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**Do You Know My Name?  
How Local Elites Influence Primary Election  
Outcomes**

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# Do You Know My Name? How local elites influence primary election outcomes.\*

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**Abstract:** Extensive evidence suggests that voters have little information about candidates in primary elections, yet Congressional primary electorates systematically tend to nominate ideologically extreme candidates and candidates with previous political experience. In this paper, I propose a model where party activists influence the outcome of primary elections by providing resources used to generate name recognition for favored candidates. Using data on candidates, donors, campaign, and voters, I show empirically that party activist support strongly predicts primary election outcomes regardless of candidate experience or ideology, but that this support uniquely aids candidates with names that are common and easy to remember. Together, this evidence suggests that the invisible primary is central to the dynamics of congressional primary elections in the United States and political elites use the heuristic of name recognition to influence voters.

**Keywords:** Primary elections; voter behaviour; political coordination; political polarization; political parties; invisible primary.

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# 1 Introduction

Why do primary elections work? Primary elections systematically nominate candidates who are both ideologically extreme relative to the median voter and have more legislative experience than would be expected at random. This holds even in competitive, multi-candidate primaries. Past research has noted this selection effect of primaries, comparing it to the preferences of voters for experienced candidates and noting the divergence of the median primary voter from the median voter in the general electorate to suggest primary nominations reflect the preferences the primary electorate.

However, voters know little about the candidates in primary elections. Primary elections generally require voters to choose between candidates who are broadly similar on most dimensions and who run more muted campaigns than those run in the general election. A primary might, for example, require voters to choose between 5 candidates, multiple of whom have prior elected experience and all of whom agree on most salient issues. Within parties, the degree of similarity between candidates will generally dwarf the degree of difference between them. Research shows that voters are generally unable to distinguish between primary candidates on ideological dimensions, even when there might be a strategic incentive to do so (Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz, 2015; Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz, 2016; Hall and Lim, 2018). Voters lack the information necessary to make these subtle differentiations and likely further lack the motivation to do so. Even scholars of primary elections struggle to accurately measure intraparty differences in ideology (Bonica, 2018; Hirano et al., 2015).

To explain this gap between what voters know and how they behave, I propose and test a model of party control of primary elections that relies on candidates' abilities to generate name recognition. While previous research has focused on voter preferences, I turn to a measure of the preferences of local party actors following Hassell (2016) and investigate local party preferences over candidates. Research has shown that local party actors often have divergent preferences and beliefs from voters Broockman et al. (2021), Lockhart and Hill (2022), and Kujala (2021). I show that local parties strongly prefer candidates who have prior legislative experience and who are

close to the median of the party's Congressional delegation. I then show that these preferences are reflected in the outcome of primary elections. Local party support, beyond other candidate attributes, predicts outcomes in primary elections.

But how do local party elites influence outcomes when voters seem to be unaware of even basic candidate attributes? To explain this puzzle, I propose a model of positive campaigning where party-backed candidates focus on connecting their name with their partisan label. In elections without many distinguishing features between candidates, strategic candidates will promote their own name instead of focusing on contrast with the competition. Voters, in turn, can rely on this cue either through the positive impression generated by exposure or by using name recognition as a proxy for candidate valence traits; a candidate who runs a prominent campaign could be expected to be more competent than one who runs a worse campaign. Empirically, I show this by leveraging variation in how easy a name is to remember. I argue more common names are easier to recall and so more readily generate name recognition through campaigning. I show that party support is more effective for candidates with easier-to-recall names.

My research contributes to three important areas of understanding in primary elections. First, it builds on prior work showing the importance of political parties. Previous research focusing on the invisible primary has largely assumed party actors either push candidates out of the primary or provide direct endorsements (e.g. Kousser et al., 2015; Hassell, 2018; Kujala, 2021). Relatively little is known about how party actors impact vote choice in elections with less salience; when leaders are not providing direct endorsements and signals, how do they affect control over the party? I argue they do so through scarce resources that candidates use to build effective campaigns.

Second, this research directly tests the role of name recognition in elections, an element that has long been suggested as important in low information environments, but has rarely been directly tested (Kam and Zechmeister, 2013; Jacobson and Carson, 2019). This contributes to our understanding of how voters might use heuristics to find suitable candidates, even in extremely low information environments such as open primary elections. Further, I provide a theory as to why this might be rational for voters to do.

