NOMINATION CONTESTS AS INDICATORS OF GENERAL ELECTION STRENGTH

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Public Policy

By

Jedediah Daniel Ober, B.A.

Washington, D.C.
April 3, 2009
This work would not have been possible without the assistance of

Harold Ickes, Deborah Nolan,

and, of course, David Newman.
NOMINATION CONTESTS AS INDICATORS OF GENERAL ELECTION STRENGTH

Jedediah D. Ober, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: David Newman, S.J. PhD

ABSTRACT

The 2008 Democratic nominating campaign will be remembered as the longest and closest in the history of the Democratic Party. Throughout the campaign the party’s nominating rules were debated by the campaigns, members of the media, and over dinner tables across the country. Never before had the inner workings of an American political party’s selection process been under such scrutiny for so long. As the nomination campaign continued unremittingly, the debate began to focus on which candidate would in fact be more electable in the November general election. While each candidate chose a different set of metrics to gauge their potential general election strength, both focused on one widely available source, the results of state Democratic nominating contests. At the time, many argued there was simply no connection between a candidate’s performance in a nominating contest and their potential general election strength, and at the time, it was impossible to measure given the general election had not taken place. Now, a closer examination is possible. This study employs ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis to model the relationship between a candidate’s performance in a nominating contest and their subsequent performance in the general election.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..........................................................................................................................1

Literature Review.................................................................................................................3

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis..............................................................................7

Data....................................................................................................................................10

Analysis Plan.....................................................................................................................12

Descriptive and Bivariate Analysis....................................................................................15

Results of Multivariate Analysis........................................................................................21

Multivariate Analysis Introducing Nominating Mechanisms............................................26

Implications and Recommendations..................................................................................32

References..........................................................................................................................36
INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Party’s 2008 presidential nominating process will be remembered as the longest and closest in the party’s history. From its beginning until its end, two high profile candidates competed for the party’s nomination.

Throughout the process, the party’s nominating rules were debated by the campaigns, members of the media, and over dinner tables across the country. Never before had the inner workings of an American political party’s selection process been under such scrutiny for so long. As the country tried to decipher the arithmetic underlying the Democratic Party’s rules, the campaigns of both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton spiritedly lobbied the now famous Super Delegates. As neither candidate would reach the requisite minimum of pledged delegates to secure the nomination, the remarkable responsibility of choosing the party’s nominee fell to this group of unpledged party leaders and elected officials. Of course, the Super Delegates eventually chose to confirm Barack Obama’s narrow margin in the pledged delegate race, thus paving his way to become the Democratic nominee and ultimately the country’s next president.

As the nomination campaign continued unremittingly, the debate began to focus on which candidate would in fact be more electable in the November general election. While each candidate chose a different set of specific metrics to gauge their potential strength in November, both focused on one widely available source, the results of state Democratic nominating contests. Secretary Clinton’s campaign claimed her appeal was stronger in the swing states, such as Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Florida and that her support amongst critical general election constituencies, such as Hispanics
and blue collar workers would propel her to victory in November. The Obama campaign claimed greater support amongst independents and that their candidate had an ability to appeal in states which traditionally favored the Republican candidate such as North Carolina and Virginia. At the time, many argued there was simply no connection between a candidate’s performance in a nominating contest and their potential general election strength, and at the time, it was impossible to measure as the general election had not yet occurred.

With the results of the 2008 general election now known we can use this data to conduct a more thorough quantitative analysis of the claims made by both campaigns that primary performance can be used as an indicator of general election strength. This research seeks to answer the question, what can we infer from a candidate's nomination campaign performance about their potential strength in the general election? This analysis could prove useful not only in settling a campaign long dispute but also in efforts which are currently taking place to rewrite the party’s delegate selection rules. If a nominating campaign can serve as an indicator of general election strength this would be valuable information when crafting new delegate allocation methods for the future of the Democratic nominating process. Using 2008 state level data, this research aims to uncover any statistical relationships between a candidate’s performance in a party nominating contest and their subsequent performance in a general election.
LITERATURE REVIEW

While previous research has not focused specifically on identifying direct correlations between primary performance and general election outcomes, many scholars have explored the relationship. Two specific fields of research are of particular interest to this study. First, research which investigates the potential for shared characteristics between primary and general election electorates is valuable. Second, research which employs general election outcome models provides guidance in terms of model specification.

PRIMARY ELECTORATES VS. GENERAL ELECTORATES

A long scholarly debate exists as to whether or not primary electorates are ideologically similar or dissimilar from their general election counterparts. In attempting to decipher this relationship, Ranney and Epstein (1968) show how the ideologies of primary electorates do not differ significantly from their general election partisan counterparts. They reach their conclusion by comparing party specific primary voters to non-primary voting partisans, assuming these individuals are representative of the greater party rank and file. Dinitto and Smithers (1972) confirm their finding. Norrander (1998) makes a critical correction to this analysis when she compares the partisan primary electorate to the general election partisan electorate which did not participate in the nominating campaign. She finds a statistically significant similarity between these two groups.

