

Campaign Finance in U.S. House Primary and General Elections

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This chapter explores the relationship between U.S. House primary and general elections, focusing specifically on campaign finance. 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 nonincumbents in primary elections receive little political action committee (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 reduce the power of political machines. A second goal was to increase accountability to the voters.¹ One indication of whether congressional primaries serve 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 twentieth 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 on the modern scholarly literature on congressional elections, specifically on the concept of "candidate quality" and the "strategic politicians" theory of congressional candidacy developed by Jacobson and Kernell.² 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.³ 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*.⁴

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. Rather, candidates are required to report twelve days prior to the primary.⁵ To derive an estimate of primary spending, we first calculated the number of days between the preprimary report and the next FEC report submitted. We then computed the average expenditure per day for that period, and added the product of the average expenditure per day and the number of days to the preprimary expenditures. Although still an estimate, this computation is superior to relying on the preprimary report or on the next regular submission to the FEC.⁶

We excluded Louisiana from our analysis because of its unusual system in which

the primary often functions as a general election as well.⁷ We also excluded several 1996 Texas primaries,⁸ special primaries, third-party primaries, and a few other oddities.⁹ This left us with 3,142 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,

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
1968	23	4	9
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: Norman Ornstein, Thomas Mann, and Michael J. Malbin. *Vital Statistics on Congress 1999–2000* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2000), Table 2–7, 57.

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.¹⁰ When this unusual year is removed, the average number of incumbents suffering defeat in a primary was 2.0.

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 percent.¹¹ This gives us a measure of competitiveness that applies in two-candidate and multicandidate elections.¹² We classify contested primaries where the difference between the top two vote getters was *more* than 20 percent as *weakly competitive*.

In table 5.2, we present a candidate's average two-party vote share according to the competitiveness of the primary election and the type of candidate who won

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)	Out-party Challenger (N)
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.

the primary.¹³ The findings are fully consistent with the strategic politicians theory. Open-seat primaries were the most likely to be competitive, with 49 percent (192 of 392) meeting this standard. Only 18 percent of the open-seat winners ran unopposed. In contrast, over 70 percent of the incumbents ran unopposed, and only 51 of 1,464 (3 percent) of the primaries involving incumbents were competitive. Fifty-four percent of the out-party primaries were uncontested; 20 percent were competitive.

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

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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 times 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

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

Candidate	Election Status	Average	Percentage of Contributions from:				N
			PAC	Individual	Candidate	Party	
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 challenger	Primary losers	46,779	5	53	39	0	811
	Primary winner	81,607	13	64	20	1	1282
	General	145,939	21	55	18	10	1282
In-party challenger	Primary losers	41,784	6	64	36	0	476
	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.

measure of competitiveness, this finding conforms with the strategic politicians theory.

With respect to sources of funding, we note that most incumbents keep a fundraising operation in place at all times,¹⁶ 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 (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 strategies.¹⁷ 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. Herrnson¹⁸ 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-seat candidates 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 nonincumbent candidates—42 percent. Open-seat candidates and out-party and in-party challengers received 17 percent, 13 percent, and 7 percent, 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 got 17 percent of their primary funding from PACs, but after the primary, their PAC funding increased to 32 percent of their total.

The greatest differences between categories of candidates appeared in the self-financing of campaigns¹⁹—"In primaries and the general elections for the House in 1994, some 163 candidates contributed \$50,000 or more to their own campaigns."²⁰ Self-financing accounted for only 1 percent 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 percent of their campaign funds, and out-party primary winners, 20 percent. Self-financing accounted for 39 percent of the funding for primary losers. We find it particularly significant that challengers who *defeated* incumbents provided 53 percent of their own campaign funds.²¹ These data indicate that without self-financing, challengers would have had even less money in comparison to incumbents and that

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 the percentage of that expenditure that comes from the candidate."²² In table 5.4, we plot candidate self-financing 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-financing percentage and total spending for the top two vote getters in all races: $r = -.13$ ($p < .001$). 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-financing as a percentage of total primary spending, controlling for types of races and candidates, the correlation is positive, meaning that the percentage of self-financing increased as races became more competitive.²³ The relationship was strongest for open-seat and in-party challengers.

