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Introduction

> It's an open secret that the more conservative members of the party quietly support primary challengers to certain progressives as well … so the way I think about it is might as well be honest about it.
>
> Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

When Republican Jim Nussle retired from Congress in 2006, Democrat Bruce Braley decided to run for the resulting open seat in Iowa's 1st District. Braley had deep roots in the local community, having been born in the state and attended Iowa State and the University of Iowa. For the past twenty years, he had been a prominent lawyer in the district, serving as president of the Iowa Trial Lawyers Association. Before Braley could compete in the November election, he first had to defeat fellow Democrat Rick Dickinson in a primary election.[1] Dickinson had several decades of experience in state politics, serving initially as a city council member, then for fourteen years as the mayor of Sabula, and, most recently, as a representative in the Iowa House of Representatives. In addition to his lengthy career as a public servant, Dickinson was a respected figure in the state party, having previously served as the chair of the Jackson County Democratic Party and as a delegate at the Democratic National Convention.

Both men argued that they were the best choice for the party faithful to elect as a Democrat in a seat that, though represented by a Republican for the previous sixteen years, had been trending Democratic at the

[1] Two other minor candidates also ran in the district.

presidential level.[2] In their primary campaigns, both candidates focused on their long records of service and deep personal connections with the district, touting their competence in both the private and public sectors as evidence that they understood the district's needs, which would enable them to defeat a Republican opponent in November. Both claimed that their experience would help them deliver valuable federal resources from Washington, DC to northeastern Iowa and that their expertise would be an asset in producing good legislation once in Congress. Though policy differences between the candidates existed, little discussion of national policy positions featured in either campaign, and no comparison of relative positions was made by either candidate. Dickinson had a history of public service going back to the late 1970s and had taken positions – such as a belief that life begins at conception – that were potentially misaligned with a Democratic primary electorate, but Braley refrained from attacking Dickinson on the grounds of positional incongruence or policy "fit" with Democratic primary voters or the district.

Though the district appeared winnable for the Democratic Party, evidence of state or national party involvement or support for either candidate during the primary was scarce. Media attention consisted of coverage in the local *Telegraph Herald* and *Quad-City Times* in May and June 2006.[3] Beyond northeastern Iowa, the election went largely unnoticed. The two campaigns spent less than $400,000 between them,[4] and, perhaps as a result, fewer than 30,000 Iowans – less than 7 percent of the district's voting-age population – cast a Democratic primary ballot on June 6, 2006. Braley narrowly won the nomination and was elected to Congress five months later, defeating Republican Michael Whalen in the November general election.

On March 17, 2020, Representative Dan Lipinski lost his reelection campaign in Illinois' 3rd District to a fellow Democrat. Two years previously, he had narrowly survived a primary challenge to his left from Marie Newman, scraping by with 51 percent of the vote. The second time around, Newman was successful in ousting Lipinski. Newman had a long history of activism including running a national anti-bullying organization and campaigning for gun control measures. Initially drawn into

[2] Partisan Voter Index (PVI) of D+2 in 2006.

[3] A particularly thorough interview with each candidate featured in the May 21 *Quad-City Times* (Bruce Braley, Iowa 1st Congressional District Democrat Candidate Survey 2006; Rick Dickinson, Iowa 1st Congressional District Democrat Candidate Survey 2006).

[4] Braley spent $171,798 and Dickinson $128,702 during the primary, as reported in their 12P Federal Election Commission (FEC) pre-primary reports.

Democratic Party politics by Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign, Newman decided to become a full-time politician after Hillary Clinton's presidential defeat. Lipinski was a relative moderate in Congress and was notable for some of his more conservative positions,[5] especially on abortion and stem cell research.[6] Though specific issues motivated Newman's campaign, she attacked Lipinski's voting record from the left more broadly, arguing that he was "out of step with the Democratic platform" (Herndon 2020) and that her positions were more congruent with the preferences of the district in explicitly *ideological* terms.[7] In addition, she argued that a new type of politics and politician was needed, and that Lipinski was the product of an outdated form of machine-era politics rife with nepotism – Lipinski's father had represented the district before him – that needed to be upended. Lipinski's personal shortcomings as a representative were framed as systemic issues and connected to questions of economic inequality and redistribution. Newman's policy positions, including her support for the Green New Deal and Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All legislation, featured prominently in her campaign material and informed the way she referred to Lipinski.

In her 2018 campaign, Newman had earned the endorsement of multiple national groups, including MoveOn, Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, and the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. By 2020, she had added the support of multiple presidential candidates, including Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, and was endorsed by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. These groups and individuals are commonly conceived as being aligned with the Democratic Party's progressive *faction*.[8] Following her narrow loss in 2018, in which she spent $401,480, activist groups and individuals in her network increased their support, enabling her to spend $641,073 in her successful 2020 challenge. Indeed, Newman's narrow 2018 loss, rather than signaling to supporters that she was not a viable candidate, served to indicate her strength and Lipinski's vulnerability. Newman's primary campaigns attracted national (Peters 2020; Stolberg 2020) and international (Sugarman 2017) media coverage, including a lengthy interview in the

[5] NOMINATE score of –0.227.

[6] Lipinski's position on the issue was not dissimilar to that of Rick Dickinson in the previous example, though he had aired his views in the national rather than state legislature.

[7] The district had a PVI of D+6 in 2018 and 2020.

[8] Though the Iowa Trial Lawyers Association in the previous example could be viewed as a local faction, their support was connected to Braley's personal history as a member rather than his policy positions.

New York Times (Herndon 2020) where the contest was interpreted as having wider significance for the future direction and identity of the Democratic Party. The 2018 primary brought 95,205 voters (just under 18 percent) to the polls and the 2020 contest exceeded six figures, with 103,859 voters (over 19 percent) turning out.[9] Newman, like Braley before her, then won the November general election, taking her seat in Congress in January 2021.

These primary contests illustrate a narrative of low-interest, candidate-centered nominations focused on personal competence and connection to the district becoming infused with factional intra-party conflict in ideological terms. These examples are far from unique, where a plethora of alternatives from either major party could have been used to document a similar story of the changing landscape of primary competition in the twenty-first century. In Part I of this book, I make the case that a fundamental transformation of the dynamics of competition in congressional primary elections has taken place in both parties in the twenty-first century.

