Chapter Five

Campaign Finance in U.S. House Primary and General Elections[1]

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Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between U.S. House primary and general elections, focusing specifically on campaign finance. In the chapter, we assess how competitiveness in primaries may correspond to competitiveness in general elections, and investigate the sources of campaign funding for these races. We find similarities in primary and general election funding patterns, and a broad association between electoral competitiveness and candidate spending. We also find that non-incumbents in primary elections receive little PAC funding, and that they rely on personal funds far more than incumbents do.

To guide our analysis, we first consider contrasting perspectives on the expected patterns of competitiveness and funding in congressional primaries. We find one such perspective in the goals of the reform movements that led to the creation of congressional primaries. Most basically, the goal of these reform movements was to increase accountability to the voters.[2] One indication that congressional primaries are currently serving this purpose would be relatively high levels of

congressional primary competitiveness. In our campaign finance data, we interpret approximate equality in candidate spending as an indication of competitiveness, with a lopsided funding ratio being suggestive of noncompetitiveness.

The need to establish primaries as an avenue of accountability was most acute in districts where there was little interparty competition, as normally was the case in the many large, eastern cities and in the Deep South early in the 20th century. In such districts, primary elections afforded the only realistic opportunity to displace an ineffective, unresponsive, or corrupt incumbent. A finding of relatively high levels of congressional primary competitiveness in districts where general elections are the *least* competitive, with lower levels of primary competitiveness in districts where a healthy measure of two party competition does exist, would suggest that primaries are serving this specific purpose.

For a contrasting perspective on what might turn up in our data, we draw upon the modern scholarly literature on congressional elections, specifically upon the concept of "candidate quality" and the "strategic politicians" theory of congressional candidacy developed by Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell.[3] A quality candidate is one who has political experience or other credentials that should enable him or her to attract substantial voter support. Elections involving incumbents are almost never competitive unless a quality challenger enters the contest.

Being politically savvy and understanding the sacrifices involved in seeking election to Congress, quality candidates make strategic choices about when and where to run.[4] They base these choices largely on their prospects for success. Given the low probability of defeating an incumbent in a general election and the even lower probability of beating one in a primary, quality candidates will often wait for opportunities to run for open seats, challenging incumbents in general elections selectively, and rarely challenging them in primaries. Thus, the strategic

politicians theory predicts that primaries involving incumbents will seldom be competitive, and that opposition party primaries in districts where an incumbent seeks reelection will less often be competitive than open seat primaries. The exceptions are most likely to occur when an incumbent appears to be highly vulnerable. These highly vulnerable incumbents are likely to attract quality general election challengers as well as quality primary challengers. The strategic politicians theory suggests, then, that when competitive primaries involving incumbents do occur, they will often be associated with competitive general elections. This is quite the opposite of the reformers expectation that competitive primaries would offer a recourse to voters in districts with noncompetitive general elections.

Study Design and Methodology

We examine campaign spending and election results in primary and general elections for the U.S. House during the 1992-98 election cycles. Using data from Federal Election Commission (FEC) detailed candidate report files, we merged primary vote data from the published editions of *America Votes*.[5]

One of the difficulties in studying primary election finance is that the FEC does not require candidates to report complete receipts and expenditures for the primary phase. Candidates are required to report twelve days prior to the primary.[6] To derive an estimate of primary spending, we first calculated the number of days between the pre-primary report and the next FEC report submitted. We then computed the average expenditure per day for that period, and added the average expenditure per day times the number of days to the pre-primary expenditures. Although still an estimate, this computation is superior to relying on the pre-primary report or the next regular submission to the FEC.[7]

We excluded Louisiana from our analysis because of its unusual system in which the primary which normally functions as a general election as well.[8] We also excluded several 1996 Texas primaries,[9] special primaries, third-party primaries, and a few other oddities.[10] This left us with 3142 cases.

Findings

We first investigate the general relationship between primaries and the corresponding general elections. In Table 5.1, we list the numbers of primary election defeats and general election defeats for the U.S. House from 1946 to 1998. Since 1946, an average of 6.9 incumbents have been denied renomination in primaries, with wide variability over time. A spike in the data appears in each election immediately following redistricting, when incumbents sometimes ran in radically reconfigured districts, and were occasionally forced to run against each other because two districts were consolidated into one.