Finally, it helps to explain why primary elections continue to produce polarizing results despite the general preference of voters for moderate candidates. One of the most important questions facing American politics is why polarization is occurring despite incentives to moderate (Hirano et al., 2010; Theriault, 2006; McCarty, 2019). By examining the voter's incentives and connecting voter behaviour to party involvement, I show that polarization can occur because of party preferences and why voters might vote for more extreme primary candidates even if they would prefer a moderate.

This paper proceeds in four parts. First, I show that the existing literature lacks a convincing explanation for empirical patterns observed in primary elections. Second, I develop a theory of party control of primaries that uses differences in candidate name recognition as a path for parties to shape primary election outcomes. Third, I present empirical results showing the importance of name recognition in primary elections. Finally, I empirically demonstrate the role of parties in primaries by showing parties support a narrow range of candidates and that these candidates tend to outperform similar candidates who the party does not support.

## **2 Existing Literature**

Existing research suggests that down-ballot primary elections are a hard case for voters in American elections. General elections provide both more distinct choices and more accessible heuristics for voters to make use of than their primary counterpart. Candidates in the two major parties differ in predictable ways across social, economic, and foreign policy issues (Moskowitz, 2021). A voter can reasonably differentiate the general election candidates based solely on their party affiliation and the candidates' likely issue positions to compare with their own positions.

Further, when voting across many different elections voters in general elections can make use of party labels as a heuristic to simplify the question of who to vote for (Downs, 1957; Schaffner and Streb, 2002). The same basic heuristic of party label can inform voters' decisions in national, state, and local elections and so serves to structure much of politics. This is evidenced by the fact that most voters in general elections do not split their ticket across levels of government or office,

suggesting their votes are largely driven by differences between the parties rather than candidate specific features. General elections thus serve as an easy case for voters wishing to make policy driven choices.

In primaries, policy differences are muted and the partisan cue is absent. Voters face a much more difficult choice as a result. In one example, Hirano et al. (2015) tried to place candidates running for state legislative offices on an ideological spectrum relative to one another to identify more extreme or moderate candidates using statements and media coverage of the candidates. Despite their expertise, even they found it challenging in many cases to even produce an estimate of candidate ideologies.

In practice, this seems to match with voters' own experiences. Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz (2016) investigate the impact of reforms to California's voting system designed to increase the incentive for candidates to moderate by moving to a top-two primary system as opposed to partisan primaries. The change was supposed to advantage candidates who could appeal to moderate voters from each party, but Ahler and coauthors found no such moderating effect. They argue that this lack of centripetal force was because voters could not successfully identify the more moderate candidates to support. The information necessary to distinguish the ideology of candidates from the same party was too difficult to find and voters had to rely on other cues.

In my own work speaking to voters, I have also found support for the limited role of ideology in the minds of voters. Conducting exit polls of Texas primary elections in 2020, I found that voters were rarely able to place even their preferred candidate on an ideological spectrum. In almost no cases did voters provide multiple ideological placements, suggesting they knew little about the ideological positions of candidates<sup>1</sup>.

And yet primary elections seem to explain two important phenomena observed empirically in Congressional elections that would suggest voters are operating more systematically than the evidence suggests. First, research by Hirano and Snyder (2019) suggests that primaries act as an effective screening mechanism for parties by ensuring high quality candidates make it to the

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<sup>1</sup>Because the results turned out to include so much missingness, I was not able to compile any meaningful analysis although additional quotes are presented later.

general election. They argue that, empirically, primaries serve surprisingly well at screening out potential candidates who lack experience and other non-policy characteristics that would hurt the party's chances in the general election. Looking at historical data, they find past elected experience has consistently conferred a substantial advantage to politicians seeking their party's nomination in a primary election.

Second, primary elections apparently reinforce ideological homogeneity within parties. Primaries consistently advantage more extreme candidates at the expense of moderate candidates. While early reformers thought primaries would produce results largely reflective of local characteristics, the introduction of primaries has largely reinforced party homogeneity. Members of Congress consistently demonstrate behaviour that suggests they are concerned about challenges in their primary if they do not act sufficiently in line with the party agenda while in Congress (Boatright, 2013). Further, despite the theoretical possibility of 'crossover voting' discussed by some scholars (Cho and Kang, 2015), there exists no evidence for this kind of behaviour. Primaries consistently nominate candidates in line with the party's agenda.

