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Recommended Citation

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The Power of the Party: An Assessment of Political Party Impact on the
Nomination Processes for the U.S. House of Representatives

Cary Gibson

Government Honors Thesis

1997

In 1942, prominent political scientist E.E. Schattschneider said of the importance of the nomination to political parties: "Unless the party makes authoritative and effective nominations, it cannot stay in business...The nature of the nomination procedure determines the nature of the party; he who can make nominations is the owner of the party."¹ Statements such as this articulate the importance of the nominating power to political parties: the ability to make effective nominations is an integral part of their function in the electoral system.

However, throughout this century, American political parties have been witness to a startling decline in their ability to make nominations for office. Once, the party organization was the primary instrument through which a candidate sought nomination. Approval from the party was essential to obtaining the nomination and the party often rewarded those who moved up through its ranks. Now, however, party approval is no longer necessary in order to gain nomination. The direct primary enables potential nominees to make their appeals directly to the electorate and bypass the party altogether. Consequently, the party organization can no longer guarantee that its preferred candidate will win the nomination. It can no longer make "authoritative and effective nominations" as E.E. Schattschneider suggests it should. The power to make nominations rests in the hands of the primary electorate and the party elite have been relegated to the sidelines.

For example, in 1982, New York City mayor Ed Koch ran for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination against then lieutenant governor Mario Cuomo. Koch worked hard to gain the support of New York

¹E.E. Schattschneider, Party Government (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1942), p. 64.

Democratic party officials and eventually won party endorsement at the state Democratic convention with 61 percent of the vote. However, Cuomo built a grass-roots, traditional New Deal coalition and, through this appeal to the electorate, won the primary and the Democratic party nomination. Koch had the party endorsement and was clearly the preferred candidate of the party leadership. However, party support did him little good in the face of Cuomo's appeal to the electorate.² Another example of party failure to control the nomination is the gubernatorial nomination contest in the Minnesota Democratic-Farm-Labor party (DFL), also in 1982. In this instance, the DFL endorsement went to Minnesota attorney general Warren Spannaus by a large majority. However, Spannaus lost the nomination to former Governor Rudy Perpich, who had a strong political base in northern Minnesota and a strong popular appeal. Again, even though Spannaus was the preferred candidate of the party, this endorsement was worthless. Perpich was preferred by the electorate, and he prevailed.³

U.S. Representative and former state Democratic party chairman David Price (D-NC) says of party involvement in his campaign, "Neither my recognition among party activists nor my wider exposure as a party spokesman gave me anything approaching a decisive edge in the Democratic primary...[The] nomination was not within the power of local, state, or national party organizations to deliver...."⁴ The ability of the party to guarantee a victory for its preferred candidate has declined while the influence of the electorate has increased. Clearly, party impact on the nominating process has been severely weakened.

²Malcolm E. Jewell and David M. Olson, Political Parties and Elections in American States, 3rd ed., (Chicago, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1988), pp. 103-104.

³Ibid., pp. 103-104.

⁴John F. Bibby, "State Party Organizations: Coping and Adapting," in L. Sandy Maisel, ed., The Parties Respond, 2nd ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 32.

The power of the electorate to determine the nomination and the subsequent need for candidates to appeal to the electorate to win nomination are often the causes of what is known as "candidate-centered politics." Candidate-centered politics describes a political arena where the candidate is not only much more visible than, but also somewhat independent of, the party he represents. The candidate, not the party, determines how the public will vote and affects the outcome of an election. This type of politics further diminishes the party role as the party organization is unable to provide the candidate with the resources necessary to compete in this arena. Thus, the candidate must look elsewhere for resources such as money, communication venues, and professional campaign expertise.

Increasingly, the candidate finds it necessary to form his own organization to obtain those resources the party cannot give. This organization is formed during the primary election and is capable of carrying the candidate all the way through the election cycle. The candidate does not need party approval to gain nomination nor does he need party resources to win an election. The party becomes unnecessary, and its role is further reduced. Political scientist John F. Bibby states that candidates are becoming more dependent on outside campaign consultants and money from special interest groups and far less dependent on their parties to provide the resources for their campaign organization.⁵ Also, parties have become secondary to the media as a conduit for the candidate's message. The media is much more effective in getting information to the voters.⁶ In addition, many candidates find it beneficial not to be closely tied to a party at all, since voters

⁵John F. Bibby, Politics, Parties and Elections in America, 3rd ed., (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1996), p. 14.

⁶Ibid.

tend to glorify the candidate who stands above the party.⁷ The result is a political system in which the candidate really has no need to rely on the party. As such, party power and involvement in nomination processes has declined.

The decline of party power and involvement in the nomination process has led many to speculate that political parties no longer retain *any* involvement in the nomination process. According to some, candidate organizations have all but replaced the party organizations and thus party ability to affect the process is very small. However, that assumption is not entirely correct. Political parties have faced a significant loss of influence in the nomination process, but their influence is not entirely gone. Through various mechanisms, parties are able to have an impact on the nomination process. This paper will examine political party involvement in the nomination processes for the U.S. House of Representatives to determine the extent to which political parties are still able to influence the effectiveness of nominations for political office.

A History of Political Parties' Role in the Nomination Process

Prominent political scientist V.O. Key notes, "Through the history of American nominating practices runs a persistent attempt to make feasible popular participation in nominations and thereby to limit or destroy the power of the party oligarchies."⁸ Indeed, the history of political parties in the United States is characterized by frequent attempts to give the voters more of a voice in nominations for office and to decentralize party power.

⁷Bibby, "State Party Organizations: Coping and Adapting," p. 25.

⁸V.O. Key, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, 5th ed., (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), p. 371.

After the Revolutionary War, the primary method for nominating candidates was the legislative caucus. In this system, legislators gathered at the state capital to confer and offer a list of candidates to the voters. The masses had very little say in who the nominees for office would be. A hopeful nominee would have to appeal to the party leader in order to be successful. Thus, the party had complete control over the nomination process. By 1800, the legislative caucus was the dominant method of nomination. However, many felt the legislative caucus was not representative enough, and it was overthrown in 1824. At the same time, Andrew Jackson and his followers overthrew the Congressional caucus as a method of choosing nominees for President.⁹

The legislative caucus was replaced with the convention system as a method for nomination. The convention system was intended to be a means for the expression of the wishes of the party "masses," that is, of the nonelite. However, in practice, the convention consisted of delegates chosen either directly by the party membership in local units or by county conventions. The membership of the county conventions was chosen by smaller local party gatherings known as precinct conventions, caucuses, or primaries. The convention system did expand the means for participation, but only among party leaders. The majority of the party members were still unable to participate and the party elite retained considerable control over the nomination. The convention remained the dominant method of nomination until 1910 and, in that time, it came to be known as an instrument of party control.

The direct primary replaced the convention system and, according to V.O. Key, was "...a means by which an enlightened people might cut through

⁹Ibid., p. 372.

the mesh of organized and privileged power and grasp control of the government."¹⁰ The first statewide direct primary was enacted in the state of Wisconsin in 1903 as a result of a progressive movement led by Robert M. LaFollette. The rest of the country soon followed. In 1907, the states of Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Washington had adopted the direct primary. Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Ohio adopted it in 1908. Arizona, Arkansas, California, Idaho, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Tennessee followed in 1909 and by 1917, all but a few states had adopted the direct primary system of nomination.¹¹

According to Key, there were three consequences of the direct primary, each of which loosened party control in the nomination process. The advent of the direct primary is responsible for the broadening of popular participation in nominations. In addition, rival factions within parties and aspiring nominees could take their appeals directly to the people. Finally, the advent of the direct primary introduced new elements of power into the nominating process such as newspaper publishers and "others in control of channels to reach the public."¹²

Institutional Adaptations

Various state parties, however, have made institutional adaptations in an effort to gain back some of the power they have lost due to the advent of the direct primary system. These adaptations were made state by state and, consequently, the type of adaptation varies. Some state parties still use the convention system of nomination. Others use preprimary endorsements to

¹⁰Ibid., p. 375.

¹¹Ibid., p. 375.

¹²Ibid., p. 381.

indicate their preferences to the electorate. Still others engage in slate making and other forms of unofficial endorsement. Finally, some parties do not play a role in the nomination process at all.

The party convention as a system of nomination still exists as an option in Alabama, Virginia, and, to some extent, Iowa.¹³ However, in 1996, party conventions were used to make nominations only in Virginia and even then the convention was not the sole method of nomination across the state. Alabama does not normally use the party convention system and in Iowa, a party convention makes the nomination only if no one candidate receives at least 35 percent of the primary vote. Thus, actual use of the party convention to make nominations is slight. Generally, when the convention system of nomination is used, the candidate who wins the convention vote becomes the party's nominee and a primary election is not held. V.O. Key speculated that the convention system survived in states where there were closely competitive parties and thus, "... made the propaganda of the enthusiasts for the direct primary less persuasive in these states; a 'democratic' popular choice between parties existed even though the intraparty procedures for the designation of the candidate were quite 'undemocratic.'"¹⁴ The party still holds a significant amount of power in states which use the party convention to nominate candidates as the primary electorate is never given the chance to vote for their preferred nominee. Instead, the nomination decision is made by the party elites.

Seven states, Colorado, Connecticut, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island and Utah, have legal provisions for endorsing candidates. "The existence of these statutory requirements for endorsing

¹³The Book of the States 1994-95, (Lexington, KY: Council of State Governments, 1994-1995), pp. 217-218.

¹⁴ Key, p. 377.

conventions reflects the ability of the party organizations in these states to retain a significant role in the nomination process even while the state legislatures were succumbing to the pressures for the direct primary."¹⁵ These states may hold pre-primary conventions for the purpose of endorsing candidates preferred by the party. Formal, statutory endorsement often carries with it benefits for the candidates. For example, in Colorado, any candidate who receives at least 30 percent of the convention vote is granted access to the ballot and the candidate who receives the most votes is listed first. Any candidate who receives less than 10 percent of the convention vote is precluded from further petitioning for ballot access.

