

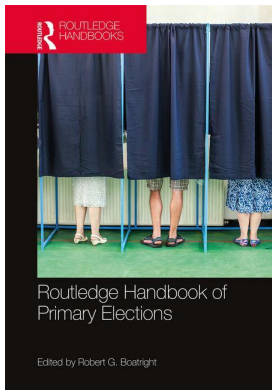
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7

THE EFFECT OF OPEN AND CLOSED PRIMARIES ON VOTER TURNOUT

Matthew J. Geras and Michael H. Crespin

In late June 2016, the voters in New York's 19th congressional district went to the polls to pick candidates to stand on the party lines for the general election. Since Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY) was retiring, there were strong candidates in both the Democratic and Republican races seeking to run in a competitive district that Barack Obama won by six points in 2012. Nevertheless, there were only 17,007 voters on the Democratic side and 13,714 votes cast for the Republican candidates for an overall turnout of under 13 percent (Hamilton 2016). In contrast, statewide turnout in Georgia's primary was just over 20 percent.¹ One major difference between the two states that might explain the difference in turnout is who is allowed to vote in the primary elections. In New York, only registered party members are allowed to vote in party primaries. This is not true in Georgia where there is no party registration and voters may pick either ballot on primary day. Since many potential voters are excluded, it is not surprising that turnout was lower in the closed primary state compared to the open one. In this chapter, we provide a systematic test of the hypothesis that primary type will influence turnout rates in over 2,000 contested House primaries across nine election years from 2000 to 2016. In short, our results show us the New York–Georgia differences are not an anomaly and that closed primaries are associated with lower levels of voter turnout.

Below, we first discuss some of the previous work that has examined turnout in U.S. Elections. We then briefly outline our theoretical expectations followed by descriptive measures of turnout by primary type. Finally, we present a more thorough test of our hypotheses to show that primary type influences turnout in congressional elections.

Turnout in Primary Elections

The literature on turnout in U.S. elections is ample, so we will only focus on the highlights here. Political participation scholars are concerned with why citizens vote (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), potential changes in turnout over time (McDonald and Popkin 2001; Burnham 1965), and why voters bother to cast a vote at all as they weigh costs and benefits (Aldrich 1993; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). In general, there are a few larger scale factors that consistently influence turnout – voter demographics, race-specific characteristics, and state institutional laws and rules. Most of the research examines turnout in the general election, although a few scholars do pay attention to primaries. Throughout, researchers study the question using both surveys and

actual turnout data for all levels of elections – presidential, congressional, and state races. More recently, scholars have started to use experiments to probe specific ways campaigns can increase turnout by contacting voters (Green and Gerber 2015).

Wolfinger and Rosenstone's (1980) *Who Votes?* is the seminal work that explains how individual voter demographics can influence decisions to vote. The authors argue that education is the key predictor of the decision to vote where more education predicts higher turnout. Other individual factors that matter are income, occupation, age, marital status, and race of the voter (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Leighley and Nagler 1992a; Teixeira 1987; Verba and Nie 1987; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Political attitudes such as efficacy and party identification may also influence turnout choice (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Teixeira 1987). Although there is a debate regarding stability in the size of the effects of individual variables over time, more educated and higher SES citizens are still more likely to vote (Shields and Goidel 1997; Leighley and Nagler 1992a, 1992b; Burnham 1987).

In terms of race-specific factors, several interrelated variables matter, including spending, competitiveness, and district political characteristics (Patterson and Caldeira 1983; Caldeira and Patterson 1982). Citizens might turn out at higher rates because they think their vote "matters" more (Aldrich 1993) or as a result of get-out-to-vote campaigns by candidates, parties, and other interested actors (Cox and Munger 1989). Of course, it takes money to generate excitement, so higher spending tends to correlate with increased turnout (Caldeira and Patterson 1982). Methodologically it is difficult to sort out which of the district variables are most informative because they tend to move together, but it is theoretically clear how they can make a difference.

Legal features at the state level can also drive turnout decisions by making it more or less difficult to vote (Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978). These variables include issues related to polling hours, mail in ballots, ease of absentee voting, and variations in registration laws such as motor-voter or Election Day registration (Southwell and Burchett 2000; Knack 1995; Fenster 1994; Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko 1985). Some rules such as Election Day registration increase turnout, but other reforms such as early voting did not pan out as predicted (Burden et al. 2014; Hershey 2009). More recently voter ID laws have been implemented in several states. Since they increase the cost to voting, the expectation is they will work to reduce turnout; however, the results have been mixed (Grimmer et al. 2017; Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson 2017; Alvarez, Bailey, and Katz 2008; Mycoff, Wagner, and Wilson 2007) depending on other laws in place and the unit of analysis. Researchers have found though that different subgroups do shoulder legal costs in different ways (Highton 2004).

