true for Republicans as well as Democrats.

Nominating procedures are determined by states, and there are three basic types of primary. The two simplest primary forms are what we refer to as “open” and “closed” primaries. In the open primary, any registered voter may participate regardless of partisan affiliation. This category also includes states that allow same-day party registration. Conversely, in the closed primary, only same-party registered partisans may participate. Modified-open primaries encompass a broad category of voting rules that are neither fully closed nor fully open for all to participate and include primaries where same-party registrants may participate with “independents,” “unenrolled,” “unaffiliated,” or “undeclared” voters. As of 2000, 35% of Democratic primaries and 31% of Republican primaries are closed to registered party members. Forty-one percent of Democratic and Republican primaries are open to all registered voters, and the remaining 24% and 28% of Democratic and Republican primaries, respectively, are characterized by modified-open procedures (see Table 1).

Primaries and Representation

The question of representation and the extent to which primary voters reflect the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of nonvoters and rank-and-file

²These reforms, while instituted by the Democratic party, were adopted in many cases by the Republicans as well, since nomination rules were often institutionalized by Democratically controlled state legislatures.

TABLE 1

Types of Primaries and Caucuses by Party and Year—1988 to 2000

Type	Democrats				Republicans			
	1988	1992	1996	2000	1988	1992	1996	2000
Closed Primaries	45% (23)	43% (22)	37% (19)	35% (18)	43% (22)	37% (19)	35% (18)	31% (16)
Open Primaries*	39 (20)	41 (21)	41 (21)	41 (21)	39 (20)	41 (21)	41 (21)	41 (21)
Modified Open Primaries**	16 (8)	16 (8)	22 (11)	24 (12)	18 (9)	22 (11)	24 (12)	28 (14)

Note: Cell entries are the percentage of cases for each year. Parentheses are the number of cases. Cases include primaries and caucuses for fifty states plus the District of Columbia.

* Open primaries refer to primaries where any registered voter could vote in the primary.

** Modified primaries refer to primaries where voters registered to the party in whose primary they are voting along with “independents,” “unenrolled,” “unaffiliated,” or “undeclared” could vote in the primary.

Source: *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (Cook 1991), 3478; (Cook 1995), 2485–2599; Rhodes Cook, *Race for the Presidency: Winning the 1988 Election* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1987); Alice V. McGillivray, *Presidential Primaries and Caucuses 1992: A Handbook of Election Statistics* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1992); Richard M. Scammon, Alice V. McGillivray, and Rhodes Cook, *America Votes: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics*, Vol. 22 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1997); Federal Elections Commission Web site 2001 (<http://www.fec.gov/votregis/primaryvoting.htm>); various state Secretaries of State.

partisans generally has been a long-standing concern to students of primary politics. The findings from this research are decidedly mixed. Some scholars conclude that primary voters are demographically unrepresentative of the larger partisan electorate (Geer 1988, 1989; Key 1956), while others find fewer differences (DeNitto and Smithers 1972; Moore and Hofstetter 1973; Norrander 1989b). Further, Austin Ranney (1968, 1972; with Epstein 1966) maintains that regardless of demographic differences, the attitudes and political preferences of primary voters and nonvoters are indeed quite similar. The scholarly focus on demographic representation assumes a link between socioeconomic characteristics and political preferences. At the core of Ranney’s argument, however, is that preferences are what count.

From the perspective of this research, demographic *and* preferential differences have important consequences for democratic representation. On the one hand, we agree that adequate representation should reflect the ideological balance and policy preferences of the mass party base. Beyond this, however, we note that negative consequences may result from demographic misrepresentations alone. As primaries are intraparty contests, there is likely to be a good deal of broad ideological agreement among party brethren (Hedlund 1978). Important variance

within the party, nonetheless, derives from the policy priorities of its members. Even diverse groups that share similar ideological orientations can be very divided in their respective legislative priorities. A demographically misrepresentative primary electorate may have a strong agenda-setting effect on national politics, regardless of how well they mirror the more general ideological leanings and policy preferences of the mass base. For this reason, our analysis poses both ideological and demographic comparisons of primary types and their respective participants.

Theory and Expectations

The general assumption that underlies the movement toward more open primaries is that enhanced access to the primary ballot will result in the greater ideological moderation of the overall primary electorate. While there appears to be broad acceptance of this supposition, there has been little formal discussion as to why this should be so. From a strict institutionalist point of view, changing eligibility rules for statewide primaries, in and of itself, provides an impetus for independents and weak partisans to participate in formerly “party only” primaries. To the extent that these independents and weak partisans (who are presumed to be less ideologically intense than their strong partisan counterparts) increasingly participate in primary voting, their presence will likely counterbalance the ideological extremity of the party activists who disproportionately participate in primary elections.