In applying this research to the 2008 Democratic nominating campaign, we could confirm that at least within partisan groupings, support amongst primary electorates can
be used as a basis to make inference on the potential support of general election partisans. These studies do not, however, shed light on whether or not that partisan support for one candidate means these individuals are unlikely to support the partisan alternative. The body of literature which focuses on nominating contest divisiveness can aid this study in that regard.

**GENERAL ELECTION OUTCOME MODELS**

The study of primary divisiveness is one which employs general election outcome models. Election outcome models are defined by researchers in attempts to answer important electoral questions. The definition and application of such models can be divided into a few major research categories which all contribute to the broad discussion of the appropriate specification of election outcome models. Two of these categories, the study of nomination campaign divisiveness and election forecasting, are particularly helpful to this research.

Kenney and Rice (1984) examine the effect of divisiveness in gubernatorial and senatorial elections. As a measure of divisiveness they include the eventual Democratic nominee's percentage of the primary vote simultaneously with the same measure for the Republican counterpart. By simultaneously including these variables, they find using ordinary least squares regression analysis that divisiveness has a negative effect on the eventual nominee's chances in the November election. They also find this effect to be greater amongst senatorial candidates.

Stone (1986), in studying “the carryover hypothesis”, finds an individual's pre-nomination preference to have a very slight effect on their general election participation,
but finds that for partisan activists a bitter primary campaign may dissuade them from political activism in the general election. Stone uses a series of dichotomous dependent variable regression models to gauge both general election participation and activism with an individual level sample of 1980 Iowa party activists as well as National Election Study surveys. Stone's study shows how nomination activity can in fact effect general election activity.

In their 1987 study, Kenney and Rice correct their previous measure of divisiveness by abandoning their simultaneous measure in favor of a relative measure calculated as the difference between the Democratic nominee's share of the statewide vote and that of his Republican counterpart. They employ ordinary least squares regression with control variables for states’ previous voting patterns, the percentage of total minor party vote, an incumbency control as well as a variable to account for the unique politics of the south. Their corrected measure of divisiveness also shows prenomination preferences significantly affecting general election candidate choice, particularly when one party holds a divisive primary while the other enjoys a relatively non-competitive nominating campaign. This aggregate analysis, which has been confirmed by other scholars (Lengle 1980), builds off of Stone's findings at the individual level.

Kenney and Rice (1988) use a dynamic simultaneous model of vote choice to show that prenomination preferences affect general election vote choice. Unlike previous studies with similar models, they include as an independent variable a prenomination
preference. Through path analysis they show the significant effect this prenomination term has on eventual general election candidate selection.

Atkeson (1998) questions previous general election outcome models on the basis that they do not control for election year context. Any changes in divisiveness over time, she explains, should be attributable to the context of an election year. She argues candidate quality, which had been measured in statewide races (Kenney and Rice 1984), is critical to the outcome. For this reason, she argues the general election should be viewed in a national context, and thus changes the unit of analysis to year. This change allows her model to include controls for presidential approval as well as the change in the unemployment rate. To gauge divisiveness she subtracts the out party’s nominee nomination vote share from the incumbent party’s nominee vote share. She also employs dummy variables to control for election year context. Her ordinary least squares regression, controlling for candidate quality, finds divisiveness is not significantly different than zero and that the state of the economy and favorability of the incumbent party are more important than divisiveness.

**GENERAL ELECTION FORECASTING**

General election forecasting is generally not relevant to this research as most forecasts use the results of individual state level polling to hypothesize the outcome, however, some of these models can provide guidance on particular control variables of interest to this study. For example, Norpoth (2008) expresses a candidate's primary support as the percentage of the vote garnered by the eventual nominee relative to his chief competitor in his ordinary least squares general election outcome model. His
rationale for this correction is in its ability to eliminate any effect which a crowded primary field may have on the nominee's support throughout the nominating campaign. He also includes a dummy variable which corrects for incumbency. This enables his model to adapt to situations in which an incumbent faces little to no realistic opposition in his party's nominating contest. Both of Norpoth's corrections will help guide this study.

While previous studies do not identify specific relationships between a candidate's performance in a nomination contest and their subsequent performance in the general election, they provide a useful framework for which such an analysis can be conducted. As most studies have focused on individual preferences and not candidate performance, such an analysis could fill a void not only in the contemporary political debate but also within literature which aims to reveal connections between nominating campaigns and general election contests.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS**

This study seeks to explain the relationship between a candidate's performance throughout a primary campaign and their subsequent performance in the general election. Specifically, it aims to show that a strong performance in a state level nominating contest could serve as an indicator of that candidate's potential in the statewide general election contest. To conduct such an analysis we must consider a host of factors. These factors can be divided into traditional general election outcome controls as well as a group of potential indicators from the nominating campaign. The following equation outlines some broad potential measures of state level general election support:
Democratic Nominee General Support = $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Strength of Economy} + \beta_2 \text{State Level Partisanship} + \beta_3 \text{Presidential Approval} + \beta_4 \text{Democratic Primary Support} + \beta_5 \text{Republican Primary Support} + \beta_6 \text{Type of Democratic Nominating Mechanism} + \beta_7 \text{Divisiveness}$

While one could consider including a direct poll of the potential state electorate, this study will not employ the use of pre-election polling data as its focus is not to predict the winner of the election, but to gauge the effect of certain factors on candidate general election strength.