In Connecticut, the endorsed candidate automatically becomes the nominee unless challenged by another candidate who receives at least 20 percent of the convention vote. A similar situation exists in New York, where the endorsed candidate becomes the nominee unless challenged by another candidate who receives at least 25 percent of the vote. Candidates not receiving at least 25 percent of the vote may use a designating petition to put themselves on the ballot. Endorsed candidates in North Dakota and Rhode Island are automatically placed on the ballot and other candidates must petition to qualify for placement on the ballot.¹⁶ Provisions in New Mexico are similar to those in Colorado and New York.¹⁷ In Utah, if the endorsed candidate wins 60 percent of the convention vote, then he or she becomes the nominee and no primary is held (new laws enacted in 1994 and designed to reduce divisive primaries lowered this percentage from 70 percent).¹⁸ In

¹⁵Bibby, Politics, Parties, and Elections in America, p. 140.

¹⁶Data compiled from The Book of the States and Bibby, Politics, Parties and Elections in America.

¹⁷L. Sandy Maisel, Parties and Elections in America, 2nd ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), p. 152.

¹⁸Andrew M. Appleton and Daniel S. Ward, State Party Profiles: A 50-State Guide to Development, Organization, and Resources, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly,

states with statutory provisions for preprimary endorsement, party approval is valuable to candidates because of the advantages it can bring with regard to ballot access. Thus, in these states, the party is still an important player in the nomination process.

In California, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania parties engage in extralegal endorsements.¹⁹ Unlike statutory endorsements, extralegal endorsements do not carry with them ballot access privileges for the candidate or other legal effects. Rather, parties that make extralegal endorsements often make quiet, unofficial endorsements and also attempt to discourage other candidates from running. Some states, such as Minnesota and Massachusetts, regularly hold publicized endorsing conventions. Other states make less public endorsements. The California Democratic party has an optional procedure for endorsing candidates. In addition, party affiliated groups, the California Republican Assembly and the California Democratic Council, also make endorsements. Political parties in Illinois often engage in slate making—that is, drawing up a list of approved candidates. In Pennsylvania and Ohio, party leaders frequently make endorsements.²⁰ Because extralegal endorsements do not bring benefits in terms of ballot access to candidates, they are less valuable than the statutory endorsements. Parties in this case still play a role in the nomination process, but that role is limited.

See Table 1

1997), p. 318.

¹⁹Usually, Wisconsin is also included in this group. However, parties in this state have not engaged in endorsement since 1978. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, Wisconsin parties are not included with those who engage in extralegal endorsement.

²⁰Bibby, *Politics, Parties and Elections in America*, pp. 141-142.

States which use the Convention System for Nomination	States with Statutory Requirements for Preprimary Endorsement	States with Extralegal Provisions for Preprimary Endorsement	States without Endorsement Provisions
Alabama Iowa Virginia	Colorado Connecticut New Mexico New York North Dakota Rhode Island Utah	California Delaware Illinois Louisiana Massachusetts Minnesota Ohio Pennsylvania	Nebraska Nevada New Hampshire New Jersey North Carolina Oklahoma Oregon South Carolina South Dakota Tennessee Texas Vermont Washington West Virginia Wisconsin Wyoming
		Alaska Arizona Arkansas Florida Georgia Hawaii Idaho Indiana Kansas Kentucky Maine Maryland Michigan Mississippi Missouri Montana	

Source: John F. Bibby, Politics, Parties and Elections in America, pg. 141.
The Book of States, 1996-97, pg. 157-158.

The effects of party endorsements are varied. Some political scientists contend that party endorsements make the primary less divisive by discouraging unendorsed candidates from running.²¹ However, as the examples in the introduction indicate, party endorsements are not always effective in ensuring the party favorite is elected. Nevertheless, the practice of endorsement continues.

In addition to endorsement procedures, party influence in the nomination process is also affected by a variety of rules that define the primary electorate in each state. These election rules manifest themselves in four types of primary systems across the country: closed, open, blanket, and nonpartisan.

In a closed primary system, participation is restricted only to those who are registered in a specific political party.²² In other words, only a registered Democrat can vote in the Democratic primary. States that have a closed primary system maintain party lists and voters are prohibited from changing their party affiliation a certain number of days before the election. These states are: California,²³ Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming. A variant on the closed primary system occurs in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. In these states, voters must publicly choose

²¹Ibid., p.143.

²²Information on primary systems compiled from Bibby, Politics, Parties, and Elections in America and Maisel, Parties and Elections in America.

²³California, however, recently passed a measure—proposition 198—which changes its primary system to a blanket primary system like the one currently in use in Washington and Alaska.

one party or the other on election day, but their choice is not recorded and the state does not maintain a list of who is in which party.

Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin have an open primary system. In these states, voters are not required to register in one party or the other, nor are they required to choose a party prior to voting. Citizens are free to vote in whichever primary they wish, regardless of party affiliation.

The states of Washington and Alaska have a blanket primary system. This system is a variation on the open primary system with even fewer restrictions on who may vote in which primary. In the blanket primary, a voter may vote in one party's primary for one office and another party's primary for another. The top vote getter from each party wins the nomination and goes on to the general election in the fall.

Finally, in the state of Louisiana there is yet another variation on the open primary which is known as the nonpartisan primary. In this type of primary, all candidates from all parties are listed on the same ballot, and voters choose from among all the candidates. If a candidate receives 50 percent of the vote or more, then he wins the office and does not have to compete in the general election. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent, the top two vote getters, regardless of party, go on to compete in the general election. In this system, it is possible to have two Democrats or two Republicans competing against each other for the same office in the general election.²⁴

See Table 2

²⁴Because of a court decision which declared certain district lines in Texas illegal, the initial primary results of 13 Texas districts (3,5,6,7,8,9,18,22,24,25,26,29, and 30) were invalid in the 1996 elections. Once the districts were redrawn, a system similar to the one in Louisiana was used for the elections in this district.

Table 2: State Primary Systems

Closed Primary		Open Primary	Blanket Primary
<i>states maintain party lists, voters cannot change party affiliation after a certain date</i>	<i>voters must choose a party on election day, but states do not maintain party lists</i>	<i>voters are not required to choose a party prior to voting</i>	<i>voters may choose to vote in one party's primary for one office and another party's primary for a different office, and so on.</i>
California ^a	Alabama	Hawaii	Alaska
Connecticut	Arkansas	Idaho	Washington
Kentucky	Georgia	Michigan	
Maine	Illinois	Minnesota	
Maryland	Indiana	Montana	
Nebraska	Mississippi	North Dakota	Non-partisan Primary
Nevada	Missouri	Utah	
New Hampshire	South Carolina	Vermont	Louisiana
New Jersey	Tennessee	Wisconsin	
New Mexico	Texas		
New York	Virginia		
Oklahoma			
Arizona			
Colorado			
Delaware			
Florida			
Iowa			
Kansas			
Massachusetts			
North Carolina			
Ohio			
Oregon			
Pennsylvania			
Rhode Island			
South Dakota			
West Virginia			
Wyoming			

^a As a result of a referendum in 1996, California will have a blanket primary in future elections.

Source: L. Sandy Maisel, Parties and Elections in America (1993).
 John F. Bibby, Political Parties and Elections in America (1996).

Another way in which states vary relates to what is necessary to win a primary election. In most states, a simple plurality is all that is needed. However, in 10 southern and border states, a majority of the primary vote is needed in order for a candidate to secure nomination (in North Carolina, only 40 percent). If no one candidate receives the percentage of the vote necessary, then a runoff primary is held between the top two vote getters to determine the nominee. According to Bibby, the runoff primary was instituted in the era of Democratic dominance of the South, when the winner of the Democratic primary was pretty much assured election to office. The runoff was devised to ensure that the person who was elected had the support of the majority of the Democratic voters. Bibby states that "the potential for a second primary diminishes the internal party pressures for preliminary coalition formation, and, therefore, tends to increase the number of candidates in the initial primary." It is entirely possible for the winner of the initial primary to lose the second primary.²⁵

Literature Review

Given the transformation of parties and their powers in this century, parties have been the subject of considerable study and much has been written about them. Some political scientists point to party endorsements and the like as evidence that political parties have successfully adapted to the changes forced upon them. Others point to the prevalence of candidate-centered campaigns as evidence that the party system as we know it is in decline and that parties have not been able to regain the authority they lost after the institution of the direct primary.

²⁵Bibby, *Politics, Parties and Elections in America*, pp. 138-139.

In his book, Politics, Parties, and Elections in America, John F. Bibby thoroughly examines the ways political parties function in the current political system. Bibby maintains that even though the direct primary negates the ability of the national, state or local parties to *control* the nomination, they are still in a position to *influence* the nomination. He says that party organizational strength is still strong in many states, especially those states in which the party engages in preprimary endorsements and holds nominating conventions. Preprimary endorsements reduce the number of candidates in a primary contest as unendorsed candidates are discouraged from running because they lack party backing and the resources it brings. Therefore, the party has a positive impact on the nomination process because it reduces the divisive nature of primaries by decreasing the number of candidates who are likely to run.

Bibby also discusses other factors which are likely to have an impact on the party's influence in nominations. The presence of a runoff primary will increase the number of candidates as will a blanket primary. In addition, he recognizes that candidates are becoming less dependent on parties because of their dependence on assistance from outside campaign consultants, their need for an exorbitant amount of funds to run for office, and the immense power and influence of the media. Bibby says of the development of the direct primary system that it was a means of challenging established party leaders and that it gives greater legitimacy to nominated candidates.

Political scientist Samuel Eldersveld says in his book, Political Parties in American Society, that party organizations have been heavily regulated and decentralized because Americans distrust them: "Since 1900 we have moved steadily in the direction of expanding the opportunities for direct popular decision making in party affairs with less emphasis on making

decisions through representative party institutions."²⁶ He describes the party organization itself as being characterized by "autonomous centers of organizational power."²⁷ The party organization, he maintains, is not a hierarchy. Rather, it is characteristic of a stratarchy.

Eldersveld lays out the consequences of the decentralization of party organizations. He says they have become undisciplined in a formal organizational sense and are no longer able to agree on leadership and policies. Consequently, there is no body of party authority at the national level. Rather, party power lies within the state and local units of party organization. Like Bibby, Eldersveld feels that the influence of party organizations in a campaign is influenced by the pervasiveness of "new techniques of mass persuasion" and new methods of mass communication. The party has become less useful in these areas.

