The Consequences of Changing Primary Participation Laws

for Party Registration and Partisanship

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Most concerns over primary participation rules, such as open versus closed, speculate about their influence on the composition of the primary electorate. Political scientists, however, over a period of 60 years have demonstrated an alternative effect. Primary participation rules shape people's partisan identities. In the broadest sense, closed primary rules encourage individuals to think of themselves as partisans, while open primary rules encourage people to identity as independents. In this paper, we examine how changing primary participation rules affects patterns of party registration and party identification across the 50 states.

Classifying State Primary Participation Rules

The classification of primary participation rules begins with whether or not a state asks voters to state a party preference on the voter registration form. Thirty states do so. This process produces party registration or party enrollment. This party registration is a legal classification of the public. The other twenty states do not ask for party preference on the voter registration form, so party registration does not exist in these states. However, party identification is an attitude, and it occurs across all 50 states.

States with party registration have two forms of primary participation laws. Closed primary laws required registration as a partisan in order to vote in a primary. Those who fail to register as a partisan cannot vote in any primary. Closed primary rules result in more voters

registering as partisans. The other format for states with party registration is that semi-closed primary. In these states, registered partisans are confined to their own party's primary while registered independents choose in which party's primary they wish to vote. Semi-closed primary rules encourage people to register as independents. The format of the semi-closed primary rules actually are quite varied. In some states, an independent who votes in a partisan primary becomes a registered partisan. How long this new partisan registration lasts also varies by state. In New Hampshire, voters simply change their enrollment back to independent as they leave the polling place. In other states, voters would need to change their registration at a later date. In some states, the independent registration is not altered by participating in a partisan primary. A third type of semi-closed primary state is one that allows any voter to alter their party registration on the poll on Election Day as they have Election Day voter registration.

States without party registration have two types of open primaries. In pure open primary states, voters are able to choose a party's primary ballot in secret. One form is for voters to receive a ballot with each party's candidates listed, such as in separate columns, and voters choose to vote in one of the party's primary. Pure open primary do not provide an incentive for voters to identify as a partisan, so more would adopt an independent identification. The second format of open primaries is the semi-open primary. In these states, voters must tell the election official which party's ballot they wish to receive. In some of the semi-closed primary states, voters may face an oath of party loyalty or the possibility of a public challenge (e.g. Indiana, Texas). In other semi-open primary states a public record is kept of which party's primary a voter participated in (e.g. Alabama, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Virginia). In other semi-open primary states, participation in one party's primary precludes participation in

any run-off primary of the other party (e.g. Georgia, Texas). The public declaration of support for a party and other consequences result in more people viewing themselves as partisans in these semi-open compared to the pure open primary states.

This four-fold classification of primary participation rules is the one used by many scholars studying primaries (Boatright 2014; Holbrook, Thomas M. and Raymond J. La Raja 2008; McGhee, Masket, Short, Rogers and McCarty 2014; Norrander 1989). Recent reforms created a fifth category of a top-two primary. In these primaries, candidates from all parties are consolidated on one ballot. Voters select one candidate for each elective office and can switch back and forth between voting for a Democratic or Republican candidate. California and Washington State adopted this format after the Supreme Court overturned the blanket primary. Louisiana has its own form of top-two primary sometimes called a "jungle primary." In on-year elections this "primary" is held on the general election date, and if no candidate wins a majority, a run-off election is held later. In odd-year state elections, the primary is held before Election Day, but if a candidate receives 50 percent of the vote in the primary they are elected.

Clarifying the Distinction between Party Registration versus Party Identification

Political science research when investigating Americans' party preferences is overwhelming referring to an attitudinal orientation toward the parties known as "party identification" or "partisanship." Party identification is viewed as a stable, long-term attitude toward the parties that does not easily change (Campbell *et al*. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). Almost all Americans identify either as a Democrat, a Republican or an

independent. An independent is someone who does not view themselves as a partisan, although most independents "lean" toward one party over the other. In today's polarized politics, party identification has become part of Americans' social identities (Mason 2018). As party identification is solely an attitude, it is measured through public opinion polls.

"Party registration" or "party enrollment" is a legal definition of party attachment that affects participation in primary elections in 30 states. The other 20 states do not ask for party preference on their voter registration form. Thus, party identification exists across all 50 states, while party registration occurs in 30 states. Conceptually party registration and party identification are distinct, but in voters' minds the two may be linked such that primary participation rules shape party identification as well as party registration. Further, voters may easily confuse the two related concepts believing their party registration is their party identification, or vis versa.

