Consolidating Votes: The Lingering Effects of Same-day Primaries

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Abstract

I exploit state-level changes in the timing of Presidential primary elections to show that holding a consolidated primary (when Presidential and down-ballot primaries are held simultaneously) leads to 46% increase in primary election turnout and a 10% increase in turnout in the subsequent general election. These general election spillovers benefit challengers to incumbents, as margins of victory narrow and the odds of a challenger victory double following a consolidated primary. To explain these results, I find that consolidated primaries cause more moderate challengers to be elected, and these challengers also achieve higher rates of voter contact. These results suggest that turnout shocks in primary elections can change both the identity of primary election winners and also the resources available to general election challengers.

Keywords: Primary Elections, Candidate Ideology, Turnout

Introduction

On April 26, 2016, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island both held Presidential primaries. When voters in Rhode Island went to the polls, they saw candidates for the President, cast their vote, and were finished. In Pennsylvania, in addition to the presidential race, voters could also vote for all other contested elections, including United States Senate, House of Representatives, and other down-ballot races. In order to vote in non-Presidential primary elections, Rhode Island voters would have to return to the polls again in September. Across the country, millions of primary voters were able to simultaneously vote the President and for all other offices. Millions of other voters needed to cast two separate ballots, usually months apart, to vote in all their state's primaries.

This paper starts with a small question. What happens to Congressional elections when Presidential primary elections are consolidated with down-ballot elections?[1] I exploit changes to the date of states' Presidential primary elections and employ a difference-in-differences technique to estimate the effect of consolidated primaries. The initial answer is simple: more people show up to vote in Congressional primaries. I find that consolidating a primary leads to a 46% increase in the number of votes cast in a House of Representatives primary election.

I also find that consolidated primaries have numerous spillovers into Congressional general elections. Following a consolidated primary, general election races see a 10% increase in the number of votes cast, and elections with incumbents become more competitive, featuring smaller margins of victory and lower incumbent vote shares. Finally, and most importantly, challengers become much more likely win the general election. But without a better understanding of what drives these results, their significance is limited by the uniqueness of the setting. Turning to the mechanism that drives these results, I find that the increase in primary elec-

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[1]To my knowledge, there is no widely-accepted term for holding Presidential and down-ballot primaries simultaneously, and the term "consolidated primary" comes from Illinois statutes.

tion turnout leads to more ideologically moderate candidates (though not ones that exhibit higher levels of quality). I also find that members of a challenger's party report a much higher incidence of being contacted by the party. Members of the incumbent's party see no such boost.

The research design presented here exploits changes in primary consolidation brought on by changes in the timing or existence of presidential primary elections. While these changes are often caused by state legislators' actions, I show that the changes are not caused by state-specific economic or political shocks, and that state legislators are not attempting to gain a political advantage. In fact, these shocks usually affect both parties equally, and there is no evidence that lawmakers anticipate any effect on Congressional elections from changes in Presidential primaries. Instead, they appear to set the timing of the Presidential primary based on how they want to fit into the national Presidential primary and caucus calendar, with little consideration of the down-ballot primaries.

Literature Review

Research on election systems in the United States has begun to focus more on primary elections in recent years. This may be due in part to a recognition of recent political trends. As more Congressional and Senate seats have become safe for one party or another, primary elections become a central mechanism through which voters can shape policy. Hirano and Snyder Jr. (2014) argue that the existing literature has typically understated the importance of primary elections, and show that even in non-competitive districts, primaries lead to higher quality candidates. The importance of primary elections is also suggested by research that finds that general elections candidates do not converge in policy to that of the median voter (Lee et al., 1998). The large body of research showing that the decisions of elected officials is affected by their personal characteristics, including race (Rocca et al.,

2009; Logan, 2018), gender (Gertzog, 1995), and military experience (Lupton, 2017), reinforce the notion that candidate selection is a crucial component of U.S. elections.

Primaries also provide fertile ground for natural experiments because, unlike general elections for Federal offices, many characteristics of primary elections are left to the state, providing researchers with opportunities to evaluate the impact of numerous components of candidate selection, while also providing them with potentially unbiased estimates of causal effect. The results of this research has shaped how we understand runoff election primaries, the timing of elections (Boatwrigt 2017), and even the existence of primary elections themselves.

The best comparisons to the setting studied in this paper involve changes to the composition or size of the primary electorate. Open and closed primary elections, the rules for which determine who is allowed to vote in a primary, are one heavily-studied example. Gerber and Morton (1998) show that states with open primaries feature elected officials whose voting behavior better reflects the opinion of the median voter. However, their analysis fails to control for time or state effects, and several studies using well-defined identification strategies (Rogowski and Langella, 2015; McGhee et al., 2014) fail to support the claim that open, more inclusive primaries affect the ideology of candidates. Rogowski and Langella (2015), using a differences-in-differences framework, find that changes in the open or closed nature of primary systems does not have a consistent effect on the ideological moderation of candidates. This non-result highlights the persistence of primary election outcomes. Primary elections feature few high-quality candidates and large margins of victory, so small changes in the structure of primary elections may not lead to significant changes in general-election candidates.