In fact, the tendency for primaries to nominate non-centrist candidates has been exaggerated over time and likely contributes to polarization in Congress. Since the 1960s, primaries have nominated increasingly extreme candidates (Hill and Tausanovitch, 2018). While the exact cause of the shift in candidate nominations is contentious, it is clear that replacement through primary elections is the driving force in polarization, not changes in existing representatives' behaviour (Theriault, 2006).

More unclear than the outcome of primaries or voter competence is what parties do in primary elections. There is limited evidence to suggest a role for parties in primaries, but the overall extent of this evidence is still small and only speaks to some facets of party involvement. Most notable is the research by Hans Hassel that shows party involvement in Senatorial primaries is an important source of primary success (Hassell, 2016). Hill (2020) also finds evidence that when institutional reforms aimed to limit the formal role of parties are introduced, campaign contributions also increase. He argues that this represents parties finding alternative pathways for influence over

primary elections. It is this line of research that I build on below.

### **3 Name Recognition as Party Power**

To reconcile the activity of parties in primaries and their predictable outcome, I turn to the role of name recognition in determining vote choice. Name recognition is often used loosely in the literature, but I use it to refer narrowly to the *familiarity of a candidate's name, regardless of any associated feelings*. Voters might know nothing about a candidate but recognize their name strongly in some cases while in others they might have strong positive or negative feelings associated with the candidate whose name they recognize.

The role of name recognition as a shortcut in elections has a long history. Jacobson (2015), for example, argues that name recognition is one of the important drivers of incumbent success in Congressional politics. Burden (2002) looks at bad press coverage in primary elections and argues that it produced positive benefits for candidates by increasing their name recognition. Many more scholars argue that name recognition, on its own, contribute to the success of candidates

How does this mechanism work? Voters can use their recognition of a candidate's name, regardless of whether they have developed associated feelings, as a heuristic in extremely low information environments. Absent any additional information about candidates' experiences and platforms, a familiar name can be enough for a voter to select one candidate over another. Previous work by Kam and Zechmeister (2013) provides evidence for this; they show that exposure to candidate names, when presented without additional information, can be enough to win the support of voters in a lab setting. They argue that name recognition on its own is enough to generate positive impressions through the mere exposure effect (Bornstein and D'Agostino, 1992). Stimuli that are more familiar are more easily processed, which in turn might suggest they are safer or benign choices.

This model is roughly consistent with an online processing model in which voters rely on impressions of candidates rather than specific facts about the candidates they can recall (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh, 1989). This model does not require voters to make an explicit comparison



between their options; instead they can focus on their general impression of candidates. Like with name recognitions, voters do not need to compare candidates on policy or personal dimensions to choose a candidate; they can select their preferred candidate without any knowledge of who they are.

Voters themselves support this idea when asked about their primary votes. When asked why they support a given candidate, most voters offer only general reasons such as the candidate's "value" or they "agreed on most stances", without naming specific issues or positions<sup>2</sup>. Voters do not know specific details or provide comparisons between candidates.

Name recognition offers an explanation for how voters might decide in primary elections given their lack of knowledge of the candidates. As discussed above, voters in primaries generally struggle to differentiate the candidates they are presented with. In many important ways, the candidates are similar to one another and more subtle differences are hard to come across and remember. In this case, absent other information, Kam and Zechmeister (2013) show that voters tend to revert to this simplest of heuristic. While they might prefer to make their decision along more sophisticated dimensions, voters can fall back on candidate recognition to make a choice among candidates who they know little or nothing about.

Given the incentive to build name recognition in the electorate, successful primary campaigns should orient themselves around this goal. Increasing the profile or familiarity of a candidate in a low information race can increase their support, regardless of whether voters can recall anything about the candidate or even form an impression of the candidate. Candidates can engage in a wide array of activities to do this, from placing lawn signs in prominent locations, door knocking, attending or hosting local events, and of course through direct advertising campaigns. In fact, much of the activity campaigns engage in can be thought of as generating name recognition.