Prior Research on Connection between Primary Laws and Partisan Identities

Sixty years of research demonstrating a link between primary participation rules and voters' party identification begins with the classic voting behavior text -- *The American Voter*. Campbell and his coauthors (1960: 268-76) test the influence of the political context on voters' party identification. These authors create a scale of state laws, including a classification of primaries as open, closed or blanket, to measure the extent to which state laws facilitated a party attachment. They find that "Voters governed by rules most likely to promote partisanship are most likely to be strong party identifiers and least likely to classify themselves as Independents" (269). Norrander (1989) conducts an aggregate-level analysis connecting the

percent of self-identified independents in a state to primary participation rules, levels of intraparty competition and organizational strengths of state parties. She finds that states with primary participation rules that require a legal attachment to the parties in order to participate (i.e., closed primaries) have fewer independents, while states that have no restrictions on primary participation (i.e., open primaries) have more independents.   She also notes that other variations of primary elections also influence partisan identities. For example, semi-closed primaries, where independent may vote in either party's primaries, produce high numbers of registered independents and high numbers of independent identifiers.

Other research demonstrates the link between party registration and people's party identification. Finkel and Scarrow (1985) and Thornburg (2014) demonstrate that in states that ask for party designation on voter registration forms, e.g., party enrollment, that this legal classification generally matched voters' self-described partisan identities. Likewise, Burden and Greene (2000) establish that people are more likely to view themselves as independents if they live in a state that does not ask for party designation on voter registration forms.

Altogether, these research articles demonstrate a strong connection between state primary laws, party registration and party identification.   Much of this research presumes a causal link between primary laws, or party registration, and party identification. Thus, the authors of *The American Voter* argue that state laws "promote partisanship" (Campbell et al 1960: 269).   Burden and Greene (2000) use self-perception theory to argue that the process of registering as a partisan is a behavior that shapes a person's self-perception as a partisan, especially for those who may have weaker preferences for the party. The above studies rely on cross-sectional data that can establish a link but not demonstrate causality between primary

laws and voter's party identification. However, a recent field experiment by Gerber, Huber and Washington (2010) finds that when previously unaffiliated voters are reminded of the need to enroll in a party in order to vote in a closed primary that their partisan attachments become stronger. In this paper we examine causality by examining state-level trends in party registration and party identification across 20 years (1996 – 2016) and match these trends to whether states maintained consistent primary participation rules or altered them. If primary rules shape partisan identities, changing primary rules should alter trends in both party registration and party identification.

Stability and Change in State Primary Laws: 1996 – 2016

In examining direct primary laws over 20 years (1996 – 2016), states fall into five categories. The first four categories are for states that had a consistent primary participation rule across all 20 years. These consistent categories are closed, semi-closed, semi-open and open. With consistent primary participation rules over 20 years, we expect little changes in the influence of these rules on party identification. The fifth category includes states that changed their primary participation rules over this time period. When states change their primary participation rules, voters should react in changing their patterns for both party registration and party identification. In the 1996 – 20016 time period, ten states altered their primary participation format. We gathered information on primary participation rules for all 50 states over this time period from a number of sources. In classifying states by primary participation rules, we relied on a number of sources. Foremost is Congressional Quarterly's *The America Votes* series of election books. Along with yearly results for top elective posts, these books provide a description of primary participation rules for each state. Additional information on

primary participation rules came from other scholars and organizations (Holbrook and La Raja 2008; McGhee and Krimm 2010; Rogowski and Langella 2015).[1]

States that changed their primaries laws between 1996 and 2016 did so for various reasons. Two Supreme Court cases shaped some of these recent changes. In *Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut*, 479 U.S. 208 (1986) the Court rules that a political party has the First Amendment associational rights to determine who votes in their primary. In this case, the Court ruled that the Republican Party in Connecticut could allow registered independents to vote in its primary even though the state of Connecticut had closed primaries rules. *In California Democratic Party v. Jones*, 530 U.S. 567 (2000) the Court struck down the blanket primary. Once again, the Court reasoned that this primary format violated the political parties First Amendment freedom of association. The U.S. Supreme Court in a variety of cases from the late 20th and early 21st century ruled in favor of political parties based on their associational rights (e.g. *Eu v. San Francisco County Democratic Committee*, 489 US 214, 1989)