Putting the politics of voter mobilization back into the equation, however, there are clearly many factors, apart from voting procedures, that influence the quantity and the kinds of voters that participate in the primaries. In particular we suggest that the candidate choices available to voters in any given election interact with these election rules to mobilize both core and crossover voters. The presence of strong, moderate candidate alternatives is likely to mobilize the ideological centrists within the party—regardless of primary eligibility rules. Viable moderate candidates, in conjunction with expanded primary eligibility, however, represent an even greater likelihood of a moderate primary electorate; closed primaries that offer no centrist choices are likely to fall at the other extreme.

In general, we have no reason to believe that these factors (eligibility rules and candidate diversity) will have disparate effects on the Republican and Democratic parties. Nonetheless, to the extent that moderate primary candidates are more likely to emerge within one party or the other, this most certainly will influence the relative effect of primary rules on electorate ideology. Under these circumstances, and if only one party offers a strong moderate candidate, independents and weak partisans will likely flow to the party primary where the centrist choice is available, leaving the ideological makeup of the other party’s primary electorate either unchanged or even more extreme. Thus, given the push-pull dynamic at

play when only one party offers moderate choices, there is little reason to believe that open eligibility rules alone substantially affect the composition of primary electorates.

Two other factors that most certainly affect the number of voters in presidential primaries are the timing and competitiveness of the primary in question. Early primaries, by virtue of their relative importance, garner greater media coverage and typically have higher rates of campaign spending and more candidate visits, all of which contribute to relatively high voter salience (Bartels 1988). Overall levels of competitiveness in the party primary, as well as the relative level of competitiveness in a given state primary, are also likely to influence salience and turnout. Further, state-specific factors, such as mean income and educational levels and racial composition, have been shown to influence turnout, with better educated, more affluent, and less racially diverse states typically showing higher rates of primary turnout than others (Norrande and Smith 1985).

It is important to note that while higher turnout may lead to greater ideological moderation (under the assumption that new peripheral voters are more moderate than the core), it does not necessarily equate with a more demographically representative primary electorate. Furthermore, it is not self-evident that open eligibility procedures will automatically alter the demographic characteristics of primary voters. This seems especially true of modified-open procedures that allow independents and unaffiliated voters to participate. To the extent that political independents are demographically similar to party regulars, their inclusion should not significantly change the age, class, or educational mix. Nonetheless, in the case of open primaries that include same-day registration, it is reasonable to expect a somewhat younger electorate as research on easy registration indicates a particularly strong mobilizing effect among young voters (Jackson, Brown, and Wright 1998).

Apart from the case of same-day registration, we maintain that it is the nature of the candidates in a given primary race, coupled with the level of interest in the race, that will likely dictate the diversity and representativeness of the primary voters. In a contest with two or more centrist candidates, activists and ideologues may remain poorly mobilized. However, in races where ideologically more extreme candidates are both present and competitive, one might expect a less moderate voter pool than otherwise. It is thus important as we explore the relative influence of eligibility rules on electorate diversity to control for year-specific effects as well as for the timing and competitiveness of primary races.

Data and Methods

To address these issues about the representativeness of primary electorates, we used the 1988–2000 *Voter Research and Surveys* and *Voter News Service* election day exit polls. Unfortunately, exit polls were not available for all states, and many primaries were missing. In other cases, polls were available but lacked the survey questions necessary for our analysis. In all, we include polling data from

113 primaries.³ (For additional information on the individual cases and sampling methodologies used in each of the surveys, see Appendix II.) Using these available polls, we computed a mean score for the political ideology of the primary electorate (on a 1–3 scale), and then compared that with the mean score of the party following for the general electorate (Geer 1988, 1989). By *party following*, we mean those who voted for the party's candidate in the general election, regardless of their partisan identification. Our dependent variable for ideological representation is simply the difference between the mean score of the party following and the mean score of the primary electorate for each state. Positive values for this dependent variable indicate states where the general electorate's party following is more conservative than the primary electorate (i.e., the primary electorate is more liberal).

