Rent-Seeking Political Parties, Competition, and Information

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Political parties are a mixed bag for representative democracy. On one hand, political parties provide necessary functions of *agency* that facilitate the operation of elections and government and provide a mechanism of accountability.[1] As E.E. Schattschneider put it, "Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties."[2] On the other hand, political parties are biased agents seeking to advance their own political and policy interests. Political parties seek to win elections and control the government to hold power and gain a disproportionate share of policy benefits for party actors and constituencies.[3] Political agency entails a principal-agent problem of slippage. What benefits party coalition actors and constituencies may not be in the best interests of the broader citizenry even if parties frame their policies in these terms.

This book views *political parties as rent-seeking coalitions* of political actors. *Political rents* refer to policies or other benefits that accrue to party actors and constituencies, beyond what could be obtained in an electoral marketplace under conditions of perfect competition and complete information.[4] This definition modifies the Bawn et al, thesis that political parties are coalitions of political actors that seek to gain power to obtain disproportionate benefits for party actors and constituencies at the expense of others.[5] The rent-seeking definition modifies their formulation by specifying that competition and information affect how much parties can get away with. Further, this conception aligns the definition of political parties with the competitive elite theory of democracy, in which electoral competition and information are critical conditions for citizen empowerment and government accountability.

These points require some unpacking. To begin, what does it mean that political parties provide functions of agency in elections and government? Political parties are agents or intermediaries that facilitate the functioning of elections and government on behalf of the citizenry. Political parties help resolve collective action problems that arise in separate elections

across multiple levels of government crossing numerous jurisdictions and governing institutions.[6] Political parties are the coordinating mechanism to form winning coalitions in a decentralized electoral system. Parties define issues and conflicts, nominate candidates, provide information, and organize and mobilize voters to contest elections across electoral jurisdictions and institutions. Parties establish brands, images, and policy reputations to appeal to voters. They develop and use party loyalties and organize to mobilize potential supporters to vote. If they win, they work to organize government and enact policies.[7] Political parties help resolve collective action problems in government by organizing and structuring collective decision-making within legislatures and across the branches of government that share constitutional authority for making policy.[8] Parties form durable policy-making coalitions and bridge the separate institutions that share and compete for policy making authority.[9] Parties also serve as mechanisms for checking and limiting the party in power. The opposition party calls out the governing party for poor governance, abuses of power, extremism, and sweetheart deals for special interests. It is the competition and information offered by the opposition party that is critical for holding a governing party accountable and thus enabling the empowerment of voters over the governors whose authority is legitimized through elections. If an opposing party is electorally weak, that party lacks the resources to provide information to voters that would give them reason to reject the incumbent party, and its candidate will not have a reasonable chance to win. In this scenario, the citizenry will have only minimal, if any, ability to hold the governing party or politicians accountable for their actions in government or for the conditions of the country that occur during that party's time in office.

While political parties provide necessary functions of agency in representative democracy, this agency entails potential conflicts of interest. Political party actors have their own

interests, policy demands, priorities, which may not be those preferred by the broader citizenry nor necessarily good of the country viewed either as what is good for the greatest number or as what is good for the country as a whole.[10] The principle-agent problem arises because citizens rely on political parties to facilitate elections and the operation of government, but parties can exploit competitive advantages and information asymmetries to secure benefits for themselves. Voters may not have much choice in selecting their government or holding government accountable if elections are not competitive or if voters lack the information needed to know whether a party acts to further their wellbeing or that of special party interests.[11]

One of the paradoxes of American politics is that, simultaneously, most voters lack the information about policy needed to hold individual elected officials accountable, and yet voters can and do respond to government policies and societal conditions by rewarding or punishing candidates of the governing party.[12] The general lack of knowledge about policies and the imprecise or even wrong attributions of causality for conditions can lead voters to blame or reward the governing party out of proportion to the governing party's role in the unfolding of events or creation of conditions. In 2024, for example, many voters cast ballots against the Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris because of their dissatisfaction with the cumulative effects of inflation, even though Biden Administration policies could reasonably account for only fraction of the inflation that occurred in 2022 and 2023. Few voters could explain which Biden policies contributed to inflation, and fewer still could explain how much. All that mattered for most of these voters is that inflation occurred and the Democrats were the governing party. The Democrats were held accountable to the voting public, because enough voters were dissatisfied and enough voters could and did cast ballots for the opposing party.

Holding the governing party accountable is contingent on the competitiveness of elections and availability of information about the governing party. In 2024, for example, the country has been closely and deeply divided along party lines national level. The opposition Republican Party could and did communicate to voters that Biden was to blame for inflation and other societal problems. The opposition, Republican Party messaging gave form and direction to public dissatisfaction. Presidential elections are sufficiently competitive, such that a small shift in voter preferences resulted in a change of party control of the White House and Senate. If an opposition party has minimal ability to win or cannot inform voters, then the governing party would not be constrained by concerns about public reactions. The ability to inform voters of the governing party's actions and the competitiveness of elections thus are necessary conditions for parties to function as a mechanism for accountability in a system of decentralized elections to the separate institutions that share authority for making policy.[13] The political rent-seeking capacity of the governing party is constrained by public reactions manifested in the next election.

This also means that rent-seeking parties benefit from less competition and may seek to create competitive advantages for their preferred candidate. Rent-seeking parties also seek to take advantage of information asymmetries and public indifference to obtain disproportionate benefits for themselves at the expense of others.[14] The winning political party or coalition can gain disproportionate political and policy benefits for themselves and their constituencies when there is less electoral competition and less information available to voters.[15] This relationship holds conditionally, assuming that the winning party or coalition gains control of elected institutions of government and remains unified.[16] That parties can exploit less competition and imperfect information for their own advantage is problematic for representative democracy because they reduce voters' options and thus their ability to select or reject the polity.[17]

Political parties thus are necessary for representative democracy, but they become increasingly problematic for representative democracy as elections become less competitive and as information available to voters becomes thinner. This view of political parties differs from that of E.E. Schattschneider because it implies that political parties have non-democratic tendencies and can use government resources, or resources gained because of their positions of authority, to obtain competitive advantages in elections, constrain voter choices, and take advantage of information asymmetries between them and the public.[18] Less electoral competition and information increase the latitude that party actors have to pursue political rents, provided the winning party remains unified once in government. Imbalanced competition and information benefit the winning party and their coalition partners, but produce worse outcomes for the actors and constituencies of the losing party and potentially the broader citizenry. Conversely, more competitive elections and more information constrain the ability of political parties to seek political rents, resulting in outcomes that may serve the general welfare as opposed to disproportionately benefitting party actors and constituencies.

To illustrate political rent-seeking, consider the two biggest policy changes of the Obama and first Trump Administrations. In each case, the Democratic and Republican parties, when they controlled the elective branches of national government and maintained party unity, enacted policies that provide disproportionate benefits to their own constituents while displacing most of the costs on to others. Partisan actors and voters like the outcome when their party controls government, but not when the opposing party controls government.

Democrats enacted the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010. The ACA greatly reduced the percentage of Americans without some form of health care coverage, through the expansion of Medicare eligibility for low income families and through tax subsidies for insurance

premiums offered through ACA marketplaces.[19] The benefits of the program mostly benefitted low-income and self-employed Americans, while most of the costs were displaced onto wealthier citizens through surtaxes on incomes and some forms of investment income and for larger businesses that do not offer insurance to employees. Further, states that adopted the expansion of Medicare under the ACA benefitted from federal revenues from the citizens living in states that did not adopt the expansion of Medicare under the ACA. Most of the states adopting the ACA Medicare expansion were "blue" states with Democratic Party dominated state governments, while all of the states rejecting the expansion of Medicare were "red" states with Republican Party dominated state governments.

When Republicans controlled government after the 2016 election, they enacted the "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act" in 2017 that cut taxes by $5.5 Trillion over a decade, with benefits disproportionately going to corporations and high-income households with investments. To minimize the size of the resulting budget deficits, the tax bill offset these tax cuts with tax increases of $4.1 Trillion over a decade. The tax increases disproportionately affected people living in metropolitan areas with high property values, large mortgages, and high state and local taxes.[20] These areas are disproportionately Democratic. The Republican tax bill thus was mostly a tax shift with most of the benefits going to traditional Republican business and affluent constituencies, while three quarters of the revenue loss was offset by tax increases that mostly affected people represented by Democrats.