Several states (e.g. Oregon, South Dakota) reacted to the *Tashjian* decision by codifying the party option into state law, leaving it up to the state parties whether they wanted to allow independents to vote in their primary or to remain with the closed primary format. The semi-closed rule is often more attractive for the minority party in a state, as the minority party hopes to attract independents who would support the party's candidates in the fall election. Thus, the South Dakota Democratic Party in 2009 adopted the semi-closed rules while the majority-

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[1] Additional information on primary participation laws obtained from Project Vote Smart, https://justfacts.votesmart.org/elections/voter-registration.

party Republicans continue to employ the closed format.[2]   Oregon is a traditional closed

primary but allows party leaders to notify the state 90 days prior to a primary on whether the

party wishes to allow independents to vote in its primary. Both parties in Oregon experimented

with the semi-closed format between 1998 and 2002, but since that time both have reverted to

the closed primary format. West Virginia also allows political parties to decide whether to

allow registered independents to participate in their primary, with Democrats allowing

independents to vote in their primaries throughout the 1996 – 2016 period while Republicans

held closed primaries from 1996 to 2006 but opened up the primary to independents in 2008.

Thus, when parties are given the option of being able to determine whether to hold closed or

semi-closed primaries, the format can vary across years and across the two parties.

The Supreme Court's 2000 ban on blanket primaries affected three states. Washington

State adopted the top-two format in 2004 with the passage of Initiative 872. The

implementation of the format was delayed by legal suits from the Democratic, Republican and

Libertarian parties. Lower courts overturned the top-two format, but the U.S. Supreme Court in

2008 overruled them and deemed the top-two format constitutional by a 7-2 vote. [3] The

Court's majority argued that the top-two format is not choosing candidates by party so it does

not violate the parties' First Amendment rights. Washington first used the top-two format in

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[2] South Dakota adopted a law for party option in 1996. https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/democrats-open-primary-to-independents/article_201d5b71-b0a7-5d89-8d15-279e466ea4a7.html

[3] *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party*, 552 US 442 (2008).

2008. The state used open primaries in the period between the ban on blanket primaries and

the judicial support of top-two primaries.[4]

California changed it primary format several times during this time period. California

traditionally held closed primaries. California switched to a blanket primary after approving

Proposition 198 in 1996. After the Supreme Court overturn blanket primaries in 2000,

California held semi-closed primaries from 2001 to 2011. The top-two primary format was

adopted with the passage of Proposition 14 in 2010 and took effect with the 2012 election

cycle. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger backed the top-two format asserting it

would produce more moderate candidates as both party's candidate would need to court

supporters from the other party in order to win one of the top two spots. Other proponents of

the two-two format asserted it would give primary voters a larger choice of candidates and give

independent voters a greater role in the nomination process. In addition, this would boost

turnout in primary elections. Opponents of the top-two format argued it would make primary

campaigns more expensive, hurt the two major parties' ability to select their own candidates,

and disadvantage minor parties, as their candidates would rarely place among the top two slots

(Green 2016).

Alaska is the third former blanket primary states. After 2000, the Republican Party in

Alaska consistently held semi-closed primaries.   Beginning in 2004, the Alaska Democratic Party

held a "combined party" ballot with a variety of smaller parties (Alaskan Independence Party,

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[4] Ballotpedia, accessed May 7, 2021, https://ballotpedia.org/Top-two_primary.

Libertarian Party, and Green Party).[5] Voters registered with any of these parties received a

consolidated primary ballot, and the candidate from each party receiving the most votes is

nominated. The parties on the combined ballot allowed registered independent to

participation, and in most years these parties allowed any registered voter to participate.

Another change in primary format is coming in the future. Alaska voters in 2020 adopted a top-

four format for their primaries (state executive, state legislature and Congress.) A top-four

primary is similar to a top-two primary except that four candidates' names are placed on the

general election ballot. Along with the change in Alaska's primary ballot, Alaska adopted

ranked-choice voting for their general elections.

Arizona switched from closed primaries to semi-closed rules for its direct primaries

when Proposition 103 passed in 1998, with 2000 being the first use of the semi-closed primary.