In accord with Geer (1988, 1989), we propose the party following as the appropriate baseline because the main concern of political parties is to win elections. Ranney (1972) and Crotty and Jackson (1985) use primary nonvoters as their basis of comparison, while others have compared primary voters with same-party identifiers in the general election (DeNitto and Smithers 1972; Lengle 1981). Norrander (1989b) maintains that general election voters who did not vote in the primary are the most appropriate baseline. To determine whether changing the comparative baseline would make a difference to our findings, we conducted a parallel set of analyses using same-party identifiers in the general election in lieu of the party following. The results were so substantively similar that we report only the party-following analysis. We did not have data for all four years to replicate our findings using the Norrander baseline. We did, however, have such data for 1988 and calculated ideology scores for both the party following as well as general election voters who did not vote in the primary. The Pearson's R correlation for ideology scores between these two different baseline groups was .984 (sig. $p \leq .000001$). There is no reason to believe that, at least for 1988, using a different baseline would alter our findings.

We followed a slightly different procedure for computing the age and income representativeness of the electorate. To construct our age comparisons, we computed the percentage of the primary electorate and the general electorate party following that was over age 60. Subtracting the primary percentage from the percentage for the party following yields a difference wherein positive values indicate a primary electorate that is younger than the general electorate (i.e., the general electorate is older).

For income, we subtracted the percentage of those earning more than \$50,000 per year in the primary election from the same percentage for the general elec-

³ While we do not have data for all primary elections in these four years, our sample nonetheless offers substantial variance across important variables. We have excellent regional variation in our sample: 33% of our 113 cases are from the Northeast, 29% are from the South, 27% are from the Midwest, and 11% are from the West. Variance in the timing of the primary is also well represented, with 38% of our cases occurring after Super Tuesday, 22% before Super Tuesday, and the remaining 30% on Super Tuesday.

torate's party following, again for each state. As this difference increases, it indicates that the primary electorate is poorer than the party following in the general electorate (i.e., that the general electorate is wealthier).

The initial analysis combining data from four presidential years contains 44 cases for Democrats and 69 cases for Republicans. The first set of independent variables evaluates the impact of four separate election years on the representativeness of the electorates (using 1988 as our baseline for comparison). As each election season presents a unique set of candidate choices, we strongly expect to find year-to-year differences.

The second set of independent variables regresses the dependent variables on indicators for region. We know from previous research that primary electorates vary by region in numerous ways (Norrande 1989a, 1989b; 1993, 347), and the fact that groups of geographically proximate states schedule their primaries at the same time may be relevant to how closely these states' primaries correspond to their general electorate party followings. Clustering primaries by region draws more media and candidate attention to these elections, heightening mobilization through the sense that these votes really do count, perhaps as part of a regional bloc. We have included dummy variables for three regions: Midwest, South, and West, with the Northeast being the excluded baseline category.

A third set of independent variables combines primary structure with the timing and competitiveness of primaries. To measure primary structure, we used two dummy variables: one for open primaries and the other for modified-open primaries with closed primaries as the baseline. We gauge timing and competitiveness with a measure that combines the *earliness* of the primary—estimated by the inverse of the number of days after January 1 the primary was held—with the *competitiveness* of the primary—measured by the inverse of the difference between the primary winner's vote share and the vote share that he or she would have obtained had all primary competitors still active in the campaign evenly split the primary vote. Because turnout in the early and competitive primaries typically exceeds those in later, less consequential ones, we expect the composition of these early primaries to be somewhat different from the later ones, although it is not fully intuitive as to what these results should look like. On the one hand, the ideologically more extreme activists are likely to be particularly mobilized in the early, competitive races. On the other, higher turnout may yield a proportionately greater number of moderate, peripheral voters than in the later races. The results for both the Republican and Democratic electorates are presented in Table 2.

We follow up this analysis by returning to the individual-level data (a pooled data set of the 2000 primary surveys) and examine the effects of primary structure, as well as their timing and competitiveness, on the nature of crossover voting in both parties' primaries. Given the strong crossover appeal of the McCain candidacy in the 2000 election (absent a similarly attractive moderate among the Democrats), this case seems particularly well suited to explore the asymmet-

rical effects of candidate choice in the context of different primary eligibility rules.

Ideological Representation

Our analysis indicates that primary structure reform has slightly moderated the liberalism of Democratic primary electorates, although the standard error for the coefficient for open primaries is inflated due to multicollinearity (see Table 2, first column under “Ideological Representation”). Even so, our findings suggest that after controlling for regional and election year differences in the candidate offerings, the rules alone are of less importance. Notably, and as expected, the timing and competitiveness of primaries are quite important—the earlier and more competitive the race, the more liberal the Democratic primary electorate. Apparently liberal activists are much better mobilized in the early competition than they are in later races where the outcome has already been determined. Southern primaries show more of a tendency toward ideological conservatism, compared with the Northeast, as do midwestern and western primaries. In other words, liberal ideological distortions of the primary electorate occur primarily in northeastern states, with the South, West, and Midwest pulling the Democratic primary electorate back toward the center. The results also indicate that 2000 was a distinctive year for the Democrats as they exhibited a primary electorate that was, on average, much more liberal than the party following (compared with 1988). Given the popularity of the McCain candidacy and his apparent appeal among moderates and crossover voters (shown later), Republican moderation in this year was apparently achieved at the expense of the Democrats as it pulled many of the otherwise centrist voters into the GOP primaries.

