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**Primaries, conventions, and other methods
for nominating candidates: How do they matter?**



Importante

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Abstract

The way political parties select their candidates should be considered a fundamental topic in political science. In spite of being profoundly consequential in several regards, candidate-selection methods were understudied for a long time in the academic literature. A renewed awareness of the implications of different nomination rules, along with an increased use of primary elections around the world, has accelerated this research in the last two decades. The goal of this essay is to review the main areas of enquiry regarding candidate selection as reflected in contemporary research. I survey the most recent literature asking four broad questions about candidate-selection methods. 1) What types are there? 2) What consequences do they have? 3) What are their origins? 4) What questions can be formulated for future research? All in all, this survey hopes to convey that research on candidate selection is important, growing and full of open questions.

Keywords: Primary elections, candidate selection, political parties, democratization

Resumen

La manera como los partidos políticos seleccionan a sus candidatos debería ser considerado un tema fundamental en la ciencia política. A pesar de tener profundas consecuencias en varios aspectos, los métodos de selección de candidatos fueron escasamente estudiados en la literatura académica por un largo periodo. Una mayor conciencia de los efectos de distintas reglas de nominación, así como un uso creciente de las elecciones primarias alrededor del mundo, ha acelerado esta investigación en las últimas dos décadas. El objetivo de este ensayo es revisar las principales áreas de estudio sobre la selección de candidatos según vienen reflejadas en la investigación contemporánea. Reviso la literatura más reciente haciendo cuatro preguntas generales sobre los métodos de selección de candidatos. 1) ¿Qué tipos hay? 2) ¿Cuáles son sus consecuencias. 3) ¿Cuáles son sus orígenes? 4) ¿Qué preguntas de investigación futura pueden formularse? Con todo, este resumen de la literatura espera demostrar que la investigación sobre la selección de candidatos es importante, está creciendo y sigue llena de preguntas abiertas.

Palabras clave: Elecciones primarias, selección de candidatos, partidos políticos, democratización

Introduction: Why do candidate-selection methods matter?

The way political parties select their candidates should be considered a fundamental topic in political science. In democracies based on a party system, each party needs a way to select candidates that will compete for office with other parties' candidates. In other words, each party needs a candidate-selection method (CSM). As I will document in this essay, political parties around the world and across time have employed a wide variety of rules for choosing those who will represent them with the electorate at large. There are many pathways for citizens to become candidates and it turns out that different pathways have different consequences for a host of relevant issues in politics. In spite of being profoundly consequential in several regards, candidate-selection methods were understudied for a long time in the academic literature. In American politics there were several key contributions throughout the twentieth century regarding the introduction of the direct primary, which is a specific CSM with some particularly spectacular features.¹ In the European context, scholars were also scrutinizing the inner workings of parties already a century ago.² But only recently has this area regained significant attention among scholars across regions. A renewed awareness of the implications of different nomination rules, along with an increased use of primary elections around the world, has accelerated this research in the last two decades.

The goal of this essay is to review the main areas of enquiry regarding candidate selection as reflected in contemporary research. To do so, I will survey literatures of different kinds, both from American and non-American contexts, both empirical and theoretical, both behavioral and institutional, and both quantitative and qualitative. Indeed, this recent literature is very much question-driven, which forces it to transcend disciplinary boundaries. It should be noted at the outset that I did not intend to exhaust the important literature in this area. My intention was to cover the main questions being asked in this subfield, illustrating them with a few of its interesting new publications. But the obvious constraints in this type of exercise imply that some excellent new research will regrettably be neglected.³ All in all, this survey will hopefully convey that research on candidate selection is important, growing, and full of open questions.

A prominent reason for studying candidate selection is the impact it can have on governance. Consider the following notion: any given country is likely to have millions of citizens that are legally eligible to head the government as a president or prime minister. Among those, probably thousands would be interested in doing so by becoming candidates. Yet, in most cases, only a handful of actual candidates compete in the corresponding election, meaning that the electorate is eventually offered a much

¹ Some of the classics include Key (1956) and Polsby (1960).

² Some early classics include Ostrogorski (1902) and Michels (1915).

³ Another survey of the recent literature covering somewhat different references can be found in Sandri and Seddone (2015).

reduced menu of choices to vote for. What happened to millions of potential candidates who were legally able to run, and thousands who were willing to do so? They were mostly filtered out by parties: the nomination process reduces the choices available to voters to only one person per party. At the legislative level, parties also reduce our options as voters to only a select list of candidates per election. From this perspective, parties are the real kingmakers in modern democracies – perhaps more so than regular voters. This thought should compel us to pay closer attention to the internal processes that determine candidate nominations in each party, as they largely determine the outcome of government formation. In accordance with this view, the academic literature is gradually proving how this winnowing process has significant consequences for the electorate.