In 1998 the state legislature proposed a referendum to switch to a semi-closed primary due to

fears about a competing voter initiative to switch to a blanket primary (Duda 2011). The

initiative failed to make the ballot due to an insufficient number of valid signatures, but

Proposition 103 was approved by the voters with 69 percent. Arizona voters rejected a

proposal for a top-two primary in 2012 (Proposition 121) with 67 percent voting no. Arizona's

presidential primaries, however, remain closed

Idaho and Utah recently moved toward closed primaries. Utah has a tradition of

nominating candidates by conventions, and if a candidate receives 60 percent of the vote at the

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[5] The Alaska Green Party lost its ballot qualification in 2008 and no longer appears on the combined party ballot. In 2020, the Alaska Libertarian Party lost its ballot qualification.   For a review of Alaska's primary rules see "Alaska's Primary Election History," Alaska Division of Elections, http://www.elections.alaska.gov/doc/forms/H42.pdf (accessed April 19, 2021).

convention that candidate can become the nominee without holding a primary. With a split

vote at the convention, only the top two candidate names are forwarded to the primary. A

candidate also can qualify for the primary by collecting signature, though this method was

rarely used in the past. However, Mitt Romney used the signature method to be placed on the

Republican 2018 senatorial primary. Still, primary elections in Utah are rare. The primaries that

do occur are run by the parties rather than the state government. Utah Republicans choose to hold

closed primaries. Utah Democrats hold open primaries, most likely because Utah has more

registered independents than registered Democrats.[6]

In 2011, Idaho adopted closed primaries but allows parties to inform state officials if

they choose to hold a semi-closed primary. Idaho does have Election Day registration which

would allow any voter to change their party affiliation at the polls for a primary election. The

change in format was due to a federal court decision, *Idaho Republican Party v. Ysura*, (765

F.Supp.2d 1266 (2011).   In that suit, the Republican Party claimed the prior open primaries

violated its First Amendment right of freedom of association.[7]

State Trends in Party Registration and Party Identification

Prior research suggests that primary laws are linked to voter registration patterns and

party identification. In particular, closed and semi-open primaries have been linked to fewer

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[6] Julia Ritchey, May 25, 2018, "How to Vote in Utah's Primary Election if You're Unaffiliated," KUER, https://www.kuer.org/post/how-vote-utahs-primary-elections-if-youre-unaffiliated#stream/0. Statewide totals for partisan registration in Utah only available since 2014. Unaffiliated voters may register as Republicans on primary election day at the polls and become eligible to vote in the Republican primary. "How Elections Work in Utah" https://www.actionutah.org/how-elections-work-in-utah/ (accessed June 28, 2019).
[7] "Primary Elections in Idaho," Idaho Secretary of State, https://sos.idaho.gov/elect/primary_elections_in_idaho.html accessed May 7, 2021.

independents, while semi-closed and open primaries are linked to larger numbers of

independents (Norrander 1989). Thus, for states that maintain consistent primary participation

laws we expect consistent patterns that fit with those expectations. For states that altered

their primary participation laws we expect more changes in independent voter registration and

party identification.

To demonstrate the effect of primary participation laws on party registration and party

identification, we set up statistical models to measure the amount of linear change in

independent registration and independent identification from 1996 to 2016 for each of the 50

states. Independent registration figures came from each state's official election website,

usually the website of the state secretary of state. State party identification values came from

the media exit polls for presidential and off-year elections. [8] An OLS regression model was run

for each state. The dependent variable is the percent of registered independents or self-

identified independents in each election year. A year count from 0 (1996) to 20 (2016)

indicates the presence of a linear trend. The regression coefficient for the year count variable

gives the average percentage point increase (or decrease) in independent registration or

identification per year. The constant from the regression analysis indicates the percent of

independents at the beginning of the time span. Results are presented in Table 1 for closed

and semi-closed primary states.

Among the 10 states that held consistently closed primary across the 20-year time

period, most began with relatively low numbers of registered independents (as signified by the

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[8] These exit polls were not conducted in every state for each election year, so the number of values for
independent identification varied.

constant for the regression equation). The median value of the constant indicates these states

in the 1996 averaged 11.80 percent for registered independents. Most of these states had

modest increases in registered independents as signified by the b values.   The median change

was .18 percentage points increase for each year.   Florida and New Mexico stand out with

larger increases in the number of registered independents. Florida's increase in independent

voter registration is found among younger, Hispanic and Asian voters (MacManus 2018). In

addition, new residents arriving from other states may be less familiar with Florida's closed

primary law and the need to register as a partisan to participate (Binder 2020). The growth in

independent registration in New Mexico has also been among younger voters (Metzger 2021).

