

“...divided, we fail.”
The impact of primary divisiveness on gubernatorial elections

Tyler Emilie Frisbee, Nicholas B. Dominguez , and Richard F. Winters

Dartmouth College

Prepared for delivery at the annual conference on State Politics and Policy, Philadelphia, PA,
May 30, 2008. Corresponding author: Winters at rfw@dartmouth.edu

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Introduction:

Surely, divisive primaries hurt general election candidates. Conventional wisdom about the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries argues that the series of divisive primaries from New Hampshire to Pennsylvania to Kentucky and Oregon will damage the general election chances of the Democratic nominee.¹ Indeed, there appears to be a large gap between the conclusions of political scientists who find hardly any appreciable general effects of a divisive primary on the subsequent general election, and the conclusions of political analysts of the conventional wisdom who can scarcely comment on the Clinton-Obama race without hinting at, alluding to, or pontificating about the likely disastrous consequences of divisive primaries.

While it may be the case that divisive primaries damage general election chances, we are unlikely to get much purchase on the issue by examining presidential races -- there are too few of them and they are protracted affairs spatially and temporally. Quadrennial presidential elections, while interesting and important yield only a handful of modern elections about which conclusions can be drawn about the conditions that dampen or attenuate the impact of divisive primaries. Furthermore, presidential primaries are unlike *all other primaries among American elections*. First of all, they are *primaries plural*, that is to say, a set of spatially and temporally distributed primaries. They are held, state by state or set by set, in different states with distinctive constituencies, and across time where different issues and “issue sets” are raised, local passions aroused and inflamed, and the issues raised subsequently get elaborated on, thrashed about, or “trashed” in the next state or set of primaries. Further, the stakes for candidates and for voters are “ultimate” ones – no further office is likely to be pursued and the candidates come to represent and lead the party top to bottom in the next election. More money is raised, more positive and negative ads are employed, and the stakes are seen to be huge.

¹ See any U.S. newspaper, any date, and on just about any page between March 1 and May 27.

That is not true of America's other executive races, that for governors of the American states where multiple elections in diverse settings can be observed and examined over time. However, for gubernatorial races, only one primary is observed; it is winner take all, and it occurs at a single point in time.² The losers do have "another life;" they go back to the state senate, they return to Washington, or they just go home and become local political luminaries.

Our study:

Using gubernatorial elections from 1990 until 2006, in our aggregate analysis we increase the N to 210 elections and add variability. By focusing on this decade-and-a-half long period, we examine these races in both an *aggregate analysis*, and by incorporating exit poll data, we test for the impact of primary divisiveness on *individual voting behavior*.³

There are any number of dimensions along which "division" might occur in primary contests. Not-so-casual observations suggest that candidate differences may occur for reasons, say, of race, of gender, and between generations. In races for governor, divisions also appear for reasons of region, e.g. "downstate" vs. the rest of Illinois, where "the rest..." means Chicago and Cook County. Divisions occur between urban and rural candidacies. Because states' chief executives are judged by voters on standards regarding the economy, crime, human rights, welfare, education, and so on, intra-party cleavages can develop along any number of these parallel or cross-cutting issue cleavages.⁴ For our purposes, approaching it as we do from a rational choice perspective, we argue that divisiveness typically results from the accumulation of distinctions along parallel cleavages, or put more succinctly, *ideological distinctions* – conservatives vs. moderates in the Republican Party and moderates vs. liberals in the Democratic Party. We specifically test for general election consequences of *ideological, spatially-arrayed divisions* in primary contests. The relative spatial positions of the primary candidates vs. the

² Albeit with the handful of states exceptions, Louisiana being the most prominent, with run-off primaries.

³ This version of our analysis is quite preliminary for two reasons. First, it employs only the results of only *the first surface mail survey* of expert respondents in the 50 states. We subsequently emailed the 1500 respondent set with an emailed round of the survey instrument, and we then sent out a 2nd round of surface mail questionnaires. We have not yet incorporated these last two waves into our current data set. Second, our exit poll analysis is limited to the 1990 to 2000 biennial polls. We expect to update the data set with the 2002, 2004 and 2006 exit polls this summer. We hope that subsequent versions of the paper with updated data according to the above will be presented at the forthcoming Southern and Midwestern meetings.

⁴ See Squires and Fastnow (1994) for analysis of voters' judgments of governors.

party's eventual nominee genuinely should separate candidates. Ideological distinctions may well serve as a proxy distinction for any number of other divisions – In Illinois, for example, ideology is also a proxy for regional and urban-rural distinctions.⁵

Our argument is simple: If the losing primary candidate is more moderate than the winner, the party potentially loses votes of the moderate party faithful as well as “independents” to the now, possibly more adjacent, other-party candidate, and the divisive primary is harmful. The rational behavior of the opposing party's candidate is to exploit the ideological position of the winner by aggressively moving towards the middle in hopes of capturing defecting other-party partisans. If the loser is the more extreme, the impact of division is attenuated as the more extreme voters still remain closer to the winning party-moderate candidate – their N-th choice, nevertheless, still preferred relative to the other party's candidate. Note that while general election abstention remains a rational strategy for the disgruntled voter at the edge, we do not test for such behavior.

Our two-party system encapsulates many interests within each party, creating for each party broad coalitions of like and not-so-like-minded individuals. Within these pluralistic party environments, modern primary candidates come to represent coalitions of different fragments. Two or more candidates battling for a piece of the party's base may reflect cleavages and therefore reinforce differences, but conflict between them may also create new, deep divisions within the party that are difficult to bridge or even paper over. Further, the mere fact of division tarnishes the image of the winner with the general public. According to conventional wisdom, a candidate who has faced such a divisive primary is disadvantaged against one who has “swept” through the primary process. There may be an attenuating corollary: When both parties' nominees face divisive primaries, the effects may be offset and nullified.⁶

⁵ For example, in the 2002 Illinois Democratic gubernatorial primary, the southern Illinoisan candidate was the quite conservative (and winner) Glenn Poshard who competed against the more liberal Chicagoan, Illinois' Attorney General and Black candidate, Roland Burris, and the Chicago-Daley machine-candidate, John Schmidt, and a former U.S. Attorney, Jim Burns.