For the Republicans, the move to open primaries has invited in a more liberal primary electorate relative to their general election party following. Open primaries in the GOP are associated with a 10.4% increase in the liberalism of the primary electorate, relative to the party following, compared to closed primaries. This finding, coupled with the slight tendency for open primaries to moderate the ideological liberalism of Democratic primary electorates, suggests that primary reform produces some ideological convergence of the party primary vote. Timing and competitiveness had less of an impact on GOP primaries than they did on Democratic ones, but the regional differentiation of primary electorates is apparently more pronounced for Republicans. Midwestern, southern and western primary electorates were all considerably more conservative, relative to their party followings in the general electorate, than those in northeastern states, and the southern primaries registered the most conservative voters. On average, the southern primary electorates are about 17.5% more conservative relative to their party following than in the Northeast. This informs us that most of the conservative ideological distortion wrought by Republican primaries is a product of the southern and western states rather than the liberal Northeast. Finally, Republican

TABLE 2

Influence of Structural Changes in Primary Type on the Ideological, Age, and Income Representation of Republican and Democratic Primary Electorates Compared to the Party Following in General Election, 1988–2000

Independent Variable	Democratic Primaries			Republican Primaries		
	Ideological Representation	Age Representation	Income Representation	Ideological Representation	Age Representation	Income Representation
Year 1992	.070 (.049)	-.020 (.027)	.045 (.033)	.055 (.049)	-.082** (.026)	.033 (.034)
Year 1996	.044 (.087)	-.027 (.048)	.007 (.084)	.032 (.038)	.038* (.020)	.040 (.026)
Year 2000	.133** (.042)	-.066** (.023)	.096** (.029)	-.010 (.038)	-.052** (.020)	.076** (.026)
Midwest	-.062 (.046)	-.032 (.026)	.007 (.035)	-.072** (.034)	-.034* (.018)	-.001 (.023)
South	-.124** (.046)	-.044* (.026)	.001 (.032)	-.089** (.031)	-.052** (.017)	-.008 (.022)
West	-.094 (.084)	-.020 (.047)	.031 (.057)	-.074** (.036)	-.030 (.019)	.004 (.025)
Early & Competitive	.00001* (.000004)	.000008** (.0000004)	-.000002 (.000001)	-.000003 (.000001)	.000004 (.000003)	.000003 (.000001)
Open Primaries	-.014 (.047)	.057** (.026)	-.047† (.033)	.052* (.029)	.033** (.015)	-.015 (.020)
Modified Open	.042 (.045)	.014 (.026)	.046 (.030)	-.029 (.034)	.004 (.018)	-.003 (.023)
Constant	-.053 (.050)	-.125 (.028)	.043 (.032)	.022 (.053)	-.084 (.028)	-.001 (.037)
Adj. R ²	.428	.171	.279	.141	.519	.063
N	43	43	43	68	68	68

Data source: ICPSR; *Voter Research and Surveys*, and *Voter News Service, Primary and General Election Exit Polls, 1988–2000*.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; † indicates standard errors inflated due to multicollinearity.

Interpretive note: *positive* coefficients indicate that the primary electorate is more ideologically liberal, younger, and poorer than the party following in the general electorate.

Dependent variable coding is as follows:

1. *Ideology difference* = (general electorate ideology of party following minus primary electorate ideology) with ideology scaled from 1 = liberal to 3 = conservative.
2. *Age difference* = (percent of general electorate party following over age 60 minus percent of primary electorate over age 60).
3. *Income difference* = (percent of general electorate party following earning more than \$50,000 per year minus percent of primary electorate earning more than \$50,000 per year).

primary electorates are more consistent relative to the party following across years than are the Democrats.

Age Representation

Differences in the youth of the electorate are important given the increasing prominence of aging-related issues in presidential elections. Most of the time, primary electorates are considerably older than general electorate party followings (Geer 1989). This is true for Democrats and Republicans. Our data show that the move to open primaries within the Democratic party has resulted in a younger primary electorate relative to the party following, compared with the traditional closed primary system. Specifically, there is a substantial 20% reduction in the tendency for the Democratic primary electorate to be older than the party following in those states that held open primaries. Modified-open primaries, as anticipated, had no statistically significant impact on age representation. But the timing and competitiveness of Democratic primaries also pulls them in a more youthful direction—a one standard deviation increase in timing and competitiveness yields a primary electorate that is 9% younger. Distortions in the direction of old age occur primarily in the southern states, with the South exhibiting the oldest primary electorate relative to its general election party following. Controlling for other variables, the 2000 primaries also exhibited some tendency toward elderly dominance of the primaries (compared with 1988).