When they could, each party enacted policies that disproportionately benefitted party constituencies while a disproportionate share of the costs was borne by others. In each case, the opposing party criticized the policies thereby contributing to polarized opinion on each policy. In each case, party constituencies supported their party's policy while opposing that of the other.[21]

In these policy examples, each party sought benefits for party constituencies while displacing costs on constituencies of the opposing party as much as possible. The more common type of cost displacement involves candidates and parties seeking concentrated benefits for party actors and constituencies while diffusing costs so that these costs are not noticeable, and thus less likely to generate a backlash. Democrats, and Republicans beginning with Ronald Reagan, have gained policy benefits for party actors and constituencies by resorting to deficit spending.[22] Borrowing passes the costs inter-generationally to an unspecified, future population that is not voting in the next election, or at least not voting with their future debt in mind during the next election. For example, the tax cut portion of the 2017 Republican tax bill—the part not offset by tax increases, was paid for by borrowing. This enabled Republicans to steer benefits disproportionately to their traditional party constituencies without having to cut spending which would likely would have generated more electoral backlash. Political parties can get away with a lot. In a politically polarized country, citizens cheer when their preferred political party controls government and chafe when the opposing party controls government.

These examples also illustrate the role of competition as a constraint on parties. In these examples, both parties raised concerns about deficits and debt only when the opposing party controlled government and could provide benefits to their supporters.[23] Opposing "deficit spending" serves as a lever to constrain the majority party's ability to deliver benefits to their supporters, in hopes that these supporters become dissatisfied or disillusioned and reduce their support for the party in power, which in turn would improve the minority party's electoral prospects.[24] In this dynamic, the majority seeks benefits for party constituencies by displacing or diffusing costs, and the opposition party resists deficits as a way to constrain rent-seeking by the party in power. Without an electorally competitive opposition party, the constraint on the

majority party would be negligible and the majority party could repeatedly use government to benefit their constituencies at the expense of others.

While they seek political rents, American political parties are not political cartels as some political parties appear to be in European countries with parliamentary systems of government.[25] American political parties *try* to govern as political cartels, but their ability to do so is control and management of government is conditional upon party unity.[26] Political parties, when they are unified and have majority control of the legislature and executive, can adopt rent-seeking policies as noted above. American political parties can divide or factionalize in ways that reduce the ability to win elections (e.g., Republicans in 1912 or Democrats in 1968) or govern (e.g., Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2023). Just as a party's ability to govern depends on maintaining party unity, the argument here is that party actors' ability to cooperate among themselves to nominate a preferred candidate is conditional upon the unity of party actors at the nomination stage. This is why political parties are referred to in the title of this book as conditional mediators of democracy.

The cooperative, cartel model of political parties is simply less applicable to American political parties, especially in the national electoral setting. The political party cartel model envisions a small group of party and elected officials as colluding to nominate candidates and restrict voters' choices, using resources available through government or made available to them by virtue of their positions in authority, and leveraging information asymmetries to gain disproportionate policy and other benefits for themselves.[27] The definition of a party cartel is similar to the definition of rent-seeking parties. The difference is that actors in a cartel party always collude in nominations, general elections, and government. American political party actors sometimes fail to cooperate among themselves during nominations and instead engage in

intra-party rivalry to win control of a nomination. Political parties are conditional mediators of democracy because party actors vary in their intra-coalitional cooperation in nominations, elections, and government.

American political parties diverge from the party cartel model for several reasons. First, the party cartel model envisions a relatively small group of actors at the top who make decisions for the party. The major political parties in America are decentralized, with changing coalitional compositions, and with varied and sometimes incompatible preferences for policy. Republicans in Texas and Oklahoma, for example, seek more conservative policies than do Republicans in New York or Massachusetts. Democrats in California and Oregon seek more liberal policies than do Democrats in West Virginia or Oklahoma.[28] Intraparty collusion in American political parties, to the extent that it occurs, requires coordination and cooperation among numerous, largely autonomous actors operating at national, state, and local levels, and which are organized in overlapping networks.

In *The Party Decides,* Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller resolve this coordination problem among decentralized, autonomous party actors, by positing that party actors engage in a signaling game, in which party actors signal their preferences and converge on mutually acceptable candidate.[29] Cohen et al, argue this occurs, first, behind the scenes by encouraging prospective candidates to run, or not run against a preferred candidate, or by encouraging candidates to drop out of the race.[30] Coordination also occurs publicly as party groups, activists and officials signal each other of their preferences and converge in their support behind a candidate who is mutually acceptable for policy reasons and who can win elections.[31] Signaling occurs through various modes of media and through behind the scenes efforts to persuade groups, donors, journalists, and even candidates that one candidate is preferrable to other

candidates.[32] Party insiders, group leaders and activists signal their support through public endorsements, talking up the virtues and chances of a preferred candidate and dismissing those of other candidates, and by encouraging convergence in campaign contributions in which the preferred candidate benefits from party donor networks while other candidates' campaigns are starved for cash. More generally, group leaders, public intellectuals, candidates, and others organize issues and frame political discussions in ways that frame electoral decisions in ways that advance particular partisan or ideological interests.[33] By stacking the deck in favor of their preferred candidate, caucus and primary voters may be faced with a plebiscitary choice to ratify or reject the party's choice.[34] Nominations that involve collusion among party actors in support of a mutually agreed upon candidate are less competitive in the caucuses and primaries where party voters will decide among fewer candidates with reasonable chances of winning.[35]

Viewing parties as conditional mediators of nominations differs from the UCLA perspective on political parties.[36] The UCLA perspective on political parties focuses on cooperation among the networks of party actors that form the political party coalitions.[37] While party actors often cooperate among themselves to nominate a mutually agreed on candidate, sometimes party actors engage in rivalry over party nominations.[38] Party actors are not always active in supporting a candidate and sometimes those, that are active in a campaign, do not converge in their support of a candidate at the nominating stage of the election cycle, and occasionally not in the general election. American political party actors sometimes fail to attain consensus among themselves about who their nominee should be, and thus fail to collude in ways that structure party voter choice in favor of a preferred candidate. The heterogeneity of the political parties at the national level makes intra-party cooperation more difficult and increases

the prospects for a contested nomination. Parties generally are more able to cooperate internally at the state and local levels where intra-party differences are less substantial.

A second way that American parties differ from the cooperative, cartel party model results from the use of primaries to nominate candidates. The American political parties use of primary elections to nominate candidates makes their nominating processes relatively porous. Primaries facilitate intra-party competition for nominations.[39] Candidates and groups aligned with a party, can work around party elites or the existing coalition of party actors, to compete for the party's nomination for a particular office. Primaries even create the possibility of a hostile take-over of a party's nomination, such as when Donald Trump secured the 2016 Republican presidential nomination.[40] This is not an isolated event. Tea Party and then MAGA candidates and groups have primaried and defeated incumbent Republicans and candidates backed by party committees and leadership PACs. Similarly, groups affiliated with the progressive left, particularly those with an affinity for the label of Democratic Socialists, have primaried and defeated incumbent Democrats in local, state, and congressional primaries. These occurrences simply do not fit the model of cartel party members cooperating among themselves for mutual benefit. The nomination reforms of the early 1970s increased the options for outsider candidates and party factions to contest presidential nominations.[41] Former Michigan GOP Chair Saul Anuzis, said, "The party is the infrastructure, the party is the coordinating body, it's helpful to have a good, strong party, but it's not unusual to have people work around the party."[42]

The questions then are when, to what extent, and why do party actors cooperate or compete in party nominations? This book argues that the conditions that most affect intra-party cooperation during nominations are the inter-party competitiveness of general elections, the volume and asymmetry of information, the unity of the party coalition, and availability of a

candidate who can unite the factions of a party.[43] We will start with the implications of electoral competition for party nominations.