⁶ It is not at all clear to us that divisive primaries in America's two parties will have symmetrical impacts. One straightforward hypothesis is that division within the more pluralistic of the two parties -- the Democratic Party as the party of minorities in Axelrod's terms (1972) -- might generate more intra-party contests and find such contests creating and reinforcing greater cleavages, thus making reconciliation more difficult. Consistent with this, Kenney and Smith (1987) find that Republican divisions are less consequential at the general election time than Democratic Party contests.

Conceptualizing the nature of the divisive primary and its effects

A simple four-fold distinction of primary elections may be useful:

Type I: Conventional wisdom claims that divisive primaries are harmful.

Type II: Under some conditions, divisive primaries can help candidates. For example, the Gore-Bradley contest had a certain degree of divisiveness which may have (1) sharpened Al Gore's message, (2) toughened up his organization, (3) pointed out issues that might be persuasive and winning in the general election contest, and (4) left the centrist candidate (Gore) in the race.

Type III: Still, there is a further argument, that easy victories may, paradoxically, be *unhelpful*.

No primary or an easy primary may not vet potential nominees and leave them open as easy prey for a skilled general election opponent.

Type IV: Conventional belief argues that Type IV elections are the typical. An easy primary win leads to (1) large amounts of cash raised and saved for the general election, (2) time and person-power to create a well-trained organization, (3) the time necessary to put together large numbers of supporters, and (4) the build-up of creative tensions leading to general election hopes of victory.

Figure 1: Classes of Primary Elections

	Harmful	Helpful
Close/Divisive Primary	I The conventional wisdom	II The counter-intuitive wisdom.
Not Close/ Not Divisive Primary	III The unlikely prospect.	IV The typical primary and general election result.

We focus on Type I primaries while being attentive to the party, context, and candidate differences that lead to other types. The following is a series of hypotheses regarding when and under what conditions divisive primaries actually damage general election candidacies.

(1) The baseline divisive-primary hypothesis is that as the number of candidates for a party's nomination increases, say, by a simple count of candidates receiving 10% or more of the primary votes indicating real, imagined, or created divisions, so does the damage to the party's

subsequent chances and the eventual nominee's percentage of the two-party general election vote. A corollary is that as the fraction of the primary election vote represented by the winner drops -- the simple percentage of the winner's primary vote variable -- so do that party's and nominee's votes and November chances diminish. And, as the margin of victory between the nominee and the second place finisher shrinks, the party's willingness to rally around the nominee decreases, as does the public's trust in the nominee. A further corollary suggests that division is a function not only of the number of candidates, but also their respective "shares" of the vote. We utilize the "inverse of the Hirschman-Herfindahl index" to measure the N of candidates weighted by their vote shares.⁷ We hypothesize that each of these "divisiveness" variables will be negatively related, for Republican primaries, to the Republican percentage of the two party general election vote, and for Democratic primaries, positively related to the Republican vote. We test for each variant of the primary divisiveness hypothesis.

(2) The spatial distribution of candidates matters in two ways. (1) The more extreme the primary winner is in a simple spatial sense, the more likely it is that moderate voters will defect to the other party's candidate in the general election. A divisive primary with less damaging consequences occurs when the victor represents a more centrist position relative to the opponent and to the general voting population. In order to assess the spatial positions of gubernatorial primary candidates, we conducted a two-wave mailed questionnaire and a one-wave email survey of about 1500 academics, party leaders, activists, and journalists in the states to gain insider judgments regarding relative spatial positions. A sample of the survey instrument appears in Appendix 1, and an interesting, albeit preliminary (see fn. 3) table of the expert-responder-assessed "liberalism-conservatism" scores for American governors from 1990 to 2006 appears in Appendix 2.⁸ We also obtained the experts' spatial estimates of the primary candidates in each party from 1990 to 2006. The spatial distribution variable is simply the mean

⁷ The $1/HHI$ is the inverse of the sum of the squares of the candidates' vote shares. An example: In the 1992 New Hampshire Democratic primary, the winner, Arnie Arnesen, gained 27.7% of the vote, while Norm d'Amours earned 27.3 and Ned Helms won 22.4% with the rest split among other candidates. The resulting HHI score = $1/((.275^2) + (.273^2) + (.224^2) + (.22^2)) = 3.96$. When one candidate wins all of the primary vote the $HHI = 1$. In our data set, at the plausible upper limit of, say, five candidates more or less splitting the vote evenly, the HHI approaches 4.99.

⁸ The complete raw data set will be available shortly in the TOADS file at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~rwinters/> as TOADSgov.txt in a comma delimited simple text file and TOADSgov.xls in an Excel file. The data is discussed in TOADSgovREADME.txt.

estimate of our respondents' judgments regarding each candidate in each party's primary for each election from 1990 to 2000 for each state. Thus, the greater the distance between the nominated candidate of either party and the most "moderate" alternative, the greater the divisiveness and the greater the impact on the general election outcome. (2) We also argue that as the number of candidates in a primary grows and as the linear distances between them grows, the greater the emotional "ideological arousal" that is generated among voters and the greater the ideological sensitivity to ideology and the greater the likelihood of voter defection to the other part or rejection by not voting of the more moderate voters.

3) Finally, we expect that, *ceteris paribus*, the more ideologically divisive the primary in the above ways, the greater the perverse impact on the vote decision of more moderate party identifiers. For Republicans, if the winning candidate emerging from a primary contest is scored as "most conservative" by our expert respondents, we would expect that self-described Republican "moderate" and "liberal" voters would more likely defect with liberals defecting at greater rates than moderates.⁹ Similarly, we expect that moderate and conservative Democrats will also be affected by the nomination of the more extreme Democratic candidate and to respond accordingly by defecting to the Republican Party at heightened rates.