However, Eldersveld states that state and local party organizations are still "...important infrastructures undergirding the electoral process."²⁸ Local activists have the power to mobilize the vote and undertake other activities state chairpersons consider important such as building the party organization, fund raising, campaign activity, and candidate recruitment. In addition, the party may seek out possible recruits, encourage people to seek public office, or mobilize a coalition of support behind possible candidates. Eldersveld maintains that, at the time of his writing, 60 percent of those in Congress had relied on the party for nomination and election where the party organization is well organized.²⁹ The party, according to Eldersveld, has the dual role of persuading those who are able to run for office and of screening out those

²⁶Samuel J. Eldersveld, Political Parties in American Society, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), p. 94.

²⁷Ibid., p. 97.

²⁸Ibid., p. 132.

²⁹Ibid., p. 205.

who are not fit to hold office. Finally, Eldersveld says that more primary competition indicates the more successful party and that "where party was strong and virtually assured of the election, there were more hotly contested primaries."³⁰

In Political Parties and Elections in American States, Malcolm E. Jewell and David M. Olson contend that the direct primary is a consequence of one party domination of state politics. They say that one of the consequences of the direct primary is that the primary, not the general election, becomes the place where an unpopular incumbent is challenged.

Jewell and Olson state that the basic method of comparing nominations among the states is examination of the depth of party involvement in the selection of nominees. At one extreme is the case where a few party leaders select the nominee and that nominee is not challenged. At the other extreme is the case where the nominee is chosen through direct primary by the electorate and there are several candidates from which to choose. They measure party participation in the nomination process by collecting the following:

- laws defining who may vote in primaries;
- laws and practices for party organizational endorsements in primaries;
- the extent of competition, specifically whether several candidates are running and the closeness of the outcomes if they do;
- the proportion of voters who turn out for primaries;
- the factors that explain the outcomes of nominating contests;

Jewell and Olson state that the advent of direct primaries has removed the most important function from the party: the ability to make

³⁰Ibid., p. 220.

nominations. As a result, the "organizational vitality" of the parties has eroded. Parties have lost the ability to screen potential candidates and to present a slate of candidates which best represents party views and ideologies and which has the best chance of winning the election. One of the ways parties have moved to counter this, the authors note, has been through the use of preprimary conventions and endorsements. These mechanisms give the parties some influence, but not complete control over nominations. Preprimary endorsements reduce the number of candidates and increase the chances that the winner of the primary will have a majority of the primary vote. The states where the endorsement has the most effect are those in which the endorsement has a legal basis. However, the authors acknowledge that the endorsement itself may have little to do with the election outcome; rather, they help candidates only because they force them to pull their organization together in order to campaign for the endorsement. Jewell and Olson also acknowledge the trend of the decline of political parties and the rise of the candidate centered campaign.

Party Organizations in American Politics, by Cornelius P. Cotter, James L. Gibson, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn, is the seminal study on political party organizations. The authors state that they are extremely uncomfortable with the "parties in decline" thesis and concern their study with parties as organizations. They list the leading attributes of party organizations as budget, professional staff, party officers, institutional support, and candidate-directed programs. They maintain that parties are significant to candidates and campaign activists because state law assures parties a position on the ballot, parties can build a popular plurality based on a core of party voters, and because the party organizations quite often gain material benefits from the government. The authors contend that effective party

organizations are adaptive and will attempt to find ways to use obstacles such as the direct primary to their advantage.

Party organizations, they say, engage in two types of activities: institutional support activities and candidate directed activities. Institutional support activities consist of: fundraising, electoral mobilization programs, public opinion polling, issue leadership, and publication of a newsletter. Candidate directed activity consists of financial contributions to candidates, provision of services to candidates, involvement in the recruitment of candidates, involvement in the selection of convention delegates, and preprimary endorsements. During the course of their study, the authors found that Republican party organizations are organizationally stronger than Democratic party organizations. They also found that as subjective party attachments weakened in the 1960's and 1970's the level of party organization increased.

The authors found six variables that influenced the party organization's control over nomination:

- the openness of the primaries;
- the restrictiveness of regulations governing voter party declaration;
- whether a straight-ticket option is provided to the voters;
- whether a "disaffiliation" statute exists—e.g. independent candidates must announce they are not a member of any political party prior to nomination;
- whether a "sore-loser" statute exists (this precludes a losing candidate from running as an independent);
- whether the party has the authority to replace deceased or resigned candidates;

Closed primaries, stringent regulations, controlling declaration of party affiliation, the straight-ticket options, the means of punishing dissident candidates, and the authority to designate candidates under special circumstances all provide direct benefits to parties. The authors conclude that although the party in the electorate may be in decline, the party organization is not and is, in fact, being enlarged as it integrates and becomes interdependent with national party organizations. A party's electoral strength is not associated with its party organizational strength.

In his book, Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America, John Aldrich examines whether parties have become irrelevant to the system or whether they still perform a necessary function in the nomination process such as the filtering of candidates and the narrowing of the primary field. Like Cotter et al., Aldrich maintains that the party as organization is getting stronger while the party in the electorate is in decline. He says that because of the shift from party-centered to candidate-centered politics, the public has come to believe that the party is irrelevant. Aldrich takes a historical perspective in his study of parties. The modern mass party disappeared as an institution in the era of the 1960's, he says. Their decline happened as candidates came to rely on their own personal organizations rather than the party's organization. The process was enabled in part by television, the media and other political organizations. The end result is that the party is no longer in control of the candidate, but rather in service to him and is designed around the ambitions of individual candidates and their campaigns.

Hypothesis

As previously discussed, historical trends indicate a decentralization of party power, especially in the nomination process. This decentralization has been exacerbated by the advent of the direct primary system. As a result of this decentralization, various institutional adaptations, typically in the form of preprimary endorsements, have been made across the country in an effort to restore party power. Texts by Bibby and Jewell and Olson suggest that where these endorsement procedures are in place, they have served to counter the effects of the direct primary, to an extent, by discouraging unendorsed candidates from running and thereby reducing the divisiveness of the primary election. As Jewell and Olson state, endorsement power has compensated parties for the loss of their ability to "screen" potential candidates and have returned to the parties the ability to maintain influence, but not complete control, in the nomination process. Specifically, preprimary endorsements, legal and extralegal, reduce the number of candidates in a primary election and increase the likelihood the winner will receive a majority of the primary vote.

However, institutional adaptations such as preprimary endorsements are not the only factors present in the status quo which affect parties' ability to influence nomination processes. As Bibby notes, the type of primary instituted in each state also has an effect on party involvement in the nomination process. A closed primary system, which restricts participation to those who are registered members of a given party, allows parties to be most influential in the process. Bibby states that a closed primary ". . . creates a known constituency to whom appeals for support can be made, and makes

control of the nomination process somewhat easier to achieve."³¹ Conversely, an open primary system, which allows a member of any party to vote in any primary, gives the party considerably less influence over the nomination process because it has little control over who will be voting in its primary.

Primary systems and party roles are not necessarily designed to enhance each other. Sometimes, in fact, they are meant to counter the influence of each other. For example, in the state of New York, political parties are given substantial endorsement power. In addition, New York employs strict voter registration and primary participation laws. Hence, each of these factors, primary systems and party roles, enhances the power of the other. In contrast, the state of Louisiana has instituted a nonpartisan primary system, which provides the party with almost no role, yet political parties in Louisiana engage in informal endorsing procedures. In this case, the informal endorsing procedures are designed to reduce the divisiveness a nonpartisan primary naturally induces. Thus, it cannot be assumed that these two factors always work in conjunction with each other. However, each plays an important part in determining how the party will be able to have an impact on the nomination process. Those states that operate under a closed primary system and provide for a formal party role are those in which the party has the greatest impact on the nomination process. Those states that operate under an open primary system and do not provide for any type of party role are those in which the party will find it most difficult to have an impact on nomination processes.

There is one other inherent factor which affects the party's ability to influence the nomination process in a particular race: the status of the seat.

³¹Bibby, *Politics, Parties and Elections in America*, p.135.

That is to say, whether there is an incumbent running or not or whether the seat is open or not. The status of the seat affects the divisiveness of a primary by either discouraging potential candidates from running, as in the case of the former, or by attracting a large number of candidates, as in the case of the latter. Seats in which an incumbent runs for reelection typically attract fewer candidates because incumbents are usually extremely strong candidates.³² This phenomenon, often termed by political scientists as "incumbent advantage," can be attributed to the incumbent's prior occupation of office and the benefits this position brings. On the contrary, open seat races are often more competitive because the prospect of not having to battle an incumbent in the general election makes the race more attractive to potential candidates.

This study investigates the impact of various institutional factors on the ability of political parties to influence the nomination process. It will do so in the context of the 1994 and 1996 elections for the United States House of Representatives. Two assumptions will be tested: first, that a strong party role is effective in giving the party the ability to influence nomination processes; second, that the type of primary system also has an effect on the party's ability to influence nomination processes. In all cases, the party's impact on the nomination is determined by the divisiveness of the primary election. The presence of party influence is evidenced by less divisive primaries; a lack of party influence is evidenced by competitive primary elections.

As such, this paper will explore the relationship between party roles, primary systems, and primary divisiveness. It hypothesizes that those factors designed to enhance the ability of a political party to influence the

³²Maisel, *Parties and Elections in America*, pp. 167-168.

nomination process do in fact achieve the purpose for which they were intended. Further, it hypothesizes that where these factors are in place, their effectiveness is evidenced by less divisive primaries. Conversely, where these factors are absent, the ability of a political party to affect the nomination should be curtailed, as evidenced by a competitive primary contest.

Data Collection and Methodology

The hypothesis above was tested using results from the 1994 and 1996 nomination processes for the U.S. House of Representatives.³³ The data set includes all candidates who ran for an office in the House of Representatives in 1994 and 1996 and their percentage of the primary vote in their particular race.