Another motivation is to understand political trends of relevance. Parties around the world routinely change their candidate-selection methods, thus providing a rich source of institutional variation that can be exploited theoretically and empirically. One of the fascinating trends in the past couple of decades has been the rise of primaries around the world. The literature has documented the introduction of primary elections by political parties in many countries; and recently, primaries have even been employed at the supranational level by the European Green Party and the Party of European Socialists for elections to the European parliament (Sandri and Seddone 2015). This variation in the CSM can be used as a valuable dependent variable if we are interested in the sources of endogenous institutional choice; and it can also be a valuable independent variable if we are interested in the economic, political and social consequences of institutional arrangements.

These reasons should help explain the increasing academic interest in candidate selection.⁴ The research agenda about CSMs has been roughly divided in three broad questions: (1) what types there are; (2) what consequences they have; and (3) what their origins are. The next three sections of this survey are devoted to reviewing these topics, illustrating them with several representative publications. In a final section, I rephrase many of these issues in the form of open research questions that are interesting from the public-choice perspective.

Categorizations: What types of candidate-selection methods are there?

There has been significant effort to delineate this topic of enquiry. If the study of candidate selection was understood as an academic subfield, what would its subject matter be exactly? To gain a good understanding of the universe of CSMs it is useful to classify them according to a few categories. The comparative literature has actually revealed an overwhelming variety of recruitment methods that can be employed by political parties, so a parsimonious classification could bring clarity into this detailed set of complex institutions. Conceptual clarity is also useful for empirical work. Using the

⁴ Other motivations can be found in the enthusiastic study of candidate selection by Hazat and Rahan (2010, chapter 1).

variation in CSMs as a dependent or independent variable requires classifying them along measurable dimensions. Furthermore, constructing statistical data calls for precise definitions that are comparable across countries and across time. For these reasons, several authors have endeavored to provide definitions and categorizations for the multiplicity of existing methods to select candidates.

One of the most comprehensive typologies was developed by Reuven Hazan and Gideon Rahat over the course of a decade leading to their influential book of 2010 where they proposed several dimensions for categorizing CSMs. The first dimension, which they called *candidacy*, corresponds to the various restrictions that can limit the eligible pool of candidates, such as age, party membership, etc. In their words, this dimension “tells us who can present himself or herself in the candidate selection process of a single party in a particular point in time”. The authors found significant variation across parties in the restrictions and requirements applied to potential candidates, suggesting that parties can be placed in a continuum along this dimension. One end of this continuum, which they call the *inclusive* pole, corresponds to parties imposing almost no restrictions to become their candidates. For example, parties in the United States allow nearly any adult citizen to stand for a candidacy. Hazan and Rahat find some instances of extreme inclusiveness in America to be “strange”, as they have allowed aspirants for office to “practically impose themselves on the party, which must accept their candidacy, reluctantly or otherwise.” (I imagine the authors would interpret the Donald Trump phenomenon of 2016 in the Republican Party as validation of their viewpoint.) The other end of the continuum, which the authors call the *exclusive* pole, corresponds to parties imposing numerous stringent restrictions to become their candidates. To illustrate this extreme exclusivity, they mention the requirements to be allowed on a primary ballot for the Belgian Socialist Party. In 1974, the party stipulated that aspirants should have sent their children to state rather than Catholic schools; have been regular subscribers to the party's newspaper; and have made annual minimum purchases from the Socialist co-op.

The second dimension in this typology is called the *selectorate*. In accordance with the party politics literature, Hazan and Rahat (2010) define the selectorate as “the body that selects a political party's candidates for public office.” Hence this second dimension corresponds to who makes the nomination decision. The authors view this dimension as the most consequential in their framework. It turns out that selectorates can acquire all possible sizes, from millions of people as in an open primary election, to a single person as when the party leader handpicks the candidates. The authors thus postulate a continuum of selectorates according to their size, ranging from the most inclusive selectorates (i.e. the largest ones) to the most exclusive selectorates (i.e. the smallest ones). Again, the United States provides the most inclusive examples in this dimension. The authors consider the *nonpartisan primaries* and the *blanket primaries* to have the largest existing selectorates, as they allow any registered voter to vote for primary candidates from any party without declaring any party affiliation. Among the many in-between categories, *party conventions* are widespread: they consist of a limited number of party delegates (as compared to all members and sympathizers) who can

vote to choose the candidates. At the extreme of elitism, the selectorate is reduced to one person. Some of the Israeli parties serve as examples of such an extremely exclusive selectorate: the authors mention an ultra-religious party in Israel, Degel HaTorah, where a single rabbi was authorized to decide the composition and order of every party list.