The "divisive primary" hypothesis

The "divisive primary hypothesis" has its origins in an engaging 1965 analysis by Andrew Hacker, then of Cornell University. It subsequently provoked a modest cottage-industry of analysts who examined the hypothesis and came to various conclusions (Piereson and Smith, 1975; Bernstein, 1977; Born, 1981; Kenney and Rice, 1984; Kenney and Rice, 1987). Hacker examined 220 senatorial and gubernatorial elections in states with competitive party systems, and of these, 126 had one or more primaries with divisions -- in his dichotomous definition winning with less than 65% of the primary vote. Hacker discovered that, for governors, divisive primaries were, more often than not, followed by defeat, yet these office-seekers stood a better chance relative to their senatorial competitors. This appeared likely due to divisions in gubernatorial primaries, which often reflected the weaknesses of the opposing incumbent who was running unchallenged. That is to say, intra-party division simply reflected the eager, large

⁹ We exploit the biennial 1990 – 2000 VNS exit polls to gain purchase on voters' behaviors.

crowd of those questing to take on a weakened incumbent or other-party likely nominee. A further dampening of the effects of "division" is that primary contests more likely occur in the majority party in states. And while division more likely dampens the chances of "challengers" or candidates in open seat races, primary division in races with gubernatorial incumbents is more often than not consequential (5 of 9 incumbents who were challenged subsequently lost). Hacker concludes that the fate of those with or without divisive primaries "would have been much the same even if they had had no difficulties at all in securing their nominations" (110). Piereson and Smith (1975) reaffirmed these findings for non-Southern gubernatorial races from 1903-1968. On the other hand, Bernstein (1977), in a re-analysis of Hacker's data, concludes that division within the stronger party is more frequent (reflecting the belief in heightened prospects for victory) and especially harmful, which, counterintuitively, thus strengthens the less strong of the two parties (544).

Hacker's 1965 analysis was limited to cross-tabular evaluations of election outcomes using simple dichotomous variables. The post-1965 flourishing of quantitative analysis pushed the divisive primary hypothesis into other analytic directions. Johnson and Gibson (1974) discovered that divisive primaries in an Iowa congressional race did, indeed, alienate citizen-activists mobilized on behalf of the losing candidates, thus attenuating resources available to the winner. What is unclear to us from their accounts, however, is, whether given the limited samples of races, the fact of a hard-fought primary also engaged and mobilized new, counter-active activists on behalf of the winner, thus rendering the net effects of division uncertain. Comer (1976) examined county chair activities in gubernatorial and senatorial primary and general election races in Ohio and rediscovered the mixed nature of the outcome of primary division on activities in the general election.

Born (1981) transforms the hypothesis into a more general quantitative form. Division can be thought of quantitatively: winning by 80% is different from 65% which is different from 51%. Further, Born brings more powerful statistical methods to bear, and he alerts us that while causation may run from primary division to diminished general election support, a moment's reflection would also suggest that the prospects for victory, that is to say, the prospect of winning big in November, ought to bring out more primary contestants to compete for the looming prize

– the low-hanging political fruit. Born echoes some of the endogeneity arguments by arguing that crowded primaries may be a harbinger of winning “big” for the primary victor of the now-seen-to-be-advantaged party. The severe weaknesses that some incumbents have may bring on many other-party primary challenges, and thus exacerbate divisions (e.g. in Illinois gubernatorial politics, the numerous prospective challengers to ex-incumbent George Ryan), yet bring a subsequent general election loss that would have happened irrespective of the number and contestation in either party primary challenges. Nevertheless, Born’s more sophisticated measurements at the Congressional level bring precious little comfort to the divisiveness hypothesis: He concludes that “primary divisiveness leads only to minor electoral damage” (660).

Kenny and Rice (1984) extend the quantitative analysis of gubernatorial primaries, and after controlling for other-party divisiveness, the South, incumbency, a “normal vote” proxy, and dichotomous variables for Democratic “swing” or bonus years, discover that the benefit of an unchallenged primary victory for the Democratic nominee, that is to say, 100% of the vote vs. a 50% win, was only a 3% bonus at general election time -- hardly a resounding verdict for the impact of division. In addition, the impact of division in Republican gubernatorial ranks was almost zero. Their 1987 article extends the analysis by grounding their theoretical expectations in small group theory. They also extend the generalization to presidential primaries and presidential general election results in the states. Their object is to examine the interaction of the two parties’ primaries. When one party has no division (a one-candidate primary) and the other has a bitter primary, then a mathematical composite variable indicates a substantial bonus for the favored candidate/party. They note, as well, the implications for actually “winning” the general election contest in 1976. Had Gerald Ford “...been unchallenged for the Republican nomination [by Ronald Reagan] he would have won five more states in November, . . . easily enough to carry the Republican ticket to victory (44).”

Berry and Canon’s more recent contribution (1993) focused on the origins, not the consequences, of division. They argue that division likely results “when a single party is dominant in a state, [thus] it is likely that all electoral competition will be channeled through its primary By contrast, when the opposition party is competitive, the number of serious candidates for a party’s

nomination should be fewer” (455). They contrasted this with the structure hypothesis: primary competition is greater in states that hold “double primaries,” those with run-off elections.

Ware’s review (1976) of the generalization is the most interesting, but least-known and, therefore, least-appreciated treatment. Ware draws an analogy between primary election battles and rugby semi-final matches -- merely looking at the final numbers is an inaccurate picture of what really took place. A close victory may be damaging, however it may also be beneficial in terms of focusing an organization (382). Examples exist of close primary races that have helped focus and organize political campaigns, and there are examples of easy primaries followed by smashing general election defeats. Ware points out certain circumstances where a close primary is beneficial. A close primary can force a campaign to develop better organizational skills or focus on a “winning issue” (383). Not only will that winning idea push the candidate into the general election, but it will also be an advantage to the nominee in the general election.

Further, while primaries run the gamut in terms of divisiveness, they are all characterized by certain resources and finite opportunities. Ware focuses his attention on the allocation of post-primary “resources.” According to Ware, such resource allocation is of greater concern than the statistical observations associated with the study of primaries. “In an obvious sense, a divisive primary is one that leads to a close result, but in themselves such primaries are of little interest to political scientists. Rather, political scientists should be concerned with primaries that are divisive in the sense of redistributing the victor’s potential resources to the benefit of his opponents at the general election.” Electoral scandal, timing of the election, ideological positions of candidates, name recognition, organizational skills, and campaign money are resources and have an impact on the general election fates of the nominees. For our purposes, we focus on two important resources that candidates bring to the general election that should be affected by qualities of their primary contests: their intra- and inter-party ideological position.

