

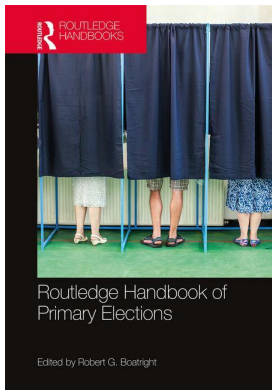
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## **Routledge Handbook of Primary Elections**

Robert G. Boatright

### **Primary Elections and Group Dynamics**

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## 14

PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND  
GROUP DYNAMICS

## Examining the Makeup of the Party Coalitions

*Casey B. K. Dominguez*

Political parties are usually defined as coalitions that run candidates for office in order to control government and achieve policy outcomes (Downs 1957; Schlesinger 1985; Sorauf 1984). Because American parties choose candidates in primary elections, rather than the more controlled internal processes used by parties in other countries, there is always some question about whether American party nominees are really loyal to the party itself, or whether they are independent agents who will make promises to anyone (inside the party or not) in order to get elected (Herrnson 1988, 2001; Jacobson 2001; Silbey 1990). Lacking enforceable party platforms, there are also real questions about whether there really is “a party” to whom we might ask candidates to be loyal. But the fact of the matter is that partisan elected officials do control government policy. The substantive priorities of the parties do differ by party. And some (if not all) important policy positions are the subject of widespread, if not universal, agreement among the party’s representatives in office. Since officeholders are not bound by platforms, or handpicked by party leaders, where does that policy agreement come from?

Primary elections help us answer some of those questions about party composition, policy positions, and identity. When a party nominates a candidate, it makes a statement about what the party itself cares about. In primary elections, groups and individuals in a party coalition fight with each other over which candidate embodies the best set of values and who articulates the best set of issue positions. The groups and individuals who are involved in a party’s primary contests are those that have the first (and potentially among the greatest) effects on the issue positions the candidate takes. Research suggests that incumbents pay the most attention to their primary election constituency (Brady, Han and Pope 2007). Presumably they also pay attention to the interest and issue groups that shaped the promises the incumbent made to that primary constituency. If some groups are habitually in the business of participating in a party’s primaries, across space and time, it is reasonable to bet that their preferences will be reflected by many of that party’s nominees and eventual officeholders. Therefore, if we want to understand how parties adopt core issue positions, and how they evolve over time, it is important to understand how the party coalitions manifest themselves in primary elections.

Because participation in primary elections is mostly limited to partisans, examining those partisan actors who engage in primary campaigns helps us to define the “base” of the political parties. Although the press mostly considers the “base” of the party to be a bounded group of ordinary voters, research on voting behavior strongly suggests that voters’ positions on issues are

malleable and subject to elite guidance (Achen and Bartels 2016). In keeping with a recently developed but prominent strain of research that considers party coalitions to be *primarily* interest group coalitions (Bawn et al. 2012) rather than voter coalitions, this chapter will examine the elite, group-centered coalitions that emerge in primary elections. This chapter delves into federal primary elections for the House, Senate, and President, not by examining particular candidates, but by focusing on the groups that compose the party coalitions that are active in primaries. The goal is to use primary elections as a way of understanding the makeup of the party coalitions themselves.

This chapter will make three main points. First, it will argue that some primary elections are more systematically interesting and important for understanding party coalitions than others. Second, it will show that (obviously) the Democratic and Republican primary coalitions are quite distinct, and that their differences are made evident by examining campaign contributions to primary election candidates in each party. Finally, it will use data gathered from primary elections to show how the party coalitions themselves have changed over time, and how changes in those coalitions are consistent with the partisan polarization so widely observed in the last two decades.

### **What Do We Know about Primary Elections and the Composition of Party Coalitions?**

Most research on sub-national primary elections has focused not on the party's involvement in candidate selection, but on the emergence of candidates themselves. One reason for that focus is that for many years, the dominant mode of thinking about congressional elections has put candidates in the drivers' seat, and so when scholars conceptualized the nature of primary elections, they focused on the "emergence" of candidates and the candidate-specific determinants of their success. This research taught us that incumbency, the distribution of partisanship in the district and the quality of the nominee have the biggest effects on which party wins any given congressional election (Bond, Covington and Fleisher 1985; Jacobson 2001; Stone and Maisel 1999).

The research on candidate emergence has shown us that primary election environments are fundamentally shaped by the competitiveness of the general election. More candidates want to run in races they think they can win, and so few run to challenge strong incumbents, and more (and better) candidates run in open seat primary contests (Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Bianco 1984; Hogan 2003; Lazarus 2005).

Another focus in the study of legislative primary elections has been the relative prevalence and consequences of divisiveness and negative campaigning. Some studies have shown that highly divisive primaries have no effect on the party's general election fortunes (Geer and Shere 1992) while others suggest that divisive primaries hurt the party (Kenney and Rice 1987) or hurt Democrats more than Republicans (Kenney and Rice 1984; Lengle, Owen and Sonner 1995). Some evidence suggests that intense primary battles can cause the activists who aligned themselves with the losing candidates to refuse to participate in the general election or support the eventual nominee (McCann, Partin, Rapoport and Stone 1996; Miller, Jewell and Sigelman 1988; Stone, Atkeson and Rapoport 1992). Parties can also take actions to reduce this divisiveness (Dominguez 2005; Herrnson and Gimpel 1995; Kazee 1983).

This literature mostly assumes that factionalism and divisiveness is driven by candidate loyalty and candidate characteristics, and so the makeup of factions themselves is not a particular focus of study. Recent work on political parties, however, suggests that the party coalitions may have other important actors besides candidates – including activists, donors, and affiliated interest groups (Bawn et al. 2012; Bernstein 1999; Cohen et al. 2008; Masket 2004; Monroe

2001; Schwartz 1990; Skinner 2007). These actors share information, strategy, and resources with each other, but not with the other side (Heaney et al. 2012; Koger et al. 2009; Skinner 2007; Skinner, Masket and Dulio 2012). If we consider the parties to be coalitions of these many actors, we are able to ask new and different questions about primary elections.

In the party coalition paradigm, members of the coalition drive primary election dynamics through intergroup competition and coordination. Whether they concentrate their support or divide it among many candidates measurably affects the course of the primary race itself (Cohen et al. 2008; Dominguez 2011). Winning primary candidates, in this model, are simply the product of those machinations. From this perspective, primary elections become one of our only windows into describing and modeling party coalition management because they are one of the only moments when party coalition members engage with each other in the public eye.

Research about primary elections does not tell us very much about variation in coalition deliberation because the scholarly literature has traditionally treated all groups (outside of the formal party committees) as nonpartisan. That definition discourages observers from considering activist groups as members of a coalition who could be airing and adjudicating explicitly intrapartisan disagreements in primary elections. Recently, however, interest group and party scholars have now opened up the possibility that some groups should be considered explicit members of party coalitions. That opens the door to asking *who the partisan groups are*, and *how these partisan groups behave* in primary elections. To assess a group's partisanship, this chapter relies on campaign contributions to each of the two major parties' candidates for federal office.

