Provoking the Opposition

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Congress is becoming more ideologically polarized

1. Extremists replacing moderates — Thomsen (2014, 2017) and Hall (2019)
2. Incumbents becoming more extreme — McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2016), Bonica (2014)

Mixed evidence of a corresponding increase in mass polarization

Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2008), Bafumi and Herron (2010), Barberá (2015), Ahler and Broockman (2018)

Electoral penalty for extremism

Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan (2002) and Hall (2015)

3. Penalty is diminishing, but only for incumbents

Bonica and Cox (2018) and Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2018)

A mechanism that explains 1., 2., and 3. without a polarizing electorate

Extremist incumbents face extremist challengers

- Extremist incumbents embolden opposition party's base who field challengers who are more congruent

Trade-off between electability and congruence

Primary voters care about policies and probability of winning

Coleman (1971), Aronson and Ordeshook (1972), Abramowitz (1989), Abramson et al. (1992), Owen and Grofman (2006), Rickershauser and Aldrich (2007), Serra (2011), and Woon (2018)

Incumbents' influence on selection of candidates in opposition party

- Means
  - Choose policies to manipulate this trade-off and provoke opposition extremists
- Motivation
  - More likely to beat an extremist challenger

Reid/Angle McCaskill/Akin

Can incumbents provoke extremists to win primaries?

And thus improve their reelection chances?

Key Takeaway

Incumbent can increase her probability of reelection by moving away from center

Downs (1957), Wittman (1983), and Calvert (1985)

Two mechanisms:

1. Primary elections
2. Candidate entry

Provoking the opposition can only happen when

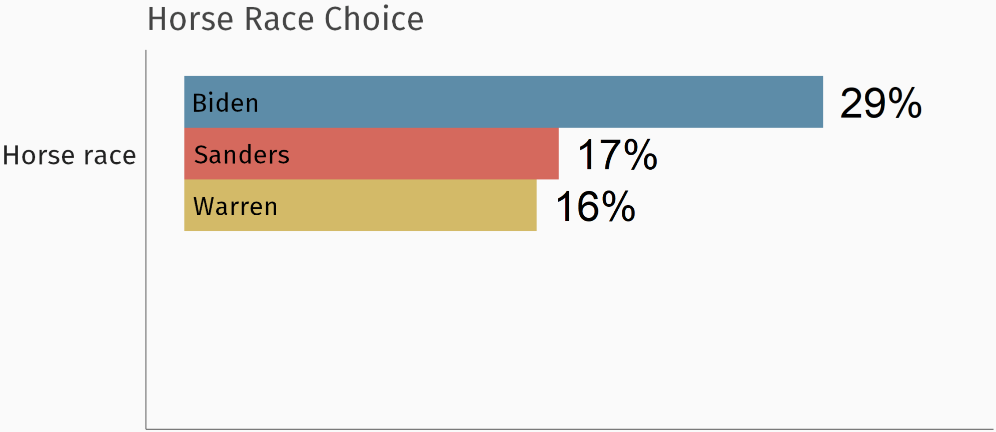
1. General and primary electorates are divergent

   Brady, Han, and Pope (2007), Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2010), King, Orlando, and Sparks (2016), and Hill and Tausanovitch (2018)