Crucially, name recognition can be built by any candidate. It does not depend on a candidate being ideologically close to the primary electorate, nor does it directly depend on the skills of

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<sup>2</sup>These quotes are based on exit interviews I conducted with voters in competitive primary elections in Texas in 2020. Other voters specified name recognition, having heard of the candidate, or a general good feeling as the reason for their vote. Few voters named a specific policy position the candidate held and fewer still suggested they knew anything about candidates besides their preferred choice.

the candidate or whether the candidate would be seen as qualified by the electorate. Any candidate who runs an active campaign has the ability to generate name recognition, particularly if they focus on building it. This provides a pathway for local parties to influence primaries directly. In essence, the low information environment in primary elections allows parties additional control as they can influence primaries through a channel that does not depend on an informed citizenry. While in higher information environments like presidential primaries, power might be exerted through endorsements or signals of ideology, in low information environments a much weaker signal is all that is necessary to build support. This gives parties more room to shape the outcome of elections as any desired candidate can benefit from the party support.

What should this look like? Based on existing research showing patterns in primary elections, we should expect parties to be targeting two types of candidates. First, while voters might prefer more moderate candidates (Hall and Lim, 2018), we should expect parties to nominate relatively more extreme candidates (Broockman et al., 2021). However, there is a limit to this extremity; local party actors will not support the most extreme candidates who are even more extreme than they are. Instead, their support will be narrowly focused on candidates that match the extremity of the party as it currently exists in Congress. On average, candidates closer to the median Member of Congress of the party should benefit from party support.

Second, we should expect parties to support more experienced candidates. This follows Hirano and Snyder (2019)'s findings that experienced candidates receive an electoral benefit in primary elections. I argue experienced candidates are more likely to be known to local party actors and therefore more likely to receive their support. Local party actors, in turn, would prefer experienced candidates as they already know the candidate's disposition and ideology.

### **3.1 Voters and the invisible primary**

Why would it be rational for voters to use name recognition as a shortcut for voting in primary elections? Another way to understand the impact of name recognition is from the perspective of the voter. Voters can use name recognition as a heuristic for valence characteristics and a proxy for ideology, especially when parties are homogenous.

Unlike in general elections, the primary election pits candidates with similar ideological positions against one another. Republican primary candidates tend to hold similar preferences for reduced taxes and spending as well as for socially conservative policy while Democratic primary candidates hold the opposite positions in large. While high profile intraparty disagreements and factions do emerge, polarization has increased the homogeneity of the two political parties dramatically, increasing the amount of intraparty agreement (Dancey and Sheagley, 2018). Increasingly, both moderate and extreme members of Congress vote along party lines; since 1970 party line voting has gone from around 60% to around 90% in Congress.

As co-partisans become increasingly likely to vote with one another and hold similar policy positions, the benefit of primary elections as policy selection tools decreases. The expected gap in policy outcomes between electing a moderate and extreme representative of the same party has shrunk, reducing the potential utility voters derive from selecting a candidate marginally closer to their position. In a case such as that with reduced party heterogeneity, a rational voter might respond by relying on informational cues that are easier and less costly to locate while still providing some differentiating information.

These cues might include name recognition, candidate ethnicity and gender, or possibly candidate background if that is listed on the ballot.<sup>3</sup> Among these cues, name recognition has the largest potential to act as a reliable shortcut as it provides two potential pieces of information to voters. First, it provides valence information about candidates in the form of their fundraising and campaigning abilities as generating name recognition requires mounting a credible and reasonably competent campaign. In this way, name recognition is an example of a recognition heuristic where a positive trait (campaign skills) might correlate with recognition and become a useful shortcut.

This path operates through how candidates generate name recognition. For voters to develop a sense of who a candidate is, they must be exposed to the candidate during the election campaign. The more frequent the exposure (across advertising, campaigning, and word of mouth), the stronger the voter's recognition of a candidate will be. Even if the voter has not followed an elec-

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<sup>3</sup>In California, for example, candidates may designate an occupation on the ballot.

tion campaign, they can infer that candidates they recognize must have mounted some campaign and the candidate who seems the most familiar likely lead one of the most active campaigns. If voters are interested in candidates who will be generate positive campaign activity lead up to the general election, they can use name recognition to infer which candidate is likely to be best at campaigning.

