

THE OPEN PRIMARY:  
A PROCESS REPRESENTATIVE OF CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATES

By

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## I. Introduction

An interesting phenomenon with regards to voter affiliation in this country has been developing rapidly in recent years. As statistics on the website *IndependentVoter.org* state, registered independents and those who have declined to state an affiliation now comprise roughly 40 percent of the electorate in the United States. This number began its dramatic rise in the fifties, and has been gradually, if not exactly steadily, increasing since that time. In more recent years, the American public has appeared to become more and more disenfranchised with the two major parties. In a newly released article by Gallop Polls entitled “Americans Renew Call for Third Party,” research has demonstrated that “Americans' desires for a third political party are as high as they have been in seven years. Fifty-eight percent of Americans believe a third major political party is needed because the Republican and Democratic Parties do a poor job of representing the American people (Jones).” It appears that this emerging mentality discussed in the Gallop article is having numerous spillover effects within the American electorate.

Rare phenomena have occurred in this past midterm election. One such exceptional event took place within the Senatorial race in the state of Alaska. Incumbent Lisa Murkowski lost in the Republican Party primary to challenger Joe Miller, who was supported by the increasingly popular and debated Tea Party. After this occurred, she launched an aggressive write-in campaign in the general election. As a result of these efforts, she won, “making the election historic in that it was the first time a write-in candidate had defeated the official nominees of the Republicans and Democrats in 50 years (Martin).” Another interesting occurrence within the

midterm elections this past year is the rising success of the Tea Party movement. As stated in an ABC News report on the result of the 2010 elections, “One widely discussed effect of public disenchantment this year was the rise of the Tea Party political movement. In preliminary exit poll results, 41 percent of voters described themselves as supporters of this movement; 21 percent supported it strongly (Srikrishnan).” The authors of this report reference a number of rather surprising victories for candidates backed by this movement, the most notable being the defeat of Democratic incumbent Russ Feingold to Ron Johnson in Wisconsin’s Senatorial race.

What can stories like these really say about the current political climate in America? Arguably, public sentiment is slowly evolving with regards to the two main parties in our system. Shifts in political affiliation are becoming increasingly commonplace, as the electorate is becoming more and more hesitant to ally themselves with either the Democratic or Republican parties. As a result, the numbers of independent voters and non-affiliated voters is greater than ever. How does the public’s apparent disenfranchisement with the two party system relate to the issue of primaries?

According to *Fairvote.org*, an informational site dedicated to the sharing of electoral information, approximately twenty-six states hold closed primaries. Only eighteen states hold open primaries. The rest all utilize processes that are contorted by numerous special provisions. Essentially, in order for a candidate to meet with success in a primary election, he or she needs to appeal to the core of their party’s voters who are most likely to cast their vote. As states Karen Kaufmann in her

analysis of voter behavior in primaries, those who are on the more extreme end of a political party's spectrum are the most likely group to come out and vote on that day (Kaufmann). As a result, these politicians must appeal to this voting demographic by taking staunch positions that correlate to Democratic or Republican platforms so as to earn the votes of these strict party identifiers. Come general election time, however, these candidates find themselves in a predicament as they must now appeal to more moderate voters in order to stand a chance at electoral victory. This might call for drastic adjustments in how a campaign utilizes its resources, what messages and issues a candidate chooses to focus on, etc. Truly, the effects of a closed primary can have far-reaching consequences in the course of a candidate's journey to office. Because of the rise of the independent and non-affiliated voter in America, are closed primaries truly still the best option in today's political climate?

In this thesis, I argue that open primaries are, by their very nature, more wholly representative and democratic of a process than are closed primaries and thereby should have more widespread utilization. Considering that the majority of American voters hold moderate views and that the independent voting block is growing across the nation, candidates are forced to constantly pander to the more extreme party identifiers that are likely to vote in primaries is becoming counterintuitive. Open primaries would allow those not affiliated with either party to make their voices heard as early as possible in the election process. Candidates could then focus on one cohesive campaign strategy that would appeal to the moderate vote throughout the entire cycle, instead of obliging them to make numerous changes in their approach after winning a primary.

There have been a variety of studies completed by political scientists that delve deep into this very issue. With such an array of knowledge available to readers, it will be very valuable to create a thesis that can address and organize some of the existing ideas on this topic. In addition, I hope to add some strength to the arguments of the school of thought that supports open primaries on my own merits. The dialogue I hope to spur with this thesis is one that has always held some importance within the field of political science. Arguably now, however, is the time when such a topic is at its most critical. As much evidence can demonstrate, these past midterm elections help show the vastly changing mindset of the American electorate, and lend this thesis its topical nature and a sense of true immediacy.

