An Examination of Ideologically Extreme Congressional Primary Candidates

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Curious Cases of Eric Cantor, Bob Bennett, and Christine O’Donnell

At the start of 2014, Republican Eric Cantor was in his seventh term in the U.S. House of Representatives as Virginia’s Seventh Congressional District’s representative. He was the House majority leader and seen as a top contender to succeed John Boehner as Speaker of the House (Martin 2014). Cantor was a party leader who had served on several committees and was capable of tapping a considerable network of donors (Palmer and Tarini 2105). His long tenure in Congress and position of power afforded him significant name recognition and he managed to raise $5.4 million for his 2014 campaign (Martin 2014). Thus, entering the 2014 mid-term elections, Cantor was the epitome of a strong incumbent; the type of candidate that Democrats would be scared to challenge in the general election and certainly the type that fellow Republicans would have recognized as extremely difficult to unseat in the primary.

Eric Cantor’s loss in the 2014 Republican primary to staunchly conservative Tea Party candidate Dave Brat shocked the political world. Cantor’s loss marked the first time that a currently serving House majority leader had lost a primary since the inception of the role in 1899 (Barabak 2014). That his loss came at the hands of a relatively unheard of college professor whom he out-funded by a factor of more than twenty-four, contributed to the magnitude of the upset (Barabak 2014). Going into the race, Brat had to have been of aware of how low his chances of success were likely to be. He was competing with an incumbent who wielded an advantage over
him in every sense of the word, was a party leader, and had handily won his previous primaries and general elections (Martin 2014). An unprecedented electoral outcome such as this leads one to believe that there must have been intervening factors that served to assist Brat and help him find success against what would typically be regarded as overwhelming odds.

Virginia’s seventh congressional district is characterized as a “strongly Republican” district and has a Cook PVI\(^1\) score of R+10 (Cook). Throughout his campaign, Brat criticized Cantor for being too moderate and for being too soft on issues such as immigration (Martin 2014). It seems as though his assertions that Cantor was working together closely with Democrats got through to the district’s right-leaning constituency (Barabak 2014). Brat also received backing from local, grassroots Tea Party organizations and a number of national figures in the conservative media, such as Laura Ingraham and Anne Coulter (Martin 2014; Barabak 2014; Bump 2014). Interestingly, Cantor had been regarded as a valuable party figure owing to his ability to successfully communicate with both the traditional party establishment and more extreme members (Martin 2014). The ability of the Tea Party to portray aspects of Cantor’s reputation in conjunction with some of his policy decisions as moderate appears to have contributed to Brat’s capacity to wage a successful campaign from the right-lying ideological pole. This is especially interesting because Cantor voted with the Republican party on 95% of all roll call votes and received a substantially conservative DW-Nominate\(^2\) score in excess of .55, placing him well within a category of congressmen referred to as “strongly

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\(^1\) See pgs. 34-35 for full explanation of Cook PVI Scores
\(^2\) See pgs. 33-34 for full explanation of DW-Nominate Scores
conservative” (Douglas 2013; Enten 2014; Voteview). These metrics would indicate that only an extremely conservative Republican partisan could conceivably view Cantor as a moderate.

In 2010, Republican Bob Bennett was completing his third term in office as a United States senator representing the state of Utah and seeking to win a fourth term in the midterm elections. Until 2010, Bennett’s political career representing Utah had been characterized by few speed bumps; nobody challenged him for the Republican nomination in 2004 and in 2006 he garnered an approval rating of 93% among the state’s primary voters (Gardner 2010). Additionally, in the build-up to the 2010 elections, he had raised over $5 million in campaign funds and received a sparkling endorsement from one of Utah’s favorite sons, Mitt Romney (Open Secrets). Thus, prior to the election, he stood as another extremely strong candidate whose incumbency advantage and background would be expected to discourage strategic challengers from waging primary campaigns against him.

The state of Utah utilizes a somewhat complex form of caucusing to determine if a primary election is necessary, and if so, which candidates will appear on the ballot. In the second round of this process, Bennett managed only to take 26% of the vote, losing to two Tea Party supported candidates, Mike Lee, a lawyer, and Tim Bridgewater, a businessman (Goldsmith 2010). This is significant in that Bennett, the popular sitting senator of nearly two decades was denied a spot in the primary and his campaign was effectively ended before it could start. This situation provides another instance in which intervening variables seemingly enabled these challengers to take on a well-situated incumbent.
The state of Utah has become progressively more conservative over the course of the last two decades. With a Cook PVI score of R+20 in 2010, it was the most Republican leaning state in the nation (Cook). As a steady conservative, Bennett was seemingly a great fit to represent the state in the Senate. He routinely received stellar grades from conservative advocacy groups including the National Rifle Association (NRA), the United States Chamber of Commerce, and the American Conservative Union (Zeleny 2010). However, the Tea Party objected to several of his policy decisions while in office and deemed him a target that needed to be “primaried,” or unseated in the primary election. Tea Party groups levied criticisms against him for voting in favor of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, for co-sponsoring a health care bill with a Democratic senator, and even tied him to rampant government spending through his position on the Appropriations Committee (Gardner 2010).

Mike Lee and Tim Bridgewater were ultimately able to benefit from endorsements and the support of the right wing Tea Party. The group’s influence and efforts to unseat Bennett introduced new considerations into the challengers’ strategic decision-making process. Lee and Bridgewater were both able to capitalize on the effects of the conservative movement by launching an ideological primary attack from the pole in the most right-leaning state in the union. Whereas typically Bennett would be an extremely safe incumbent, his position was eroded considerably by Tea Party interest groups and grassroots organizations, contributing to his downfall.

In 2010, after Joe Biden vacated his Senate seat in order to assume the role of Vice President and join President Obama in the White House, the state of Delaware
held a special election in order to fill his empty seat. The perceived frontrunner and logical candidate for the Republican nomination was Mike Castle, former governor of Delaware and nine-term congressman (Cameron 2010). However, Christine O’Donnell, who is most notable for her political ads declaring that she was “not a witch,” received significant Tea Party backing and endorsements from figures such as Sarah Palin and Jim DeMint. After accusing Castle of “selling out to the moderate wing of the party,” O’Donnell managed to defeat him by securing 53% of the vote to Castle’s 47%. The main Republican establishment made it clear that it was backing Castle and accordingly, O’Donnell would receive no national fundraising support (Cameron 2010).

In the general election, O’Donnell found herself competing with Democratic nominee Chris Coons. Coons had prior political experience as a county executive. The general electorate did not respond well to the extreme nature of O’Donnell’s stance and proposed policies. As such, Coons, with 56% of the vote, handily defeated O’Donnell who could only muster a vote from 40% of the electorate (Hanna 2010). It would seem as though the extremity that played to O’Donnell’s advantage in the primary and helped secure her the nomination ultimately proved to be her undoing. The circumstances of this election constituted a serious disappointment for the Republican Party as Castle, whom they had supported, was generally viewed to have a much better chance than O’Donnell to defeat Coons in the general election (Hanna 2010). Not only was Castle more moderate than O’Donnell, who was widely regarded as too conservative for the state, but he was also one of Delaware’s most popular politicians (Balz 2010). While we can only speculate, it can be said that if Castle had
won the Republican nomination, he would likely have had more appeal to the general electorate than Christine O’Donnell. This points to a type of penalty that the Republicans seemingly paid as a result of O’Donnell’s nomination. While the right-leaning voters in the primary welcomed O’Donnell’s relative extremism, she was not a feasible candidate when opposing a more moderate Democrat in the general election. Perhaps, if Castle had won the primary, the general electorate would not have dealt the Republicans such a blow.

**Why an Examination of Extreme Congressional Primary Candidates?**

Recent election cycles have seen ideologically extreme candidates find success in primaries within both the Republican and Democratic parties. The three cases outlined above were perhaps among the more high profile instances of victory for relatively extreme primary participants. This is because somewhat unheard of challengers unseated well-situated, veteran congressmen before they could even reach the general election. However, these instances are indicative of a much more extensive trend that according to polarization literature, applies to the whole range of congressional contests.

In the United States, an election for every seat in the House of Representatives and one third of those in the Senate is held every two years. As the races that determine the members of Congress, the outcomes of these biennial competitions have significant and widespread effects on the dynamics of American democracy. As the topic of polarization has become increasingly prevalent in political science literature since the early 1970s, more research has been devoted to the dynamics and
consequences of congressional elections. Admittedly, this research has been geared more toward general elections than the primaries that determine which candidates will ultimately represent their parties in those general elections. The purpose of this thesis is to make use of quantitative analyses in order to delve deeply into the success of the ideologically extreme candidates in primary elections for open congressional seats. Hopefully, generating a better understanding of these extreme open seat candidates will also shed light on extremists who take on incumbents.

In several of his books, Robert Boatright has conducted some of the most extensive work on primaries. Among other topics related to congressional primaries, he has focused on challengers, incumbents, and financing. While Boatright uncovered a steady rise in primary challenges occurring on ideological grounds beginning in the early 1980s, this thesis seeks to investigate all extreme primary candidates, not simply those who attack incumbents and accuse them of being too moderate. Candidates who launch campaigns from the poles of the political spectrum and attack incumbents as moderates certainly are an important subset of the larger assembly of extreme primary entrants that have emerged in the American political system. However, the treatment of polarization in American politics as a widespread phenomenon at both the elite and mass levels indicates that a truly comprehensive inquiry into extreme candidates requires a very broad focus. As such, this thesis employs a data set that includes all congressional primary races from the 2004 election cycle to the 2012 cycle. It aims to uncover when, where, and why relatively extreme candidates achieve electoral success.
It does so by specifically examining open seat congressional primaries from 2004 to 2012 in which there was an identifiably most ideologically extreme candidate present in the race. The logistic regression carried out for these elections in the House will incorporate variables pertaining to primary type, candidate fundraising gaps, electoral sub-unit partisan leanings, and electoral sub-unit education level. A linear regression conducted for these elections in the Senate will also employ similar independent variables. The reasons for selecting this sample of elections and incorporating these predictors will be laid out more clearly later in the thesis, but this setup provides an ideal mix of an environment conducive to candidate study and predictors for which there is precedent to consider in electoral investigations.

**Figure 1.1 – Party Divergence on Key Issues over Time**
As polarization has progressed within American politics since the 1970s, it has drastically impacted electoral and congressional dynamics. In both chambers of Congress, the average and median positions for members of the Democratic and Republican parties have steadily diverged on seemingly all fronts, as measured by broad metrics and more specific metrics concerning issue topics ranging from cultural issues to social welfare issues (Barber and McCarty 2013). The exodus of the two major parties away from the middle ground in American politics has coincided with key shifts in how members of Congress interact with their counterparts across the aisle. Experienced members of Congress have even reported that as polarization has progressed, it has become ever more difficult to build the sort of personal relationships across party lines that once fostered trust and bipartisan cooperation (Barber and McCarty 2013). It has become apparent that since the early 1970s, tactics and negotiation strategies between majority and minority party members have become significantly more confrontational (Sinclair 2012). In stark contrast to the centrist politics of the mid-20th century, Congress has come to be characterized by increasing levels of partisan conflict in recent decades. As the fledgling process of polarizing was solidified in the 1970s and early 1980s, Congress came to be composed of more ideologically hard line policy entrepreneurs. Rule changes in the both the House and the Senate that were meant to facilitate control by the majority party led to more aggressive and obstructionist action by individual members of Congress in addition to party leadership (Sinclair 2012).

The Senate has seen a steady increase in both the employment of the filibuster

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3 Figure 1.1, Source: Barber and McCarty 2013
and the passage of the cloture votes required to end a filibuster. Another such trend is the meteoric rise in the use of restrictive special rules in the House so as to prevent extensive debate and limit amending activity on the floor. Whereas these special rules were utilized on an average of 15% of major pieces of legislation in the late 60s and early 70s, today they are utilized on essentially 100% of major bills. Both of these developments point to the routine attempts that are made to circumvent the opposition in the hopes of passing legislation that is subject to partisan disagreements. The relative lack of rules governing debate in the Senate has allowed for individual senators not only to filibuster but also to submit unwieldy numbers of amendments on the floor as a method of obstruction (Sinclair 2012). Thus, in recent decades, it has become common practice for the majority party to attempt to sidestep the minority and pass as much of their agenda as possible. In turn, the minority party seeks to fulfill an obstructionist role and employs any prerogative at its disposal to block the majority party while attempting to push through its own policies.