Other authors have created alternative typologies, according to relatively different criteria stemming from different research questions.⁵ Moreover, some research has been devoted to studying specific CSMs of interest. While the authors mentioned above endeavored to build all-encompassing scales for their comparative work, other authors have focused on studying a narrower range of CSMs that are relevant to their country of interest. A particularly striking way of selecting candidates occurred in Mexico during the period of one-party dominance in the twentieth century. As explained in by Langston (2006), in the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) there was in effect a selectorate of size one. A single person, the president of the country who was always a member of the PRI, would almost single-handedly choose his party's candidates for all relevant positions at all levels of government.⁶ This CSM came to be known in Mexico as the “dedazo” or “selection by pointing the finger”.

At the other extreme, the use of super inclusive methods is also striking. As mentioned above, some of the most open and democratic CSMs are found in the United States, including the famous *direct primary* which has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention. It should be noted that the *American primary* does not refer to a single homogenous process, but is actually a collection of complex methods that can vary importantly across states in the country. The sometimes subtle differences can be challenging to understand for the non-specialist; yet, these differences matter as they can lead to very different outcomes.⁷ This was demonstrated by Gerber and Morton (1998) who made a useful distinction between open, closed and semi-closed primaries. In short, a primary is considered *open* if participants do not need to declare a party affiliation as a prerequisite to participating in a primary election. A primary is defined as *closed* if participation is limited to voters who declared their affiliation to the party within a specified period of time prior to the election. And a primary is defined as *semi-closed* if new registrants are allowed to both register and choose their party on the day of the primary. As I mention later, Gerber and Morton found that these three types of primaries have different and surprising effects on the ideologies of the nominees.

Given that primary elections are becoming more frequent outside of the United States as well, a natural step for academic enquiry is to propose precise definitions that are appropriate for comparative work. This is the task undertaken by Sandri and Seddone (2015). In their wide-ranging essay on primary elections across the world, these authors try to reconcile the somewhat different ways in which the concept of “primaries” is used in diverse regions. They note that in the American

⁵ See for example the scales created by Bille (2001), LeDuc (2001) and Meinke, Staton and Wuhs (2006).

⁶ For a detailed history see the analysis in Langston (2006).

⁷ A detailed introduction to American primaries for a non-American audience comes in Amorós and Puy (2013).

context, the term “primary” generally refers to an election in which candidates are chosen for a subsequent election; this might include a contest where both parties pool their candidates together as in top-two primaries. On the other hand, in Europe this label relates more specifically to direct elections *within* a party. Another difficulty in reaching a consensus is the link between primaries and general elections: the link in America is essential given that primaries are held in direct relation to an imminent general election. In contrast, some primaries in parliamentary regimes are not so automatically linked to an immediate general election, such as when a party chooses its leader. The authors propose the following definition as a compromise:

We define as party primaries the internal elections for selecting political leaders or candidates for office (either for parliamentary elections or for chief executive mandates, at all levels) that entail full membership votes (closed primaries) or votes by members, sympathisers and registered voters (open primaries). (Sandri and Seddone 2015, p. 11)

Other scholars have also tried to reconcile different uses of the term “primaries” for empirical work.⁸ On the other hand, theoretical work also requires sharp definitions but probably emphasizing different aspects of primaries. In particular, formal models in the rational-choice tradition will tend to focus on the dynamic interactions that primary elections induce on strategic actors – which can differ from the aspects of primaries that are paid attention to in statistical work. Nevertheless, any formal model with broad applicability faces the same linguistic challenge of the word “primaries” being used differently in different countries. Precise definitions are thus helpful for the reader to know what concrete cases are inspiring a formal model. In my own modeling of primaries in Latin America and the United States, I chose to restrict my subject matter the following way:

By [a closed] primary election we refer to the organized competition among aspiring candidates within the same party that culminates in the democratic vote of all party members. (Serra 2011, p. 22)

Defining closed primaries this way captures some dynamics that seem to be missing from other definitions that come from statistical analysis instead of theoretical modeling. First, the definition above specifies that a primary election is an “organized competition”, which is of course the aspect that most captures the attention of formal modelers: a typical question for us is how different rules governing this competition will lead to different behavior. The definition above, which was used to introduce the models in Serra (2011, 2013), is thus ruling out nominations where there was no competition, such as the many uncontested primaries in America where the incumbent is unopposed within her party. Indeed, from the strategic point of view, those two situations are completely different, which calls into question whether an uncontested primary should even be called a “primary election.”

⁸ Much progress was also made in the full-length definition of “party primaries” by Kenig, Cross, Pruyers and Rahat (2015).