As congressional primaries have transformed, criticism of them for exacerbating party change and partisan polarization in Congress has grown ever louder (Alvarez and Sinclair 2015; Foley 2022; Schumer 2014). Part II of this book attempts to understand the relationship between these contemporary trends, to identify both *whether* and *how* the changing primary environment has contributed to partisan trends in Congress. In other words, (how) has recent *primary transformation* contributed to *party transformation*? To date, much of the academic literature considers the evolution and impact of primary elections since their inception (see e.g., Hirano and Snyder 2019) or across several decades (Boatright 2014). To date, limited research explores the diverse mechanisms through which primaries may contribute to polarization. By focusing explicitly on the twenty-first century – the period in which primaries have transformed and criticisms of the nomination have emerged – I examine the different ways that contemporary primary competitions may influence the positions of nominees who emerge from them to represent the party in November. In Part II, I show that the new dynamics of primary competition identified in Part I do matter for partisan polarization in Congress, but that the ways they do so are nuanced, conditional, and disconnected from the preferences of primary voters.

[9] The 2020 Democratic presidential primary was held on the same day and likely boosted turnout, hence the inclusion of the 2018 figures.

IDEOLOGICAL AND FACTIONAL COMPETITION IN PRIMARIES

Congressional primaries have existed for over a century, and their introduction was followed by a sustained period of *de*polarization (Lewis et al. 2021), meaning any claims about their polarizing effect must first demonstrate that something about congressional nominations has changed in the modern era. Part I of this book is therefore dedicated to determining the extent to which the examples of Braley, Dickinson, Lipinski, and Newman are generalizable. How often did competence and experience-based nominations transform into contests motivated by the distinct policy platforms of the leading candidates? Why did partisan groups and individuals, the media, and primary voters care so little about Braley or Dickinson and so much about Newman and Lipinski? Have the reasons for primary elections changed, particularly in terms of *ideological* campaign framing and candidates receiving support from distinct *factions* in the party? And are these trends consistent across incumbent, challenger, and open-seat primaries in both the Republican and Democratic parties?[10]

To quantify the changing dynamics of congressional nominations, I develop the concepts of ideological and factional primaries. I define *factional primaries* as contested nominations where the leading candidates are aligned with and receive support from distinct groups and individuals in their party. *Ideological primaries* are contests that are framed in ideological terms by the leading candidates competing in them, where a candidate's reason for running for Congress invokes positional difference from their intra-party opponent(s). Factional primaries therefore serve as a measure of candidates' intra-party *support*, with distinct actors within the party expressing preferences for different candidates. Ideological primaries are an indicator of *framing* (Entman 1993), with candidates' campaigns and media interviews referencing intra-party differences in terms of distinct policy preferences or citing opposition to their opponent(s) on positional grounds as their motivation for running for Congress.[11]

Using the concepts of ideological and factional primaries, I demonstrate that in 2006 most contests looked like the competition between

[10] The terms incumbent primary, challenger primary, and open-seat primary are used to denote a nomination contest where the current office holder is running for the party, for the alternative party, or not standing, respectively.

[11] Though the two concepts are conceived and identified independently, there is, unsurprisingly, significant overlap between them.

Braley and Dickinson: nonfactional in terms of support and nonideological in terms of framing. By 2020, most primaries in both parties had transformed into ideologically framed contests where candidates received support from different factions in the party network, as in the example of Newman and Lipinski. This proliferation of ideological and factional primaries should therefore be understood as a transformation in the *dynamics* of congressional primary competition. The descriptive identification of these dynamics of primary competition – including a higher frequency of contested nominations, factional intra-party support, ideological reasons for contests, increased campaign spending, and higher voter turnout – between 2006 and 2020 is the first major contribution of this book. These changing dynamics give us a clearer sense of the shifted landscape of intra-party conflict in congressional nominations.

Why did the dynamics of congressional nominations shift so fundamentally? Several important structural changes in US politics and society took place between 2006 and 2020, with ramifications for the behavior of key actors in primaries. Throughout the period, partisan competition increased in intensity and animosity, with growing ideological distance between party elites and closely fought elections for national institutions (Fiorina 2017; Lee 2016). Though nationally elected seats of power became more competitive, individual states and districts became safer for a given party (Wasserman and Flinn 2021). Beyond Congress, voters' identification with and loyalty to a preferred party increased (Mason 2018), and impressions of the alternative party also declined (Abramowitz and Webster 2018).

These changing electoral conditions offered new incentives and constraints to parties, candidates, and voters in primary elections. Regulatory reforms further changed the way primary campaigns were financed, altering the profile of donors and avenues through which candidates were able to raise money. Changes to campaign finance were particularly important for altering the balance of power between the formal and informal parts of party organizations (Masket 2009). Meanwhile, an array of technological developments, including an evolution of the media ecology and the transformative effects of internet access, have reconfigured the avenues available for candidates and other partisan groups to communicate in primaries (Karpf 2016; Kreiss 2016).

Throughout Part I of this book, I offer empirical support for the descriptive argument for *primary transformation*. Yet the importance of these changes is contingent on their effect on general election nominees and with it the position of the parties in Congress, defined as *party*

transformation. If there has been no noticeable change in the identity of successful candidates emerging from primaries, then interest in the dynamics of congressional nomination appears little more than a curiosity for those among us deeply interested in the internal machinations and workings of the two major parties. Yet primaries now garner attention from a far broader audience, chiefly as the alleged driver of partisan polarization in Congress, a topic that has come to dominate multiple subfields of political science and is the focus of Part II of this book.

WHY STUDY PARTISAN POLARIZATION IN CONGRESS?

Both parties in Congress are said to have been fundamentally transformed in the partisan era by a process of elite polarization. Whereas both parties were once ideologically broad, containing liberal and conservative members of Congress, they are now ideologically cohesive, with ever fewer moderates and growing ranks of committed partisans. Elite polarization in Congress has been growing since the late 1970s and reached unprecedented levels in recent years (Lewis et al. 2021; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Primaries are frequently positioned as the main contributor to the growing ideological distance between members of Congress (Kamarck, Podkul, and Zeppos 2016; Schumer 2014), meaning it is this definition of party transformation as elite ideological change – rather than alternative forms of polarization such as mass partisan affect, or the growing salience of partisan identity among the public (e.g., Mason 2018) – that is the object of interest in this book.