The dependent variable in the following study is represented by the results of the primary contests. In order to study these results, they were divided into four categories: *no nominee*, *closely contested*, *not closely contested*, and *uncontested*. A race was classified as *no nominee* if there was no candidate running in that party's primary. A *closely contested* primary indicates there was more than one candidate in that contest and at least one candidate finished within fifteen percent of the winner. A race was classified as *not closely contested* if there was more than one candidate, but no one finished within fifteen percent of the winner's percentage. Finally, a race was classified as *uncontested* if the party fielded only one candidate for that contest. A classification of *uncontested* or *not closely contested* indicates a less divisive primary and a significant level of party impact. *Closely contested* indicates the party was unable to make an impact in that race. *No nominee*

³³Data was compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

indicates a race in which the party was unable to perform even a minimal function in the nomination process.

The distribution of primary results is explained by the presence of two causal independent variables: degree of party role and type of primary system. Put simply, primary results within each state vary according to what type of role its parties have and the type of primary system it employs. Each of these two variables was considered separately and evaluated independently of the other so that the singular impact of each could be determined. This impact was measured by the divisiveness of the primary contests within each category.

In order to examine the impact of the degree of party role on the nomination process, the various party roles were divided into three categories: *formal*, *informal*, and *no role*. A state was put into the category of *formal party role* if the actions of its political parties resulted in ballot access for the preferred nominee. States in this category have legal provisions which provide for a party role. For example, some state laws give the endorsed candidate an automatic place on the ballot. In other states, candidates are nominated by the party in convention only. It is hypothesized that parties with a formal role in the nomination process have a greater potential to make an impact on the nomination process than parties with an informal role or without any role at all.

A state was put into the category of *informal role* if its political parties take action to support preferred candidates but do not otherwise have an impact in terms of ballot access. Unlike the states in the *formal role* category, states in the *informal role* category do not provide a statutory means through which a party can influence a primary election. Actions by parties in the

informal category include unofficial endorsements and slate making (i.e. drawing up a slate of candidates).

Finally, a state was classified under the *no role* category if its political parties do not attempt to participate in the nomination process. In these states, the parties do not attempt to endorse, not even unofficially, or otherwise influence the outcome of the primary election. In this category, the hypothesis indicates that the fate of the candidate is truly in the hands of the primary electorate. Table 3 shows the division of states by party roles.

See Table 3

To determine the impact of the type of primary system on the party's ability to influence the nomination process, the states were once again divided into categories, this time according to the type of primary system they have: *closed*, *open*, *semi-open*, *blanket*, or *nonpartisan*. A state with a *closed* primary system restricts its primaries to voters who are registered with a specific party. *Open* and *semi-open* primaries, however, are open to all voters regardless of party affiliation (there are a few slight variations between these two systems of primaries, but in both cases, voters do not have to decide until they are at the polling place which party they will be voting for. As such, the data for these two primaries were combined). Thus, a *closed* primary would be restricted to party members only while an *open* primary would be all inclusive. The other two types of primaries, *blanket* and *nonpartisan*, are only used in three states. Because of their small numbers, these primary systems will be discussed on an individual basis.

The intervening independent variable, as discussed in the hypothesis, is the status of the seat. This study does not intend to measure the impact of this variable, but in order to obtain a true picture of the impact of various institutional adaptations, this variable needs to be controlled for.

Table 3: State Party Roles

Formal Party Role	Informal Party Role	No Party Role		
<i>states have party conventions that have a significant impact on access to the primary ballot (e.g. in the form of preprimary endorsements)</i>	<i>party organizations or other party groups endorse candidates or take other actions in their favor without that action having an official role in the primary process</i>			
Colorado	California	Alabama ^c	Nebraska	
Connecticut	Delaware	Alaska	Nevada	
Iowa ^a	Illinois	Arizona	New Hampshire	
New Mexico	Louisiana	Arkansas	New Jersey	
New York	Massachusetts	Florida	North Carolina	
North Dakota	Minnesota	Georgia	Oklahoma	
Rhode Island	Ohio	Hawaii	Oregon	
Utah	Pennsylvania	Idaho	South Carolina	
Virginia ^b		Indiana ^d	South Dakota	
		Kansas	Tennessee	
		Kentucky	Texas	
		Maine	Vermont	
		Maryland	Washington	
		Michigan ^d	West Virginia	
		Mississippi	Wisconsin ^e	
		Missouri	Wyoming	
		Montana		

^a In Iowa, a post-primary convention nominates candidates when no candidates polls 35% in a primary.

^b In Virginia, the political parties' executive committees may substitute a convention for a primary; this practice is usually followed for congressional nominations and has been used for statewide office.

^c In Alabama, the political parties' executive committees can substitute conventions for primaries, but they have not done so in recent years.

^d In Indiana and Michigan, conventions are used to nominate statewide candidates below the level of governor and United States senator.

^e In Wisconsin, the Republican party has a provision for pre-primary endorsements, but that provision has not been used since 1978.

Sources: L. Sandy Maisel, Parties and Elections in America (1993).

John F. Bibby, Politics, Parties and Elections in America (1996).

Council of State Government, The Book of the States, 1996-1997 (1996).

To that extent, the data for measuring the impact of party roles and primary systems are considered within three different contexts: primary races in which the incumbent ran for renomination, primary races in which there was no incumbent in that party (but there was one in the other party), and primary races in which there was no incumbent in either party (open seats).

In the analysis, the data for 1994 and the data for 1996 were discussed and analyzed separately. No one political year is exactly the same as the other. The context of each one provides stimulants and deterrents to potential candidates. For example, in 1994, a strong anti-Democratic mood likely prevented many potential Democratic candidates from running. Likewise, many Republican candidates who might not have run otherwise were encouraged by the vulnerable state of their potential Democratic opponents. For contextual reasons such as this, the 1994 and the 1996 data were considered separately.

Analysis

What effect does party role have on the nomination process?

In order to assess the impact different party roles have on the nomination process, we must first look at the effect of these roles on the nominations (or, more accurately, renominations) of incumbents. As table 4 indicates, there are a significant number of uncontested incumbent nominations for all party roles both in 1994 and 1996. In states where party plays a formal role, there are significantly more uncontested nominations than in states where party plays an informal role; however, the disparity

between states where party plays an informal role and states where party does not play any role is only slight.

See Table 4

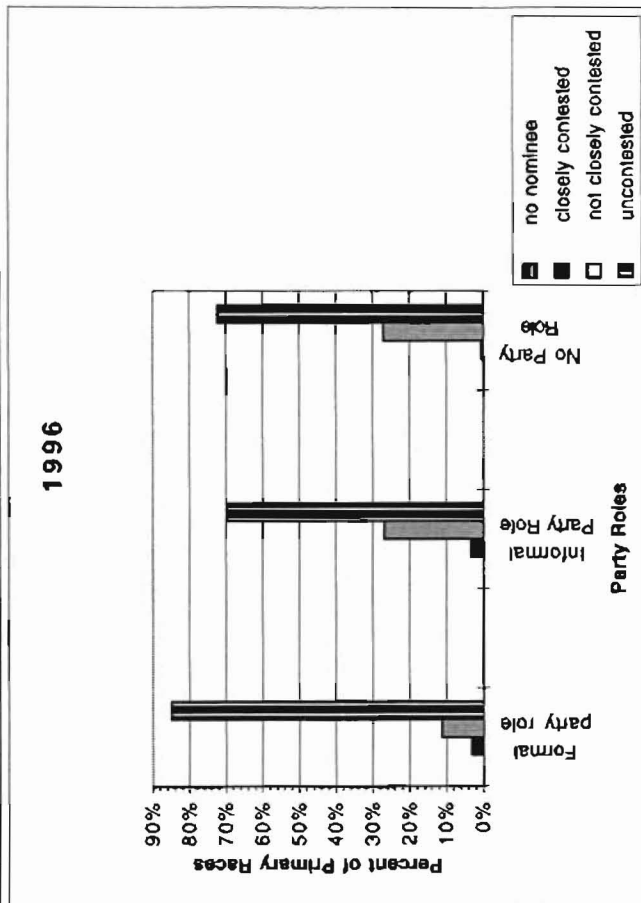
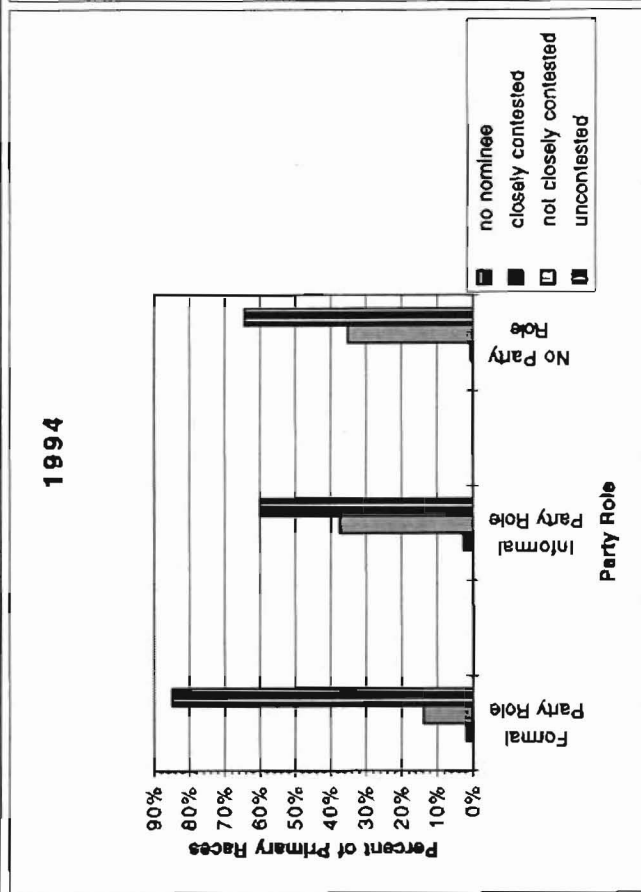
These patterns suggest that party role in the case of incumbent nominations does make an impact, but that impact is limited. The party has the ability to make the greatest impact in those states that provide a statutory role for the party. The slight disparity in uncontested nominations between states with informal party roles and states with no party roles would seem to contradict the notion that a party can make an impact. However, because of "incumbent advantage," this is not necessarily the case. As previously noted, incumbents are especially strong candidates because they have previously occupied office and often bring certain advantages with them into an election, not the least of which is name recognition. Incumbents tend to win a high proportion of the primaries in which they are challenged and an incumbent is unlikely to be beaten in a primary.³⁴ As such, the presence of an incumbent is usually enough to deter potential candidates from running for office, thus increasing the number of uncontested nominations.