In order for one to begin any discussion of the future of primary systems in the United States, it is important to first begin with a foundational in-depth analysis of Congress's structure. How does it work and operate in today's current political climate? What factors drive and shape the decisions and actions of its members? Why are these factors such important legislative motivators? Once this topic has been thoroughly discussed, the factors that inspire and incentivize legislative action need to be further analyzed in terms of the distinct role that the electoral system plays as an influence on congressional members. It is the logical next step to discuss how this complicated process affects the platforms and positions of candidates as they struggle to achieve electoral victory. How does the quest for success in an election or reelection bid impact a candidate both on the campaign trail and while holding political office? Lastly, the third aspect of this thesis will address the functions that both open and closed primaries play in this electoral process and in

turn, how that translates to effects on congressional candidates themselves. Does one system have a more positive impact on our current political climate than the other? I argue that one does, and in order to establish a foundation with which to support one over the other, there needs to be a direct comparison made between the repercussions of both systems of primary. I hope to successfully argue through careful discussion of each of these processes that open primaries are far better suited to today's changing political and ideological makeup than is the method of closed primaries.

## II. Congress: How It Operates

In accordance with the aforementioned outline, it is best to first consider Congress in terms of its most fundamental questions: how does it work as a legislative body and how are its members influenced while in office? To my mind, R. Douglas Arnold, in his book *The Logic of Congressional Action* does a solid job addressing this issue. As most of the American public knows, the elected members of both the Senate and House of Representatives comprise what is seen as the legislative, or law-making branch of our national government. These members can draft, revise, pass, veto, redraft, and vote for the bills that govern and regulate an incredibly diverse spectrum of influence on how our lives operate. Congress has been responsible for widespread, sweeping reforms to our nation's healthcare system, economy, educational structures, job markets, with the list going on and on. Congress is also instrumental to our nation's budgeting and foreign policy approaches. This broad description, while correct, does not, however, accurately portray the more commonplace day-to-day operations of Congress.

Arnold finds that congressional members spend the majority of their time in office working toward the passage of legislation that is tailored to either serve separate influential, organized interests or to deliver “narrowly targeted geographic benefits (3)” back to their voting constituencies. This is indeed, in its purest, most simplistic form, the function that Congress primarily serves on an everyday basis. After meeting with a successful outcome following the oftentimes rigorous election process, congressional members tend to focus the majority of their attention on sending financial support and other resources back into their districts to maintain the support and the goodwill that got them elected in the first place. The times when the actions of Congress are completely tied up in battles over national reforms are somewhat rare. Therefore, a primary motivator for congressional actors becomes that of taking care of those who voted, or will vote, for them during election time. Because it is in this way that Congress members spend so much of their time in office, it is blatantly apparent that how these voting constituencies operate truly affects how Congress itself operates.

In an influential book by political scientist Richard Fenno, Jr., “Home Style – House Members in Their Districts,” he approaches the image of actors specifically from the House of Representatives from a unique vantage point: the constituencies that shape them. To create this work, he followed eighteen representatives around their districts intermittently for a period of eight years. He argues that each representative has four distinct constituencies that help form the foundation for their behavior and decision-making processes whilst of the campaign trail and in office. He claims that the primary concerns of members of Congress are the



improvement of their chances at reelection and gaining power within their respective house during the duration of their term. Fenno argues that these political actors attempt to achieve these goals through appealing to the four constituencies he outlines in this work. In his discussion of these different groups, he develops and outside-in approach. He begins with the largest, most far-reaching constituency, and then narrows these boundaries as he discussion progresses.

The first group he emphasizes is that of the *geographic* constituency. This is comprised of all residents within the Congressional district in question, all potential voters (1). The next is that of *reelection* constituency, or all members within the first constituency that are most likely to cast their vote for the representative in question (8). The third group he analyzes is that of the *primary* constituency, or those in the district that are the most likely to volunteer or “go to work” for the candidate’s campaign (18). The last constituency he discusses is that of the *personal* constituency, or those that the candidate works with and relates to on a more private level. Fenno discusses how this constituency is often utilized by the candidate for the primary purpose of either grounding one’s self, or balancing one’s self emotionally whilst attempting to deal with the stresses and strain of the campaign trail (24). Each of these constituencies clearly tie into the discussion of what motivates members of Congress during their terms. Arnold would claim that Congress operates in ways to send resources back to its constituencies. Fenno would further that claim, demonstrating how influential these various constituencies really are as motivators to members.