Although most of the turnout research is centered on the general election, some does examine primary races. For the most part, the same general factors that influence turnout in November matter for primary elections (Kenney and Rice 1985), although there are some variables that are unique to primaries, such as only allowing registered party members to vote (Norrander 1991; Moran and Fenster 1982). In primaries, there is an expectation that moving from closed to open rules will increase the levels of participation (Jewitt 2014). While this is not always the case for presidential primaries (Norrander 1991), evidence suggests an increase in turnout for gubernatorial primaries (Kenney 1983), and under some circumstances for Senate races as well (Kenney 1986). Although we would expect to find more ideologically extreme voters or candidates in closed races compared to open primaries (Gerber and Morton 1998), this does not always hold (Norrander and Wendland 2016) and is contingent on other factors (Kaufmann, Gimpel and Hoffman 2003; Kanthak and Morton 2001). While there is a fear of "raiding" in open primary systems, Southwell (1991) suggests this does not happen all that often.

Compared to literature on presidential primaries, fewer scholars study congressional races and most focus on the Senate, largely due to the difficulty in acquiring data at the district level.

Turnout for congressional primaries hovers at around 25–35 percent, although this is also contextual. Voter participation in primaries has declined since the 1930s and 40s (Boatright 2014, 77–79). Just like other types of contests, turnout for Senate primaries is higher when races are close, or when there is a contested presidential primary on the same day (Kenney 1986). Further, when the Democratic Party dominated the South, turnout was often higher in the primary than in the general election.

Primary Type and Turnout: Expectations

Overall, the existing literature finds several factors that influence levels of voter turnout in American elections. In this chapter, however, we are most interested in examining the effects of primary laws on voter turnout in congressional primaries. Specifically, we build off of Jewitt's (2014) existing theoretical framework that predicts that voter turnout in primary elections will increase as the electoral process becomes more open.

In the United States, there are four major types of primary elections: open, closed, hybrid, and top-two.² Parties that utilize open primaries allow all voters the opportunity to vote, regardless of their party affiliation, as long as they meet the qualifications to vote in the general election. On the other end of the spectrum, parties that use closed primaries only allow affiliated partisan voters to participate. Hybrid primaries fall between these two extremes, in that they require registered partisans to vote in the primary for the party to which they are registered, but they allow unaffiliated voters to vote in either the Republican or Democratic primary.³ Finally, in recent years, California and Washington have begun using top-two primaries at the congressional level. During a top-two primary, all candidates for office, regardless of their party affiliation, appear on the same ballot. The two candidates who receive the most votes, again regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election. Our main hypothesis then is relatively straightforward as we expect that as restrictions increase, turnout should decline, because subsets of voters are not allowed to participate. This means turnout in open primary states should be higher compared to closed elections. Although there is nothing stopping a citizen from registering with a party so they can vote in a primary, not everyone wants to do so. Some are truly independent and do not want to affiliate with a party while others might not want to spend the time and effort to pick one party.⁴ Hybrid and top-two allow all registered voters to participate, so we also expect turnout to be higher in these states compared to closed races. Below we discuss our data and present our results.

Measuring Voter Turnout in Primary Elections

In order to examine the effect of primary laws on voter turnout and to test our hypotheses, it is necessary to examine primary elections across the country over a significant period of time. As a result, we examine voter turnout in all congressional primary elections from 2000 to 2016 where there were at least two candidates on the ballot.⁵ While examining such a lengthy time period allows us to exploit considerable variation in regard to both primary voter turnout and primary format, it also requires a significant amount of data collection. Pettigrew, Owen, and Wanless (2014) have greatly contributed to the political science community by compiling U.S. House of Representatives primary election results from 1956 to 2010. Moreover, they collect biographical information on primary candidates as well as election-specific data such as the type of primary and the number of candidates running for office. The analysis presented in this chapter both relies on this data, aggregating it to the election level when necessary, and extends the data in some key aspects to include the 2012, 2014, and 2016 election cycles.