The GOP primary electorate is also younger thanks to open primaries, but the impact has not been as great in this set of elections. Our results indicate that open primaries show a 10% reduction in the tendency for older voters to dominate in primaries—about half the impact that these reforms had for the Democrats (see Table 2). To the extent that the elderly dominate Republican primaries in disproportion to their influence in the general electorate party following, this is mostly a function of midwestern and southern states—the Northeast has a younger primary electorate relative to its party following. The GOP also shows much more election-to-election sensitivity in age representation than the Democrats, with the 1992 and 2000 electorates characterized by elderly dominance in the primaries (compared with 1988) and 1996 showing less primary dominance by elderly voters. This 1996 result is consistent with the fact that Bob Dole attracted far more elderly voters in the general election than he did in the primaries, where he quickly emerged as his party's choice.

Income Representation

Income representation is critical inasmuch as American politics has a class basis. Our results in Table 2 indicate that open primaries have increased the representation of wealthy voters in Democratic primaries. Given the absence of a similar effect in the modified-open primaries, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Republicans who cross over into Democratic primaries have significantly

higher incomes than the traditional Democratic primary electorate. Furthermore, the tendency for Democratic primaries to be characterized by a slant toward lower income echelons relative to the party following was reduced by about 10% in states holding open primaries between 1988 and 2000. Timing and competitiveness did nothing to alter the basic differences in income between primary and party following, but there is some evidence that the 2000 elections were characterized by a poorer primary electorate relative to the party following than 1988, likely reflecting Al Gore's popularity among higher income, socially liberal voters in the general election.

The difference in income between the GOP primary electorate and the party's general election following is not especially well predicted by any of the variables we utilize in Table 2. Only the dummy variable for the 2000 election is statistically significant, and it shows that the Republicans moved toward a lower income primary electorate (relative to the party following) that year. The dominance of the GOP primary by wealthier voters relative to the party following was reduced by 17% in 2000 and by 9% in 1996 (although the latter figure is not statistically significant due to multicollinearity). The decline of class differences between the party primary electorates could well be the result of the GOP's growing appeal to low- and middle-income voters and the rise of noneconomic issues as the basis for political cleavage between the parties.

In sum, and consistent with our expectations, the modified-open primaries do not meaningfully alter the demographic composition of primary electorates for Democrats or Republicans because the independents that join the partisans in these primary contests offer little in the way of significant diversity. On the other hand, open primaries do lead to younger electorates and, in the case of the Democrats, wealthier ones. It seems that the Republicans who cross over into Democratic primaries give an income boost to the average, while the crossover Democrats do not appear to come from the ranks of the poor.

Who Are the Crossover Voters? The Case of the 2000 Election

We have noted the impact that structural reforms have on mitigating the differences between primary and general electorates, and we conclude that primary reforms lead to somewhat of an ideological convergence between Democratic and Republican primary electorates. Although Table 2 indicates that the open primaries have had a greater total effect on Democratic primaries than on those of the Republicans, this is likely to be an artifact of the particular elections we analyze. Democrats had hotly contested primaries in 1988 and 1992 that invited crossover voting and probably enhanced the relative influence of structural reforms. The 2000 primary season represented a somewhat reverse case in which the Republican primaries were more competitive than those of the Democrats. Beyond the competitiveness distinction, the Republican primaries in 2000 also included John McCain, a candidate with enormous crossover appeal who actively targeted Independent and Democratic voters. The following analyzes crossover

voters in the 2000 primaries with an eye to how structural reforms might affect the relative openness of the presidential nominating system to newcomers, political mavericks, party outsiders, and others. It also illustrates quite nicely how the candidate offerings within one party's primary influence the ideological composition of the other party's primary electorate. The asymmetrical results in 2000 further suggest that primary reforms may facilitate moderation but do not cause it directly.