Gradually over the past four decades, incumbents have become less likely to lose in a primary. In the 1960s, with pervasive redistricting resulting from Supreme Court malapportionment decisions, the average number of incumbents defeated was 7.4. In the 1970s, the average was 7.6. It dropped to 4.6 in the 1980s, and was 5.4 in the 1990s. We consider this 5.4 mean for the 1990s to be misleading. Nineteen of those who failed to win renomination in the 1990s did so in 1992, after redistricting and the House banking scandal.[11] When this unusual year is removed, the average number of incumbent suffering defeat in a primary was two.

=====Table 5.1 about here=====

We see a somewhat different trend in general elections. The number of incumbents losing in general elections declined from an average of 28.4 in the 1960s, to less than 20 per election in the 1970s, to 17.6 in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the average rose again to 20 per election.

We next consider how a competitive primary election appears to affect the competitiveness of the general election. We define a "competitive" primary as one in which the difference in vote percentage between the first and second place candidates was *less* than 20%.[12] This gives us a measure of competitiveness that applies in two-candidate and multi-candidate elections.[13] We classify contested primaries where the difference between the top two vote-getters was *more* than 20% as "weakly competitive."

In Table 5.2, we present the incumbent's average two-party vote-share according to the competitiveness of the primary election and the type of candidate who won the primary.[14] The findings are fully consistent with the strategic politicians theory. Open seat primaries were the most likely to be competitive, with 49% (192 of 392) meeting this standard. Only 18% of the open seat winners ran unopposed. In contrast, over 70% of the incumbents ran unopposed, and only 51 of 1464 (3%) of the primaries involving incumbents were competitive. Fifty-four percent of the out-party primaries were uncontested; 20% were competitive .

=====Table 5.2 about here=====

We also find predictable associations between the competitiveness of primaries and the competitiveness of the corresponding general elections in Table 5.2. The winners of competitive open-seat primaries fared better in general elections than unopposed or weakly opposed winners, possibly suggesting that open seat primaries are most likely to become competitive when candidates perceive that a primary winner will have good prospects in the general election. Incumbents who won competitive primaries averaged only about 56% in the general election. In

comparison, those who won weakly competitive or unopposed primaries averaged 67% and 69%, respectively. Out-party challengers who won competitive primaries averaged about 37% in general elections, as did those who won weakly competitive primaries. Unopposed out-party challengers averaged only about 32%.

Thus, in the districts where incumbents sought reelection, competitive primaries portended competitive general elections. This is what should occur if challengers respond strategically to perceptions of incumbent vulnerability, entering primaries only when they consider incumbents to be weak.

We regard one other finding involving a very small number of cases as noteworthy. Of the 22 challengers who did beat an incumbent in a primary, 18 went on to win the general election.[15] One would not expect so much general election success for these primary winners in a representative cross section of districts. Almost certainly, many of these must have been one party dominated districts in which the general election provided little opportunity to displace the incumbent, and the primary served the reformers purpose.

How Candidates Fund Their Races

We now assess primary election funding, comparing it with funding for general elections. In Table 5.3, we present the total funding and the percentage of funding from various sources in both primary and general elections.[16] Among the primary winners, incumbents raised twice as much money as open-seat candidates, five times as much as out-party challengers, and about ten imes as much as out-party challengers who went on to lose in the general election. In-party challengers who defeated incumbents collected nearly as much as the incumbents. This finding suggests that when an incumbent runs for reelection, seriously contested primaries in either party

are uncommon. To the extent that funding is appropriate as a measure of competitiveness, this finding conforms with the strategic politicians theory.