Measurement of, data for, and models of the divisive primary

We first test our hypotheses on an aggregate data set of 210 elections from 1990 to 2000.¹⁰

¹⁰ We do not include general elections in which an “independent” or “third-party” candidate received more than twenty percent of the vote, specifically:

Figure 1 displays the simplest “baseline” model of the expected Republican vote for governor. As the “Republican quality” of the candidates increases, Republican support is expected to rise and to decline appropriately for “Democratic high-quality” candidates. To quantify political experience, we modified Squire's candidate quality scores (1992). Our modifications spread the quality range by increasing the differential between certain offices.¹¹ We multiplied the office ranking by the proportion of the state electorate represented by the office, e.g. Governor = 100; State Senator = 1/n of State Senate, U.S. House member = 1/n of state’s House delegation, etc. State senate and House leaders were coded with an electorate multiplier of 100% of the state National and state economic conditions are critical in predicting the expected distribution of the vote (Chubb 1988; Kone and Winters 1993; Stein 1990; Atkeson and Partin 1995). We include measures of national economic performance: the percent change in the national unemployment rate and the national real disposable income per capita are measures of the condition of the national economy in the data set. Both of these measures are multiplied by the party of the sitting president (+1 for Republican presidents, -1 for Democratic administrations).

AK, 1990 election; HA, 1994 election; IL, 2006 election; KY, 1999 election; ME, 1994, 1998 and 2006 elections; MN, 1998 and 2002 elections; NY, 1990 and 2002 elections; OK, 1994 and 2002 elections; PA, 1998 election; TX, 2006 election; and WI, 2002 election.

¹¹ The quality rankings are as follows:

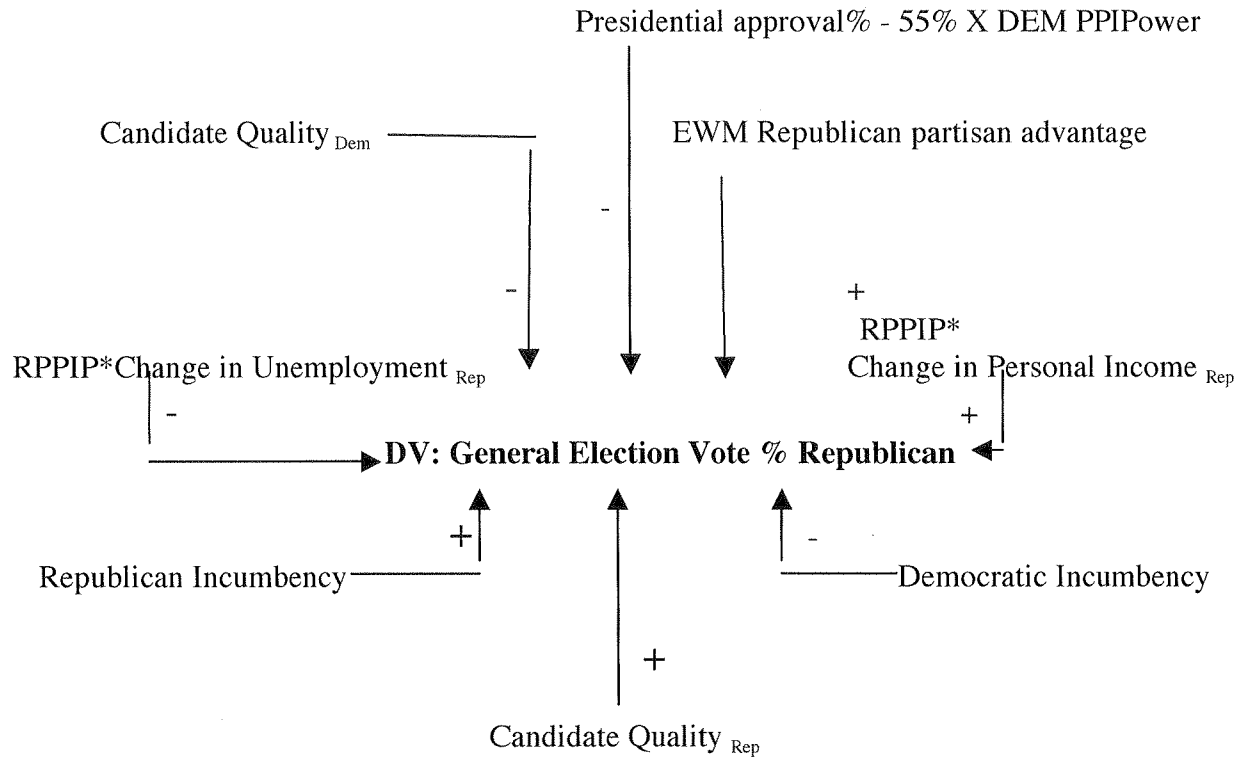
7.5 =	incumbent governor or former governor,
6 =	US Senator,
5.75 =	lieutenant governor or attorney general,
5.25 =	secretary of state, or state treasurer,
5 =	U.S. Representative,
4.5 =	state senator,
4 =	state representatives or state party chairs,
3.5 =	mayors of large cities within the state,
3 =	other statewide elected officials,
2 =	locally elected executive officials,
1 =	other local, elected positions,
0 =	no elective political experience.

electorate.¹² The presence of a Democratic incumbent seeking re-election, coded as "1," and all others coded as "0," should be negatively related to the Republican vote. Conversely, Republican incumbency ought to be positively related to the Republican percentage of the vote. The electorate of each state has an expected partisan division, a proxy for the individual-level estimation of a "normal vote." The Republican partisan advantage variable is the electoral year percent Republican by state as calculated using the Erikson-Wright-McIver data files.¹³ We also include the Gallup 3rd quarter presidential approval score minus 55 and weighted by the "Democratic president in power" index.

