

Direct Primaries and the Openness of the Two Party System, 1904-1920

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September 19, 2004

Abstract

When the progressives pushed for the adoption of the direct primary, one of their goals was to wrestle away the political machine's control over ballot access to ensure a more open electoral process. An open system, they argued, would help to curb many of the corrupt practices inherent in the current system. The party bosses, however, were able to weaken many of the direct primary laws in order to maintain some form of control over the nomination process. This paper develops a model to empirically test the effect of the direct primary on the openness of the two-party system in congressional elections. The findings suggest that certain rules associated with the primary reforms did little to encourage outsider candidates from leaving their third parties to seek a major party nomination, especially in machine cities.

Whether all the results depicted by the advocates of the system will actually follow, there may be some serious doubt.

– Charles Merriam (1908:164)

Introduction

In the early 1900s, states started to use primary elections to choose the party nominee instead of allowing the party leaders to make these decisions for many elected offices. What were the consequences of this new electoral system? This paper seeks to determine if the introduction of primary elections encouraged traditional "third" party candidates to join the major-party system as intended, or ascertain if political machines were able to maintain some control over the ballot in congressional elections.¹ The results of this research speak to the accepted notion that primary elections weakened the political machine's control over ballot access. More generally, however, this research uses an historical approach to help us to understand some of the unintended consequences of primaries on party competition in the United States throughout the 20th century.

The progressive movement pushed for the passage of many far-reaching reforms to clean up the party driven political environment. The stated goal of the movement was to wrestle away political dominance from the entrenched political machines amid claims of system wide corruption (Hofstadter 1955). One crucial part of the movement focused on weakening the party bosses' control over the general election ballot, which enabled them to keep unwanted reform-minded candidates out of office and forced candidates not favored by the party leaders to run on third party tickets. The powerful party leaders like Boss Tweed and George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany Hall were able to act as the gate-keepers to elected office through control over ballot access. Their strength was supported by appointing loyal party nominees to the ticket who answered strictly to the party leaders, rather than the voters (Schattschneider 1942). Writing in the midst of the machine era, Meyer (1902:262) was able to sum up the extent of the problems:

¹In this paper, the terms third party, minor party and outsider are used interchangeably and refer to any party other than the Democratic or Republican Party.

We have today, in many of the departments of government, from the town up to the nation, officials who are not the representatives of the people, but who are the creatures of a small group of men which has acquired the power of placing them in office.

One proposed solution to the problem of ballot access for “outsider” candidates was the passage of direct primary laws that would allow citizens in the voting booth, rather than the party elites at a caucus or convention, to choose the candidates standing under the party banner for the general election.² The progressives, by helping to force through the passage of the direct primary laws, hoped to open up the political system to a wider range of candidates outside of the reign of the political machines. Ware (2002), however, offers an alternative to the traditional story. He suggests that the passage of the direct primary had less to do with the progressives and more to do with the institutionalization of the parties at the behest of the party elites.

The introduction of the direct primary, along with the adoption of the Australian ballot and the end of the “spoils” system, has been part of the standard textbook story for the decline of the political machines and the rise of the candidate centered campaign (see e.g. Epstein 1986; Galderisi and Ginsberg 1986; Jacobson 2001; Kernell and Jacobson 2003).³ This reform era has traditionally been characterized by a struggle between democratically idealistic reformers on the one side, and the bosses and elites who enjoyed and sought to maintain their power within the party (Merriam and Overacker 1928; Hofstadter 1955). However, more recent scholarship has questioned this depiction of such reforms as being the result of a clear-cut conflict between elites and grassroots forces (Buenker 1973; Crotty 1983; Ware 2002).

In this paper, I attempt to reconcile the two competing theories by examining the *actual*, instead of the intended results of the reforms. This paper, using historical data from the 1904-1920 (59th- 67th Congresses) congressional elections, seeks to systematically examine if the direct primaries did indeed open up the major party system to a wider range of candidates

²The direct primary is sometimes referred to as the Crawford System as it was first used in Crawford County, Pennsylvania in 1868 (Meyer 1902). During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the term primary without the direct modifier referred to picking candidates at a caucus.

³The progressives were also instrumental in the passage of the Australian ballot and the Pendleton Act. See Rusk 1970 and Katz and Sala 1996 for an analysis of the impact of the Australian Ballot and Hoogenboom 1959 for a reevaluation of the civil service reforms.

as intended, or if an alternative explanation holds that the machines were still able to keep "outsiders" out. Using both a panel study and cross-sectional methodological approaches, the results suggest that the adoption of the direct primary in some states actually did quite little to open up the major-party system, while in others the intended effects were realized.

Nominations at the Congressional Level

While most of the contemporary nomination literature focuses on the presidential primaries (see e.g. Brams 1978, Aldrich 1980, Bartels 1988, Abramson et al. 1992., Norrander 2000, Flowers et. al 2003), a substantial portion of the congressional direct primary literature was written in the early 1900s.⁴ One of the earliest and most comprehensive academic works detailing the direct primary as it stood at the turn of the century was Meyer (1902). He argued that the push for nomination reform was due to corruption in the caucus and convention system and that the primary would be the “source of power in government” (v). However, he pointed out some of the difficulties that third parties would face under the new system, including the gathering of signatures in order to appear on official ballots - a task that the highly organized machines were well equipped to deal with. Merriam (1908) traced the development of the laws associated with party primaries from their earliest introduction in 1866 through their current status in 1908. He suggested that since the Australian ballot was printed by the states, the direct primary was necessary to determine who the official party candidate would be in this new, more democratic, electoral process.