Throughout this book, I argue that though the two major parties are not so broadly divided as in the mid-twentieth century, they instead contain close but deeply divided ideological factions which exert a centrifugal force on the parties in Congress. For the forty years between the start of the partisan era in the 1970s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, growing elite partisan polarization and intra-party homogeneity aligned. Starting from a broad base in which both parties contained liberal and conservative factions and were ideologically incongruent in the mid-twentieth century (American Political Science Association 1950), partisanship and ideology converged such that Republican and conservative, and Democratic and liberal, have almost become synonymous. As the numbers of conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans in Congress dwindled, both parties became more internally consistent and less like their partisan opponents in the early twenty-first century (Theriault 2008). Yet, in the period since, scholarly attention on

the subject of intra-party factionalism has been resurgent (Blum 2020; Clarke 2020), likely connected to growing intra-party strife on both sides of the aisle (Hilton 2021; Lee 2018), and a broad public understanding of both parties as containing wings, lanes, or factions has emerged. If partisan polarization and intra-party homogeneity are one and the same, then we should expect that growing ideological factionalism reduced partisan animosity, but this period has instead been notable for an acceleration of the growing ideological distance between the parties in Congress (Lewis et al. 2021). In the modern era, internal party conflict has instead disincentivized cross-party cooperation and served to reorient the parties in Congress toward their ideological poles. Nowhere has this trend been more visible than in congressional primary elections.

The radicalization of the Republican Party has perhaps been one of the most studied phenomena in recent years. In Congress, Republican roll-call voting scores have been moving rightward for several decades (Lewis et al. 2021). More recently, Republican legislators have adopted authoritarian rhetoric (Cowburn and Oswald 2020), and racialized antidemocratic sentiment has become prevalent in the party (Bartels 2020). The rightward movement of the Republican Party has driven asymmetric partisan polarization (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Hacker and Pierson 2006; Theriault 2013). Indeed, media and scholarly criticism of the framing of partisan trends as "polarization" – rather than Republican radicalization – has focused on the stark positional movement and nonadherence to democratic norms in the modern Republican Party (Kreiss and McGregor 2023; Rubin 2021; Zimmer 2019) and the relative lack of equivalent on the ideological left. By analyzing the intra-party dynamics of each party separately, this book explicitly centers the features of the congressional nomination process which have pulled Republican elites asymmetrically rightward and transformed the party to a greater extent.

Though roll-call scores of Democrats in Congress have not moved leftward to the same extent, the party has, over the long term, transformed in its positions on foundational subjects such as race and identity, where "the party of Jim Crow has become the party of Barack Obama" (Hilton 2021, 7). The party's economic worldview has also changed in recent decades, where a self-identified socialist garnered more than 40 percent of the vote in the 2016 presidential nomination contest, carrying twenty-three states in the process. Comparisons of "establishment" Democratic presidents such as Bill Clinton and Joe Biden also reveal leftward movement on a variety of issues including minority

rights, crime, and fiscal policy (Dionne 2023). In Congress, the ranks of progressives and further-left members, including those with connections to democratic socialism, have swelled in recent years (Thomsen 2017a). Though Republican transformation is almost entirely responsible for the emerging distance between partisan elites in Congress, the leftward movement of the Democratic Party through a combination of positional adaptation and generational replacement has been identified by scholars (see e.g., Wehner 2019) and recognized by representatives in Congress (Zengerle 2022).

The consequences of this increase in congressional polarization range from declining legislative productivity (Jones 2001) due to gridlock (Binder 2003), a greater disconnect between the positions of citizens and those who represent them (Bafumi and Herron 2010), the adoption of increasingly "unorthodox" procedures outside of formal institutional rules (Sinclair 2011), a decline in the power of Congress relative to other branches of government (Carmines and Fowler 2017), and detrimental effects on policy implementation (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999). Committee procedures including bill mark-ups now receive input from a narrower range of experts, with lower levels of congressional oversight (Hetherington 2009). Perhaps of most concern, a polarized Congress is delivering worse policy outcomes, with evidence that polarization has increased income inequality (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006) and prevented action in areas such as criminal justice reform (Thomsen 2017b). Set against this backdrop, it should perhaps be unsurprising that congressional job approval has declined dramatically in recent years (Gallup 2022). Though the phenomenon has been credited with some positive consequences, such as greater political awareness among the public (Zaller 1992), translating to higher levels of political engagement (Abramowitz 2010; Hetherington 2008), polarization of the national legislature is broadly understood as a hindrance to the functioning of US politics by academics, media, and the general public alike.

In short, these changes to the parties matter, with partisan polarization described as "the most serious problem facing the U.S. today" (Hall and Snyder 2015). Explaining this trend has been a central focus of political scientists studying US party competition in the twenty-first century (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Sinclair 2006; Theriault 2008). Primary elections have frequently been attributed as exacerbating polarization, where the porousness of party organizations and inclusive candidate selection processes have been said to pull elites in Congress toward their ideological poles (Jacobson 2000).

MECHANISMS OF PARTY CHANGE IN PRIMARIES

This book seeks to clarify both *whether* and *how* the modern dynamics of primary competition may have altered the composition of the two parties through the nomination of more "extreme" candidates for Congress.[12] To do so, I examine the different mechanisms through which primaries may influence candidate positioning.

Primary election polarization theory contends that voters in primaries are more ideologically extreme than general election voters and so reward ideological candidates at the expense of comparatively moderate alternatives (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007; Burden 2001), with entire books written on the need to abolish partisan primaries to "mitigate mischief" (Alvarez and Sinclair 2015). Primary voters have not only been lamented by scholars, with leading politicians arguing for the need to "end partisan primaries [to] save America" (Schumer 2014) and national media commentators warning that the current process of candidate selection may "destroy democracy" (Foley 2022). Though this narrative about primary voters appears intuitive – and is now widely assumed to be true by many scholars, journalists, and politicians – empirical evidence on the subject is, at best, mixed and tends toward no polarizing effect (Hirano et al. 2010; Sides et al. 2020). Despite these findings, positional difference between primary and general electorates is the most commonly advocated way that the institution of congressional nomination is said to exacerbate ideological divisions in Congress. Oftentimes, this is the only mechanism of primary polarization considered.

If primary voters hold noncentrist positions, we may expect that they systematically prefer comparatively "extreme" candidates when they compete against relative moderates in an election. In such a scenario, primary voters' preferences would produce nominees further from the political center than would be selected under alternative methods of nomination. I label this mechanism the *selective effect* of primary elections, directly emanating from voters' decisions on election day. I find that, even when primary elections are explicitly fought on ideological and factional grounds, voters do not systematically express preferences for candidates further from the center, and nominees selected via contested primaries are not positionally distinct from other nominees. These results

[12] I use the term "extreme" in line with the established use in the primary election literature (see e.g., Hall 2015). "Extremism" may result from positions far from the "center," greater consistency, or some combination of these.

indicate that any polarizing effect of primaries is not a bottom-up process emanating from the preferences of voters.