¹² We multiplied the "office score" by the proportion (e.g. 100 for an office that has a state electorate base of 100% of the state) so that final candidate quality numbers range from 0 to 750. The finely delineated classifications of the upper level statewide elected positions -- lieutenant governor and attorney general, secretary of state and state treasurer -- are approximations devised to capture the relative frequency that the occupants of those offices pursue the governorship and the relative prestige of those offices. We believe that the lieutenant governorship and the attorney generalship are offices which offer better political positioning for a gubernatorial run than those of state treasurer and secretary of state. However, all four positions have substantial advantages statewide, thus their positioning between US Senator and US Representative. Squire allowed former governors and US Senators to retain their ranking past the normal two-year cutoff point, considering the residual prestige and significance of those offices. We broadened that group to include US Representatives as well as the statewide elective offices mentioned above. In our subsequent regressions, we tested quality effects simply by using the "office scores," but neither set of variables worked well in explaining general election successes.

¹³ Accessed at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~wright1/>.

Figure 1: Basic model with Economy & Candidate Quality



Measures of primary divisiveness: In Figure 2, we present our argument about the nature of intra-party primary competition and the general election vote. (1) The simple presence of a competitor in the primary contests ought to affect the Republican margin of the general election vote – negatively so for Republican primaries and positively so for Democratic primary contests. (2) As the number of Democratic primary aspirants exceeding 10% of the primary vote grows, indicating increasing divisiveness, the Republican margin in the general election ought to increase; and, conversely so, for Republican number of competitors. (3) As the percentage gained by the Democratic victor grows, indicating intra-party agreement, then that should elevate Democratic vote-getting and dampen Republican results. As the percentage of Republican primary vote gained by the winner rises, final Republican efforts will be helped; high margins of Republican primary victories will boost Republican chances in November. (4) However, as the distances between the top two Democratic or top two Republican primary vote-getters shrink, so then should the Republican general election vote be positively or negatively affected. (5) Finally, primary division is fundamentally driven by two separate variables: the numbers of candidates and their vote shares. We employ the inverse of the Hirschman-Herfindahl index to join these traits into one measure.

Figure 2 folds our five measures of primary divisiveness into the baseline model above.

Figure 2: Measures of primary divisiveness and general election performance

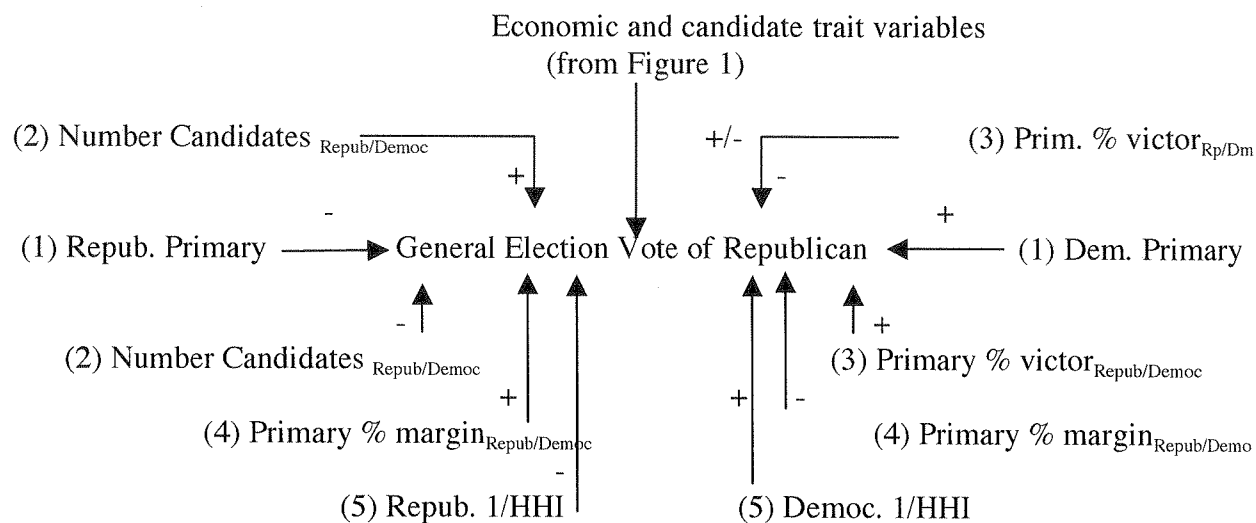


Table 1 assesses our tests of these simple hypotheses of the effects of primary divisiveness on the vote. Column (1) presents the expected directions of the coefficients. Column (2) presents the results of the simple baseline model as presented in Figure 1 above. As the Republican fraction of the state electorate rises, so also does electoral support for the Republican gubernatorial candidate. Also, not surprisingly, if the Republican candidate is the incumbent, the office-holding itself appears to endow the candidate with a 10% vote gain. Percentage general election support for the Republican nominee, the dependent variable here, is paralleled by a lesser vote loss if the Democratic nominee is the incumbent. The asymmetry in vote gain/loss by party incumbency repeats itself throughout our results. While each of the coefficients measuring the effects of having a “high quality candidate” from each of the two parties has the expected sign, neither is significant. Nor are the effects of economic performance, again with each measure – real, disposable personal income per capita and change in unemployment – neither having the expected sign. Having high presidential approval for the Democratic president or low approval ratings for Republican presidents helps/hurts the Republican gubernatorial candidate.

The results of these five different measures are serially assessed in equations (3) through (7) in Table 1. Our results are generally favorable to the expectations regarding the “divisive primary hypothesis,” albeit with attenuated results in many instances. The simple existence of any

primary competitor, on balance costs the two-party nominee about 2% to 2.5% of the expected fall vote, per equation (3). A measure of the total number of serious primary candidates (10% or more of the primary vote) also is correctly signed, but falls well short of statistical significance.¹⁴ Equation (5) tests for the impact of primary closeness. Again, the expected effects occur, but with high standard errors. The expected opposing signs appear for the measure of the winners' margins – high primary margins help the candidates in each party.

The inverse of the Hirschman-Herfindahl index (1/HHI) probably best captures the correlated traits among the measures of primary divisiveness -- the numbers of candidates and vote margins. Here the results also are weakly supportive of the divisiveness hypothesis. How to account for the relatively weak results? Divisive primaries hurt, but hurt marginally so, and at modest to almost imperceptible rates. Indeed the rates are sufficiently low to lead to the following conjecture: The negative divisive primary effects are consistent with a “just appreciable difference” effect – the effects of divisive primaries are overcome by efforts -- “spatial adjustments,” money, and “rally round the nominee” efforts by the nominee and his/her party in the general election contest to the extent necessary to win the general election. Put differently: (1) We have little or no evidence that the divisive-primary-endorsed nominee, in fact, suffers a general election defeat; and, (2) if the nominee is winning the general election, why bother to spend scarce “political capital” to overcome the last vestiges of a divisive primary? Still differently put, most primary divisiveness tests invariably look at the general election aggregate percentage results, as we do, i.e. the “Republican general election percentage of the vote.” The issue for the nominee is generally not “my percentage,” but “my winning.” And, there is precious little evidence that division in the primaries *ever cost the nominee the general election contest*. Why? Just enough sufficient efforts are committed to overcome the divisiveness burden.