Table 3 presents the results of a probit analysis of the crossover vote by primary structure, ideology, age, and income for the 2000 elections. The dependent variable for the Republican primary crossover vote presented in the first column of results is coded 0 for a Republican identifying voter, 1 if the voter identifies as a Democrat, Independent, or "Something Else." In the second column we present results only for Democratic crossovers; the dependent variable is coded 0 if a voter is a Republican or other voter and 1 if the voter identifies as a Democrat. The analogous coding conventions are used to analyze the crossover vote in the Democratic primaries in columns 4 and 5. We first examine the characteristics of all crossovers in the Democratic primaries, then we turn to just the Republican identifiers who voted in the Democratic primaries.

The results largely amplify the points we made in response to our analysis in Table 2 and also allow us to expand upon them. Not surprisingly, far more crossover voters are present in open primary states than in closed primary states, but the effects are vastly different for the two parties. Democrats were far more attracted to vote in Republican primaries than Republicans were in Democratic primaries. About 14% of voters in Republican open primaries were crossovers, compared with just 4% in Democratic open primaries. Modified-open primaries proved to be an important stimulus to crossover voting, something our analysis in Table 2 did not reveal. Specifically, the probability of being a crossover voter is 22% higher in GOP modified-open primaries than in closed primaries. The same effect for Democrats in 2000 is only 5%.⁴

Early and competitive primaries see far more crossover action than later, less competitive ones. In the earliest and most competitive Republican primary, for example, up to 54% of voters are crossovers, compared with just 22% in the least competitive and latest primary. In Democratic primaries, the effect of timing and competitiveness is reduced, but it is still highly significant with as many as 42% of crossovers in the early and competitive primaries identifying with a party other than the Democrats, as Independent, or as unaffiliated. Roughly 7% of these crossover voters identified as Republicans.

Confirming the results from Table 2, the 2000 GOP primaries saw an increase in the proportion of lower income crossover voters and a drop in the proportion

⁴ While modified-open primaries do not allow other-party *registrants* to participate, our results using individual-level survey data clearly illustrate an important distinction between party registration and party identification. Apparently, many of the officially "unaffiliated" are nonetheless self-described partisans.

TABLE 3
 Characteristics of Crossover Voters in the 2000 Democratic and
 Republican Primaries

Variable		Republican Primary Voters		Democratic Primary Voters	
		All Crossovers	Democratic Crossovers	All Crossovers	Republican Crossovers
Open Primaries	min	.30	.07	.24	.04
	max	.44	.15	.28	.04
	diff	.14	.08	.04	.00
Modified Open Primaries	min	.29	.07	.23	.04
	max	.51	.14	.28	.04
	diff	.22	.07	.05	.00
Early and Competitive Primaries	min	.22	.01	.17	.03
	max	.54	.29	.42	.07
	diff	.32	.28	.25	.05
Under \$15 k	min	.35	.09	.26	.04
	max	.43	.17	.19	.05
	diff	.08	.08	-.07	.01
\$15–29 k	min	.36	.09	.26	.04
	max	.39	.13	.21	.04
	diff	.03	.04	-.05	.00
\$30–49 k	min	.36	.09	.25	.04
	max	.38	.09	.24	.04
	diff	.02	.00	-.01	.00
\$75–100 k	min	.36	.10	.25	.04
	max	.34	.07	.26	.04
	diff	-.02	-.03	.01	.00
\$100 k up	min	.37	.10	.25	.04
	max	.33	.06	.26	.03
	diff	-.04	-.04	.01	-.01
Age 18–29	min	.36	.09	.25	.04
	max	.34	.08	.30	.06
	diff	-.02	-.01	.05	.02
Age 45–59	min	.34	.09	.25	.04
	max	.41	.10	.26	.04
	diff	.07	.01	.01	.00
Age 60 and over	min	.35	.09	.25	.05
	max	.38	.09	.24	.04
	diff	.03	.00	-.01	-.01
Liberals	min	.35	.08	.29	.05
	max	.45	.18	.21	.03
	diff	.10	.10	-.08	-.01
Conservatives	min	.48	.11	.23	.03
	max	.27	.07	.36	.11
	diff	-.21	-.04	.13	.08

Dependent Variable for cols 1 & 3: 1 = Crossover voter; 0 = Democratic (Republican) voter.

Dependent Variable for cols 2 & 4: 1 = Democratic (Republican) crossover voter; 0 = Other category of voter.

Cell entries show the estimated probability of being a crossover voter at the minimum and maximum values of the independent variable, and the difference between the minimum and maximum values, with all other independent variables held constant at their sample means. For complete results see Appendix Table 1.

Source: *Voter News Service 2000 Primary Election Exit Polls*.

Excluded baseline categories: Closed primaries; Income between \$50k–75k; Age 30–44; Moderates.

of high-income crossover voters, relative to those in the middle-income bracket (\$50,000–\$75,000). Crossover voters in the Democratic primaries, on the other hand, were less likely to be low income than middle and upper income. These findings indicate a class convergence occurring within party ranks, as Democratic primary voters came from higher income brackets and Republican voters from lower income strata.