The data presented here suggests that it is useful to define boundaries around the groups in the party's coalition, because watching changes over time in those groups' involvement in primary elections sheds important light on the nature of the party itself.

### Contribution Data

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) collects and makes public all contributions made by groups and individuals to candidates for federal office. They also collect and make public the data on independent expenditures made on behalf of those candidates. The analysis that follows will make use of group contributions to Democratic and Republican candidates in different types of primary elections in order to describe the party coalitions over a 32-year period, from 1984 to 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Looking at donor political committees in this period, our first observation is that there is *very wide* variance in how much total money the committees give to federal candidates in this 32-year period. Some groups gave as little as \$10, total, while others gave more than \$500,000,000. Figure 14.1 shows the number of groups that gave in each category. The modal group gave a total of about \$100,000. Over three decades, with allowable contributions of \$5,000 per candidate, that modal group, and most others, could give money in as few as 20 races. Such groups probably don't have the kind of widespread or sustained influence over elections or candidates to figure into a story about national party composition and change.

A total of 10,830 Political Action Committees gave contributions to Democratic or Republican candidates in this time period. However, most of the money was actually given by a tiny fraction of the committees. The top 1,083 (10%) of PACs gave 87 percent of all of the organizational money contributed to or spent on behalf of federal candidates. Therefore, most of the analysis in this chapter focuses on that top 10 percent of PACs.

Most of these groups would probably claim to be nonpartisan, but there are reasons to be skeptical of such suggestions. Like voters who claim to be "independent," but are reasonably consistent partisans, some subsets of groups are probably disguised partisans. And like voters, there is probably some spectrum of partisan attachment from the strong, long-term partisans, to more

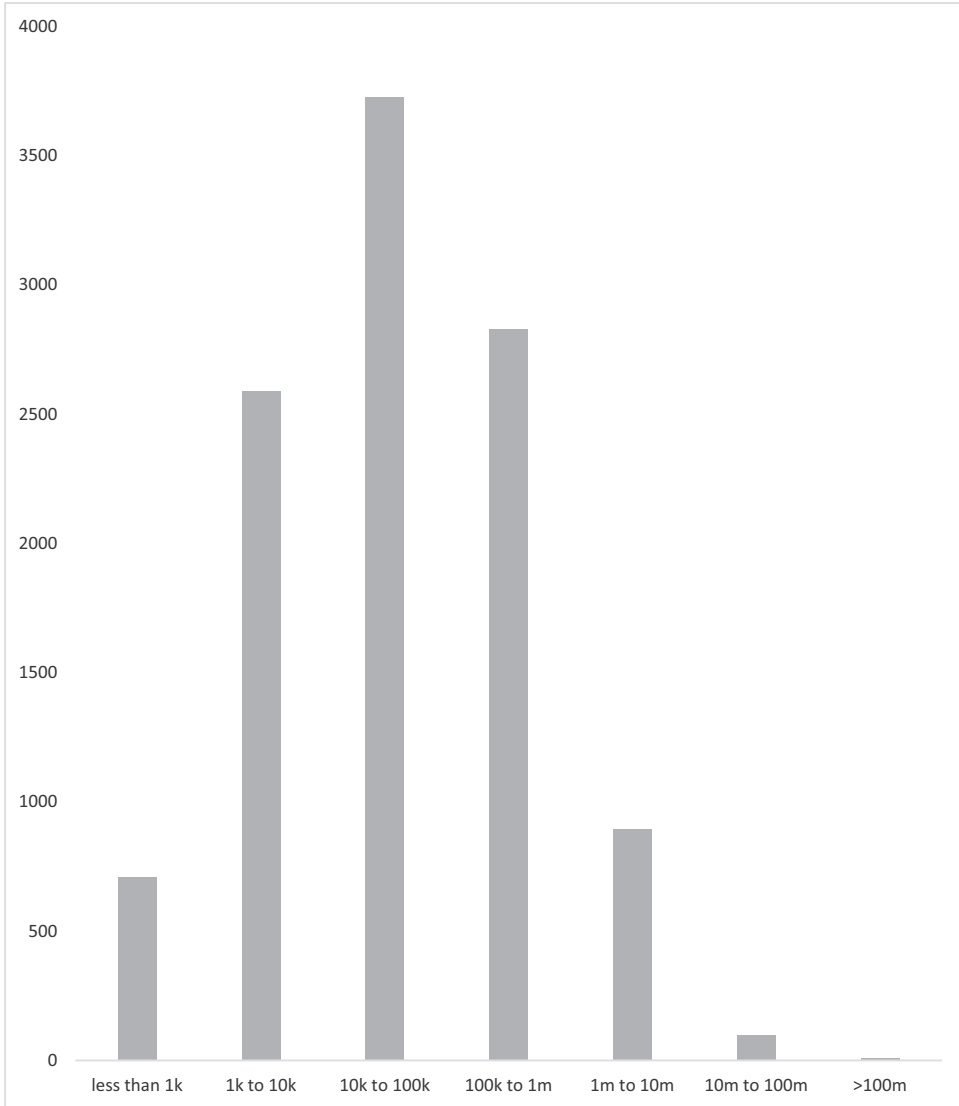


Figure 14.1 Number of PAC Committees, by Total Contributions (Primaries and General Elections), 1984–2016 (U.S. Dollars)

fair-weather partisan supporters. A group that gives more than 80 percent of its contributions to Republicans may be able to make a weak claim to independence, but it does not survive any reasonable amount of scrutiny. That threshold could be set at 75 percent, or at 90 percent, but here we will use the 80 percent cutoff to define “partisan” groups. Groups that give between 21 percent and 79 percent of their contributions to each party will be considered loosely “nonpartisan.”<sup>2</sup>

It is straightforward to assess the partisan lean of each group by adding up all of the group’s contributions to Democratic candidates and to Republican candidates, and calculating what percent of the group’s total contributions went to one party. Figure 14.2 uses the Democrats as a reference point. It shows the number of groups that gave a particular percentage of their contributions to