Rent-Seeking Political Parties and Electoral Competition

Political parties have more rent-seeking opportunities when elections are less competitive between the parties, which often is the case in congressional, state legislative, and local elections in areas dominated by one party. The more competitively balanced the parties are in an election, the more responsive the political system will be to the desires of the majority.[44] One implication is that rent-seeking political parties have incentives to constrain or structure voter choices in general elections.[45]

The two major political parties benefit from a variety of legal and political factors that constrain general election voters' choices to the nominees of the major parties. Voters' general electoral options are restricted by single member plurality districts, ballot access laws, and to a lesser extent, by campaign finance regulations that impose start-up costs on nascent parties or independent candidates.[46] Minor parties lack the organizational infrastructure, resources, and the geographic footprint needed to coordinate campaigns across political jurisdictions, and they often cannot get traction because they are unable to deliver policy benefits to supporters since they do not often win elections.[47] Politically, the major parties take opposing positions on most electorally relevant issues and coopt the popular policy ideas of minor parties, thereby limiting the issue space in which other parties can appeal to voters.[48] That most voters identify with or lean toward one of the major parties, and are largely loyal to that party, also limits the opportunities of third parties or independent candidates. As a result, third parties and independent candidates, when they appear on the ballot, usually are symbolic options for voters dissatisfied with both major political parties. American general election voters effectively are

constrained to choose between the nominees of the two major political parties because these are the only candidates with a reasonable chance to win.

The major political parties also use legal and political processes to seek competitive advantages in elections relative to each other. For example, subject to constitutional constraints and court rulings, political parties have gerrymandered local, state, and congressional legislative districts for partisan advantage.[49] Party efforts to gain structural advantages seem to be increasing as the political parties have polarized over the past fifty years. The policy benefits and costs associated with winning and losing, respectively, have increased as the political parties polarized into two divergent camps. Party voters support their party's candidate, if only to prevent the other party from gaining power.[50] Polarization thus increases the incentives for parties to gain electoral advantages when and where they can.

Some Republican-controlled state legislatures have sought to reduce "voter fraud" by enacting voter ID laws (nine states), voter interference laws (six states), excluding P.O. Box addresses for voter registration (South Dakota), requiring certain paper weight for voter registration forms (Ohio), or imposing large fines on organizations that violate regulations governing voter registration drives (Florida).[51] These "reforms" to maintain "electoral integrity" have the convenient side effect of raising the costs of voting and reducing voter turnout for groups like African-Americans or college students that currently vote more Democratic.[52] Believing that making voting easier would help their candidates, Democrats have sought to make voter registration automatic and expand early voting and voting by mail. Both political parties, however, only advance reforms thought to give them a competitive advantage in elections.

While much of the activity to restrict voting has been initiated by Republicans in state legislatures in which they have partisan majorities, both Democrats and Republicans in local

governments have constrained voter participation by scheduling elections at times other than the dates of national elections. The scheduling of local elections on days different from the national elections is more consequential for reducing voter turnout than any of the restrictions mentioned above. Both parties defend their actions in terms of principles like promoting election integrity or democracy, but each does so only in a way that gives them a competitive advantage in elections. Locking in electoral advantage reduces the constraint on the governing party since it knows can probably win the next election regardless of the policies that it enacts.

While discussions of electoral competition generally refer to the competition between parties, competition is also an element in party nominations because the expansion of primaries and reformed caucuses expanded the opportunities for outsider candidates and participation for party voters.[53] Elections are a two-stage process, with a nominating election and a general election. Competition has different effects on party actor incentives for the nomination and general election stages of the election cycle. Each political party has more opportunity for policy rent-seeking when there is less inter-party competition in the general election. However, *low inter-party competition in the general election increases the incentive for intra-party competition at the nomination stage* of the election cycle. When a party is likely to win the general election, ambitious politicians and factions of party actors may contest nominations to gain even more satisfaction of their policy demands since winning the nomination may be tantamount to winning the general election and thus getting even more desired policy benefits. Hans Hassel, for example, found that groups and activists are more likely to cooperate in congressional nominations for competitive electoral districts, while competing in nominations for partisan, safe districts.[54] This is exactly the prediction if political parties operate as rent-seeking coalitions.

In election jurisdictions where one party dominates in terms of organizational infrastructure, resources, and party voters, the dominant political party wins uncompetitive general elections and seeks policies demanded by party actors. The winning party engages in political rent-seeking. States that are more solidly Republican enact more conservative policies on taxes, labor and environmental regulations, and social issues such as abortion, religious activity in schools, gun ownership, and racial equity in education. More solidly Democratic states have adopted more progressive taxation, stronger environmental policies, gun control policies, and greater efforts to promote equality along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity. In such one-party states, districts and localities, the main threat to incumbents of the dominant party is not the other party, but primary challenges from within the party by candidates and groups seeking even more of what they demand.

Elected officials in these jurisdictions embrace partisan or ideological positions to ward off intra-party primary challenges. For example, Republican members of Congress who supported Trump's "stop the steal" were less likely to face a primary challenge than those that did not in 2022.[55] Primary challenges against a member of Congress whose party is the minority or underdog in their home district had no effect on the members' voting records.[56] It is elected officials of the dominant party in electorally safe districts or states that adopt more partisan or more ideological positions. Doing so helps ward off intra-party challenges.

In electoral jurisdictions dominated by one political party, factions within the dominant party have an incentive to contest nominations to demand an even greater share of the spoils of victory. Whether these one-party dominant areas cooperate or contest party nominations depends largely on the compatibility of policy demands of party actors, which is a function of the homogeneity of the party coalition at that level. Though beyond the scope of this book, the

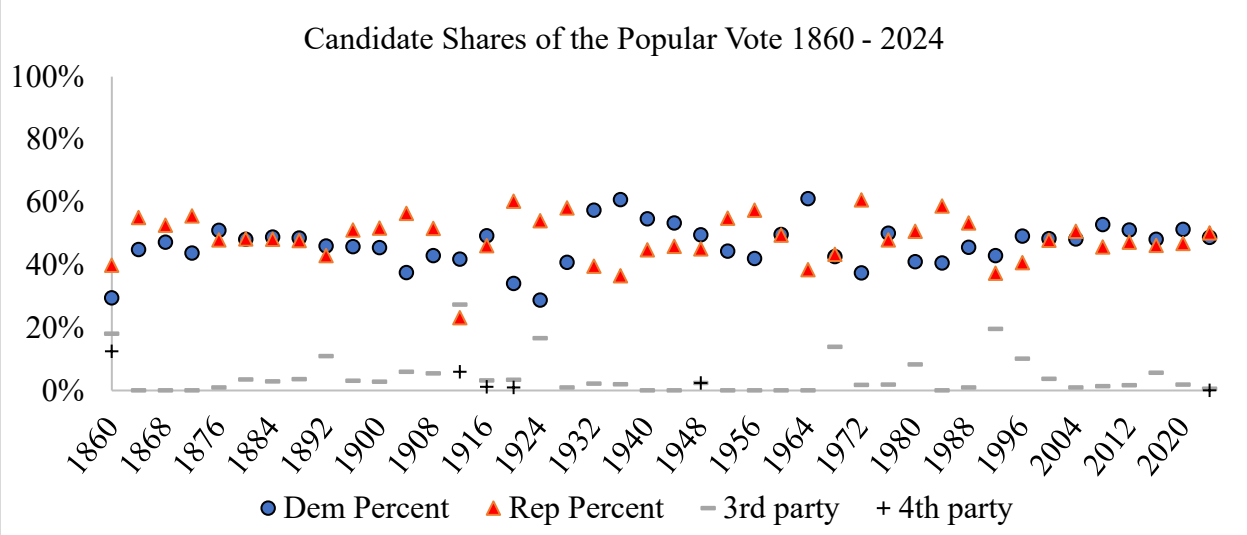
expectation is that, if a dominant party in local or state general elections has a relatively homogenous coalition, then party actors are expected to cooperate during party nominations. If, however, a dominant party at the local or state level is more heterogenous, then candidates and factions of the dominate party will compete for the nomination. In either case, the dominant party will engage in rent-seeking after the election, because winning the nominating election generally will be sufficient in these areas to secure the policy benefits demanded by the faction of the dominant party that wins the nomination.