The manner in which the two parties interact in Congress has reduced the efficiency with which the legislative body can pass laws. Over the course of the last five to six decades, the number of issues stuck in gridlock has steadily risen. In recent congresses, as many as three quarters of the most salient issues remained unresolved at the end of the congress (Binder 2014). This deadlock and relative inaction due to the adversarial and confrontational nature that has developed within inter-party congressional dealings is certainly recognized by the masses. Accordingly, public approval ratings for the legislature have plummeted over the same time frame. Whereas, congressional approval hovered closer to 40% in the 1970s, today only 14%
of the American population approves of the job that Congress is doing, with that number dropping to as low as 9% in 2014 (Gallup). The gridlock, combative congressional tactics, and discord that polarization has facilitated are precisely why the investigation carried out in this thesis is valuable. The increased extremism and reduction in moderate stances across party lines has been a major factor in progression of polarization. Generating an understanding of the circumstances where more extreme candidates for congressional office find success is imperative if we are to fully comprehend how today’s American political atmosphere has developed over recent decades and how it may evolve in the near future.

Research focusing on extreme candidates has found that the nomination of an extremist in a primary typically results in electoral penalty being paid by the nominating party in the general election. Additionally, in different electoral sub-units the extent of these penalties is known to vary (Hall 2014). If the penalty is severe enough to result in a loss in the general election, the extremist-nominating party may find itself at a disadvantage in future cycles because of a transfer of the incumbency advantage to the opposing party. Thus, the negative effects arising from the nomination of an extreme candidate in a primary election can persist for multiple cycles. The aforementioned variance in the size of the penalties assessed by electorates on extreme candidates and the parties that nominate them indicates that there are certain districts and states with much smaller penalties than others. As such, it is possible that these are the locations where extremists have been able to find the most success. This suggests that district characteristics are capable of playing a sizable role in the success attained by candidates who stand near or at the ends of the
ideological spectrum. Such a possibility presents further reason to investigate interactions among the district level variables including partisan leanings, voters’ consideration of the tradeoff between electability and policy, and candidate vote share.

Overview

This chapter served as an introduction and provided context for the study to follow. Chapter 2 consists of a comprehensive literature review that discusses a range of previous work pertaining to candidates, elections, and polarization. Chapter 3 begins with an explanation of the data set, its components, and its construction. This explanation includes descriptive statistics, which provides an overview of the entire data set and insight into some of the more important variables. Chapter 3 also includes an analysis of the relationship between candidate ideology and district/state ideology across parties and by election cycle. What follows in Chapter 4 is a bifurcated investigation into open seat congressional primary races where there was a candidate who could be identified as the most extreme race participant. This analysis is separated by chamber so as to allow for a separate investigation into extremist success in the House and Senate. Chapter 5 closes the thesis with a series of conclusions and a discussion of the work’s theoretical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Setting the Stage

In recent decades, there has been a significant amount of scholarship devoted to the decision-making process of potential congressional candidates. There has been a growing body of work focusing on candidates as “strategic actors,” and accordingly, many contributions have been made to the study of factors that drive candidates to enter elections (Bianco 1984; Goodliffe 2001; Jacobson 1989; Lazarus 2008; Maisel and Stone 1997; Pyeatt 2010; Thomsen 2014). Some of this work has focused on the conditions that entice a “quality” candidate to run as opposed to an “amateur” (Lazarus 2008). Other research has been carried out with an aim towards identifying the differences in how potential candidates perceive elections in which there is an incumbent versus those in which there is an open seat (Bianco 1984). While political scientists have devoted a substantial amount of time to examining candidates’ strategic behaviors and determining what motivates them to enter congressional races, there still exists critical gaps in this extensive segment of the literature.

Although there may be a consensus as to what general factors spur candidates to enter congressional races, there has been a dearth of scholarship concentrating on the relatively recent trend of incumbents being targeted and in some cases, defeated, in primary elections by members of their own party. Moreover, while countless political scientists have investigated the well-known reduction of the number of moderates in Congress, few have worked to understand when and why more extreme candidates find success in modern electoral circumstances. This thesis attempts to
generate an understanding of when, where, and why extreme candidates may achieve victory in competitions for open congressional seats, with the hope that this effort will also contribute to the understanding of extremists that challenge incumbents. To do so, it considers a variety of factors pertinent to the decision making of politicians and members of the electorate and considers how these variables may have changed in recent decades. This investigation is done while considering the progression of what, in recent decades, has been referred to the polarization of American politics.

The stage for an investigation such as the one undertaken in this thesis was set in the 1950s with the advent of the Median Voter Theorem (Downs 1957). An application of this theory to voting outcomes would suggest a Congress populated by individuals who approximate the citizenry’s median voter. However, more recent theories have arrived at the conclusion that in any situation in which candidates are drawn from a population containing a continuum of ideologies, candidates will, without fail, emerge from the extremes of this ideological span. This tendency stems from the ways in which the benefits of running for office accrue to ideologically different candidates. While all candidates would receive what is referred to as “office-holding benefits” if they were to win, potential policy benefits become more significant for progressively more extreme entrants (Großer and Palfrey 2014). This theory was bolstered by suggestions that moderate members of the public with political aspirations might abstain from running for office due to a low perception of party fit and anticipated difficulties in achieving policy goals (Thomsen 2014). Thus, an application of these two theories would suggest a Congress characterized by relative extremists. Despite the lack of an agreement on this topic of theoretical
congressional makeup, a myriad of researchers have gone on to explore the elements upon which congressional candidates’ strategic electoral decisions are based.

**Strategic Candidates**

There is a strategic aspect of the behavior exhibited by all candidates for congressional office in that they must take into account a wide variety of considerations before choosing whether or not to “throw their hat in the ring.” Logically, a candidate will be far less likely to enter a race that they do not believe can be won. Thus, they need to evaluate current electoral and economic conditions, trends, and results on both the local and national levels. A prospective entrant is much more likely to seek the nomination if these conditions favor their party and present favorable odds of victory (Jacobson 1989). One of the most significant local circumstances that has to be accounted for is the presence of an incumbent, due to the vaunted incumbency advantage. A strong incumbent’s presence in a congressional seat often serves to dissuade quality challengers, who frequently make entry decisions based mainly on district-level economic and political conditions, from running. Interestingly though, a district-wide perception that a sitting congressmen is senile or “out of touch” may instead spark interest from opposing candidates in both the primary and general elections (Bianco 1984). Still, a race against an incumbent who is held in a low regard by their constituency would not be as enticing as one for an open seat (Bianco 1984).

Calculating and deliberate candidates’ first tactical assessment concerns how likely they are to receive their party’s nomination. Therefore, the incumbency effect
has an even stronger repulsive effect for those that share a party affiliation with the incumbent (Maisel and Stone 1997). The aforementioned incumbency advantage stems from a number of benefits that elected officials receive from holding office. They are capable of securing future votes by satisfying constituent desires during previous terms, gaining name recognition through utilization of the franking privilege, and raising campaign funding more effectively (Eckles et al. 2013; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Incumbents are also permitted to carry over unused campaign funds from previous elections and in effect, build an ever-growing “war chest” over time. While there are contradictory bodies of work on the ability of war chests to deter challengers, they should certainly serve as a signal that an incumbent has extra funds to employ if need be, and is capable of efficiently raising money (Goodliffe 2001).

Some of the most inspired work in this field has made use of empirical studies to test aspects of candidate entry models. By employing regression analyses, some studies have examined the varying significance of potentially influential factors in the decision-making process for different types of candidates. One study found that candidates respond to factors that influence their decision to enter a race differently based upon their level of political experience, whether they would be running for an open seat or against a challenger, and whether or not they belong to the incumbent’s party (Lazarus 2008).

As the number of moderates has steadily dwindled in Congress while we have witnessed congressmen and senators move towards the poles, a limited body of work has looked into factors that may be making extreme positions more advantageous for
prospective candidates. Indeed, it seems that since 1980, and particularly since 2000, ideological challengers have enjoyed a notable increase in fundraising, often receiving donations from outside of their district or state (Boatright 2013). Additionally, observant challengers can determine the ideological approximation of a constituency’s median voter and the ideological stance of an incumbent, and then arrive at their own probability of winning, conditional upon espousing certain positions. This implies that as the political sphere has become more saturated with information and statistics in the past few decades, challengers have become increasingly able to stake out the most extreme position that they can “get away with.” Furthermore, if they come to the realization that they have a low probability of winning, they may adopt extreme positions for expressive purposes (Boatright 2004).

After decades of political science research focused on candidates’ tactics and voters’ considerations, it has been made clear that candidates must judiciously appraise their chances of winning based upon consideration of a wide array of factors. The necessity for such carefully considered strategic decision-making arises from the potential negative effects of an electoral defeat. The stigma of an unsuccessful campaign could hinder a political career and make funds harder to raise in the future (Jacobson 1989). The increasing number of primary challenges of sitting members of Congress stands in stark contrast to this vast portion of the literature that portrays potential candidates as strategic actors. Additionally, one would expect the fact that a candidate’s extreme views may give voters pause and result in their use of a vote for a candidate deemed more strategically sound for the general election, to moderate the stances of primary contenders. Thus, there must be intervening variables that are
emboldening candidates, making them more willing to enter races and stake out positions relatively close to the ends of the ideological spectrum, causing them to deal with what would traditionally be viewed as an extremely uphill battle. While there have been various attempts at identifying the main factors involved in candidates’ process of deciding whether they will run for congressional office, additional work is required, in order to uncover the political environments within which these often extreme challengers thrive. Perhaps the answer lies, in part, in the characteristics of modern polarization.

The Effect of Primary Type on Election Outcomes

A number of political scientists have devoted attention to the idea that primary elections have the potential to be a polarizing force. This idea is predicated on their suggested capability of influencing electoral outcomes through the type of nominating system and level of openness that is employed. One such effort utilized a “difference in difference” approach to assess time series data of candidate ideology and type of primary. Using this approach in conjunction with very large data sets has shed light on the effects of primary type and level of openness on candidate behavior. The assertion has been made that the level of openness in primary contests is in no way systematically tied to candidate ideologies (Rogowski and Langella 2014). Additional work that examined the relationship between ideal point estimates of congressional legislators and the primary systems through which these legislators were elected, arrived at a similar conclusion. The study was unable to uncover any consistent or significant effect of primary type on politicians’ ideology (McGhee et al. 2014).
Experiments in California during the 2012 elections corroborated this claim and demonstrated that moderates stood no better chance of winning in open primaries than they did in a closed system. This was because despite being on average fairly moderate, voters are unable to detect ideological variability between candidates of different levels of extremity in the same party (Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz 2013). Perhaps, if voters were more knowledgeable, or if congressional elections received more media coverage, this inability could be overcome and something like a top-two primary\textsuperscript{4} would provide an advantage to moderate candidates.

Interestingly, some work has contradicted these arguments upon the theoretical view that because closed primaries restrict the voting population, the median voter is less centrist and thus extreme candidates benefit from a higher likelihood of winning (Westley, Calcagno, and Ault 2004). Another inquiry that made use of a multivariate regression analysis suggested that there was indeed a functional influence being exerted upon the ideologies of U.S. representatives by their primary systems. According to this investigation, those legislators that were produced by closed primary elections tended to adopt more extreme positions, with the most restrictive primary systems producing commensurately more extreme representatives. Moreover, while open primaries were tied to more moderate legislators, because blanket and nonpartisan primaries allow for crossover voting by moderate members of the electorate, they were tied to the most moderate primary victors (Gerber and Morton 1998). Thus, there is a disagreement between segments of the literature

\textsuperscript{4} top two/non partisan blanket primary/jungle primary – primary where all candidates, regardless of party affiliation are placed on the same ballot and the top two vote getters move on to the general election
pertaining to this matter. However, the balance of evidence, particularly in more modern research seemingly points to primary type as a non-factor in the determination of candidate ideology. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that primary type in conjunction with levels of candidate exposure and media coverage could feasibly affect the amount of success found by extreme candidates.

**Voter Decision Making**

Candidates are far from the only strategic actors that must be considered when examining the dynamics of congressional contests. There has been a wide array of work that has focused on voters as strategic actors and considered the consequences of their strategic voting (Londregan and Romer 1993; Mirhosseini 2011; Razin 2003). When deciding which candidate to cast their vote for, those members of the electorate that make a careful appraisal of their options, do so with special attention given to several factors. They realize that a distinct tradeoff must be made between a candidate’s presented policies and their electability. Thus, a primary voter must carefully weigh how closely their views are approximated by a given contender against the aspiring congressman’s potential for success in both the primary and general elections (Mirhosseini 2011). This relationship may be quantifiable through an examination of the connection that exists between the level of uniformity present between a candidate’s ideological position (as identified through a CF score) and the partisan lean of the district where they are running, and their vote shares in general elections. In a way, this would be a measure of candidate electability, admittedly calculated with the benefit of hindsight though the examination of voting outcomes.
The strength of the correlation between these two pieces of data would help determine the level of importance that voters place on congruence between their views and those of electoral candidates.