Consolidated primaries lower the participation costs for voters and while many papers have studied the effect of voting costs on general election outcomes, fewer papers have studied their effect on primaries. Gatrell and Bierly (2002) show that rainfall was negatively correlated with primary election turnout in a series of Ken-

tucky elections, but do not show any further results (challenger success, ideological shifts) associated with this turnout drop. Several studies using general election results have found that rainfall affects Democratic-leaning voters more than others (Gomez et al., 2007). Since consolidated elections only decrease the cost to voting in Congressional elections for people who are voting in Presidential primaries (which may not be a representative sample of the primary-election electorate) consolidation may also affect the distribution of primary voters.

Due to the nature of primaries as the first in a two-stage election process, spillover effects are likely, and many studies have shown the profound ways that primaries can impact elections. [2] Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr. (2007) find that the introduction of direct primary elections led to general election winners who were more independent from their party. Hall (2015) shows that ideologically extreme primary election winners drag down their party's general election fortunes. Many papers have tested the "divisive primary hypothesis" that divisive primaries hurt political parties, to inconclusive results (Kenny and Rice, 1987; Atkenson, 1998). Hall (2016) find that when primary elections were pushed into a second round runoff, candidates for United States Congress performed worse in the subsequent general election. There are numerous mechanisms through which these spillover effects can operate. Obviously, a change in the identity of the candidate can change the willingness of general election voters to support that candidate. Additionally, shocks to a primary election may change the costs that candidates face in their general election campaign. For example, Hall (2016) show that state Congressional candidates actually do *better* following a runoff election, which they attribute to low-salience candidates receiving a boost to their name recognition due to the primary election battle. This may in turn make it easier for candidates to raise money, or make their get-out-the-vote efforts more effective, since more potential voters recognize them.

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[2]Null findings are just as fascinating. Anastasopoulos (2016) shows that nominating women has no impact on general election outcomes, while Hirano et al. (2010) find that the introduction of direct primaries did not result in increased polarization in Congress.

While the setting examined here (consolidated primaries) is unique and, to my knowledge, previously unstudied, numerous papers on local elections help shape expectations for the effect of consolidated primary elections. Zoltan and Lewis (2003) show that municipal election turnout in on-cycle elections (those held the same year as Federal elections) are 25%-36% higher than off-cycle elections. Anzia (2012) looks that the effect of a 2006 Texas law that forced some school districts to move their elections to the same year as federal elections. She found that off-cycle elections saw lower turnout and higher raises for teachers, who were members of well-organized unions. The logic behind this result is that elected officials are more responsive to a dominant interest group when turnout is low. In the context of primary elections, which are seen as having more ideologically extreme voters compared to the electorate as a whole, we would expect a positive shock to turnout to have a moderating effect on candidates, assuming that the turnout shock results in relatively fewer ideologically extreme voters.

Consolidated Primary Elections

Before moving to the results, it's important to describe how the consolidation of a primary elections changes within a state. Compared to the relative stability of other election structures, the timing and nature of Presidential primaries and caucuses have varied significantly over the past 50 years. Most states did not hold presidential primaries before 1972, and since 1980 all but a dozen states have seen changes in the timing, consolidation, and even existence of their presidential primaries and caucuses. When states change the timing of presidential primaries, this often results in a change in the consolidation of primaries even though the down-ballot primaries are otherwise unchanged.

Figure 1 illustrates these relative changes, by showing the average day of the year of Presidential and Congressional primaries. While the average date of Congres-

sional primaries has drifted slightly earlier, it has hardly moved since 1972, always being held between the 175th and 198th day of the year. Presidential primaries, on the other hand, have both moved towards the beginning of the year while also experiencing more year-over-year change. The average 2008 primary was held a full 2 months before the average 1972 primary, and then moved back more than 35 days in 2012. With such significant variation in when Presidential primaries are held, it follows that primary consolidation also changes significantly. On average, more than 4 states change their consolidation in each Presidential election year (compared to the prior Presidential election year).

Since states must actively choose to move the date of the Presidential Primary or cancel it altogether, the decisions themselves must be unrelated to other dynamics that affect Congressional political outcomes for my estimates to be unbiased. If states change the timing of their Presidential primary in response to a state-specific shock that also affects political outcomes, or if they change other components of Congressional primaries at the same time, my results would be biased by the effects of these forces. In support of my identification strategy, I find no evidence that changes in the timing of presidential primaries were correlated with state-specific economic or political shocks, or that lawmakers were motivated by (or even aware of) potential impacts of the timing of Presidential primaries on their own general election outcomes. Instead, the strongest trend regarding consolidation regards how Presidential primaries fit into pre-existing primary schedules. When Presidential primaries became common, states with early down-ballot primaries (Feb or March) didn't consolidate their primaries when they added a presidential primary, while those states that held later primaries did.

As national dynamics change, states feel compelled to move, introduce, or cancel their Presidential primary. Most of the variation of primary consolidation comes from states that traditionally held consolidated primaries breaking up those primaries, and then typically resuming consolidation at a later date. Most occurrences

can be described in one of two ways, and illustrate how the variation in consolidation can be both state-specific and plausibly exogenous: 1) states that traditionally held primaries on the same day moving presidential primaries earlier to try to have more influence in a heavily contested presidential primary; 2) States canceling their primary because only one person qualified for the ballot.