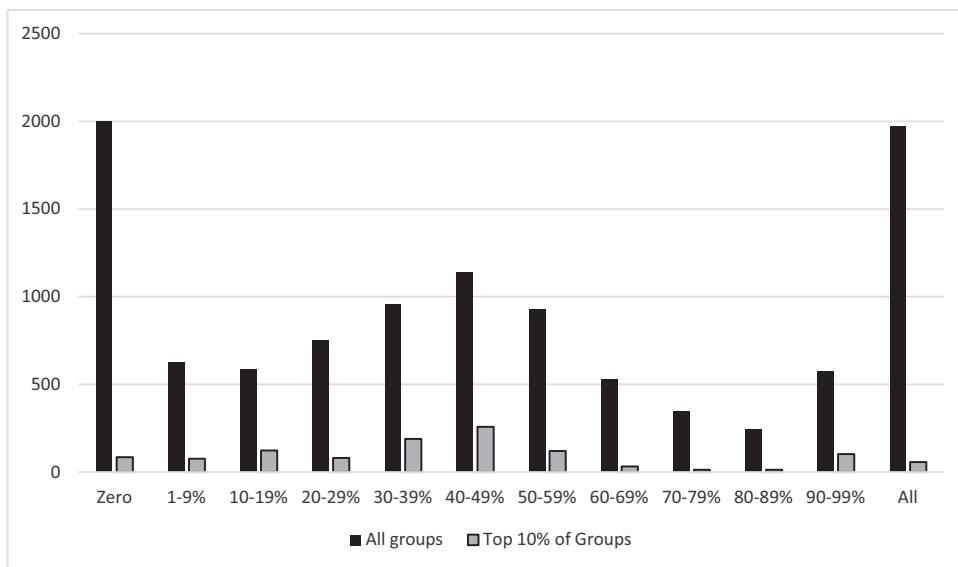


Figure 14.2 Number of All Groups and Top Groups by Percentage of Expenditures to Democratic Candidates (Primaries and General Elections), 1984–2016

Democrats. Among all groups, the distribution appears roughly bimodal – there appear to be a large number of groups that only give money to candidates in one party. However, most of these groups are relatively poor and don't give that much money or to that many candidates. Figure 14.3 zooms in and restricts the partisan analysis to cumulative donations by the top 10 percent of PACs. This reveals that there are about 400 very loyal groups – clustered at the two ends of the distribution – that predominantly support candidates in only one of the two parties. It also shows that there is a

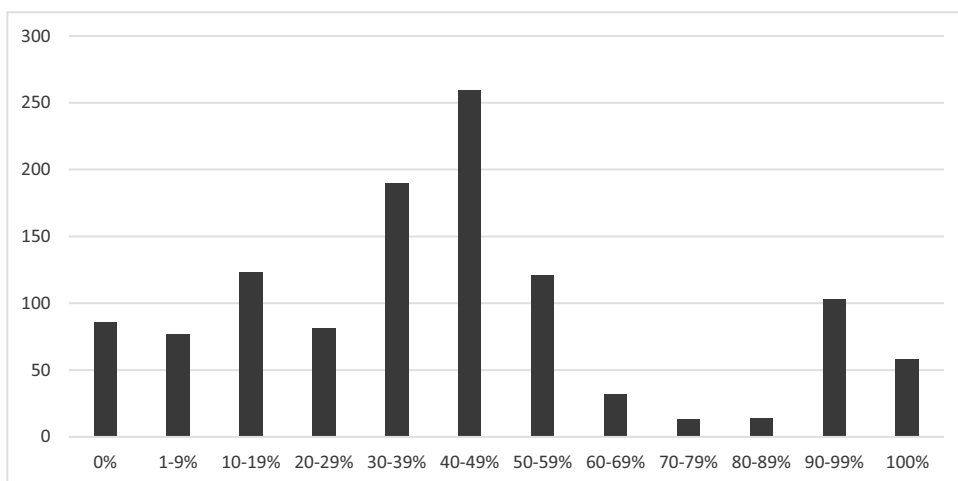


Figure 14.3 Number of Top 10 percent of PACs, by Percent of Total Expenditures Going to Democratic Candidates (Primaries and General Elections), 1984–2016

sizeable number of “leaning,” or perhaps “access-buying” groups that give to both parties, but in this period these access-buying groups tended to give more to Republicans than to Democrats. The overwhelming majority of the access-buying groups are corporate PACs and Trade Associations.

The Democrats are more heavily reliant on their most loyal groups than Republicans are. The 178 most loyal Democratic PACs (>80% to Dems) play an enormous role in getting Democratic candidates elected. Though they make up a little over 1 percent of all PACs, they supplied 61 percent of all money raised by or spent on behalf of all federal Democratic candidates in this time period. Republicans have more diverse sources of money. The 206 most loyal Republican groups (>80% to Reps) only contributed 46 percent of all of the money contributed to or spent on behalf of all Republican federal candidates in the time period. Clearly, the few hundred most loyal groups are critical parts of each party’s infrastructure.

### The Party Coalitions

Any reasonable political observer can make some smart guesses about the types of groups in the Democratic coalition, the Republican coalition, and the nonpartisan/access-buying pool. Figure 14.4 probably confirms many of these suspicions, while also revealing some less intuitive insights.

It is probably unsurprising to see that more than a quarter of Republican-loyal committees are either corporations or trade associations. Corporations and trade associations also dominate the nonpartisan groups that divide their support more evenly among the two parties’ candidates. It is also unsurprising, though perhaps not widely recognized, that about a third of the groups

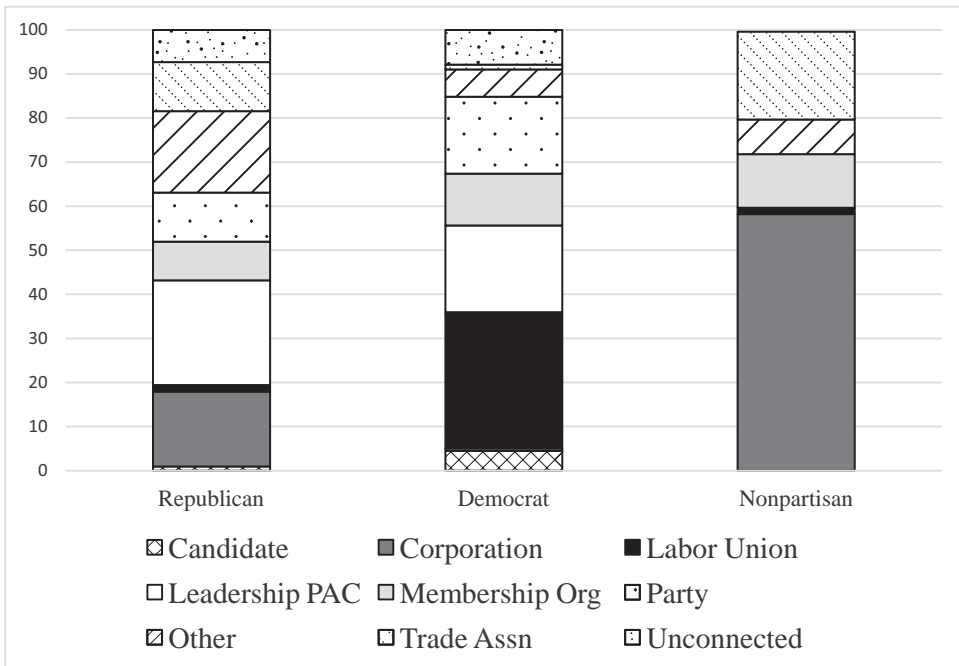


Figure 14.4 Percentage of the Total Number of Elite Groups That Give At Least 80 Percent to Republicans, 80 Percent to Democrats, or Are Nonpartisan, (in Primaries and General Elections) by PAC Classification Type

that were most loyal to Democrats, and contributed the greatest amount of money to them over this time period, were labor unions. Explicitly partisan groups like state and federal party committees are important to each party, as are Leadership PACs (which are formed by members of Congress to raise money for each other's races). Though the number of Leadership PACs is small in the overall PAC universe, they make up about a third of the most loyal and most important fundraisers for both parties' candidates. We will note later that the relative importance of formal party committees and Leadership PACs has changed significantly over time.