However, voters’ considerations extend well beyond this lone tradeoff. For example, a vote has two potential uses; it can be used to affect the identity of the winning candidate or to send a message about their policy prescriptions. As such, a voter may be incentivized to vote for their favored candidate, or rather to vote for the opponent in order to signal that they are unhappy with the policies choices of their preferred winner. Thus, if a voter anticipates a close election, they are more likely to place the most emphasis on ensuring that their desired victor comes out on top, while in landslide elections, they may be more inclined to send a message (Razin 2003).

Beyond the legislative effects of their votes, constituents consider what a candidate can tangibly do for them. In this vein, they are focused to some extent on how effectively a candidate could provide services to the citizens that he or she would represent (Londregan and Romer 1993).

The bulk of this work on voters has been of an economic nature and has been predicated on an assumption of perfect information held by voters. In contrast, research done by political scientists has differed in its perhaps more realistic assumption of imperfect information. These studies suggest that members of the electorate attempt to vote for the candidate whose policies comprise the closest Downsian approximation of their own preferences (Leiter 2008). However, in an environment with imperfect information, there are a wide variety of intervening variables that could impact voter behavior and ultimately results in favor of
candidates that are not the closest match in terms of policy preferences, such as the candidates’ perceived ability to govern (Leiter 2008). Other factors that may influence voting decisions are strong moral or ethical views on sensitive topics such as abortion and gay rights, information passively acquired through friends and family or the media, and partisan endorsements (Dominguez 2011; Hillygus and Shields 2005; Winchester, Binney, and Hall 2014). Additionally, through quantitative analyses, it has become apparent that district characteristics including, the composition of the field of candidates, demographic makeup, and prevailing partisan biases can play a significant role in influencing the nature of primary elections. These characteristics impact the dynamics and voter decision-making in primary elections and the level of divisiveness that pervades between sub-groups of primary electorates (Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). Yet another study that examined voter learning over the course of elections determined that voter support could shift mid-cycle as a result of learning more about candidates (Hirano et al. 2014). Thus, the economic literature paints a picture of strategic constituents who vote for electable candidates with views similar to their own. Interestingly though, political science literature suggests that the strategic desires may be complicated by a number of factors.

Campaign promises serve an important role in signaling candidate stances to voters and accordingly, there is a cost of betrayal that must be paid if promises are doubled back on. As such, voters prefer an extreme candidate that presents a clear platform to a candidate whose policy preferences are unknown and who could possibly take either a very centrist or very extreme stance. This suggests that there is some amount of risk aversion in the voting public that causes it to accept candidates
that are more extreme than it otherwise would if it was risk neutral (Asako 2015). Therefore, it implies that in modern politics, staking out a firm, yet polarized ideological stance may have developed into a preferential campaign strategy when compared to a less fixed, but more moderate platform. It has also been posited that because candidate deviation varies across districts, the emergence of extreme candidates may partially be a function of electoral sub-unit level variables such as degree of political competition, the importance of ideology to primary voters, and how firmly entrenched candidate reputations have become. As it has become the norm to see more extreme candidates, the aforementioned non-policy related incumbency advantages might also be helping extreme congressmen to remain in office (Burden 2004).

**Polarization of the American Political System**

In the mid twentieth century, the American political system was characterized by moderate politics in which both major parties routinely staked out centrist positions that did not differ significantly from each other. This was so much the case that calls were made for the parties to move closer to the poles, in order to create an “effective opposition” and facilitate better government (APSA 1950). However, the 1970s marked the beginning of a process that has continued until today, by which the Republican and Democratic parties have steadily polarized. Metrics used to quantify the position of congress members’ positions along an ideological spectrum have demonstrated consistent movement away from the center in both chambers. In 2007, the Republicans and Democrats were 55 percent further apart in the House
of Representatives and 65 percent further apart in the Senate than they were in the 1940s (Butler 2007). Any overlap between liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats is now completely nonexistent. While the majority of this migration has resulted from increasingly conservative Republican congressmen, both parties are certainly responsible for this exodus from the center (Butler 2007).

There has been much contemporary work focusing on how shifts in candidate ideology have coincided with the polarization of the American political system. One theory suggests that as the Democratic and Republican Parties have become increasingly polarized and moved closer to the ideological poles, they have brought with them the policy stances of congressional candidates with their respective party affiliations (Ansolabehere et al. 2001). Relying on the previously discussed strategic tendencies of aspiring candidates, other work suggests that as money has grown in electoral importance, office seekers have increasingly worked to maximize receipts of campaign donations. These efforts have taken the form of data mining to “microtarget” individuals who are likely to donate and the construction of lucrative leadership PACs (OpenSecrets; Washington Post). Party activists donate sizable sums of money to both political campaigns and political action committees (PACs) and are more likely to turn out on Election Day (especially for primaries). However, activists are also considerably more polarized than the general public (Layman 2014). Consequently, in order to please these groups of party hardliners and obtain valuable electoral resources, candidates have abandoned the ideological “middle” (Peress 2012).

Additional attention has been devoted to the election process’ iterated
Figure 2.1 – House and Senate DW-Nominate Party Medians over Time

Figure 2.2 – House and Senate Polarization over Time (quantified by DW-Nominate)

Figures 2.1/2.2 – Data Source: VoteView
structure. Because candidates seeking congressional office must participate in both a primary and general election, they face two distinct electorates that are in need of wooing. Hence, they must stake out a position on the ideological spectrum that strikes a delicate balance between satiating the partisan that turns out in the primary election and the median voter who turns out for the general election (Brady, Han and Pope 2007). These theories paint mounting partisan divergence as the major causal factor in the creation of two candidate pools, that barely overlap, if at all, leaving the political median barren and host to very few moderates. Logically, these theories contribute to an explanation of why the two major parties are moving apart in Congress.

However, when considering that there is also a simultaneously polarizing electorate, it is plausible that voters are viewing incumbents as moderate holdovers from previous iterations of Congress that were less polarized. Thus, a strategic window is provided for primary entrants who abandon the ideological middle, providing a partial explanation for this movement of candidates towards the ideological poles. It has been noted that American electoral sub-units like states and congressional districts have become increasingly homogenous. As citizens have sought out residential areas where they can live with like-minded individuals in terms of ideological preferences and political values, congressional elections have become less competitive (Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning 2006). This development indicates that on an ideological continuum, congressional districts are coming to approximate one of the extreme peaks of a bimodal voter distribution, rather than the
median voter, which would lies between these two peaks.\textsuperscript{5}

**Figure 2.3 – Bimodal Distribution of Voters by Ideology**

![Bimodal Distribution of Voters by Ideology](image)

Source: Jacobson 2012

There are numerous implications of such self-selecting into homogenous electoral sub-units. For the purpose of this thesis, it is insignificant whether this process is occurring consciously or unconsciously, but the consequences are potentially substantial. As districts and states continue to homogenize, they find themselves with primary and general electorates composed of increasingly similar voters on an ideological scale. Accordingly, these districts and states stand to be particularly attractive to extreme primary candidates. As was previously mentioned, both strategic voters and candidates are aware of the tradeoff that exists between those more polarized political stances that are popular with primary constituencies but are less successful in general elections, and those that are more moderate. However,

\textsuperscript{5} Figure 2.3 demonstrates the bimodal voter distribution through separation of the population by party affiliation
as a district becomes more ideologically homogenous, this tradeoff becomes less and less noteworthy. If a potential primary contender is aware that much of the population of the district or state within which they intend to run is ideologically similar, he or she will likely be more comfortable staking out an extreme position that will benefit them in the primary, without needing to worry as much about potential penalties in the general election. Accordingly, one would expect more extreme candidates to find greater success in these homogenized electoral sub-units.

This research suggesting that individuals are seeking out electoral districts and states populated by people with similar political leanings, thereby resulting in less competitive general elections and primaries that are hospitable to extremists underscores another important consideration. It would appear as though the progressive polarization of elites that has been visibly occurring in Congress since the 1970s is mirrored by a moderately similar phenomenon on the mass level. While the jury is certainly still out as the whether mass polarization is causing elite polarization or elite polarization is causing mass polarization, it is certainly clear that the process is occurring across multiple strata of the political arena. No matter what the initial cause and effect relationship was, it seems possible that in today’s world, mass and elite polarization feed into each in a feedback loop of sorts. The development of homogenous districts with severe leanings stands to produce more extreme congressional candidates and representatives that view their election as a mandate to take ideologically extreme stances. The stances of these party elites may serve as cues to rank-and-file party members that result in further mass polarization and electoral sub-unit polarization. It is these results that could feed into and further exacerbate
each other. While the time frame examined in this study may not be long enough to adequately examine this possibility, with a larger data set, it should be possible to determine if from election to election, American electoral districts have steadily become characterized by more intense political leanings as their congressional representatives have simultaneously moved away from the ideological middle.

Additionally, surveys that asked members of the electorate to self identify as Republican, Democrat, or unaffiliated voters have demonstrated that today’s unaffiliated voters are nearly identical to those of the early 1970s, in an ideological sense. However, the mean ideological position for Republican voters has become significantly more conservative, while that of Democratic voters has become significantly more liberal (Butler 2007). This is to say that a higher prevalence of successful extreme candidates for congressional office may be expected as the electorate seemingly becomes increasingly bifurcated. Accordingly, there appears to be merit in the quest of identifying the conditions that are most conducive to success for relatively extreme candidates. Because they are facilitating the election of more ideologically disparate Republican and Democratic members of Congress, these conditions are at least partially responsive for the shift in congressional dynamics that have been observed since the 1970s.

**Research Direction**

This thesis will conduct an empirical examination of extreme primary candidates over the course of five recent election cycles, from 2004-2012. In doing so, it will attempt to address the existing gaps in the literature. Using the literature as
a jumping off point and a dataset constructed from FEC data, DW-Nominate scores, and CF scores, it will conduct an investigation into the upsurge of extreme primary candidates and the situations wherein they succeed. While examining this trend, the thesis will take into consideration today’s polarized atmosphere, the candidates, and a number of both candidate and district level variables. The thesis will attempt to identify the conditions that contribute to a higher likelihood of extremists attaining high vote shares and ultimately winning open seat congressional races. These factors could be location specific, tied to aspects of the electorate, or related to the individual decision making process of potential candidates. In geographic terms, it will attempt to discern the locations wherein the penalties paid by extreme primary victors are small in the general election and ascertain whether small penalties are in part responsible for extremist success. This analysis will include a bifurcated examination of open seat races in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. A discussion will then follow, that will attempt to ascertain the effects of the oft-discussed trend of polarization that has occurred over the last half century on candidate tendencies in relation to candidate deviation and its tie to a rising prevalence of successful extremists.

The analysis carried out herein will seek to answer a number of questions, which would contribute to the literature on extreme candidates and the dynamics surrounding their performance in primary elections. It will look at the electoral results across election cycles in order to determine the relationships between metrics of extremist success and a number of predictors. The joint use of DW-Nominate, CF, and PVI scores will also allow for a comparison to see how well extreme candidates
fare in races held in districts and states with varying degrees of partisan favorability. In a similar vein, it will quantify the relative importance placed on the levels of congruence between voters’ views and those of a primary candidate. Across all elections, it will consider success rates for candidates along a continuum of increasing extremity in order to determine how voters perceive and respond to ideologically polarized candidate positions across party lines.

As was previously discussed, there are two segments of the literature, one of an economic nature and one of a political nature, that are predicated upon different assumptions, and therefore result in different expectations. The principal disparity between these two subsets of research is in the level of information with which it is assumed voters operate. Thus, there is merit in endeavoring to determine which set of assumptions is correct or at least more accurate, so as to clarify expectations pertaining to voter behavior. If voters were acting on perfect information, one would expect their voting decisions to be flawless in terms of selecting a candidate that best represents their ideological position while weighing the tradeoff between electability and extremism and considering the use of their vote as a message sending tool. However, if they were operating with imperfect information, their decisions would likely deviate from those under ideal conditions. While comprehensively testing this would prove difficult, this thesis will contribute to the discussion by analyzing ties between vote totals and other information both known and unknown to the voting public.
CHAPTER THREE: DATA

Overview of Data Set

In order to answer the questions posed in the previous chapter of this thesis, a data set containing the entire nation’s continuum of congressional candidates across multiple election cycles was needed. The first step in constructing this data set was to obtain electoral data from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for the electoral cycles from 2004 to 2012. This resulted in a sizable data set spanning five electoral cycles and containing data on 9,781 major party candidates for congressional office that participated in elections for 2,340 congressional seats.