The first instance is called "front-loading" and can best be illustrated by the 2008 primaries. NJ, CA, AL, and AR changed the consolidation of their primaries while TX (along with many other states with consolidated primaries) did not. The reason for the difference between states was that those 4 states traditionally held their consolidated primaries in May or June, while TX held its in March. Likewise, other states (CT, FL,GA) also engaged in front-loading, but because they did not have consolidated primaries before 2008,[3] the consolidation variable did not change. A similar phenomenon occurred in 1988, when a number of Southern states moved their primaries to March, hoping for a stronger influence in Presidential nominations. North Carolina and Kentucky previously had consolidated primaries in May, while other states either already had March primaries (Texas, Georgia) or didn't have their consolidation affected when they moved their primaries up (Tennessee and Louisiana moved their primaries up, but remained unconsolidated).

The second instance occurs because some states (primarily MS and SD) have rules that force them to cancel primaries when other states do not. In instances where only 1 candidate qualifies for the ballot, both of these states will cancel the presidential primary. For example, both states canceled the 1984 Republican and 2000 Democratic primary when only Ronald Reagan and Al Gore qualified for the ballot, respectively. The consolidation variable in other states was unaffected, either because the states never held consolidated primaries (and the cancellation of the presidential primary had no effect) or because it customarily held a primary even if only 1 candidate qualified. In both instances, the state-specific variation in

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[3]Florida did until 1952, but not in the period I am studying.

consolidation is the result of an interaction of each states persistent customs and common time shocks, instead of states experience different time shocks. Therefore, I employ a difference-in-differences estimation strategy, which will allow me to control for persistent differences across states as well as common time shocks.

To test the validity of my estimation strategy, I attempt to predict whether a state holds consolidated primaries with a number of political and economic variables within a diff-in-diff framework. I use the following independent variables: the unemployment rate, whether a state has 1-party control of the state house, the percentage of seats that are held by freshmen incumbents (who are the most vulnerable to lose re-election), and whether the presidential primary features a "favored son" or "favored daughter".[4] If states are more or less likely to consolidate their primaries in periods of high or low unemployment or following a change in the political environment (such as whether a single party controls the state legislature, or if a favored son or daughter is running), my estimates of the causal effect of consolidated primaries would be biased if these shocks also affected the political outcomes I measure (such as the success of incumbents). The results, reported in Table 1, show that none of these variables predict changes in the consolidation of primaries, giving credence to my identification strategy. The point estimates for each of the variables fail to be statistically or practically significant.

Finally, the nature of consolidated primaries themselves make it difficult for politicians to use consolidation to gain a political edge, even if they wanted to, and I find no evidence that law-makers hold any belief that the date of the Presidential Primary election will affect Congressional elections. When states move the dates of Presidential primaries, they do so for all political parties. Therefore, if politicians believed that they would gain by having their own primaries held with (or without) Presidential primaries, they would likely believe that this same benefit would be realized by their cross-party opponents. In dozens of news stories on states' decisions

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[4]This is measured as having a candidate from that state participate in the presidential primaries. Anyone who dropped out before the primaries started is not included.

to move their presidential primary election, I find no mention of a desire by politicians to gain an electoral advantage, or from critics arguing that moving away from a consolidated primary would hurt or help any particular group of candidates.[5] In most instances where states have moved away from consolidated primaries (such as the 2008 front-loading) states quickly re-consolidate their primaries, arguing that the cost of an additional election was too high. If the purpose of moving a presidential primary was to change Congressional election outcomes, surely those same politicians would keep those rules in place if they believe that they had an effect. Instead, politicians seem focused on their state's role in the presidential primary system.

When lawmakers change the consolidation of primaries, they do not change the date of Congressional primaries.[6] I regressed a dummy equal to 1 of the consolidation changes on a dummy equal to 1 of the month of down-ballot primaries changed, and found that changes in one could not predict changes in the other. Nonetheless, I include the month of the Congressional primary election as a control in my regressions.

Data

House of Representatives primary election data is from Pettigrew et al. (2016), supplemented using data from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for 2012 and 2016. General election data comes from CQ Press's Voting and Elections Collection. The consolidation variable was constructed using a variety of sources, including thegreenpapers.com, the FEC, and different Secretaries of State websites. Candidate policy scores are from Bonica (2014); candidate spending is from the FEC; district

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[5]Talks with current campaign staff confirms that there is no belief that consolidated primaries have any particular effect on Congressional general election outcomes.

[6]There are instances of states moving presidential and Congressional primary dates at the same time, but not in a way that affects consolidation. Illinois moved all elections up in 2012, but kept them all consolidated.

demographics from Adler (2018). Voter survey data is from the American National Election Study (ANES) merged 1952-2012 data set and 2016 time series survey from the ANES.