### Not All Primary Elections Are the Same: Different Environments Have Different Group Dynamics

So far, we have just been looking at overall total contributions, in both general elections and primary elections. But of course, primary elections are our special concern. Of all money contributed to candidates or spent on their behalf by the top 10 percent of committees (\$6.9 billion over 32 years, including both partisan and nonpartisan committees), 30 percent (\$2.1 billion) was spent in primary elections.

Contributions to candidates in general elections should be expected to be heavily weighted toward access-buying groups. Those groups have a well-known inclination to support incumbents and sure-bets. They are not interested in wading into factional fights or wasting money on candidates who won't be in a position to affect policymaking in Washington.

The groups that make up the party coalitions, however, have compelling motivations to be involved in primary elections. A group with a strong position on abortion, for example, wants to make sure that every candidate in its affiliated party shares that group's position on abortion. Selecting true-believer candidates means the groups don't have to spend as much time lobbying on policy later, and helps to ensure that the groups have access to the party's agenda. Groups that want to affect the policy positions of everyone in a party, writ large, have good reasons to be involved in many different primary elections. So if we want to understand how party positions develop in the first place and change over time, it might prove useful to zoom in on certain kinds of primary elections, and the groups that become involved in them. The distribution of groups in Figure 14.5 helps to justify this strategy.

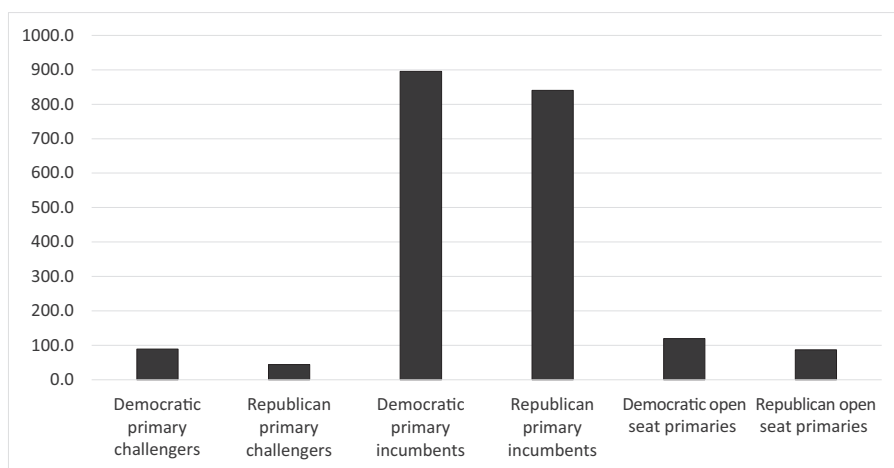


Figure 14.5 Total Primary Contributions, in Millions of U.S. Dollars, All Groups in All Years, by Type of Primary Election



The vast majority of the money (82%) contributed in federal primaries is contributed to candidates in incumbent renomination primaries. Those primaries are overwhelmingly likely to be uncontested by serious challengers, and to feature either no competition or only token opposition. Why, then, do these incumbents raise so much money in their primary races? The answer is that they do not necessarily *spend* the money, they just raise it. PAC committees are legally allowed to contribute one \$5000 check to a candidate in the general election, *and one in the primary*. So by giving to an incumbent in both races, even if the primary election is obviously uncontested, groups can effectively double their campaign contribution to a sitting member of Congress. It would be reasonable to expect that access-buying, relatively nonpartisan groups (who don't give more than 80 percent of their total contributions to one party's candidates) would take special advantage of this rule. That is what we are seeing in Figure 14.5. Neutral groups give two-thirds of all of the money contributed in incumbent primaries, and those neutral groups devote 85 percent of their overall primary resources to those incumbent primaries.

The other two types of primaries, those to nominate candidates to run in open seats, and those to run as challengers to incumbents, are far less attractive to access-buying groups, because it is far less certain that any particular challenger or open seat primary candidate will actually be elected to Congress. For groups trying to influence the makeup of the party's elected membership, however, these primaries are the most important ones. Open seat primaries are the main way that new members get elected to Congress for the first time. So we should expect to see most of the money in those primaries being contributed by the more partisan groups. Figure 14.6 confirms this hypothesis.

Primaries to nominate new candidates, either as challengers to incumbents, or as nominees in open seat races, draw the attention of the more partisan groups. The most loyal Democratic groups spend the vast majority of money in Democratic primary contests to nominate challengers to incumbents and nominees in open seats.

Loyal Republican groups are major participants in primaries to nominate challengers to incumbents, but in open seat primaries, neutral groups outspend loyal Republican groups. That seems somewhat puzzling, except that on the Republican side there may be less difference between the 70 percent loyal Republican groups and the 80 percent loyal Republican groups. Most of the PACs that give between 70 percent and 80 percent of their money to Republicans are corporations and trade associations with similar profiles to the 80 percent to 90 percent loyal Republican PACs.

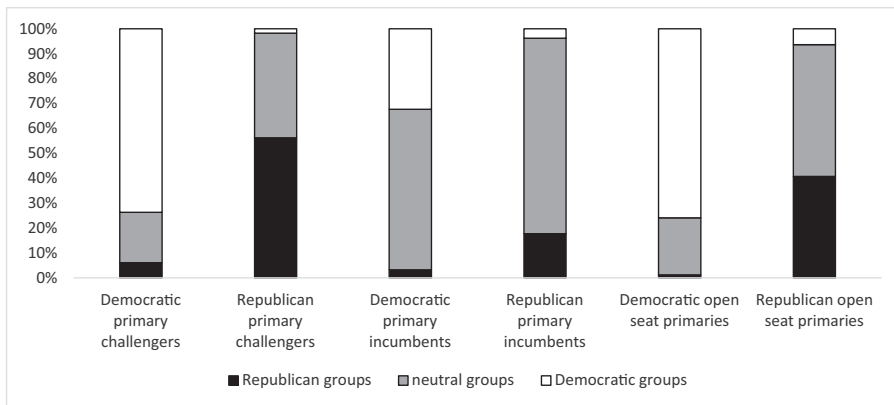


Figure 14.6 Percentage of Money Spent by Top Groups in Each Type of Primary Election, by Partisanship of the Group

In both parties, the nonpartisan groups spend most of the money to nominate or fill the campaign coffers of incumbents, regardless of whether they face primary opposition. These nonpartisan groups participate far less in challenger primaries and somewhat less in open seat primaries, as noted above. This pattern has persisted throughout the 1984–2016 period.