Voting constituencies clearly play an incredibly important role in influencing the legislative actions on congressional members, but there is yet another significant factor that has yet remained unmentioned in my discussion thus far: the role of political parties within the context of motivating operations of Congress. Within the classic work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Anthony Downs, operates under the assumptions that the functioning of most democracies falls under the realms of economic theory, and that actors within the government will attempt to choose the least complicated methods with which to achieve their desired ends. To Downs' mind, these simpler means are most often realized through direct cooperation with political parties. This is a fundamental concept within the confines of today's environment in the United States with regards to how Congress currently operates. As Downs asserts, "Interest groups want government to adopt policies favorable to them, so they pose as representatives of popular will. They try simultaneously to create real public opinion supporting their views and to convince government that such public opinion exists (94)." This truly captures a dynamic that exists in Congress today, and demonstrates how the influences of both interest groups and political parties act as essential motivators behind the actions of its members.

### III. Elections: How the Process Affects Congressional Behavior

It is now critical to put these factors into the context of how members of Congress are affected by the electoral process. Arguably, the greatest motivator of congressional action is the quest for reelection itself, so a discussion of this idea is the next logical phase that will eventually lead to the comparison between open and closed primaries. Perhaps the most influential discussion on this concept has been

author David Mayhew's book, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. In this work, he makes the argument that not only do politicians desire to hold office, once elected, a successful bid for reelection becomes their primary goal. To my mind, this book is based on a completely valid premise: that one of the most essential driving forces behind the actions and behaviors of members of Congress is this ever-present wish to be reelected. (Mayhew himself claims that his assertion is merely a hypothetical one, yet it is one that incidentally coincides with the behaviors of real life politicians quite well.) This is an argument that is absolutely applicable to in-depth discussions of both primary and general elections as both of these cycles impact congressional actors.

Also in his book, he argues that on an individualistic level, candidates can help shape their prospects of reelection in three primary ways: through *advertising*, *credit-claiming*, and *position-taking*. For the purposes of this thesis, I believe that his discussion of *advertising* is the most relevant. He describes it as, "Any effort to disseminate one's name among constituents in such a fashion as to create a favorable image but in messages that having little or no issue content (49)." I would argue that many politicians, in order to appease both extremes within parties and also moderate voters, have to resort to such representations of themselves and their positions, and in turn lack substance and specificity. This then muddies the ideological waters of the politician's own platforms, and creates the overall image of a candidate that is not overly appealing to any one demographic.

Now Mayhew is absolutely by no means the only political scientist to focus on the connection between reelections and its effects on the politicians in the midst

of them. As author R. Douglas Arnold would claim in his previously quoted work, members of Congress are absolutely motivated by reelection as a primary goal. Certainly individual personal policy preferences do in fact, play a role in the decision-making processes of these political actors, but the quest for reelection often can be an even further reaching influence. As he states, “[a]lthough they are not single-minded seekers of reelection, reelection is their dominant goal (5).” Despite the huge number of various motivations that affect members of Congress, it is clear that the hope for success during the electoral process arguably has the greatest impact on their actions.

Another interesting way to approach the topic of how elections shape the behaviors of candidates is to look at potential voter turnout itself. In an article entitled “Presidential Primaries--Reflections of “The People’s Choice”?” by Harvey Zeidenstein, he uses a variety of empirical data to address various methods in which the American public can achieve a fundamental goal: making the victor in presidential primaries the candidate that truly best reflects the will of the electorate. In order to ensure that this is in fact the case, Zeidstein states that two unique criteria must be met. Firstly, he argues that the higher the voter turnout is in the primary, the more wholly representative a candidate might be of popular choice if they were to win the general election. Secondly, he claims that “strongly partisan counties should not cast a disproportionately large share of the total statewide primary vote for a party (858).” For my purposes, both of these criterion for interesting bases for discussion within the context of members of Congress, as opposed to merely presidential elections.