===== Table 5.3 about here =====

With respect to sources of funding, we note that most incumbents keep a fundraising operation in place at all times,[17] and as a result, we expect incumbent primary and general election funding patterns to be similar, with the overall total amount raised increasing over the election cycle. We anticipate that open-seat candidates and challengers will collect less political action committee (PAC) funding than incumbents will, and that they have to wait until after the primary to receive much of this funding, especially if their primary is contested. We base this prediction on existing studies of PACs funding act strategies[18] . PACs that follow an access strategy generally contribute to incumbents . They will also contribute to open-seat contests, but usually stay out of primary contests. In contrast, other PACs will implement ideological strategies. Herrnson[19] notes:

> Ideological PACs spend more time searching for promising challengers to support than do PACs that use access-seeking or mixed strategies. Ideological committees are also more likely than other PACs to support nonincumbents in congressional primaries.

The willingness of ideological PACs to fund challengers is, however, conditional. They give money where they think it will make a difference—in competitive elections. Thus, we assume that ideological PACS will normally reserve their contributions to challengers and open seats candidate until after these candidates have emerged from primaries as nominees.

The data pertaining to funding sources are consistent with these expectations. Candidates in every category depended most heavily on individual contributions, with these contributions typically accounting for slightly more than half of the total funding. Incumbents collected a larger

percentage of their funds from PACs than any category of non-incumbent candidates--42%. Open-seat candidates, out-party and in-party challengers received 17%, 13%, and 7%, respectively. After winning the primary election, open-seat candidates and both types of challengers collected a much higher percentage from PACs than they did prior to their primaries. For example, open seat primary winners got17% of their primary funding from PACs, but after the primary, their PAC funding increased to 32% of their total.

The greatest differences between categories of candidates appeared in the self financing of campaigns.[20] "In primaries and the general elections for the House in 1994, some 163 candidates contributed $50,000 or more to their own campaigns."[21] Self financing accounted for only 1% of all spending by incumbents, which makes sense given that incumbents have ready access to many other sources of money. In contrast, open-seat primary winners contributed 18% of their campaign funds, and out-party primary winners, 20%. Self financing accounted for 39% of the funding for primary losers. We find it particularly significant that challengers who *defeated* incumbents provided 53% of their own campaign funds.[22] These data indicate that without self financing, challengers would have had even less money in comparison to incumbents, and on the average, congressional primaries probably would have been even less competitive than they were.

Maisel characterizes self financing as somewhat of a last resort for candidates unable to find money elsewhere. He notes that the "more that is spent on a campaign, the lower he percentage of that expenditure that comes from the candidate."[23] In Table 5.4, we plot candidate self-funding as a percentage of total primary spending for each type of primary. We find a result consistent with Maisel's – a negative correlation between self-funding percentage and total spending for the top two vote-getters in all races: $r = !0.13$ ($p < 0.001$). But this correlation does not control for the type of primary and candidate. We expect candidates to spend more of their

own money if the race is close. When we recalculate candidate self-funding as a percentage of total primary spending, controlling for types of races and candidates, the correlation is positive, meaning that the percentage of self-funding increased as races became more competitive.[24] The relationship was strongest for open-seat and in-party challengers.

=====Table 5.4 about here =====

Spending and Competitiveness

Anticipating a replication of the patterns found in general elections, we expect to find a close association between competitiveness and funding levels in primary elections. Recognizing that competitive elections attract money and that money makes elections competitive, we do not attempt to disentangle the causal relationship between money and competitiveness. Following Herrnson's study of spending and competitive races in the 1996 general election, we define competitive elections to be "contests that were decided by margins of 20% of the vote or less."[25]

In Table 5.5, we calculate the total amount of money spent in a general election (by the two major-party candidates) according to the type of candidate and his or her level of competitiveness.[26] Unopposed incumbents spent about $344,000; compared to $517,000 for those that drew weak competition, and $902,000 for those with strong competition. Uncompetitive open-seat candidates spent $277,791, compared to $670,000 for candidates in competitive open seat races. For challengers who were uncompetitive the average was about $111,000, with $518,000 being the average for competitive challengers.

=====Table 5.5 about here =====

In Table 5.6, we present the comparable results for primary elections. We use only the primary winner in our calculations. Overall, incumbent spending dwarfed challenger spending.

Even incumbents unopposed in the primary spent more than the average competitive open-seat candidate or (out-party) challengers. On average, incumbents spent $265,000 before the primary election, open-seat candidates spent $161,000, and (out-party) challengers spent $57,000.