The subject of direct primaries was a central topic in the 1907 *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*. Macy (1907) discussed some of the potential effects of the direct primary. First, he predicted that the link between the party and the voter would be severed and the parties would no longer exist as they did at the turn of the century; although they may survive in name only. Second, he argued that the end of the caucus and convention system of

⁴For exceptions, see Gerber and Morton 1998 and an edited volume by Galderisi, Ezra and Lyons 2001.

nomination will take the platform creation out of party control and place it in the hands of the individual candidates, further weakening the parties.

Merriam (1907) also weighed in at the *Proceedings*. Here, he discussed some of the problems associated with defining party membership under the direct primary method since party members, rather than party elites, would be nominating the candidates. Some of the early tests of party loyalty involved expression of previous support for the party, as well as pledges for future backing. These tests were at times administered by the parties, giving them some means of control over who voted in the primaries. In other instances the states set the minimum requirements that defined party membership and it was at this time that we began to see some early vestiges of party registration and record keeping. The goal of defining and recording party membership was to deter party raiding and keep the “wrong” type of people from participating in the primaries.

Although there were several state specific case studies written in the early 1900s (e.g. Beard 1910, Jones 1910, Barnett 1912, Millspaugh 1916, Feldman 1917 and Dorr 1937), the preeminent work on the early effects of the direct primary was by Merriam and Overacker (1928) who revisited Merriam’s earlier works. They observed that while many predicted that primaries would bring about the end of the party system, the Democratic and Republican parties somehow managed to survive. They also noted that many candidates were not earning the nomination with a small percentage of the vote as predicted. Many feared that the nominee would be someone who was not preferred by a majority of the party after receiving only a plurality in the primary.⁵ This fear was unfounded given that in many cases there was only one candidate running, and in others, the voter’s focus was on the top two candidates for fear of “throwing the vote away.” Finally, according to the authors, the machines, at least in 1928, were still very much alive and did not disappear as predicted.

For more than 70 or so years after the seminal work by Merriam and Overacker, direct primaries by themselves did not receive much attention in the literature, although the progressive movement was widely studied. Recently, there seems to be a growing return to studies related

⁵To alleviate this problem, some states instituted run-off elections (Bullock and Johnson 1985)

to the direct primary and their institutional roots. Galderisi and Ezra (2001) discuss the introduction of the direct primary and how some party leaders hoped to weaken their intended effects. To do this, some states introduced a sore loser provision which no longer made it possible for a candidate who lost in the primary to return and run in the general election under a different party label. Under the old caucus system, it was easy for candidates failing to get the nomination to justify to the voters why they were running as third party candidates if it was the proverbial "smoke filled back room" deals that kept them off the ticket. They also begin to show some early evidence, perhaps related to the legitimizing of the two-party system, pointing towards a decline in third parties in Michigan and Indiana after the direct primary was initiated.⁶

In an excellent recent work, Ware (2002) takes previous scholars to task and persuasively makes the case that the political machines allowed reforms to pass through the state legislatures. He argues that "[the parties] could have prevented the introduction of the direct primary - had they wanted to do so," since the party leaders could act as legislative gatekeepers (15). This runs contrary to the theory that the progressives were instrumental in their passage and forced the legislation through state legislatures, riding a tide of antipartism. He contends that the party elites were able to shape the legislation so it appeased the reform movement, but at the same time, were able to water down the new laws to weaken the intended effects of dismantling the machines. The new nomination procedures were passed to institutionalize the party system and take it away from the informal and widely varying procedures for running elections. In fact, Ware goes on to argue that some party elites thought that the primary could make parties even stronger. Clearly, there are two different hypotheses here. The first argues that progressive reformers pushed through legislative changes to weaken the existing party system. The second states that the parties allowed the "reforms" to be passed into law because they would merely institutionalize current practice.

⁶See Galderisi and Ginsberg 1986 for another argument about third party decline in Indiana and Ohio.

Direct Primaries: An Open or Closed System?

The literature to date has offered competing theoretical accounts of the effects of the direct primary. One theory, the textbook approach, argues that the introduction of the direct primary was supposed to open up the electoral process to candidates not associated with the major political parties. The goal was to rid the political system of the corrupt cronies of the party bosses by placing the power of nomination in the voters' hands. Candidates who were not favored by party leaders could now work from within the system to earn a major party nomination. The other theory, largely put forth by Ware (2002) is a revisionist approach that suggests that the machines allowed the reforms to become law. In doing so, they were able to successfully shape the legislation in their favor to limit any damage the reforms could do to the current party system, at least in the short run. By accounting for both of these theories we can better understand the consequences of direct primary legislation.

Textbook Theory

The textbook theory of the progressive reforms was largely based on institutional design. Under the old caucus system, candidates not favored by the major party leaders could not gain access to the major party ballots and their only option was to form third parties. Once the direct primary became the method to nominate candidates, other options opened up to traditional third party candidates and now primary elections could "channel dissent into the two major parties," (Bibby and Maisel 2003:62). Key (1956:105) argues along similar lines, suggesting that the primary system divides the electorate into two groups, one that supports the majority party and votes in their primary and another that supports the minority party and will choose their nominee.

Since third party candidates rarely win elective office in the American context, forming a new party to institute political change can be both a costly and unproductive venture (Schlesinger 1984, Epstein 1986:173). Candidates with any chance of winning are much better off trying

to earn the nomination of the Democratic or Republican Party if they seek to win the general election, even if their ideas are outside of the mainstream of either party. Robert La Follette of Wisconsin used this tactic, choosing to run for governor as a Republican instead of claiming affiliation with a progressive third party (Key 1949). This type of system *pushes* candidates away from the third parties towards the major-party system.