Open primaries across more states would help address the issue that Zeidenstein brings to light. Generally, it stands to reason that if the number of independent votes cast in a primary in a strongly partisan area increased, some of that partisanship would be tempered. As a result, this would help prevent partisan areas from disproportionately skewing a vote in a state's primary election, making outcome a far more representative one. Secondly, I would like to discuss Zeidstein initial assertion. If there existed a more widespread open primary system in the United States, more voters would have access to ballots for the primary. Such a system would allow the increasing large independent voting block to voice their say earlier on in the electoral process, thereby making the ultimate victor of a campaign the truly more representative of the "people's choice." Within the realms of the Congressional context, the temperance of such harsh partisanship would result in less of a drastic shift in the positions and behaviors of candidates during the electoral process. The electoral process, in place of dictating and shaping the majority of the actions of congressional members would instead be more likely to be what is molded by the candidates themselves.

In continuing the theme of analyzing voter turnout and in turn, its effects on how the electoral process shapes the behavior of actors in Congress, one might look at the work of Gary Jacobson. In the fifth chapter of his book, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, he apprises his readers of an interesting trend with regards to congressional voters: as he states, there are merely fewer and fewer of them heading to the polls each year, especially for years without the benefit of a pull for a presidential election drawing them to the polls. As he claims, less than half of the

eligible voting population participating in House races is becoming the norm. It is important to “recognize that members of Congress are elected by an unimpressive proportion of eligible voters (114).” This is an intriguing phenomenon to consider in light of a discussion with regards to how elections affect the behavior of congressional members.

Under the assumption that Jacobson’s assertions are correct, it is clear that far more influence over congressional members is now being given to the fewer percentages of the electorate that actually attend the polls during voting periods. As countless political scientists would tell us, it stands to reason that demographically, the individuals most likely to get out and vote are those on the more extreme ends of the ideological spectrum, even in light of overall dwindling voter turnout. With this being said, Congress members within the confines of their legislative bodies are then forced to tailor their actions to these more extreme views time and time again. This demonstrates the direct correlation between our country’s electoral processes and its affects on the behaviors of our politicians.

To add one final dimension to the analysis of the connection between elections and their influence on how Congress members operate, it is necessary to look back to Fenno’s *Home Style*. As I discussed earlier, he uses the categorization of four distinct constituencies that House members must appeal to while both on the campaign trail and holding a term in office. Now in order to further my analysis of this connection, I shall use Fenno’s descriptions of the *geographic* constituency and juxtapose it with both the *reelection* and *primary* constituencies. This is essentially a comparison between the voters who merely reside in a candidate’s district and

those who are likely to vote for or even volunteer for a particular candidate's campaign. Fenno often discusses which factors are responsible for causing individuals to move or shift from one of these constituencies to another. One of those factors is most clearly how closely that individual's positions coincide with that of the candidate's. Logically, the closer a voter feels to their elected officials ideologically, the far more likely they are to offer up their support. Also, it stands to reason that oftentimes, the more extreme an individual's positions are, the more likely they are to attempt to actively insert their input into a campaign.

This is not to say in any way that independents are politically passive. Rather, I am merely asserting that generally, it is the less moderate individuals that tend comprise Fenno's *reelection* and *primary* constituencies, as opposed to merely his *geographic* constituency. This then leads to a more partisan influence on members of Congress. Throughout the duration of a politician's time in office, they are forced to give a great deal of attention to the constituencies that Fenno references back in their districts. As the *reelection* and *primary* constituencies are comprised of those who are slightly more partisan than average and would offer the most support to a candidate, these members of Congress spend a great deal of their time in office attempting to garner as much of that support as possible by making more slightly partisan choices themselves, thus marginally alienating the moderate voter come general election time.

#### IV. Primaries: Comparative Analysis of the Open and Closed Systems

Now that a firmer grasp on how Congress operates and how the electoral process shape the behaviors and decision-making processes of its members has

been demonstrated, it is appropriate to delve into the complex argument for the support of the open primary system over that of the closed primary system. In order to begin this discussion, I will start with an anecdote from Fenno's *Home Style*. In his chapter entitled "Presentation of Self I," he interviews an anonymous representative regarding his choices with regards to how he hones his images based on his unique audiences. The results, while not surprising, are amusing and informative:

In three different counties – none of them his place of residence – he verbalized his relationship with the people who lived there. Chatting with a group of businessmen riding to lunch after a meeting with the officials of Alpha County on sewer and water problems, he said,

"Did you know that an Alpha County man saved my grandfather's life in the Civil War? In the Battle of Williamsville, my grandfather was badly wounded and Lieutenant Henry from Henryville picked him up and carried him off the field... He did and my grandfather lived. My roots go deep in Alpha County."