Second, to the extent that parties are an important source of support for candidates and their support leads to higher name recognition, name recognition can be used as a cue by voters to infer that candidates hold positions broadly in line with the party. Put another way, name recognition can help voters screen out candidates who fall very far outside the mainstream of the party. This is because candidates who hold policy positions outside the norm for the party will struggle to find support in the local invisible primary. Without support, their campaigns will struggle to generate the activity necessary for building name recognition in the electorate. A candidate a voter recognizes in the primary election is likely to be a reasonable representation of the party they support, even if the voter does not know the candidate's policy positions specifically.

## **4 Data and Methods**

### **4.1 Methods**

For the purpose of simplicity, I begin by explaining the analysis before describing the data sources. I proceed with the analysis in two parts. First, I look at whether name recognition is indeed an important factor in primary elections. I do so by looking at the returns to campaigning for candidates depending on the commonality of a candidate's name. This approach draws on the insight from psychology that people are better able to recall items that are easier for them to process and that they are more familiar with (Bornstein and D'Agostino, 1992). In this case, because surnames are shared across individuals, some people will have surnames that are easier to recall. For example, it might be easier to recall someone with the surname of Smith than someone with a less common surname as it is easy to bring the surname 'Smith' to the top of one's mind.

Because candidates naturally vary in how common their surnames are, I use this variation

to ask whether the ease with which voters can recall a candidate's name impacts the usefulness of candidate advertising. If name recognition is one of the principal drivers of primary election outcomes, candidates with easier to remember names should be at an advantage; their campaign activity will generate a larger change in their name recognition than for a candidate with a difficult to remember name. Thus, the association between party support and their probability of success in a primary should be moderated by how common their name is.

I look at how name recognition moderates the relationship between party support and candidate success. This builds on the work of Hassell (2016). I begin by replicating his finding that receiving support from local party actors is associated with success in primary elections. Crucially, though, I look at what happens when this measure is interacted with a measure of name commonality, using name commonality as a proxy for memorability. I expect that if party support is leading to candidates generating name recognition through their campaign activities, the independent effect of party support will depend on how easy a candidate's name is to remember. Candidates with more familiar names should find it easier to build name recognition and therefore support.

I also control for additional features to identify the impact of name recognition. First, I control for the ideology of the candidate. Past research has shown the important role of ideology in predicting primary outcomes (Boatright, 2013); if this is correlated with party support it might be that parties and voters both prefer the same type of candidate and so the relationship would be spurious. I further control for district features that do not vary over time and shocks that impact specific years with district and year fixed effects. This controls for differences that might be attributed to either the district's location or composition or shocks such as wave elections that impact all districts.

Second, I look at whether party supported candidates fit in the mould we would expect, based on the existing literature. I begin with a measure of party support in local elections, again following Hassell (2016). I do this by focusing on donors who contribute to the central parties. I classify party contributors as those who gave to one or more of the Democratic National Committee, Republican National Committee, or any of the four party campaign committees for the House and Senate in that cycle. These donors are those who are most likely to be involved with the political party at the

local level and likely to provide additional support in the form of volunteering or other resources Hassell (2016). Candidates who receive donations from these donors are likely those favored by the local party.

To measure the preferences of local party actors, I look at what factors predict support from party contributors. I look at two key factors that might influence the support from party actors. First, I look at the ideological distance between candidates and the median candidate for a party. I expect that, all else equal, parties are likely to support candidates who are neither too extreme nor too moderate; they're likely to back candidates who closely resemble the existing ideological landscape of the party. These candidates likely resemble the donors themselves as they fit closely to the national image of the party, as we might expect contributors to national campaigns to be. Following Hirano and Snyder (2019), I then look at the impact of experience on party support. I expect that candidates with prior experience in elected office will be significantly more likely to gain the support of party contributors. In addition, I control for the district and year using fixed effects.

## **4.2 Data**

To conduct this analysis, I bring together data on 5 different aspects of primary elections. My main outcome of interest is the electoral success of candidates. To measure this, I use election returns covering 21st century primary elections for the House of Representatives in every state. This data is collected from Hirano and Snyder (2019) and supplemented with additional electoral returns from the Federal Elections Commission. All candidates who appeared on the election ballot appear in this data set.