The key dependent variable for our analysis is voter turnout at both the congressional district-level and the individual primary election level. Unfortunately, measuring voter turnout in primary elections is not as straightforward as one might think and makes studying House elections more difficult (Boatright 2014, 85). Determining the numerator is easy and is the number of votes cast in a particular election. The Federal Election Commission compiles that number in each primary. Determining the denominator, the population of eligible primary voters, is more complicated. While we acknowledge that there are several ways to measure primary voter turnout (see Burden and Ezra 1999 and Geys 2006), we measure turnout as the total number of votes cast in each primary divided by the voting age population of each congressional district. The voting age population of each congressional district was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau through either the official census, which is conducted every ten years, or through the annual American Community Survey.⁶

This measure of voter turnout is conservative and if anything underestimates voter turnout since it relies on the voting age population instead of the voting eligible population (McDonald and Popkin 2001). That being said, we argue that the voting age population is a reasonable denominator to use in the context of primary elections, since neither estimates of the voting eligible population (McDonald and Popkin 2001) at the congressional district level, nor estimates of partisan registration rates at the state or congressional district level are available for all states. The latter point is especially valid in open primary states without party registration. While the exact level of turnout is debatable, our methods allow us to collect a consistent variable over our timeframe and every state. Further, since we are most interested in testing *differences* between types and not the overall percentage of turnout, our measure is sufficient.

Factors that Influence Levels of Voter Turnout

Since the goal of this chapter is to estimate the effect of several different primary laws on rates of voter turnout, our main independent variables are dichotomous variables that indicate the type of primary being contested by each party within each state. While each state party may enforce unique primary rules that create nuanced differences across parties and states, we classify primary elections into four major categories and create a dichotomous variable for each category. Starting with the classification system laid out by Pettigrew, Owen, and Wanless (2014), we use several sources including the National Conference of State Legislatures, Fair Vote, and Ballotpedia to determine who is eligible to vote in both the Democratic and Republican primaries in each state. Specifically, we classify each primary as either an open primary, a closed primary, a hybrid primary, or a top-two primary.

In order to ensure we are making accurate estimates as to the effects of each type of primary on voter turnout, it is necessary to control for several factors that have been previously found to influence levels of voter turnout. First, we control for several election-specific factors such as whether or not each congressional district has an incumbent seeking reelection. Specifically, since we are analyzing individual primaries, we distinguish between open seats, a Republican incumbent seeking reelection, and a Democratic incumbent seeking reelection. Next, we control for both the total number of candidates running in each primary election as well as the total number of quality candidates seeking each nomination.⁷ In order to incorporate the ideological leanings of each congressional district and acknowledge that some districts advantage either Republican or Democratic candidates, we control for the proportion of the two-party vote each party received in the last general election. When we are analyzing Republican primaries, we use the Republican vote share, and when we are analyzing Democratic primaries, we include the Democratic vote share. Finally, we control for the total amount of funds raised between all

primary candidates according to the most recent FEC reporting deadline prior to each primary. Taken together, these variables help to control for the competitiveness of a particular district.

In addition to the election-specific control variables, we also control for numerous state-level variables that may influence voter turnout. First, we control for the number of weeks that each primary is held prior to the general election as an acknowledgement that interest in a congressional race may fluctuate throughout the course of an election cycle. Due to the recent debate over voter identification requirements, we use a dichotomous control variable for whether or not a strict voter identification law is in effect in each state during each election cycle. We use Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson (2017) to identify strict voter identification laws. We also control for whether or not a Senate election is taking place during each election cycle because additional elections are likely to increase interest in political campaigns. While the state-level variables just outlined control for state-specific factors that may vary from one election cycle to the next, there are many other potential factors that can influence turnout, such as demographics, education levels, and political culture that change at much slower rates. Since we are largely interested in testing for differences across primary types, we decided to simply add fixed effects for both states and election years rather than create measures for each possible covariate. This way, we control for other factors, but do not estimate separate coefficients. Because our dependent variable, turnout, is a proportion we estimate generalized linear models with a logit link.