A nominee's support in a state level general election will depend on a number of economic and political factors, some of which can potentially be measured by the candidate's support in a state level party nominating contest. Of primary consequence to a general election candidate is the strength of the economy and whether or not that candidate is a member of the incumbent president's party or of the opposition (Fair 1978, Atkeson 1998, Bartels 1987). In a struggling economy the out-party candidate can expect a greater level of support than he would otherwise, and likewise, the incumbent party candidate can expect to be framed as a symbol of current economic hardships.

An important political factor to consider is the current partisan makeup of the state's electorate. In an electoral system which is dominated by two parties, the partisan leanings of the state’s electorate could provide a simple but powerful lens to view potential candidate support. While there are certainly examples of statewide elections bucking the state’s partisan trend, such as the Republican governor of the staunchly
Democratic state of California as well as the former longstanding Republican control of the Massachusetts governor's office, generally, we can expect a state to follow a partisan trend over time.

States in which the electorate displays high levels of disdain or approval for the incumbent president can be expected to display similar preferences for the major party general election candidates (Finkel 1993). A state which views the president and his policies favorably, can be expected to support the candidacy of the president's partisan peer. In contrast, those states which express high levels of disapproval of the president's agenda may be more likely to support the out party candidate.

The support of a candidate in state level nominating campaigns may provide indications of how this candidate will fair in the state's general election contest. If a candidate is able to effectively build a strong coalition of primary voters, this may forecast their ability to bring critical constituencies into a potential general election coalition. This study intends to show how a candidate's support in a state level nominating contest can provide evidence of their potential support in the state level general election contest, and specifically hypothesizes that variables which gauge a candidate's support in a nominating campaign will have a positive relationship with that candidates statewide support in the November election.

This study will also focus on the potential for the Democratic Party's differing nominating mechanisms to affect this relationship. A particular style of nominating mechanism may accentuate this relationship or perhaps even negate it. Given this framework, this research will attempt to draw conclusions on whether certain styles of
nominating mechanisms are better suited to act as potential measures of a candidate's general election strength. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that open primary systems will most accurately predict a candidate's strength in a general election campaign. Open primary systems are more inclusive, so have the potential to create a sample via a nominating contest which is more representative of a potential general election electorate. This research will provide Democratic Party leaders with important insight into their nomination process and allow them to consider changes to party rules which will best equip them to nominate candidates with broad general election appeal.

DATA

This research uses a data set compiled by the author which includes state level results of the 2008 general election and nomination contests as well as a variety of state level political and economic factors. It encompasses all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Its sources are many, and where applicable they are cited.

It is important to re-emphasize that this data set includes only 2008 data and to explain why the decision to limit this study's scope to the 2008 election season was made. The 2008 presidential electoral cycle was like no other in that on the Democratic side two high profile candidates traded wins and losses from the early January contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, which Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton split, until the final June contests in Montana and South Dakota, which they also split. Never before had a nominating contest provided such a full sample of state level data for researchers. Not
only was the contest competitive from the beginning until the end, it also shattered
previous voter turnout marks. In light of these facts, the results of the 2008 Democratic
nominating campaign make for a unique and potentially powerful state level analysis.

Data for the results of the general election and nominating contests was collected
from a variety of electronic resources. Vote totals and percentages were collected as
reported by Real Clear Politics and MSNBC and then confirmed on secretary of state
websites where conflicts existed. Democratic nominating contest types were tallied from
The Green Papers, who report the state contest’s voter eligibility interpreted from state
party delegate selection plans. Total state registration with partisan breakdowns was
gathered from voter registration statistics reported by state boards of elections. State level
economic indicators were collected as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Partisanship measures were gathered from the National Conference on State Legislatures.
All data is collected at the state level for all fifty states plus the District of Columbia.

While this data set provides an intriguing sample, given the nature of the 2008
Democratic nominating contest, it admittedly suffers from inadequacies. Most critical is
the limited number of observations this cross sectional state level data set provides, which
may detract from the power of this study’s results. Another problem is timing. While we
are trying to conduct an analysis on an event which has recently transpired, some state
level data is unavailable for November of 2008. Certainly any census variables which
may have otherwise been useful will not be available, however, would most likely not
affect the results.
ANALYSIS PLAN

This research focuses on how nomination contest performance can provide indications of a candidate's general election strength. The initial analysis will focus on a fifty one observation state level sample of election results, political and economic factors. It will then expand to include controls for Democratic nominating mechanisms.

This research will employ ordinary least squares regression analysis to create a series of general election outcome models which will examine the aforementioned relationship. It is expected that this relationship will be linear and positive throughout. The first two stages of this analysis use a general election outcome model which will include as the dependent variable the percentage of the vote garnered by the Democratic nominee in the state general election contest.

The key explanatory variable in this initial model is the percentage of the vote garnered by the eventual Democratic nominee in the state level nominating contest. This variable will act as a measure of nominating contest support. This percentage will be corrected, however, using previous researcher's methods. This study will employ the same correction method used by Norpoth (2008) and re-calculate the nominee's support relative to that of his chief competitor. Specifically, the nominee’s support was divided by the sum of his support and that of his chief competitor. This corrected percentage is also included for the Republican nominee.