Yet voter preferences are not the only way in which the institution of primary elections might contribute to polarization. Focusing solely on the preferences and behavior of primary voters may mean we fail to fully appreciate the influence of primary competition on nominee positions. In this book, I consider two further mechanisms through which primaries may exacerbate partisan polarization in Congress. These mechanisms do not reflect the expression of voter preferences but instead focus on the adaptation of incumbent members of Congress and primary candidates both during and between election cycles. The full list of (potential) mechanisms of primary polarization is summarized in Table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1 *Potential mechanisms of polarization in primaries*

Mechanism	Explanation	Target
Selective effect	Voters prefer noncentrist candidates and so will systematically nominate them when they face moderate alternatives. Primary winners – especially those who win nomination contests concerned with intra-party positions (ideological and factional primaries) – will therefore be further from the center than other nominees.	All candidates
Between-election adaptative effect	Incumbents perceive that the nomination process favors noncentrist candidates and so move away from the center between elections to minimize the threat from ideological and factional challengers.	Incumbents only
Within-election adaptative effect	During the nomination phase of the election cycle, all candidates will adopt "artificial" positions further from the center to appeal to their primary constituency. Knowing that voters dislike inconsistency, primary winners are then forced to hold these positions, presenting general election voters with polarized choices.	All candidates
Preventative effect	Potential candidates perceive that the nomination process favors noncentrists and so moderates choose not to run for office. Among incumbents, this mechanism takes the form of retirements due to perceived noncongruence.	All candidates

A *between-election adaptative effect* might manifest in the form of incumbent movement toward an ideological pole (left in the Democratic Party, right in the Republican Party) between election cycles following a primary challenge on ideological or factional grounds. Following the emergence of an ideological same-party challenger, incumbent officeholders may attempt to signal partisan loyalty or ideological congruence by voting more consistently with their party. I show that when comparatively moderate incumbents are challenged by same-party opponents with the support of the more polarized faction, their voting behavior moves significantly away from the center. Members of Congress hold these adapted positions for several further congresses. I find a smaller but similar effect in ideological primaries. In both ideological and factional primaries, this effect is larger for Republicans.

The *within-election adaptative effect* is the third potential mechanism of primary polarization examined in this book. Primaries may induce *all* candidates away from the center during the nomination phase of the election cycle if they perceive a need to appease to an extreme primary electorate or other important party actors.[13] If candidates adopt noncentrist positions during the primary, nominees who win primaries will then likely retain these artificial positions afterwards out of fear of being labeled inconsistent, presenting general election voters with polarized choices. The expectation that nominees will retain these positions poses problems for measurement and observation, meaning I test "artificial" positioning as revealed by the moderation of losing candidates after the primary. In an analysis of a single election cycle, 2020, I present evidence that Democratic candidates communicated artificial – or "strategic" (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007) – positions in contested primaries. Republicans did not adapt their positions in this way. As with the between-election adaptative effect, this effect is most prominent in ideological and factional primaries. Winning candidates held their positions beyond the primary, indicating that contested nominations altered candidates' behavior in a way that contributed to a polarization of *choices* for general election voters.

I restrict my analyses to whether primaries polarize candidates who choose to run. The question of candidate emergence – the *preventative effect* in Table 1.1 – where potential moderate candidates perceive the

[13] These include donors, interest groups, members of formal party organizations, activists, and even friendly partisan media. The subject of policy demanders is examined in more detail in the Chapter 2.

nomination process as favoring noncentrists and so decide not to run, appears relatively settled (Thomsen 2014, 2017b). Among incumbent officeholders, this effect manifests in the form of retirements when members of Congress perceive they cannot win renomination due to positional incongruence with their primary constituency. Given the need to engage with different data about candidates that do not emerge, I only consider the polarization of candidates *after* they choose to run and who make it as far as the primary ballot. I therefore focus on electoral pressures on candidates and incumbents *during* the primary phase of the election cycle, meaning I do not examine the preventative effect.[14]

Of the three mechanisms analyzed, the selective effect is a direct result of the preferences of primary voters, whereas the two adaptative effects are results of changing candidate behavior. Though I find little evidence that primary voters prefer noncentrist candidates, I show that many candidates adapted their positions away from the center both between and within election cycles. Ideological and factional primaries therefore appear to be contributing to partisan polarization, but their doing so is not the result of voter decisions – likely due to a lack of information about candidates' positions among the primary electorate.[15] I find a divergence between voters' expressed preferences and candidates' responses, with considerable evidence of adaptation by incumbent representatives between elections, and among all candidates within an election cycle. Primary voters do not systematically prefer candidates away from the center, even in contests featuring ideological framing and factional support. Yet candidates running for Congress often behave *as if* they do.

I offer two explanations for the observed difference between voter preferences and candidate behavior. First, voters are not the only important actors in primary elections, where influential groups of "policy demanders" (Bawn et al. 2012) play a crucial role during the nomination process (Hassell 2018; Masket 2009). These policy demanders include donors, activists, interest groups, and partisan media outlets, who hold distinct preferences and wield substantial power during the nomination. Even if these preferences do not align with those of their primary voters, candidates may perceive and receive significant benefit from aligning with these actors. Second, I contend that the dominant narrative of primary voters as holding "extreme" policy preferences has shaped the behavior

[14] I examine preventative polarization further in Cowburn and Theriault (2023).

[15] A finding further supported by some small selective effects in incumbent primaries, where voters have the most information about at least one candidate: the incumbent.

of those running for office, creating a misalignment between candidates' perceptions about and the reality of primary voters' positions. If candidates *perceive* that primary voters prefer noncentrist candidates, then they may change their behavior regardless of whether voters are sending this signal in elections. Candidate fears that primary voters are a source of polarization may, paradoxically, be contributing to the growing distance between the parties in Congress, with commentators' accounts about the preferences of primary voters inadvertently contributing to the problem they seek to decry.

In examining the distinct ways in which primaries may polarize, this book offers a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of party change that emanate from the nomination. Current theories about the polarizing effects of primaries focus almost entirely on the relative position of the electorate and their ability to identify and select congruent candidates (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007; Burden 2001). Yet almost half of primary voters cannot even remember their candidate's name immediately after voting (Bawn et al. 2019), raising significant doubts about voters' ability to discern comparative positions of multiple same-party candidates (Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz 2016). Indeed, many critiques of spatial models of voting are even more applicable in low-salience elections where voters lack the informational cues provided by party labels. This book therefore questions voter-centered theories of primary polarization, instead arguing that the behavior of elite actors – most prominently the candidates themselves but also donors, activists, issue groups, and other politicians – should be the focus of our scholarly attention in these elections. Though the United States has one of the most open systems of candidate selection in the world, these groups remain highly influential during the nomination (Cohen et al. 2008; Hassell 2018).