Hypothesis and Results

What impact could consolidated primaries have? First, since voters need to only turn out once to vote for all candidates, they face a lower opportunity cost of voting. Since numerous studies (Gomez et al., 2007; Hihgton and Wolfinger, 2007; Brady and McNulty, 2011) have found a negative relationship between the opportunity cost of voting and turnout, I will first test for a change in the number of people casting ballots in primary elections.[7] I therefore estimate the effect of primary election timing using the following diff-in-diff model:

$$Ln(Votes)_{dpt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Consolidated_{dpt} + \beta_2 Rep_p + \iota_t + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{dpt} \qquad (1)$$

$Ln(Votes)_{dpt}$ is the natural log of the total reported votes cast in a House of Representatives election in year t, district d, in the primary election for party p. $Consolidated_{dpt}$ is a binary variable equal to 1 if a primary was held the same day as a presidential primary, and 0 otherwise. Rep_p, ι_t γ_s are a full set of dummy variables for political party, election year, and states, respectively. The sample is all Congressional primary elections for the Republican or Democratic party during a Presidential election year from 1976 to 2016 (even if the Presidential primary was un-contested) for which the number of votes cast is recorded. For some uncontested elections (especially those before 1996) the total number of votes is not recorded. The results are similar if I full exclude all uncontested elections. I only analyze years

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[7]Given the nature of my findings, I will describe other potential primary-election impacts, such as observable characteristics of the primary winner, later in this section.

1976 onward because many states had no presidential primaries or caucuses before 1976. If I included previous years, variation in the *Consolidated* variable would be coming from the establishment of presidential primary, and not variation in the timing. If the creation of Presidential primary or caucus affected other outcomes, such as rates of voter registration, my results would be driven by factors other than the consolidation of primaries.[8]

The results of the regression are in Table 2. Column 1 shows the diff-in-diff estimate for the full sample; columns 2-4 break up the sample into races with incumbents, races for general-election challengers to incumbents, and open-seat elections. The coefficient of 0.379 log points means that primaries held on the same day saw turnouts 46% higher than those held on other days. Columns 2 and 3 show that the effect is similar in incumbent and challenger races. Open races see no such boost, as seen in Column 4. There are several reasons why open races could be less affected by consolidated primaries. They have high baseline turnout, with 70% more voters than challenger races. However, incumbent races also have high baselines, so this explanation alone is not sufficient. Open races may may attract voters who are likely to vote in primaries regardless of whether or not they are consolidated. This would imply the possible existence of reverse coattails, since these voters would then find themselves participating in Presidential primaries when they are consolidated. I find some evidence of this: Presidential primaries that take place during consolidated primaries also have higher turnout than stand-alone primaries.

Finally, I test for whether consolidated primaries change the likelihood of an incumbent primary win. Given the large change in the number of voters, such a shock could systematically help or hurt incumbents seeking re-nomination. As

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[8]Ansolabehere et. al. (2010) looked at this same question, but concluded that the timing of presidential elections only affected turnout in Congressional elections if the Presidential primary was itself contested. The difference between the results presented here and theirs is due to the sample. They used data from 1980-2004. If we re-run our regressions from just this period, we also find no significant effect.

seen in Column 5, I find no effect of consolidated primaries on the likelihood of incumbents winning primary elections. This also means that consolidated primaries have no effect on the identity of the nominee when an incumbent is running in a primary election.

To estimate the spillover effect of the primary election turnout shock to general elections, I use a similar framework:

$$Y_{dt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Consolidated_{dt} + \alpha X_{dt} + \iota_t + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{dt} \qquad (2)$$

Where Y_{dt} is the general election outcome variable in district d in year t. $Consolidated_{dt}$ is equal to 1 if the challenger against an incumbent or if either candidates in an open election had a primary election held the same day as a Presidential primary. X_{dt} is a set of district characteristics: population, black population, median income, and the month of the primary election.

First, I consider the number of votes cast.[9] Though consolidated elections increase the number of voters in Congressional primaries, it is not obvious that it would increase general election turnout. Voters who voted in Congressional primaries because they were held the same day as presidential primaries may have intended to vote in the general election anyway. Few ANES survey respondents claim to have voted in Presidential primaries and then not voted for the President in the general election, though no such question is consistently asked regarding Congressional primaries

The results are presented in Table 3. Columns 1 & 2 show the results when the log of votes is the dependent variable. Column 1 shows that consolidated primary elections lead to 0.0979 increase in the log of votes, or about 10.4%. Column 2 estimates the difference in this effect between open races and races with an incumbent.

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[9]Throughout, I use the number of voters instead of turnout (i.e percent of registered or eligible voters who vote). By including a population variable, this is still capturing a similar effect, but is free of any concerns regarding correct measurement of the number of registered voters.

Given the difference in effect between open and incumbent-held seats in primary election turnout, I would likewise expect a difference in general election votes, as the results confirm this. The effect of consolidated primaries is realized more by incumbent races. In fact, the interaction term coefficient is greater in magnitude than the level effect of having an incumbent, which drives down turnout. So the effect of having a challenger selected under a consolidated primary is greater than the negative effect of having an incumbent in the race.

Another set of results, presented in Table 4, provides more detail on where these votes are coming from. Mechanically, an increase in votes in House of Representatives must come from: 1) An increase in people turnout out to vote, 2) Fewer people turning out to vote neglecting to vote for a House of Representatives candidate, or some combination of the two. To answer this, I merge house data with Presidential election data, and aggregate up to the state level, as district-level Presidential returns are not available for my full sample.