It's important to point out some deficiencies in the available data. First of all, on the Democratic side, the eventual nominee did not appear on the ballot in the state of
Michigan. Instead of accepting this as fact and thus removing this state from the analysis, this study follows the lead of the Democratic Party's Rules and Bylaws committee in using as the percentage of the vote for Barack Obama the proportion of votes cast for “uncommitted”. Also of concern were some anachronistic methods of delegate allocation on the Republican side. In Wyoming, no vote totals were ever reported as a result of the Republican closed caucus. In place of Wyoming percentages the study uses percentages based on the state's final national convention delegate breakdown. The Hawaiian Republican caucuses presented no clear solutions for inferring statewide nominating contest support. Hawaiian Republicans do not express presidential preferences at the county level only support for state level delegates who elect national convention delegates. No results of any sort were reported besides that the party had allocated all of its delegates to Senator John McCain. As a result, Hawaii was dropped from the analysis.

As an additional measure of nominating contest support, the model includes a pair of dummy variables representing whether or not the Democratic nominee, as well as the Republican nominee, emerged victorious from the state's nominating contest. This variable provides the ability to gauge a potential carryover effect of simply winning a state's nomination campaign.

As previous research suggests (Fair 1978, Atkeson 1998), this model also includes an appropriate measure of state level economic conditions. In order to gauge economic conditions at the appropriate time, state level unemployment as reported in October of 2008 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics is included. We can expect increases in
statewide unemployment to positively affect our dependent variable, given that, the Democrat, Barack Obama, was the out-party nominee in 2008.

Also included is a measure of state level partisanship. While an obvious choice to gauge partisanship would be raw partisan voter registration numbers, this was not possible for a number of reasons. First, many states don't require partisan voter registration. Second, when states do require partisan registration some do not publicly report the partisan breakdown, only the total number of registrants. Lastly, North Dakota does not require registration at all. Given the small size of this study's sample, it was decided not to use registration numbers and instead include the most recent partisan breakdown of the state's legislature. This variable is reported as the Democratic percentage of the total state legislature including both the state house and state senate or their state level equivalents. The values reflect the current makeup of state legislatures as reported by the National Conference on State Legislatures.

Consistent with previous aggregate general election models, this study incorporates a measure of divisiveness. This measure is calculated as the difference between the eventual Republican nominee’s percentage of the nominating contest vote and the eventual Democratic nominee’s percentage in the same state level nominating contest (Kenney and Rice 1987, Atkeson 1998).

There is theoretical potential for specific styles of nominating mechanisms to serve more effectively as predictors of a candidate's potential general election strength. It's conceivable that open mechanisms, which allow for cross party voting, may provide a more representative sample of the state's November electorate. On the other hand, closed
mechanisms, which prohibit the participation of voters registered with another party, may not accurately represent the November electorate. This study examines the potential for unique effects of varying styles of nominating contests. To achieve this, a series of dummy variables were constructed to capture whether a state employs an open primary system, a closed primary system, an open caucus system, a closed caucus system, or modified primary or caucus systems. Finally, the nominating mechanism dummy variables are interacted with the corrected percentage of the Democratic nominee's nominating contest support (Norpoth 2008). These variables are designed to gauge the combined effect of the style of nominating contest and the nominee's support in that contest on the eventual general election performance of the nominee, to assess whether particular styles of nominating systems have unique abilities to project potential general election support.

DESCRIPTIVE AND BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 1 presents basic descriptive statistics for our dependent variable as well as our independent variables of interest. President Barack Obama secured a mean of 51.4 percent in general election contests as opposed to Senator John McCain’s mean of 47.0, both with a standard deviation of 11 percent. Barack Obama won 29 states in the general election as opposed to the 22 states which awarded their electoral votes to John McCain. The highest percentage he received was 92.4 percent, in the heavily Democratic District of Columbia. John McCain’s maximum was 66.7 percent, in the Republican stronghold of Oklahoma.
TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS - DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND CONTINUOUS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Vote in General</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>92.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Vote in General</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee Primary Vote</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Nominee Primary Vote</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Percentage of State Legislature</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Real Clear Politics, National Conference of State Legislatures, Bureau of Labor Statistics
Notes: The term “primary” is used to generalize for all styles of nominating contests. Primary support calculations based on corrected percentages (Norpoth 2008)

In the nominating contests, Barack Obama received mean state level support of 54.9 with a standard deviation of 12.9 percentage points. John McCain received 56.7 percent of the vote with a standard deviation of 21.1. The differences in standard deviation may be attributable to the competitiveness of the Democratic contest in relation to the Republican one. It is also noteworthy that John McCain’s minimum level of state level support was 5.6 percent where Barack Obama’s was 27.2 percent. For McCain this represents the primary contest in Utah, for Obama, Arkansas. In contrast to his primary
performance, John McCain eventually won Utah in the general election. Consistent with his primary result, Barack Obama lost Arkansas in the general election.