Party identification patterns, versus party registration patterns, may show more

fluctuation across election years. People rarely go through the process of changing their party

registration, but their perception of their own partisan preferences may alter with changing

issues or particular candidates. Still, we expect to find patterns similar for party registration

and party identification. For the closed primary states, the percent of residents identifying as

independents at the start of the 20-year period averaged 17.91 percent, a bit higher than the

11.80 percent registered as independents. The growth in independent identification for these

closed primary states was modest, at .21 percentage points per year. The lower average R^2,

compared to that for party registration, indicates more noise in the trends for party

identification than for party registration. This would be expected in that attitudes are more

likely to fluctuate than the legal status of party registration.

Particular closed primary states that stand out for trend in party identification include

Nevada with a large increase (b = 1.07) and to a lesser extent, Florida (b = .76) and New Mexico

(b = .71). Connecticut and Delaware show a slight decline in independent identification.

Nevada is a state with a growing population, and these new residents can add to the number of self-identified independents. Nevada also is a state with a changing partisan pattern moving toward the Democratic Party in recent elections. These changes show up in the party identification trends, as new voters and voters changing partisan preferences may gravitate to the independent identification. However, to be able to vote in Nevada's closed primary, these voters will need to register as partisans, leading to the lower rate of change for Nevada's percent of registered independents. Florida and New Mexico also saw a relatively high increase in the number of self-identified independents to match their growth in the number of registered independents. New Mexico appears to be mimicking a broader national pattern of an increasing urban – rural divide and an increase in independent voters (Metzer 2020). Florida's increase in independent identification can be linked to people moving in from other states, younger voters and immigrant groups (Michael Binder quoted in Stanfield 2020).

Semi-closed primary states should have large numbers of independents both in terms of voter registration and party identification. However, since these states have not changed their primary laws, we expect little overtime change in these patterns. Data in Table 1 confirm these expectations. Among the semi-closed primary state, independent registration was high in the 1996, with the median value of 32.33 percent. Only modest growth occurred in the numbers registering as independents, with the average increase of .18 percentage points with each passing year. That is the same level of growth in independent registration as found in the closed primary states. Patterns for independent party identification are the same, a high initial

number of independent identifiers, with a median value of 27.80 percent, and little over-time change, with the median value for the b coefficient of .22.

Semi-closed primary states with unusual registration patterns include New Hampshire and North Carolina which experienced steeper growths in registered independents while New Jersey experienced a decline in registered independents. The details of a semi-closed primary may explain the different trends. In New Hampshire unaffiliated voters need to register as a partisan at the polls on Election Day, but they can unenroll in the party by filling out a form prior to leaving the polling location. This easy switch back to unaffiliated status allows the number of registered independents in New Hampshire to remain the same or increase over time. In addition, younger voters in New Hampshire are more likely than either long-term or new residents in the state to register as independents (Johnson, Scala and Smith 2016). In New Jersey, unaffiliated voters also can enroll in a party on primary election day, but they do not have the opportunity to change back registration at the polls. To return to unaffiliated status, voters in New Jersey need to file a party affiliate form with their county government. Having to file a subsequent registration form to return to unaffiliated status may lead to fewer voters doing so and could explain the decrease in independent (e.g. unaffiliated status) voters in New Jersey over time. Unaffiliated voters in North Carolina may choose to vote in either the Democratic or Republican Party primary and this does not change their unaffiliated registration status. Thus, the North Carolina rule allows individuals to remain registered as "independent" when voting in a partisan primary and incentivizes them to do so. These nuanced primary participation rules, however, do not explain all the patterns for the semi-closed primary states. Rhode Island has the same rules as New Hampshire but experienced a decline in independent

registration.   Rhode Island had a very high level of independent registration in 1996 at 54.67

percent, so the decline in independent registration may be a "regression toward the mean"

effect.

Patterns for party identification among the semi-closed primary states differ slightly

from those for party registration. As was true for closed primary states, trends in party

registration are more easily explained than trends in independent identification, as signified by

the smaller average R^2. The Colorado data show that trends in registration may not match that

of partisanship. While Colorado shows little growth in independent registration, it does show a

high level of increase in independent identification. Colorado is a state moving from being a

Republican state to more competitive, and perhaps, even a Democratic state as growth in

urban areas, such as in Denver, has changed the partisan hue of the electorate. In Colorado

voting in a partisan primary does not change the unaffiliated status of voters. In contrast,

North Carolina experienced both a high level of growth in independent registration and

independent identification across this time period.