Descriptive Analysis

Figure 7.1 displays the total number of contested congressional primaries that occurred from 2000 to 2016, broken down by primary type. We call a primary contested if there is more than

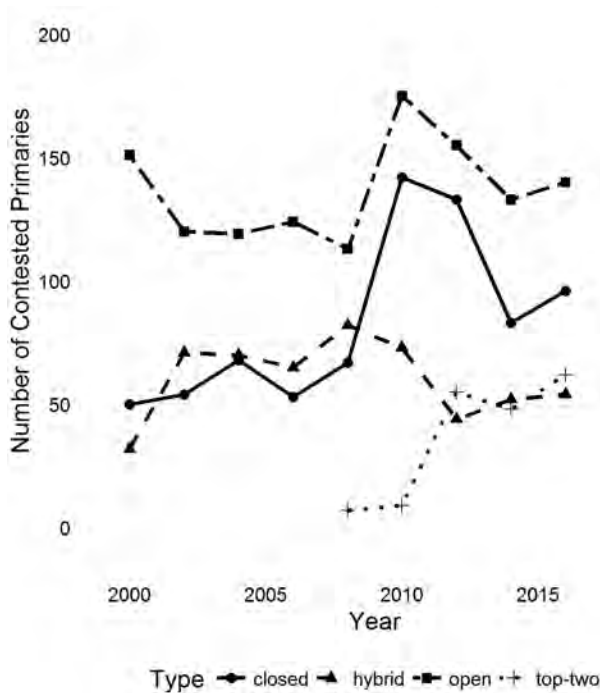


Figure 7.1 Number of Contested Primaries by Primary Type and Year

one candidate in either of the Democratic or Republican contests. Across the entire time period, open primaries were most common with at least 100 open primaries being contested in each election cycle. The second most common type of primary across this time period was closed primaries. From 2000 to 2008, the number of contested closed primaries fluctuated between 50 and 75, but 2010 and 2012 saw a spike in the number of contested closed primaries and since this time, there have been at least 80 contested closed primaries in each election cycle. Out of each type of primary, the frequency of contested hybrid primaries has remained the most stable across this time period with there never being any fewer than 32 contested elections (2000) and never being any more than 82 contested elections (2008). Finally, Washington became the first state to hold top-two primaries at the congressional level in 2008. California also began holding top-two primaries in 2010. Considering only two out of 50 states use top-two primaries, a surprising number of these primaries are contested. Since 2010, there have been at least 48 contested top-two primaries each election cycle and in 2012 and 2016, there were more top-two primaries contested than there were hybrid primaries. Overall, we can expect this trend to continue if more states choose to adopt similar electoral reforms at the congressional level.

While the number of contested primaries has fluctuated since 2000, congressional primary voter turnout has remained mostly stable and relatively consistent across each type of primary. Figure 7.2 displays the mean congressional district-level voter turnout by primary type across the last nine election cycles. At least from this initial descriptive perspective, there seems to be little relationship between the openness of a primary and levels of voter turnout. From 2000 to 2006, voter turnout hovered between 16 percent and 20 percent, regardless of primary type. Since 2008, there has been greater variation in primary voter turnout with a slight tendency for higher levels of participation in open primaries compared to hybrid or closed primaries, particularly in

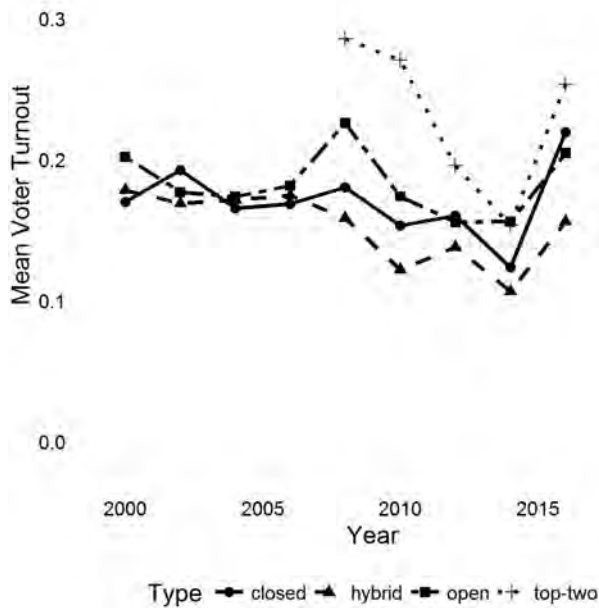


Figure 7.2 District-Level Voter Turnout by Primary Type and Year

2008 and 2014. Additionally, since their inception, top-two primaries experienced higher levels of primary voter turnout than traditionally expected. In three of the last five election cycles, mean voter turnout in top-two primaries has been greater than 25 percent. Moreover, mean voter turnout in top-two primaries has been never been lower than the average turnout rates in the other three types of primaries. However, in 2014 turnout hovered around 15.5 percent in both top-two and open primaries.