Other variables included in this analysis are state level unemployment as well as the partisan makeup of the state’s legislature. The mean unemployment rate across states was 5.8 percent with a standard deviation of 1.4. The lowest unemployment rate was 3.3 percent in both South Dakota and Wyoming. The highest unemployment rate was 9.3 percent in Michigan. These results are consistent with previous research in that the out-party, the Democrats, won the state which suffered the highest unemployment rate, Michigan, and the in-party won the states with the lowest (Fair 1978, Bartels 1987, Atkeson 1998).

The mean percentage of Democratic representation in state legislatures is 55.4 percent with a standard deviation of 15.9 percent. The most Democratic state legislature is Rhode Island, a state carried by Barack Obama. The least Democratic state legislature is Idaho, a state carried by John McCain.

Table 2 displays a comparison between the Democratic nominee's performance in the nominating contests and the general election. In sixteen states, Barack Obama won the nominating contest and the general election. In fourteen states he won the nominating contest but lost the general election. The majority of his general election victories came in states in which he won in the nominating campaign. However, this pattern does not hold for the states in which he lost the nominating contest. He won thirteen states in the general election that he lost in the nominating contest, as opposed to eight states in which
he lost both contests. A chi square test of significance on this frequency distribution shows no statistical significance (\(\chi^2=.37, p=.54\)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: DEMOCRATIC FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION – PRIMARY VS. GENERAL WINS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Real Clear Politics, MSNBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes: (\chi^2=.37, p=.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 examines the same relationships for the Republican nominee. Senator McCain won ten states in the general election which he also won in the nominating contest as opposed to twenty two states he lost in November which he had won in the nominating contest. Consistent with these results, were the trends in his losses between states. He won twelve states in the general election which he had lost in the nominating campaign and lost seven states in the general which he had also lost in the nominating campaign. The chi square test of significance on this distribution does however show statistical significance (\(\chi^2=4.94, p=.02\)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3: REPUBLICAN FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION – PRIMARY VS. GENERAL WINS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Real Clear Politics, MSNBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes: (\chi^2=4.94, p=.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 examines the relationship between this study’s dependent variable, the percentage of the Democratic nominee’s vote in the general election, and the independent variables. The results of this bivariate analysis are inconsistent with the stated hypothesis that primary performance can indicate potential general election strength. The pairwise correlation coefficients are insignificant for the percentage of the vote garnered in state level nominating contests for both the Democratic nominee and the Republican nominee. This trend holds for whether the Democratic nominee won the primary contest. A surprising result of this bivariate analysis is the positive coefficient on the dummy variable measuring whether the Republican nominee won the nominating contest. This statistically significant positive measure of association is counter intuitive.

As per the results of the pairwise correlation, divisiveness also does not appear to have a statistically significant effect on the eventual Democratic nominee’s share of the general election vote. While the negative coefficient is expected, the significance level of .23 does not support a statistically significant conclusion. The correlation coefficients which control for economic conditions and statewide partisanship both show the expected positive relationships. Both of these coefficients are statistically significant at traditional levels.
To examine the effect of particular styles of nominating mechanisms, mechanism
dummy variables were interacted with the Democratic nominee’s vote share in the
nominating contest. Table 5 reports the results of pairwise correlations between these
interaction terms and the Democratic percentage of the vote in the general election
contest. The table also reports the correlations of the Democratic percentage of the vote
in the general election and a dichotomous measure gauging whether the state employed a
caucus system or a primary system. The results of this bivariate analysis show the
majority of these nominating mechanisms to have statistically insignificant effects on

| TABLE 4: PAIRWISE CORRELATIONS  
DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL VOTE VS. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coefficient</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee Primary Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Nominee Primary Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee Won Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Nominee Won Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Percentage of State Legislature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Real Clear Politics, National Conference of State Legislatures, Bureau of Labor Statistics
Notes: It should be noted that the “Norpoth correction” did improve the level of statistical significance
but not to relevant levels.
general election performance when interacted with state level primary support. A notable exception to this is the positive coefficient on the closed primary interaction. The pairwise correlation in this instance returns a positive and statistically significant result. While these bivariate results may shed some light on the effect of nominating mechanisms their effect will be more accurately gauged as part of a multivariate regression analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOMINATING MECHANISM INTERACTION</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucus</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Primary</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Primary</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Primary</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Caucus</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Caucus</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Caucus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Real Clear Politics, National Conference of State Legislatures, Bureau of Labor Statistics

**MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION RESULTS**

This section reports the results of this study's multivariate ordinary least squares regression analysis, including the initial model, described in previous sections, as well as a series of more sophisticated specifications which aim to reveal potential effects of state level nominating mechanisms on the predictive nature of the state's nominating system.

