Presidents' Effects on Opposing Party Coordination During Nomination Contests
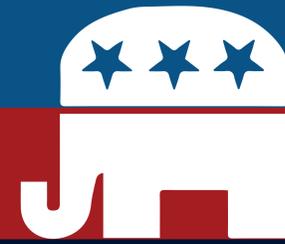
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Party influence in nominations

- Seeking to reconcile two competing theories on presidential nominations since 1968
  - ◊ Polsby (1983): Party leaders are weakened in a primary-dominated process
    - *"Rather than build coalitions (candidates) must mobilize factions"* (p. 65)
  - ◊ Cohen et al. (2008): Party leaders have adapted to the primary-dominated process and succeeded in nominating their preferred candidate for president from 1980-2004
    - *Authors find evidence of endorsements during the invisible primary (before the Iowa caucuses) playing a significant role on who is the ultimate nominee*
- Cohen et al. (2016) agree that Trump's nomination was remarkable for its factionalism and a manifestation of the diluted influence of party leaders.
- Masket (2020) points out that Joe Biden was the polling leader for most of the invisible primary and earned the most elite endorsements
  - ◊ 2020 nominations were "surprisingly good" for the party decides theory (p. 47)

Effects of incumbency and ideology

- Cohen et al. (2008) suggest that the longer a party has been out of the White House, the likelier it is to nominate a more moderate candidate, sacrificing policy cohesion in favor of electability
- A similar dynamic can be seen in strategic versus sincere voting during primary elections
- ***Do factors that inspire strategic voting similarly inspire strategic behavior from elites, specifically coordination?***


Source: Cohen et al, 2008, p. 94
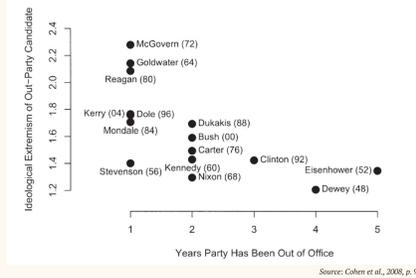
Effects of incumbency and ideology

- Mirhosseini (2015) develops a model of the trade-off between sincere and strategic voting, proposing that in elections where a party is challenging an incumbent president, voters may be more likely to vote strategically when the president is perceived to be more radical
- Similarly, Masket (2020) suggests that negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; 2018) may make a party more "desperate" and nominate and coordinate around moderate candidate earlier than they would based just on the trend observed by Cohen et al. (2008)

Results

Hypotheses 1a and 1b:
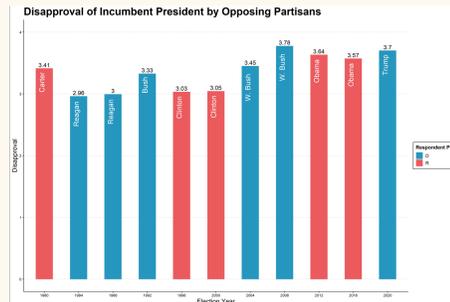
	Dependent variable:	
	Proportion (1)	cand_prop (2)
Disapproval	-30.287 (24.220)	-5.484 (22.142)
Candidate_Num	-0.393 (1.042)	
Candidate_Num		-0.979 (0.953)
Constant	140.847 (78.579)	83.665 (71.837)
Observations	11	11
R^2	0.226	0.157
Adjusted R^2	0.033	-0.054
Residual Std. Error (df = 8)	21.706	19.844
F Statistic (df = 2; 8)	1.168	0.744
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Hypotheses 2a and 2b:
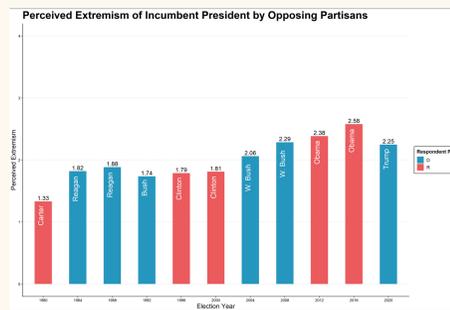
	Dependent variable:	
	Proportion (1)	cand_prop (2)
FoldedIdeo	-18.853 (22.159)	3.535 (19.382)
Candidate_Num	-0.458 (1.122)	
Candidate_Num		-1.138 (0.981)
Constant	77.399* (41.450)	59.725 (36.255)
Observations	11	11
R^2	0.152	0.154
Adjusted R^2	-0.061	-0.058
Residual Std. Error (df = 8)	22.727	19.878
F Statistic (df = 2; 8)	0.714	0.727
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Could not find statistical significance for any hypothesis that used party coordination measures as the dependent variable. But what about the ideology of the ultimate nominee as the dependent variable?