Frequently, the major parties are able to take ideas and candidates that may generate third parties in another institutional setting and use them as their own in order to stop a fissure in their party (Sundquist 1983). In this case, the major parties are *pulling* candidates (and their issues) away from the minor parties. Finally, even if the party leaders wanted to reject the outsiders it may be difficult to do so if the candidate has enough support for the primary since it is the voters, not the party leaders, who eventually pick the candidates.

The institutional constraints suggest that the primaries work in two ways to deter third parties. First, the electoral system fosters two-party, rather than multi-party competition which funnels candidates into one of the two major parties. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the direct primary no longer allows party leaders to keep unwanted candidates out of the mainstream electoral process (Bibby and Maisel 2003). The results of this process are candidates fighting for the major party nomination in the primary election.⁷ If this theory is correct, then it follows that in the presence of primary elections, there should be fewer candidates on the general election ballot.

H1 If the probability of winning the major party nomination is sufficiently large for outsider candidates, as the textbook theory suggests, and all else is held constant, the value of running as a major party candidate will increase relative to running as a minor party candidate and a smaller number of candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot in states with the direct primary compared to states without the primary.⁸

⁷See Johnson and Gibson 1974, Born 1981, Kenney 1988 and Herrnson and Gimpel 1995 for discussions of divisive primaries in the congressional context.

⁸In appendix A, I use a decision theoretic model to formally develop the theory and derive a set of testable

Another rule that may promote third party candidates to run in the major party primaries is the so called open primary. In these primaries, voters do not need to be a member of the party to vote in its primary. This is in contrast to the closed primary where voters must either be registered party members or affirm their allegiance to a party through some sort of oath.⁹ If a traditional third party candidate has support from the voting public, they should be encouraged to run under a major party label in hope of earning the nomination. Since these types of candidates' supporters may not be party members, then we should expect more of this behavior in open rather than closed party systems. Increasing the number and types of voters able to vote in the primary should increase the probability that an outsider candidate can win the major party primary, therefore similar to H1:

H2 As the probability of winning a major party nomination increases for outsider candidates and all else is held constant, the value of running as a major party candidate will increase relative to the value of the choosing to run as a minor candidate and a smaller number of candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot.

Revisionist Theory

Ballot Access

The alternative theory, that primary elections actually did not encourage third parties from joining the major-party system, is also institutionally based. This time, however, the institutions are rules associated with primary elections that either make it difficult for third party candidates to get on the major party ballots, or encourage them not to risk a nomination loss and miss a chance to be on the general election ballot. Essentially, the rules either changed the probability of winning the major party nomination or increased the costs to running in the primary. These

hypotheses. The appendix may safely be skipped by the uninterested reader.

⁹See Merriam and Overacker 1928, appendix A for a list of the many types of methods states used to confirm the party membership status of a voter.

rules allowed the political machines to continue to exert influence over naming the party nominee. If the bosses could stop outsiders from winning the major party nomination, then their chosen candidates will most likely win the general election.

Sore Loser Rule One rule which may influence the incentives for traditional third party activists to make a run for a major party nomination was the adoption of a sore loser provision. This rule precluded candidates from bolting to run under a third party banner if they previously lost in a primary election (Scarrow 1986, Appleton and Ward 1997, Galderisi and Ezra 2001). The idea behind this rule was that candidates who were not chosen by the voters should not come back to play the spoiler in the general election. It could prove disastrous for a party if general election voters split their votes between two similar candidates, thus allowing another candidate to win the general election. If a candidate has a sufficiently low probability of winning the primary for a major party and the probability of winning the general election as a third party candidate is sufficiently high, then the presence of the sore loser provision should deter a weak third party activist from running in the major party primary. If this is indeed the case, then in elections where the sore loser rule was present, this rule should have a positive effect on the total number of third party candidates.

An alternative hypothesis, however, can be derived from this rule. If the candidate's probability of winning the general election as a third party candidate is low relative to winning the major party nomination, then the candidate will run as a major party candidate, reducing the number of candidates on the general election ballot. In other words, if a candidate stands little chance of winning the major party primary, they will run as a third party candidate. Conversely, if a candidate sees little hope of winning by running as a third party candidate, they will take their chances in the major party nomination race. Specifically, the two hypotheses regarding the sore loser provision are:

H3a If the probability of winning the *major* party nomination is sufficiently small relative to winning the general elections as a minor party candidate and all else is held constant, the

value of running as a third party candidate will increase relative to running as a major party candidate and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *more* candidates on the general election ballot.

H3b If the probability of winning the general election as a *minor* party candidate is sufficiently small relative to winning the major party nomination and all else is held constant, the value of running as a minor party candidate will decrease relative to running as a major party candidate and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot.

Signature Requirement A rule that increases the cost of running in a major party primary for third party candidates and discourages them from trying to join the Democratic and Republican ranks was a signature requirement needed to appear on the primary ballot. In some states, getting a name placed on the primary ballot only required paying a nominal filing fee or formally declaring ones candidacy with the appropriate office (Merriam and Overacker 1928). In other states it was not as easy. Getting on the ballot in some states could be a rather simple procedure that required only a handful of signatures. In others, it was necessary to collect thousands of signatures from party members from different geographic areas of the particular district. Gathering signatures can be a difficult process but can be made easier if the candidate has an organization (Buenker 1973). This type of set-up favors a candidate who is supported by the party leaders because they can use their network of party members to collect the required signatures. Since third party candidates generally lack such an organization, the expectation is that this rule should deter candidates from contesting the primary and only running in the general election where rules for getting on the ballot may differ.

H4 As the cost of running in the major party primary increases and all else is held constant, the value of running as a third party candidate will increase relative to running as a major party candidate and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should

be *more* candidates on the general election ballot.