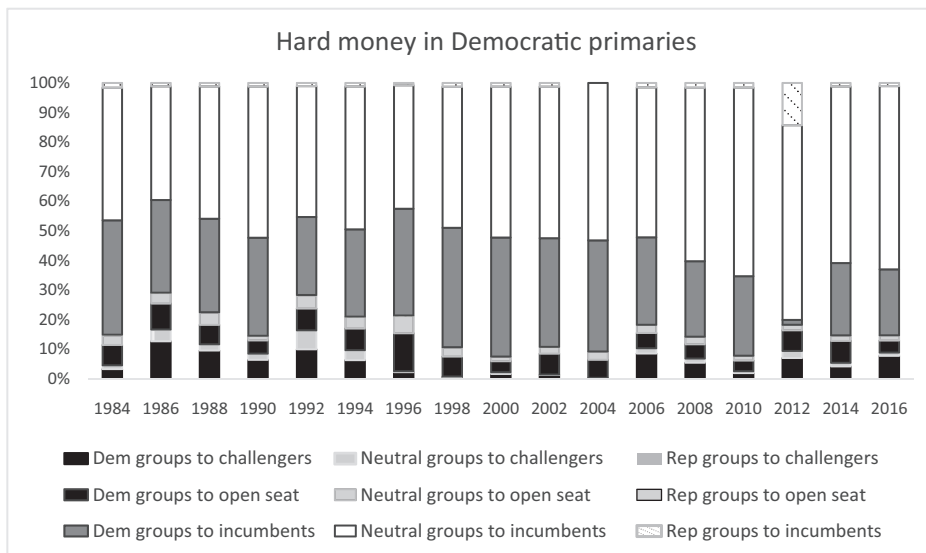


Figure 14.7a Hard Money Contributed in Democratic Primaries, by Race Type and Group Type

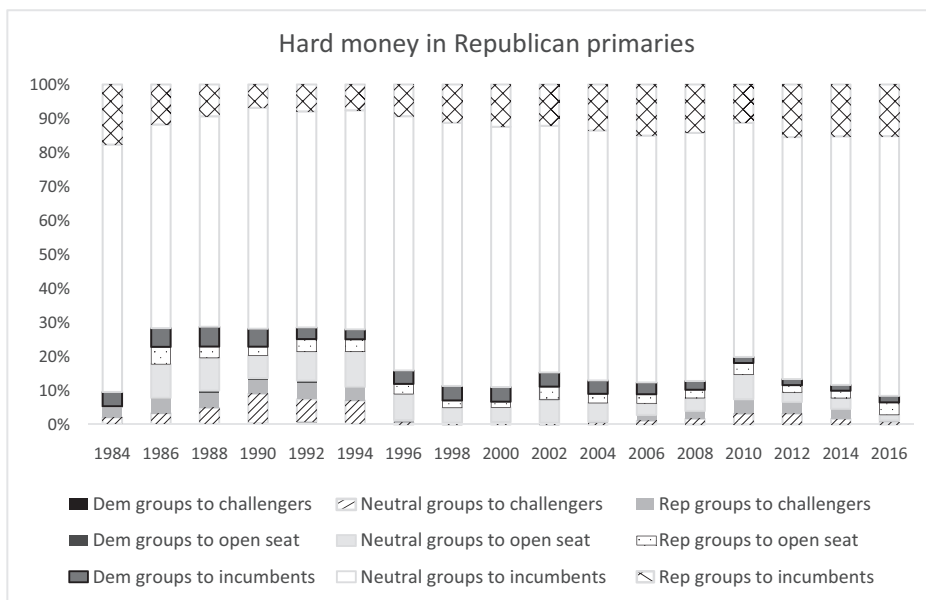


Figure 14.7b Hard Money Contributed in Republican Primaries, by Race Type and Group Type

Figures 14.7a and 14.7b shows that the overwhelming majority of money contributed in primary elections has always been contributed to incumbents. Figure 14.7a shows that neutral and democratic-leaning groups giving to incumbents has always (since 1984) dominated Democratic primary hard money donations. Figure 14.7b shows that at least 60 percent of all Republican primary hard money contributions have always been neutral groups giving to Republican incumbents. Because neutral groups giving in incumbent primaries so dominate the overall primary election hard money pool, it is necessary to look at the other types of groups and the other types of primaries to see the party network in action selecting nominees. The next two sections will focus on each party's coalition in turn.

### The Democratic Coalition

In both open seat and challenger primaries, and in both hard money contributions and independent expenditures, Democratic candidates get the most contributions from blue collar labor unions. Figure 14.8 shows the cumulative dollar totals for each type of group for the whole period.

Across the whole 32 years, including both hard and soft money, the biggest contributor to non-incumbent Democratic primary candidates was the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The SEIU was joined by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Association of Trial Lawyers, the Teamsters, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), two teachers' unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers), the Machinists' Union, and the UAW. Figure 14.8 shows that several dozen blue collar unions dominate contributions to Democrats. Membership organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (an LGBT rights group) fall far behind organized labor in overall contributions to Democrats. Ideological groups in the "other" category, like Americans for Democratic Action or Moveon.org, also fall way down

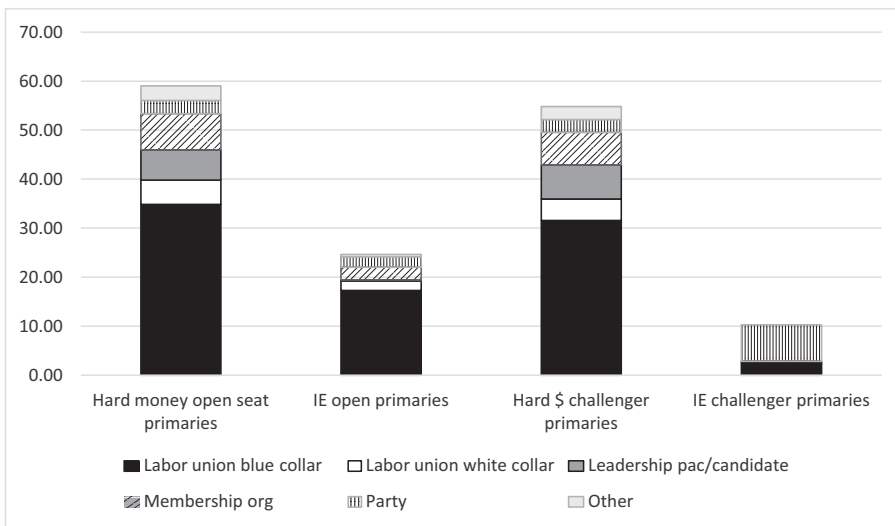


Figure 14.8 Contributions and Independent Expenditures by Elite Democratic-Leaning Groups in Non-Incumbent Democratic Primaries, 1984–2016 Totals, in Millions of U.S. Dollars

on the list. Official party committees outspend labor groups in primaries to nominate challengers to incumbents, but otherwise party committees and Leadership PACs are far outspent by labor as well.