Primaries play a vital role in determining who is elected to Congress, and – given the few viable parties in the US electoral system – serve as a crucial avenue for citizens to determine who represents them. Competitive nomination contests are frequently viewed as a potential site of intra-party factionalism in both the theoretical and comparative literature (Basedau and Köllner 2005; Carty 2004), and though a rich literature focuses on the question of how "divisive primaries" influence general election outcomes (Fouirnaies and Hall 2016; Murakami 2008; Romero 2003), connections between patterns of intra-party competition during the nomination and the position of nominees selected remain understudied. By examining the mechanisms through which primaries may contribute to partisan polarization, I establish new links

between the dynamics of intra-party competition and established theories about partisan polarization. Though research on how inter-party competition shapes parties' internal cleavages is plentiful, comparatively little scholarship exists on how intra-party factions influence the positions of parties. Given the increasing attention on the congressional nomination process, the importance of these relationships only appears to be increasing.

Closer examination of congressional primaries may therefore serve to deepen our understanding of one (potential) cause of elite polarization. In doing so, we may also hope to learn more about the internal dynamics of both major parties. Data on congressional primary elections have historically been underutilized due to the difficulty of collection, especially for low-salience candidates. These elections provide researchers with a much larger volume of data than presidential primaries, which are far more commonly studied. In presidential primaries, beyond the limitations associated with having a small number of cases, the sequential nature of contests means they may be ill-equipped to inform us about intra-party dynamics, given the importance of momentum in determining outcomes (Abramowitz 1989). To date, research has been overly reliant on presidential primaries to reveal intra-party dynamics.

The predicament that primary elections currently find themselves in, being blamed for an assortment of problems in the US political system, is also having institutional consequences for the nomination process. Since Washington (2004) and California (2010) adopted top-two primaries – with the potential for a major party to be excluded from the general election ballot, often without the knowledge of most of their supporters – numerous other states have discussed, or are in the process of enacting, similar reforms to their primaries, with the explicit goal of producing more moderate candidates ("Top-Two Primary" 2022).[16] Given the immediate real-world implications for primary elections, it appears increasingly important to understand not only *whether* but also *how* the nomination process might foster noncentrist nominees. As I demonstrate, this process is not as straightforward as popularly imagined. The necessity of this research agenda is therefore not only rooted in the need for greater academic clarity in this area but also has direct practical implications for potential reforms to the candidate selection process.

[16] Alaska adopted a top-four ranked-choice primary in 2022.

DATA

This book uses an originally constructed dataset of all United States House of Representatives and Senate primaries between 2006 and 2020 across forty-nine states, as Louisiana does not have congressional primaries.[17] For a nomination to be considered contested, at least two names were required on the ballot, following the established literature (see e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 2006).[18] A total of 7,402 potential nominations were included in the dataset, with candidates from 3,331[19] contested primaries analyzed. I relied upon multiple sources to construct the dataset used in this book, with the goal of producing as complete and representative a picture of the dynamics of primary competition as possible. Construction of this new dataset using digital sources was necessary to include candidates from all contests. This dataset includes a broader range of candidates than analyzed elsewhere, and is more recent than most other studies in the literature. The construction of this dataset of congressional primary candidates is one contribution of this book, enabling a more granular understanding of the dynamics of competition in individual races which can be aggregated to understand temporal trends.[20]

To better identify the dynamics of primary contests, I assign candidates[21] in contested primaries as proximate to a factional ideal type based on their intra-party support. These factional ideal types were constructed in line with both the academic literature and media coverage

[17] In the "Louisiana Primary" all candidates run on a single ballot on the general election date. If no candidate receives 50 percent of the vote, a runoff election is held. Given that participation in these "primary" elections is more reflective of general elections, these contests were deemed sufficiently different as to warrant exclusion. For the same reason, special elections for the Senate with this structure (e.g., Georgia 2020) were excluded.

[18] Under California and Washington's top-two system, a contest was considered a "party-primary" when two candidates from the same party stood in a district. Other scholarship on congressional primaries (e.g., Thomsen 2021) divides top-two and blanket primaries along partisan lines in the same way.

[19] A total of 1,434 Democratic House Primaries, 1,524 Republican House Primaries, 170 Democratic Senate Primaries, and 199 Republican Senate Primaries were analyzed. Further descriptive data including temporal trends are provided in Chapter 2.

[20] This dataset also includes several other variables, such as primary candidate quality, which were hand-coded by the author and would be of substantive benefit to congressional scholars.

[21] Throughout the book, individuals running in primaries for one of the two major parties are referred to as candidates or primary candidates. Once primary candidates win the party nomination, I refer to them as either nominees, nominated candidates, or general election candidates. Nominees are candidates nominated for the major parties in general election; not all nominees earn this status through primary elections, but (almost) all winners of primary elections are nominees.

about the intra-party dynamics of both parties throughout this period and are expanded upon in Chapter 2. Nominations were then labeled as *factional primaries* when the two[22] leading candidates received support from different factions.[23]

Independently, I assigned reasons for primary contests taking place using Boatright's (2013) "reason for contest" variable, using candidates' statements on their website or in local press coverage. Previously, this approach had only been applied to incumbent primaries using nondigital sources.[24] With some minor adaptations I was also able to include open-seat and challenger primaries. Assigning reasons for primary contests taking place enabled the labeling of *ideological primaries* when leading candidates framed their candidacy in terms of ideological difference from their same-party opponent(s).

Throughout this process, decisions about data inclusion followed the extant literature and established conventions for studying primary elections wherever possible (in particular Boatright 2013, 2014). I exclude primary elections which were held but where only one candidate appeared on the ballot.[25] Where primaries resulted in runoffs, I focus on the first round of the primary.[26] I also apply the same vote share calculations to states holding top-two primaries that Boatright applies to blanket and jungle primaries, namely, "I divide the incumbent's vote share by the percentage of the vote received by the incumbent and any other same-party candidate" (2013, 72). For Nevada ballots featuring a none of the options already mentioned, I excluded these votes from percentage totals.[27] One deviation from Boatright's approach is that he includes

[22] Though many primaries feature many more than two candidates, information on minor candidates – who often receive exceedingly low vote shares – is scarce. Indeed, information on the support for some candidates in second position in their party's primary was too scarce to assign factional proximity. In other primaries, particularly open-seat contests in safe districts or states, it would have been possible to assign support for many candidates, but only the two highest-placing candidates were coded for consistency.

[23] A total of 137 candidates across the dataset had recently been a member of the opposing party, were running on a platform more commonly associated with the alternative party, or were specifically running for tactical reasons – that is, to disrupt or disadvantage that party in the general election – and were therefore not considered as aligned to either party faction.