Taken together, the sore loser rule and signature requirement may influence traditional third party candidates' decision calculus in terms of trying to earn major party nominations. As Sorauf (1968:219) argues:

The key to the primary is participation - both by candidates and by voters - if there are to be meaningful choices on meaningful alternatives. But the primary by its nature tends to diminish both. The need for broad public appeal, the cost of a contest, and the sheer difficulty of getting on the primary ballot - among other factors - discourage candidacies.

If we are to understand the effect of the direct primary on party politics, then it is necessary to take into account both the factors that encourage candidates to join the Democrats and Republicans, and the factors that may discourage such behavior.

Data and Methods

In order to test the hypotheses developed above, this paper employs data from elections to the 59th-67th Congress (1904-1920).¹⁰ This period of time is ideal because it provides for sufficient variation in states which do and do not have the direct primary laws and other restrictions. Further, during this time period, there were many viable third party candidates, so many that nearly 20 members of Congress were either third party members or independents (Galderisi and Ginsberg 1986). The first empirical test employs a cross sectional analysis to compare units receiving a "treatment," the direct primary, while other units did not receive the treatment. The second test utilizes a pre and post-test design to demonstrate the effect of the primary on the same units before and after the rule changes.

¹⁰While the evidence presented below may not be a direct test of the formal theory developed in the appendix, the evidence is at least consistent with the theory and expectations. A more direct test would most likely require individual level data and results of the primary elections. Unfortunately, these data are not readily available, if they even exist at all. I chose congressional elections largely due to data availability. In future work, I would like to study state legislative elections and gather the results of primary elections.

The dependent variable for the first test, openness of the major party system, is operationalized as the number of candidates competing in the general election for each congressional district.¹¹ The first variable of interest, *primary*, is a dichotomous variable coded one for primary districts, zero otherwise. If the presence of the direct primary provided for a more open political arena, as the textbook story implies, then there should be fewer candidates in the presence of the direct primary and the coefficient on this variable should be negative and significant. The alternative theory suggests that the party bosses were able to control the direct primary and deter potential third party candidates from running for the major party nominations. In this case, the political “outsiders” will continue to run in the general election as third party candidates and there should be no change in the number of candidates in the presence of the direct primary.

Table 1 displays the average number of candidates in districts where the party maintained control over nominations and districts that used direct primaries. These preliminary results are quite mixed and do not give strong support to either sets of hypotheses. Nevertheless, we should be careful in evaluating this simple cross-tab since it does not control for the rules that might hinder outsider access and the number of districts in each category are not constant across years.

Table 1: Average Number of Candidates in Districts by Nomination Method, 1904-1920

Year	Party Control	Districts	Primary	Districts
1904	3.4	(364)	3.1	(22)
1906	3.4	(305)	2.7	(86)
1908	3.5	(206)	3.4	(185)
1910	3.2	(158)	3.3	(236)
1912	4.0	(109)	3.7	(326)
1914	3.2	(61)	3.9	(374)
1916	2.6	(23)	3.3	(412)
1918	2.5	(23)	2.5	(412)
1920	2.4	(23)	2.8	(412)

¹¹These data come from Dubin (1998). This measure of party strength is similar to that used by Scarrow (1986) who was also investigating institutional reasons for the decline in third parties. Districts, rather than states, are used as the unit of analysis since collapsing measures of third party activity to the state level ignores differences between different districts in the state, such as the presence of a political machine. Of course, this is only one very specific way to gauge the success of the progressive reforms as one could easily argue that any measures taken to increase democratic participation are valuable.

The other main independent variables of interest are the rules that were attached to the primary elections. They include the *sore loser rule*, *signature requirements* and the *open primary*. The expectation on the sore loser rule is unclear since it depends on the relative probabilities of winning the primary for the major party and general election for a minor party. Signature requirements should increase the number of candidates running in the general elections.¹² In contrast, open primaries allow voters outside the party to vote and this should encourage candidates to run as major party candidates so this variable should be negatively signed.¹³ In the dataset, 45 percent of the districts had the sore loser rule, 35 percent had a signature requirement and only 5 percent used open primaries. Each of these variables are dummies, coded one if the law is present, zero otherwise.¹⁴ Since these variables are only present with the direct primaries, they are conceptually the same as interactions and treated as such for interpreting both substantive and statistical significance in the regressions below.

Another important variable that may influence the number of candidates running in the general election is whether or not the district is controlled by a political machine. The dichotomous variable, *machine*, is coded using a list of machine cities from Gimpel (1993) and historical maps of congressional districts (Martis 1982). Since party bosses and their machines seek to keep loyal members in power, the coefficient on this variable should be positive. In total, there were 30 cities in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island which accounted for 73 machine controlled districts each year from 1904-1912 and then 74 for each of the remaining years due to reapportionment. Table 2 lists the mean number of candidates in districts with and without machine control. In each case, there

¹²In a few instances, only a handful of signatures were required for ballot access. When $N \leq 25$ signatures were needed, the case was coded as not having a signature requirement. Alternative coding did not change the results. Ideally, I would like to have used a continuous variable measuring the number of signatures required for ballot access to test the influence of signature requirements. Unfortunately, the descriptions by Merriam and Overacker 1928 were not clear enough to make this distinction.

¹³While this is theoretically plausible, a cautionary note about the data is required since only three states, Michigan, Montana and Wisconsin, had open primaries during this time-period.

¹⁴Information regarding the presence of a congressional primary election, open primaries and signature requirements comes from Galderisi and Ezra (2001) and Merriam and Overacker (1928). The data for the sore loser provision are listed in Appleton and Ward (1997). In a few instances, states did not have a legal sore loser rule but filing deadlines made it impossible for a candidate to run as third party candidate if they lost the major party nomination. I coded these cases as if they had the sore loser rule.

were significantly more candidates in machine districts ($p < 0.01$). These preliminary results are consistent with the argument that in machine districts, outsider candidates have difficulty earning major party nominations and continue to run in minor parties.