Next, I use campaign finance data from Bonica (2014) to measure two additional variables of interest: candidate ideology and party support. To measure the ideology of candidates in primary elections, many of whom never hold elected office, I use the CF Scores constructed by Bonica (2014). These scores assume that donors in elections donate to candidates with similar ideologies and policy positions to their own to recover systematic estimates of ideology for candidates who are never elected. Following Hassell (2018) and Lockhart and Hill (2022), I classify party contributors

as those who gave to one or more of the Democratic National Committee, Republican National Committee, or any of the four party campaign committees for the House and Senate in a given cycle. Candidates who receive donations from party contributors should be those who are receiving support from local party actors who are involved in the primary; these donations should track other types of non-monetary support from these actors. This operationalization of party support is a more broad one than that used by Hassell (2018) as it captures donations to any national political organization as opposed to just the national Senate campaigns. As a result, it captures a wider swatch of donors who might be involved in party politics at the local level.

I measure candidate experience using data collected by Porter and Treul (2019) on candidate experience. This data draws on candidate biographical information to measure whether a candidate is considered experienced. Following Hirano and Snyder (2019), I define any candidate with prior legislative experience in state or municipal governments as being experienced.

Finally, to measure the impact of name commonality on electoral success I use the US Census Bureau's decennial publication of surname frequency per 100,000 individuals. This list provides data on surname frequency in the United States for all names that occur more than 100 times in the given census. Names that occur less than 100 times are given a score of 0.

## **5 Name Recognition**

Table 1 replicates the results of prior research in the context of primaries for the House of Representatives from 2010 to 2018. Columns 1 and 3 both show that candidates who receive donations from party contributors are significantly more likely to win primary elections, even when controlling for candidate ideology, district, and year. This replicates Hassell (2016)'s research on the Senate in the House. Additionally, surname frequency on its own has no impact on candidate success.

Columns 2 and 4 provide evidence that party support is acting through the generation of name recognition by increasing campaign activity. There are two important results here to note. First, when candidate names are added to the regression showing the advantage of party support, the apparent impact of party support dissipates. This is not surprising but clearly shows the important

Table 1: Determinants of electoral success based on name commonality.

	Democrats	Democrats	Republicans	Republicans
Support from Party	0.018+	-0.005	0.604***	-0.017
	[-0.003, 0.039]	[-0.028, 0.017]	[0.397, 0.812]	[-0.479, 0.444]
Ideology	0.040	0.035	0.020	0.030*
	[-0.016, 0.097]	[-0.019, 0.090]	[-0.008, 0.047]	[0.003, 0.057]
Experience	0.293***	0.267***	0.153**	0.154**
	[0.192, 0.393]	[0.168, 0.366]	[0.058, 0.248]	[0.062, 0.246]
Log Name Frequency		-0.015		0.010
		[-0.038, 0.009]		[-0.007, 0.027]
Total Donations		0.000**		0.000***
		[0.000, 0.000]		[0.000, 0.000]
Name Frequency X Party Support		0.008*		0.130**
		[0.001, 0.014]		[0.033, 0.227]
Num.Obs.	480	480	628	628
R2	0.583	0.618	0.401	0.448
R2 Adj.	0.250	0.304	0.061	0.128
R2 Within	0.155	0.225	0.120	0.189
R2 Pseudo				

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001



role of name recognition

Secondly, candidates with more common names do receive substantial returns to party support, especially on the Republican side. A candidate with a more common surname can expect to benefit much more from party support than a candidate with a less common name. A 1% increase in the commonness of a surname leads to a 0.008 increase in the impact of party support on candidate success for Democrats and a 0.13 increase in the impact of party support for Republicans. This provides evidence that voters need to be able to remember the name of the candidate for parties to be able to provide support. Candidates with unfamiliar names struggle to generate name recognition as efficiently.

## **6 Party Involvement**

Figure 1 plots the distribution of candidate ideologies for both party supported and non-party supported candidates. The distribution shows that Democrats are significantly more likely to support candidates who are left of center and clustered around a score of -1. This represents a reasonably liberal but not extreme candidate within the party, similar to the median member of the Democratic Caucus in Congress. Neither extreme nor overly centrist candidates receive significant party support.

Republicans behave similarly, though following previous work there is some evidence they prefer slightly more extreme candidates than Democrats. Figure 2 plots the same distribution and shows that Republican party support clusters around candidates who have DIME scores narrowly above 1. Again the party appears to select candidates relatively close to their median to support in primaries. Moderate and extreme candidates receive significantly less support.