Systematic Results

On the whole, while descriptive results are informative and useful in examining overarching trends, in order to truly analyze the relationship between primary laws and voter turnout, more systematic analysis is necessary. Table 7.1 displays the results of three generalized linear models estimating the effect of each of our independent and control variables on voter turnout across three different scenarios. The first model estimates the effect of each state-level variable on district-level, both Republican and Democratic, and voter turnout in states where Republicans and Democrats follow the same primary guidelines. The other two models incorporate all of our campaign- or election-specific variables in order to analyze their effect on voter turnout at the individual partisan primary level. Specifically, model 2 analyzes voter turnout in Republican primaries and model 3 analyzes voter turnout in Democratic primaries. In all cases, open primaries are the excluded reference category so the primary type variables should be interpreted compared to open races. Since top-two primaries contain candidates from both parties, we exclude these races from the partisan models.

District-Level Voter Turnout

At the congressional district level, it is important to note that some of the 2,070 total observations are based upon one contested primary, meaning only one of the two primaries was contested in a given year, while the other observations are based upon two contested primaries. In order to control for this, we include a binary variable to indicate when an observation was based on two contested elections. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a significant positive relationship between two contested primaries and district-level voter turnout. The other three state-level control variables – weeks until the general election, the presence of a strict voter identification law, and Senate election – all also have a positive and statistically significant relationship on district-level voter turnout. Theoretically, this means that district-level voter turnout increases as the amount of time between the primary election and general election increases. Similarly, and somewhat surprisingly, states that enforce strict voter identification laws appear to have higher levels of district-level voter turnout than states that do not enforce such laws.⁸ Finally, as expected, district-level voter turnout increases when a Senate primary election takes place at the same time as the House primaries.

Ultimately, the district-level voter turnout model only provides limited support for our expectations. While we find that there is a statistically significant negative relationship between district-level voter turnout and hybrid primaries in comparison to open primaries, there is no significant differences in voter turnout between open, closed, and top-two primaries. Although it may seem odd that voter turnout decreases when going from an open primary to a hybrid primary, but not when going from an open primary to a closed, one potential explanation is that perhaps hybrid primaries create confusion as to which voters are eligible to participate. While closed primaries are ultimately more restrictive in terms of voter participation, they at least provide a clear guideline in that only registered partisans are allowed to vote if they choose to do so.

Table 7.1 GLM Estimating Voter Turnout in Primary Elections

<i>Variables</i>	<i>District-Level Primaries</i>	<i>Republican Primaries</i>	<i>Democratic Primaries</i>
Closed	-0.0511 (0.0824)	-0.2153 * (0.0787)	-0.1926 * (0.0851)
Hybrid	-0.3008 * (0.0770)	-0.2998 * (0.0752)	-0.4550 * 0.0786
Top-Two	0.0107 (0.0784)		
Democratic Incumbent		-0.3794 * (0.0392)	
Republican Incumbent			-0.4024 * (0.0487)
Open Seat		-0.1445 * (0.0380)	-0.2294 * (0.0512)
Number of Quality Candidates		0.1238 * (0.0174)	0.0933 * (0.0201)
Number of Candidates		0.0161 (0.0084)	0.0363 * (0.0116)
Party's Previous Vote Share		0.7520 * (0.0718)	0.4072 * (0.0822)
Fundraising (\$10,000s)		0.0004 * (0.0001)	0.0006 * (0.0002)
Weeks Till General Election	0.0104 * (0.0028)	0.0127 * (0.0031)	0.0073 * (0.0029)
Strict Voter ID Law	0.1232 * (0.0504)	0.0995 * (0.0456)	0.0166 (0.0640)
Senate Election	0.1183 * (0.0257)	0.0430 * (0.0253)	0.0999 * 0.0323
Both Contested	0.7278 * (0.0254)		
(Constant)	-2.0948 * (0.1280)	-2.8591 * (0.1329)	-2.4249 * (0.1874)
Log-Likelihood	-272.9	-121.8	-112.2
AIC	669.8	375.6	354.3
BIC	1019.1	719.3	682.5
N	2,070	1,350	1,151

Robust Standard Errors in Parenthesis * $p < 0.05$

Note: The effect of each predictor on voter turnout is displayed. The reference category for the primary variables is an open primary, and for the models estimating voter turnout by party, the reference category for the incumbency status of each race is an incumbent from the party being analyzed. Though they are not shown, each model is estimated with both state and year fixed effects.