When we examine the composition of the Democrats' nominating coalition over time, we see the overall dominance of blue collar labor unions is maintained, although some other patterns emerge as well. Figure 14.9 focuses on primary contributions to Democrats in open seats in each election cycle.

As seen in Figure 14.9, in open seat primaries, blue collar labor groups dominate both direct candidate contributions and independent expenditures. The leading hard money blue collar contributors in open seats are the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Teamsters, and the Food and Commercial Workers unions. Teachers groups and AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) top the list of white collar unions. However, in recent years, Leadership PACs, membership groups, and "other" (including issue-based and ideological) groups have played an increasingly large role in nomination contests in both presidential and midterm years. Leadership PACs may receive a larger proportion of their money from access-buying (and corporate-dominated) groups, as would be expected for incumbents. The membership and "other" groups that have also contributed more over time include the Human Rights Campaign, NARAL (National Abortion

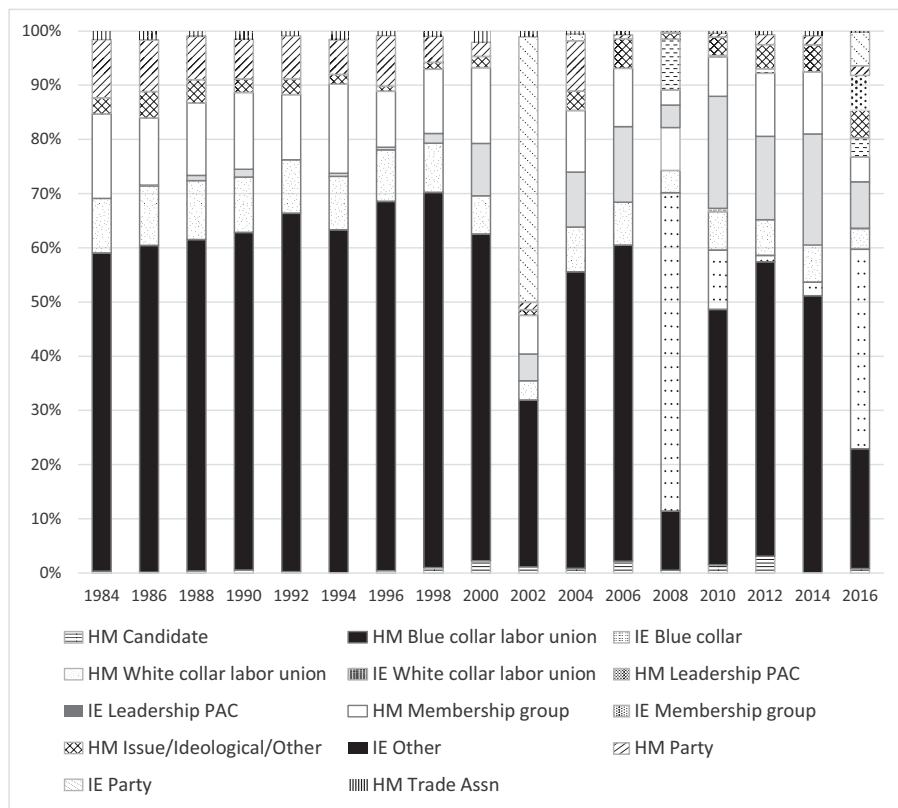


Figure 14.9 Top Democratic Groups' Proportion of Total Hard Money Contributions (HM) and Independent Expenditures (IE) in Open Seat Democratic Primaries

Rights Action League), EMILY's List (focusing on electing pro-choice women), the National Committee to Preserve Social Security, the Sierra Club, League of Conservation Voters and MoveOn.org. The proportion of all Democratic group contributions in Democratic primaries contributed by blue collar labor groups peaked in 1998, when those groups contributed more than two-thirds of the money contributed by the top Democratic groups to Democratic primary candidates. In 2016, blue collar groups composed only about half of the hard money contributions received by Democrats.

Democratic groups rarely use independent expenditures in open seat primaries. Only a few groups have done so (including the United Food and Commercial Workers, affiliates of the Service Employees International Union, EMILY's List, the League of Conservation Voters, MoveOn.org, and the Human Rights Campaign) but those independent expenditures are also dominated by the blue collar groups, which in presidential years supplant blue collar hard money contributions for the largest overall category of coalition primary spending.

In primaries to nominate challengers to incumbents, hard money contributions have been similarly dominated by Electrical workers, Teamsters, Teachers, AFSCME, and the UAW, while soft money primary expenditures has been led by the Service Employees International Union and affiliates, as well as the party committees. Despite labor giving more money than other groups in nearly every year, contributions to challenger primary candidates has been increasingly led by Leadership PACs in the last decade.

What does this analysis tell us about the Democratic party as a whole? It certainly says that new federal candidates need to jostle for support from a fairly predictable list of groups. Blue collar labor unions have dominated the Democratic coalition for a generation, and continue to do so. (Given that labor unions also provide the foot-soldiers in most Democratic campaigns it is almost surprising that we do not call it the Labor party.) The Democrats' dependence on and loyalty to organized labor is surely not lost on Republicans, who have undertaken prominent efforts to undermine unions, especially public employee unions, in recent years. This picture helps us to understand why the Democratic party puts the interests of working people prominently in their party platforms, and why Democrats favor increases in the minimum wage. It poses as a puzzle, however, why the Democrats turned toward free trade and against the core interests of organized labor in a certain amount of wage protectionism. The time series also shows us that in the long term, the Democratic party may be beginning a trend toward relying on social issue groups and ideological groups for a greater share of its primary campaign resources.

In their general elections, and once they have won election and become incumbents, Democrats also raise money from a large number of access-buying corporate groups and trade associations. In incumbent re-nomination primaries, Democrats also receive a great deal of money from realtors, beer wholesalers, car dealers, home builders, bankers, and doctors, among many others. Whether and to what degree their initial support from organized working people is diluted by wealthier interests is an important empirical and political question that is made more specific by examining the data in this way.

### **The Republican Coalition**

Let us now examine primary contributions to Republican candidates from the most loyal (>80%) Republican leaning groups.

Republican primary candidates receive the most money in direct contributions from a recognizable coalition of groups and corporations. The top donors to Republican primary candidates in all races are a mixture of nonpartisan groups and highly partisan ones, but the leading party-loyal

contributors are groups in the building industry (Associated Builders and Contractors), the energy sector (Exxon Corporation, Koch Industries), other business groups like the National Federation of Independent Business, Raytheon Corporation, and the National Restaurant Association, and issue groups like the National Rifle Association.

Figure 14.10 shows the distribution of primary contributions over time in open seat races. In Republican open seat primary races, three stories stand out: first, there is noticeable stability in the proportions of hard money contributed by membership, ideological, and corporate groups over time. There was a jump in the amounts spent by all groups around 2002, but a lot of stability before and after that. Second, the biggest trend in the data is the replacement of formal party contributions in open seat primaries by Leadership PAC contributions. That replacement happened about the time that the Republican party took over the House for the first time in 40 years, in 1994.