Table 2: Average Number of Candidates in Districts by Machine Control, 1904-1920

Year	Machine Control	Non-Machine
1904	4.2	3.2
1906	4.0	3.0
1908	4.1	3.3
1910	3.9	3.1
1912	4.6	3.6
1914	4.5	3.6
1916	3.6	3.2
1918	3.0	2.3
1920	3.4	2.6

While the direct primary and other laws are the variables of interest here, there are other confounding factors that may influence the number of candidates contesting the general election.¹⁵ A variable that may increase the number of candidates is the presence of an *at-large* district. This variable is coded one if the race was at-large, zero otherwise. During this time period it was not uncommon for states that gained seats due to reapportionment to simply add an at-large district rather than change district boundaries. Third party candidates may be more likely to contest these types of elections because they can pool their support from all areas in the state and increase their chance of winning. From 1904-1920, there were 105 at-large elections.

Outside of district specific variables that may influence third party activism, Southern states should have fewer candidates on the ballot. This is directly related to the Democratic dominance

¹⁵Since these elections fall well before the trio of Supreme Court rulings (Baker v. Carr (1962), Reynolds v. Sims (1964) and Wesberry v. Sanders (1964)) that enforced equal populations in congressional and legislative districts, it may also be necessary to control for any differences in terms of district population. Measuring district population could also help to capture some of the relative ideological heterogeneity between districts (see Lee and Oppenheimer 1999 for an argument in favor of using state population to measure heterogeneity). An alternative and/or complimentary approach would be to use presidential vote in the district. Unfortunately, these variables do not readily exist for the entire time-period and presidential vote is not available in urban districts for historical research since it must be taken from county returns. This would cause many important observations in machine cities to be dropped. Nevertheless, I attempted to use existing measures of population and presidential vote that were available for the period 1904-1910 and neither variable was statistically significant.

of the South since the end of reconstruction (Key 1949). In many instances, the Democratic primary stands as the de facto general election since it was often the case that the Democratic nominee faced only token opposition once he was nominated. To control for this, I include a dummy variable coded 1 for states in the *South*, zero otherwise.¹⁶ Finally, to control for any national forces that may influence the success of third parties, I include fixed effect dummy variables for the 59th - 66th congresses with the 67th serving as the baseline category.

Results

Cross Sectional Analysis

Since the dependent variable is a count of the number of candidates on the ballot, Poisson regressions with Huber/White standard errors are used to test the hypotheses outlined above.¹⁷ Table 3 gives the results of three regressions. The first is a naive model that does not control for primary electoral rules. The second controls for these rules while the third tests the model only on non-Southern states.

In the naive model, the primary variable is negative and significant. This suggests that primary elections had the intended effect on the openness of the two-party system. In the presence of the direct primary, there were an average of 0.14 fewer candidates on the general election ballot. While substantively modest, this finding supports the textbook theory. However, since this model fails to control for any other rules that apply to the primaries, drawing conclusions here would be premature. Turning to the other variables in this first model, the presence of both machine and at-large districts increases the number of candidates on the general election ballot while in Southern districts, the effect is negative. When a district is run by a machine, the

¹⁶I define the South as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia, the 11 states of the Confederacy.

¹⁷The mean of the dependent variable is 3.25 and the variance is 1.52 so over dispersion is not a problem and negative binomial regression is not needed. Note that when candidates ran for more than one party under a fusion ticket, they were only counted as one candidate.

change in the predicted number of candidates is an increase of 0.30.¹⁸ For at-large districts, the change in the predicted number of districts is an increase of 0.87 candidates and the predicted decline for the South is 1.61 candidates.

Table 3: Poisson Regression - Influence of Primaries and Rules on Candidates Party Choice in Congressional Elections across Districts

Variable	Model (Robust Standard Error)					
	Naïve Model	Δp^\ddagger	Primary Rules	Δp^\ddagger	Non-South	Δp^\ddagger
<i>Primary</i>	-0.045* (0.013)	-0.14	-0.062* (0.017)	-0.20	-0.097* (0.017)	-0.36
<i>Sore Loser Rule</i> × <i>Primary</i>	–		-0.016 (0.011)	-0.05	-0.048* (0.011)	-0.17
<i>Signature Req.</i> × <i>Primary</i>	–		0.052* (0.012)	0.16	0.058* (0.012)	0.21
<i>Open</i> × <i>Primary</i>	–		-0.002 (0.017)	-0.007	0.005 (0.017)	0.02
<i>Machine</i>	0.093* (0.010)	0.30	0.087* (0.011)	0.28	0.091* (0.010)	0.34
<i>South</i>	-0.593* (0.015)	-1.61	-0.576* (0.016)	-1.57	–	–
<i>At-Large District</i>	0.248* (0.031)	0.87	0.249* (0.030)	0.88	0.228* (0.033)	0.92
<i>Constant</i>	1.14* (0.02)	–	1.14* (0.02)	–	1.15* (0.021)	–
<i>N</i>	3737		3737		2825	
χ^2	2878.93*		2934.78*		1202.85*	
log-likelihood	-6064.05		-6061.62		-4740.63	

* $p < 0.05$, two-tailed test

Dependent Variable - Number of candidates on General Election Ballot

Congress specific fixed effects not reported.

[‡]Note - Cells contain changes in predicted probability from 0-1 .

The next model includes variables that may influence the decision calculus of the candidates. Again, the primary variable is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that the textbook theory is correct; primary elections did encourage traditional third party candidates to seek refuge

¹⁸Descriptive statistics are listed in Appendix B.

in the major parties. The predicted decrease in the number of candidates is 0.20. Nonetheless, this only tells part of the story because the sore loser rule, signature requirements and open primaries also influence the dependent variable. Since these variables are only present when primary is coded one, they are treated as interaction terms and require tests of joint significance to determine if their effect is statistically significant.