Column 1 shows the effect of consolidation on presidential general election voters. The point estimate is close to 0, and I can rule out a large effect (5.4%) on the number of presidential voters. Assuming that the consolidated variable does not affect presidential undervotes, this point estimate shows that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that consolidated elections do not increase the number of people who vote in general elections. Column 2 focuses on undervotes for the House of Representatives, calculated as the percentage (out of 100) of people who vote in the Presidential election who don't vote in the House election. The estimate of a reduction in undervotes of 2.7 percentage points represents a large decrease compared to a mean of 7.2.

While it is impossible for me to precisely divide the increase in House votes into an increase in voters and a decrease in undervotes, I can reject the null that the effect if coming purely from an increase in turnout, as well as the null that the consolidation has no effect on undervotes. Given the size of the confidence intervals,

neither either effect is large enough to explain the full effect on general election votes, so it is likely that the effect is coming from a combination of movements along the two margins.

Consolidated primaries may have differential effects between incumbent and challengers. The intuition behind this is based on Condorcet's Jury Theorem and median voter theories. If an increase in the number of voters makes it more likely that the "correct" choice is made, consolidated primaries may lead to better candidates. Similarly, if the voters who are induced to vote in the primary due to consolidation are more representative of the general election population, consolidated primaries may lead to candidates who are ideologically better suited for the general election. However, I have already shown that consolidated primaries do not change the identity of the candidate when an incumbent is running, suggesting that the causal effect from consolidated elections to primary elections with an incumbent is smaller than incumbency advantage. Therefore, consolidated elections may change the identity of the challenger, but not the incumbent, creating a differential effect.

Columns 3 -5 of Table 3 focus on those incumbent races. The results indicate that consolidated primaries lead to more competitive general elections in races with incumbents. Specifically, they lead to lower incumbent vote shares, smaller margins of victory, and an increased likelihood of a challenger win. Each of these estimates suggests both a statistically and practically significant. The effect on the margin of victory, 6.728 percentage points, represents a 16.6% decrease from a mean of 40.43, and a 21.2% decrease if I restrict the sample to contested elections. Most importantly, the odds of a challenger win doubles, from an admittedly low starting point (3.8%).

I constructed the *Consolidated* so that it was equal to 1 if the state held a consolidated primary for a challenger's party (instead of the incumbent's party), but this construction is not driving my finding of more challenger success. Most

occurrences of consolidation affect both parties, as most variation occurs at the state/year level. This means that when both parties hold a consolidated primary, the challenger still receives a general election boost. I test this by simply dropping any state where one party held a consolidated primary, but the opposing party did not. Therefore, I am identifying only off of instances where states changed both parties' consolidation status. Using this subsample of states, I still find that consolidation leads to lower general election votes shares for incumbents and a higher likelihood of challenger wins.

In the following section, I explore what drives these results. By examining the underlying mechanisms that drive the results, I can disentangle different theories that could explain why consolidated primary elections improve the outcomes of challengers. Identifying the mechanism(s) is especially important in this setting, given the uniqueness of the source of variation being used here. Understanding how consolidated primaries change the identity or behavior of candidates will broaden the applicability of the findings.

Mechanism

Broadly, the potential mechanisms must describe one of the following: a change in the identity of the candidates, or a change in candidate or voter behavior. Throughout, I rely on the same diff-in-diff model that was used to estimate the electoral effects of consolidated primaries:

$$Y_{dt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Consolidated_{dt} + \alpha X_{dt} + \iota_t + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{dt} \qquad (3)$$

where each variable is defined the same as before, but Y_{dt} is a variety of different outcomes variables that I am testing as potential mechanisms.

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I take each of these possible effects in turn. First, I test for changes in candidate characteristics. I focus on measurements of ideology and candidate quality, using a variety of measures. If challengers are more successful following consolidated primaries due to voters selecting "better" challengers, I would expect to see candidates with higher observable levels of quality, or candidates who are well matched ideologically with their district. I find that while consolidated primaries do not lead to candidates of higher quality, they do lead to the selection of more moderate challengers, which is in turn correlated with higher rates of challenger success.

Candidate Characteristics

I rely on 2 measures of candidate quality that are commonly used in the literature: candidate spending, and political experience of challengers. To measure challengers' political experience, I use a binary variable equal to one if a candidate held a prior office before running for the House of Representatives, and zero otherwise. While the measure is coarse, it has found to be a reliable measure (cite). Second, I use a variety of spending and fundraising variables. Higher quality candidates may be better at fundraising or wealthier and able to loan their campaign money. I therefore test whether consolidated elections increases the amount of money raised or spent by challengers. The results for all of these variables is presented in Columns 1-3 of Table 5. The dependent variables in Columns 1 & 2 are the log of challenger receipts and log of challenger disbursements, respectively. Column 3 uses the previously held elected office variable. Consolidated primaries do not lead to challengers who are more likely to have previously held office, receive more in contributions, or to have spent more money on their campaigns. Assuming that these measures capture, or are sufficiently correlated, with candidate quality, consolidated primaries are therefore no more likely to attract and select higher-quality candidates.