Semi-open and open primary states do not have party registration, so only independent

identification trends can be measured as shown in Table 2. The semi-open primary states had a

beginning value for independent identification closer to that of closed rather than semi-closed

primary states. This matches previous research which found lower levels of independent

identifiers in these two types of states (Norrander 1989). Both a legal connection to a party,

through party registration, and a social pressure connection to a party, through declaring for a

party's primary ballot, lead to more partisans and fewer independents in these states. The

semi-open primary states show a greater increase in independent identification than did the

closed or semi-closed states. Three states in particular had larger increases: Arkansas, Tennessee and Texas. Arkansas had a relatively late southern realignment from Democrat to Republican. An increase in independent identification can accompany the split voting patterns that may occur during a secular realignment.

Open primary states began the 20-year time period with a median value of 26.91 percent self-identified independents. This value nearly matches that of the semi-closed primary states. Thus, these patterns confirm prior research which found the greatest number of self-identified independents in the open and semi-closed primary states as both sets of rules encourage independent identification (Norrander 1989). The median increase in independent identification for open primary states (.255) is also most similar to that of the semi-closed states. Montana and Vermont saw the highest growth in independent identification, but these values are more modest than the increases in independent identification for the other three types of primary laws.

The final category of states, presented in Table 3, are states that altered their primary laws over the course of the 20 years. However, some of these changes were modest or short-lived. Oregon falls into this category because state law leaves it up to the parties whether or not to allow registered independents to vote in their primaries. Between 1998 and 2002 one or the other of the two parties chose to hold semi-closed primaries. However, since 2004 both parties have consistently held closed primaries. Thus, the values for Oregon look like a more typical closed primary state registration with minimal change in party registration. However, Oregon did have a larger increase in independent identification which may be tied to its change to an increasingly more reliable Democratic state. Alaska and Washington also had more

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modest changes in their primary structures. Both had blanket primaries prior to the 2000

Supreme Court overturning this structure. Washington eventually adopted a top-two primary

while Alaska's two parties chose slightly different responses. Alaska Democrats tend to have

almost an open primary allowing any registered voter to participate in their primary held in

conjunction with Alaska's minor parties. The Alaska Republican Party tends to hold semi-closed

primaries. As such, Alaska experienced a very small increase in registered independents,

although it had a larger increase in self-identified independent identification. Washington State

does not have party registration and its switch from the blanket to the top two format did not

alter the ability of voters to cast ballots across the two parties in a single primary election.

Thus, Washington State had a large number of independents at the beginning of the 20-year

period but more modest growth over time. Louisiana always had its own unique take on

primaries and had some modest changes between on and off-year elections. Still, Louisiana

experienced an increase in both independent registration and independent identification

during this time as its jungle primary allows voters to select candidates from either party.

Idaho and Utah both recently adopted party registration and a mixture of primary

formats. Utah began the process of switching to party registration in 2002 and required it by

2010. As it adopted its party registration, its primary format switched mostly to the semi-

closed format (although in 2016 and 2018 the Utah Republican Party held closed primaries).

Nominations in Utah also were frequently adopted through the convention system, making

primary elections less important. There is not enough of a time-series for party registration in

Utah to develop a regression model and the change in independent identification was modest.

Idaho began party registration in 2011. As such it moved away from its previous open primary

format to mostly semi-closed primaries on the Democratic side and closed primaries for the Republican Party. Idaho, like Utah, does not have a sufficient number of years with party registration to assess a trend for those data. Among party identification the negative coefficient suggests a slight decline in independent identification with the adoption of party registration.

The change in primary format in South Dakota occurred only for the Democratic primaries. Beginning in 2010 the Democratic primary switched from closed to semi-closed. However, the Republican Party maintained the closed format throughout this time period. The registration trends for South Dakota show a middling increase of .50 while the change in independent identification was more modest. West Virginia also saw a difference in primary formats for the Democratic versus Republican parties. The Republican Party consistently held semi-closed primaries throughout the 20 year period, while the Democratic Party switched from closed primaries to semi-closed primaries in 2008. The more consistent semi-closed primary format after 2008 may account for the somewhat larger increases in both independent registration and identification in West Virginia. West Virginia, too, had a relatively late southern realignment.