The FEC data comprised the backbone of the data set but did not contain the types of ideological measures necessary for carrying out the work to be done in the following chapter. Accordingly, additional variables were incorporated for each candidate so as to make the data set more useful. The first of these variables was the Campaign Finance score (CFscores) as created by Adam Bonica and found within the Stanford Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections (DIME). These scores are principally based upon the assumption that political donors distribute financing in response to their estimations of candidate ideology (Bonica 2014). Additionally, CFscores are capable of placing all congressional candidates on a common ideological spectrum through an analysis of 13.4 million individual donors and over 511,000 political organizations from 1979 to 2012. In essence, by identifying the partisanship of political donors who contribute at least in part upon ideological proximity to candidates, CFscores quantify said candidates ideological
leanings. Furthermore, the system of scores accounts for ideological development over time by examining changes in donation patterns across election cycles (Bonica 2014). These data points are utilized in order to place candidates on an ideological continuum surrounding the neutral point zero, with more negative scores being associated with increasing liberalism and more positive scores being associated with increasing conservatism. Additional information such as the total campaign funds raised by each candidate in every election cycle, their receipts from political action committees (PACs), and their receipts from individual donors were also incorporated from the DIME database.

The CFscores developed by Bonica are immensely valuable in how they differ from other metrics of politician ideology. A number of other well-known measurement methods are predicated upon the use of roll-call voting results within Congress. While this is a reliable and logical way to measure ideological positioning, by its nature, data can only be collected for those candidates that ultimately won both a previous primary and general election. In contrast, because CFscores utilize campaign-financing data, any candidate who participated in so much as a single primary election and received monetary campaign donations can be analyzed. However, this is certainly not to say that metrics employing roll-call voting outcomes are without value. In fact, they were also incorporated in this data set.

One such metric, the DW-Nominate score, which was created by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal in the 1980s, has for several decades, communicated to observers the stances and positioning of serving members of Congress (MCs) based upon their roll call votes. While the DW-Nominate scores are incapable of placing
candidates that have never served in Congress within its measurement space, this score provides another dimension through which congressional incumbents can be examined and compared. Politicians are placed along an ideological scale, ranging from -1 to +1, with the positive end of the scale being conservative and the negative end, liberal (Poole and Rosenthal 1985). This is done through the use of spatial utility function in conjunction with a probabilistic voting model and observed voting choices. With a correlation coefficient \( r = .92 \), CFscores have proven to be strongly, positively correlated with DW-Nominate scores (Bonica 2014). Indeed, in the data set used for this thesis, the correlation coefficient between DW-Nominate scores and CFscores collected for incumbent Congressman was calculated to be .93. At least for sitting congressman, this is a relationship that follows logically from the assumption that campaign donors are providing funds according to ideological proximity. As long as donors can adequately gauge the ideological position of politicians by observing their roll call votes, one would expect CFscores, which are calculated according to these donations, to nearly mirror DW-Nominate scores. This correlation that exists between these two systems in terms of placing serving MCs on an ideological continuum provides a degree of confidence in the scores that Bonica’s system is producing for candidates that have no experience in Congress.

The next step in enhancing the data set was to include some variables that are capable of conveying information pertaining to the political leanings of the electoral sub-units in which congressional candidates are running. To that end, the Cook Partisan Voter Index and vote share received by the most recent Democratic presidential candidate was incorporated for every state and congressional district in
each election cycle. The Cook PVI, published by the Cook Political Report, quantifies the Democratic or Republican partisan lean in each state and congressional district by comparing the district presidential vote shares to national averages. For example, if the Democratic presidential candidate were to receive 62% of the vote in a state or district, while receiving 50% of the vote in a national average, the Cook PVI of that district or state would be D+12. Thus, it provides an easily understandable method by which the partisan leanings across districts and states can be readily interpreted and compared.

Another variable in the data set, the debatable importance of which was discussed in the literature review, is the primary type that each congressional candidate participated in. This “type” refers to a classification describing how restrictive the rules are that govern who may vote in a state’s primary elections. Rogowski and Langella utilize these classifications in their investigation into the effects of primary restrictiveness on candidate ideology. Nonpartisan primaries are the least restrictive and allow all voters to vote for any candidate of any party. In open primaries, all voters can privately choose to cast a ballot in either the Democratic or Republican primary, regardless of their political affiliation. Semi-open primaries are slightly more restrictive in that each voter must publicly disclose which primary they will vote in. Semi-closed primaries allow registered party members to vote only in the primary of their party, while independent and nonpartisan voters may choose the primary that they vote in. Closed primaries are the most restrictive in that they allow only individuals who are registered party members to vote in a primary contest (Rogowski and Langella 2015). While Rogowski and Langella ultimately found no
significant relationship between primary type and candidate ideology, the expected
effects of primary type that have been circulated in the literature are that more
restrictive rules such as those found under closed primaries would have a radicalizing
effect on candidates. The rules in semi-closed and nonpartisan primaries were
anticipated to have a moderating effect on ideologies. The expected relationship of
semi-open and open primary regulations on candidate stances was less clear because
while openness to voters who are not party members could have a moderating
influence, more extreme candidates could emerge if members of the opposite engage
in “raiding” (voting for a weaker candidate in the opposite party’s primary)
(Rogowski and Langella 2015).

The data set constructed for this investigation contained basic FEC
information on 15,333 congressional candidates, consisting of party affiliation,
primary vote share, general election vote share, and several other variables. However,
the crux of the work carried out in this thesis is dependent on additional variables
such as the aforementioned CFscores, fundraising data, and DW-Nominate scores
obtained from the DIME database. These data are only available for those candidates
that have prior political experience (in the case of DW-Nominate scores) or have
received campaign funding through donations (in the case of CFscores). The subset of
candidates that belonged to one of the two major parties and for which this broader
range of information could be compiled was significantly smaller than the initial
15,333 listed in the FEC data. There were 6,301 candidates that met both of these
criteria. This data set breaks down by party affiliation, incumbency, and election
cycle as follows:
### Table 3.1 Breakdown of Data Set By Party, Incumbency, and Extremity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Rep</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Non-Incumbent</th>
<th>Unopposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2719</strong></td>
<td><strong>2963</strong></td>
<td><strong>1983</strong></td>
<td><strong>3699</strong></td>
<td><strong>619</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Rep</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Non-Incumbent</th>
<th>Unopposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>265</strong></td>
<td><strong>354</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>493</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.2 Breakdown of Absolute Value of CFscore by Election Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Abs(CF)&gt;2</th>
<th>Abs(CF)&gt;1.5</th>
<th>Abs(CF)&gt;1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.1 – Boxplots of Candidate Extremity by Cycle
Even from this CFscore data (in table 3.2) spanning approximately a decade, it is immediately apparent that there are increasing numbers of extreme congressional candidates in each cycle. Not only is this clear, but there are also more extreme candidates at various degrees of extremity. This speaks volumes in regards to the aforementioned process of elite polarization. It fits the pattern established in the literature that began in the early 1970s and demonstrates that party elites continue to polarize at a steady and significant rate from cycle to cycle. The continuation of this pattern suggests that relatively extreme ideological positions and stances by congressional candidates are becoming more common. This growing prevalence of polarized candidates, especially as electoral districts and states polarize, as was noted in the literature review, is precisely why the investigation carried out in this thesis has been undertaken.

**Table 3.3** Descriptive Statistics for Data Set of 6,301 Congressional Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>25%/50%/75%</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abs(CFscore)</td>
<td>1.046</td>
<td>.725/.997/1.27</td>
<td>.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Campaign Funds Raised ($)</td>
<td>1,222,000</td>
<td>76,080/563,200/1,350,000</td>
<td>2,863,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abs(PVI) of Electoral Sub-Unit</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>5.00/9.00/14.00</td>
<td>13.284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.4** Breakdown of PAC Contributions by Election Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Mean ($)</th>
<th>25%/50%/75% ($)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>699,200</td>
<td>46,490/293,600/656,000</td>
<td>1,689,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>734,400</td>
<td>53,780/302,100/707,500</td>
<td>1,875,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>716,800</td>
<td>47,970/296,600/759,600</td>
<td>1,821,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>703,600</td>
<td>32,740/218,100/738,300</td>
<td>1,739,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>755,600</td>
<td>33,520/241,900/734,700</td>
<td>2,115,098</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 Breakdown of Primary Type of Candidate Participation by Election Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Nonpartisan</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Semi-Open</th>
<th>Semi-Closed</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables above provide summary information for several of the most integral variables in the data set. There is a seemingly non-uniform, but upward trend in campaign contributions to candidates from political action committees in recent election cycles, which would fit with the previously uncovered trend of increasing support for competitive primary challengers since 1980 (Boatright 2013). However, this may be a function of inflation, which has simply caused the costs associated with waging a congressional campaign to rise. It is also notable that while the means of the absolute values of the CFscores and PVI values in the data set are 1.046 and 10.54 respectively, there are a multitude of even more extreme outlying values for both variables. It is some of these observations that will prove important in the regression analysis to follow. The final table in this chapter provides a brief overview of the main variables incorporated in this data set.

Table 3.6 Description of Major Variables in Data Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>D or R to denote affiliation</td>
<td>Federal Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Vote Share</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Percent as decimal ranging from 0 to 1</td>
<td>Federal Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Election Vote Share</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Percent as decimal ranging from 0 to 1</td>
<td>Federal Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Indicator</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>(I) denotes that candidate is an incumbent</td>
<td>Federal Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF Score</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>number ranging from approximately -5 to 5</td>
<td>Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections (DIME)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW-Nominate Score</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>number ranging from -1 to 1</td>
<td>DIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook PVI Score</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>number ranging from -32 to 43 (more positive → more liberal)</td>
<td>Cook Political Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote Share Data</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Percent as number ranging from 0 to 100</td>
<td>DIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Financing Total</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Dollar amount describing total funding raised for campaign</td>
<td>DIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC Contributions</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Dollar amount describing funding raised from PACs</td>
<td>DIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Contributions</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Dollar amount describing funding raised from individuals</td>
<td>DIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Type</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Describes level of restrictiveness in primary rules</td>
<td>Jon C. Rogowski data set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Percent ranging from 0 to 1 (fraction of population with at least a bachelors degree)</td>
<td>United States Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Candidates</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Number of candidates participating in primary</td>
<td>Calculated from Federal Election Commission data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Analysis of Candidate Responsiveness to District and State Extremity

The major focus of this thesis is to assess the relationship between extreme candidates in congressional primaries and the conditions that contribute to their emergence and success. The utilization of PVI score in combination with DW-Nominate and CF scores for congressional candidates presents a valuable opportunity to assess the link between partisan leanings in electoral sub-units and the policy positions of primary candidates. According to the aforementioned research on the trend of polarization, we should expect to find increasing numbers of relatively extreme electoral sub-units and MCs in recent election cycles. Additionally, it would be unsurprising to discover an increasingly strong and positive link between the intensity of partisan leanings in an electoral sub-unit and the ideological extremity of candidates seeking office within it.

In order to assess the interaction between these two variables, a linear regression analysis was carried out with candidate CFscore as the dependent variable and district or state PVI as the sole explanatory variable. This analysis was conducted for both the Republican and Democratic parties across for each cycle from 2004 to 2012. For the purpose of investigating this question, the candidates in each party were sub-divided into groupings of incumbent candidates, non-incumbent candidates, and candidates that ultimately won their primary contest. These sub-grouping granted the opportunity to gain greater insight into how issue stances are tied to district leanings among candidates that may be facing greatly different incentive structures. For example, one would expect a re-election seeking incumbent candidate to do
everything in their power to win the primary and then general election, including aligning politically with their constituency. However, non-incumbent candidates may have entered the primary in a pursuit of a principal objective other than victory. These candidates may be seeking to make a point about the policies of their districts’ current incumbent or attempting to draw attention to a specific issue (Mudde 1999).