Conversely, the more competitively balanced the parties are in terms of organization, campaign resources and voter loyalties in the general electorate, the more party actors have an incentive to cooperate and compromise at the nomination stage, to advance less noticeable deviations from existing policy or at least obfuscate policy extremism, and to nominate a candidate who can win in the general election. *Inter-party competition in general elections reduces a party's rent-seeking opportunities but increases incentives to cooperate at the nomination stage to obtain a candidate who can win in the general election*. This does not mean that parties in competitive electoral situations always cooperate. It means that they have incentives to cooperate. As with safe districts or states dominated by one party, parties in competitive districts may still engage in intra-party rivalry over nominations if there is sufficient factionalism (see chapter five). Factionalism results from party actors having policy demands that are sufficiently incompatible that these differences cannot be reconciled.

Presidential generally elections consistently have been competitive, which can be shown in several ways. Figure 2.1 shows the popular vote shares of the candidates in the general elections from 1860 to 2020, the period of political competition between the Republican and Democratic parties. Presidential general election results often are close, especially during periods

of high political polarization when the stakes of losing are greater. The peak periods of polarization in American parties occurred during the 1880s to 1900 and again since the 1990s. In all of these elections, the popular vote margin for presidential elections was razor thin.

Figure 2.1 Party shares of the popular vote 1864 to 2024.



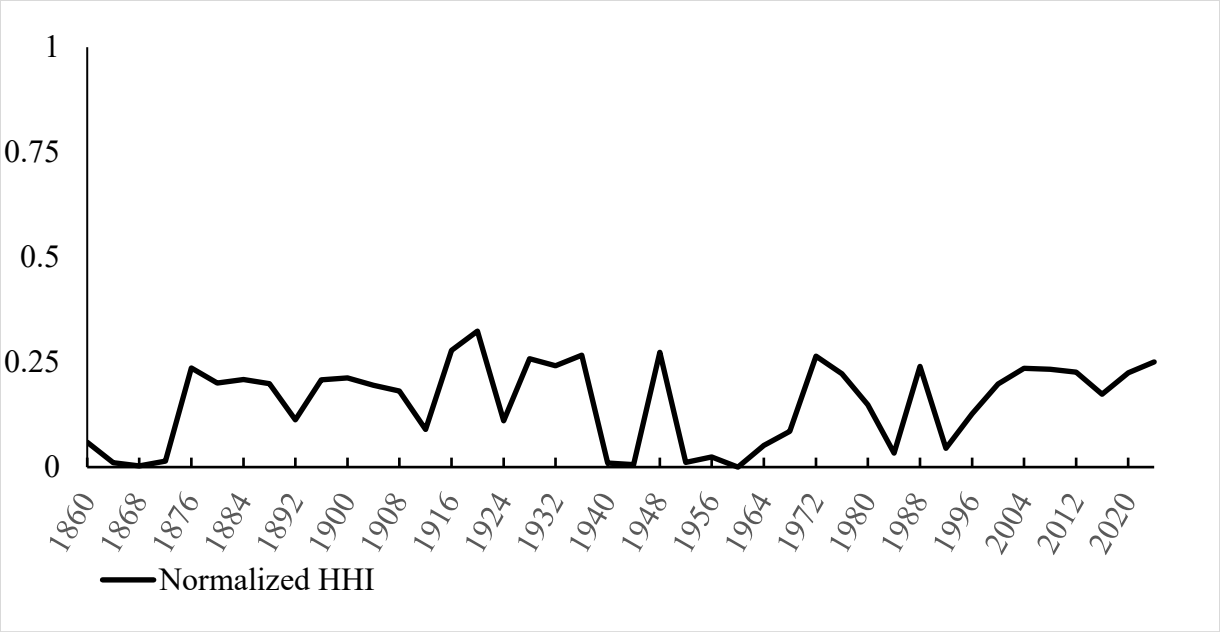
Data on popular vote shares of candidates comes from the American Presidency Project, a the University of California Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data; and Deborah Kalb, ed. 2015, *Guide to US elections*. CQ Press

Candidates' vote shares by themselves, however, are not the best measure of electoral competition. A better measure is provided by the Herfindahl-Hirshman Index (HHI), which is used by economists and government regulators to measure market competition and consumer power. The HHI has been adopted in studies of multi-party and multi-candidate elections to measure electoral competition and voter choice.[57] This statistic accounts for the number of candidates or parties in an election, along with their relative vote shares. In elections with a dominant party, the HHI will generate a higher score, indicating the advantage for the dominant

party. The HHI is measured here as the sum of the squared vote shares of all candidates receiving at least one percent of the vote.[58] The measure then is normalized to control for the number of candidates since third party candidates run stronger in some elections than others. The normalized HHI^N = (HHI-1/n)/(1-1/n), where n is the number of the candidates or parties. Normalizing the HHI creates a range of scores from zero, which would occur if candidates or parties had equal shares of the vote in a perfectly competitive election, to one, which would occur if only one candidate received votes in an electoral monopoly.

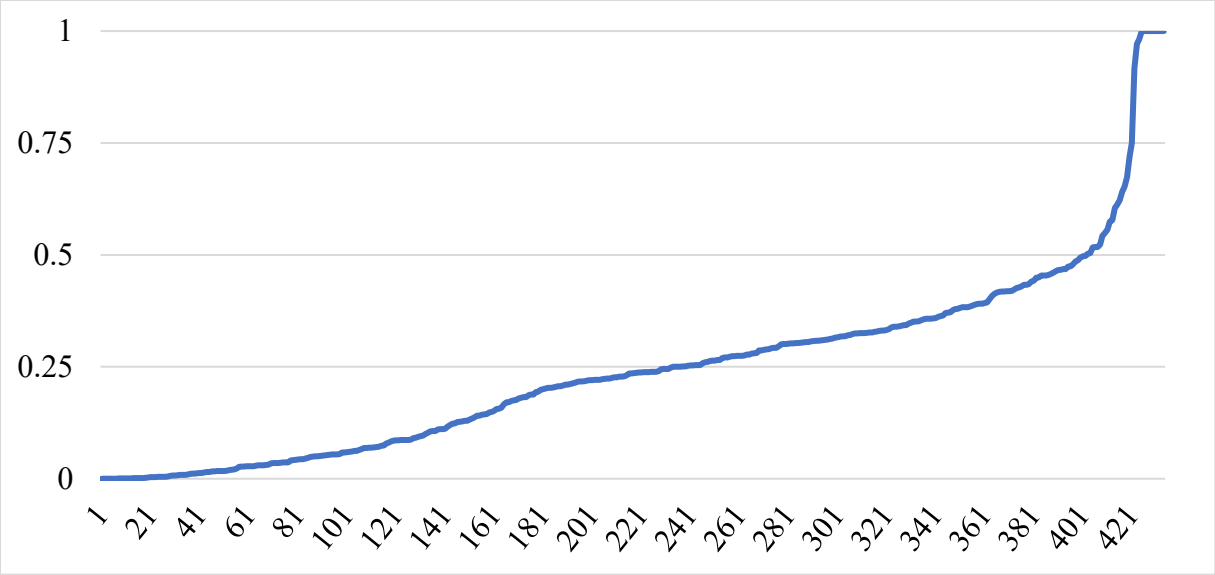
The HHI^N, used to measure competitiveness of presidential elections from 1860 to 2024 is shown in Figure 2.2. The Federal Trade Commission and the Anti-Trust Division of the Justice department use this normalized statistic with an interpretive standard to measure the competitiveness of a market, in which scores between 0 and .15 indicate a highly competitive market; scores between .15 and .25 indicate a competitive market; scores above .25 indicate a less competitive market; and higher scores indicating substantially less competition and thus less consumer choice until scores reach 1.0 in which consumers have no choice.[59] This analysis uses the same interpretive frame. By this metric, 18 of the last 42 presidential elections were highly competitive, 17 were moderately competitive, and six were less competitive but very close to being in the range of moderately competitive elections. No presidential election evidences the lopsided victories that occur in congressional, state and local elections (see below).