As a second condition, the definition above also requires that such competition takes place among “aspiring candidates”, which refers to several human beings out of whom the party representatives will be chosen. This excludes other types of competition, for example when policies are directly voted on (instead of voting for people who will implement those policies). Some political parties actually decide their policy platforms this way: the Green Party in the United Kingdom, as well as other green parties across Europe, frequently ask their members to decide the party platform by majority vote at a conference. The outcome of this membership vote is then included in the party’s manifesto. My definition would not consider those votes as primary elections.

A third specification is that only candidates “within the same party” are competing with each other. This is controversial as it would rule out the so-called *nonpartisan primaries* such as the top-two, the Louisiana, and the blanket primaries where candidates from both parties are pooled together. There is in fact a nascent debate about how to classify those CSMs. Amorós and Puy (2013) follow the dominant view in America of considering all of them primary elections of different kinds.⁹ The previously-quoted definition of *party primaries* from Sandri and Seddone (2015) seems to leave a door open for including nonpartisan primaries. But Kenig, Cross, Pruyers and Rahat (2015) are decidedly against including them in theirs: they clearly state that “the so-called Louisiana Primary is not a party primary as these are events in which all candidates for the same public office run against each other, regardless of party affiliation.” As was demonstrated theoretically in Amorós, Puy and Martínez (2016), these two types of primaries, partisan and nonpartisan ones, create very different strategic situations which, in my view, justifies classifying them differently as I did.

A fourth requirement of the definition in Serra (2011, 2013) is that the eventual vote should be “democratic”, meaning that the election should be free, fair and without fraud. This was meant to rule out “undemocratic” votes occasionally occurring in primaries throughout Latin America that are manipulated to distort the will of party members. In short, my definition endeavored to capture several distinctive elements of primaries that are useful for formal modeling. As mentioned before, other definitions are geared to helping the construction of statistical data sets. Still others try to bring clarity into qualitative comparisons. All are trying, in their own way, to categorize the existing CSMs to allow comparative analysis. Much progress can be made by continuing to contrast typologies that come from different approaches and traditions.

⁹ In the same vein, Amorós, Puy and Martínez (2016) compare what they consider two types of primaries: “closed” and “top-two”.

Consequences: What are the effects of different candidate selection methods?

Several deep consequences of varying the CSMs used by parties have been documented. Of all CSMs, the recent literature has paid particular attention to the introduction of primary elections. Some of its effects that have been mentioned are the following. On the positive side, several studies have found a “primary bonus” whereby candidates earn a larger vote share in the general election if they were nominated through an inclusive CSM instead of an exclusive one (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). This suggests that primaries select candidates that are more appealing to voters, all things equal (Cantillana Peña, Contreras Aguirre and Morales Quiroga 2015). Primaries also seem useful to resolve intraparty disputes between rival factions (Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro and Hirano 2009). And competition in primaries can serve to compensate a lack of competition in the general election (Hanks and Grofman 1998). On the negative side, holding primaries in developing countries could generate disputes among party members fighting for clientelistic resources and patronage from primary candidates. Such is the case in Ghana (Ichino and Nathan 2013). Moreover, a poorly organized primary could quickly become undemocratic by displaying ballot fraud, vote buying and bullying from party officials, leading to riots and defections within the party. An illustration occurred in Romania in 2004 (Gherghina 2013). Even in advanced democracies, some authors have warned that parties that are too inclusive run the risk of diluting their coherent ideals and losing their well-defined program (Hazan and Rahat 2010). But probably the most-often mentioned consequence of introducing primary elections is ideological polarization.

Indeed, one of the most active debates about primaries, especially in America, is whether they lead to the extremism of candidates’ platforms. Some persuasive arguments can be made to expect such a polarizing effect, at least theoretically. A common claim among both academics and pundits is that primary voters have more extremist preferences than the general population, which gives an advantage to extremist primary contenders, and forces moderate primary contenders to diverge away from the ideological center. The alleged reason is that a typically low turnout in primaries gives pivotal weight to groups of passionate activists. As proof, some observers point to the influence of the Tea Party in primary contests (Jacob 2015). This popular claim has been tested by a series of increasingly sophisticated empirical articles in academic journals. One of the papers that kick-started the modern empirical debate is Gerber and Morton (1998). The goal of that pioneering paper was to measure how different types of primaries for congressional elections led to selecting candidates with different types of ideologies. The authors famously found that winners of open primaries are more moderate than winners of closed primaries, which confirmed the traditional view. But surprisingly, they found that winners of semi-closed primaries are even more moderate, which suggested there is a nonlinear relationship between a primary’s openness and the extremism of its winning candidate (p. 312).