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 percent of the vote or less."²⁴

In table 5.5, we first calculate the total amount of money spent in a general election (by the two major-party candidates) according to the type of candidate

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

	Correlation (r)	N
All candidates	-.13	4522
Incumbents	.07	1462
Open-seat candidates	.13	717
Out-party challengers	.05	1907
In-party challengers	.16	436

Source: Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: All correlations significant at $p < .05$ (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

<i>Candidate Type</i>	<i>Competitiveness (Two-Party Vote)</i>	<i>Average Spent</i>	<i>N</i>
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 figures adjusted for inflation (1998 dollars). Data include top two vote getters and exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

and his or her level of competitiveness.²⁵ Unopposed incumbents spent about \$345,000, compared to about \$518,000 for those that drew weak competition and \$903,000 for those with strong competition. Uncompetitive open-seat candidates spent about \$278,000, compared to \$671,000 for candidates in competitive open-seat races. For challengers who were uncompetitive, the average was about \$112,000, with \$519,000 being the average for competitive challengers.

In table 5.6, we next 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 \$106,000 in expenditures before their primaries. In comparison, weakly opposed open-seat candidates averaged about \$167,000, and strongly opposed open-seat candidates averaged \$117,000. The only anomaly in these data is for out-party challengers. They spent more in weakly competitive elections than in competitive ones.²⁶

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 gen-

Table 5.6: Average Primary Election Spending and Competitiveness

<i>Candidate Type</i>	<i>Competitiveness (Difference)</i>	<i>Average Spent</i>	<i>N</i>
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 they exclude incumbents who ran against other incumbents.

eral elections, with more spending corresponding to a larger vote share for open-seat candidates and challengers, but with the reciprocal for incumbents.²⁷ The major constraint on open-seat and challenger spending is the 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 so. When incumbents spend less, it is usually by choice and usually because they face either 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.

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 ($r = -.40$) than in the primary ($r = -.26$). 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 ($r = .19$) as it is in general elections ($r = .22$). For challengers, however, the correlation is much stronger in general elections ($r = .51$) than in primaries ($r = .17$). We note, however, that for open-seat and challenger primary winners, the relationship between spending

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

Candidate Type	Primary (N)	General (N)
Incumbent	-.13 (432)	-.040 (1282)
Open-seat	.19 (644)	.22 (392)
Challenger	.17 (1634)	.51 (1304)

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

Notes: All correlations in this section are statistically significant at $p < .001$ (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.

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 of spending by the second-place candidates, who won significantly more votes as they spent more.

CONCLUSION

Our data indicate that House primaries resemble 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

House. Few incumbents face primary challengers, and the vast majority of those challengers are not visible.²⁸ Incumbents are less threatened by primaries than by general elections, and that threat is infrequent.

But as David Mayhew argued, incumbents worry about reelection even though the odds are heavily in their favor in general elections.²⁹ For this reason, primaries need not necessarily be competitive to encourage responsiveness to constituents. The possibility that a serious primary challenger might come along may enhance incumbent accountability to in-party activists and important allied interest groups.

Campaign spending since 1984 demonstrates that when incumbents encounter strong in-party challenges, they are more likely to find themselves in competitive general elections. This reality is more an artifact of a weak incumbent attracting competition in and out of the party than evidence that primaries enhance accountability. Indeed, party machines were more likely to engender loyalty to party leaders than direct primaries are.

An additional limitation of primaries is that they add substantially to the overall costs and sacrifices associated with seeking election to Congress, and as a 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 an 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