Of the three sub-groups, that with the most variance around the regression line that was fit to the scatterplots was the incumbent candidate group. Surprisingly, this was true for both the Republican and Democratic parties across all five cycles included in the data set. This relatively high level of variance indicates that primary candidates hailing from districts and states with the same or similar Cook PVI scores exhibited significantly different CFscores. While the CFscores of incumbents are clearly responsive to PVI, these differences indicate that incumbents chose dissimilar platforms to represent similar constituencies. This finding contradicts the expectation that MCs representing constituencies with comparable partisan leanings would adopt ideologies that while not identical, were less dispersed. Interestingly, there was less variance around the regression lines in both the non-incumbent and winning groups of candidates. Perhaps, the prevailing re-election rates and the advantages conveyed to candidates that are already sitting members of Congress provides incumbents with a degree of ideological freedom which challengers are not capable of enjoying. If MCs are developing into policy entrepreneurs, as their tenure in Congress grows longer, their ideological positions may be shifting slightly while maintaining high approval ratings. Additionally, it seems plausible that incumbents’ experience with the voters of their states and districts delivers to them the knowledge of exactly how far they can
stray from the prevailing partisan leanings of their electoral sub-unit without endangering their campaigns.

The regressions for the incumbent groups in several of the cycles also demonstrated the most significant slopes of all. While the regressions that were fit to the scatterplots of the non-incumbent and winning candidates were relatively flat, averaging a slope of .0028, those for incumbents were fairly steep, averaging -.0078, and exceeding -.01 in several cases. This steepness indicates that incumbents’ ideology reacts in a comparatively robust manner to district or state PVI when compared to the other candidate groups. As districts and states characterized by citizenries with growing partisan leanings have grown more common, both Republican and Democratic congressional incumbents’ stances have followed suit. While this relationship is not as precise as one would hope because of the aforementioned variance that exists in the incumbents’ scatterplots, it is certainly present. The negative slope in 9 of the 10 incumbent scatterplots points to an expected relationship; incumbent candidates from more conservative districts and states adopt more conservative ideological positions.

This strong association that results in candidates with extreme ideologies hailing from communities with commensurately significant partisan leanings appeared to diminish greatly during the 2012 election cycle within both parties. A shift such as this one points to much less significant relationship between electoral sub-unit PVI and candidate CFscore. A change in this trend during a single cycle might be temporary, and as such, an outlier. However, an investigation into the 2014
Figure 3.2 – Republican Incumbent CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle
Figure 3.3 – Democratic Incumbent CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle
Figure 3.4 – Republican Non-Incumbent CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle
Figure 3.5 – Democratic Non-Incumbent CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle
Figure 3.6 – Republican Winner CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle

2004 Republican Winners

2006 Republican Winners

2008 Republican Winners

2010 Republican Winners

2012 Republican Winners
Figure 3.7 – Democratic Winner CFscore/Electoral Sub-Unit Scatterplots by Cycle
cycle, 2016 cycle, and beyond would be helpful in uncovering the true direction that this relationship is headed in. Understanding the influence that the political leanings of constituencies will have over the ideologies of incumbent MCs seeking re-election in future cycles would likely prove very valuable.

The scatterplots and regressions for the sub-groups of candidates composed of non-incumbents and winning candidates ultimately demonstrated different results. There was far less variance of data points around the regression lines, signifying that candidates in these groups that came from electoral sub-units with similar partisan leanings adopted more similar ideologies than members of the incumbent groups. Additionally, the slope of the regression lines was less severe, meaning that the correlation between district and state PVI and candidate CFscore was less substantial. Whereas in the incumbent plots, there was typically a fairly negative slope, in these plots, slopes were as flat as .0005, and averaged a slightly positive .0028. In the cycles where the slope approaches zero, there is little interaction at all between the two variables, suggesting that candidates are barely responding to district or state extremity.

The non-incumbent grouping of candidates includes those that lost in the primary election. If these candidates lost in part because they were unable or unwilling to correlate their platforms with their electoral sub-units’ leanings, their presence may explain the absence of this correlation. Amongst the winners, this result is slightly harder to rationalize. These winners are those that were victorious in the primary but nothing has been said of their success in the general election. Moreover, Cook PVI is a measure of the political leanings of not the primary electorate, but the
district or state’s population as a whole. Thus, they may have attained victory in the primary due to their ideological platform, which despite being well aligned with primary voters, was ill suited to the general electorate. If this was the case, it is then plausible that a strong correlation between PVI and CFscore would not appear among primary winning candidates.

While of a smaller magnitude than the negative slope found among incumbents, the average positive slope present sub-groups of non-incumbents and winners is worthy of more discussion. In a majority of the scatterplots associated with these subgroups, the regression line that was fit the chart displayed a slightly positive slope. This slope reveals an inverse relationship to that which was discussed in the incumbent subgroups. In essence, it denotes that as districts and states become more liberal in their political leanings, these primary candidates, on average, adopt more conservative stances. This is a fairly perplexing outcome in that one would expect a primary candidate from a relatively liberal electoral sub-unit to take advantage of this situation by adopting an appropriately liberal ideology. As a Democrat does this, they simultaneously bring themself in line with both the primary and general electorate. Although there is less incentive for a Republican candidate to do so, they can bring themselves in line with the general electorate, while not alienating primary voters as much as they would in a more conservative sub-unit. Ostensibly, this was the behavior observed in the incumbent plots. Because this pattern is present in both of the non-incumbent and winner sub-groups across the parties in the five election cycles, it is not likely an artifact of statistical outliers.

As was mentioned earlier in this thesis, as the two parties have diverged
during the process of polarization, the Republican Party has been responsible for a majority of the gulf that today is present between them. If Democratic candidates and voters are indeed more moderate, it is conceivable that already fairly liberal candidates feel electorally safe in these relatively extreme districts and states and thus do not feel the need to adopt even more extreme stances. However, such a strategy might leave votes on the table as these districts and states continue to radicalize in the future and are labeled with increasingly extreme PVI values. We would expect to see a strategic candidate capitalize on these electoral dynamics by adopting extreme positions that would appeal to the primary constituency.

Discussion of Included Variables

While the partisan disposition of a state or congressional district is a factor that can serve to influence both candidate position taking and extremist success, the upcoming logistic regressions incorporate several additional variables. These variables include type of primary contest, total fundraising level (while considering the fundraising mix from PACs and individuals), district education statistics, and the number of candidates participating in the race. The relationship between these independent variables and the dependent variable of extremist primary victory has the potential to explain a degree of the variation in candidate ideologies. Moreover, these regressions will clarify the circumstances that are conducive to the success of extreme candidates in primary elections.

As was established in an earlier chapter, until now, the results of research on the impact of primary type on election outcomes and the ideology of winning
candidates have been mixed. It has been stated theoretically that more restrictive primary rules insulate the typically more extreme primary electorates and result in the election of fewer moderates. This theory has been stated and empirically tested on multiple occasions and claims that the level of primary openness is an influential variable, and that greater openness, which allows for crossover voting, is correlated with more moderate winners (Gerber and Morton 1998; Westley, Calcagno, and Ault 2004). Other empirical studies have directly contradicted these findings and posited that there is indeed no relationship between primary type and the level of ideological extremism exhibited by winning candidates (McGhee et al. 2014; Rogowski and Langella 2014). A possible reason for this lack of influence on candidate ideology is that voters are largely unable to distinguish between varying levels of extremity in candidates from the same party (Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz 2013).

For the purposes of this analysis, the categorical variable of primary type was coded such that four dummy variables would allow for analysis of the five possible types of primary election. In this manner, a variable was created that had a value of 1 if the primary was semi-closed and 0 if otherwise. Similarly, this was process was carried out for a variable to identify semi-open, open, and nonpartisan primary contests. Primaries denoted as closed become apparent when all four of the preceding dummy variables have a value of zero. The incorporation of these variables in this particular way allowed for an attempt to determine the true nature of the connection between primary voting rules and candidate ideology, or lack thereof. Moreover, it becomes possible to determine if more extreme candidates receive higher vote shares across the continuum of progressively more restrictive primary types.
This thesis incorporates fundraising as an integral independent variable when conducting its investigation into candidate ideology and the conditions that contribute to extremist success. Money in politics and elections is an area that has spawned an immense amount of interest and research. The positive relationship between the level of total fundraising or campaign expenditure and votes received has been established and re-affirmed countless times (Gierzynski and Breaux 1996). While the magnitude of this relationship differs among incumbents and challengers, it is always of importance. The fact that greater expenditure over the course of a congressional campaign typically results in more votes received is a chief reason that the fundraising advantage enjoyed by incumbents translates into such a powerful incumbency advantage. As such, total campaign fundraising has been included as an independent variable in this analysis. While the amount spent on an election by a candidate has been proven to be an important predictor of success, the source of campaign funding has been a subject which has also received substantial attention.

Political actions committees (PACs) have proved themselves capable of raising very large sums of money and have donated these funds to challengers deemed capable of unseating a targeted incumbent (Boatright 2013). PACs ultimately make campaign contributions for one of two reasons: to influence the ultimate outcome of an election, as these PACs attempt to do by targeting particular incumbents, or to influence the decisions of office-holders after the conclusion of an election (Magee 2000). The fact that PACs are capable of providing candidates with considerable sums of money, which is arguably the most important campaign resource, and often do so with specific electoral and policy goals in mind points to
these donations as a variable potentially capable of influencing both the issue positions of congressional primary candidates and the degree to which extreme candidates attain success. Large amounts of contributions to congressional campaigns originate not only from institutional donors such as PACs, but also from individual Americans. A recent study found that ideologically extreme candidates are more likely to receive significant portions of their campaign funds from individual donors than are more moderate entrants (Johnson 2010). Additionally, the 21st century has witnessed increasing levels of individual donations to primary candidates that have originated from outside of the electoral district or state (Boatright 2013). Thus, it seems as though the magnitude of campaign contributions originating both from PACs and individual donors could play an influential role in candidate position taking and success. While a full investigation of this matter lies outside the scope of this thesis, it is also important to consider that both institutional and individual donors who hail from outside the electoral sub-unit may have an ability to pull candidates’ stances out of alignment with their district. This phenomenon might be able to explain some of the variance discussed above that is present in the scatterplots of incumbent CFscore and electoral sub-unit PVI. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the origin of campaign funds is capable of being an important explanatory variable in candidate ideology selection and extremist success.

An extensive segment of the literature and countless studies have focused on the connection between education level and both party affiliation and voting outcomes. It has been shown that among voters who hold a bachelor’s degree or post-graduate degree, the Democratic Party enjoys a considerable advantage in terms of
party affiliation (Pew Party Affiliation). It is logical to assume that this advantage extends to voting outcomes. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that this extension is not limited to the choice being made when considering which party to vote for. Indeed, voters with different education levels have been shown to gravitate towards candidates with varying levels of extremity. For example, during the 2016 Republican Presidential primary contest, it became apparent that among Republican voters, those without a college education tended to support Donald Trump, while those with a bachelor’s degree or higher credential tended to be split among other candidates (Wasserman 2016). It stands to reason then that the district-wide or statewide statistic of voter education level as defined by the percentage of the population that holds at least a bachelor’s degree could be correlated in some way with the success of particularly moderate or extreme primary candidates. The incorporation of this variable in the regression analyses that follow allows for inquiry into this potential relationship.

Previous research has arrived at the conclusion that higher education effectively has a polarizing effect on those who receive it. Liberals who received degrees became more liberal, while conservatives who received degrees became more conservative (Tuschman 2014). With primary electorates being noticeably more polarized than the general population, one would expect primaries to produce even more extreme winners in districts and states where a greater portion of the population has graduated from a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree-granting program. This expectation will be tested in the upcoming analysis.
CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Open Seat House Primary Races

The logistic and linear regressions used in the following analysis explore the links between several predictor variables and extremist success in primaries. The most informative situation within which to investigate the success of extreme candidates was contested primary elections held for open congressional seats. Races for an occupied seat where an incumbent is present play host to altered race dynamics. The re-election rates for congressional incumbents, due in large part to the incumbency advantage, are routinely in excess of 90% (Open Secrets). This level of electoral dominance indicates that the presence of an incumbent would reduce the success rates of extreme entrants regardless of any district or candidate-level variables. The relative vacuum provided by races with no incumbents generates an analytical space where factors such as candidate ideology, fundraising totals, and primary type, among others, are much more likely to take on a significant predictive role. It has been noted by Robert Boatright that these open seat primaries draw more candidates than other races, provide a better environment to study competition, and draw more attention from the parties, the candidates, and the voters (Boatright 2014). While he briefly examines open seat primaries, he pays no attention to the presence or success of extreme candidates. This investigative value of open seat races as described by Boatright, provides the justification for the use of open seat races in this thesis. Because an incumbent runs in the majority of congressional races, the data set contained only 331 instances where none was present and where no candidate ran
unopposed. A race where a candidate ran unopposed in the primary would be
uninformative in this analysis due to the single candidate’s certainty of victory despite
any district or candidate level variables.