Next, I turn to candidates policy scores. Even if candidates are not of higher quality, consolidated elections may choose challengers who are better suited for their

district. For example, if voters in consolidated elections are more representative to the general election population of voters, they may in turn choose a challenger who will be better able to succeed in the general election. Since DW-Nominate, the most common measurement of politician policy preferences, cannot be calculated for politicians who never take office, I cannot use it to measure the position of challengers (most of whom lose). Instead, I use the DW-Dime score developed by Bonica (2014), which uses campaign contributions to estimate the policy positions of candidates.

DW-Dime is calculated using campaign donations, which makes it available for many more candidate than DW-Dominate, but is still not available for many challengers (who may receive few contributions). However, it is available for an important subset of the population. Using the subset of races for which DW-Dime scores can be calculated, I find that the treatment effect of consolidated primaries on challenger success is particularly strong, while I find no treatment effect for districts where no DW-Dime score exists for the challenger. DW-Dime scores can be interpreted similarly to DW-Nominate scores, politicians are scored along a [-1,1] range, with 0 denoting the median position.

Consolidated primaries result in more moderate challengers, as shown in Column 4 of Table 5. Consolidated primaries lead to a decrease in the absolute value of DW-Dime scores of 0.0318, compared to a mean of 0.373. Moderate candidates also have greater success in the general election: decreases in the absolute value of DW-Dime scores are associated with a decrease in incumbent vote shares and an increase in challenger general election wins. Comparing these results to those of Rogowski and Langella (2015) highlights the magnitude of the turnout effect stemming from consolidated primaries. They find that closed primaries (which feature more restrictions on who can participate in primary elections) do *not* lead to more ideologically extreme candidates. But the effect of closed primaries on voter turnout is much smaller, so the corresponding effect on election outcomes could be

extremely small or non-existent.

One concern of using DW-Dime to measure candidate ideology is that consolidated primaries could change the behavior of donors, or lead candidates to seek out different donors. In this case, the causal effect would not be because different kinds of candidates are being selected, but because of changes in who was donating to candidates. However, the correlation between DW-Dime scores and DW-Nominate scores of successful challengers is extremely high (0.9948). Therefore, DW-Dime scores are likely accurate reflections of the preferred policy positions of the candidates themselves, and not the result of changing donation patterns.

This result suggests that the influx of voters in consolidated primaries are more moderate than other primary voters. Unfortunately, data on Congressional primary voters is scarce. For instance, I am unaware of any survey that asks people separately if they voted in Presidential and Congressional primaries. However, Brady et al. (2007) show that Congressional primary voters are more ideologically extreme than general election voters. Comparisons of voters in midterm elections to those in Presidential election years suggest that midterm voters are more ideologically extreme (Halberstam and Montagnes, 2015). If this same logic is applied to primary elections within a presidential election year, we would expect voters who are affected by consolidated primaries to be more ideologically moderate, and therefore the median voter theorem would suggest that consolidated primaries push candidates towards the middle (or select moderate candidates).

An alternative way of viewing these results is that consolidated primaries lead to challengers who are more ideologically similar to the incumbents they are facing, and since they are usually on opposite sides of the political spectrum, they achieve this through more moderate views. However, the fact that the body of voters in consolidated elections is significantly larger than when elections are not consolidated, and that this larger group votes for more moderate candidates, suggests that moderate politicians are desirable to voters.

Survey Results

The American National Election Study is the only nationwide survey with data available for the entirety of my sample, so I rely on this for my outcome variables. I find that the survey data confirms the election outcome data in that respondents increase reporting having voted for challengers following a consolidated primary, and also that voter opinions of challengers improve. I also find that members of the challenger's party report being more likely to have been contacted by their party following a consolidated primary while member of an incumbent's party do not.

Table 6 presents the results when survey data are used for the dependent variables. Column 1 uses a binary variable equal to 1 if a respondent reported voting for an election challenger, and 0 otherwise (including those who did not vote) I find that consolidated primaries lead to more respondents voting for general election challengers, consistent with the shift in vote shares shown in Table 3. Columns 2 and 3 use a "thermometer" rating of challengers and incumbents, respectively, where respondents are asked to rate candidates on a 0-100 scale.[10] I find that consolidated elections increase respondents opinion of the challenger, while the incumbent receives no such boost. In fact, the boost that challengers experience closes the (52.83 to 56.47) that exists between challengers and incumbents, suggesting that consolidated primaries reduce the incumbent/challenger gap in respondent favorability.

Interestingly, the increase in respondent opinions of the challenger are clustered among members of the respondents' political party. While same-party members see a large increase, non-party respondents show only a modest, statistically insignificant increase. This result suggests that candidate characteristics alone do not explain the increase in challenger success. Since consolidated primaries leads to challengers who are ideologically more moderate, I would expect members of the

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[10]I only included observations in which the respondents ranked both the challenger and the incumbent.

incumbent's party or independent to increase their favorability of the candidate at magnitudes similar to, if not greater, than that of the candidate's own party. I do not find this to be true, which suggests that candidate characteristics alone do not explain the increase in challenger success.

Finally, I find that consolidated primaries lead to an increase in voter mobilization in favor of challengers. The ANES asks whether a respondent has been "contacted" by either party. While the definition of contact can be ambiguous and open to interpretation, it is strongly correlated with respondents' stated voting behavior. Since Congressional campaigns can purchase voter rolls following a primary election, larger primary electorates will in turn yield larger voter rolls. I find that when the challenger is selected in a consolidated primary, members of the challengers' party state that they are 10.7 percentage points more likely to report having been contacted by their own party, as seen in Column 4 of Table 6. This is a 41% increase when compared to a mean of 25.9% contact rate.