As we expected, we find that candidates spend more money when primaries are competitive. For example, candidates unopposed in an open seat primaries averaged about $105,000 in expenditures before their primaries. In comparison, weakly opposed open seat candidates averaged about $166,000, and strongly opposed open seat candidates averaged $177,000. The only anomaly in these data is for out-party challengers. They spent more in weakly competitive elections than in competitive ones.[27]

===== Table 5.6 about here =====

The Relationship between Primary Spending and Vote Percentages

Finally, we examine the relationship between primary spending and primary vote percentages. We anticipate that the patterns will be similar to those found in general elections, with more spending corresponding to a larger vote share for open-seat candidates and challengers, but with the reciprocal for incumbents.[28] The major constraint on open seat and challenger spending is candidate's ability to raise money, and the stronger that a candidate appears to be, the more readily the money flows into his or her campaign treasury. In contrast, incumbents can almost always raise substantial sums if they perceive the need to do. When incumbents spend less, it is usually by choice, and usually because they face no opposition or token opposition. When seriously challenged, they normally spend more.

In Table 5.7, we present the data on spending and percentages of vote for the different types of candidates. For the primary election, we use the spending of the top two finishers and the

percentage of the total vote. For the general election, we use the spending of the primary winner and the percentage of the two-party vote.

===== Table 5.7 about here =====

We find the anticipated negative correlation between spending and vote percentage for incumbents, in both primaries and general elections. The negative relationship is somewhat stronger in the general election ($r = !0.40$) than in the primary ($r = !0.26$). The probable explanation for this is that competitive general elections are more common than competitive primaries.

Also as anticipated, we find that open-seat candidates and challengers got more votes as they spent more in both primary and general elections. For open-seat candidates, the coefficient is about the same in primaries ($r = 0.19$) as it is in general elections ($r = 0.22$). For challengers, however, the correlation is much stronger in general elections ($r = 0.51$) than in primaries ($r = 0.17$). We note, however, that for open-seat and challenger primary *winners*, the relationship between spending and vote percentage was *negative* (as it was for incumbents). This suggests that the open-seat and challenger primary *winners* implemented primary spending strategy much as the incumbents did. It appears that when they did not face serious competition in primaries, they reserved their resources for the general election; they spent more only when they perceived a need to do so. The positive overall correlation between primary spending and vote percentage among open-seat candidates and challengers was entirely an artifact spending by the second-place candidates, who did win more significantly more votes as they spent more.

Conclusion

Our data indicate that U.S. House primaries resemble U.S. House general elections in several important respects. We found that about half of all open seat primaries were competitive, but that competitive primaries in districts where incumbents sought reelection were uncommon. Incumbents usually ran unopposed in primaries, and when opposed, they almost always won. Normally outspending their in-party opponents and candidates in the opposition party primary by wide margins, incumbents collected far more money from PACs, and relied much less on self financing in their campaigns. Close primary elections involving incumbents usually seemed to result from a combination of two circumstances: 1) the incumbent appeared to be vulnerable; and 2) a challenger was able to provide significant funding for his or her own campaign.

The data are consistent with the prediction that quality candidates will be strategically reluctant to challenge incumbents. Generally speaking, the data do not support the proposition that primary elections increase the accountability of the U.S. House, but we see room for argument on both sides of the issue. Primaries need not necessarily be competitive to encourage responsiveness to constituents. Regardless of their overall competitiveness, the *existence* of primaries and a the possibility of in-party challenges should help to keep incumbents on their toes, and should especially enhance accountability to in-party activists and interest groups. In addition, we found that when incumbents did encounter strong in-party primary challenges, they were also more likely to find themselves in a competitive general election. This suggests that primary elections sometimes may weaken incumbents, perhaps by reducing their credibility or exhausting resources that would otherwise be available to them in general elections.