Finally, it is worth noting that in some years, including 2016, corporations in the energy sector actually contribute a greater proportion of the total given to open seat Republican candidates than all other loyal Republican corporations and trade associations combined. Driving that finding is the fact that total contributions from most groups stayed flat on average since 2002, while Leadership PAC contributions quintupled and energy sector corporate contributions tripled in the last decade.

As we saw with the Democrats, primaries do not draw as many independent expenditures as general elections do. However, even though open seat primaries did not draw much attention in independent expenditures, we can see a growth in issue-based (abortion, guns) and ideological PAC expenditures since 2008. In 2012 and 2014, ideological group independent

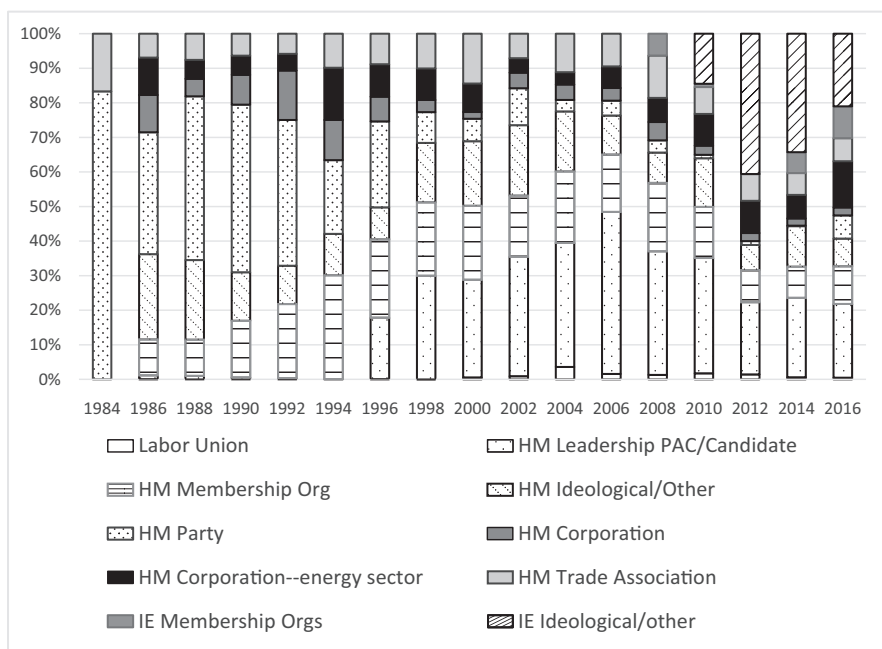


Figure 14.10 Republican Groups' Proportion of Hard Money Primary Contributions and Independent Expenditures in Open Seats

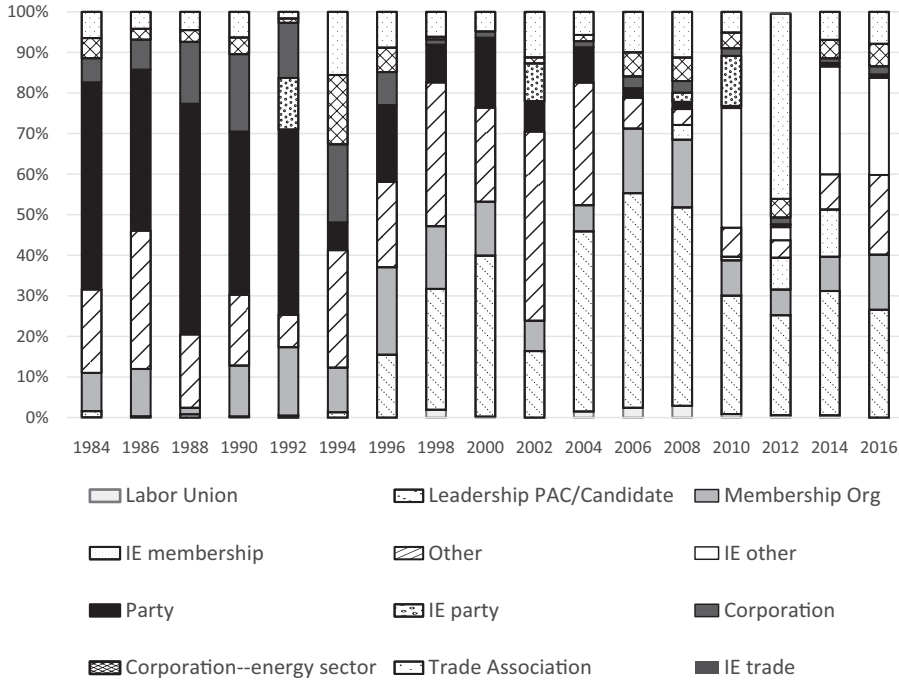


Figure 14.11 Republican Groups’ Proportion of Hard Money Primary Contributions and Independent Expenditures in Primaries to Nominate Challengers to Incumbents

expenditures were double those of primary contributions from any other sector. Leading independent spenders were from groups like Citizens United, TeaPartyExpress, and Republican Majority Campaign.

In primaries to nominate challengers to incumbents, we see a similar story about Leadership PACs replacing formal party committees as the main contributor to Republican primary candidates. Figure 14.11 shows the totals spent in primaries to nominate challengers to incumbents including both hard money contributions and independent expenditures. Business groups make up a fairly small proportion of the total contributions from the most loyal groups. Corporations and trade associations maxed out their proportion of contributions to challenger primaries in 1994. The “other” category, which includes many ideological groups, are major contributors to challenger primary candidates after 1994. A wide variety of ideological groups outspend corporate groups in these races, and in addition, conservative groups also spend considerable amounts in independent expenditures in challenger primaries. Independent spenders include conservative groups like Eagle Forum, the National Right to Life PAC, the NRA, Citizens United, and Tea Party Express. If you combine independent expenditures and hard money, in 2014 and 2016, groups in the issue/ideological category spent more than 40 percent of the money in Republican challenger primaries.

What does this analysis tell us about the Republican Party? Broadly, it tells us that Republicans are the more pro-business, pro-corporate party. It also highlights the really significant degree to which companies in the energy sector are loyal to the Republican party and participate in its internal deliberations. The animosity that Republican officeholders, especially those elected in

recent years, have for environmental regulations and climate change science seems very consistent with the early and consistent support these candidates get from oil and gas companies. This may be fairly obvious, but it is not clear that scholars and the public have directly tied primary election participation to candidate and officeholder positions. More research establishing a more causal relationship between those forces seems warranted.

Second, these data highlight the increasing influence of ideologically motivated groups in Republican primaries in the last decade. Issue and ideological groups spend most of the “80 percent party loyal” money spent to decide Republican primaries (although recall from Figure 14.6 that business-dominated nonpartisan groups do give a sizeable share of the overall open seat primary contributions). Business groups, however, do not compete with independent expenditures spent by ideological groups in primaries.<sup>3</sup> These data may help us to understand the war between older, more Main Street or Wall Street Republicans, and the more ideological members elected in recent years. The primary elections in which new Republican candidates are chosen, especially in safe seats, have in recent years been heavily influenced by ideological groups, not business groups. If newly elected Republican officeholders are ideological rather than pro-business conservatives, that may be one reason why.