First, sore loser is jointly significant with primary ($\chi^2 = 26.19, p < 0.05$). The negative sign here gives support to the hypothesis that the sore loser rule did little to discourage candidates from running in the major party nomination race. The predicted change in the number of candidates is quite small though with a decrease of only 0.05 candidates. In races with signature requirements, the coefficients are also jointly significant ($\chi^2 = 23.21, p < 0.05$). The predicted increase in candidates for this variable is 0.16, nearly the same as the decrease for primary elections. This provides strong evidence in favor of the revisionist theory that primary elections did little to open up the two-party system to outsider candidates. The countervailing influences of the primary election and signature requirements implies that there is some truth to both sides of this argument. Primary elections did contribute to the decline of third parties but this decrease could be counteracted if the appropriate restrictions were in force.

The coefficient for open primaries is negative and jointly significant ($\chi^2 = 14.11, p < 0.05$) but substantively quite small. I expect this is largely due to the heavy influence that Wisconsin is having on this variable. Of the 189 districts with open primaries, 99 were in Wisconsin, a hot-bed for the progressive movement.

Political machines exert a strong influence on the number of candidates as evidenced by the positive and significant coefficient. There are 0.28 more candidates in machine cities relative to cities that are not under machine control. Finally, the coefficients on the at-large variable is positive and significant while the coefficient on South continues to be negative and significant.

Since an argument can be made that there were actually two separate political systems in the country after the Civil War, one in the South and one outside the former Confederacy, I reran the model with the Southern states removed as a robustness check. As expected, the

results listed the sixth column of Table 3 are consistent with the earlier model. In the presence of primaries, the party system appears to be more open with fewer candidates on the ballot. However, when restrictions are enforced, third party candidates are still influenced by other primary rules. This argument is supported by significant joint hypothesis tests involving the primary variable and the sore loser and signature requirement variables ($\chi^2_2 = 94.27, p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2_2 = 38.43, p < 0.05$ respectively).

Table 4: Predicted Number of Candidates in Machine and Non-Machine Districts*

Machine Districts						
<i>Party Control</i>		<i>No Restrictions</i>	<i>Sore Loser</i>	<i>Signature Req.</i>	<i>Sore Loser</i>	<i>€ Signature Req.</i>
3.41	<i>Primary</i>	3.21	3.16	3.38		3.32

Non-Machine Districts						
<i>Party Control</i>		<i>No Restrictions</i>	<i>Sore Loser</i>	<i>Signature Req.</i>	<i>Sore Loser</i>	<i>€ Signature Req.</i>
3.13	<i>Primary</i>	2.94	2.89	3.09		3.05

*Note - Cells contain predictions using CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2000) for non-South and non-at-large districts.

In order to better interpret the influence of the independent variables on the party system, the results of the Poisson regressions are used to predict the number of candidates based on nomination method and ballot restrictions for both machine and non-machine districts. The upper portion of Table 4 lists predictions for machine districts while the lower focuses on districts not under machine control. The first column in each table is the baseline prediction of the number of candidates when the party controls the nominations. In machine districts, there are 3.41 candidates per election when they appoint the major party nominee. This number declines to 3.21 when the direct primary is the nomination method. As rules are added, this number drops to, 3.16 with the sore loser rule but climbs to 3.38 with signature requirements, virtually the same number of candidates as when the party was in control of the nomination process. Evidently, in some machine cities, primary elections did little to help traditional third party

candidates. The predictions are consistent in the non-machine districts as well, only there are fewer candidates across the board compared to the same categories in machine districts.

Panel Analysis

The evidence in Tables 3 and 4 uses a cross sectional analysis to compare districts with and without primary elections. Another way to approach the question at hand is to study what happened to the *same* districts before and after the primaries were introduced. To answer this question, a different dependent variable is necessary. Here, the dependent variable measures the difference in the number of candidates for the current and previous elections. This new variable now measures the *change* in the number of candidates, not the actual number as before. In the following analysis districts are "shocked" with a new electoral process. If the primaries had their intended consequences, then districts should see the number candidates decline in the election after voters were allowed to nominate the candidates. Since the new dependent variable can be negative, OLS regression now is used to estimate the results. The main independent variables of interest also differ slightly. For each of the primary or rule measures, a dichotomous variable is coded as one for the *first* election with the rules in place. The other independent variables are the same as before.

Table 5 displays the results.¹⁹ Once again, the coefficient on the primary variable is negative and significant indicating that primary elections opened up the electoral process. In the election following the exposure to the new laws, the number of candidates within each district declined, compared to the change in districts without the laws. Additionally, the rules variables, sore loser, signature requirement and open are still jointly significant, ($\chi^2 = 15.87, p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 6.58, p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 6.95, p < 0.05$ respectively). This time, however, the coefficient on sore loser is positive supporting the notion that candidates were scared off from the major

¹⁹The number of cases does not match the results in table 3 due to redistricting. First, some states simply created at-large districts when they gained seats and did not immediately redistrict. Once they did, the at-large district does not match up with any one of the state's districts and the case was dropped. Second, even if states did redistrict right away, any additional districts gained as a result of reapportionment do not coincide with older districts and were also dropped.