On the other side, however, we note that primaries do add substantially to the overall costs and sacrifices associated with seeking election to Congress, and as result, they may create a general disincentive for candidates to run. In this regard, we encourage further investigation of

how primaries may affect the recruitment of out-party candidates. As general election underdogs who must scramble for every dollar and contend with every advantage that incumbency bestows, out-party challengers must feel especially burdened by primaries. Primaries may help them to hone their campaigning skills, but primaries can also wear candidates down, drain their resources, reduce their position taking flexibility, and tarnish their personal images. We can readily envision situations in which possible out-party candidates weigh the low probability of defeating an incumbent against the difficulty of first running in a primary and *then* running in a general election, only to decide to wait for open seat or to seek a different office. If this is occurring with any regularity, then primaries are constricting the out-party candidate field, potentially reducing the incentive for U.S. incumbents to be accountable.

Notes

1. We thank the research assistants who helped us build the data set used for this paper: Brant Avondet, Damon Cann, Nathan Cherpeski, Hannah Michaelsen, Jay Shafer, Kim Spears, Peter Stone, Jon Tanner, and Amanda Telford. Michael Lyons provided valuable comments and suggestions for this chapter. We appreciate the research funds provided by the College of Family Home and Social Sciences at Brigham Young University. Bob Biersack of the Federal Election Commission assisted with the 1998 data, and Rhodes Cook graciously provided data for 1998 primary election voting.

2. V.O. Key. *American State Politics: An Introduction* (New York: Knopf, 1956). Also see chapter two in this volume.

3. Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell. *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections.* 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 13-34.

4. For further discussion on this theme, see Chapter 3 in this volume, "Primary Elections as a Deterrence to Candidacy for the U.S. House of Representatives."

5. We are grateful to Rhodes Cook for providing information before the 1998 edition was published.

Richard M. Scammon and Alice V. McGillivray *America Votes 21*, 1993; Scammon and McGillivray, *America Votes 21* [1994], 1995; Scammon and McGillivray *America Votes 22* [1996], 1997; Scammon, McGillivray, and Rhodes Cook, *America Votes 23* [1998], 1999).

6. Candidates may also file a report thirty days after the primary. Few, if any, do so. Ezra (Marni Ezra "The Benefits and Burdens of Congressional Primary Elections. " Paper prepared for presentation at the 1996 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 18-20, 1996) explains both the theoretical and the practical difficulties of estimating primary

expenditures. She uses an alternative method to the one we use here, isolating money upon primary election voter contact.

7. To compare across years, we adjust the financial data for inflation; all figures are in 1998 dollars.

8. We include Alaska and Washington (and California in 1998) since the top vote-getter in each party advances to the general election. Even though it is a blanket primary, we have divided the votes into the two parties to get the percentage received by each candidate within his or her party.

9. "In August 1996, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, in *Vera et al. v. Bush et al.*, redrew district boundaries, invalidated the results of the primary and runoff elections, and ordered new elections in thirteen congressional districts. In those districts, candidates participated in a special general election on November 5, 1996. Where no candidate received a majority of the vote cast, a runoff election was held on December 10, 1996, between the top two vote-getters, regardless of party." [(Federal Election Commission. Federal Elections 96: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. (Washington, D.C.: Federal Election Commission, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/cover.htm>, 1997)]. The districts were 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 18, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, and 30.

10. In two cases, the incumbent representative runs for senator. When comparing primary and general elections, we exclude cases where the primary winner drops out of the race. Whenever there was a special election in a district during an election cycle, we also exclude the subsequent (regular) primary election, for we have not yet been able to separate the spending in the special and general (primary or general) elections, as a result of inconsistencies in FEC coding.

Finally, we generally omit the four primary elections in which two incumbents ran against each other.

11. While certain elections are thought to be bad for Democrats or Republicans, some elections will be hard on incumbents generally. The most recent example of this was in 1992, which was a bad year for incumbents for two reasons. First, the reapportionment forced five incumbents to run against five other incumbents (in four primary elections, and one general election). Other redistricting changes forced incumbents to adjust to a new constituency. Second, in 1991, the public learned that many House members had bounced checks at the House Bank. In response to this scandal, voters could vote against the incumbent in the general election *and* the primary election. Additionally in 1992, because of redistricting, 4 incumbents defeated other incumbents in the primary (and another incumbent defeated by an incumbent in the general). With such an unusual circumstance and so few cases, we usually do not include it in the analyses that follow.