Age generally predicted crossover voting within GOP primaries better than it did Democratic primaries. Republican crossover voters tended to be older and were especially likely to show up in the 45–59 baby-boom age bracket. The Democratic crossovers, though, were from the younger 18–29 age range.

Finally, the results for ideology also speak to the issue of the ideological convergence of the two parties. We find that crossover voters in Republican primaries were about 10% more likely to be liberal than moderate and about 21% less conservative than moderate. On the Democratic side, their crossover supporters were about 8% less likely to be liberal than moderate and 13% more likely to be conservative than moderate. These important findings suggest one reason why we wound up with the most competitive general election in the nation's recent history—the two major party candidates were products of a primary system where voters were strongly centered in the middle of the ideological spectrum.

These findings also suggest that open and modified-open primaries may have the potential to wreak havoc on political parties and their tentative control over nominations. While George W. Bush, the preferred choice of Republican party elites, was able to fend off John McCain's primary challenge, the findings from this crossover analysis nonetheless point to the importance that reformed primary structures have to insurgent candidates and their prospects. Large numbers of Independents and Democrats participated in the open and modified-open Republican primaries, with McCain winning six of these primaries. Should states continue to reform their existing primary structures, opening up the selection process to greater numbers of nonparty affiliated voters, the hold that Democratic and Republican party elites have over their respective nominations will most certainly become weaker.

Discussion

The representativeness of primary electorates has been an enduring question in political science research. Our results suggest that open primaries can result in a more ideologically moderate, and a more ideologically convergent, electorate. Through the adoption of open primaries, Republicans' primary electorates often wind up less conservative than their party following and Democratic primaries less liberal than theirs. These movements toward the ideological center certainly suggest that open primaries do conform to their founders' intent, making for a primary electorate that is closer to the general electorate party following than traditional closed primaries. Nonetheless, the variability of these results over time

indicates that candidate choices within each party primary matter as much as election rules. Surely the 2000 analysis illustrates the critical importance of candidates in tempering the ideological makeup of primary electorates. McCain's appeal to crossover voters resulted in more moderate Republican primary electorates; however, as demonstrated in Table 2, it also left the Democrats with a more liberal primary electorate than in the three prior elections. Primary structure was a critical feature that enabled moderate voters to participate in the Republican primaries, but it was the McCain candidacy that clearly pulled the moderates in. Without a comparable McCain-like candidate, the Democrats lost some of their moderation, in spite (or perhaps because) of these more open primary structures. As much as individual state parties and state legislatures have tried to "legislate for moderation," the key to greater ideological representativeness is not the rules alone. The rules only come into play when viable moderate candidates are on the ballot.

Our results for 2000 also indicate that a totally open primary may not be necessary to achieve the desired effect of diminishing the ideological extremism of primary electorates. We found that the modified-open primary states produced more crossover voting in Republican and Democratic primaries than the open primary states. This is due to the fact that most crossover voters are Independents and third-party identifiers, not Republicans and Democrats. If moderation is the valued commodity, a totally open primary may not purchase much more of it than a modified-open primary.

Finally, we recognize that closer correspondence between primary and general electorates is an important value to many, but it is a value open to reasonable normative debate and is certainly not the only value we may want to uphold in our electoral system. There are various means proposed for reaching the end of a more representative and responsive political system, and some argue that open primaries undermine this goal. For example, there is substantial evidence that open primaries further weaken the political parties' influence over the nomination process, running contrary to the goal of building a strong and responsible two-party system. Parties can promote democracy only under certain conditions, one of which is that voters know the parties, what they stand for, and what they have accomplished (Geer and Shere 1992). If the purpose of a primary election is to produce a candidate representative of a party, opening the primary to non-partisans and partisans of the other party totally defeats this purpose. Why have a primary at all, so the argument goes, if the primary is open to everyone? For parties to retain their ideological and policy distinctiveness, it is important that party elites and their members have control over their nominations. On the other hand, parties do have other means of control, including fund-raising for a now highly front-loaded system where only the party anointed stand a chance. Party insiders have won the nomination since 1976 on both sides of the aisle, in spite of the move toward greater openness. Party leaders seem to find clever ways of regaining control in spite of the reforms that were aimed at reducing their influence.