Table 5: OLS Regression - Influence of Primaries and Rules on Candidate Party Choice in Congressional Elections within Districts

Variable	Model (Robust Standard Error)	
	Primary Rules	Non-South
<i>First Primary</i>	-0.426* (0.133)	-0.466* (0.139)
<i>Sore Loser</i>	0.657* (0.123)	0.561* (0.125)
<i>Rule × First Primary</i>		
<i>Signature</i>	0.066 (0.108)	0.087 (0.123)
<i>Req. × First Primary</i>		
<i>Open × First Primary</i>	0.381 (0.252)	0.516* (0.252)
<i>Machine</i>	0.003 (0.043)	0.003 (0.043)
<i>South</i>	0.095* (0.040)	–
<i>At-Large District</i>	0.022 (0.128)	0.072 (0.132)
<i>Constant</i>	0.262* (0.044)	0.128* (0.048)
<i>N</i>	3270	2465
<i>R²</i>	0.17	0.21
Root MSE	0.913	0.894

* $p < 0.05$, two-tailed test

Dep. Var - Difference between numbers of candidates at time $_t$ and time $_{t-1}$

Congress specific fixed effects not reported.

party nomination campaign in the first election following the passage of primary legislation. Signature requirements were still keeping outsiders from joining the ranks of the major parties. In machine districts, there was no significant change in the number of candidates on the ballot. While caution is necessary when interpreting a null result, the insignificant finding suggests that primaries did not immediately contribute to the collapse of political machines. These results are also consistent while dropping the Southern states.

In sum, there is strong evidence that in some instances primary elections did open up the major party system as evidenced by the decline in third party candidates in the presence of these new laws. This result supports the textbook theory of the progressive reforms. Conversely,

rules such as signature requirements encouraged candidates to continue to run on third party tickets. For other rules such as sore loser and open primary, the results were either mixed or in the opposite direction as expected. Finally, in some instances, such as in machine cities, the end result was no change in the number of candidates. These results help to sustain the more revisionist theories of political development in the early 1900s. Clearly, the "textbooks" are not telling the whole story.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the party literature, there are two competing theoretical accounts of the effect of the direct primary on third parties and the openness of the party system. One theory suggests that the changing institutional design should funnel third parties into either of two major parties while concurrently, the major parties should absorb them to avoid a party split. In contrast to this theory, others have argued that the primary method of nomination still advantaged the party leaders and their choices for nominees since ballot access was not an easy task for potential candidates without a strong organization.

This paper has provided evidence in support of both theories. When a simple primary election without any ballot restrictions was in effect, the results were consistent with the idea of a more open party system. Yet, when rules like signature requirements were put into place, outsider candidates were deterred from running in the major party nomination campaign and continued to run with their third parties. Also, in machine cities, there were significantly more candidates on the general election ballot across districts, and no change in the number of candidates once the primary rule was enacted. These results indicate that primary elections may not have been the downfall of the strong party era as some have suggested. Instead, it might be the case that other factors may have contributed to party decline. These may include changes in communication technology and a decline in party identification. In future research I hope to answer these questions. Further, in order to bolster the claims provided here, it would also

prove beneficial to gather data on state-level elections to provide stronger evidence in support of these findings. Finally, gathering actual primary election results can also add to our knowledge of the time-period.

While the research in this paper focused on what some could call obscure rules associated with an unimportant event, it is necessary to put this work in perspective. Similar to other historical works (see e.g. Jenkins 2000, Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart 2001) this paper sheds some light on a contemporary theoretical question by seeing if it is time dependent or general enough to explain behavior more broadly. The results could also contribute to a recent political debate in a "former" machine run area. In New York City, local officials and Mayor Michael Bloomberg attempted to do away with primary nominations for city elections and instead turn to "non-partisan" elections. The argument in favor of the change was to "increase the number of minority group members in elective posts and weaken the iron fist of party bosses."²⁰ This current attempt to change the electoral system adds an ironic twist to the story of primary elections told here given that they were first introduced by the progressive reformers towards the end of the 19th century as a means to *weaken* the party leader's powerful grip on the nomination system. If party bosses are still exerting influence over elections 100 years after the reform movement, all of the intended results of the primary were probably not realized. When future changes are to be made to the electoral system, those making the changes would be wise to look to the past to study previous successes and failures.

²⁰Jonathan P. Hicks, "A Model City of Nonpartisan Correctness," *New York Times*, 21 October 2003, sec. B. Candidates had the option to list a party affiliation by their name. While the referendum was eventually voted down, it is not to say the question will not be revisited by New York or other cities.

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Appendix A

Formal Expectations

Similar to Black (1972), Riker and Ordershook (1973), Rohde (1979) and Aldrich and Bianco (1992) a simple utility maximization model can be used to motivate a theory to describe candidate behavior. In this model, there are two states of the world $S = \{S_1, S_2\}$ where S_1 is an election system with no direct primary and only a general election and S_2 is an election system with a direct primary followed by a general election. In S_1 the major party leaders appoint candidates to run in the general election. Therefore, any candidate who is not the party favorite will not run under a major party label and must run as a third party candidate. In S_2 , candidates run in the primary election of their choice in order to try to secure a spot on the general election ballot for that party.

There are N *potential* nominees $N = \{N_1, N_2, \dots, N_n\}$ who choose a party, $P = \{D, R, T\}$ where $T = \{T_1, T_2, \dots, T_n\}$ and D is the Democratic Party, R the Republican Party and T are any number of third parties. The potential nominees must choose over strategies $A = \{a_D, a_R, a_T\}$, and run as a Democrat, Republican or third party candidate to stand for one or two elections $E = \{E_1, E_2\}$, depending on the state of the world.²¹ E_1 is a direct primary election where the voters pick the nominees among the candidates to stand for E_2 , a general election. In state of the world S_1 , the candidate only runs in E_2 while in S_2 , the candidate runs in E_2 if they win E_1 . The outcome $O = \{O_D, O_R, O_T\}$ of the game is the winner of each stage of the electoral process. There are costs, $C = \{C_D, C_R, C_T\}$ associated with each strategy and each stage in the election. I assume that candidates have some policy preferences so the party choice is restricted to picking between one of the two major parties and then a third party.