Despite the impact of incumbent advantage, it would be erroneous to conclude that party does not make a difference for incumbent candidates in states where it is relegated to an informal role. Rather, in these states the party can and does help its incumbent candidates. It is true that the presence of an incumbent is so strong a factor in primary contests that, even in those states where party does not have a role, an incumbent is not likely to face a divisive primary. This does not mean, however, that party involvement does not influence an incumbent's primary; it simply means that incumbent advantage oftentimes is enough to reduce the divisiveness of a primary

³⁴Maisel, *Parties and Elections in America*, pp. 167-168.

Table 4: Impact of Party Role on Incumbent Nominations

	1994		1996	
	Formal Party Role	No Party Role	Formal party role	No Party Role
	%	%	%	%
no nominee	0	0	0	0
closely contested	2%	3%	3%	3%
not closely contested	14%	38%	11%	27%
uncontested	85%	60%	85%	70%
n=	65	120	62	123
				181



Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

without any party role. Party roles, where they are present, *do* benefit incumbents in their races for renomination, even though the benefits might not be readily apparent. Further, in most cases, since the party is most likely to endorse an incumbent *because* he or she is the strongest candidate, party support could be considered as part of the incumbent advantage. To obtain a better picture of how the party can help the incumbent, it may help to look at some specific examples.

First, as previously noted, states in which party has a formal role contained the highest percentage of uncontested primaries. This is a clear indication that legal provisions for party endorsement are beneficial to incumbents (as they are to all candidates, in general). For example, in Connecticut, those candidates who do not win the party endorsement are under considerable pressure from the parties not to challenge the party endorsee.³⁵ In Colorado, in order to qualify for the primary ballot, a would-be candidate must receive at least 30 percent of the vote at a county or state convention. According to political scientists Andrew Appleton and Daniel Ward, often only one candidate receives 30 percent of the vote and becomes, in effect, the party nominee.³⁶ When an incumbent runs, obviously, he or she has the greatest chance of receiving the convention vote because he or she is the most well known. In addition, Colorado parties provide certain services to their candidates. For example, the Republican party provides their candidates with "briefing books" that include "demographic characteristics of their election district and facts, both positive and negative about their Democratic opponent." The Colorado Democratic party provides similar services.³⁷ Incumbents who run for renomination in states such as these are

³⁵Appleton and Ward, p. 48.

³⁶Ibid., p. 41.

³⁷Ibid., p. 43.

likely to enjoy an easier road to renomination, since it is the party (and their own personal campaign) that keeps the number of competitors to a minimum. In Colorado, six incumbents ran for reelection in 1994. Out of these six, four were unchallenged. In 1996, four incumbents ran for reelection in Colorado and three were unchallenged in their primary election. Similarly, in Connecticut, six incumbents ran for reelection in both 1994 and 1996. In both these years, all six incumbents were unchallenged in their primary election. In these cases, the party is beneficial to its candidates and is far from obsolete.

There are other ways, too, in which the party can help incumbents. In 1994, Illinois Democrat Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL) ran for reelection amidst grand jury investigations for his role in the House Post Office scandal. The race was billed as the "political fight of his life."³⁸ However, Rostenkowski easily won a five-way primary, carrying 50 percent of the vote and "demonstrating that the city's [Chicago's] broad-shouldered precinct organization still works. . . ." ³⁹ According to Congressional Quarterly, a number of Illinois politicians, such as Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, came out to support Rostenkowski. Party workers labored to ensure that voters turned out for the embattled Ways and Means chairman. The Los Angeles Times estimated 6,000 party workers had been mobilized by Mayor Daley and the Democratic party on Rostenkowski's behalf. Rostenkowski's renomination was the number one priority.⁴⁰

The data for incumbents running for nomination seem to support the hypothesis that parties do have the ability to influence the nomination

³⁸Maureen Grope, "Rostenkowski's Ground Troops Carry the Day in Chicago," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Mar 19, 1994, p. 685.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 686.

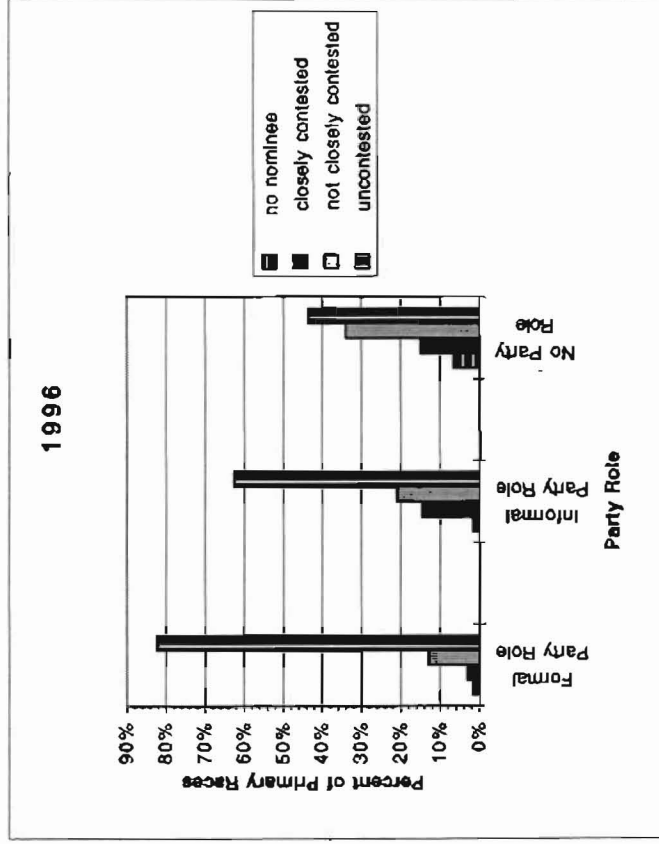
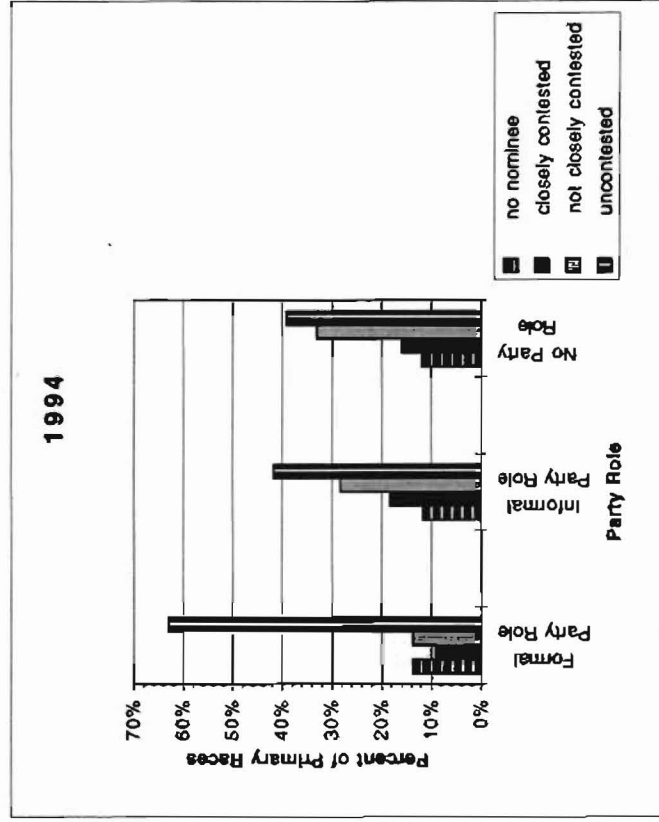
process in states in which they are provided with such a role. This ability is especially indicated by the large number of uncontested nominations in states where party has a formal role, compared with the moderate number of uncontested nominations in states where party has an informal role. Put simply, the results indicate that where the state provides for a strong party role, the primaries are less divisive. In addition to the numerical data, examples from the 1994 and 1996 elections illustrate how the party can provide support to its candidates, even if they *are* incumbents, and thus benefit them. It is true that the ability of the party to influence the nomination is somewhat mitigated by incumbent advantage, and in some cases it is difficult to tell whether it is the involvement of the party or the presence of the incumbent which is responsible for the reduction of primary competition. What is clear, though, is that party does make a difference.

In order to fully understand party impact, it is necessary to look at the nomination experiences of those who seek their party's nomination to challenge the incumbent in the general election. In these primaries, incumbent advantage is not a factor and thus it is easier to measure the impact of the party's role. As table 5 indicates, a clear pattern exists for party involvement in these primary elections. As party role declines, so do the number of uncontested nominations. This result is seen most clearly in the 1996 nominations, where the percentages between states where parties have informal roles and those with no roles vary dramatically.⁴¹

See Table 5

⁴¹This variation can be attributed to the strong anti-incumbent feelings directed towards the Democratic congress which swept the nation in 1994 and thus enabled the Republican revolution. Such strong sentiment likely produced more competition in 1994 in all cases.

	1994			1996		
	Formal Party Role	Informal Party Role	No Party Role	Formal Party Role	Informal Party Role	No Party Role
no nominee	14%	12%	12%	2%	2%	7%
closely contested	9%	18%	16%	3%	15%	15%
not closely contested	14%	28%	33%	13%	21%	34%
uncontested	63%	42%	39%	82%	63%	44%
n=	65	120	194	62	123	181



Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

The significant disparities in uncontested nominations between states with formal party roles and those with informal party roles, and between states with informal party roles and those with no party roles indicates two things. First, party does have an impact on the primary elections of those who seek to challenge an incumbent in the general election when it is provided a role to do so. Second, the party has a greater impact when its actions have legal consequences, as in those states that provide for legal endorsements and ballot access privileges. These conclusions are similar to the conclusions drawn for nominations of incumbents.

Once again, in order to examine the effects of party role more closely, it may help to look at some specific examples. In these examples, it becomes clear that certain party actions specifically benefit the candidate or the party. The most common party actions are strategizing and endorsement. Parties strategize when they choose to recruit "sacrificial lambs" to oppose an especially formidable opponent and thus conserve party resources. This is a frequent practice of the Democratic party in Utah.⁴² The party may also choose to switch candidates after the nomination process has taken place in order to further its chances in the general election. Party endorsement is actively sought by potential candidates where it is offered and endorsed candidates tend to be successful. The consequences of these party actions will become clearer in the following examples.