¹⁴ Of the 210 primaries in each party, only 68 were uncontested (at the 10% level or greater) in the Republican Party and 78 contests among the Democrats.

Table 1:
The impacts of divisive primaries on gubernatorial election outcomes, 1990-2006

Variable	(1) Expected value	(2) Baseline	(3) A primary	(4) N of candidates	(5) Prim. closeness	(6) Vote margin	(7) 1/HHI
EWM 1990-2006 Repub. Partisans	(+)	0.27** (0.08)	0.29** (0.08)	0.29** (0.09)	0.29** (0.08)	0.26** (0.08)	0.32** (0.08)
Republican incumbent	(+)	10.1** (1.63)	9.35** (1.66)	9.59** (1.70)	9.72** (1.64)	10.09** (1.64)	9.05** (1.64)
Democratic incumbent	(-)	-6.08** (1.62)	-4.93** (1.69)	-5.53** (1.70)	-5.83** (1.65)	-6.21** (1.63)	-5.09** (1.64)
Republican candidate quality X size	(+)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Democratic candidate quality X size	(-)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Real disp. pers. income X RPPIP	(+)	15.29 (25.09)	17.72 (24.91)	14.43 (25.1)	18.08 (25.09)	13.20 (25.25)	21.33 (24.79)
Change in Unemployment X RPPIP	(-)	-0.86 (1.60)	-0.92 (1.60)	-0.92 (1.62)	-0.87 (1.60)	-0.66 (1.61)	-0.37 (1.59)
Presid. approval X DEMPPIP	(-)	-0.14* (0.07)	-0.14** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.07)	-0.15** (0.07)	-0.16** (0.07)	-0.16** (0.07)
Republican primary competitors	(-)	--	-2.54* (1.37)	--	--	--	--
Democratic primary competitors	(+)	--	2.26* (1.29)	--	--	--	--
N of Repub. primary competitors	(-)	--	--	-0.85 (0.77)	--	--	--
N of Democ. Primary competitors	(+)	--	--	0.63 (0.74)	--	--	--
Republican Primary closeness	(-)	--	--	--	-0.038 (0.025)	--	--
Republican Primary closeness	(+)	--	--	--	0.019 (0.025)	--	--
Repub. prim. winner's vote margin	(+)	--	--	--	--	.031 (0.026)	--
Democ. prim. winner's vote margin	(-)	--	--	--	--	-0.029 (.025)	--
1/HHI Repub. primary fractionalization	(-)	--	--	--	--	--	-1.73* (0.60)
1/HHI Democ. primary fractionalization	(+)	--	--	--	--	--	0.98 (0.67)
Constant		40.05** (3.29)	39.50** (3.45)	39.48** (3.47)	40.90** (4.45)	40.55** (4.19)	40.18** (3.76)
Std. error		.44	.45	.44	.45	.46	.46
Adj R ² =		210	210	210	210	210	210
N =							

One tailed t tests: * sig. at .05; ** sig at .01

Our fundamental hypotheses examine the impact of two contingent conditions of primary divisions on the general election outcome: (1) the greater the “extremism” of the major party nominee relative to his/her primary contestants, the greater the vote loss in the general election; and (2) as the spatial distances among all primary contestants grow in absolute size, the greater the “ideological arousal” among primary contestants, and the greater their willingness to abandon the extreme candidate.

Table 2 tests for these effects in the aggregate data set across the 1990-2006 period (columns (1) and (3)) and among the general election contests that, in fact, had contested primaries, columns ((2) and (4)). We continue to employ our control variables of average percentage Republican across the time period as calculated according to the Erikson-Wright-McIver data set, the two party incumbency variables, the two party candidate qualities adjusted by constituency size, income, unemployment, and presidential approval rates adjusted by the Democratic presidential party in control variables. These variables perform more or less consistently with those in Table 1.

We add another pair of control variables: the “signed value in the Republican and Democratic candidate’s ideologies as scored by our panel of “experts.” The signed values for the Republican candidates run from the low values indicating moderation to high positive values for candidate conservatism. In column (1), as the Republican candidates grow in conservatism, this acts to dampen their general election results. These results are especially powerful for Democrats, signed so that positive values indicate candidate moderation. As the Democratic candidates grow in moderation, this spatial effect dampens Republican vote getting.

Our interests, however, are with the next set of variables, namely the distance between the nominees of each of the two parties and their most moderate primary alternative. For Republicans, this absolute value variable runs from 0 to 3 indicating that the greatest distance among contested primaries appeared to be a contest between a candidate right at the “middle” spatial mark vs. the nominee at the most conservative mark of value “3.” For Democrats, the range runs from 0.0 to 3.82 indicating that some Democratic nominee(s) at the most liberal end of the spectrum had primary contestants that were to the right of the “middle” mark, i.e. the difference between a “-1” and a “2.82.” When the winning candidate was to the left of the

primary alternatives for the Republican party and to the right of the alternatives for the Democrats, the nominee was scored as a “0.” All unchallenged candidates were also scored as “0.” Our hypotheticals suggest that as conservative Republican candidates grow in distance from his/her more moderate primary alternative, more moderate Republican voters will defect to the Democratic party, thereby costing candidate votes. The sign of the variable should be negative. Similarly, for the Democratic party nominee, as the candidate grows in extremism relative to alternatives, this should help the Republican rival – the variable should be signed positively. The hypotheses are sustained for the Democrats, albeit at insignificant statistical levels, and contrary signed for Republicans.

Columns (3) examines this same relationship for those general election contests where a contested primary was held. Our universe of contests shrinks to 76, but the same relationships hold for our variables of interests. Note however that the “incumbency variables” behave as expected – each shrinks in size and with larger standard errors.