The primary system continues to be revised and modified, but the reformers seem mostly blind to the effects of their tinkering. There is legitimate concern that open primaries facilitate crossover voting and run the risk of nominating candidates with few real differences, of muddying the political waters and offering little in the way of meaningful choice. Collapsing the primary electorate toward the middle of the ideological spectrum may also make voter decision making more difficult by producing candidates who are too similar, in turn alienating legions of voters who already complain of the limited choices our system produces. On the other hand, these open processes may create political opportunities for new movements and political outsiders that never would have been viable in the past. These are difficult issues that will continue to fuel debate well into the twenty-first century. We hope that our work contributes to a more realistic appraisal of the effects of changes in election law as the ongoing assessment of presidential primaries continues.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Characteristics of Crossover Voters in the 2000 Democratic and Republican Primaries

Variable	Republican Primaries		Democratic Primaries	
	All Crossovers	Democratic Crossovers	All Crossovers	Republican Crossovers
Open Primaries	.454** (.022)	.535** (.039)	.120** (.026)	-.053 (.045)
Modified Open Primaries	.632** (.023)	.479** (.041)	.153** (.032)	-.00001 (.056)
Early and Competitive Primaries	.0001** (.00001)	.0003** (.00001)	.0001** (.00001)	.00006** (.00001)
Under \$15 k	.236** (.039)	.451** (.048)	-.231** (.041)	.106* (.062)
\$15–29 k	.093** (.028)	.282** (.037)	-.158** (.034)	-.027 (.055)
\$30–49 k	.063** (.023)	.024 (.033)	-.061** (.030)	-.111** (.051)
\$75–100 k	-.069** (.027)	-.214** (.042)	.041 (.036)	-.025 (.062)
\$100 k up	-.127** (.026)	-.265** (.041)	.044 (.036)	-.126* (.065)
Age 18–29	-.049 (.031)	-.059 (.044)	.163** (.039)	.234** (.061)
Age 45–59	.227** (.021)	.119** (.030)	.047 (.027)	-.053 (.045)
Age 60 and over	.097** (.023)	.015 (.033)	-.044 (.029)	-.116** (.049)
Liberals	.316** (.027)	.555** (.033)	-.275** (.023)	-.169** (.041)

APPENDIX TABLE 1 *continued*

Variable	Republican Primaries		Democratic Primaries	
	All Crossovers	Democratic Crossovers	All Crossovers	Republican Crossovers
Conservatives	-.616** (.018)	-.265** (.027)	.389** (.032)	.643** (.046)
Constant	-1.564** (.044)	-3.687** (.073)	-1.408** (.055)	-2.182** (.092)
N	26,927	26,927	17,668	17,668
McKelvey-Zavoina R ²	.325	.746	.378	.772
PRE	.245	.016	.011	.000

Dependent Variable for cols 1 & 3: 1 = Crossover voter; 0 = Democratic (Republican) voter.

Dependent Variable for cols 2 & 4: 1 = Democratic (Republican) crossover voter; 0 = Other category of voter.

Probit Coefficients (Standard Errors): * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$.

Source: *Voter News Service 2000 Primary Election Exit Polls*.

Excluded baseline categories: Closed primaries; Income between \$50k–75k; Age 30–44; Moderates.

Appendix II

Cases Included

1988 Democratic primaries: Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. 1988 Republican primaries: Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, and Texas.

1992 Democratic primaries: Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas. 1992 Republican primaries: Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

1996 Democratic primaries: Illinois and New Hampshire. 1996 Republican primaries: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

2000 Democratic primaries: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont. 2000 Republican primaries: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Vermont.

Sampling Methodology

1988 and 1992 primary and general election surveys “were conducted at polling places among a sample of voters immediately after they cast their votes. The precincts were a random subsample of those used for estimating election outcomes. Sample precincts were selected with probability proportionate to the total vote cast in a recent past election. The sampling frame consisted of all precincts in a state, stratified by party vote and geography. Within precincts, respondents were selected on a systematic random basis. The interviewer had no control over respondent selection.”

In 1996, primary election surveys were sampled in two stages. “First, a probability sample of voting precincts was selected to represent the different geographic areas across the state and the vote by party. Precincts that voted more Republican in the past were sampled at a higher rate than precincts that voted more Democratic (except in Illinois and New Hampshire). Second, within each sample precinct, voters were sampled systematically throughout the voting day at a rate that gave all voters in a precinct the same chance of being interviewed.”

This two-stage sampling method was also followed in 2000 surveys, with two exceptions. In 2000 surveys, more Republican precincts were not oversampled. Precincts with larger minority populations, however, were oversampled. Samples were weighted to adjust the representation of these precincts to their correct share of the total vote.

Source: Voter Research and Surveys and Voter New Service exit poll questionnaires for selected years.

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