Members of an incumbent's party see no such increase, with Column 5 showing a small, statistically insignificant effect. Using the sample sizes and means, I calculate that incumbents contact 56% more people who are members of their own party than do challengers, even though they contact similar *rates* of their own party members. Because fewer people report being members of challengers' parties, challengers may face a resource gap in mobilizing voters.[11] Since challengers' parties are, on average, have fewer people in their district, challengers must reach higher rates of those potential voters to match the mobilization efforts of incumbents. Consolidated primaries, which increase the number of people contacted by 40%, appear to significantly narrow this gap.

Consolidated elections lead to more moderate challengers winning elections, and increased rates of voter contact for members of that challenger's party. But are these

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[11]I do not find that consolidated elections lead to more people reporting being members of the challengers' party, indicating that consolidated elections do not lead to an increase in people registering for challengers' parties.

the mechanisms that drive the higher challenger vote shares and likelihood of general election victory? The results (not shown) from a regression of general election outcomes on each of these variables indicate that they are strongly associated with increased challenger success.

These results still leave several more questions which cannot be definitively answered here. Challengers see a boost in mobilized voters while incumbents do not, even though they both see similar boost in primary voters. There are several potential explanations for this. First, even though challengers and incumbents see similar boosts to primary turnout, the distribution of voters may skew in favor of challengers. In the ANES survey data, I find that members of the challenger's party are more likely to vote in presidential primaries when they are consolidated, which may also mean that they are more likely to vote in Congressional elections when they are consolidated. Alternatively, the "affected" voters in incumbent primaries may be more attached voters than those in challenger primaries. If those who are drawn into primary elections involving incumbents were highly likely to vote in the general election anyway, consolidated primaries would have little effect.

Conclusion

Challengers to incumbents will probably lose their elections. They face uphill battles against candidates who are well-funded, well-known, and (usually) well-liked within their own district. This paper shows how a seemingly trivial attribute of a challenger's political environment, whether their primary was consolidated with a presidential primary, has lingering effects on the general election success of challengers. Consolidated primaries result in an increase in primary and general election votes, and more competitive challengers, with smaller margins of victory for incumbents and increased likelihood of challenger wins.

I find that two specific mechanism are present to explain how consolidated pri-

maries help challengers. First, challengers selected during consolidated primaries are more ideologically moderate. Second, members of challengers' parties report a higher likelihood of being contacted by their party during a general election campaign following a consolidated primary. Members of incumbents' parties report no such increase.

Both the ideological moderation of challengers and voter contact are associated with improved general election outcomes. However, a causal link cannot be directly established in this setting. The nearest econometric solution would be to use consolidated primaries as an instrument for voter contact (or moderate challengers). Unfortunately, in the two-stage framework where I instrument for voter contact, I would have to assume that the effect of consolidation does not act through some other mechanism; but since it also leads to more moderate challengers, I would in turn be assuming that the extent of ideological moderation has no effect on election outcomes. Fortunately, I can appeal to a body of literature that has consistently shown that moderate challengers are more successful in general elections. The effect of voter contact is more mixed, but has typically found that direct voter contact successfully increases a candidate's success.

General elections in the United States increasingly feature two politically polarized candidates (the absolute value of DW-Dime scores for challengers increased by 12% from 1980 to 2012; for incumbents it increased by 33%), and research has shown that general election voters fail to push candidates towards the political center. Therefore, primary elections are emerging as the main mechanism through which voters can influence the moderation of elected officials without voting for someone on the opposite end of the political spectrum than their own. But low-turnout primaries end up selecting more politically extreme challengers, who also become more likely to lose in the general election, with lingering effects (Hall, 2015). By holding primaries on the same day as presidential primary elections, politicians and voters may be able to achieve numerous beneficial (from their perspective) outcomes.

Political parties can reduce the probability of nominating extreme candidates who fare poorly in general elections, and since high-turnout primary elections lead to higher rates of voter contact, it also provides them a low-cost method of identifying potential general-election voters.