Giving an after dinner speech to the Women's Business and Professional Club of Beta County, he said,

"I feel as much at home in Beta County as I do any place on earth... My friends and neighbors, my supporters and my constituents. I come home to refresh my spirit and renew my strength, here in the heart of our district, where my family's roots go deep. To me, this truly is 'holy ground.'"

Speaking to a sesquicentennial celebration in adjacent Gamma County, he began,

"I have never recognized the boundaries that separate our two counties. I have felt as much at home in Gamma County – our



county – among my friends and neighbors as if I had been born here, raised here, and lived here every day of my life (65, 66).”

To my mind, within the microcosm of this small anecdote, there is an important lesson that can be learned. As Fenno’s mystery Congressman so perfectly illustrates, politicians must keep their images in constant flux, depending solely on the desires and ideas of the distinctly unique audience whose support they are attempting to garner. This concept is absolutely applicable to the idea of open versus closed primaries. A closed primary, or a system that results in the exclusion of registered independent voters, establishes an electorate that is more partisan by its very nature. During the course of the primary election process, candidates must increasingly tailor their platforms to suit the approval of these more heavily party-affiliated voters. This thereby makes them more appealing to those likely to vote in the primary, yet less appealing to the emerging majority of the more moderate public.

As this occurs, there are two distinct potential outcomes. On one hand, a candidate may find their hands tied as they will have established platforms in the primary that appeal to party voters, yet that result in the disenfranchisement of the moderate base during the general election. It will truly be a struggle for candidates to find some semblance of balance in this scenario. On the other hand, if in a primary, the more heavily party-affiliated candidate beats out the more moderate candidate, that winner may have to exert great efforts to make their positions more accessible and moderate to independent voters. In an open primary system, however, the potential for involvement by moderate voters is available from the

start of the electoral process, helping to address many of these problems from the very outset.

In a book edited by Robert E. Denton entitled, *The 2008 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*, he and a variety of other scholars discuss these concepts in terms of the most recent presidential election. In the first chapter of the Denton reader, Judith S. Trent provides a thorough analysis of how the early stages of a campaign establish a fundamentally important foundation for how the rest of the race is to be run. This point truly emphasizes the overwhelming importance that the primary process plays in terms of the behaviors and actions of a politician. She presents a variety of lessons that are applicable to these early stages of a campaign that are focused on analyzing how these steps can later positively or negatively impact a candidate's chances in the general election. For example, she claims that it is the very first stirrings of an election bid that shape the foundation of the entire rest of the run. As she states, within the primary process, "paths are chartered for which there is no going back (4)."

It is this lesson that is critical to the argument supporting open primaries. If a candidate is forced to pander to those who are heavily identified with one party in order to win that party's primary, then his or her hands may be tied politically when it comes to attracting the votes of moderates. A second lesson discussed by Trent relates to the potentially useful functions that primaries can play to candidates. She claims that performance in primaries can offer candidates the opportunity to learn a great deal about how they are received by the voting public. This "important feedback," as she puts it, enables candidates to subtly adjust the focus of their

campaigns, if need be in order to become more appealing to voters and thus garner more support. This assertion can be used to illustrate that open primaries would be the most beneficial to the political climate of the nation today, as it would allow candidates access to this “important feedback” without tying in their hands politically.

In what I consider to be one of the most complicated yet interesting chapters of the book, chapter five, Robert E. Denton analyzes the role that identity politics in played in elections in 2008. As one lesson, he explains how each candidate must construct their identity in four separate and distinct ways. Firstly, they must reflect on how they view themselves as a candidate. Secondly, they must choose how to reveal themselves to others with regards to personal positions, the issues they would like their campaign to primarily focus on, etc. Thirdly, they must analyze what roles they hold and duties they perform in day to day life, and how that makes them appealing or unappealing to the voting public. Lastly, they must realize how the connections they hold to larger, distinct groups, such as party connection, ethnic group, religious affiliation, can affect their viability as a candidate. Most relevant to the discussion about open compared with closed primaries is that final point he makes in particular regards to party affiliation. Since these ties clearly have a major impact on how a candidate chooses to run their campaign, those running under a closed primary system must secure themselves more and more closely with party lines earlier on in the process, despite the fact that demographically, the number of registered independents is increasing dramatically.