Subsequent papers have continued to test the link between primaries and polarization. Several have been consistent with the hypothesis that primaries lead to the extremism of candidates.¹⁰ Brady, Han and Pope (2007) assessed the level of policy extremism of House representatives who were seeking reelection and were thus facing a primary and a general election. They did so by comparing the legislators' ideological positions (as measured by their DW-Nominate scores) to the average ideological preferences of their respective districts (as measured by the presidential vote). Their results revealed sharp differences between the ideological positions needed to win a primary and those needed to win a general election. It turns out that extremist incumbents fared better in primary elections: they had larger vote margins and they lost the primaries less frequently than moderate incumbents. On the other hand, moderate incumbents fared better in general elections: if they were able to win the primary, then they had larger vote margins and they lost the general election less frequently than extremist incumbents. Therefore, in choosing their voting record in Congress, legislators seem to face what the authors called a "strategic dilemma" between pleasing primary-election and general-election constituencies. In resolving this dilemma, the results indicated that legislators are increasingly opting for pleasing primary voters in detriment of general-election voters, which would help explain the increased polarization in Congress over the past several decades. Brady, Han and Pope attribute this trend in large part to well organized interest groups that have been able to influence the nomination process since the late 1960s.

Given the traditional belief that primaries create polarization, along with a first wave of empirical papers that seemed to confirm this claim, it is not surprising that scholars endeavored to build theories explaining this claim. In fact, a significant number of formal models have been developed making the prediction that primaries induce divergence among candidates.¹¹ Most recently, Amorós, Puy and Martínez (2016) pitched closed primaries against top-two primaries. In elections with four aspirants – a moderate and an extreme Democrat, and a moderate and an extreme Republican – they show theoretically that when the median voter is moderate but median party members are extreme, closed primaries always generate extreme winners while top-two primaries always generate moderate winners.

In spite of these compelling theories, the recent empirical evidence seems to be pointing in the opposite direction. New statistical studies have actually been finding that primaries of all kinds have no effect, or a negligible one, on the polarization of candidates.¹² For instance, Peress (2013) tested this hypothesis by comparing the ideologies of expected primary voters with the ideologies of candidates in each

¹⁰ See for example Burden (2001); Burden (2004); and Brady, Han and Pope (2007).

¹¹ Among others, these models include Owen and Grofman (2006); Jackson, Mathevet and Mattes (2007); Adams and Merrill (2008); Padró i Miquel and Snowberg (2012); Hummel (2013); Adams and Merrill (2014); Hortala-Vallve and Mueller (2015); Kselman (2015); and Amorós, Puy and Martínez (2016).

¹² Such as Hirano, Snyder, Ansolabehere and Hansen (2010); Peress (2013); and McGhee, Masket, Shor, Rogers and McCarty (2014).

district.¹³ As it turns out, he did not find that the variation in primary constituencies had a statistically significant effect on the variation in candidate's policies. His conclusion was that candidates' positions on policy are not responsive to the relative extremism of primary electorates (pp. 88-91). So the issue of whether primary elections induce polarization is not settled, with a new wave of statistical studies contradicting this traditional hypothesis. So the empirical debate rages on.

This poses a challenge from the theoretical point of view. With so many theoretical models of primaries predicting divergence, why are the newest empirical studies not finding it? One possible interpretation is that primaries have in fact a conditional effect, leading to polarization in some contexts but not in others. If so, is it possible to build a formal model where primaries *do not* lead to divergence? Such a model would allow us to compare its assumptions with the assumptions of other models where primaries *do* lead to divergence. This was the goal of Serra (2015), which tried to shed light on this controversy. Therein I developed a model with only essential elements to investigate the effect that we should expect from primary elections on policy polarization. To the well-known linear model developed by Anthony Downs, I only added a nomination stage with two political parties where candidates need to compete before being able to run for office. I assumed that the two parties have extremist ideologies on opposite sides of the median voter. Furthermore, neither party cares about winning the election *per se*, but rather they care only about the policy implemented by the candidate who wins the election. Finally, once a candidate promises a policy to her party in the primary, this promise is assumed to become binding in the general election as well. These assumptions were stacking the deck in favor of obtaining polarization – and yet the model did not find any. In line with the most recent empirical literature, I found that primaries do not induce candidates to diverge from each other at all. The reason is the rationality of primary voters: even if they have extremist ideal points, party members understand the importance of voting strategically by choosing a moderate candidate who can prevent the other party from winning. It should be noted that several empirical studies of political behavior have found strategic voting in primary elections.¹⁴ It turns out that this assumption alone, at least in my simple model, is enough to induce all primary candidates from both parties to converge completely to the median voter's ideal point.