2. Parties are constrained in their choice of candidates

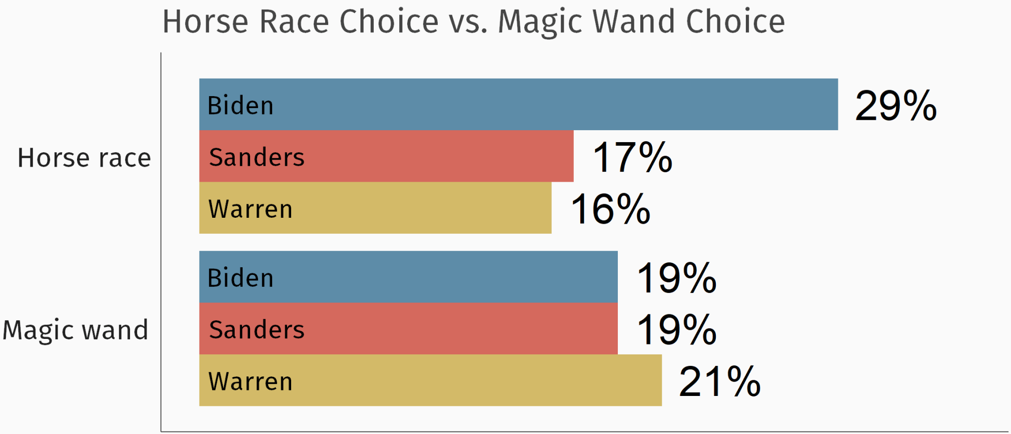
   Banks and Kiewiet (1989), Steger (2000), Mattozzi and Merlo (2008), Thomsen (2014), Hassell (2015), Dal Bó et al. (2017), Thomsen (2017), and Hall (2019)

Democrats are constrained to a few candidates for 2020



Avalanche Strategy, May 30-June 3, 1109 likely Democratic voters

Choices with and without electability concerns diverge



Avalanche Strategy, May 30-June 3, 1109 likely Democratic voters

October 2019

Roadmap

1. Primitives
2. Primary elections
    - Endogenous primaries, exogenous set of candidates
3. Endogenous entry
    - Exogenous primaries, endogenous set of candidates
4. Combined model
    - Endogenous primaries and endogenous set of candidates
5. Discussion

Primitives

Primitives

Citizens with ideal points $v \in \mathbb{R}$, median voter's ideal point is 0

Two parties on either side of median

Loss from policy: $-\ell(|v - x|)$, increasing and convex

e.g. $|v - x|$, $(v - x)^2$, $e^{|v-x|}$, ...

Global utility shock for incumbent, drawn from log-concave density f, cdf F

e.g. uniform, normal, exponential, ...

Incumbent's ideal policy is t, cares about her platform and office rents B

$$\Pr(\text{reelection})(B - \ell(|t - x_I|))$$

Majority rule

Timing

1. Incumbent chooses her platform $x_I > 0$
2. Challenger $x \leq 0$ is selected
3. Utility shock revealed
4. General election takes place
5. Winner implements their platform in the second period

SPNEq in undominated strategies

Analysis

General election

Median voter votes for challenger with probability

Why?

$$F(\ell(|x_I|) - \ell(|x|))$$

Two candidates, single-peaked preferences $\implies$ median voter is decisive

Pins down the probability any challenger would beat incumbent

Primary Election

Primary election

Primary voter's net gain:

$$\underbrace{F(\ell(x_I) - \ell(-x))}_{\text{Probability of beating incumbent}} \quad \times \quad \underbrace{(\ell(|x_I - v|) - \ell(|x - v|))}_{\text{Payoff gain from beating incumbent}}$$

When x closer to zero, candidates are more electable but less congruent

Proposition 1

When the marginal loss function satisfies log-concavity, the median primary voter's optimal candidate wins the primary.

Open nominations

Suppose opposition is unconstrained in their challenger choice

$$\max_{x \in \mathbb{R}} F(\ell(x_I) - \ell(-x))(\ell(|x_I - v_p|) - \ell(|x - v_p|))$$

Against a more extreme incumbent:

- Improve both probability and policy gain
- Challenger's ideology may be more or less extreme
- But not so extreme to lose more often

Proposition 2

When the opposition party is unconstrained in the ideology of the challenger, they defeat a more extreme incumbent with a higher probability.