12. Robert A. Bernstein ("Divisive Primaries Do Hurt: U.S. Senate Races, 1956-1972." *American Political Science Review* 71 (1977): 540-55) and Herrnson (*Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington* 2nd ed (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998)) use the 20% margin to define a competitive general election.

13. Andrew Hacker ("Does a 'Divisive' Primary Harm a Candidate's Election Chances?" *American Political Science Review* 59 (1965): 105-10) defines a divisive primary as one in which the winning candidate receives less than 65%. If one measures by absolute vote percentage, one cannot distinguish between a candidate who defeats one candidate 55 to 45 from a candidate who wins 55% of the vote while three other candidates split 45% evenly. Herrnson and Gimpel (1995) devise a more complex, linear measure which takes into account the primary vote proportion for

all candidates. Since we treat these data as a simple dichotomy, we use the simpler 20% margin.

14. We exclude those cases in which the incumbent lost in the primary election (or primary runoff) to a challenger (N = 22), and cases where the incumbent ran against another incumbent in the primary (N = 4). We also drop candidates such as Dean Gallo of New Jersey's 11th district in 1994; after he won the primary election, he withdrew from the general.

15. All seven challengers who defeated the incumbent by a margin exceeding 20% won the general election. This does not include incumbents who faced other incumbents in primaries, nor the challengers who ran against two incumbents in a primary.

16. Herrnson (*Congressional Elections*, 1998) presents figures for the 1996 general election (Figures 6-4, 6-5, and 6-6). His data are consistent with the results presented here, as are Ezra's for the 1994 election (1996). It is also consistent with data in Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin (*Vital Statistics on Congress, 1999-2000*. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2000, Table 3-8)). In general, all financial data is right-skewed. However, all of our conclusions hold when using the median as a basis for comparison. For ease of exposition we use the mean (average).

17. Gary C. Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections* 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).

18. John R. Wright. *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).

19. Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, 1998.

20. Following Herrnson, "candidate contributions include loans candidates made to their own campaigns" (Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, 1998.

21. Theodore J. Eismeier and Philip H. Pollock, III. "Money in the 1994 Elections and

Beyond." In *Midterm: Elections of 1994 in Context*, edited by Philip A. Kinkner (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

22. The eight incumbents who faced other incumbents in the primary election (not included in the table) are qualitatively similar to other incumbents, except that the four incumbents that lost relied more heavily on PACs (56%) and less heavily on individuals (34%).

23. L. Sandy Maisel. *From Obscurity to Oblivion; Running in the Congressional Primary.* (Revised ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982)

24. The same results hold when examining only the winner in each primary.

25. Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, 1998.

26. For this section, general election spending includes spending that occurred before the primary election. The spending that took place before the primary election likely was affected by (and affected) the competitiveness of the general election race. As Goldenberg and Traugott note, "Incumbents who were vulnerable spent a great deal of money both before and during the general election campaign" (Edie N. Goldenberg and Michael W. traugott. *Campaigning for Congress.* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984). We expect viable challengers and open-seat candidates to do the same.

27. This anomaly disappears when considering the top two finishers in the primary.

28. In this section, we exclude unopposed primaries, since, by definition, spending cannot affect the vote percentage.

Table 5.1: U.S. House Incumbents Retired or Defeated, 1946-1998

Year	Retired	Primary Defeat	General Defeat
1946	32	18	52
1948	29	15	68
1950	29	6	32
1952	42	9	26
1954	24	6	22
1956	21	6	16
1958	33	3	37
1960	26	5	25
1962	24	12	22
1964	33	8	45
1966	22	8	41
1970	29	10	12
1972	40	11	13
1974	43	8	40
1976	47	3	13
1978	49	5	19
1980	34	6	31
1982	40	10	29
1984	22	3	16
1986	40	3	6
1988	23	1	6
1990	27	1	15
1992	65	19	24
1994	48	4	34
1996	49	2	21
1998	33	1	6

Source: Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin (2000), Table 2-7.