In light of these new empirical and theoretical results, it is clear that more research is needed. At the theoretical level, the models of primary elections that predict polarization need to be examined closely: given that a bare-bones model such as in Serra (2015) predicts convergence, it is worth figuring out which additional assumptions in those other models are triggering divergence. At the empirical level, the factors interacting with primaries also need to be examined more closely to determine why they lead to divergence in some circumstances but not in others.

¹³ In Peress (2013), the ideology of expected primary voters was estimated by the location of party identifies for the Democratic and Republican parties according the National Annenberg Election Survey. The ideology of candidates was estimated from candidates' responses to the National Political Awareness Test.

¹⁴ Such as Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde (1992).

Origins: Why do parties adopt different candidate-selection methods?

Now that we have reviewed several consequences of different CSMs, we are in a better position to analyze their origins. Indeed, reforms to the institutions within parties are usually motivated by their impact (real or perceived). Part of the recent literature, especially the one from a rational-choice perspective, has paid particular attention to the impact of these changes on the people in charge of reform. If we believe, as in much of the public-choice tradition, that institutions are endogenous to the preferences of individual decision makers in positions of power, then understanding the consequences of those institutions permits explaining by a process of backward induction why they exist. The literature has mentioned two sorts of actors influencing the CSM that a party will employ: external actors and internal ones. By the former I am referring to decision makers who are external to parties and yet are able to impose a CSM on them. By the latter I am referring to decision makers who are internal to the parties and have the ability to shape their own CSM. Let me review each one in turn.

An obvious external force that is often able to impose a CSM on parties is the State. Government agents of several types routinely attempt to influence the behavior of political parties; and regulating their CSM is a frequent recourse. For a variety of reasons that are still being discussed, an increasingly frequent regulation from governments around the world is to request parties to open their CSM to a larger selectorate, such as asking them to organize primary elections. In the United States, this is the most-often mentioned origin of primary elections. Indeed, the methods used by parties to nominate their candidates in America are largely determined by the law in each state. One immediate consequence of CSMs being written in the law is that, in each state, both parties have to employ the same CSM. So, for example, the law in California used to mandate that both the Democratic and the Republican parties hold semi-closed primaries; then in 2010 the local legislature reformed this law to mandate instead that both parties hold top-two primaries.¹⁵ Hence in the context of American political development, asking about the origin of primary elections and other CSMs leads to asking why certain reforms were passed in state legislatures.

This type of reforms is often advocated by a coalition of legislators, politicians and intellectuals who share the agenda of empowering party members by weakening party elites. A remarkable episode of this kind was the Progressive Era during the early 1900s in the United States. This historical period has been attracting renewed attention in past years, as some scholars are proposing a revisionist view that overturns several previously held beliefs.¹⁶ In a recent book, Seth Masket documents the antiparty sentiment that animated Progressive activists in their efforts to create new legislation. As an illustration, he quotes a journalist proclaiming that “the party system is a device for the prevention of the expression of the common will; it misleads

¹⁵ See the analyses of this change in California by Amorós and Martínez (2013); Amorós, Puy and Martínez (2016); and Masket (2016).

¹⁶ Notable examples are Ware (2002); Ansolabehere, Hansen, Hirano and Snyder (2010); and Masket (2016).

and obscures public opinion; it is simply another form of despotism.” Accordingly, the Progressive Era was rife with attempts to rein in parties by disempowering party bosses and their corporate benefactors. The author explains that between 1890 and 1920, federal and state governments passed laws regulating how party leaders and delegates were chosen and what sorts of conventions they must hold. In particular, these laws created direct primaries across the country as a way of transferring the power of nominating candidates for office from a few hundred convention delegates to thousands of voters. The original aim was to let moderate citizens, rather than party-loyal convention delegates, choose nominees (Masket 2016, chapters 1 and 2).

Nevertheless, forcing all parties to adopt primaries simultaneously by law can have unintended consequences. As argued by Snyder and Ting (2011), this regulation could determine the types of localities where primaries are instituted. These authors develop a formal model for the introduction of open primary elections in the United States. In their theory, each State Congress must decide whether to introduce open primaries, and if it does, both parties are forced to use them. The decision to mandate primaries for both parties comes from whichever party dominates the state by having a majority of legislators. The authors claim that these assumptions agree with the historical introduction of the American primary:

In our model, the electorate’s dominant party chooses whether parties must select their candidates by primary. This assumption reflects the fact that politicians from the *ex ante* favored party are more likely to be in a position to write or implement election laws. It also reflects the way in which primaries were adopted across the United States. Outside the South, no parties adopted statewide primaries until state laws mandated them, and these laws always applied to both major parties. (Snyder and Ting 2011, p. 782)

For these authors, the alternative to an open primary election is a “centralized mechanism” that randomizes over all possible candidates. To be concrete, their model assumes that if primaries are not introduced, then parties will employ a method consisting on choosing a nominee at random among the aspirants that have declared an interest. The main result of their model is that only ideologically extreme localities will adopt primaries where the median voter will choose the candidates in both parties. On the other hand, moderate localities will be left with this conjectured nomination mechanism where both parties are choosing their candidates randomly (Snyder and Ting 2011, p. 783).