In this case, maybe the lower rates of district-level voter turnout in hybrid primaries compared to open primaries have less to do with openness and more to do with confusion.

Since the magnitudes of individual coefficients are difficult to interpret when dealing with generalized linear models, we also compute the predicted district-level voter turnout for each individual state based upon the 2016 election cycle. Figure 7.3 displays these predictions along with their corresponding 95 percent confidence interval. Not surprisingly, based on the results in Table 7.1, there is not a consistent trend in terms of which states have higher levels of turnout

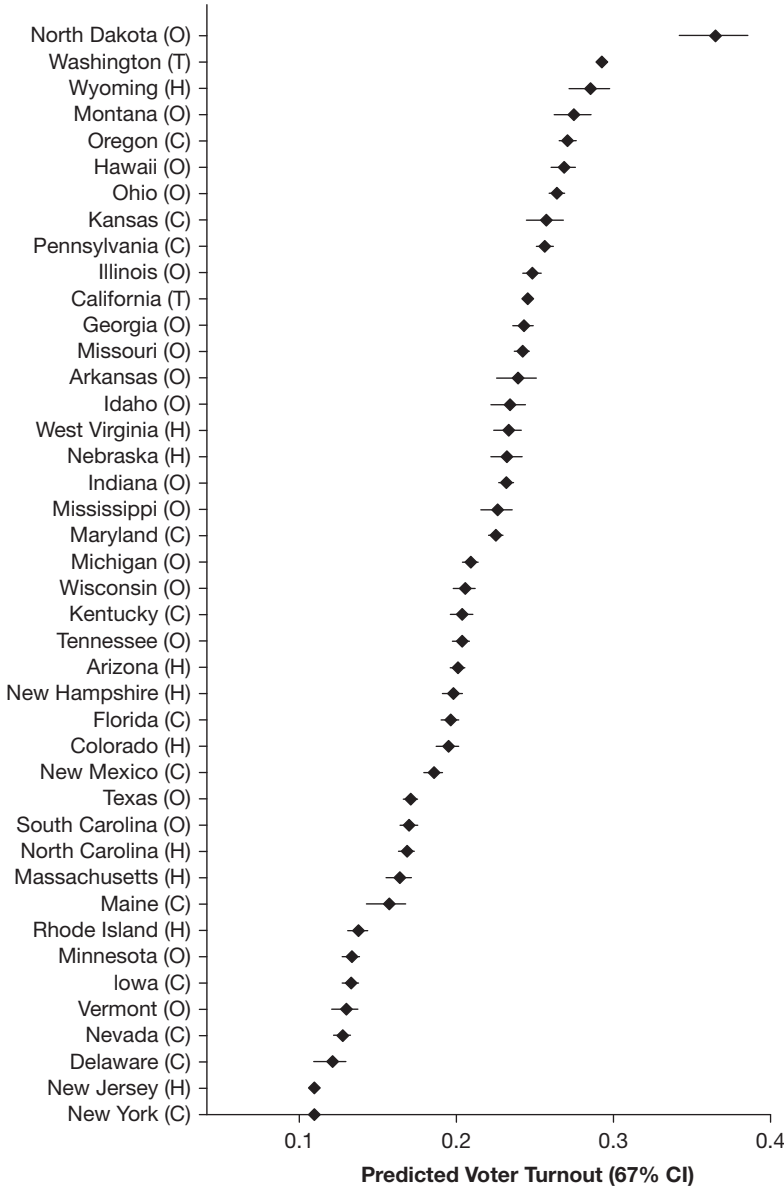


Figure 7.3 Predicted District-Level Voter Turnout by State

Note: Displayed is the predicted district-level voter turnout along with its 67 percent confidence interval for each state in which Democrats and Republican hold the same style of primary. Each predictor variable is set to match the 2016 political climate in each state. O stands for open primary, T stands for top-two primary, C stands for closed primary, and H stands for hybrid primary.

compared to their primary type. In fact, the three states with the highest predicted district-level turnout each have a different primary type. North Dakota, an open primary state in 2016, has the highest predicted turnout by quite a bit. This is probably due to the fact that it is the only state that does not require voter registration. Second on the list is Washington, which, as

previously mentioned, conducted top-two primaries in 2016, and third is Wyoming, which held hybrid primaries. There are also several states near the top of the list who held closed primaries, including Oregon, Kansas, and Pennsylvania. One potential explanation for this trend is that beyond primary type, these states may have a political culture which places greater emphasis on political participation. While individual state features such as political culture are controlled for with state fixed effects, these controls do not necessarily explain the impact that these factors may have on voter turnout during primary elections. That being said, there does not appear to be a geographic trend in levels of voter turnout.