[24] Boatright uses the biannual *Almanac of American Politics* and *Politics in America* between 1971 and 2011 to code his data.

[25] "There is no salient difference between districts where one candidate ran and districts where there was no primary. This effectively creates a category for primaries where there was no competition" (Boatright 2014, 118).

[26] "I consider the primary that preceded the runoff, not the runoff itself" (Boatright 2013, 72).

[27] Again following Boatright (2013).

data from party conventions whereas I code these districts as not having held contests, though note where conventions were used. I consider party conventions as a structurally different nomination process to a primary election, with reduced ballot access and limited opportunity for members of the public to participate.

The goal is to combine multiple data sources to provide as complete an account of primary competition between 2006 and 2020 as possible. The approach of identifying primaries as being ideological and factional – explained in detail in Chapter 2 – involved qualitatively hand-coding each contest. Manual coding of these sources has several advantages, particularly when interpreting candidates' framing and factional support. In specific application to primaries and their relationship with polarization, Kamarck and Wallner (2018) comment on the need for more qualitative research regarding the motivations and concerns of candidates and members of Congress. Given the potential complications of qualitative interpretation using multiple sources, all coding was personally conducted by the author.

Unlike some other studies of primary elections, I do not restrict the inclusion of contests in my main analyses via the use of thresholds. In Boatright's (2013) study on incumbent primaries, he only includes challengers who receive more than 25 percent of the vote, and in his book on congressional primaries (2014) he sets a threshold of 5 percent of the primary vote to be included.[28] Boatright positions these thresholds as generous, to "err on the side of being too inclusive in measuring serious campaigns rather than excluding some legitimate challenges" (2013, 69). I prioritize the inclusion of all competitions, leading to more primaries being recorded in states such as Indiana and Maryland which have fewer restrictions on ballot access.[29] There may also be normative reasons to include all contests, if recent perceptions about primary competition have been skewed by an unrepresentative subset of contests, where "literature on primary elections often takes its cue from particularly notorious primary challenges" (Boatright 2013, 173), then broadening the inclusion

[28] I repeat all analyses in this book using both of these thresholds elsewhere (Cowburn 2022b); the results are substantively unchanged.

[29] Given that the focus of this book is not on variation between states, this poses minimal challenges for the stated research questions. All analyses are repeated in the supplementary materials online using the two most common vote thresholds in the literature: an above 5 percent candidate threshold (Boatright 2014) and a below 75 percent winners threshold (Jewitt and Treul 2018). In addition, I perform my analyses with a threshold based on challengers' reported campaign receipts, as noted on their 12P Pre-Primary FEC report (see also Thomsen 2021). These thresholds produce only minimal differences in trends observed beyond a slightly lower number of contests recorded.

of contests seems an appropriate mitigation of this problem. At worst, there appears to be minimal harm in being overly inclusive, especially given that the temporal trends identified in Part I are unchanged by the introduction of thresholds.

Sources

Multiple sources were used to assign candidates' proximity to a factional ideal type and the reason for primary contests taking place, including membership of ideological caucuses, endorsements, policy positions, campaign themes, candidates' self- or opponent-framing, and explanations of why they were running in the primary. Where sources indicated different support or reasons, the most prominent or clearly associated factions and reasons for contest were prioritized. A full list of sources used is provided in Table 1.2, with each source clarified further in Chapter 2.

Membership of an ideological caucus was used as an indicator of factional proximity among members of Congress. These groups sit together on Capitol Hill with a common ideological orientation,[30] meaning this metric is only available for candidates who have spent time in Congress and provides an indication of ideological self-placement within the congressional party. Caucuses exist outside the control of party leadership, meaning they are often the site of factional organization (Bloch Rubin 2017). Ideological caucus membership is commonly used in scholarship on factionalism to identify subparty affiliation (e.g., Blum 2020).

Endorsements by, or associations with, prominent groups and people were used to indicate proximity to a faction,[31] and these associations were often made in explicitly ideological terms, with candidates often using these people as reference points of the type of Republican or Democrat they would be in Congress. Endorsements have been used as a key component in important academic works (Cohen et al. 2008) and are now tracked by media sources such as *FiveThirtyEight* to measure support within the party (Bycoffe and Dottle 2019). Endorsements are especially valuable in intra-party contests where – absent party labels – an endorsement may be the most visible cue voters have about a candidate. Multiple studies find a positive causal effect of party endorsements on the performance of candidates in primaries (Cohen et al. 2008; Dominguez 2011; Hirano and Snyder 2019; Kousser et al. 2015; Steger 2007)

[30] Nonideological caucuses or working groups were not included (e.g., Congressional Black Caucus).

[31] The full list of individuals and organizations used is introduced in Chapter 2.

TABLE 1.2 *Data sources*

Source	Use	Strengths	Weaknesses
Caucus memberships	Assign factional proximity	Self-indication of ideological position in the party	Only available for incumbents
Endorsements/ associations (groups)	Assign factional proximity	In line with existing literature showing endorsements matter	Relative paucity of endorsements, also include candidate affiliations to overcome this: not sanctioned by associated group
Endorsements/ associations (people)	Assign factional proximity	In line with existing literature showing endorsements matter	Relative paucity of endorsements, also include candidate affiliations to overcome this: not sanctioned by associated individual
Policy positions and campaign themes on candidate websites	Assign factional proximity and reason for contest	Public-facing proclamations by candidates	Potential for strategic position taking
Ideological self/ opponent identification on campaign websites or in interviews	Assign factional proximity and reason for contest	Public-facing statements by candidates	Potential for strategic position taking
Candidate explanations of reasons for running	Assign reason for contest	In line with existing literature (Boatright 2013)	Self-ascribed reasons from candidates

and other research uses endorsements to draw conclusions about intra-party dynamics (Kamarck and Podkul 2018; Manento and Testa 2021). Endorsements are primarily made on ideological grounds in presidential (Johnson, McCray, and Ragusa 2018, 3; see also Cohen et al. 2008; Steger 2007) and congressional races (Kousser et al. 2015).[32]

[32] Other studies (Hall and Snyder 2015; Karpowitz et al. 2011) use endorsements to scale congressional candidates ideologically, indicating the validity of their use here.

Affiliations with groups supporting candidates based on ideological position were used, in line with other research that uses interest group alignment to determine factional allegiance (Bendix and Mackay 2017). Organizations included endorsed candidates who held policy views aligned to a faction. These groups attempted to provide shared resources and funds to candidates from structures outside of formal party institutions, and often used distinct branding to identify endorsed candidates aligned with the faction. These endorsements were designed to help primary voters identify these candidates as holding certain positions or prioritizing specific issues within their party's wide tent.