In other countries, the law can play a different role on the parties’ choice of CSM – or play no role at all. Outside the United States, parties are most often free to choose their nomination procedures without government intervention, although many cases do exist of governments intervening in some fashion. For instance, the law can define the State as an enabler of primaries, being their organizer if parties request it. The State can also incentivize the use of primaries in other ways while still making them optional for parties. Or the State can simply serve as guardian of the peace in case an eventual primary election goes awry. Sandri and Seddone (2015) also noted

these intermediate cases: they explain that in Europe, primaries are usually organized and financed by the parties themselves; but they are often regulated by the State in the legislation, as for instance in Germany and Finland.

Another region with a rich set of regulatory frameworks is Latin America. Parties there have experimented with a wide array of nomination designs, which has sparked interest among scholars. A few ambitious statistical studies with region-wide data have already attempted to find the causes of party democratization.¹⁷ Regarding the State's influence in the parties' adoption of primary elections, Freidenberg (2015) analyzed the relevant laws of eighteen Latin American countries. She was able to classify them in five categories, which I am paraphrasing here. These are Freidenberg's categories according to the level of State intervention:

1. Simultaneous open primaries are compulsory for all parties. The State will organize them on behalf of parties. (Argentina, Honduras and Uruguay.)
2. Open or closed primaries are compulsory for all parties. They do not need be simultaneous. Parties themselves have to organize them. (Panamá, Paraguay, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica and Venezuela.)
3. Primaries are contemplated in the law as voluntary. A party can request the State to organize them on its behalf. (Colombia and Chile.)
4. The law requires candidate selection to be somehow "democratic," without giving specific details or requirements for parties. (Mexico and El Salvador.)
5. Candidate selection is not specifically regulated in the law. (Guatemala, Brazil, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Dominican Republic.)

As suggested by Freidenberg's classification above, Latin American parties have much leeway in choosing their CSM freely. Overall, the comparative evidence indicates that the majority of primary elections around world are being adopted *voluntarily* by political parties, rather than being imposed by law. Explaining party democratization in this circumstance requires an altogether different approach. In particular, the focus needs to be placed on the elites and leaders of each party. Evidently, as with other political choices, parties attempt to be strategic – and their leaders are mostly in control of this strategy. It is hardly surprising that party elites have a strong preference for centralized CSMs that they can control; scholars such as Bonnie Field and Peter Siavelis have observed that whenever they have a margin to choose, "leaders are likely to prefer more exclusive candidate selection procedures."¹⁸

This prediction is validated in Mexico. Since democratization in the 1990s, the electoral management bodies, which are prestigious institutions in the country, had been fairly active in supervising the internal life of parties. When they were created, the electoral institutions were legally mandated to hear any cases of party officials in

¹⁷ Such as Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006), Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro and Hirano (2009); Aragón (2013); and Aragón (2014).

¹⁸ This was the case during the democratic transitions in Spain and Chile, according Field and Siavelis (2009).

dispute with their rank-and-file members. As it turns out, these cases have been very frequent: electoral tribunals at national and subnational levels have been flooded with stories of party bosses anointing loyalists in smoke-filled rooms, rather than holding nominations that can be deemed fair and transparent as mandated by law (Serra 2012). In fact tribunals have often overturned parties' choices by requesting new nomination processes. In 2007, losing patience with such intervention, the leaders of all major parties brokered a coalition in Congress to pass new legislation attempting to shield their practices from government supervision, which included the following unambiguous statute:

The electoral authorities must consider the preservation of the political parties' freedom of political decision-making and their right to self-regulation whenever they are resolving any dispute regarding the parties' internal affairs. (Mexican General Law on the System of Means to Challenge in Electoral Matters)

The list of "internal affairs" that legislators declared to be outside the State's jurisdiction was almost exhaustive, and included the selection of candidates and leaders. To many observers, this autonomy from the State that party bureaucrats granted themselves violated the political rights of regular party members (Serra 2012, p. 109). In this regard, if we compare the histories of Mexico and the United States, we could say that the Mexican legislation of 2007 is a sort of anti-Progressive reform.