Also in this chapter, Denton has formulated another interesting idea. He emphasizes that candidates should encourage voters to base their decision-making processes on individualism, rather than on identity politics, stating that such decisions can be “shallow (118).” To my mind, this is certainly a concern. In today’s voting public, many neglect their responsibility to truly educate themselves on politicians and their positions. It is certainly tempting for a great many of the electorate to head to the polls and blindly vote for all candidates that are registered in the same party as themselves. Voting along party lines solely for the sake of party identification itself is lazy and irresponsible. This is the one of the very issues that open primaries would help to combat. Individuals would have to make the decision for themselves each and every time they head to the polls which ballot they wish to use. With that in mind, it stands to reason that they would, in turn, have to give more degree of thought to their overall voting choices. Perhaps if individuals were free to select the particular ballot that they wished to utilize in the primary, it would encourage them to take more a proactive approach to voting. Additionally, and even more importantly, this blind voting in the primary for the candidate that most strictly adheres to a particular party’s lines is something that does not transfer well when it comes time for that same candidate to compete for moderate votes in the general election. If, through an open primary system, more moderates could be involved from the get go, and individuals could have more freedom in choice regarding which parties’ ballots they would like to utilize, then candidates that win the primary would have more widespread, representative appeal in the general election.

Continuing in this vein, chapter seven of this compendium addresses this particular issue in even greater depth. The authors Karl Smerecnik and George Dionisopoulos state that the principle struggle that candidates face is that they must balance party platforms that remain inherently true to the strict ideology of their core coalition in order to advance through primaries, yet they also must be appealing to undecided voters come the general election period. It is hard for candidates to achieve this, as it is occurring with increasing frequency that independent voters are becoming alienated from each party's core views. As is the case with many moderates, they might hold a few basic tenets of one party's platforms, yet reject another set of positions from that same platform. Therefore, candidates must fight to appeal to both the party they identify with on a personal level and also attempt to capture as many votes as possible by advocating semi-moderate views for more widespread appeal. Essentially, this chapter calls to mind the exact issue that is caused by closed primaries. It is generally the most extreme candidate within each party that wins the primary, yet that same individual will have to appeal to those without a registered party affiliation during the general election.

It is these non-affiliated or independent voters that provide the biggest challenge to politicians. It is truly a struggle to establish an image that will capture the support of voters from outside the candidate's own party. This struggle is addressed very well in an article by CNN reporter Ed Hornick called "Wedge Issues Divide Politicians from Independents." It opens with a frank discussion of the extreme controversy that was inherent in this summer's breaking news of the

potential mosque intended for construction at the site of Ground Zero. The author then classified this as a “wedge issue” or a controversial topic which results in the disenfranchisement of the moderate and independent voting block with either of the two main parties. These wedge issues, Hornik asserts, are used by politicians to elicit emotion responses from either party’s base demographic. They do not have the substance of issues that carry true weight, such as issues surrounding the economy, etc. Instead, politicians take stances on them based solely upon their controversial merits. As is asserted by Omar H. Ali, an independent voting analyst and professor at the University of North Carolina in the article, “[b]ringing up divisive issues that distract from fixing the country's economic woes will only create cracks in the bridge between the two major parties and independents.” Again, this is an issue that open primaries would help address. Such a system would help diminish the fractionalization between party voters and independents that occurs as a result of the use of such tactics by politicians because the moderates would have marginally increasing influence. As Hornick goes on to claim, “Ali said having nonpartisan elections, ballot access reform and referendums are essential things for independents like himself. ‘These are structural issues that go to the heart of the process and independents for over a quarter century have been voicing their concerns.’”

In continuing the comparison between the effects of open and closed primaries, it is important to put Ali’s assertions to the test. Karen Kaufmann, James Gimpel, and Adam Hoffman have done just that. In their article named “A Promise Fulfilled? Open Primaries and Representation,” they chiefly discuss how in order to

“moderate ideological extremity of primary voters, states have increasingly adopted more open primary eligibility rules (456),” and analyze the extent to which this shift has met with success. One of the most interesting statements made by the authors is that there is a burgeoning widely held acceptance of the claim that open primaries will tend to result in more moderate and generally appealing candidates. Regarding this claim, the authors acknowledge, there is very little in-depth discussion within existing literature surrounding this topic, yet it is one that they still seem to feel is valid.