In 1994, in New York's fourth district, the Democratic party expected to face Republican incumbent freshman Representative David A. Levy in the general election. In an election year that seemed to heavily favor the Republican party, the Democratic party expected to lose to Levy in November and did not put much effort into finding a strong nominee. When it became

⁴²Appleton and Ward, p. 319.

apparent that Levy had lost his primary and would not be running in the general election, the Democratic party reacted by giving its nominee, lawyer Ferne Steckler, a nomination for a state judgeship and quickly replacing her with Philip Schiliro, a strong candidate who had run against Levy in '92 and had garnered 45 percent of the vote to Levy's 50 percent.⁴³ In this scenario, the Democratic party reacted quickly to ensure there would be a viable candidate to run against a potentially weak Republican nominee.⁴⁴

More recently, in 1996 in Connecticut's 2nd district, Republican Edward W. Munster worked hard to defeat primary challenger, state Rep. Andrew Norton. His strategy? Working "diligently in recent months to shore up his support among Connecticut's Republican leaders. . ." and winning the endorsement of the state party. He won the endorsement and the nomination, and he went on to challenge Democratic incumbent Sam Gejdenson in the general election.⁴⁵ In New York's 21st district (party has a formal role here), represented by conservative Democrat Michael R. McNulty, environmental activist Lee H. Wasserman tried to counter McNulty's advantageous support from the powerful Albany County Democratic Organization by running a grassroots campaign. He lost the primary, only managing to get 43.8 percent of the vote to McNulty's 56.2 percent.⁴⁶ Finally, in the Republican primary contest in Minnesota's fifth district, where party has an informal role, lobbyist Jack Uldrich gained the endorsement of the state Republican party and easily defeated opponent Chris Flynn with 63

⁴³Rep. Levy Disputes Close Loss in New York GOP Primary," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Oct. 8, 1994, p. 2911.

⁴⁴Despite its best efforts, however, the Democratic party still lost this election. Schiliro received only 37.3 percent of the vote. Republican nominee Dan Frisa received 59.4 percent.

⁴⁵Robert Marshall Wells, "Munster Goes After Gejdenson for a Third Time," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Sept. 14, 1996, p. 2613.

⁴⁶Jonathan D. Salant, "Incumbents Win the Day Despite Challenges," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Sept. 14, 1996, p. 2614.

percent of the vote.⁴⁷ In each of these examples, the candidate who had party support gained the upper hand in his primary contest. Clearly, party can and does have an impact on the nomination process.

Like the data for incumbent nominations, the data for the nominations of those who seek to challenge the incumbent in the general election indicate that party roles do indeed influence the nomination process. In fact, the absence of "incumbent advantage" in this data makes the assertion even stronger. There are clear disparities in the percentages of uncontested nominations between all three categories of party role. This distribution indicates it is not only the *existence* of party role that makes an impact. The *degree* of that party role makes an impact as well. The point is shown further by specific examples from the 1994 and 1996 elections which clearly illustrate that party roles do have an effect on the nomination process and are beneficial to the party candidates. Finally, it is evident from the data presented thus far that the absence of incumbent advantage allows the party to make a greater impact in these primary elections than in those in which an incumbent is running for renomination.

Lastly, in examining the ability of party role to influence the nomination process, we must examine the effect of party role in the nominations for open seats. The data presented here, in tables 6 and 7, appear to be inconclusive. The data for open seats in table 6 are divided into categories based on competitiveness of the general election as follows: If the nominee received more than 60 percent of the general election vote, the race was classified as "1," and a landslide win. If the nominee received 40 to 60 percent of the general election vote, the race was classified as "2," and a

⁴⁷Juliana Gruenwald, "Primaries Set Up Rematch for Wellstone, Boschwitz," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Sept. 14, 1996, p. 2616.

competitive race. If the nominee received less than 40 percent in the general election, the race was classified as "3" and an overwhelming defeat. These races were classified in this way because the most competitive races tend to draw the most candidates; open seat races in which one candidate appears to be assured of victory draw the fewest. Table 7 summarizes the data and presents it in the form of percents in order to illustrate the results more clearly.

See Tables 6 and 7

As these numbers indicate, the party role has no bearing on the number of people who run for open seats. Rather it is the competitiveness of the seat which makes this determination. Where the seat is the most competitive (sub category 2) the most candidates run. This circumstance severely affects the party's ability to reduce the divisiveness of the primary. Another factor which affects the party's ability to reduce the divisiveness of the primaries for open seats is the value of the nomination. As stated previously, open seat nominations are considered extremely valuable because the nominee will not have to run against an incumbent in the general election. Open seats, therefore, provide the easiest route into public office. These nominations are so valuable to potential candidates that those who do not have party support, but do have other resources, will not hesitate to run and attempt to obtain these nominations. Thus, there tend to be very few noncompetitive primaries for open seat races and even fewer uncontested nominations.

An examination of the data presented indicates that any sweeping assumptions about the party role in open seat elections would be erroneous. For the nominations that were *closely contested*, the patterns for 1994 are as we would expect. That is, as the degree of party involvement decreased the

Table 6: Impact of Party Role on Nominations for Open Seat Elections

	1994						1996									
	Formal			Informal			Formal			Informal			No Role			
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
no nominee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
closely contested	0	1	1	3	8	1	5	25	6	1	4	0	2	3	0	7
not closely contested	1	2	1	0	6	2	3	16	1	0	2	1	0	7	1	4
uncontested	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	5	0	2	2	0	1	2	0
n=	1	3	2	3	15	4	9	46	12	1	8	3	2	11	2	11

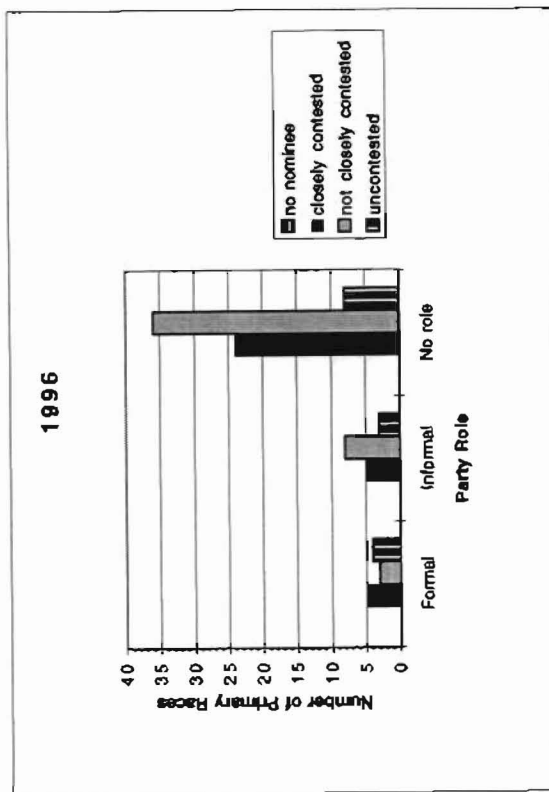
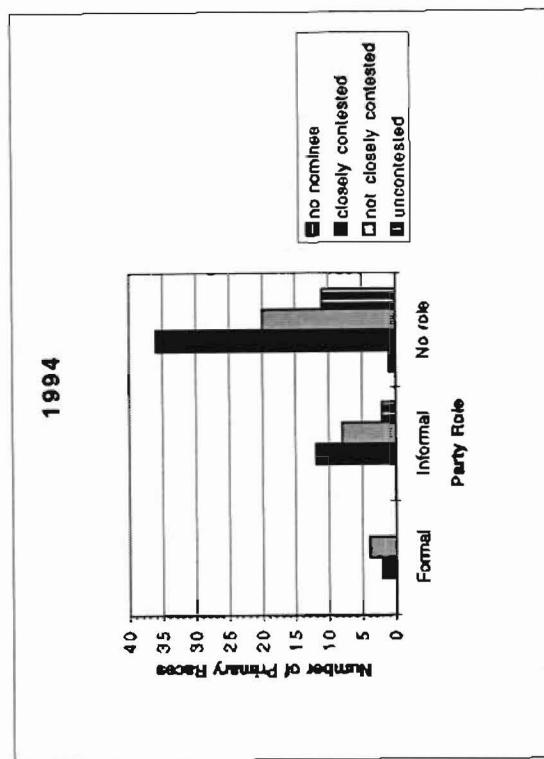
1=nominee received more than 60% of the general election vote

2=nominee received 40%-60% of the general election vote

3=nominee received less than 40% of the general election vote

Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

	1994				1996					
	Formal		Informal		Formal		Informal		No role	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
no nominee	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
closely contested	2	12	12	36	5	5	5	5	5	24
not closely contested	4	8	8	20	3	8	3	8	3	36
uncontested	0	2	2	11	4	4	4	3	4	8
n=	6	22	68	68	12	16	68	68	68	68



Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

percentage of *closely contested* nominations increased. This specific pattern would seem to indicate success for the party role. However, the patterns for *closely contested* nominations in 1996 directly contradict those patterns found in 1994. In 1996, as the degree of party involvement decreased, so did the number of *closely contested* primaries. This pattern does not indicate success for the party role in any way. Similar contradictory patterns are found for the *not closely contested* primaries and the *uncontested* primaries for 1994 and 1996. What would seem to indicate effectiveness of the party role for one year is contradicted by the data for the next.

Thus, because of the ambiguous nature of the data for open seat nominations, generalizations about the effectiveness of the party role in these elections cannot be made. The only safe conclusion that can be made is that the competitive nature of open seat elections and the value of the nominations overrides whatever effect the party role may have on the nomination processes of the races for these seats. The party does continue to play a role in these races, as it does with all other races, where it is provided with a chance to do so. However, the nature and effect of party roles within races for open seats are difficult to determine. As with the other two sets of data, specific examples will help to discern the impact of party role.