On the whole, our analysis of district-level voter turnout aligns with the descriptive results we presented earlier as well as past research. Boatright (2014) finds turnout for congressional primaries hovers around 25–35 percent and Figure 7.3 reveals that 21 states are projected to have district-level voter turnout greater than 20 percent. Ultimately, the key limitation of our analysis thus far is that we have not yet considered the influence of campaign and election-specific factors on voter turnout. This is what we turn to next by analyzing voter turnout at the partisan primary level.

Partisan Primary-Level Turnout

The second and third models from Table 7.1 display the results of our analysis of Republican and Democratic primaries. The dependent variable here measures the total votes cast in each primary, divided by the voting age population in the district. This means we are underreporting turnout, albeit in a consistent fashion across types. As discussed earlier, this allows us to test our hypotheses regarding differences in turnout levels, but will not always accurately reflect turnout rates.

Both models highlight the importance of campaigns when examining voter turnout. For both parties, as the number of quality candidates, the party's previous vote share, and the total amount of fundraising throughout the primary increase, so does voter turnout. Similarly, partisan primary level voter turnout appears to be much higher when a party's incumbent is seeking reelection. This is probably due to incumbents' increased name recognition, as well as to the sorts of campaign tactics that are used in races where the incumbent is facing a challenger. In addition to the number of quality candidates, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the total number of candidates running for office and voter turnout in Democratic primaries.

In terms of state-level effects on partisan primary level turnout, the results are similar to those for the district-level turnout. Senate elections increase turnout, as does an increase in the number of weeks between the primary election and the general election. Here, the presence of strict voter identification laws appears to increase turnout in only Republican primaries.

While there appeared to be little relationship between primary laws and voter turnout at the congressional district level, primary laws seem to have quite a bit of impact on voter turnout at the partisan primary level. Moreover, the relationship between turnout and primary format largely fall in line with our expectation that as primary laws become more open, political participation increases. Changing from an open Republican primary to either a closed or hybrid Republican primary decreases voter turnout. That being said, there is no difference in Republican primary voter turnout when comparing hybrid primaries to closed primaries. In Democratic primaries, voter turnout decreases when switching from an open primary to either a hybrid or a closed primary and also when switching from a closed primary to a hybrid primary. As was the case when examining district-level turnout, hybrid primaries seem to result in the lowest levels of voter turnout, especially for Democrats.

The magnitudes of these differences can be seen graphically in Figure 7.4, which displays predicted voter turnout for each type of primary by political party for the 2016 election cycle.

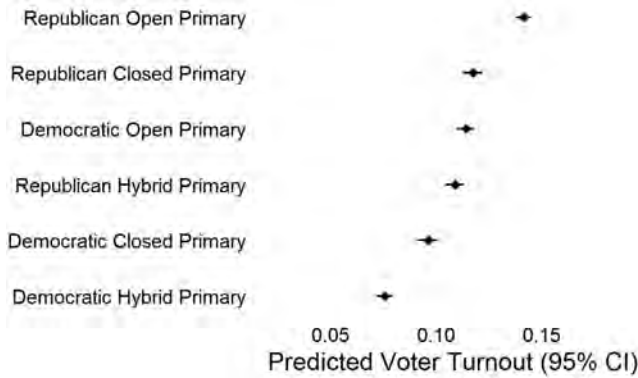


Figure 7.4 Predicted Primary-Level Voter Turnout

Note: Displayed is the predicted voter turnout and corresponding 95 percent confidence interval by political party and primary type. Each of the district and state-level variables is set to either the median or mode for each political party. The state fixed effect is set to Michigan because Michigan was found to have the median voter turnout in Figure 7.3 and the year fixed effect is set to 2016.