Following this, I formalize these predictions in a model predicting support from parties. I further include the role that experience plays in generating support from local parties. To do so, I model whether a candidate receives party support as a function of the candidates previous experience in elected office, DIME score, and incumbency status. Table 2 shows that candidate experience is strongly predictive of support from both the Democrat and Republican parties. This

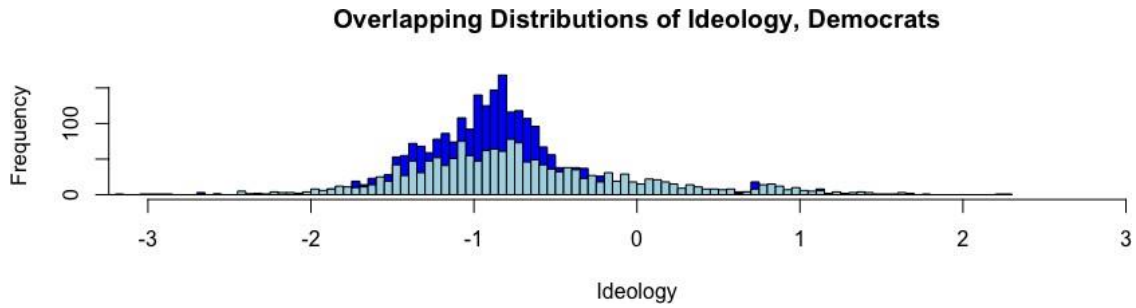


Figure 1: Distribution of primary candidate ideology by party support status among Democrats. Party supported candidates are dark blue, other candidates are light blue.

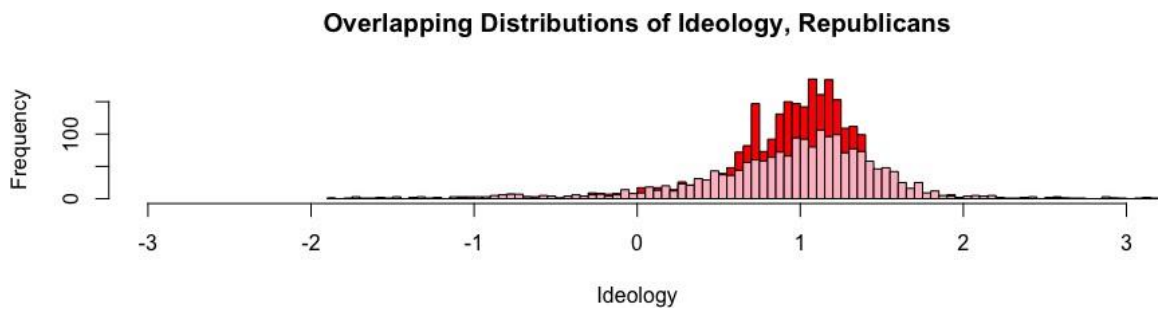


Figure 2: Distribution of primary candidate ideology by party support status among Republicans. Party supported candidates are dark red, other candidates are light red.

Table 2: Impact of experience and distance from mean candidate ideology on support from party actors.

	Democrats	Republicans
Experienced	-0.017 [-0.294, 0.260]	0.016* [0.003, 0.029]
Distance from Mean Ideology	-0.194* [-0.352, -0.035]	-0.043*** [-0.063, -0.023]
Num.Obs.	2628	2937
R2	0.533	0.434
R2 Adj.	0.240	0.142
R2 Within	0.002	0.008
R2 Pseudo		

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

suggests that parties are choosing to back candidates who have a high profile within the party; holding equal candidate ideology there is a preference for candidates who local actors will be more familiar with.

In this model, I code ideology as the absolute deviation from a party's average candidate in an election cycle. This captures that parties would rather support mainstream candidates who are neither moderate nor extreme. Parties should be likely to support candidates who are close to the mean of candidates running in a cycle. The results support this; party support declines significantly as candidates become either more moderate or more extreme. Democratic party donors in particular seem to respond to ideology of the candidates, focusing their donations on a narrow range of candidates.

Next, I look at Table 3 which examines the independent impact of party support on candidates' electoral fortunes. In this model, I control for both the ideology of the candidate and the experience of the candidate. It shows that while experience and ideology predict party support of primary candidates, party support itself is independently associated with winning primary elections. This suggests that some voters might respond to the candidates directly, but the invisible primary has an independent effect on other voters.