Arizona and California both switched away from closed primaries in the late 1990s. Arizona's proposition passed in 1998, with 2000 being the first use of the semi-closed primary. Arizona had the largest increases in registered independents (b = 1.21) and self-identified independents (b = 1.23) of any of the 50 states across these 20 years. The switch to a semi-closed primary incentivized independent registration, or at least reduced the legal pressures, to register as a partisan. A change in party registration was accompanied by a change in partisan

identities. California's experiment of moving away from closed primaries and eventually ending up with the top-two format also increased independent registration and self-identification, although not at the magnitude as happened in Arizona. However, both states are similar in that under closed primary rules they had low rates of independent registration (Arizona at 14 percent and California at 11 percent in 1996) and self-identification (Arizona at 16 percent and California at 16 in 2016). While twenty years later under different primary rules both had higher levels of independent registration rates of 23 percent (California) and 35 percent (Arizona) and independent self-identification at 30 percent (California) and 40 percent (Arizona). Changing primary rules changes rates of party registration and partisan self-identification.

Moving Beyond Partisan versus Independent Categories

Party registration figures only allow a classification of partisan or independent. Likewise, the state exit poll data on party identification only include a partisan or independent selection. However, the more typical party identification scale used by social scientists provides a more nuanced look at party identification with partisans divided into strong versus weak and independents into leaning and pure independents. Prior research also tended not to investigate the patterns of primary participation rules on these more nuanced categories of party identification. In this paper, we take a first look at the overall pattern between primary participation rules and the four intensity categories for party identification. To do so, we need

survey data from the 50 states. We turned to the CCES cumulative file using respondents from

2016 and 2018 surveys.[9]

Table 4 looks at the proportion of respondents within each of the four partisan intensity

categories by the different formats of primaries. In this analysis, we include Oregon as closed

and Arizona as semi-closed as these were the formats in place during the 2016-2018 time

period. Looking at the pattern for strong partisans, the largest proportions are found in closed

and semi-open primary states. This reflects the pattern in previous research for a single

partisan category. Closed primaries also have more weak partisans than the semi-closed, semi-

open or open primary formats. The proportions of pure independents does not vary as much

across the primary formats. That leaves the leaning independent category responsible for

much of the previously found patterns for independent identification. Closed primary states

have the lowest proportion of leaning independents, while semi-closed and open primary

states have the highest proportions. More research is necessary to clarify the influence of

primary participation laws on the full range of party identification categories.

Conclusion

Prior research presented evidence that primary participation rules are related to

patterns in party identification. Some primary types (closed, semi-open) were associated with

more partisans while others lined up with more independents (semi-closed, open). This prior

research, however, was mostly cross-sectional and did not allow for examining patterns over

[9] Kuriwaki, Shiro, 2021, "Cumulative CCES Common Content", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/II2DB6, Harvard Dataverse, V6; guide_cumulative_2006-2020.pdf [fileName] and Kuriwaki, Shiro, 2021, "Cumulative CCES Common Content", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/II2DB6, Harvard Dataverse, V6

time, especially when primary formats may change. Our research on patterns in party registration and party identification over a 20-year period confirmed prior research on the relationship between the four primary formats and partisan patterns. Although variations in states within specific types of primary formats suggest that other factors contribute to changes in party registration and party identification patterns. Some of these other causes may be changing demographic composition of a state's electorate and effects from realigning states. Future multivariate analysis will include these and other potential influences on trends in state-level party registration and party identification. One pattern that was confirm by our research is that changing primary participation rules does change the propensity to register as a partisan versus independent and whether a person identifies as an independent. In this paper we also briefly introduced the influence of primary rules on the more nuanced categories of partisan strength: strong partisans, weak partisans, leaning independents and pure independents. Future research will ascertain more of the influence of primary participation rules versus other institutional and personal factors in shaping the full nature of partisanship among American voters.

Table 1: Trends in Independent Registration and Independent Identification by Primary

Type between 1996 and 2016 for Closed and Semi-Closed Primary States.