The decision theoretic steps in this complete information model are outlined in figure 1 below. First, nature decides if the candidate is in a district without the primary (S_1) or with the direct primary (S_2). In S_1 , the candidate is either the party choice and runs for the major party (here, the Democratic Party) in the general election or they run as a third party candidate. In S_2 , the candidate first decides which party's primary to enter and then if successful, they run under that party label for the general election. The cumulative result for all N candidates for each district will be at least one major party candidate and some number of third party candidates. This total number of candidates will serve as the primary dependent variable.

In S_1 , the calculus is simple since it is the party that forces the decisions of the candidates. Any candidate who is not picked by the party leaders must run under a third party banner if they want to be on the general election ticket. Therefore, the general expected utility calculus is:

$$EU_i(a_k) = \pi_{jk}U(O_k) - C_k \quad (1)$$

where:

- $EU_i(a_k)$ is the expected utility for player i of choosing strategy k ,

²¹Similar to Aldrich and Bianco (1992), I assume that there is no value given to not running so all candidates run. Further, a candidate cannot win a specific party's primary unless they pick that strategy.

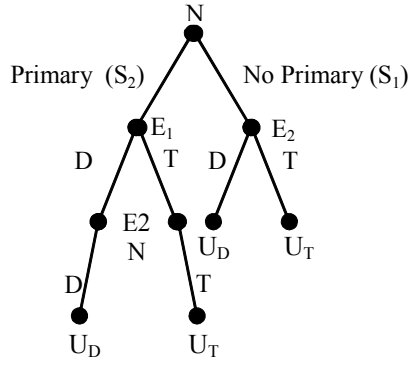


Figure 1: Congressional Candidate Decision Tree

- π_{jk} is the probability of outcome j (winning E_2) given that action k has been taken, where $\pi_{jk} = 0$ for $j \neq k$ ²²
- $U(O_k)$ is the utility the actor receives from outcome k ,
- C_k is the cost associated with strategy k .

More specifically, we assume:

$$EU(a_D) = \pi_D U(O_D) - C_D; \quad (2)$$

$$EU(a_R) = \pi_R U(O_R) - C_R; \quad (3)$$

$$EU(a_T) = \pi_T U(O_T) - C_T; \quad (4)$$

and the candidate wants to pick the strategy that maximizes their expected utility over the outcomes. Given that it is assumed that a candidate has some policy preferences, equation three is removed from the calculus and we will focus on two and four.

In S_2 , the calculus involves maximizing utility over two events, E_1 and E_2 . This makes the new set of decision calculi:

$$EU(a_D) = \pi_{DE_1} \times \pi_{DE_2} [(U(O_{DE_1}) - C_{DE_1}) + (U(O_{DE_2}) - C_{DE_2})] \quad (5)$$

$$EU(a_T) = \pi_{TE_1} \times \pi_{TE_2} [(U(O_{TE_1}) - C_{TE_1}) + (U(O_{TE_2}) - C_{TE_2})] \quad (6)$$

where it is assumed that $\pi_{TE_1} > \pi_{DE_1}$ and $\pi_{DE_2} > \pi_{TE_2}$. Using these equations and the expectations from the two competing theoretical outlooks, I developed the following hypotheses.

²²Given this assumption, I drop the multiple subscripts j and k .

- H1 If π_{DE_1} is sufficiently large for outsider candidates, as the textbook theory suggests, and all else is held constant, $EU(a_D)$ will increase relative to $EU(a_T)$ and a smaller number of candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot in S_2 compared to S_1 . If Ware is correct, there should be no change in the number of candidates.
- H2 As π_{DE_1} increases for outsider candidates and all else is held constant, $EU(a_D)$ will increase relative to $EU(a_T)$ and a smaller number of candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot.
- H3a If π_{DE_1} is sufficiently *small* relative to π_{TE_2} and all else is held constant, $EU(a_T)$ will increase relative to $EU(a_D)$ and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *more* candidates on the general election ballot.
- H3b If π_{TE_2} is sufficiently *small* relative to π_{DE_1} and all else is held constant, $EU(a_T)$ will decrease relative to $EU(a_D)$ and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *fewer* candidates on the general election ballot.
- H4 As C_{DE_1} increases and all else is held constant, $EU(a_T)$ will increase relative to $EU(a_D)$ and more candidates should run on third party tickets. The result should be *more* candidates on the general election ballot.

Appendix B

Table 6: Summary statistics Poisson Regression

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Dep. Var. Count	3.254	1.233
Primary	0.66	0.474
Sore Loser Rule	0.452	0.498
Signature Req.	0.346	0.476
Open	0.051	0.219
South	0.244	0.43
At Large	0.028	0.165
Machine	0.177	0.382
59th Congress	0.103	0.304
60th Congress	0.105	0.306
61st Congress	0.105	0.306
62nd Congress	0.105	0.307
63rd Congress	0.116	0.321
64th Congress	0.116	0.321
65th Congress	0.116	0.321
66th Congress	0.116	0.321

Table 7: Summary Statistics for Regression Analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Dep. Var. Party Difference	-0.098	0.999
First Primary	0.103	0.304
Sore Loser	0.07	0.255
Signature Req.	0.055	0.228
Open Primary	0.006	0.08
South	0.244	0.43
At Large	0.028	0.165
Machine	0.177	0.382
59th Congress	0.103	0.304
60th Congress	0.105	0.306
61st Congress	0.105	0.306
62nd Congress	0.105	0.307
63rd Congress	0.116	0.321
64th Congress	0.116	0.321
65th Congress	0.116	0.321
66th Congress	0.116	0.321