Figure 2.2. Normalized HHI for presidential elections, 1860 to 2024.



As a point of comparison, Figure 2.3 presents the normalized HHI^N measuring the competitiveness of all 435 U.S. House elections in 2020. The results are sorted from the most competitive (a score of zero) to least competitive (a score of one). Compared to the presidential elections, House elections are far more variable, with 161 races in the competitive range, 74 races in the moderately competitive range, and 200 races not competitive. While all presidential general elections since 1860 have been competitive or close to that mark, almost half of House elections are not in the competitive range. Almost 30% of the House elections in 2020 were less competitive than the least competitive presidential election going back to 1860. Almost 10 percent of House races had no competition at all.

Figure 2.3 The HHI^N for U.S. House elections in 2020

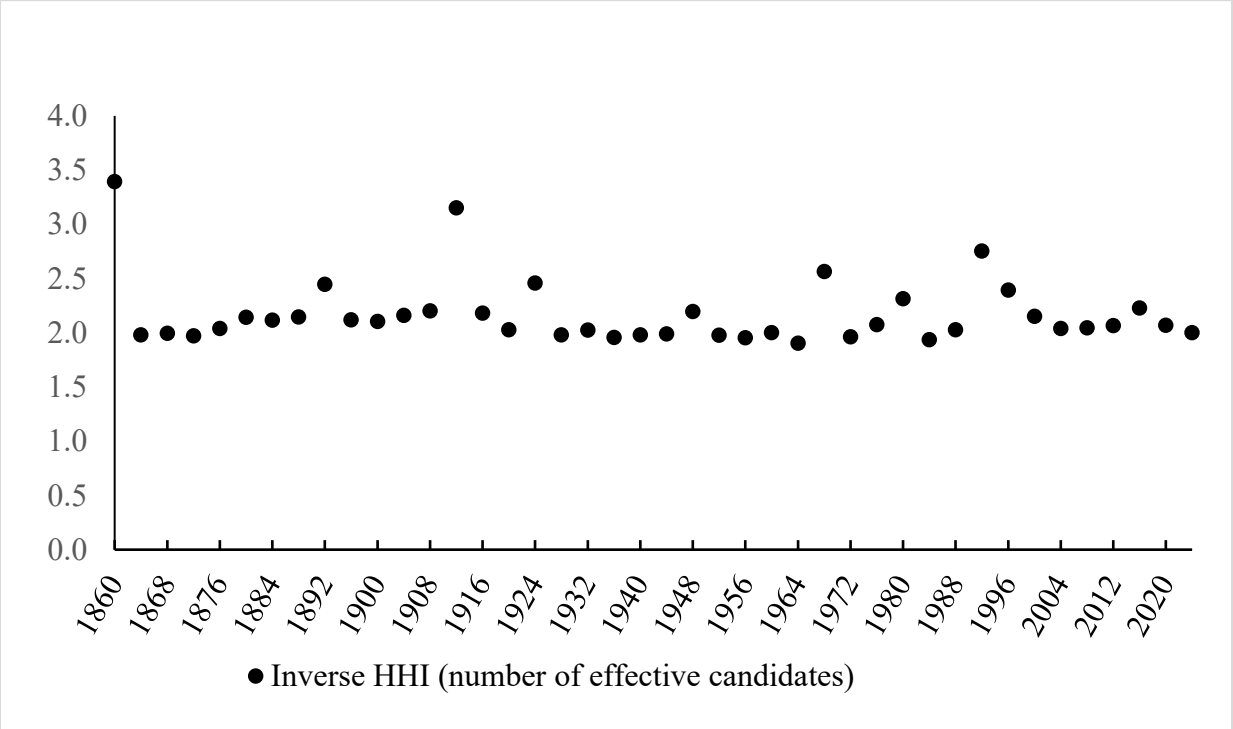


The implication is that presidential general elections, being competitive, incentivize party to cooperate among themselves to nominate a candidate who can win a general election. By comparison, House district are more variable so we should see a wide mix of cooperation versus rivalry at the nomination stage of the election cycle. Indeed, groups and activists are more likely to cooperate during congressional nominations in competitive electoral districts, while engaging in rivalry, competing among themselves for nominations for partisan, safe districts.[60]

What does this mean for voter choice? Economists use the inverse HHI as a proxy measure for consumer power in a market, which is analogous to voter empowerment in an election.[61] The more options that voters have on the ballot, the more power that voters have in selecting political leaders. Figure 2.4 presents the inverse of the Herfindahl-Hirschman index, which is used to measure the number of "effective" or competitive candidates or parties in an election.[62] The inverse HHI is more robust than simply counting the number of candidates on the ballot, since some candidates may have no reasonable chance of winning the election. The bottom panel indicates that in every presidential election, voters have had two or more effective candidates to choose among, each with enough of a chance to win the election that there would

be some doubt about the outcome. The only occasions in which third party presidential candidates have been more than symbolic choices occurred when one of the major parties splintered with a faction breaking off to compete as a third party. In these cases, the dissenting faction acts as a spoiler, lessening the chances of the party from which they splintered. That the major political parties do occasionally splinter in general elections, however, does indicate that the major party coalitions do not always act as cooperative coalitions. Interestingly, these elections have always involved the majority political party splintering, with the result that voters do have more meaningful choices in these elections.

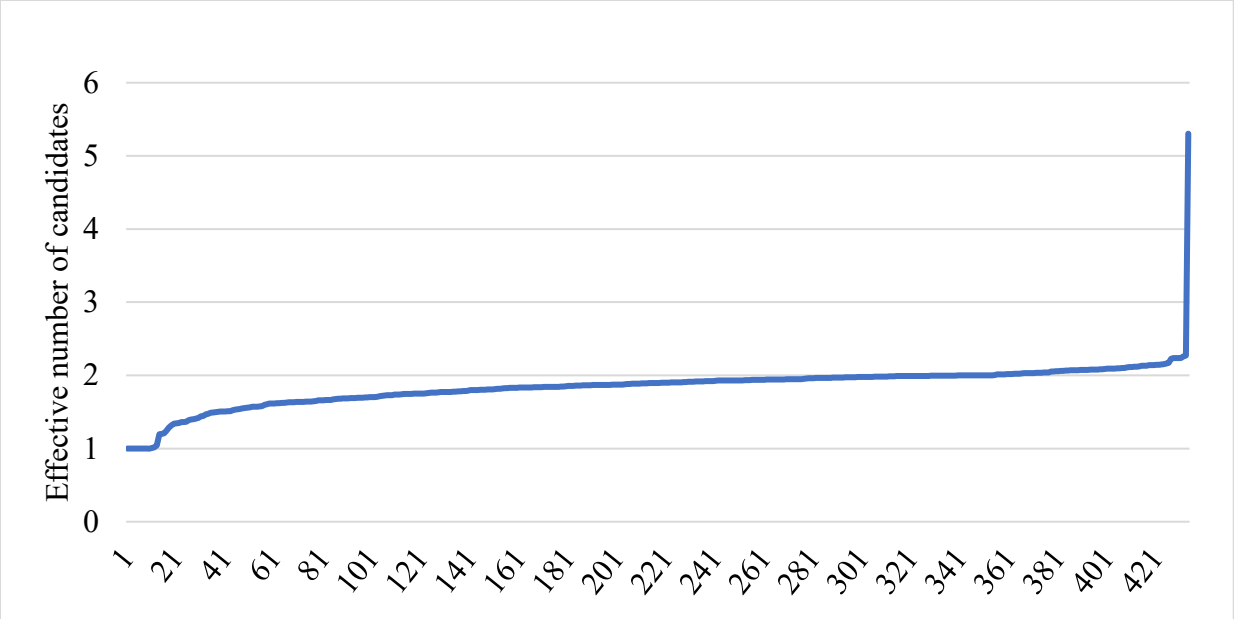
Figure 2.4. The number of effective candidates in presidential elections, 1860 to 2024



Again, as a matter of comparison, Figure 2.5 presents the Inverse HHI, measuring the number of effective candidates, for U.S. House elections for 2020. For easier visual interpretation, the results are rank ordered from the least to most choice in the elections. Whereas voters in presidential general elections since 1860 have had at least two effective

candidates to choose among, that is only true for 81 congressional districts, or less than 19% of the US congressional elections in 2020. The most competitive congressional elections occurred in Louisiana, which uses a unique system in which all candidates appear on the ballot, and if no candidate receives a majority of the vote, there is a run off election between the top two candidates. This results in a potentially larger number of candidates with a reasonable chance to win, at least in the first round of the election which functions essentially as a primary election. It should be noted that many House elections are close to the 2.0 threshold identified as being significant for voter empowerment. This means that there are biases, like an asymmetric partisan balance or incumbency advantages, that make most of the congressional elections less competitive than what is ideal from the standpoint of competitive elite democracy. In many congressional districts, one party or candidate is advantaged, significantly but the outcome might still be in doubt. However, in more than a third of US House elections in 2020, voters had no meaningful choice because there was only one effective candidate with a reasonable chance of winning the election. Whether due to incumbency advances or an advantage in partisan voters, these districts had only one candidate with a reasonable chance of winning.