Earlier in this thesis, the benefits of using a metric such as a CFscore were
discussed. Because they quantify extremity through campaign donations rather than
roll call votes, CFscores are capable of describing all candidates, rather than solely
individuals who have already served in Congress. However, in order for a CFscore to
be generated for a candidate in a congressional primary, they must not only have
raised more than a trivial amount of campaign financing, but they must also receive
these funds from parties whose political leanings have been catalogue. In short, this
means that not all of the 331 identified open seat primary elections for congressional
seats were usable. Although a contest may have involved multiple candidates, unless
a CFscore could be calculated for at least two of them, no individual could be
identified as the most extreme in the race. Often times, this occurred when a well-
financed candidate ran against one other contender who failed to receive significant
funding. These cases, where a CFscore was generated for only one candidate, were
not of value for the purposes of this analysis because nobody could be identified as
the most ideologically extreme participant in the race. Without the knowledge of
whether or not the winning candidate who was indeed furthest from the center, their
success provided no useful information pertaining to the ties between the predictors
and the outcome of extremist victory.

When taking this into account and removing the 10.9% of primaries that
contained CFscore information on only one candidate, the data set consisted of 295
races, 243 of which were House primaries and 52 of which were Senate primaries.

The table that follows breaks down this grouping of 243 House contests by election cycle, extremist victory, and party.

**Table 4.1 Breakdown of Data on Competitive Open Seat House Races by Cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Cycle</th>
<th>Total Primaries</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>37(10) 27.0%</td>
<td>24(6) 25.0%</td>
<td>13(4) 30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>37(14) 37.8%</td>
<td>19(9) 47.4%</td>
<td>8(5) 62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>45(16) 35.6%</td>
<td>25(7) 28.0%</td>
<td>20(9) 45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>50(23) 46.0%</td>
<td>31(5) 16.1%</td>
<td>19(8) 42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>74(42) 56.8%</td>
<td>38(11) 28.9%</td>
<td>36(12) 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>243(76) 31.3%</td>
<td>137(38) 27.7%</td>
<td>106(38) 35.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Layout: number of races(number of extreme candidate wins) success rate

The most extreme candidate running in a contested primary for an open House seat won in 31.3% of races. Moreover, the most extreme Republican candidate achieved victory in only 27.7% of cases, whereas the most extreme Democratic candidate won in 35.8% of cases. Although this is a fairly small sample size, this data presents is a fairly large incongruity across parties. The fact that in open seat contested primary elections, the most extreme Democratic candidate is noticeably more likely to win than his or her Republican counterpart points to a impactful divergence between the parties somewhere in the electoral process. The differing rates of victory could speak to candidate strategies, donor behaviors, and other factors that may vary across party lines.

There is a significant jump in competitive open seat elections in the 2012 election cycle. This is likely a direct result of congressional redistricting that followed the 2010 census. As districts were re-drawn, a number of states gained a total of 12
new congressional districts that did not previously exist (Bloch, Ericson, and Quealy 2011). These brand new open seats supplied perfect circumstances for 24 contested open seat primary competitions. Because of this development and the general irregularity with which open seats elections take place for congressional offices, 2012 was a year in which an anomalously high number of elections took place.

The House races included in this sample range from high profile primary contests between established, well financed candidates to contests between unproven candidates that were little known outside of the district where they took place. One primary, which pitted two fairly strong candidates against each other, took place in one of the above mentioned newly created congressional districts. Prior to 2012, nobody had represented Florida’s 22nd Congressional District because it had not previously existed. Since then, the district, which is located along the state’s southeastern coast, has exhibited a slight Democratic lean with a PVI score of D+3. In the 2012 election, both Lois Frankel and Kristin Jacobs entered the Democratic primary. Prior to the election, Frankel had served 14 years in the Florida State Senate, reaching the rank of Democratic minority leader and was then elected mayor of West Palm Beach (Frankel Biography). Kristin Jacobs was an experienced social activist, having testified before the House and the Senate, and a civil servant who had served on the Broward County Commission and county zoning board (Florida House of Representatives; Sentinel 1998). Frankel with a CFscore of -1.18 was considerably more liberal than Jacobs, who’s CFscore was calculated to be -0.43. Additionally, Frankel managed to raise approximately $3.5 million in campaign funding, greatly outraising Jacobs in terms of donations from both PACs and individuals. Indeed,
Jacobs only managed to raise a little under $500,000 in funds. The race became contentious with Frankel claiming that Jacobs wasn’t gutsy enough for the job in Congress, while those supporting Jacobs argued that she had the temperament to reach across the aisle. Jacobs shot back, saying the West Palm Beach mayor was too much of an insider who would heed to special interests in exchange for money (Kam 2012). On Election Day, Jacobs was unable to overcome her fundraising disadvantage and ultimately lost in a landslide, with Frankel receiving more than 61% of the vote. The amount of money that Frankel attracted from both interest groups and individual donors, compounded with the fact that the 22nd district was brand new and its seat would play an important role in the Democratic effort to wrestle control of Congress away from the Republicans contributed to the media attention that the primary and ultimately the general election received. So, as the more extreme candidate, Frankel managed to win the primary and ultimately the general election, and continues to serve in Congress to this day (Frankel Biography).

The details of the 2012 Republican primary in Ohio’s 3rd Congressional District stand in stark contrast to those of the race Congresswoman Frankel won. The district, which is essentially the city of Columbus, Ohio, is heavily liberal, having received a Cook PVI score of D+17. This was a two-horse race between two candidates of nearly equal ideological extremity. Chris Long, who had served on the Reynoldsburg, OH city council and held a CFscore of 1.22 was slightly less moderate than his opponent, John Adams, who while appropriately named for politics, had a CFscore of 1.15. Perhaps, because of the fact this primary was being carried out to determine the Republican nominee in such a liberal district, it was deemed a foregone
conclusion that whoever won the primary would lose in the general election. Such a sentiment would help to explain the dearth of media coverage on this race, which made it difficult to uncover any information beyond what was contained in the data set compiled for this thesis. While Long only managed to raise a little over $25,000 for his campaign, he dwarfed his opponents grand fundraising total of exactly $0. Long managed to capture the Republican primary with 57% of the vote but then, perhaps as expected by most, lost in the general election to Democratic nominee Joyce Beatty who received over 68% of the vote from the general electorate.

There is an important concern to keep in mind when thinking about how this model investigates races where there was a candidate who was identifiable as the most extreme contestant in a primary race. Because this method uses the binary variable of whether or not an individual is the most extreme entrant and whether or not they won their primary, it may miss enlightening cases present in the data. Consider for a moment the 2012 Texas Republican primary election for an open seat in the Senate. Ted Cruz, the state’s former Solicitor General, decided to enter the race with significant backing from the Tea Party, its conservative PACs like the Club for Growth, and endorsements from the likes of Sarah Palin and Jim DeMint (Huey-Burns 2012). He took on David Dewhurst who was the state’s Lieutenant Governor and had close ties with Governor Rick Perry. With a combination of Tea Party apparatus aid and grassroots support, Cruz picked up steam heading into the primary (Huey-Burns 2012). Dewhurst raised more than twice as much money as Cruz for the campaign and heavily outspent him. The Lieutenant Governor achieved a decisive victory in the primary and captured over 10% more of the vote than his Tea Party
opponent. However, with 44% of the vote, Dewhurst failed to reach the 50% threshold, which would have allowed him to avoid a runoff election (Huey-Burns 2012). Seemingly, a more conservative group of voters turned out for the runoff and Cruz won handily. In the conservative state of Texas, which held a PVI score of R+10, Cruz went on to win the general election against Democratic nominee Paul Sadler.

While Cruz and Dewhurst were the two major contenders in the Republican primary, the field was rounded out by a number of minor candidates who received negligible vote totals and campaign donations. With a CFscore of 1.28, Cruz was a considerably conservative candidate, and certainly more so than Dewhurst who held a score of 0.98. However, the most extreme candidate in the race was one of these minor candidates. This individual, Curt Cleaver received less than half of one percent of votes in the Republican primary and had an astronomically high CFscore of 3.90. Thus, despite being a fairly extreme open seat primary candidate, the case of Ted Cruz is not captured by this model. Curt Cleaver who was far and away the most extreme candidate but in reality not a feasible one, was included by this model. Rather, Cruz represents those candidates that are the most extreme feasible candidates, who should be included in the model but are difficult to identify when using binary indicators for extremity.

Results

The regression analysis conducted for contested open seat primaries in the House of Representatives consisted of two trials. The first consisted of a regression
with all of the House observations, and the second was bifurcated in order to obtain results separated by party. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 display the results of these logistic regressions. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 display predicted probabilities of victory as the district favorability and funding difference/1000 variables vary.

**Table 4.2 Logistic Regression Results for House Contested Open Seat Primaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cycles 2004-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Favorability</td>
<td>-0.03021 (0.02018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Closed</td>
<td>0.13165 (0.66193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Open</td>
<td>0.68227 (0.53448)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>0.72995 (0.63924)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan</td>
<td>0.22265 (0.79209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Education Level</td>
<td>0.08202 (2.57881)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Difference/1000</td>
<td>0.00202 *** (0.00029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Candidates</td>
<td>-0.16691 (0.10247)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Dummy Variable</td>
<td>0.10910 (0.43125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.28511 (0.82590)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 242

Standard Errors in Parenthesis

***p<0.01, **p<.05, p<.1

**Table 4.3 Results by Party for House Contested Open Seat Primaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Favorability</td>
<td>-0.05630* (.02924)</td>
<td>-0.03003* (.04470)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Closed</td>
<td>-0.09591 (.96038)</td>
<td>0.58169 (1.21817)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Open</td>
<td>0.25459 (.69356)</td>
<td>1.67080 (1.21797)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>-0.27026</td>
<td>1.81031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4 Predicted Probabilities of Victory for Extreme Republican Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean – ½ SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean + ½ SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Favorability</td>
<td>-1.57 (19.08%)</td>
<td>4.05 (16.60%)</td>
<td>9.67 (14.38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Difference/1000</td>
<td>-2204.98 (0.08%)</td>
<td>-613.49 (16.60%)</td>
<td>977.91 (83.21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Layout: Value of variable (chance of victory with other variables held constant)

Table 4.5 Predicted Probabilities of Victory for Extreme Democratic Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean – ½ SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean + ½ SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Favorability</td>
<td>-1.57 (17.45%)</td>
<td>4.05 (15.14%)</td>
<td>9.67 (13.09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Difference/1000</td>
<td>-2204.98 (0.07%)</td>
<td>-613.49 (15.14%)</td>
<td>977.91 (81.63%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Layout: Value of variable (chance of victory with other variables held constant)

Discussion

These regressions were conducted at the race level for all contested open seat primary elections in the House from 2004 to 2012. The dependent variable was a binary variable, with 1 indicating the most extreme primary candidate won the
election and a 0 indicating that another candidate was victorious. The independent variable of district favorability was created from the Cook PVI data that was incorporated in the larger data set. Its purpose was to account for the different effects that a district’s political leanings will exert on the primaries of the two parties. The Cook Political Report codes PVI with a combination of letters and positive numbers such that, a conservative district may receive a score of R+10 and an equally liberal district may receive a score of D+10. Therefore, in order to statistically contextualize the partisan environment within which the races occurred, the district favorability variable was created. The simplest way to explain this variable is through an example. If there were both a Republican and Democratic primary in a district with a Cook PVI of R+10, the Republican race would receive a favorability score of 10, while the Democratic race would receive a favorability score of -10. Conversely, if the district had a PVI of D+10, the Republican race would receive a favorability score of -10, while the Democratic race would receive a favorability score of 10.

Across both parties, district favorability proved to be statistically significant in open seat House primaries when there was a candidate identifiable as the most extreme participant. However, the coefficients for this variable indicate a relationship with extremist success in the opposite direction of what would be expected. For both the Republican and Democratic parties, it would seem that the most extreme primary candidate is more likely to win in less favorable districts, as quantified by PVI score. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 display predicted probabilities generated from the logistic regression model detailed in table 4.2. In the first rows of tables 4.4 and 4.5, all predictors were held constant at their mean or median value so as to examine the
isolated impact of changes in district favorability. In both parties, there is a fairly weak relationship between favorability and the chance that the most extreme candidate will win the primary. As districts move from slightly unfavorable or approximately neutral to favorable, the chance of victory drops. This seems to imply that all things being equal, the average extreme candidate does not win that often, but stands a slightly better chance in a relatively neutral district.