Columns (3) and (4) examine our “ideological arousal” hypothesis. As the number and ideological distances between candidates increase in a party’s primary, voters become aware of and “aroused” by the ideological choices, and are more likely then to defect or abstain. Large ideological variability appears to have no impact on the Republican outcome, but does appear to have a mobilizing effect advantaging Democrats – contrary to expectations. Our initial tests of our ideological hypotheses are not particularly encouraging.

Table 2:
The impacts of divisive primaries on gubernatorial election outcomes, 1990-2006

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	All states/all time	Contested Primaries only,	All states/ all times	Contested primaries only
	Linear distance	Linear Distances	Sum of var.	Sum of variability
	N = 189	N= 86	N = 175	N = 76
<hr/>				
Variable				
1) EWM 1990-2006 Repub. Partisans (+)	0.45** (0.09)	0.51** (0.11)	0.458** (0.09)	0.53** (0.12)
2) Republican incumbent (+)	9.17** (1.69)	4.93* (2.43)	9.02** (1.75)	4.51* (2.59)
3) Democratic incumbent (-)	05.53** (1.63)	-2.46 (2.65)	-4.79** (1.74)	-0.39 (2.85)
4) Republican candidate qualityXsize (+)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
5) Democratic candidate qualityXsize (-)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
6) Real disp. pers. incomeXPPIP (+)	25.43 (24.46)	53.46* (34.69)	36.82 (26.93)	49.68 (38.05)
7) Change in UnemploymentXPPIP (-)	0.04 (1.66)	-0.56 (2.19)	0.17 (1.76)	-1.16 (2.47)
8) Presidential approval XDEMPPIP (-)	-1.38* (0.08)	-0.07 (0.1)	-0.14* (0.08)	-0.03 (0.12)
9) Repub. candidate conservatism (-)	-1.19* (0.84)	-1.14 (1.11)	-1.53* (0.91)	-0.64 (1.28)
10) Democ. candidate's moderation (-)	-2.46** (0.76)	-3.01** (1.04)	-1.93** (0.82)	-3.2** (1.28)
11) Linear distance for Republicans(-)	0.85 (1.65)	1.08 (1.81)	0.91 (1.69)	0.84 (1.88)
12) Linear distance for Democrats (+)	1.69 (1.40)	1.21 (1.51)	1.56 (1.49)	0.63 (1.59)
13) Sum of ABS Repub. Variability (-)	--	--	-0.55 (0.63)	0.26 (0.77)
14) Sum of ABS Democ. Variability (+)	--	--	0.24 (0.71)	-1.11** (0.85)
Constant	31.15**	27.92**	31.60**	26.16**
Std. error	(4.06)	(5.11)	(4.29)	(5.69)
Adjusted R-squared	0.49	0.44	0.47	0.43

One tailed t tests: * sig. at .05; ** sig at .01

The individual level analysis: We have six biennial VNS exit poll surveys (1990 – 2000) available to us to conduct an individual-level logit analysis. Our dependent variable remains Republican-signed, a value of “1” equalling the decision to cast a Republican gubernatorial vote, 0, otherwise. We include a number of “usual suspect” control variables (nos. (1) through (10)) of incumbencies, party identification, male, and Black binaries, real family income, political ideology binaries, and a year count.

We look at only the two primary divisiveness variables that were significant in the aggregate analysis – the existence of a primary contest in each of the two parties, where the cutoff point is 10% or more of the vote and the inverse of Hirschman-Herfindahl index. We include in column (1) our expectation as to the direction of the coefficient. As usual with this sized-N, most of our coefficients for the control variables are highly significant. Variable (11) and (14) are binaries for the existence of a contested primary, and each is significant and in the appropriate directions. Having a contested Republican primary dampens a Republican vote choice, but a Democratic primary elevates such a choice. We are interested in the interactions between these aggregate binaries and voters’ own party and ideological claims about self. Variables (12) and (13) and (15) and (16) control for the particular voter combinations, i.e. being a Republican and a “moderate” in philosophical beliefs. Variables (17) and (18) for the Republicans and (19) and (20) test for the effects of having a contested party primary and being a party members interacted with ideology. We expect that Republican moderates and liberals would more likely defect in the case of a contested Republican primary, but there is little evidence of such. Oppositely, we would expect that Democratic moderate and conservatives would more likely defect in the presence of a Democratic primary contest, and we discover the opposite – lesser support for the Republican alternative when there is a Democratic contest.

Column (3) of Table 3 assesses the second divisiveness hypothesis, also interacted for party and philosophy. We obtain similar weak results for three of the four interaction terms. Again, Democratic moderates in the general election following a divisive primary are less likely to defect to the Republican alternative. This may be due to the ideological distribution of the candidates themselves, a subject that we now turn to in the next section.

Table 3: The impact of divisive primaries on individual voting behaviors

Variable	(1)	A primary competitor (2)	1/HHI (3)
1) Rep Incumbent	(+)	0.47** (0.01)	0.55** (0.01)
2) Dem. Incumbent	(-)	-0.37** (0.02)	-0.36** (0.02)
3) Republican	(+)	1.15** (0.02)	1.15** (0.02)
4) Democrat	(-)	-1.10** (0.02)	-1.09** (0.02)
5) Male	(+)	0.07** (0.01)	0.07** (0.01)
6) Black	(-)	-37.79** (0.03)	-1.06** (0.03)
7) Income	(+)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
8) Conservative	(+)	0.69** (0.02)	0.68** (0.02)
9) Liberal	(-)	-0.58** (0.02)	-0.58** (0.03)
10) Year	(+)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
11) Rep. Primary Competitor/REP1/HHI	(-)	-0.23** (0.01)	-0.15** (0.01)
12) <i>RepMod</i>	(+)	0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)
13) <i>RepLib</i>	(+)	0.18** (0.09)	0.21** (0.09)
14) Dem. Primary Competitor/DEM1/HHI	(+)	0.16** (0.02)	0.04** (0.01)
15) <i>DemMod</i>	(-)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.17** (0.05)
16) <i>DemCon</i>	(-)	-0.11* (0.06)	-0.24** (0.08)
17) <i>REPComp*RepMod</i>	(-)	0.01 (0.04)	--
18) <i>REPComp*RepLib</i>	(-)	-0.03 (0.10)	--
19) <i>DEMComp*DemMod</i>	(+)	-0.08* (0.04)	--
20) <i>DEMComp*DemCon</i>	(+)	-0.17** (0.06)	--
21) <i>REPrep*1/HHI*RepMod</i>	(-)	--	0.02 (0.02)
22) <i>REPrep*1/HHI *RepLib</i>	(-)	--	-0.03 (0.54)
23) <i>REPrep*1/HHI *DemMod</i>	(+)	--	0.11** (0.04)
24) <i>REPrep*1/HHI *DemCon</i>	(+)	--	-0.01 (0.06)
Constant:		-0.39 (3.82)	