Figure 2.5. The number of effective candidates in U.S. House elections, 2020.



Coming back to presidential elections, voters in the general elections consistently have meaningful choices among at least two candidates in sufficiently competitive elections that there would be at least some doubt about the outcome. This satisfies a core criterion for voter empowerment in the competitive elite theory of democracy. This is different from congressional, state, and local elections for which it is more common for one party to be dominant in terms of organization, funds, and voter partisan affinity. Given that presidential general elections typically are competitive and give voters meaningful choices, the question of when and to what extent party actors cooperate or engage in rivalry during party nominations reduces to matters of coalitional unity and the availability of a popular candidate with appeal across party constituencies.

Intra-party cooperation or competition: Coalitional homogeneity and candidate availability

The competitive parity between the parties in presidential elections means that party actors have more incentive to cooperate and compromise among themselves at the nomination stage, relative to nominations for local, state legislative and congressional offices. The national

party coalitions, however, are more heterogeneous, with greater diversity of groups and ideological orientations within the parties across regions and states.[63] Coalitional heterogeneity increases the likelihood of incompatible policy demands among party groups and activists. Party actors also do not fully control the ambitions of candidates who may seek the support of groups and activists with intense policy demands. The adoption of primaries and the reform of caucuses in the 1970s enabled candidates and groups to contest more effectively presidential nominations.[64] These conditions combine to create variation in intra-party cooperation in presidential nominations.

Whether party actors cooperate or compete in presidential nominations depends in part on the compatibility of the policy demands made by party coalition members and their supporters. Party coalition members with strong disagreements among themselves are less likely to collude or cooperate in ways that ensure party unity and mobilization of party resources and voters to win the election. Cooperation may become impossible if coalition actors have sufficiently divergent interests, such as when conservative White Southern Democrats' preference for segregation conflicted with demands for civil rights by African Americans and their liberal White allies. When Democratic presidential candidates advocated for civil rights, as Harry Truman did in his 1948 State of the Union Speech, many Southern Democrats defected to support the Dixiecrat candidacy of Strom Thurman.[65]

Party coalitions vary in their unity across time. Intraparty cooperation and collusion are more likely to occur when a party coalition is relatively unified with mutually compatible policy demands. In absence of constraints on membership, political coalitions may not be stable.[66] Party coalitions integrate new groups, fragment, and/or realign.[67] Since the New Deal Democratic coalition began to fracture, the major political party coalitions have realigned along racial issues

and along an authoritarian/non-authoritarian value dimension involving religious, educational, occupational, and geographic dividing lines.[68] As we will see in chapter four, since the advent of the current primary and reformed caucus system of selecting convention delegates, party coalition members have attained a high level of cooperation in presidential nominating elections in only a few election cycles since 1972 without an incumbent president seeking renomination. Most often there is a moderate but probably not determinative level of cooperation. In a few nominations, there is minimal cooperation among party actors.

The emergence of left- and right-wing populist movements and candidates within the major political parties poses an additional problem for intraparty cooperation and convergence on a presidential candidate. Both types of populism have evolved in American history, occasionally surging enough to create serious pressure and demands on leaders in the political parties.[69] Populism, when it coheres as a faction in a political party, is characterized by anti-establishment sentiments and rhetoric. Populists in a party distrust and oppose the regular or establishment elements of the party, and thus resist cue-taking and other efforts to collude behind a candidate. Surges of populism as coherent movements or factions within a party, make highly likely rivalry and competition over party nominations. Democrats have had to contend with the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s and early 1970s and in a resurgent form that has cohered as an anti-racist, anti-corporate, and pro-socialist faction in the 2016 and 2020 nominations. Right wing populism has been a growing force in the Republican Party for decades but cohered as a potent political force in the form of the Tea Party and then MAGA faction of the party, arguably taking control of the party in 2016.

The occurrence of intra-party rivalry during presidential nominations, however, is more variable than long-term patterns of party coalitional formation and fragmentation. If party

coalitional unity were the only factor that mattered, we would see a correspondence between the occurrence of intra-party rivalry or cooperation and the fragmentation of the party coalition. The occurrence of intra-party cooperation or rivalry is more intermittent. Another factor affecting intra-party cooperation during presidential nominations is the availability of a candidate with appeal across the range of groups and ideological orientations of the party coalition.[70] Who runs and does not run affects the potential for cooperation among party actors. Political parties select their nominee, but they must choose among the candidates who seek the nomination. Candidates vary in their ideological profiles, political reputations, and personal characteristics like charisma, competence, and authenticity. Candidates whose appeal crosses factions and groups that form the party coalition are easier to unify behind than candidates who have appeal among members of a party faction, but little beyond that faction.[71] Party activists, groups, and politicians tend to converge on candidate who demonstrates their popularity among party voters, while often waiting or even dividing their support among candidates when none stands out from the field.[72]

While party groups and activists decide which candidates they will support, ambitious candidates play an active role in the formation of a winning coalition within the party.[73] Party actors are less likely to be able to coordinate their efforts in absence of an obvious choice—a nationally known candidate whose appeal with party voters is apparent. Without a strong candidate, party insiders, groups, and activists are more likely to divide and back the candidate who they believe will be the strongest champion of their respective policy demands. There is a sequential element to coalition building in presidential nominations. Candidates vie to be the top choice within factions and then compete for dominance in across factions in before and during sequential caucus and primary elections.[74]

Coalitional unity and candidate appeal are interactive conditions. The more fractured a party coalition, the less likely that one candidate will appeal to across groups with different policy demands. That opens up the race to more candidates. The reforms of the early 1970s expanded primaries which gave candidates and groups the ability to work around existing party coalitional agreements to contest nominations and secure benefits for themselves.[75] Steven Brams has shown, in game theoretic formulations, that nominations for a political party with multiple groups or factions involve competition among candidates for dominance among voters in each faction and then competition among candidates and their supporting groups for majority of the party.[76] Ambitious candidates also may become agents of coalitional change by expanding the scope of conflict when they and their supporters are not getting what they demand through existing coalitional arrangements.[77]

Rent-seeking political parties seek competitive advantages in order to gain policy and other benefits for themselves. One means of doing that involves using government resources to gain competitive advantages in the election. In congressional elections, for example, office holders have provided themselves with an array of resource, including staff who provide services to constituents and promote incumbents through the media, the ability to take symbolic positions on policy, claim credit for policy benefits for constituencies, and travel and communications budgets that effectively enable them to campaign on a near permanent basis.[78] Similarly, incumbent presidents have enormous advantages when seeking renomination and campaigning for reelection.[79] Incumbent presidents also have some capacity to alter the rules and structure of the nomination process, as Donald Trump did in 2020 by encouraging states to hold caucuses rather than primaries, and Joe Biden did for 2024 by replacing Iowa with South Carolina as the first in the nation nominating election (see chapter three). These competitive advantages make it

very difficult to defeat incumbents seeking renomination. Presidential renomination races thus are the epitome of the obvious choice.