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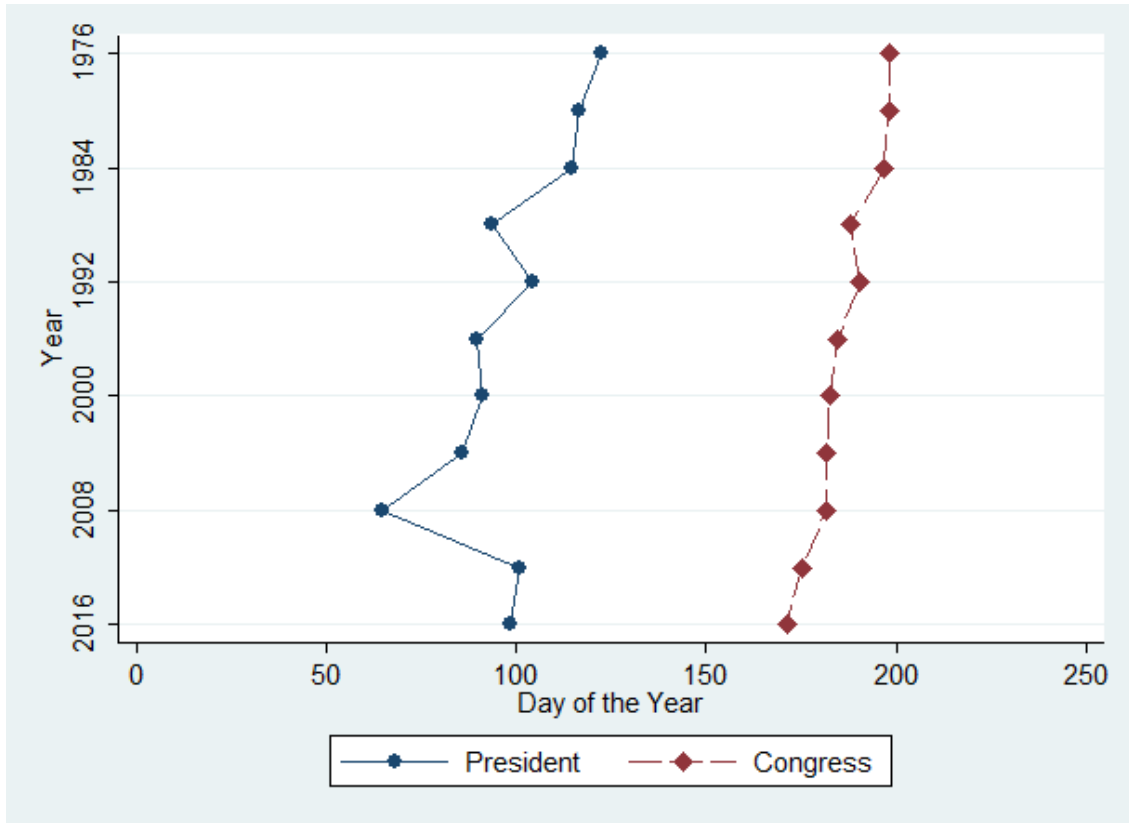
Figure 1: Determinants of Primary Elections

Table 1: Determinants of Primary Election Timing

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Unemployment Rate	-0.00618	-	-	-
	(0.01)			
% Incumbents	-	0.0000896	-	-
		(0.000324)		
Unified Congress	-	-	0.0399	-
			(0.033)	
Favorite Son	-	-	-	0.000984
				(0.0246)
Observations	500	500	500	500
R-squared	0.842	0.842	0.843	0.842

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2: Effect of Primary Election Timing

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Log of Primary Election Total Votes			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Consolidated(=1)	0.379***	0.414***	0.420***	0.0265
	(0.0971)	(0.113)	(0.0893)	(0.117)
Observations	5,316	2,306	2,282	728
R-squared	0.25	0.419	0.327	0.31
Sample	ALL	INC.	CHALL.	OPEN

Robust standard errors, clustered at
the state/year level, in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3: Effect of Primary Election Timing

VARIABLES	(1) Log(Votes)	(2) Log(Votes)	(3) Incumbent Vote Share	(4) Margin	(5) Challenger Win (=1)
Consolidated (=1)	0.0979***	0.0414	-3.530***	-6.728***	0.0455***
	(0.0306)	(0.0332)	(1.341)	(2.466)	(0.0137)
Primary Month	0.00365	0.00386	0.564*	0.991	0.00131
	(0.0107)	(0.0107)	(0.324)	(0.615)	(0.00498)
Incumbent Race (=1)		-0.0442***			
		(0.0115)			
Consolidated X Incumbent Race		0.0652***			
		(0.0220)			
Mean (D.V.)	12.29	12.29	69.22	40.43	0.038
Observations	4,427	4,427	3,957	3,957	3,957
R-squared	0.594	0.595	0.208	0.208	0.027

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: Effect of Primary Election Timing

VARIABLES	(1) Presidential Votes	(2) Undervotes
Consolidated(=1)	0.00127	-2.721**
	(0.0270)	(1.324)
Observations	502	502
R-squared	0.987	0.554

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5: Candidate Quality

Dependent Variable	Log (Receipts) (1)	Log (Disbursement) (2)	Prev. Office (3)	DW-Dime (Absolute Value) (4)
Consolidated(=1)	-0.273	-0.358	-0.00443	-0.0316**
	(0.392)	(0.338)	(0.0324)	(0.0142)
Observations	3,492	3,492	3,757	1,080
R-squared	0.15	0.127	0.069	0.23
Sample	1980-2016	1980-2016	1976-2008	1980-2012

Robust standard errors, clustered at
the state/year level, in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: ANES Survey Data

Dependent Variable	Vote Chall (1)	Chal Therm (2)	Inc Therm (3)	Contact (4)	Contact (5)
Consolidated(=1)	0.0357***	4.263**	0.0476	0.107**	0.0570
	(0.0123)	(2.04)	(1.906)	(0.0474)	(0.0627)
Observations	25,311	9,218	9,218	6,184	8,989
Mean	0.135	52.83	56.47	0.259	0.279
R-squared	0.024	0.142	0.069	0.078	0.075

Robust standard errors, clustered at
the state/year level, in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1