To review, the initial model is defined as:
Democratic Nominee General Support = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Democratic Primary Support} \\
+ \beta_2 \text{Republican Primary Support} + \beta_3 \text{Republican Nominee Won Primary} \\
+ \beta_4 \text{Democratic Nominee Won Primary} + \beta_5 \text{Divisiveness} + \beta_6 \text{Unemployment} + \\
\beta_7 \text{Percentage of State Legislature Democratic}

Table 6 reports the results of this regression analysis. Table 6 does not report a coefficient for the variable which captures the Republican nominee's performance in the state's nominating contest. The variable was dropped from the model, due to high multicollinearity with the model's measure of divisiveness. The alternative to dropping this variable would have been dropping the measure of divisiveness from the model. For two reasons, it was decided that omitting the Republican nominee's percentage of the vote from the model was the appropriate solution. The first reason stems from the depth of research focused on the effect of divisiveness on general election outcomes. With so much prior focus on the potential for divisive nominating contests affecting general election outcomes, it seemed inappropriate to drop this measure from this analysis. The second reason is due to the nature of this study. The focus of this study is the potential predictive nature of Democratic nominating contests. Considering this study focuses on potential Democratic general election performance, dropping the Republican nominee's primary vote share does not seem detrimental to the theoretical foundations of the model.
| TABLE 6: MULTIVARIATE RESULTS  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMOCRATIC PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL VOTE</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee's Primary Vote</td>
<td>0.46* (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee Won Primary</td>
<td>-7.21* (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Nominee Won Primary</td>
<td>9.12* (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisiveness</td>
<td>0.07 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>0.33 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Legislature Democratic</td>
<td>0.52* (.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| R-squared                            | .67            |
| Joint Significance                   | 0.00           |

Notes: Percentage of Republican nominee's primary vote dropped due to high multicollinearity with divisiveness. Standard Errors in parentheses. * indicates significance at 95% level or better.

The results reported in Table 6 reveal a few surprises. The model's measures of divisiveness and unemployment are not statistically significant at the traditional level. For divisiveness, this is not entirely inconsistent with previous scholars' findings (Atkeson 1998). The results do not provide a means to support a claim that the divisiveness of the 2008 nominating contest had adverse effects on President Obama's performance in the November election. The fact that the model's economic measure, the state level October unemployment rate, does not have a statistically significant effect on the Democratic
nominee's performance in November is surprising and contrary to previous research (Fair 1978). The overwhelming evidence supporting the argument that economic factors affect the results of presidential elections warrants potential changes to the model which may better capture economic realities at the state level. To account for this reality the measure of unemployment was altered to reflect the over-the-year change in state level unemployment from 2007 to 2008 as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is calculated by subtracting the final measure of unemployment in 2008 from the final measure of unemployment in 2007. The multivariate regression did not, however, return a statistically significant coefficient for this measure.

Whether each party's nominee emerged victorious in their state level nominating contest significantly affects the Democratic nominee's performance in November. The direction of this effect, however, may be a bit of a quandary. If the Republican nominee won his party's state nominating contest, the Democratic nominee can expect this to have a positive effect on his performance in the state's November election. If the Democratic nominee won his party's state nominating contest, he can expect this to have a negative effect on his performance in November.

It’s critical to understand that these dummy variables have one time intercept effects. The magnitude of the win or loss is not accounted for in these variables. While the result may seem counter intuitive, if we consider the circumstances of our limited 2008 sample, the logic may be apparent. Throughout the 2008 Democratic nominating campaign, President Obama fared well in states which would traditionally cast their votes for the Republican candidate in November, such as Idaho, Kansas and Georgia. Secretary
Clinton competed well in more traditionally Democratic states, such as California, Massachusetts and New York. As a result, many states which President Obama won in the nominating contest were inevitably won by Senator McCain in November and many states which he lost in the nominating contest he inevitably won in the general. In fact, as Table 2 illustrates, in twenty-seven states, President Obama's results were not consistent from the primary to the general election. On the Republican side, this effect may be attributable to Senator McCain's relatively early emergence as his party's nominee. As Table 3 illustrates, Senator McCain's results were consistent across the primary and general elections in only seventeen states. So while the results may initially seem counter intuitive, a deeper analysis of the 2008 case sheds light on the directions of these coefficients.

State level partisanship also has a statistically significant effect on the Democratic nominee's performance in the general election. For each percentage point of Democratic representation in a state's legislature, the Democratic nominee can expect an additional .52 percentage points in that state's November election. This result is far from surprising. The more Democratic a state legislature, the more likely the Democratic nominee is to fare well in the state's general election. These results are consistent with the model's theoretical foundations.

The independent variable of interest, the Democratic nominee's percentage of vote in the state's nominating contest displays a statistically significant effect on the nominee's percentage of the vote in the state's November election. For every percentage point of support garnered by the Democratic nominee in the state's nominating contest, the
nominee can expect .46 percentage points of support in the state's general election. This finding supports those who argue that nominating contests can serve as potential indicators of general election strength.

MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION RESULTS: INTRODUCING NOMINATING MECHANISMS

In order to capture the effects of varying styles of nominating mechanisms, a series of OLS regressions were conducted which use as a foundation the model discussed in the previous section. Table 7 and Table 8 report the results of these models.