Party elites

Two primary candidates with platforms $x_E < x_M$

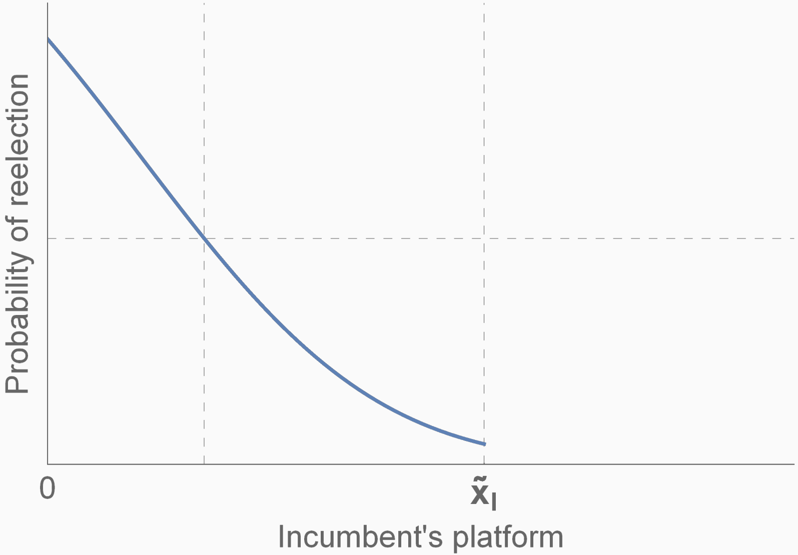
$$\max_{x \in \{x_E, x_M\}} F(\ell(x_I) - \ell(-x))(\ell(|x_I - v_p|) - \ell(|x - v_p|))$$

When median primary voter closer to E, but M much more electable, Conditions

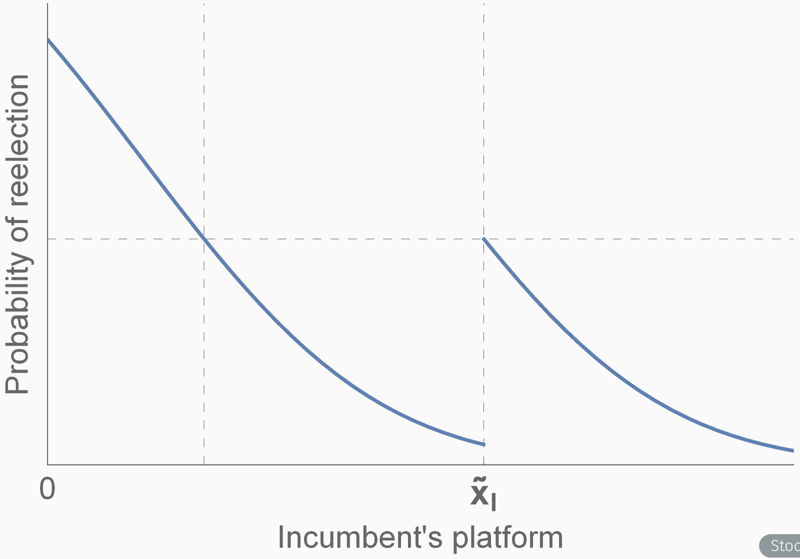
there exists an incumbent platform $\tilde{x}_I$ such that

- When incumbent is more moderate, M wins primary
- When incumbent is more extreme, E wins primary Lemma