For example, endorsed GOP candidates for Minnesota's (informal endorsement state) open sixth district in 1994 enjoyed such benefits as a ". . . featured space at the county fairs that are a staple of summer life in Minnesota. At the Washington County fair this month [endorsed GOP candidate] Jude, shared space in the tent for endorsed GOP candidates positioned prominently near the food and games."⁴⁸ Obviously, endorsed

⁴⁸"Eager Candidates Storm Voters, Who Seem Slow to React," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Aug. 20, 1994, p. 2414.

candidates for open seat elections enjoy the same benefits as other endorsed candidates. However, perhaps because of the electoral competitiveness of the seat, these benefits do not reap the same strategic advantages enjoyed by candidates who are not running for an open seat.

In terms of evaluating the impact of the party role on the nomination process, then, the data for the open seat nominations do not prove or disprove the hypothesis. The example indicates that open seat endorsees do enjoy the same advantages as other endorsees, but that these advantages do not have as much weight. Open seats are often too attractive to potential candidates for them to be deterred by the prospect of a party endorsed candidate. In open seat nominations, the effect of the party is outweighed by the value of the seat. Thus, the party has little chance to affect primary competitiveness in the elections for these seats.

What effect do primary systems have on the nomination process?

Tables 8, 9, and 10 indicate the competitiveness of the primary elections broken down by primary system. Primary systems influence the competitiveness of primary elections in a different way from party roles. Party roles affect the number of candidates in a primary. That is, they restrict the competitiveness of primary elections by reducing the number of candidates. Primary systems have little or even no bearing on who may or may not run in a primary election. The various electoral rules associated with different primary systems do not confer specific advantages on certain candidates as party roles do. Instead, primary systems establish rules regarding the voting population and thus affect who may vote in a specific primary election. These rules often deal with voter registration and party

affiliation. As such, they may reduce the competitiveness of a primary election by reducing who may vote in a primary, or more specifically, what kind of voter may vote in a particular election.

For example, a closed primary restricts the voting population to registered party members. Therefore, in theory, those who would be voting would be those most closely aligned with the party ideology. Thus, in theory, the candidate who is most closely associated with the party ideology would receive the most votes and would win with a solid margin. By comparison, open and semi-open primaries allow anyone to vote in a party primary, regardless of party affiliation. As such, the voting population is likely to be composed of people with varying views, values, and ideological backgrounds. Consequently, the vote is likely to be divided among various candidates and the winner is likely to win by a smaller margin.

Because the type of primary system affects only who votes and not who runs, we are restricted to examining the *not closely contested* and *closely contested* nominations only in measuring the impact of varying types of primary systems. These two categories represent the most accurate measurement of the impact of the type of primary system on the nomination process. How *uncontested* nominations coincide with types of primary systems is, of course, of interest, but not a product of the primary systems themselves. Therefore, races which fall into this category are not sufficient for measuring the impact of the type of primary system on primary elections.

As with the data for impact of party role, the impact of the primary system on the nominations of incumbents will be examined first. As **table 8** indicates, in all primaries, almost no incumbent faced closely contested primaries. This pattern indicates that incumbent advantage is the overwhelming factor in these contests. The strength of incumbent advantage

Table 8: Impact of Primary Systems on Incumbent Nominations

	1994		1996	
	Closed	Open/Semi-Open	Closed	Open/Semi-Open
	%	%	%	%
	n		n	
No Nominee	0	0	0	0
Closely Contested	1%	1%	3%	1%
Not Closely Contested	31%	30%	22%	23%
Uncontested	67%	69%	74%	76%
n=	223	147	228	128
				10

Expressed as Percentage of Closely Contested/Not Closely Contested Contests Only				
	1994		1996	
	Closed	Open/Semi-Open	Closed	Open/Semi-Open
	%	%	%	%
	n		n	
Closely Contested	4%	4%	11%	3%
Not Closely Contested	96%	96%	89%	97%
n=	73	46	55	31
				10

Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

is also indicated by the large number of *uncontested* nominations, which account for about 70 percent of the incumbent nominations in all cases. Incumbents seem to have faced little to no competition in these primary elections. Moreover, the distribution of the data suggests that the type of primary system had very little effect where incumbents did face competition. In all primary systems, at least 89 percent of the contests in which incumbents faced competition were *not closely contested* (these numbers refer to the lower half of the tables). In most cases, this number is higher, around 95 or 96 percent, with the highest percentage of *not closely contested* nominations occurring among the open/semi-open primary systems in 1996. Conventional wisdom suggests that the highest percentage of *not closely contested* nominations would occur within closed primary systems, but this does not happen. Clearly, incumbent nominations are little affected by the type of primary system.

The blanket primaries in Washington and Alaska provide the strongest evidence of the impact of incumbent advantage. In these primaries, in which the loosest rules regarding party affiliation are in effect, one would expect most contests to be *closely contested*. Yet, nearly all of the incumbent nominations were *not closely contested*. The prestige of incumbency, even in these states is enough to negate whatever effect the primary system may have.

Yet another testament to the advantages of incumbency, are the large number of *uncontested* nominations found in both closed and open/semi-open primary systems. Although not used in measuring primary impact, the extremely large numbers of *uncontested* contests still bear examination in this line of analysis. In closed and open/semi-open primary systems, the majority of the incumbent nominations were *uncontested* (67 percent and 69 percent, respectively for 1994 and 73.9 percent and 75.8 percent, respectively,

for 1996). Thus, the majority of incumbents were assured of renomination before the differing types of primary systems had a chance to make an impact. These data strongly suggest that incumbent advantage (of which party role is a part) is a determining factor in primary divisiveness for incumbent nomination contests. Consequently, the role of the primary system in incumbent nominations is weak and secondary in the face of the advantages of incumbency.

The hypothesis for the impact of party systems theorized that closed primaries would enhance party impact and that open, semi-open and blanket primary systems would curtail party impact. However, the data do not clearly support this assumption for incumbent nominations. It is not clear whether closed primaries enhance party impact, although the large number of *not closely contested* primaries indicates that they at least do not curtail the impact of party role, or any other factor which may be at work. It is also apparent, however, that the open/semi-open primary systems do not curtail the impact of party role either, as there are still more *not closely contested* nominations than *closely contested* nominations. Once again, incumbent advantage is a strong factor here and it seems that primary systems are ineffective in influencing primary elections in the face of incumbent advantage.

The data for those who seek to challenge the incumbent are quite similar to the data for incumbents, although they are distributed more evenly.

See Table 9

Looking at the data for closed primaries, we once again find that 64.2 percent of the nominations for 1994 and 66.6 percent of the nominations for 1996 were *not closely contested*. 35.7 percent of the nominations in 1994 and 33.3

percent in 1996 were *closely contested*. Once again, the number of *not closely contested* nominations is greater. However, the disparity between these two categories is not as great as it was for the incumbent nominations. The data for open/semi-open primaries are remarkably similar to that of the closed primaries. That is, the number of *not closely contested* nominations is higher than the number of *closely contested* nominations. In 1994, 64.5 percent of these nominations were *not closely contested* and in 1996, 67.9 percent were *not closely contested*. The percentage of open/semi open primaries which were *closely contested* are 35.5 percent and 32.1 percent for 1994 and 1996 respectively. In the blanket primary states of Washington and Alaska, in both 1994 and 1996 the majority of the nominations were *not closely contested*.

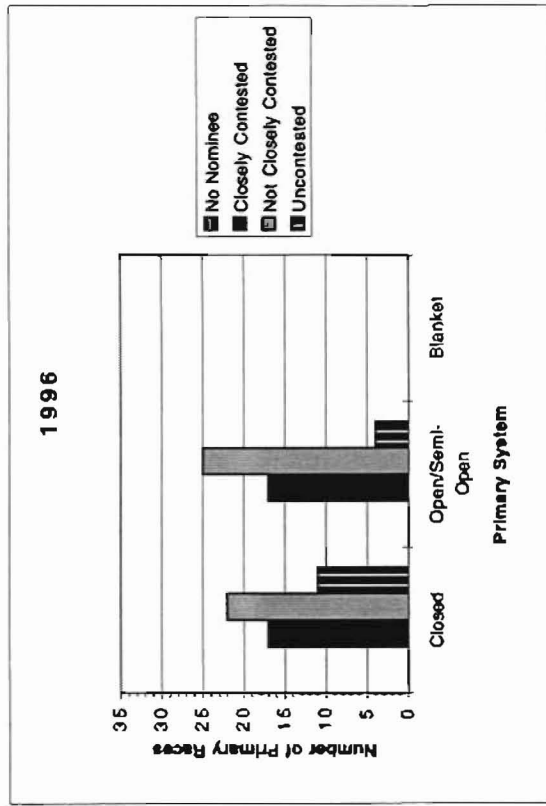
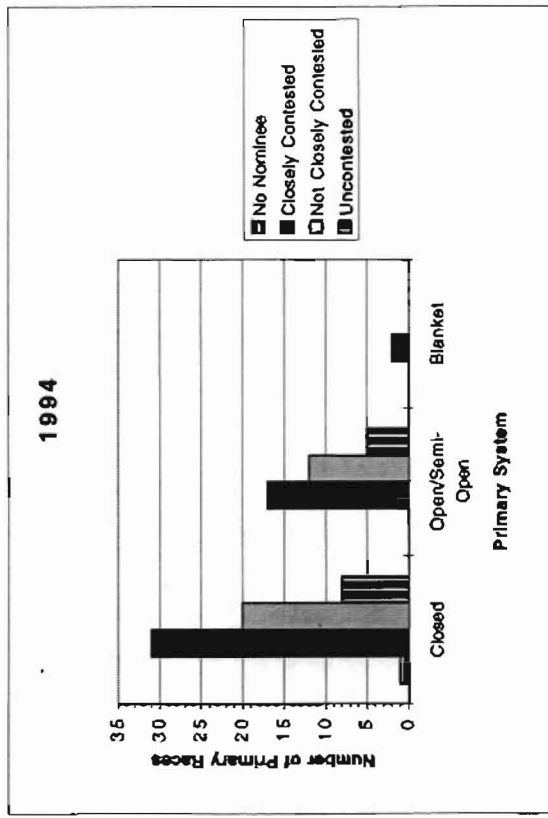
As with the data for incumbent nominations, the data for the nominations of those who seek to challenge the incumbent do not show any evidence that the type of primary system has an impact on the competitiveness of a primary. This assertion carries more weight with this set of data as incumbent advantage is not a factor here. The composition of the party electorate with regard to its loyalty to party ideologies seems to make little difference in a nomination contest.