Pseudo R²= 0.23; Log Likelihood=-78884 Pseudo R²= 0.23; Log Likelihood=-78829
 N = 210 contests and 148,540 voters. *=significant at the 0.05 level, **=significant at the 0.01 level; all using a one tailed t-test. Dependent variable = vote for Republican gubernatorial candidate

Our simplest test is to examine once all gubernatorial contests with the usual controls imposed, i.e. variables (1) through (10) alongside a number of contingent conditions that are established via binary variables. In Table 4 we include a binary variable for a primary contest in each of the two parties' primaries (variables (11) and (14)), and we include binaries for each of the hypothetical voter party/philosophical conditions, i.e. "RepMod" for all Republican identifiers who also profess to be ideological moderates. We include the linear measure of candidate extremism established in absolute values – the larger the Republican value in variable (19) the more conservative and distant from his/her most moderate primary rival and the opposing measure for the increasing liberalism of Democratic candidates is (19).

Our control variables all behave as expected, as do the binary variables for the existence of primary contests in the two parties. Republican contests dampen Republican general election vote-getting, while Democratic primaries assist Republican candidates. Republican liberal and moderate voters vote Republican and the opposite is true for Democratic moderates and conservatives. Variable (18) assesses whether political spatial extremism of Republican candidates affects the general vote decision and the answer is generally, no. The sign is positive, indicating greater support, but the coefficient is not significant. The more extremely liberal the Democratic candidate is, generally, the more helped is his/her Republican opponent.

However, our interests rest with the last four variables – the two interaction terms between the two likely defecting Republican moderates and liberals X the linear candidate extremism variable, and with the mirrored two Democratic counterpart variables. Not entirely confirmatory results appear. Republican moderates, when confronted with a more conservative Republican nominee are not less likely to defect, but marginally (and trivially) more likely to support the candidate. Similarly, for Democrats, when confronted with a more leftist nominee, moderates are more likely to defect to the Republican Party (also quite modestly so), but conservative Democrats do not. The effects of these conditional variables are so small and sufficiently contradictory that we conclude that there is little support for our ideological understanding of primary elections.

Nevertheless, there are consequences on the individual voter of the presence of primary contests. In Table 2, the existence of a primary in the Republican Party importantly dampens voter enthusiasm for the GOP's candidate. Weaker, but complementary effects appear for the Democratic Primary. This generalized primary effect on the voter is confirmed in the effects of party primary fractionalization as measured by the inverse of the Hirschman-Herfindahl index, variables (11) and (14) in column 3. The same is true, but dampened in Table 4 which also measures the simple presence of a primary contest.

Three conclusions: First, there is evidence at the aggregate election level and at the individual voter level that divisive primaries do dampen the vote-getting of the afflicted party. The measure of the simple presence of a primary contest and the more complicated HHI measure suggests vote-dampening effects of primary contests. These aggregate results were mirrored in Tables 3 and 4 at the individual level, as well. Secondly, there appears to be little evidence for a spatial understanding of vote getting or losing in general elections following divisive primary contests. Extremist candidates at general election time did not appear to hazard the support of the more moderate party faithful. Finally, the existence of a primary contests with a wealth of ideologically-driven contests (as judged by our expert panelists) also failed to generate evidence of ideologically-driven vote-defection by voters at the subsequent general election.

Nevertheless, we remain confronted by the power of the simple measure of primary divisiveness on the vote. Division appears to affect the vote aggregates and voters; decision. We, however, appear to have failed in this first effort at testing an ideological explanation for these manifest divisive primary effects.

Table 4: The impact of divisive primaries and extremist candidates on individual voting behaviors

Variable	A primary Competitor	
	(1)	(2)
1) Rep Incumbent	(+)	0.43** (.015)
2) Dem. Incumbent	(-)	-0.39** (0.016)
3) Republican	(+)	1.16** (0.018)
4) Democrat	(-)	-1.11** (0.020)
5) Male	(+)	0.072** (0.012)
6) Black	(-)	-1.07** (0.029)
7) Income	(+)	0.001** (0.00)
8) Conservative	(+)	0.69** (0.02)
9) Liberal	(-)	-0.58** (0.02)
10) Year	(+)	-0.00 (0.00)
11) Rep. Primary Competitor/ 12) <i>RepMod</i>	(-)	--0.24** (0.014)
13) <i>RepLib</i>	(+)	0.028 (0.024)
14) Dem. Primary Competitor 15) <i>DemMod</i>	(+)	0.132 (0.060)
16) <i>DemCon</i>	(+)	0.0054** (0.015)
18) ABS*Extremist Repub candidate distance	(-)	-0.073** (0.029)
19) ABS*Extremist Democ. candidate distance	(-)	-0.232** (0.044)
17) <i>REPExtremist*RepMod</i>	(-)	0.025 0.019
18) <i>REPExtremist*RepLib</i>	(+)	0.150** (0.016)
19) <i>DEMExtremist*DemMod</i>	(-)	0.066* (0.037)
20) <i>DEMExtremist*DemCon</i>	(-)	0.096 (0.086)
Constant:	(+)	0.061** (0.027)
	(+)	-0.008 (0.042)
		-3.04 (3.86)

Pseudo R² = 0.23; Log Likelihood = -78364

N = 210 contests and 147,974 voters. * = significant at the 0.05 level, ** = significant at the 0.01 level; all using a one tailed t-test. Dependent variable = vote for Republican gubernatorial candidate

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