Endorsements from, or direct associations with, certain prominent individuals within the party were considered as a further identifier of factional proximity. Prominent people within each faction were identified based on a combination of fit and frequency with which they were referenced. The individuals used were commonly cited within the media as leaders of or clearly aligned to a party faction. At the same time a variety of people were chosen to cover the ideological breadth of a faction, including different subgroups where applicable. Endorsements or associations with individuals who were at separate times viewed as proximate to different ideal types were not considered for either faction.[33]

Candidates' factional support and reasons for primary contests taking place were also assigned using content from campaign websites.[34] Campaign websites are a good indicator of candidate preferences (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2010) and were used to code policy positions, campaign themes, and intra-party support (see Hirano and Snyder 2019, 270 for a similar approach).[35] Campaign platforms in particular serve as credible signals about issues that legislators prioritize and intend to pursue once in office (Rogowski and Langella 2015; Sulkin 2009, 2011).[36] Local news reports and interviews with candidates were also used to determine how candidates positioned themselves against their

[33] Most prominently Barack Obama.

[34] Where websites were no longer active, I collected these pages using the Internet Archive "Wayback Machine"; https://web.archive.org/.

[35] The full list of positions and themes used to assign factional proximity is provided in Chapter 2.

[36] Though campaign platforms may not reflect candidates' personal preferences, where candidates may strategically adopt policies that are perceived as popular to improve their chances of winning election. There may also be practical reasons for candidates being unable to pursue their campaign policy goals once in office, or minimal incentives to adhere to commitments made (Alesina 1988), phenomena that are shown to weaken the congruence between campaign platforms and legislative activity (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2017b).

intra-party opponent(s), particularly in perceiving ideological differences or labeling themselves as the more liberal, centrist, or conservative candidate in the race. Media commentary – such as opinion pieces, editorials, or statements of endorsement – were not used, with only direct quotations from candidates included.

WHY FOCUS ON RECENT PRIMARIES?

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars theorized that elite actors in US political parties had become more homogenous as the parties polarized, with declining numbers of liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats in Congress (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Theriault 2008). In contrast to this view, the past decade has been notable for the reemergence of academic interest in the intra-party dynamics of both major parties (Bloch Rubin 2017; Clarke 2020; DiSalvo 2012; Lucas, Galdieri, and Sisco 2022; Noel 2016). The theoretical literature expects that political systems where parties are few and far between are the most likely to be rife with intra-party factions (Basedau and Köllner 2005) and that parties will be particularly vulnerable to outsider candidates in periods of ideological polarization and few parties (Buisseret and Weelden 2020). In other words, the contemporary structure of US political competition is exactly where we *should* see fierce intra-party competition.

Though the trend of increasing elite polarization started in late 1970s, the narrative of primary elections as a contributing factor has become more prevalent in recent decades. At the same time, the amount of data available about primary candidates has vastly expanded in the digital era. Yet much of the scholarship on whether congressional primaries polarize also focuses on a longer time frame and does not include digital data, prompting calls from some authors for a more refined focus on the previous fifteen years (see e.g., Drutman 2021, 38), where digital sources enable data collection about the policy preferences and campaign strategy of even minor candidates. This book therefore focuses on the eight election cycles between 2006 and 2020. Concentrating on this shorter time frame may be particularly important if, as argued here, the dynamics of primary competition have fundamentally changed in recent years. One aim of this book is to provide a more comprehensive descriptive understanding of the trends of primary competition in the modern era, using digital sources to update previously identified historical trends. Given that one of the main hindrances to our knowledge about primary elections has been a lack of data about candidates, the digital era of

campaigning marks a step change in our ability to understand primary elections both qualitatively and quantitatively. This book uses digital sources, including candidate websites, press statements, and social media to undertake this task.

Concentrating on recent primary contests allows for a more thorough analysis of the potentially heterogeneous impacts of distinct types of nomination contests using the concepts of ideological and factional primaries. Analyzing the impact of different types of primaries, in turn, advances our knowledge about the diverse mechanisms by which the congressional nomination process induces or rewards noncentrist positioning among candidates. Most current studies investigating the effects of primary elections on polarization fail to account for this variation and treat all contests alike. Given the potential for distinct results in contests between candidates receiving support from different factions within the party network and who frame their candidacy in ideological terms, the failure to consider the dynamics of primary elections on positional outcomes constitutes an important gap in the literature. It is this gap that I seek to address. If, as I argue, these dynamics have undergone a recent transformation, then studies focused on the effects of nominations over a longer period may fail to accurately capture the implications of current competition for candidate positioning and party transformation.

PARTISAN ASYMMETRIES

Given the raft of literature indicating partisan asymmetry in both the position (Hacker and Pierson 2006; Mann and Ornstein 2008; Theriault 2013) and identity (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016) of the two major parties, all analyses in this book are conducted separately for Democratic and Republican candidates. Descriptively, I show that ideological and factional primaries became common in the Republican Party earlier than in the Democratic Party. This temporal difference likely contributes to some of the asymmetric findings in several of the later chapters, such as the longer-term positional movement by Republican incumbents following a primary challenge. Beyond this temporal difference, it is clear that the Republican Party has radicalized in a way that the Democratic Party simply has not, where, by the end of the period, it was more willing to embrace extreme rhetoric and violence (Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Kydd 2021). Throughout this book, I am explicit in drawing connections between this broad trend and the asymmetric incentives in primaries pulling Republican candidates further from the center.

Relatedly, I identify a clear partisan asymmetry in engagement in congressional primaries by the formal party organizations, where the Democratic Party has been both more willing to engage in, and more successful at, supporting comparatively moderate or establishment candidates against progressives and outsiders. Willingness to support establishment candidates and party "regulars" (Noel 2016; Reiter 2004) helped produce a remarkably stable cohort of Democratic leadership in Congress throughout this period, with figures such as Nancy Pelosi, Jim Clyburn, Chuck Schumer, and Steny Hoyer holding key positions throughout the fifteen-year period of study. In contrast, Republican leadership was more volatile, with only Mitch McConnell holding a party leadership position throughout the period. Though some trends identified appear cyclical and relate to general election expectations, many of the structural changes which altered the dynamics of primary competition fundamentally affected the Republican Party more than its Democratic counterpart, in no small part due to the comparatively muted organizational response of the party establishment.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into two complimentary parts. Part I, "Primary Transformation," examines and seeks to explain the changing dynamics of primary competition in the twenty-first century. Part II, "Party Transformation," then considers how these changes have affected the position of the two major parties in Congress. Part I considers the what and why questions in terms of primary competition, identifying descriptive change in these contests. Part II tests the consequences of this change both in terms of *whether* the new dynamics of primary competition have changed the composition of the major parties and *how* these primaries have contributed to partisan polarization in the legislative branch, independently testing three distinct mechanisms through which primaries may polarize. The two parts are both crucial to the story of primaries and polarization in the twenty-first century. If no descriptive change is observed in Part I then it seems unlikely that primaries have become a contributing factor in the story of party change and congressional polarization examined in Part II. If the descriptive change in Part I takes place without consequences for the identity of candidates nominated, then the new dynamics of congressional primaries will be of comparatively limited consequence in their impact on US politics.