While unexpected, this relationship is both plausible and explainable. Good candidates may avoid a primary that is held in a district or state where their party has consistently lost. Party elites and rank-and-file members may also choose not to devote attention or resources to this type of primary. Additionally, in highly unfavorable locations for a particular party, candidates of that party may concede that their positions are inconsequential because no matter what, they don’t stand much of a chance in the general election. In such a situation, candidates may conduct primary campaigns that are geared towards delivering messages and making points rather than emerging victorious.

Indeed, when examining the data, it became clear that in multiple cases, in districts leaning heavily to one side, the less favored party only fielded one primary candidate. In situations where the unfavored party had a contested primary, it was obvious from examining fundraising and CFscore data, that there were extreme candidates present that had no chance of winning. They were either extreme to the point where they could never win in a district leaning so far in the opposite direction or had raised little to no money. Whether it is because candidates realize that they are unlikely to win and have resigned themselves to this fate or simply because low
quality candidates are the only ones to enter these races, there were often extreme candidates present that were destined to fail.

In more neutral districts, both primaries tended to be populated with competitive candidates. So, in more partisan districts, where one would expect extremists to win, their candidacies often seemed doomed from the start by extremity far beyond electability and negligible fundraising. On the other hand, fairly extreme candidates waged numerous spirited campaigns in more neutral districts, sometimes winning. These factors may well have served to produce the relationship exhibited in the results.

A far less probable explanation for these results, which should be mentioned because it was touched upon in the literature review, stems from the idea of “raiding.” In districts considered more unfavorable to one party, voters from the opposition party could make efforts to vote in the “unfavored” primary and engage in “raiding” with a goal of giving the nomination to the most extreme candidate. The purpose of doing so would be to give the nomination to an ideologically extreme candidate perceived to have a minimal chance of finding any success in the general election. However, there is little to no evidence of this phenomenon actually occurring and therefore does not seem likely to be the cause of the ostensibly reversed coefficients.

Of the primary type dummy variables included in the analysis, none were statistically significant. In light of this lack of statistically significant coefficients for all of the primary type dummy variables, it seems that there is no systematic, consequential relationship between primary type and the success rates of ideologically extreme candidates. This outcome falls in line with the work of
Rogowski and Langella, and McGhee et al. who arrived at a similar conclusion. Other work, suggesting that the rules that govern who may vote in primary elections influence the ideological extremity of those that win, appears to be incorrect.

There seems to be a marked difference between the two parties in terms of the effect of district education level and extremist success. In Democratic primary races for open House seats, the education level, or the percentage of the district population that holds at least a bachelor’s degree was not found to be statistically significant. However, this variable was statistically significant for Republican primary races and the coefficient signifies that the most extreme Republican candidate is more likely to win as the percentage of college educated individuals in a district drops. While plausible, this result contradicts previous research, which asserted that higher education exhibited a polarizing effect.

Another variable integrated into this regression was one that counted the amount of candidates present in the primary race that the extreme candidate participated in. The motivation behind this was to see if the size of the field was influencing how extremists fared in their races. The results of these regressions present no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between the number of candidates in an open seat House primary and the chance of the most extreme candidate winning.

The regression that incorporates all of the observations from both Parties employs a dummy variable with a value of 1 corresponding to Republican races and 0 corresponding to Democratic races. This dummy variable serves to reveal whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the two parties’ primary
races. In addition to indicating that there is no meaningful difference between races of the two parties, it also demonstrated again that the most important predictor was funding difference. This provides further support for the idea that primary type is not related to extremists’ chances of success. The significance of the coefficient for education level in Republican primaries may very well be a statistical artifact of chance and not in fact be meaningful. However, writing that result off as unimportant is unadvisable because of the large magnitude of the relationship that it implies. Future work is likely needed to dig deeper into the impacts of district education level.

The variable referred to in the above table as “funding difference” was generated for each observation in this sample of open seat House primary elections from candidate campaign fundraising data incorporated into the larger data set. In each race, funding difference is defined as the difference between the total amount of campaign funds raised by the most extreme candidate and the amount of funding raised by the highest fundraiser in the election, excluding the most extreme candidate. Thus, if the most extreme candidate has received the most campaign donations, the value of the funding difference variable will be positive. However, if any candidate other than the most extreme entrant has raised the most funding, the value of this variable will be negative. In both regressions, the coefficient for this variable is highly positive (per increase of $1,000) and statistically significant. This result indicates that for all extreme candidates in open seat House primaries, their ability to fundraise is a critical predictor of their success. Both the ability to raise significant levels of campaign financing and the ability to out-raise opponents contribute heavily to the odds that the most extreme candidate will win his or her primary.
The second rows of tables 4.4 and 4.5 display the predicted probability results of the process that was carried out in order to observe the isolated effect of changes in fundraising difference, as the other variables were held constant. In both parties, there is a strong relationship between fundraising difference and the chance that the most extreme candidate will win the primary. If an extreme candidate is heavily outraised by an opponent, they stand almost no chance of winning the primary. However, their chances improve considerably as they close the gap. Moreover, if the extreme candidate manages to significantly outraise their closest opponent, they can achieve a high likelihood of victory.

Because money has often been discussed as one of the most important electoral resources and campaign spending has been identified as a principal predictor of the amount of votes a candidate receives, these results were far from surprising. However, the magnitude of the coefficients and their statistical significance makes it necessary to consider the complete potential impact of money in these elections. If extreme candidates can raise significant financing from like minded organization and individuals, this money may allow them to overcome other factors that would typically make an extreme candidate less likely to succeed. With the important role that money is capable of taking on, large donation levels could be facilitating extremist success and allowing for primary victories in circumstances where extreme candidates would otherwise lose. While this is conjecture, it presents a possible avenue for future work.
Open Seat Senate Primary Races

By virtue of the Senate’s smaller size and higher profile nature of every individual seat, there were far fewer open seat Senate primary races to analyze that occurred between the 2004 and 2012 election cycles. These races break down as follows.

Table 4.6 Breakdown of Data on Competitive Open Seat Senate Races by Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Cycle</th>
<th>Total Primaries</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>12(5) 41.7%</td>
<td>6(3) 50.0%</td>
<td>6(2) 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5(3) 60.0%</td>
<td>4(2) 50.0%</td>
<td>1(1) 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5(1) 20.0%</td>
<td>4(1) 25.0%</td>
<td>1(0) 16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>15(2) 13.3%</td>
<td>9(1) 11.1%</td>
<td>6(1) 42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>15(3) 20.0%</td>
<td>9(1) 11.1%</td>
<td>6(2) 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>52(14) 26.9%</td>
<td>32(8) 25.0%</td>
<td>20(6) 30.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Layout: number of races(number of extreme candidate wins) success rate

While the sample size here may be prohibitively small to arrive at any significant conclusions, it is apparent that in open seat Senate primaries, the most extreme candidate won in 26.9% of cases, which is slightly less often than in the House. Moreover, the success rate for the most extreme Republican candidate in these primaries won in 25% of races while the most extreme Democratic candidate won in 30% of races. While the discrepancy between the two parties is not as sizable as it was in the House data, these results do mirror the House trend that the most extreme Democratic candidate is more likely to win his or her contested open seat primary than their Republican counterpart. Therefore, this appears to be a congressional trend that spans both chambers. The varying success rates across party lines for these extreme candidates points to the possibility of an institutional difference that would seem to create a slightly more hospitable primary environment for extreme
Democratic candidates than Republican candidates.

Despite the small number of observation included in the Senate samples, these races span a diverse set of potentially informative primary competitions. Generally, all Senate elections receive substantial media attention and primaries carried out to determine party nominees for these elections are typically hotly contested. One such race was that to determine the Democratic nominee in the 2012 Texas Senate election. This was an open seat race because Republican incumbent Senator Kay Bailey retired rather than running for re-election. Despite the fact that the winner of this primary would face an uphill battle in the general election, having to contend with the Republican nominee in the conservative state of Texas did not dissuade Democrats from entering the primary race (Ramsey 2012). It was a four-candidate race between Paul Sadler (former state representative), Grady Yarbrough (retired education), Sean Hubbard (31 year old, former campaign staffer), and Addie Allen (Homeland Security employee) (Dunham 2012; Holley 2012; Addie Allen Biography; CBSlocal 2012). Sadler’s CFscore of -0.61 made him very moderate when compared to Allen with her score of -1.00 and Hubbard with his score of -2.26. While Sadler did establish a distinct fundraising advantage over his opponents, all four of the major candidates in the race had difficulty attracting campaign donations. This stemmed from the perception among Texas Democrats that their nominee would lose no matter who won the primary (CBSlocal 2012). Interestingly, during the election cycle, less than 25% of campaign funds donated by Texas Democrats went to congressional candidates who were running in Texas (CBSlocal 2012). Despite this exodus of Democratic cash, Sadler made use of his fiscal advantage to take 35.1% of
the vote in the primary. However, his failure to reach the 50% threshold meant that he had to face Yarbrough in a runoff election. Sadler went on to defeat Yarbrough and take on Ted Cruz in the general where he was handedly defeated with Cruz taking 56.6% of the vote to his 40.5%.

This race reveals two points that warrant further discussion. The idea that in states or districts that lean heavily towards one end of the ideological spectrum and are politically dominate by one party, members of the opposition may view their primary elections as irrelevant could greatly impact the dynamics of these races. By sending their campaign donations and focus to candidates running outside of the state or district, registered voters of this opposition party may be contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Additionally, the experiences of Paul Sadler and Ted Cruz in the 2012 Texas Senate primaries constitute a situation wherein the most moderate Democratic primary candidate won and the most extreme, yet feasible, Republican primary candidate won. This suggests that the ideological predisposition of an electoral sub-unit could pull primary winners in the same direction (in this case, to the right). If so, a Cook PVI score of a state or district would then have the opposite effects on the two primaries that take place within its boundaries. This case serves as an example where an extreme conservative lean could have a moderating influence on the Democratic primary while simultaneously having a radicalizing effect on the Republican primary. This trend was mirrored somewhat in the scatterplots of incumbent CFscore and electoral subunit PVI where candidates of both parties on average, had more conservative CFscores in conservative locations and more liberal CFscores in liberal locations.
Results and Discussion

Because of the smaller number of open seat Senate primary races, a logistic regression was attempted in the following analysis in the presence of a Republican dummy variable with a value of 1 corresponding to Republican races and 0 corresponding to Democratic races. It is important to keep in mind that this sample size of 52 is smaller than what would ideally be used. Small sample size has the potential to reduce the statistical power of the study. The incorporation of this Republican dummy variable served to keep the sample size as large as possible in order to maximize analytical value. However, it became apparent that, despite the use of the dummy variable, the sample size was too small to arrive at any conclusion of worth or statistical merit. As such, the analysis in this section employs a descriptive analysis of the open seat Senate races followed by a linear OLS regression.

The scatterplot of state favorability and primary vote share demonstrates that in the Senate, there is no robust relationship between the partisan favorability of the state and the level of votes received by extreme primary candidates. Moreover, a two sample T-test conducted with this data arrived at a p-value of .72 for the null hypothesis that there was a difference in the favorability means between those extreme candidates that won and those that lost. In other words, it presented no evidence that these two groups of candidates had differing mean favorability levels. However, the regression line fit to this graph does suggest that these candidates who run in primaries in less favorable states may receive higher vote shares. Logically, we would assume that higher vote shares translate into a higher chance of winning. Thus,
while this analysis was carried out in a different manner than the analysis of House candidates, they both seem to point in the same direction. The results of both inquiries

**Figure 4.1** – Scatterplot of Extreme Senate Candidates’ Vote Share and Electoral Sub-Unit Favorability

![Scatterplot of Extreme Senate Candidates’ Vote Share and Electoral Sub-Unit Favorability](image)

imply that extreme primaries candidates perform better electorally, in less favorable environments. While a perplexing finding, it has now been found in both chambers and through different methods.

Figure 4.2 plots the primary vote shares for extreme primary candidates in open seat Senate races by primary type. The categories are as follows: 1 is nonpartisan, 2 is open, 3 in semi-open, 4 is semi-closed, and 5 is closed.
This scatterplot does not appear to convey any meaningful relationship between the two variables. The closed primary type has by far the most races where the most extreme candidate received at least 40% of the vote. However, this is likely a result of the closed primaries being the largest group in this set of 52 races. Accordingly, it seems as though once again, there is no systematic relationship between primary type and the achievements of extremist candidates. Moreover, there appears to be no significant differences across party lines.