	Dependent variable:	
	NomineeFoldedIdeo	
	(1)	(2)
Disapproval	0.281* (0.137)	
PresFoldedIdeo		0.170 (0.131)
ElectOut	-0.076 (0.060)	-0.084 (0.068)
Constant	0.735 (0.475)	1.352*** (0.282)
Observations	11	11
R^2	0.429	0.280
Adjusted R^2	0.286	0.100
Residual Std. Error (df = 8)	0.131	0.147
F Statistic (df = 2; 8)	3.004	1.558
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

- Statistically significant relationship (90% confidence level) between the dissaproval of the incumbent president and the extremism of the opposing party's nominee
- One-point increase in the disapproval of the incumbent president by the opposing party's electorate (on a 4-point scale) will correlate with a 0.281 increase in the ideological extremism of that party's ultimate nominee
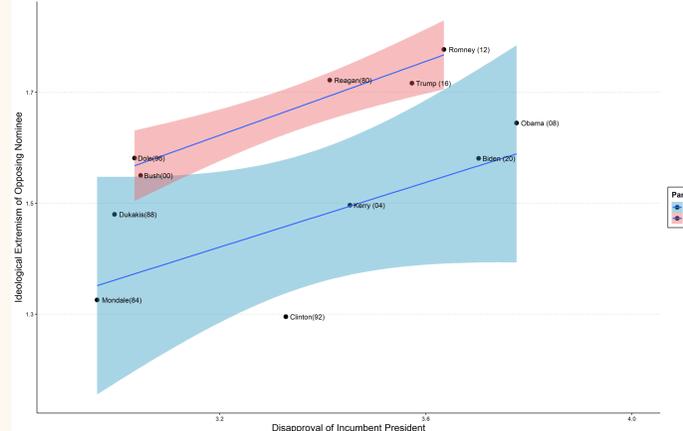
Dependent Variables: Party Coordination
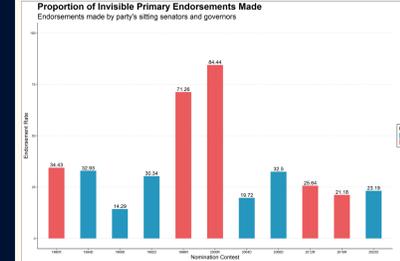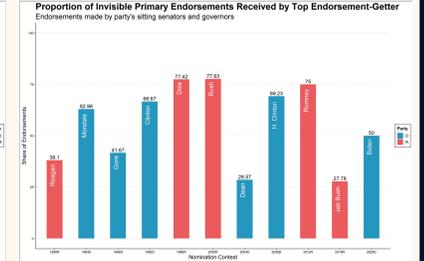
Sources: Cohen's dataset on invisible primary endorsements 1980-2004; 2008-2020 data from FiveThirtyEight and Democracy in Action; U.S. Governors 1775-2020 dataset (Kaplan, 2020); U.S. Senate chronological list 1789-Present

Hypotheses

- **H1a:** An incumbent president viewed more unfavorably by the opposing party's electorate will correlate with a higher share of the opposing party's pre-Iowa endorsements going to a single candidate
- **H1b:** An incumbent president viewed more unfavorably by the opposing party's electorate will correlate with a higher share of the opposing party's sitting senators and governors issuing an endorsement prior to the Iowa caucuses.
- **H2a:** An incumbent president viewed as more ideologically extreme by the opposing party's voters will correlate with a higher share of the party's pre-Iowa endorsements going to a single candidate
- **H2b:** An incumbent president viewed as more ideologically extreme by the opposing party's voters will correlate with a higher share of the opposing party's sitting senators and governors issuing an endorsement prior to the Iowa caucuses.

Discussion

- My analysis was unsuccessful in finding evidence that the evaluations of the incumbent president studied (disapproval and extremism) played a significant role in inspiring higher levels of party coordination during the invisible primary
- However, there was some evidence that negative partisanship does affect the extremism of the ultimate nominee
- This relationship was actually counterintuitive to what was suggested by Masket (2020); rather than inspire moderation in the ultimate nominee, negative partisanship was found to inspire more extreme nominees
- Mirhosseini (2015) hints at this relationship by suggesting that in 2008, President Bush's unpopularity made Democratic voters more comfortable voting for Obama rather than Clinton who was the establishment favorite
- Further research may investigate whether this measure of negative partisanship inspires voters to consider the nomination more strategically than sincerely based on opinion polling