Part I, "Primary Transformation." Have the dynamics of primaries, especially regarding ideological and factional competition, changed in recent years? And if so, why?

Part II, "Party Transformation." Are (ideological and factional) primaries producing noncentrist nominees? And if so, how?

- *Selective effect*: Do primary voters prefer comparatively "extreme" candidates?
- *Between-election adaptative effect*: Do incumbents move position when challenged?
- *Within-election adaptative effect*: Do candidates adopt artificial positions during the primary?

To answer these questions, I proceed as follows. In Part I, Chapter 2 considers *whether* primary transformation has taken place, presenting evidence that congressional nominations have undergone a transformation in the period of study, with a proliferation of ideological and factional primaries. This chapter demonstrates changes in primary competition across several different dynamics, showing that primaries moved away from being rarely contested, candidate-centered elections focused on valence factors with minimal policy content, little campaign spending or media attention, and low voter turnout. By the end of the period of study, contests were far more often contested and faction-oriented, featuring extensive policy content, messaging focused on intra-party alignment, and higher levels of campaign spending and voter turnout.

Chapter 3 examines *why* primary transformation has occurred. This chapter identifies three important sets of structural changes that took place in the early twenty-first century: electoral incentives, regulatory reforms, and technological developments. These changes elicited responses from policy demanders in the party networks, the candidates themselves, and, to a lesser extent, primary voters. These changes and actors' responses in the Republican and Democratic parties have been distinct, with greater change in the Republican Party. The findings for both parties are underpinned by a broader trend of nationalization, which suggests a new model of intra-party representation.

Part II then assesses the consequences of the new dynamics of primary elections in terms of party transformation. Chapter 4 considers whether primary elections *can* move representatives away from the political center in the most likely case, examining whether factional primaries helped to move the Republican Party to the right in the Tea Party era.

Using a difference-in-differences design, I show that Republican representatives in districts with factional primaries moved further rightward than those from other districts. In these districts, factional candidates appear to have found a fertile base to elicit support, win elections, and provide a credible challenge for incumbents to respond to. Under these conditions, factional primaries *can* pull party elites toward an ideological pole.

Having established that primaries can play a role in reorienting parties, I then test the distinct mechanisms through which primaries may polarize in Chapters 5–7. These chapters are therefore interested in the question of *how* primaries polarize. Chapter 5 focuses on the *selective effect* emanating from the decisions of voters. To do so, I test voters' preferences for noncentrist candidates when they compete against more moderate opponents in ideological and factional primaries. I find some associations between noncentrist positioning and success among incumbents *only*, likely explained by voters' informational asymmetry about incumbents and other primary candidates. In other contests, I show that (ideological and factional) primary winners are no further from the political center, even when contests are about candidates' relative positions. Finally, Chapter 5 tests the theorized solution to polarization put forward by reform advocates: increasing the size of the primary electorate. I find no alignment between primary turnout and nominee position, indicating the limited potential of emancipatory reform efforts aimed at voters. Taken together, the findings in this chapter indicate that any polarizing effects of primaries are largely disconnected from the actions of voters.

As discussed earlier, there may be polarizing effects of the nomination process other than those caused by voters. Chapter 6 uses fixed effects models to test incumbent representatives' positional adaptation once an ideological or factional primary challenger emerges, labeled the *between-election adaptative effect*. When incumbents are challenged on factional or ideological grounds away from the center, they adopt less centrist roll-call voting in subsequent congresses. In some cases, a factional or ideological primary challenge was associated with representatives adapting their roll-call voting behavior away from the center for up to a decade. Members of Congress, fearful of being deposed by a same-party challenger, become more consistent partisans after they are subject to an ideological or factional primary. When challenged on nonfactional or nonideological grounds, representatives do not adapt their behavior in this way. That incumbent members of Congress move toward their

ideological pole following an ideological or factional primary is one way in which primaries appear to be exacerbating partisan conflict on Capitol Hill and altering the two major parties.

Chapter 7 considers whether candidates in the 2020 election cycle adopted artificially extreme positions during their primary campaign, labeled the *within-election adaptative effect*. Given the challenges of accessing suitable data, I construct an original dataset of candidate positions across a single election cycle and conduct an interrupted time series analysis to identify movement after a primary. This chapter uses a text-as-data approach to position candidates based on their communication on Twitter during the 2020 election cycle. Artificial extremism is revealed among candidates who lose their primary election and then moderate immediately afterwards. Given the pressure to appear consistent, candidates who win primary elections and advance to the general election cannot easily alter their position between contests. Losing Democratic primary candidates moderated following their primary defeat, but Republican candidates did not. This effect was particularly prevalent in ideological and factional primaries. These findings indicate that the presence of primary elections can have a polarizing effect on candidates during an electoral cycle and further highlight the asymmetric partisan incentives for candidates. Importantly for their contribution to polarization, winning candidates in both parties maintained their positions post-primary, indicating that artificial positions taken during the primary hold through to November, presenting general election voters with polarized *choices*.

I conclude with an overview of how recent changes in primary elections relate to party transformation, with further consideration of the implications of these findings. At the party level, I discuss the implications of both parties being not nearly so homogenous as metrics such as congressional party unity scores alone indicate. I also reflect on the media framing of primary voters as a source of polarization, with the results from Chapters 6 and 7 indicating that beliefs about the ideological position of primary selectorates may well have contributed to the polarizing behavior of candidates. During the period in which this book was written, some media outlets have begun to reappraise their analyses of primary electorates, noting that voters themselves are not a source of polarization (see e.g., Skelley 2021). Taken together, the results in Part I of this book align with widely held views about changes that have taken place in primaries. Yet the findings in Part II indicate that the consequences of these changes in terms of how they have affected party

politics is not as is frequently conceived either in the academic literature or media coverage about primaries and primary voters. My hope is that this book contributes to a growing recognition of the changes that have taken place in primary elections and the more nuanced ways that the dynamics of intra-party competition relate to party transformation in the contemporary era.