**Table 4.7 Linear OLS Regression Results for Senate Contested Open Seat Primaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Cycles 2004-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abs(Candidate CFscore)</td>
<td>0.0040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike the logistic regression, the linear regression was able to produce statistically valuable results from the sample containing 52 observations. Unsurprisingly, the campaign fundraising variable was again positive and highly significant. As the most extreme candidate in a Senate race raises higher levels of financing, they receive more votes. Because this variable is log transformed and a measure of absolute fundraising instead of relative fundraising as was used in the House regression, it is difficult to compare this variable to the fundraising difference variable employed in the logistic regressions. Attempts to compare the coefficients of these variables are further complicated by the use of different regression methods and different dependent variables. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the effect associated with this log-transformed variable indicates a robust relationship between total funds raised and vote share. The electoral value of an ability to raise large amounts of funds and, as was uncovered in the House regressions, outraise opponents cannot be overstated.

The coefficient associated with the absolute value of an extreme candidate’s CFscore was not statistically significant. It does seem unlikely that the ideological position of extreme Senate candidates would not be a factor that influences their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log(Campaign Fundraising Total)</td>
<td>0.0515***</td>
<td>(4.02x10^-5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Candidates in Race</td>
<td>-0.0016</td>
<td>(.00928)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.3890*</td>
<td>(.20746)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 52
Dependent Variable – Candidate Vote Share
Standard Errors in Parenthesis
***p<0.01, **p<.05, p<.1
primary vote share. The lack of significance found in this model may have resulted from the small sample. It is also possible that their extremity is important but not when incorporated in this form. Perhaps, a measure of relative extremity would be more informative in that it is important to consider a candidate’s ideological extremity in the context of the field of candidates within which they are competing. Another potentially informative variable would be one that captures the interaction between the extremity level of a candidate as measured by CFscore and the extremity of the state as measured by PVI.

Like the regressions run for the House, this regression included a variable that counted the amount of candidates present in the primary race that the extreme candidate participated in. Again, the regression results presented no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between the number of candidates in an open seat Senate primary and the vote share of the most extreme candidate.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Discussion:

This thesis opened with a discussion of several high profile examples of the success of extreme primary candidates in recent election cycles. These races served as the impetus to study the circumstances that foster success for congressional primary candidates whose ideologies lie far from the political middle. However, two of the three elections mentioned in the introduction were instances where incumbents were unseated by challengers in the primary. Occurrences such as these, where an extremist is able to unseat a veteran MC capable of wielding an incumbency advantage signify that these extreme candidates are capable of achieving considerable levels of success. In order to conduct the most informative investigation possible, the analysis carried out in the previous chapter turned to open seat elections where observations dependent on extremist success would not be influenced by the presence of an incumbency advantage. These races shed light on a number of factors that may contribute to extremist success while also pointing to several considerations that should be kept in mind moving forward.

The polarization witnessed in American politics since the 1970s has been associated with shifting congressional and electoral dynamics. As the gulf between the two parties in Congress has grown and districts and states have become increasingly homogenous, the political center has developed into a barren area populated by few MCs. Because it is extraordinarily difficult to unseat a sitting MC, this thesis turned to open seat elections, the path through which 2/3 of congresspeople
enter the legislature, in order to understand this proliferation of extremists (Boatright 2014). The hope is that this study of extreme candidates in open seat primary elections will provide insight into their activities across all congressional races and their role in the process of polarization.

The analyses conducted in this thesis produced some expected results, and some that stood in opposition to previous work completed by political scientists. Across both parties in the House, district favorability coefficients showed that extreme Republicans and Democrats both stood a better chance of winning their primary in “less friendly territory.” Predicted probability calculations demonstrated the weak degree of this favorability relationship. In both chambers, there appears to be no structured influence of primary type upon extremist success for members of either party. In the face of research suggesting that higher education has a polarizing effect on students, these results suggest that in the House, extreme Republican candidates have a better chance of winning the primary in locations where the population is less educated. Furthermore, in accordance with a significant portion of the literature on campaign finance, this analysis affirms that fundraising ability and receiving more money than opponents are very significant predictors of success. The magnitude of this fundraising impact was confirmed by predicted probability calculations. It is important to keep in mind that higher quality candidates attract more campaign donations and because there is no measure of candidate quality in this model, by way of endogeneity, there may be some upward bias in the estimate of financing’s effect.

Although these regression results are enlightening as to the basic predictors of
extremist success, a perhaps more interesting discussion revolves around the theoretical implications that arise from their consideration in concert with previous work. Earlier in this thesis, two segments of literature were discussed that were reliant upon different sets of assumptions. In essence, the economic segment generally assumes that voters act with perfect information in their decision making process, with the political science segment incorporating the assumption that voters typically operate with information that is imperfect to some degree. In light of the results arrived at in this thesis, the later assumption of imperfect information seems to more accurately approximate voter behavior. The fact that relatively extreme candidates in open seat House elections enjoy a greater likelihood of victory in more moderate districts indicates that primary voters are not selecting nominees that most closely approximate their own ideological stance.

An extreme Republican candidate who read this thesis and entered an open seat election in the House would arrive at the conclusion that their best chance of winning could be found if they were very well financed and ran in a more moderate district with few college educated constituents. Likewise, a Democratic candidate in the same situation would believe they are more likely to win if they were able raise large levels of funding and ran in a more moderate district. An extreme candidate from either party entering an open seat Senate primary election would focus heavily on fundraising. Of the predictors examined in this thesis, the key takeaway here seems to be the importance of money in these elections. In light of the inconsistent significance of the primary type dummy variables and education variables, it is not trivial that the fundraising difference variable is significant and points to an important
relationship with extremist success in each and every regression.

In any discussion of money and political fundraising, the process of voter decision-making must be included. With money assuming a large predictive role in extremist success, donor perceptions and choices can play a critical role in primary dynamics. The experience of Democratic primary candidates in the 2012 Texas Senate primary demonstrated that where members of one party deem their position to be hopeless in the general election, they might funnel their money into other contests where they feel it will actually matter. As more and more money is raised from donors that reside outside of states and districts where races are taking place, it has been made clear that voters’ perceptions can play a large role the disbursement of campaign contributions (Boatright 2013). Because voters are considering tradeoffs, such as that between ideology and electability, when weighing candidates, extremists would benefit from finding a way of signaling their electability to their potential constituents. They should seek to deliver a message that while they are electable in the primary because they do a better job of approximating the more polarized primary electorate, they also have a real chance of winning the general election. Robert Boatright has noted that in recent election cycles, ideological primary candidates have been raising more money, particularly from individuals (Boatright 2013). This increase may be explicable, in part, by candidates who have become more successful at conveying these messages to potential individual donors.

In addition to donations from individual citizens, candidates also seek to maximize funds received from PACs. From the individual races scrutinized in this thesis, it is clear that partisan PACs, such as the Club for Growth, are capable of
putting both dollars and grass roots influence behind the candidates they support. The politics of interest groups is an avenue that deserves future study. Clearly, extreme candidates understand the importance of money and its correlation with their chances of success. As the numbers of extreme candidates and MCs rise, PACs and interest groups that lie at the ends of the political spectrum may seek out candidates that fit their ideals. However, it is also plausible that extreme candidates, in hope of outraising their opponents, will, or already are, tailoring their platforms to draw in funds from likely donor groups.

Finally, the nature of these primaries for open congressional seats that occur in the presence of relatively extreme candidates are worthy of some additional discussion. The mere fact that two-thirds of MCs enter the institution through open seat contests speaks to their importance. The opposite effects that a district or state’s partisan leanings may exert on the two parties’ primaries were briefly mentioned earlier. Suffice it to say that one would expect a heavy conservative predisposition of a district or state to pull candidates in both primaries toward the right, thus moderating Democrats, while radicalizing Republicans. In a situation where a moderate Democrat and an extreme Republican are nominated for an open congressional seat in a heavily conservative district, one could safely assume that the Republican would win the general election. The same process would occur in the opposite direction in a heavily liberal district or state. Moreover, Keith Poole found evidence suggesting that once elected to Congress, MCs tend to maintain their ideological position over time as measured by their choices in roll call votes and corresponding DW-Nominate scores (Poole 2007). Therefore, as the number of
extreme candidates rises in open seat primary elections, we would expect a significant portion of new MCs to enter the legislature through this process that turns out extreme winners who will seemingly remain extreme. When combining Poole’s evidence of constant ideological positioning by MCs, Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz’s evidence that voters can’t tell candidates of differing extremity apart if they are from the same party, and Alan Abramowitz’s evidence of states and districts becoming increasingly homogenous and polarized, this open seat electoral process by which a majority of new MCs are introduced to Congress, may very well be an impactful contributor to polarization in the legislature.

Limitations

There are several limitations to keep in mind in regards to the analysis conducted in this thesis. While the five cycles spanning from 2004 to 2012 that were incorporated in the data set provided a fairly substantial number of open seat House races with a candidate who was able to be identified as the most extreme, only 52 analogous races were identified in the Senate. Such a limited number of observations for the analysis of the Senate races may have affected the validity of the results. This work would have benefited greatly from a larger sample of these Senate races from which establish trends. Moreover, a larger number of electoral cycles would have allowed for the results of this analysis to be placed in the context of a longer time frame, which would have made important trends easier to identify. Not only is it relatively difficult to identify actual trends over a timeframe spanning less than a decade, but in a greater chronological frame, these trends may appear different or
even as outliers in a larger trend. While collecting and organizing the data utilized in this study was already a very time consuming process, the ideal data set would have contained all congressional races dating back to 1970.

This next limitation was mentioned in the previous chapter and is inherent to the model selected for this study but warrants further discussion nonetheless. Because the model was predicated on identifying the most extreme participants in the race, strictly candidates with the CFscore indicating furthest distance from the center were used. However, in multiple observations, a candidate that won, had a less extreme CFscore by a margin as small as .01. Additionally, in some races, the most extreme candidate was incredibly extreme, with the absolute value of CFscores for these individuals exceeding 4. While these extremists were present, they were often not feasible candidates, and received little to no funding or votes. Often in these elections, there were other fairly extreme candidates that were competitive or even won the primary. Thus, there were a number of observations that entered the sample as instances when the most extreme candidate failed to win, despite the fact that a marginally less extreme candidate won, or a fairly extreme, yet feasible candidate did so.

**Avenues for Future Research**

There are various directions that future research could take in order to expand on the work conducted herein. An analysis involving all cycles from 1970 to 2016 could potentially uncover far more information than this comparatively limited data set provided. There would certainly be value in expanding the scope of an
investigation such as that to include other groups of candidates, such as moderates, and challengers facing incumbents. To do so would grant the ability to compare predictors of success across these groups. Because this analysis solely focused on open seat races in the presence of identifiable extremists, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not these results are transferable to other types of candidates. A broader study could determine this and more.

The apparent and expected significance of campaign fundraising suggests that more work should be done in this already well-explored field. It would be very interesting to study differences between extremists and candidates in general that raise a majority of their funding from PACs and interest groups as opposed to those that receive a majority of their financing from individuals. It stands to reason that different types of candidates could be attracting money from different sources and that funding mix could exert an influence on both candidate ideology and success. With money increasingly traveling around the country to candidates in other states and districts, gaining a greater understanding of how the origin of funding affects its recipients should not be overlooked.

Future work could also take a closer look at the primary environments created within the Democratic and Republican parties. This analysis found that in both chambers of Congress, extreme Democrats were noticeably more likely to win their primaries than extreme Republicans. Such a result is interesting when considering that the Republican Party has received substantial attention for its radical wing and has been pointed to as more responsible for polarization than the Democratic Party. Moreover, DW-Nominate scores clearly show that Republicans are polarizing to a
greater degree than the Democratic Party. The results in the previous chapter suggest that in congressional primaries, Democrats are more receptive to extreme candidates than Republicans. Perhaps, the use of CFscores as the principal measure of candidate ideology in this thesis contributed to this result. Nevertheless, an investigation into the differences in primary environments across party lines could help uncover the reasons behind these varying success rates and the degree to which each party’s primary victors have contributed to polarization.

**Closing:**

Whereas there was once debate over how long the trend of polarization would continue, today it seems as though it is here for the foreseeable future. This thesis has worked towards gaining a greater understanding of extreme congressional candidates, who then become extreme members of Congress and thereby contribute to this trend. Understanding the dynamic interactions between extreme candidates, their electorates, and their donors is critical to modern politics and will only become more so as we move forward. It is important to continue to study the development of this trend from the 1970s to today and into the future. A more comprehensive assessment of the predictors of extremist success and a deeper appraisal of these predictors would go a long way towards unraveling the intricacies of modern day polarization.
References


Peress, Michael. “Candidate Positioning and the Responsiveness to Constituent