Table 7 reports the results of two expansions to the initial OLS model. Model A introduces a control variables to gauge the effect of primary style nominating mechanisms as opposed to caucus systems. The model includes both a dummy variable which gauges whether the state employs a primary system or not, as well as a variable which interacts this dichotomous measure with our original independent variable of interest, the Norpoth corrected Democratic nominee’s share of the nominating contest vote. The results display a potential for inconsistency. Our dichotomous primary system measure displays a statistically significant negative correlation with the nominee’s share of the general election vote. The interaction term between this dichotomous measure and the Democratic nominee’s percentage of the nominating contest vote also reports a statistically significant result. The direction of the effect, however, is inconsistent with the simple dummy variable. The results of this model indicate the potential for primary mechanisms to have a negative intercept effect on a candidate’s general election strength, but subsequently have a positive slope effect. The standardized intercept effect of -1.55 is
Model B tests the potential effect of open systems, which allow for inter-party voting, on the Democrat's relative vote share in the November election. Model B also includes a simple dummy variable measuring whether the state employs an open nominating system as well as an interaction term incorporating the open system dummy.
variable and the corrected percentage of the Democratic nominee's vote in the nominating contest. Unlike the independent effect of the primary mechanism tested in Model A, open systems do not relate to the Democratic nominee's performance in the November contest in any statistically significant fashion. The coefficients on the simple dummy variable and interaction term are statistically insignificant.

Model C in Table 8 segments the state level nominating mechanisms further, by dividing the states into six categories, one for each specific style of nominating mechanism. These different systems are controlled for by including a system of dummy variables. The system of dummy variables allows the model to capture any intercept effect a particular mechanism may have on the Democratic nominee's performance in the state's November election. Model C also includes a system of mechanism interactions which attempt to capture the potential unique predictive ability of each nominating mechanism. This system of interactions results from multiplying the Democratic nominee's vote share in the state's nominating contest by the series of dummy variables previously mentioned. The open primary system is used as the baseline for both the system of basic dummy variables as well as the dummy interactions. As a result, the interaction terms have the potential to measure any significant differences between the predictive nature of a specific nominating mechanism as compared to the open primary system. This specification follows those outlined by others who've employed similar systems of dummy variable interactions (Aiken).
### Table 8: Democratic Percentage of General Vote

**Model C: Varying Mechanisms**  
**Model D: Closed Caucuses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee's Primary Vote</td>
<td>.61* (.22)</td>
<td>.62* (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Nominee Won Primary</td>
<td>-.42* (3.9)</td>
<td>-.36* (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Nominee Won Primary</td>
<td>.39* (3.6)</td>
<td>.42* (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisiveness</td>
<td>.16 (.08)</td>
<td>.20 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>.05 (.76)</td>
<td>.04 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Legislature Democratic</td>
<td>.69* (.09)</td>
<td>.72* (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Caucus</td>
<td>.71 (36.3)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Caucus</td>
<td>1.15* (19.1)</td>
<td>1.2* (17.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Caucus</td>
<td>6.1 (923)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Primary</td>
<td>-.40 (13.3)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Primary</td>
<td>-.49 (16.8)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Caucus Interaction</td>
<td>-.73 (.52)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Caucus Interaction</td>
<td>-1.1* (.31)</td>
<td>-1.2* (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Caucus Interaction</td>
<td>-6.2 (13.5)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Primary Interaction</td>
<td>.49 (.24)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Primary Interaction</td>
<td>.45 (.33)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| R-Squared | .75 | .70 |

Notes: Standardized coefficients presented.  
* indicates significance at a 95% level.
The OLS regression run with this specification produces results which are consistent with the original specification. For most nominating mechanisms, the model does not reveal statistically significant effects. The one mechanism which does display statistical significance, as Table 7 shows, is the closed caucus system. A joint test of significance between the dummy interactions also reveals statistical significance (F=2.64(.04)). The model returns statistically significant standardized coefficients on both the simple closed caucus dummy variable as well as its respective interaction. In order to interpret these results, we must consider the effects of the closed caucus system against those of the open primary system, the model's baseline nominating mechanism.

The standardized coefficient on the simple dummy variable posits that if a state employs a closed caucus system, the Democratic nominee can expect a 1.2 percentage point increase in their November vote share compared to the yield he would expect if the state employed an open primary system. As only the closed caucus system reports a statistically significant coefficient, the final model reported in Table 7, Model D, removes all nominating mechanisms except for the closed caucus. The results remain consistent.

The model displays differences in the directions between the coefficients of the simple dummy variable and the interaction term. The same logic may help to understand this phenomenon, however, as was previously advanced to explain what at first glance looked to be counter intuitive directional results with the dummy variables which controlled for whether the Democratic and Republican nominees were victorious in state level nominating contests. It's very likely that the resulting intercept effect is a phenomenon unique to the 2008 Democratic nominating campaign. Throughout the
contest, President Obama fared better in states which employed caucus systems than he did in states which employed primary systems. Logic would stand that given this reality, if a state were to employ a closed caucus system, this could have a positive level effect on President Obama's chances in the November election. There exist at least two possible explanations for the negative coefficient on the closed caucus interaction. First, this could be indicative of President Obama's strong performance in closed caucus states whose electoral votes were unlikely to go to a Democratic candidate in November. A second, more general explanation of this coefficient, however, is that a closed caucus system excludes participation at such an extreme that the mechanism serves as a poor indicator of the potential general election electorate and thus provides a poor basis for predicting a candidate’s performance in November. An examination of the particular states this study defines as employing closed caucus mechanisms may help to further explain these counter directional effects.