Today, even in the United States party elites have a strong say in choosing whether their nominations will be inclusive or exclusive. Notwithstanding the remarks by Snyder and Ting (2011) quoted above, today party leaders can often choose whether a nomination process will be competitive or uncompetitive. Some new research, such as in Meinke, Staton and Wuhs (2006) has been overturning traditional views by claiming that nomination rules in America have become rather fluid, with parties frequently moving from a more open to a more closed rule and then back again. In a compelling book, Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller (2008) have also argued that party insiders have regained control of nominations in modern times; they have done so by leveraging their endorsements and donations to particular primary candidates. In my own work, I have argued that party elites in America and elsewhere can choose whether to provide support to a given candidate if they wish a primary election to be uncompetitive (Serra 2011, 2013). In that sense, my research represents a formalization of some of the ideas in Cohen et al. (2008) and Meinke et al. (2006).

To be concrete, the formal model that I proposed in Serra (2011) studied the trade-off faced by party leaders in deciding whether to allow a competitive primary election in their parties. In my model, the alternative to a competitive primary election is a closed-door decision at the elite level where the nominee is chosen by a few party bosses. I argued that one of the motivations for adopting primaries is to increase the expected electability of the party's nominee, where "electability" was understood as the general appeal that a candidate has to voters based on her charisma and her campaign assets (the political science literature often refers to these qualities as "valence"). This could happen for two reasons. First, the primary campaigns unveil

valuable information about the contenders' skills and resources. In effect, the primary serves as a trial that can be observed by the party who can use this new information for its choice. The second reason is that primaries open the door to a larger number of contenders. Fresh candidates who might be untested or unknown will join the race, allowing the party to discover this new talent which would go unnoticed if party elites settled on nominating a well-known insider politician. In sum, by opening the CSM the party can acquire more information about a larger pool of aspirants. According to the main theoretical prediction, the likelihood that primaries are adopted by a party increases as the policy preferences of its membership become similar to the preferences of its elite. A follow-up model in Serra (2013) predicts that competitive primaries should be more likely when the party does not have a strong incumbent running for reelection, which is consistent with empirical evidence from both the United States and Latin America.

Other arguments have been proposed to explain the voluntary adoption of primaries by political parties.¹⁹ But few of those have been formalized in game-theoretic models, so this is clearly an area where public-choice analysis can still say a lot.

¹⁹ See for example the thorough list of possible origins of party democratization in Mexico by Bruhn (2014).

Conclusions: What would we like to know in the future?

While this literature is growing in scope, and is also becoming increasingly sophisticated, many questions remain unsolved and many issues remain unsettled. The previous review should have conveyed that lively debates are still taking place regarding the types of CSMs that are available to parties, the consequences that these CSMs can have, and the reasons why those CSMs are being used by parties. To finalize this survey, I would like to rephrase some of these debates in a way that is particularly germane to the public-choice approach, namely in terms of microfoundations. Placing the focus on individual decision-makers allows to recast these debates in terms of strategic interactions leading to equilibrium behavior. It also allows to reframe the debates in terms of endogenous institutions. In that vein, I pose five questions about candidate selection that we would benefit from knowing more about in the future. Each question relates to a different set of relevant decision-makers. While all these questions have been asked in some fashion before, there is value in stating them jointly in a compact and consistent list. Together, they may serve to propose a research agenda on candidate selection from the public-choice perspective.

- 1) *What is in the mind of party leaders when they choose different CSMs?*
On many occasions, adopting a CSM is a strategic choice. Party leaders are facing trade-offs between different nomination rules. It would be interesting to better understand why they choose one CSM over another.
- 2) *What is in the mind of reformers when they impose certain regulations on parties?*
On other occasions, a particular CSM is imposed on parties by the government. It would be interesting to better understand why legislators decide to regulate these party processes.
- 3) *What is in the mind of hopefuls when they choose to compete for a nomination?*
A variety of conditions influence the decision to seek a party's nomination. It would be interesting to better understand the factors that affect the entry of candidates.
- 4) *What is in the mind of party members when they support a given candidate?*
If party members behaved rationally they would ponder their different interests in voting for a given aspirant in a primary election. It would be interesting to better understand what those interests are, and whether they are actually behaving as expected theoretically.
- 5) *What is in the mind of citizens when they choose to join a party?*

The CSM can also be expected to influence the recruitment of party members. It would be interesting to better understand if different CSMs attract different memberships.

These are difficult questions: answering them satisfactorily would require multiple methods (quantitative, qualitative and formal-theoretic) in addition to multiple sources of data (from all world regions). But they are important questions, which reinforces the point that this is an exciting new area of research.

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