With regard to the hypothesis concerning primary systems, then, the data for those who seek to challenge the incumbents do not support it. Once again, it is unclear whether closed primaries enhance the impact of the party role. However, the large number of *not closely contested* nominations in the absence of incumbent advantage suggests that, to some extent, they might. In any case, it is clear that closed primary systems do not in any way curtail the impact of party role. No definite conclusions may be drawn about the effects of open/semi-open primary systems, either. Incumbent advantage is absent and yet, the number of *not closely contested* nominations is still greater than

the number of *closely contested* nominations. If open/semi-open primary systems do, in fact, curtail the impact of party role, we would expect to see the opposite—a higher number of *closely contested* nominations than *not closely contested* nominations. The absence of this pattern strongly suggests that open/semi-open primaries do not curtail the impact of party role and thus do not have the desired effect. As with incumbent nominations, the number of *uncontested* nominations is worth analyzing, even though they are not used to measure party impact. For those who sought to challenge an incumbent in the general election, more than half the nominations were *uncontested*. In the absence of incumbent advantage, these statistics indicate that other forces, such as party roles may be at work. Once again, this possibility indicates that primary systems have a weak and secondary role with regard to their impact on the nomination process.

A study of the open seat nominations with regard to primary systems is difficult due to the nature of the data, which are extremely limited. However, a cursory glance at table 10 reveals that most of the nominations were either *not closely contested* or *closely contested*, as opposed to *uncontested* or *no nominee*. The data for 1994 and 1996 produce differing patterns and as such it is difficult to come to a conclusion as the data refutes itself. In 1994, it appears that most of the nomination contests for open seats were *closely contested* in both closed primary systems and open/semi-open primary systems. By comparison, in 1996, it appears that most nomination contests for open seats were *not closely contested* for both closed and open/semi-open primary systems. As with the impact of party role, the data for open seats does not indicate the type of primary system makes a strong impact in these elections. Rather, the effects of the open seat far surpasses any impact the primary system may have.

	1994		1996	
	Closed	Open/Semi-Open	Closed	Open/Semi-Open
	n	n	n	n
No Nominee	1	0	0	0
Closely Contested	31	17	17	17
Not Closely Contested	20	12	22	25
Uncontested	8	5	11	4
n=	60	34	50	46



Data compiled from Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1994 and 1996.

Conclusions

This paper began with the acknowledgment of an historical trend in which political parties have faced constant decentralization of their power. Further, the advent of the direct primary removed from political parties the power to carry out their most basic function--making nominations for office--and placed this power into the hands of the electorate. In an attempt to reduce the effects of decentralization, and, more specifically, the advent of the direct primary, many parties have made adaptations to their role in the political system and have thus been able to remain influential in the nomination process. In some states, these party roles are reinforced by statutory measures, in some they are not. In many states, parties have declined to have any involvement in the nomination process at all. Thus, the primary focus of this paper has been to determine how successful parties have been in retaining an ability to influence the nomination process or, in other words, to determine the effectiveness of these new roles parties have taken on. However, there are other factors which could potentially affect how much impact a party may have on the nomination process, such as the type of primary system, and the presence (or absence) of an incumbent in a race. As such, all these factors have been examined to determine how each affects the ability of a political party to influence the nomination process.

Party Roles

The hypothesis theorizes that the level of the role the party plays influences the level of primary competition. Bibby states that primary competition is lower in states where preprimary endorsements are used.⁴⁹ These lower levels of competition arise because potential candidates without

⁴⁹Bibby; *Politics, Parties and Elections in America*, p. 145.

party backing are often deterred from running by the advantages given to their party supported opponents. Further, parties that have a statutory role in the nomination process have the most benefits to give and are therefore the most successful in reducing primary competition. The impact of political parties in those states where they have an extralegal role is still visible, but weaker. Thus, parties influence nominations by making them less divisive and paving the way for their preferred nominee. Those states in which political parties choose not to play a role in the nomination process have the most divisive primaries in the country. The data, for the most part, prove this theory correct.

The data demonstrate that party role does have an impact on the nomination process, although the impact is limited in some respects. The impact of party roles was most apparent in the nomination contests of those who seek to challenge the incumbent in the general election. In these data, clear patterns emerge: as the degree of party involvement decreases, so too do the number of uncontested nominations. Primaries for these candidates were the least divisive where parties played a formal role; they were the most divisive where parties did not play any role. Party involvement and primary divisiveness are inversely related.

The impact of the party role seemed to wane in those contests where the incumbent ran for renomination and in nomination contests for open seats. The data show that incumbent advantage is a significant factor in the nominations of incumbents and has an immense impact on the divisiveness of primary elections. This impact is illustrated by the large number of uncontested nominations in all categories of party roles. While formal party roles show some ability to overcome incumbent advantage, overall, the role of the party is merely secondary to incumbent advantage in reducing the

competitiveness of primary elections. However, as examples illustrate, the influence of party roles should not be discounted in the face of incumbent advantage. Parties do provide certain benefits to incumbents when they are given a role and thus enabled to do so.

The impact of the party role was similarly eclipsed in the data for open seats. Here, it appears that it is not the party role, but rather the competitiveness, or desirability, of the seat which determines the divisiveness of the primary elections. As with incumbent advantage, party role should not be completely discounted in the face of an open seat election. Political parties can still give their preferred candidates a political edge. However, in the case of open seats, the desire for the nomination overwhelms any hesitation about running against a "party candidate." Therefore, the impact of party roles is not easily seen in these races.

Thus, several conclusions about the impact of party roles can be made. Party involvement in the nomination process is helpful to the incumbent, but not the major determinant of competitiveness in incumbent nominations. In addition, the competitiveness of open seat elections also outweighs any effects the party role may have, although party support is helpful to endorsed open seat candidates. Where party roles seem to have the most impact is in the nominations of those who seek to challenge the incumbent in the general election. In these nominations, party actions do have an impact, especially where the party has a formal role, and the divisiveness of the primary is significantly reduced. In these nominations, the party is best able to fulfill its desired role.

Primary systems

Theories on the impact of primary systems are hard to find, but those who do speculate on them theorize that closed primaries would be the least

divisive and open primaries the most divisive. As Bibby states, closed primaries are designed to allow candidates to cater to a select group of voters and thus discourage potential candidates. As a result, parties have more control. Open primaries accomplish the opposite.⁵⁰ However, the data examined in this paper indicate that these types of primary systems do not have the effect theorized. To the contrary, the impact of primary systems appear to be secondary to other factors.

The data for primary systems indicates that primary systems do not really have an impact on the competitiveness of primary elections. As with the data for party roles, it appears that the effects of primary systems are outweighed by the effects of incumbent advantage and open seats. In the data pertaining to nominations of incumbents, we see that the majority of the contests are *uncontested* (which, as it was with party roles, is attributed to the strength of the incumbent) and that in both closed and open/semi-open primaries, there are more *not closely contested* contests than there are *closely contested* contests. Once again, the data for open seats do not illustrate a specific pattern. Rather, the results are contradictory. Such erratic distribution suggests that the competitiveness of the seats and the value of the nomination for these seats make them especially immune to that which would affect the divisiveness of their election contests.

Unlike the data for party roles, however, there is very little difference between the data for incumbents and open seats and the data for elections where these factors are not present. In the nominations of those who seek to challenge the incumbent in the general election, the data indicate that the divisiveness of primary elections are not at all affected by primary systems. The results show that for all primary systems there are more *not closely*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

contested contests, than *closely contested* contests. Without the presence of incumbent advantage or open seats to account for this distortion, the effectiveness of the primary systems appears to be weak.

The data for primary elections only show one pattern: in all primary systems, nominations are more often *not closely contested* rather than *closely contested*. This singular pattern implies an ambiguity. The weakness of open and semi-open primary systems is indicated—if these primary systems were truly effective in encouraging potential candidates to run, the *closely contested* primaries would outnumber the *not closely contested* ones, which they do not. However, does the dominant pattern of *not closely contested* primaries in the data for closed primary systems indicate that closed primary systems are effective? The answer is unclear, but the existence of the singular pattern of *not closely contested* elections throughout all primary systems indicates it is probably no. It is far more likely that the dominant pattern of *not closely contested* primaries in the closed primary systems were produced by the same factor as in the open/semi-open primary systems. This mysterious factor appears to be party role.

As a consequence, primary systems appear to be overwhelmed by the party role. For example, in three of the open primary states (North Dakota, Utah, and Virginia), the state parties nominate by convention, and therefore do not put the question of the nomination before the voters. In these instances, the primary systems could not possibly make a difference in the divisiveness of the primary because the divisiveness had already been decided before the primary system even came into play. Similarly, those state parties which provide advantages to their preferred candidates and set them above other candidates, especially in terms of ballot access, also, in essence, decide on the divisiveness of the primary long before the primary contest has

a chance to make an impact. In the electoral arena the type of primary system is secondary to other factors which determine the competitiveness of primary contests and thus have little opportunity to carry out the purposes for which they were created.

Implications

Thus, the impacts of these various factors and adaptations are very different. The party role adaptations seem to have the most impact as they are the most successful in restoring some nominating power to the political parties. This success is especially evident in those states where parties are given a formal, legal role in the nomination process. Primaries in these states are far less divisive than in those where parties do not play any sort of role in the nomination process. In comparison, primary systems have little impact on the nomination process—they neither help nor hurt party influence. The minimal effect of the varying types of primary systems is consistently outweighed by the force of other factors such as party role and seat status.

Political parties are best able to influence the nomination process when they are bolstered by state laws which allow the party to endorse candidates and give them certain rights in terms of ballot access. To this end, those parties who are allotted formal roles in nominating contests are most successful. Yet, even in these states, the party does not specifically have the ability to name a candidate for office. Rather, the party is relegated to simply giving a preferred candidate as many advantages as it can. Moreover, the party's impact does not reign supreme. It is still in danger of being overpowered by incumbent advantage or an open seat election.

Thus, the power of the party to make effective nominations still exists, but only to a certain extent. Party power is still, for the most part, subservient to the decision of the voters. However, though voters have substantial

control over the nomination process, their control is also limited. The degree and nature of voter impact is often shaped by the structure of the process and the role played—formal and informal—by political parties.

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