Table 5.2: Average U.S. House General Election Percentage by Primary Competitiveness and Candidate Type, 1992-1998

Primary Competitiveness	Incumbent (N)	Open Seat (N)	General Defeat
Unopposed	69.3 (1030)	44.3 (70)	31.7 (692)
Weakly Competitive	67.3 (383)	49.5 (130)	37.0 (337)
Competitive (within 20%)	56.4 (51)	52.3 (192)	37.4 (253)

Source: Compiled from *America Votes.*

Notes: General Election Percentage is percent of two-party vote. Data include candidates who won the primary election and did not drop out of the race before the general election, and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

Table 5.3: Sources of Campaign Receipts in U.S. House Primary and General Elections

			Percentage of Contributions from:				
Candidate	Election Status	Average	PAC	Individual	Candidate	Party	N
Incumbent	Primary Losers	$ 411,879	30 %	58 %	4 %	1 %	22
	Primary Winner	410,873	42	52	1	1	1442
	General	259,912	46	48	1	3	1442
Open Seat	Primary Losers	112,126	63	53	39	0	784
	Primary Winner	215,536	17	63	18	1	392
	General	392,434	32	48	15	8	392
Out-Party	Primary Losers	46,779	5	53	39	0	811
Challenger	Primary Winner	81,607	13	64	20	1	1282
	General	145,939	21	55	18	10	1282
In-Party	Primary Losers	41,784	6	64	36	0	476
Challenger	Primary Winner	328.347	7	39	53	0	22
	General	474,370	24	39	34	5	22

Source: Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: All figures adjusted for inflation (1998 dollars). General election spending is money raised after the primary election. Candidate contributions include loans candidates made to their own campaigns. Primary winner and general election data include candidates who won the primary election and did not drop out of the race before the general election, and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

Table 5.4: Correlation Between Percent Self-funding and Total Spending in U.S. House Primary Elections, 1992-1998

	Correlation (r)	N
All Candidates	-0.13	4522
Incumbents	0.07	1462
Open-Seat Candidates	0.13	717
Out-Party Challengers	0.05	1907
In-Party Challengers	0.16	436

Source: Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: All correlations significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). All figures adjusted for inflation (1998 dollars). Data include top two vote-getters, and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

Table 5.5: Average General Election Spending and Competitiveness, U.S. House, 1992-1998

Candidate Type	Competitiveness (2-Party Vote)	Average Spent	N
Incumbent	Unopposed (100%)	$344,513	164
	Weakly Competitive (60-99%)	517,517	842
	Competitive (< 60%)	902,821	440
Open Seat	Uncompetitive (< 40%)	277,791	88
	Competitive (> 40%)	670,674	304
Challenger	Uncompetitive (< 40%)	111,935	932
	Competitive (> 40%)	518,792	372

Source: Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: All correlations significant at $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). All figures adjusted for inflation (1998 dollars). Data include top two vote-getters, and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

Table 5.6: Average Primary Election Spending and Competitiveness

Candidate Type	Competitiveness (Difference)	Average Spent	N
Incumbent	Unopposed	$ 252,116	1030
	Weakly Competitive	283,274	383
	Competitive (within 20%)	517,117	29
Open Seat	Unopposed	105,632	70
	Weakly Competitive	166,926	130
	Competitive (within 20%)	117,373	192
Out-Party Challenger	Unopposed	39,185	692
	Weakly Competitive	83,050	337
	Competitive (within 20%)	71,421	253
In-Party Challenger	Weakly Competitive	201,389	7
	Competitive (within 20%)	342,239	15

Source: Federal Election Commission data and *American Votes.*

Notes: All figures adjusted for inflation (1998 dollars). Data include candidates who won the primary election and did not drop out of the race before the general election, and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

Table 5.7: Correlation Spending and Vote for U.S. House Primary and General Elections, 1992-1998

Candidate Type	Primary (N)	General (N)
Incumbent	-0.13 (432)	-0.40 (1282)
Open Seat	0.19 (644)	0.22 (392)
Challenger	0.17 (1634)	0.51 (1304)

Source: Federal Election Commission data and *American Votes*

Notes: All correlations in this section are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ (two-tailed). Data exclude unopposed candidates. For the primary election, data include spending of the top two finishers and the percentage of the primary vote. For the general election, data include the total spending of the primary winner and the percentage of the two-party vote.