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

2. Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections*, 2d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 13–34.
3. For further discussion on this theme, see chapter three in this volume.
4. Richard M. Scammon and Alice V. McGillivray, *America Votes* 20 (1992) (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993). Richard M. Scammon and Alice V. McGillivray, *America Votes* 21 (1994) (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995). Richard M. Scammon and Alice V. McGillivray, *America Votes* 22 (1996) (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997). Richard M. Scammon, Alice V. McGillivray, and Rhodes Cook, *America Votes* 23 (1998) (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1999). (We are grateful to Rhodes Cook for providing information before the 1998 edition was published.)
5. Candidates may also file a report 30 days after the primary. Few, if any, do so. Marni Ezra ("The Benefits and Burdens of Congressional Primary Elections" [paper prepared for presentation at the 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 on primary election voter contact.
6. To compare across years, we adjust the financial data for inflation; all figures are in 1998 dollars.
7. 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.
8. "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 13 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, 1997.) The districts were 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 18, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, and 30.
9. 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 the 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.
10. 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 incum-

bent in the general election and the primary election. Additionally in 1992, because of redistricting, four incumbents defeated other incumbents in the primary (and another incumbent was 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.

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

12. 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 percent. 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 percent of the vote while three other candidates split 45 percent evenly. Paul S. Herrnson and James G. Gimpel ("District Conditions and Primary Divisiveness in Congressional Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 48, 1 [1995]: 117–34) devise a more complex, linear measure that takes into account the primary vote proportion for all candidates. Since we treat these data as a simple dichotomy, we use the simpler 20 percent margin.

13. 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.

14. All seven challengers who defeated the incumbent by a margin exceeding 20 percent 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.

15. Herrnson (*Congressional Elections*) 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 ("The Benefits and Burdens of Congressional Primary Elections") for the 1994 election. Herrnson's data are also consistent with data in Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael I. Malbin (*Vital Statistics on Congress, 1999–2000* [Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2000] table 3.8). In general, all financial data are 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).

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

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

18. Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, 112.

19. Following Herrnson, "candidate contributions include loans candidates made to their own campaigns" (Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, 113).

20. Theodore J. Eismeier and Philip H. Pollock III, "Money in the 1994 Elections and Beyond," in *Midterm: Elections of 1994 in Context*, ed. Philip A. Kinkler (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996), 86.

21. 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 percent) and less heavily on individuals (34 percent).

22. L. Sandy Maisel, *From Obscurity to Oblivion: Running in the Congressional Primary*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 68.

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

24. Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*.

25. 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 Edie N. Goldenberg and Michael W. Traugott note, "Incumbents who were vulnerable spent a great deal of money both before and during the general-election campaign" (*Campaigning for Congress* [Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984], 83). We expect viable challengers and open-seat candidates to do the same.

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

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

28. David B. Magleby and Candice J. Nelson, *The Money Chase: Congressional Campaign Finance Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990).

29. David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974).

Elections and Amateurs: The Christian Right in the 1998 Congressional Campaigns

John C. Green

In a closely watched prelude to the 1998 congressional campaign, a special election was held to fill the seat vacated by the death of California Democrat Walter Capps.¹ The Democratic nomination was straightforward: Lois Capps, the widow of the late congressman, was the presumptive nominee. In contrast, the Republican nomination was contested. Hoping to pick up the seat for the GOP (Grand Old Party) in a swing district, party professionals recruited a state legislator, Brooks Firestone. A successful vintner and an heir to the Firestone tire fortune, his moderate views on abortion and related issues resembled those of Michael Huffington, who had represented the district prior to 1994. At the same time, amateur activists, especially from the Christian Right, hoped to expand the ranks of cultural conservatives in Congress by taking advantage of this opportunity. They recruited another state legislator, Tom Bordonaro. Confined to a wheelchair and of a blue-collar background, Bordonaro's conservative views on abortion and related issues resembled those of Andrea Seastrand, who won the seat in 1994.

The Republican nomination was hard fought. The GOP establishment rallied to Firestone with endorsements and money, while the Christian Right aided Bordonaro with voter guides in churches and issue advertisements on television, including extensive independent spending by the Campaign for Working Families, headed by soon-to-be GOP presidential candidate Gary Bauer. Bordonaro won a narrow victory over Firestone in the primary but then lost an equally contentious and close general-election contest to Democrat Capps a few weeks later.²

Bitter recriminations followed Bordonaro's defeat. Party professionals blamed the Christian Right for missing an opportunity to take a seat from the Democrats and expand the slim GOP majority in Congress—a view shared even by former Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed.³ From this point of view, the Bordonaro campaign was too culturally conservative for the district. However, Gary Bauer