While voter turnout in 2016 appears to be higher in Republican primaries than in Democratic primaries, this might be an artifact of creating the figure since each of the state and district-level variables are set to either the median or mode isolated by political party. During the time period under analysis, Republicans were advantaged over Democrats in terms of fundraising and incumbency, which likely explains the higher levels of turnout. However, it is also important to note that had we examined voter turnout during a different election cycle or based on aggregate estimates without year fixed effects, it is likely that voter turnout would have been higher in Democratic primaries or at least equivalent to levels of turnout in Republican primaries.

What is of more theoretical interest is the change in voter turnout in relation to the openness of each state’s primary laws. For both the Republicans and the Democrats, voter turnout was highest during open primaries and lowest during hybrid primaries. The predicted difference in turnout between these two types of primaries appears to amount to about 2 to 3 percent. As a result, our expectations hold up in regard to open primaries allowing for the highest level of political participation, although it appears more research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the differences in voter turnout between hybrid and closed primaries. While theory would lead us to believe that turnout would be higher during hybrid primaries than closed primaries, this does not appear to be the case. As stated previously, potential explanations for this odd finding are that hybrid primaries cause confusion as to who is allowed to vote in each party's primary or that the states that use hybrid primaries have political cultures that do not place a higher importance on political participation.

Conclusion

Due to the measurement issues discussed at the beginning of the chapter, calculating voter turnout for congressional primary elections is a difficult task. However, the analysis presented in this chapter shows that even an imperfect measure of voter turnout can help to shed new light on the forces that drive political participation during congressional primaries. Overall, we find that in the context of congressional primaries, campaigns matter to a great extent in

determining how many people vote. This is, of course, consistent with previous research. Additionally, several state-specific factors, such as the Senate's electoral calendar and the timing of primaries more generally, can affect levels of voter turnout. During both Democratic and Republican primaries, voter turnout was higher in states where there was a Senate election taking place and in states that held their primary elections several weeks or even months before the general election.

Finally, in what is of most interest to this chapter, primary registration laws appear to affect levels of primary voter turnout at the margins. We find that at both the district level and the partisan primary level, voter turnout in open primaries is higher than voter turnout in hybrid primaries. Similarly, at the partisan primary level, we find that voter turnout in closed primaries is lower than voter turnout in open primaries. On the whole we find some degree of support for the theory that primary voter turnout increases as the primary process becomes more open. Ultimately, while scholars, activists, and practitioners all have found that there is no "silver bullet" to drastically increase levels of political participation in the United States, implementing more open primaries, or potentially even top-two primaries, may be a way to modestly increase voter turnout during congressional primary elections.

Notes

- 1 "State says primary turnout was around 20 percent in Georgia," 27 May 2016, retrieved from <http://www.wctv.tv/content/news/State-says-primary-turnout-was-around-20-percent-in-Georgia-381121711.htm>
- 2 Some states, such as Utah, largely rely on caucuses to pick party candidates. Owing to the uniqueness of these systems, we do not include them in our analysis here.
- 3 Sometimes hybrid primaries are broken down further into sub-classifications, mainly based on whether or not unaffiliated voters need to register with a party to vote (see "State Primary Election Types," 2016, retrieved from www.nslc.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primary-types.aspx). Since these differences are subtle, and sometimes difficult to tease out, we chose to stick with the broader hybrid primary category.
- 4 We only really tackle major party primaries here. In some states such as New York, several minor parties do appear on the General Election ballot.
- 5 Based on this definition, primaries in which a single candidate sought the nomination were eliminated from our analysis, as were any nomination contests that took the form of a party convention. Finally, we excluded all observations from Louisiana except for primaries taking place in 2008 and 2010 when they held closed partisan primaries.
- 6 Since the American Community Survey only began in 2005, the voter age population at the congressional district level was not available for the years 2002 and 2004. However, the Census Bureau did provide annual state population estimates for these years. Beginning with these estimates, we were able to approximate the district-level voting age population for 2002 and 2004. We first divided the state population estimates by the number of congressional districts in each state and then multiplied the estimated district populations by the percentage of voters who were over the age of 18 in 2000 and 2005.
- 7 We use Jacobson's (2013) dichotomous measure of whether or not a candidate has prior political experience to measure candidate quality.
- 8 Since our voter ID measure is just acting as a control variable, we offer a note of caution in drawing inferences from our analysis in terms of this law influencing turnout. If we wanted to determine the effect of voter ID laws on turnout we would likely use a different research design.

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