## Discussion

Contemporary events show us that it is important to understand how parties are composed, but researchers are just beginning to explore how to measure party composition and how to track changes in it over time. This chapter suggests that in primary elections, especially open seat and challenger primaries, it is possible to see the activity of the party’s core groups. The groups that get involved in open seat and challenger primaries are quite distinct, and look like what close observers would expect the current party coalitions to look like. Republicans have more business and trade groups, and more purely ideological groups in their inner circle. Democrats have labor and issue groups but very few ideological groups per se in their inner circles. In both parties, new candidates vying for their first election to the House, the Senate, or the presidency have to contend with the active involvement of these groups in their primary elections.

Examining the involvement of these highly partisan groups in primary elections over time reveals important patterns. The Democrats have been, and remain, a party heavily constructed by blue collar labor unions, although recent election cycles suggest that there may be a relative increase in the influence of other issue groups like gay rights organizations and women’s groups. The Republicans have been, and remain, a party of business, but the increase in ideological groups’ involvement in primaries may help to explain the extreme ideological polarization of the Republican party in recent years. Scholars struggle to explain how the party has become so radically conservative while their voters’ issue positions have not. The relative importance of ideological groups in the emergence of Republican party nominees may help to explain that development.

## Notes

- 1 The data for this analysis are compiled from the “FEC PAC Summary” and “Contributions to Candidates (and other Expenditures) From Committees” files, available at [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov) for years 1984 through 2016. Political Action Committees, which are the most longstanding form of campaign committee, are allowed to make one \$5000 contribution to a candidate in the Primary, and one \$5000 contribution to a candidate in the General election. Those contributions are labeled as “P” or “G” in the FEC databases. Candidates’ reporting committees are also labeled by party and by whether they are running as an Incumbent, a Challenger to an incumbent, or as a new candidate in an Open Seat. I developed



a simple computer code (in Matlab) that searches each year's file for each PAC's identifying number and sums its contributions to Democratic and Republican candidates, then computes a proportion of the total that goes to the Democratic and Republican parties. The raw data (downloadable at <http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/ftpdet.shtml>) are first sorted by candidate committees, self-identified as "DEM" and "REP," for each year. All contributions to those candidate committees that are defined as "24A (Independent expenditure opposing election of candidate), 24C (Coordinated party expenditure), 24E (Independent expenditure advocating election of a candidate), 24F (Communication cost for a candidate), 24H (Honorarium to candidate), 24K (Contribution made to nonaffiliated committee), 24N (Communication cost against candidate), 24P (Contribution made to possible federal candidate including in-kind contributions), 24R (Election Recount disbursement)" are combined into total amounts given to each party's candidates on those lists by every PAC in every year.

- 2 Replicating the analysis with a 70% cutoff makes very little difference to the results.
- 3 Business groups do not appear to do any primary election independent spending through the PACs in this dataset, though they may participate through 501c3 groups or others that are not analyzed here.

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## PART IV

# U.S. Presidential Primaries

The chapters in this section consider U.S. presidential primaries. Presidential primaries are quite different from direct primaries because presidential primaries are held for the purpose of selecting convention delegates. It was not until the 1960s that presidential candidates actually began to campaign in primaries, and it was not until the 1970s that the parties required delegates be bound on the first ballot to the candidate they were pledged to. Furthermore, since the 1970s the two major parties have tinkered with rules regarding when primaries may be held and how delegate allocation must work. Because of these changes and because of the relatively short life, so far, of the presidential primary system, there is not a great deal of certainty about how primaries should work. It is evident, however, that since the 1970s presidential primaries have served as venues in which parties seek to shape the process in order to produce the best possible nominee.

All of the chapters in this section reflect on the challenges the 2016 election has posed to our understanding of how presidential primaries should work. Marty Cohen's chapter visits one of the most influential books of the past decade on primaries, Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller's *The Party Decides*. The main argument of this book was that American political parties generally decide on a candidate before the primaries actually begin, and party elites work to confer the nomination with as little conflict as possible. This clearly was not the case in 2016. Cohen's chapter alleges that the theory of that book is alive and well; it explains the Democratic nomination contest well, and the Republican contest played out the way it did because the Republican Party never did decide upon a candidate. In the subsequent chapter, Wayne Steger questions the logic of *The Party Decides* and provides an alternate account of the primary process.

One of the challenges in studying presidential primaries is deciphering the logic of their sequential nature. Candidates are able to gain (or lose) momentum on account of the states that vote at particular times and on account of choices of other candidates regarding where to spend money. Even if the parties do tend to get the nominees they want, the process can often take longer than expected, and, especially in early primaries where there may be a dozen or more candidates, prospective nominees must think about how to respond to what other candidates are doing and how to address issues that matter to some states but may not resonate in others. While in direct primaries, candidate characteristics such as prior political experience or the ability to raise money may be decisive, the results of individual presidential primaries can be far less predictable.

The final two chapters in this section illustrate some of these unpredictable features. Dante Scala discusses the role of ideology in presidential primaries, discussing how Donald Trump,

a candidate seemingly out of step with the Republican Party on many issues, was able to win the nomination in 2016. And David Hopkins describes the evolution of presidential primary debates. These debates, Hopkins notes, have often ruined the campaigns of experienced and highly qualified candidates while briefly advantaging much less experienced candidates who had the good fortune to perform well on television. Both Hopkins and Scala show some of the peculiarities of multi-candidate, multi-state primary competitions. Given all of the quirks that all four of the chapters in this section illustrate, it is in many ways a surprise that most American presidential primaries have had predictable outcomes.

There is a voluminous literature on other aspects of presidential primary elections. The bibliographies of these chapters list some of the foundational works on U.S. presidential primaries. Larry Bartels' *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice* (Princeton University Press, 1988) discusses the phenomenon of momentum in presidential primaries. William Mayer and Andrew Busch's *The Frontloading Problem in Presidential Nominations* (Brookings Institution, 2003) is, as the title suggests, a consideration of how "frontloading" of different states' primaries has influenced the primary process. Mayer and Busch also consider the role the media plays in "winnowing" the primary field. There are several studies of the politics of the states that vote earliest in the primary season and the ways these states can distort primary outcomes; two such books are David Redlawsk, Caroline Tolbert, and Todd Donovan, *Why Iowa?* (University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Dante Scala, *Stormy Weather: The New Hampshire Primary and Presidential Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). And retrospectives on spending in various elections, including the Brookings Institution series edited by David Magleby, and the *Making of the Presidential Candidates* series edited by William Mayer, often include chapters on the financing of presidential primaries and on campaign advertising in primaries.

Given, however, the substantial changes in presidential primaries over the past three election cycles, the goal in this section has been to provide the reader with an understanding of some of the best research that is focused upon U.S. presidential primaries as they are conducted in 2016.