State	Independent registration			Independent identification		
	b	constant	R2	b	constant	R2
CLOSED						
Connecticut	0.09	40.93	0.16	-0.33	35.98	0.37
Delaware	0.10	22.48	0.74	-0.12	25.09	0.05
Florida	0.65	14.40	0.97	0.76	18.30	0.87
Kentucky	0.05	6.35	0.40	0.32	12.61	0.39
Maryland	0.04	10.66	0.01	0.11	19.21	0.13
Nevada	0.27	12.93	0.86	1.07	15.35	0.94
New Mexico	0.51	8.94	0.98	0.71	17.51	0.89
New York	0.04	19.80	0.46	0.14	22.65	0.19
Oklahoma	0.35	6.48	0.89	0.00	12.44	0.00
Pennsylvania	0.26	8.52	0.92	0.27	15.98	0.51
median	0.18	11.80	0.80	0.21	17.91	0.38
SEMI-CLOSED						
Colorado	0.18	32.33	0.60	0.84	25.36	0.90
Iowa	0.03	36.76	0.01	0.25	28.72	0.55
Kansas	0.29	24.43	0.95	0.30	19.81	0.60
Maine	-0.02	37.14	0.01	0.22	35.03	0.37
Massachusetts	0.27	47.80	0.89	-0.05	42.06	0.01
Nebraska	0.43	11.90	0.97	-0.07	21.76	0.02
New Hampshire	0.60	32.10	0.79	0.31	38.85	0.55
New Jersey	-0.51	56.99	0.48	0.08	27.80	0.10
North Carolina	0.92	11.06	0.99	0.80	15.04	0.91
Rhode Island	-0.35	54.67	0.37	0.02	41.37	0.00
Wyoming	0.08	10.34	0.15	-0.23	21.33	0.30
median	0.18	32.33	0.60	0.22	27.80	0.37

Table 2: Trends in Independent Identification by Primary Type between 1996 and 2016 for Open and Semi-Open Primary States.

| | Independent Identification | | |
	b	constant	R2
SEMI-OPEN			
Alabama	0.02	18.72	0.00
Arkansas	0.64	24.79	0.56
Georgia	0.47	18.99	0.63
Illinois	-0.04	25.75	0.02
Indiana	0.41	18.9	0.52
Mississippi	0.26	12.74	0.30
Ohio	0.44	21.57	0.68
South Carolina	0.05	21.69	0.03
Tennessee	0.91	19.51	0.82
Texas	0.67	20.63	0.59
Virginia	0.15	23.28	0.30
median	0.41	20.63	0.52
OPEN			
Hawaii	0.34	29.02	0.12
Michigan	0.29	23.7	0.65
Minnesota	-0.03	26.68	0.00
Missouri	0.22	22.9	0.21
Montana	0.49	27.14	0.30
North Dakota	-0.16	31.74	0.12
Vermont	0.44	32.49	0.29
Wisconsin	0.18	24.82	0.21
median	0.255	26.91	0.21

Table 3: Trends in Independent Registration and Independent Identification for States that

Changed Primary Type between 1996 and 2016.

State	Independent registration			Independent identification		
	b	constant	R2	b	constant	R2
Alaska	0.08	51.81	0.32	0.97	29.11	0.70
Arizona	1.21	13.69	0.97	1.23	16.19	0.92
California	0.60	11.56	0.98	0.75	15.28	0.91
Idaho				-0.19	23.97	0.34
Louisiana	0.62	14.42	0.96	0.51	14.98	0.71
Oregon	0.23	19.60	0.55	1.02	21.20	0.95
South Dakota	0.50	10.13	0.90	0.21	16.18	0.69
Utah				0.30	19.89	0.29
Washington				0.69	29.06	0.64
West Virginia	0.72	5.36	0.98	0.63	12.62	0.66
median	0.60	13.69	0.96	0.66	18.04	0.70

Table 4: Using proportions to test for statistical significance when clustered by state

	Closed	Semi-Closed	Semi-Open	Open	Other
Strong Partisan	.50[bde]	.46[ac]	.50[b]	.46[ae]	.45[ac]
Weak Partisan	.24[bcd]	.19[ae]	.20[ae]	.20[ae]	.24[bcd]
Leaner	.17[bcde]	.22[ac]	.20[abd]	.23[ac]	.21[a]
Pure indep	.09[bc]	.12[a]	.10[a]	.11	.10
Total %	1.00	.99	1.00	1.00	1.00
N. of Cases	10,650	6,041	12,466	4,520	5,624

Data from CCES cumulative file, 1996 and 1998

a = statistically different from closed primaries at .05 level

b = statistically different from semi-closed primaries at .05 level

c = statistically different from semi-open primaries at .05 level

d = statistically different from open primaries at .05 level

e = statistically different from other primaries at .05 level

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