Who runs matters. Incumbent presidents win renomination easily because they are rarely seriously challenged. The most likely rivals who could raise the money and attract party support are nationally known office holders, and they rarely not enter the race. For example, Joe Biden easily won the Democratic caucuses and primaries in 2024 because none of the nationally known Democratic officials like California Governor Gavin Newsom or Senator Bernie Sanders did not run. Biden's challengers consisted of a little-known US Representative from Minnesota, a self-help author, and a citizen-activist from Baltimore. Joe Biden actually received more of the vote in the 2024 Democratic caucuses and primaries than Barack Obama did in 2012, when Obama was considered to be running unopposed for his renomination. As we will see in 2024, nominations are not competitive when an incumbent seeks reelection. That is why Joe Biden's decision to step down and let the party replace him is such an historical event. He had already won the nomination, and it was only until his vulnerabilities were fully on display in inter-party competition, that it became evident that he might not win. To improve his party's chances of winning the general election, he decided to let the party replace him as the nominee. Party insiders certainly pushed him in that decision, but ultimately it was his decision. Candidates do matter.

Summary

In a competitive elite system of democracy, people are empowered to the extent that they have choices among two or more distinct political parties or candidates. The critical condition for voter choice is the relative competitiveness of the candidates or parties. This idea extends to the contemporary presidential nomination process because both political parties choose their

nominees in caucuses and primaries in which party voters can cast votes for their preferred candidate. That voters can cast ballots, however, does not necessarily make presidential nominations democratic as defined in chapter one. Party actors can collude among themselves to constrain the choices of voters in general elections and take advantage of voter uninformedness to obtain an outsized share of the policy benefits of government, potentially at the expense of the general public.[80] In contemporary party nominations, party actors can, but do not always, collude to constrain or structure the choices of caucus and primary voters.

Political party coalition members often but do not always cooperate with each other. Sometimes they engage in rivalrous behavior with their party coalition partners, potentially thwarting the efforts of their coalition partners.[81] For example, the New Deal coalition of the Democratic Party included a serious internal division between Southern Democrats and other Democrats. Starting in F.D.R.'s second term, conservative Southern Democrats often joined Republicans in a "conservative coalition" to oppose policies of their own party. [82] The conservative coalition divided the Democratic Party until the 1990s when most conservative white Southerners had switched to the Republican Party. The existence of intra-party factions that may defect contradicts the vision of parties as coalitions of cooperative actors or party cartels. Rather, political parties operate as *conditional arbiters* of nominations and elections, cooperating under certain conditions while engaging in intraparty rivalry under other conditions.

The extent to which citizens have a meaningful choice in caucuses and primaries, depends on the competitiveness of the candidates, and competitiveness of the parties in general elections.[83] Citizens are empowered to select their leaders when they have multiple, viable candidates to choose among in an election.[84] If party actors coordinate their efforts to give a competitive advantage to one candidate before the caucuses and primaries begin, then citizens

voting in these party nominating elections may have little choice but to go with the choice of party actors.[85] If party actors fail to unify in support of a preferred candidate, however, then voters in the caucuses and primaries have a larger number of viable candidates to chose among. In this case, party voters have a more meaningful role in selecting the nominee. Thus, the extent of collusion among party actors, before the primaries, impacts who holds power in the selection of party nominees and the extent to which the nominating process is democratic.

Intraparty cooperation and collusion is more likely to occur when the major partes are competitive in the general election, when a party coalition is relatively unified and stable, and there exists a candidate who has appeal across the various factions and groups of a party. Presidential elections are generally competitive, so the variables of concern in presidential nominations are the coalitional unity and the availability of a candidate with appeal across coalition groups. The more heterogeneous a party coalition's groups, ideological predilections, and policy demands, the more likely that a political party will experience competition for the party's nomination. In particular, incompatible demands for political and policy commitments may encourage ambitious candidates, groups and activists to engage in rivalry during presidential nominations. Even short of incompatible demands, party actors may engage in rivalry to define the ideological direction of the party or the prioritization of policy demands.[86] The unity of a party coalition also varies as party coalitions integrate new groups, fragment, and/or realign.[87] The resurgence of anti-establishment populism in both political parties also increases the likelihood of intra-party competition for reasons we will address in chapter five. Finally, who runs does matter. The availability of a candidate with demonstrated appeal to the various constituency groups of a party also impacts collusion or rivalry at both the group and elite levels of political parties.[88]

These are not unrelated phenomena. The existence of an obvious candidate who has appeal across groups forming the party coalition is more likely when a party coalition is relatively stable. Conversely, it is less likely that a single candidate will have appeal across the party groups when the coalition is fractious with serious disputes over policies and priorities. When party coalitions are changing and/or when rivalries emerge for control of the party nominations, then intra-party cooperation becomes more tenuous, and parties are more likely to engage in rivalry during nominations.

Analyzing the competitiveness of presidential nomination campaigns enables us to identify the extent to which party actors unify in support of a candidate, when coalition coalescence occurs, and thus what it means for democracy in the selection of presidential candidates. Nominations in which party actors are able to unify by the end of the invisible primary are less competitive once the voting begins and thus tend to be less democratic. Nominations in which party actors fail to unify have several viable options for voters in caucuses and primaries, effectively giving those voters more influence over the selection of the nominee.

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[1] Schattschneider, 1942, *Party Government,* p. 5; ------ 1960, *Semi-Sovereign People*; Georg Wenzelburger and Reimut Zohlnhöfer, 2021, "Bringing agency back into the study of partisan politics: A note on recent developments in the literature on party politics." *Party Politics*, 27(5): 1055-1065.

[2] Schattschneider, 1942, *Party Government,* p. 5

[3] Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties?,* Bawn, et al., 2012, "A Theory of Parties."; Kaare Strom, 1990, "A Behavioral Theory of Political Parties," *American Journal of Political Science,* 34(2): 565-598.

[4] Note that this differs from Gordon Tullock's definition of rent-seeking in politics, which was narrowly defined as efforts to create a policy monopoly, see Charles Rowley, Robert D. Tollison, and Gordon

Tullock, eds. 2013, *The political economy of rent-seeking*. Vol. 1. Springer Science & Business Media, and Gordon Tullock, 2005, "Public goods, redistribution and rent seeking." In *Public Goods, Redistribution and Rent Seeking*. Edward Elgar Publishing; Mancur Olson, 2003, *Collective choice: Essays in honor of Mancur Olson*. Springer Science & Business Media.

[5] This part of the argument is the same as Bawn, et al., 2012, "A Theory of Parties."

[6] Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties?*

[7] James M. Snyder, Jr. and Michael M. Ting. 2002, "An Informational Rationale for Political Parties," *American Journal of Political Science,* 46(1): 90-110; Larry M. Bartels, 2000, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996," *American Journal of Political Science,* 44(1): 35-50; Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties?*

[8] Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties?*

[9] Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties*?; Charles O. Jones, 2000, *The Presidency in a Separated System*, Brookings Institution Press.

[10] There are many ways in which we can define the public interest. This follows in the tradition of Vilfredo Pareto, in defining an optimal outcome as one in which at least one person in a community can be made better off without making at least one person worse off; with conceptions of the public good defined either in terms of utility of the community or utility for the community. For a review of these concepts, see Lewis A. Coser, 1977, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in historical and social context,* Harcourt, Brace, Janovich.

[11] Terry M. Moe, 1988, The organization of interests: Incentives and the internal dynamics of political interest groups. University of Chicago Press; Terry M. Moe, 2005, "Power and political institutions." Perspectives on Politics, 3(2): 215-233

[12] V.O. Key referred to voters as the gods of vengeance or reward. V.O. Key, Jr., 1964, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups,* (5th ed), New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, p. 568; See also James A. Stimson, 2018, *Public opinion in America: Moods, cycles, and swings*. Routledge, 2018; Christopher Wlezien, 1995,

"The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending." *American Journal of Political Science*, 39(4): 981-1000.

[13] Schattschneider, 1942, *Party Government*

[14] This argument is similar to the Bawn, et al, 2012, "A Theory of Parties" argument, differing in that it takes into account competition and information, both of which vary across elections.

[15] Thomas Brunell, 2010, Redistricting and Representation: Why competitive elections are bad for America. Routledge.