Interestingly, in this model it is the overall extremity of candidates that contribute to their

Table 3: Determinants of electoral success.

	Democrats	Democrats	Republicans	Republicans
Experienced	0.149*** [0.076, 0.221]	0.148*** [0.077, 0.220]	0.163*** [0.103, 0.223]	0.156*** [0.097, 0.215]
Ideology	-0.096*** [-0.135, -0.057]	-0.095*** [-0.134, -0.057]	0.041** [0.012, 0.070]	0.042** [0.013, 0.070]
Support from Party		0.020* [0.001, 0.040]		0.304** [0.097, 0.512]
Num.Obs.	2628	2628	2937	2937
R2	0.474	0.476	0.437	0.448
R2 Adj.	0.143	0.147	0.145	0.163
R2 Within	0.023	0.028	0.017	0.038
R2 Pseudo				

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

electoral chances; voters seem to independently prefer more extreme candidates overall instead of candidates who fit the general party label. This differs from donors who support middle-of-the-road candidates. The difference in behaviour suggests that at least some voters in primaries might respond directly to the ideological positions of the candidates.

Support from party donors is significantly associated with winning primary elections, holding candidate ideologies constant. For Democrats, there is a 5% bonus to electability from party support while for Republicans this is higher at 30%. This evidence suggests that party support must be providing a useful benefit to candidates; party donors are providing something that candidates can use to win primaries that goes beyond their ideology and past experience. In the next section, I investigate this relationship by examining the possibility that party support impacts campaign styles by providing expertise and non-monetary resources to candidates.

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

The role of parties in primary elections in the United States is increasingly being studied as an extension of party power. How and when parties involve themselves in primaries can help explain patterns observed across the presidency, Senate, and House and help researchers understand who runs for office and who wins.

In primary elections for the US House of Representatives, parties exert influence at the ground level. While these primaries are often less salient than other primaries and so direct intervention might be less likely to succeed, local party actors can work around this by providing support to candidates they support that those candidates use to win primaries.

Party actors tend to focus this support on candidates who have experience in elected office. I argued that this is because candidates with prior elected experience represent a visible pool of candidates with known ideological positions to choose from. Party actors were further seen to strongly prefer candidates close to the ideological center of the party; candidates who are neither too extreme nor too moderate. Once candidates receive party support, their chances of winning elections rise dramatically.

To explain this pattern, I looked closely at the differential impact of party support on electoral success. While in general party support does predict electoral success, I show that this is most true for candidates with highly common names. These names are more recognizable to voters and as a result should be easier for voters to remember once they are exposed to them. I show that candidates with the most common names experience the largest returns from party support while candidates with less common names do not receive this benefit.

My findings suggests two important areas for future work to address. First, future work needs to continue to explore how elites drive election outcomes. While my work focuses on the party's role in primaries, there are many other elite groups that are increasingly active in politics. Interest groups also have access to campaign expertise, committed volunteer bases, and staff that can provide intangible benefits to campaigns. Candidates looking to mount insurgent campaigns against incumbents, for instance, might use this type of outside support to build a campaign.

Organized social movements like Black Lives Matter or non-traditional party adjacent groups like the Democratic Socialists of America are increasingly providing candidates with support outside of the party system. This gives candidates who might not fit the ideological mould of a party the chance to win primary elections, potentially in safe districts where they can go on to be elected. Candidates like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez can win elections this way. If this trend continues, par-

ties will likely lose some of their control over primary elections.

Recent evidence suggests this is a growing trend. The preference for experienced candidates identified here is shrinking; thanks to early funding from outside of a district, inexperienced political outsiders are increasingly successful in primary elections (Porter and Treul, 2019). Non-party actors increasingly provide the resources parties used to control.

Second, these findings also speak to the need to better understand non-presidential primary campaigns themselves. The actual campaign activity and campaign style in Congressional primaries remains extremely poorly understood. Little is known about how, when, and why candidates choose to invest in different modes of advertising, door knocking, and campaigning activity. This is despite primary campaigns likely being a source of some of the most active persuasion in political communication as voters almost always enter the campaign without having made up their mind. This makes primaries a very useful place to study how and why different types of advertising and campaigning are effective.

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