This study defines eight states as closed caucus states: Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Nevada and Wyoming. As previously noted, Hawaii is not included in any of this study's models, due to an anachronistic nominating system on the Republican side. This leaves us with seven cases to examine. While this is admittedly a very small sample to be considering, conducting the analysis is still beneficial. Table 9 shows President Obama's relative vote share in the state nominating contests as compared with his relative vote share in the general election. In all but one of these states, President Obama performed better in the nominating contest than he did in the general election. In some cases the margin was quite large, which would seem to lend credence to the first
theory advanced above, such as in Alaska, Kansas and Wyoming. In other instances, such as Colorado, President Obama fared much better in the nominating contest than he did in the general, but was still able to garner a majority in November. In Maine and Iowa, he fared only slightly better in the nominating campaign. If the magnitude in the differences is an indicator, it would seem the first theory would prevail. The mixed effect, however, as indicated by the examples of the other states, provides the basis for a potential combined effect.

### TABLE 9: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S APPEAL CLOSED CAUCUS STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nominating Contest</th>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Nominating contest percentages reported consistent with Norpoth corrections.

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has attempted to explain the relationship between state level nominating contests and a candidate's performance in the state's subsequent general election contest. This research has found that state level nominating mechanisms can serve as indicators of a candidate's potential general election strength. Through a series of multivariate models, this research has shown a consistent and statistically significant relationship between a candidate's performance in a state level nominating contest and
their subsequent performance in the state's general election contest. Throughout the 2008 Democratic nominating campaign many argued there was no connection between a candidate's performance in a nominating contest and their viability in the November election. This study refutes that view.

Some may argue that the results of this model are only useful in drawing conclusions on the 2008 presidential campaign. Given the sample this study covers, their arguments are not without merit. However, given that the 2008 campaign provided the most complete nationwide sample of the Democratic nominating rules as they stand now, the results should not be ignored by those who look to propose changes to such rules. If we are to draw conclusions from this initial model's results, one could argue that a long and contested primary campaign is not detrimental to the party's electoral prospects in November. In fact, one could argue quite the opposite: that a long primary campaign, with two high caliber candidates, can provide a much more complete view into the potential nominee's prospects in the November election. With a fifty state sample, the eventual Democratic nominee's relative vote share in a state's nominating contest displays a statistically significant ability to predict the nominee's relative vote share in the state's general election. Given this reality, an examination of the effects of specific nominating mechanisms on general election performance, may prove fruitful to Democratic rules makers. This study provides such an analysis.

This study has shown that primary systems are generally more predictive than caucus systems. This research has also revealed the inadequacy of the closed caucus system in gauging a candidate’s general election strength. Some will say this study’s
findings on closed caucuses are solely a result of President Obama's relatively high nominating contest success rate in closed caucus states and not the mechanism's ability to create an unrepresentative sample of November voters. As previously discussed, the intercept effect is most likely attributed to specific 2008 conditions, while the slope effect may provide for more insight into general effects of the mechanism. While it may not be possible to ascertain specific percentage levels associated with these effects, it's entirely impossible to rule out the possibility of a combined effect, given the significance of the returned results. Given these concerns, the mechanism seems ill suited for gauging a candidate's November potential, in comparison to other options.

If we believe closed caucus systems poorly gauge a candidate's general election strength, the implications are serious for those considering changes to party nominating rules. By inviting states to employ closed caucus systems, the party may be allowing candidates to compete and emerge from such systems whose performance is by no means consistent with their potential general election appeal. In fact, if we consider a set of rules which required closed caucus systems across the board, the results would be extremely detrimental to the party's primary objective of winning presidential elections.

These findings have serious implications for Democratic rule makers. In crafting new delegate selection rules, the party's rule and bylaws committee should be aware of the statistical relationship between nominating and general election contests. An understanding of this relationship may prove useful in deciding upon the calendar of the nominating contest as well as pledged delegate allocation per state. This study's findings should not be overlooked when crafting the rules by which states establish their delegate
selection processes and the particular mechanisms available to state parties. This study has shown closed caucus contests to have a statistically significant negative relationship with general election contests. By excluding voters who pledge allegiance to other parties from participating in Democratic nominating contests, closed caucuses become unrepresentative of the November electorate.

By recognizing the relationship between state level nominating systems and general election contests, party rule makers could build a delegate selection system which provides for a strategic advantage over an anachronistic Republican system. By steering states away from closed caucus systems, particularly in crucial November election states, the party would be committing itself to vetting candidates with nominating contest electorates much more representative of the November electorate. Another potential application of this study's findings would be to incorporate a measure of a state's November election competitiveness in nominating contest delegate allocation and timing. By adjusting the delegate allocation factor to reward states which have the potential to be closest in the November election, the party would be creating an environment in which the fiercest competition would take place in states critical in the November election. Employing these combined recommendations could result in candidates competing vigorously in states most critical to the November election via nominating mechanisms which have the ability to significantly gauge their general election viability.
REFERENCES


*Political Science and Politics* October: 683-686.


RealClearPolitics. “Election 2008”. 