[16] John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, 2001, ''The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection,'' in *Congress Reconsidered*, eds. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 269–92; see also, Aldrich, 2011, *Why Parties?*

[17] In *Redistricting and Representation,* Thomas Brunell, argues that less competitive electoral districts maximize alignment of an elected official and the largest number of constituents. This, however, does not take into account power nor outcomes at the system level, which is the focus of the conditional party government argument. See Aldrich and Rohde, 2001, ''The Logic of Conditional Party Government."

[18] Rent seeking may also occur by parties using government to provide salaries for party and campaign officials, funds for communication, travel and other mechanisms of campaign activity.

[19] https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/journal-article/2020/feb/aca-at-10-years-effect-health-care-coverage-access

[20] https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/2017-tax-law-tilted-toward-wealthy-and-corporations#:~:text=The%202017%20tax%20law%20cuts,top%201%20percent%2C%20TPC%20estimates.

[21] https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/poll-finding/5-charts-about-public-opinion-on-the-affordable-care-act/

[22] Andrew D. Austin and Mindy R. Levit, 2013. "The Debt Limit: History and Recent Increases." Congressional Research Service Report 7-5700. www.crs.gov

[23] Wayne P. Steger, 2013, "The Changing Relationship Between Revenues, Spending and Deficits: the Rise of Deficit Fueled Political Competition," Paper presented at the Southern PSA; -- 2013, "Democracy or Hypocrisy: Power, Ideology, and Politics," Paper presented at the American PSA.

[24] Alberto Alesina and Guido Tabellini. 1990. "A Positive Theory of Fiscal Deficits and Government Debt." *Review of Economic Studies.* 57 (3): 403-414.

[25] Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, 1995, "Changing Model of Party Organization and Party Democracy: the Emergence of the Cartel Party," *Party Politics,* 1(1): 5-28

[26] David W. Rohde, 1991, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*, University of Chicago Press; see also, John H. Aldrich, 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. University of Chicago Press; Gary Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, 1993, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

[27] Katz and Mair, 1995, "Changing Model of Party Organization and Party Democracy;" Bawn, et al, 2012, "A Theory of Political Parties."

[28] Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty, 2011, "The ideological mapping of American legislatures." *American Political Science Review*, 105(3): 530-551.

[29] Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, 2008, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

[30] Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, 2008, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[31] Cohen, et al, 2008, *The Party Decides*.

[32] Cohen, et al, 2008, *The Party Decides*; see also, Greg Koger, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel, 2009, "Partisan Webs: Information Exchange and Party Networks," *British Journal of Political Science,* 39(3): 633-653; David Karol, 2009, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

[33] Hans Noel, 2012, "The Coalition Merchants: the Ideological Roots of the Civil Rights Realignment," *Journal of Politics,* 74(1): 156-173; Richard Herrera, 1995, "The Crosswinds of Change: Sources of Change in the Democratic and Republican Parties," *Political Research Quarterly*, 48(2): 291-312; David Karol, 2009, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*, Cambridge University Press.

[34] Steger, 2000. "Do Primary Voters Draw from a Stacked Deck?"

[35] Steger, 2015, Citizens Guide to Presidential Nominations."

[36] Bawn, et al, 2012, "A Theory of Parties."

[37] Gregory Koger, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel, 2010, "Cooperative party factions in American politics. *American Politics Research*, 38(1): 33-53; Rachel M. Blum and Hans C. Noel, 2024, *Cooperating Factions: A Network Analysis of Party Divisions in US Presidential Nominations*. Cambridge University Press.

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[39] Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, 1978. *Dismantling the parties: Reflections on party reform and party decline*, Amer ican Enterprise Institute; Austin Ranney, 1975, *Curing the mischiefs of faction: Party reform in America*, University of California Press; Austin Ranney, 1977. *Participation in American presidential nominations*, American Enterprise Institute,, Nelson W. Polsby, 1983. *Consequences of party reform*, Oxford University Press.

[40] Andrew Solender, 2020, "Trump's 'Hostile Takeover' of GOP, Said Party Platform 'Meant to Piss People Off,'" *Forbes,* https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewsolender/2020/10/28/audio-reveals-kushner-touted-trumps-hostile-takeover-of-gop-said-party-platform-meant-to-piss-people-off/?sh=6808f4643e56, October 28.

[41] Nelson W. Polsby, 1983, *The Consequences of Party Reform,* Oxford University Press.

[42] Quoted by Julia Manchester, 2023, "Michigan GOP Faces Existential Crisis: 'The State Party is Dead,'" *The Hill,* April 26. https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/3970792-michigan-gop-crisis-karamo-kristina/

[43] The availability of information is also consequential, but will not be developed fully in this book. The main reason is that information varies more across types of election: national versus statewide versus local or state legislative races. Media coverage of candidates varies far more across these types of elections than it does in presidential nominations.

[44] George J. Stigler, 1972, "Economic Competition and Political Competition," *Public Choice*, 13(1): 91-106.

[45] Rent seeking may also occur by government officials or parties using their positions in government to take positions on issues, secure material or symbolic benefits for constituencies, employ staff to provide services for constituencies, and funds for communication, travel and other mechanisms of campaign activity. See, R. Douglas Arnold, 1990, *The Logic of Congressional Action*. Yale University Press; David R. Mayhew, 2004, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press.

[46] Leslie Bell, 1977, "Constraints on the Electoral Success of Minor Political Parties in the United States." *Political Studies,* 25(1): 103-109; William Riker, 1982, "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: an Essay on the History of Political Science," *American Political Science Review, 76(4): 753-766.*

[47] Marjorie Randon Hershey, 2017, *Party politics in America*. 17th ed. Routledge, ch. 2.

[48] Lisa Disch, 2002, *The Tyranny of the Two-Party System*, New York: Columbia University Press.

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[50] Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven W. Webster. 2018. "Negative partisanship: Why Americans dislike parties but behave like rabid partisans." *Political Psychology*, 39: 119-135.

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[55] Larry M. Bartels and Nicholas Carnes, 2023, "House Republicans were rewarded for supporting Donald Trump's 'stop the steal' effort." Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2309072120

[56] Caitlin E. Jewitt and Sarah A. Treul, 2019, "Ideological primary competition and congressional behavior," *Congress & the Presidency*, 46(3): 471-494; Robert G. Boatright, 2013, *Getting Primaried: The changing politics of congressional primary challenges*, University of Michigan Press.

[57] Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, 1989, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Wayne P. Steger, John Hickman, and Ken Yohn, 2002, "Candidate Competition and Attrition in Presidential Primaries, 1912-2000," *American Politics Research,* 30 (3): 528-554.

[58] Economists typically do not use percentages scaled in decimals, resulting in a scale that ranges from 1/n to 10,000. The results, however, are the same as percentages scaled in decimals. Note that economists often do not use the normalized statistic, which should be used if the number of groups or competitors in a market change. Government regulators use the normalized statistic to evaluate the competitiveness of markets with different numbers of firms.

[59] Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission, 2010, *Horizonal Merger Guidelines*, https://www.justice.gov/atr/file/810276/dl?inline; Daniel Cracau and José E. Durán Lima, 2016, "On the Normalized Herfindahl-Hirschman Index: A Technical Note," *International Journal of Food System Dynamics*, 7(4): 382-386.

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[61] Patrick A. Gaughan, 2010, Mergers, Acquisitions, and Corporate Restructurings, John Wiley & Sons.

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[70] Wayne P. Steger, 2016, "Conditional Arbiters: the Limits of Political Party Influence in Presidential Nominations," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 2016, 49 (4): 709-715.

[71] I am using term faction, as Hans Noel, 2016, "Ideological Factions in the Republican and Democratic Parties," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 667: 166-188; Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, 2016, "Party versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System," 49(4): 701-708.

[72] Wayne Steger, 2016, "Conditional Arbiters: the Limits of Political Party Influence in Presidential Nominations," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 2016, 49 (4): 709-715.

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[75] Howard L. Reiter, 1985, Selecting the president: The nominating process in transition. University of Pennsylvania Press; Byron E. Shafer, 1988, Bifurcated politics: Evolution and reform in the national party convention, Harvard University Press.

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