As the authors continue their analysis, they acknowledge that on the whole, open primaries can have the very positive effect that reformers intend. However, they also caution against unintended consequences of primary provision reforms, such as an increase in cross over voting that will “muddy” the ideological waters (474). They argue this is perhaps one of the strongest arguments against the utilization of the open primary system. They fear that open primaries will result in the occurrence of massive amounts of crossover voting, thus greatly increasing the ideological complexities of our current two-party system. To my mind, this concern, while it is indeed a possible result of more widespread use of open primaries, is not significant enough to outweigh the numerous benefits of such a process. If our ideological waters do, in fact, become muddied, this is not necessarily an overly negative effect. Rather, this will merely be a result of further inclusion by the majority of the voting public. Such an inclusion is more democratic by nature, and therefore should be desirable considering the ideals upon which this country was founded. The authors’ principal purpose in including a discussion of this theme

seems to be to warn individuals from blindly supporting primary reforms. The authors themselves seem to be in favor of open primaries but they caution everyone else to truly educate themselves before coming to a similar conclusion.

To my mind, their concerns are not necessarily unfounded, just merely a bit exaggerated. It is seemingly completely logical that such an open process would lead to more wholly representative candidates moving on into success for the general election. The authors main hesitancies seem to lie in the fact that as such a call for reform is relatively new in nature, these theories have yet to truly be proven out of the realms of theoretical contexts. Thus far however, in the few instances where such reform has been attempted in “the real world,” the authors acknowledge that it has generally met with success. This small amount of evidence provides support for what already appears to be truly sound and stable in theory.

In one interesting article published in *The Arizona Republic* entitled, “The Rise of the Independent Voter: Will it Matter?” author Bill Hart provides some of the empirical data that authors such as Kaufman, Gimpel, and Hoffman might draw upon in the future regarding similar studies. He discusses the state of Arizona’s open primary system and its effect, or lack thereof on independent voters. As Hart, a senior policy analyst with Arizona State University asserts, “The rise of Arizona’s independents remains a very real and decisive development in state politics – one echoed to various degrees across the country.” The problem, however, exists that although this demographic is increasing in size over time, its influence within the electorate is seemingly not growing at a comparable rate. The article goes on to state that Arizona independents have two distinct opportunities to make their



political clout felt, both the primary and general elections. This group, while it makes a comparatively strong showing in the general election, does not do so in the primary. The author goes on to suggest that the prime reason for this may be that many in the state are simply unaware that they have primary voting rights.

Clearly, this is another distinction between the open and closed primaries processes. If all elections across the country utilized the rules of the open primary system, there would be much less confusion surrounding the independent's right to vote. By allowing each state their to individually select their own particular primary systems, voters across the nation are left with numerous questions regarding what special provisions dictate their personal voting eligibility. Therefore, this can greatly discourage independents and those who are non-affiliated with parties from turning out and casting their vote on primary election day.

This leads to another interesting phenomenon that might occur in areas where open primary reform takes hold: potential increased voter turnout. Earlier in my discussion, I mentioned Gary Jacobson's assertion there has been a trend of the decreasing percentage of the electorate heading to the polls each year. In comparison between open and closed primary systems, arguably the latter could only contribute to such a trend. As previously asserted, the extremely complicated logistics behind which individuals are allowed to vote with which party's ballot in such a system can be a strong deterrent for some to cast their vote during primary season. In addition, closed primaries are constraining in nature in that they simply exclude anyone not affiliated with a major party from participating in the electoral process.

Certainly, it is obvious that a closed primary system does not in any way take in hand the issue of dwindling voter turnout. An open primary, on the other hand, would arguably have the opposite effect. Far more voters could be involved in the primary process, which in turn would mean that the more truly wholly representatives candidates would move on to the general election. Instead of politicians that have tailored their views to only suit party supporters to win a primary election, those who have established a moderate campaign platform, or those with views more congruent with the majority of the populace will be victorious.

To support the assertion I have just made, I will call again upon Anthony Down's *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Later on in his work, he discusses how, theoretically, in a two-party political system, the parties tend to "converge ideologically upon the center (140." He claims that the overlapping of positions and platforms that arise as a direct result of this phenomenon can, in turn, make each party in such a system very similar in some regards. It is absolutely clear that such distinct ideological similarities can have a distinctly negative impact on the electorate. As he claims, "Party policies may become so vague, and parties so alike, that voters find it difficult to make rational decisions (141)."

To my mind, this concept can certainly be applied to the comparison between open and closed primaries, thus adding a whole new dimension to the study. If, as Downs argues, so much ideological overlapping occurs between the moderate supporters of each party, it should logically be a chief goal of our electoral process not to alienate such a large percentage of the voting public from being a part

of the primary process. By limiting the participation of those who are not on the far ends of the party spectrum early on in the electoral system, voters will find it even more increasingly “difficult to make rational decisions,” as they will be left only with candidates that have modified their positions and image solely to appeal to voters in the primary that in no way ideological resemble themselves, the far greater majority. Clearly, through the system of open primaries, these high levels of uncertainty that Downs repeatedly references can somewhat be diminished. By no means will changing the primary process completely solve this issue, but at least this problem will be at least marginally addressed. This thereby supports the argument for open primaries over closed.

Throughout the duration of this thesis, two distinct areas have been analyzed in great detail: primarily, how Congress functions as a legislative body and what factors motivate the behaviors of its members, and secondly, with greater specificity, how the electoral process impacts Congress men and women both in office, and on the campaign trail. Drawing upon numerous scholarly resources and utilizing the theories of countless political scientists, it is abundantly clear that politicians must always exhibit a great versatility in image and platforms in order to consistently ensure the realization of their most desired wish, a successful reelection bid. By recognizing the never-ending quest for reelection as a fundamental motivator behind the behaviors and decision-making processes of congressional members, it truly emphasizes the important impact that primary systems can have on our government. Truly, particularly in light of today’s emerging moderate climate and trend of increasing numbers of registered

independent voters, it is clear that open or closed primaries can make a great difference in the actions of our politicians, even a difference in the very politicians that are elected in the first place.

As I have attempted to argue, open primaries would be a far more effectively representative system than that of closed primaries. In addition, open primaries are by their very nature fairer to the electorate, as they allow for greater participation in the democratic process. In addition to the numerous benefits of the open primary process, there are also many dilemmas that arise through use of the closed primary process. A fundamental problem with closed primaries goes far beyond that of merely leaving voters with more extreme platforms to deal with from candidates come the general election. Rather, this trend continues past the election process into a congressional member's term.

Knowing that the reelection is perhaps the most fundamental goal of such a member, one can assume that throughout the course of their time in office, those who must be voted for through a closed primary system will arguably pander to the slightly more extreme views of their potential electorate, even for the duration of their term. Thus, it is apparent that not only can closed primaries negatively impact a politician on the campaign trail, but those effects can cross over into their time in office. This issue can be avoided through the utilization of the open primary process, however. Members elected from regions that use this system have the freedom to be a bit more moderate in their positions, as moderate as they personally see fit. In addition to giving these candidates greater leeway in the

establishment of their own platforms, a better politician is created, one that far better suits today's more moderate voting public.

## V. Conclusion

In the words of Gary Jacobson in his *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, "Congressional elections in particular are intimately linked to many basic phenomena of American politics. In countless ways, obvious and subtle, they affect the performance of Congress and, through it, the entire government. At the same time, they reflect the changing political landscape, revealing as well as shaping its fundamental contours (1)." Jacobson has truly captured the importance of the role that primary systems play in today's political climate. The repercussions of the early electoral process can be felt throughout the duration of a candidate's campaign and even term in office. These lasting effects truly demonstrate the critical significance of the distinction between open and closed primaries.

As discussed, the quest for a successful reelection bid is one of the most essential motivators to members of Congress. With this in mind, it is abundantly clear that the difference between the logistics of an open or closed primary will have a great impact on how a politician makes their decisions. As discussed, a closed primary forces candidates to adjust their platforms based on the idea that the electorate in this early stage will predominantly be comprised of those who are a bit more on the extreme ends of the political spectrum. They must then tailor their positions to capture the votes of those who are tightly party-affiliated, even though this is not, in fact, truly representative of the ideological makeup of the general voting public. In actuality, America's electorate is becoming increasingly more

moderate in their views and the numbers of registered Independents and non-affiliated voters is on the rise. That being said, it stands to reason that our primary electoral process should be able to reflect these changing trends. With closed primaries, however, this cannot happen. These independents and other moderates are excluded from the primary process, which can result in the victory of candidates that are ideologically more polarized than the majority of the electorate. The open primary system, however, would instead allow these individuals to participate in the process, making the candidates selected for the general election the ones that are more wholly representative of the wants of the public. This would result in more voting freedoms for independents and non-affiliated voters. Also, it would result in more personal freedom for the politicians themselves, as they could establish more diverse platforms and positions to appeal to a broader ideological spectrum of the electorate. The political climate of our country is constantly in flux, and we should have a primary system that reflects this truth.

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