Incumbent can improve her reelection probability by moving right



Incumbent can improve her reelection probability by moving right

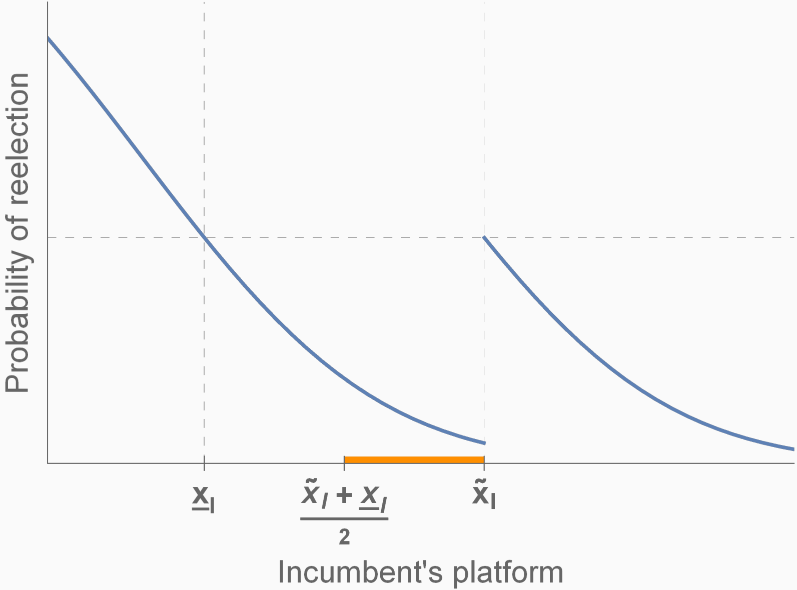


Incumbent *will* improve her reelection probability by moving right

Proposition 3

When the incumbent's ideal point t is more moderate than but sufficiently close to $\tilde{x}_I$, and office rents B lie in an intermediate range, the incumbent provokes the opposition by choosing $\tilde{x}_I > t$.

Incumbent *will* improve her reelection probability by moving right



Endogenous Entry

Endogenous entry

E and M care about policy, cost of running, office rent

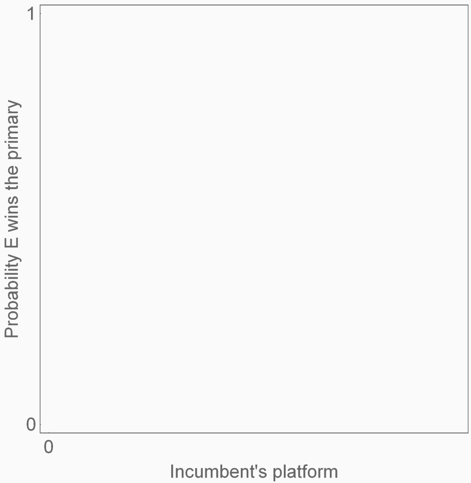
Sequential announcements

Probability extremist wins primary, $\boldsymbol{p}$, given exogenously

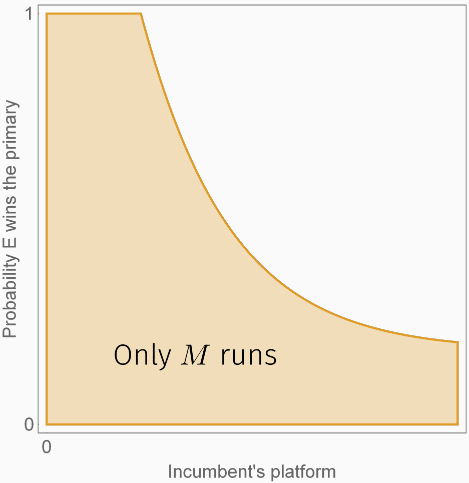
E's net payoff from running, when M is running

$$-c+p\Big[\overbrace{F(\ell(x_I)-\ell(-x_E))(B+\ell(x_I-x_E))}^{E\text{ more likely to win}}$$
$$\underbrace{-F(\ell(x_I)-\ell(-x_M))(\ell(x_I-x_E)-\ell(x_M-x_E))}_{M\text{ less likely to win}}\Big]$$

Who wants to run?



Who wants to run?



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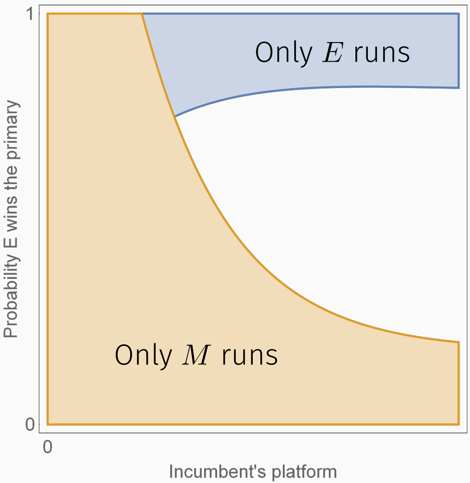

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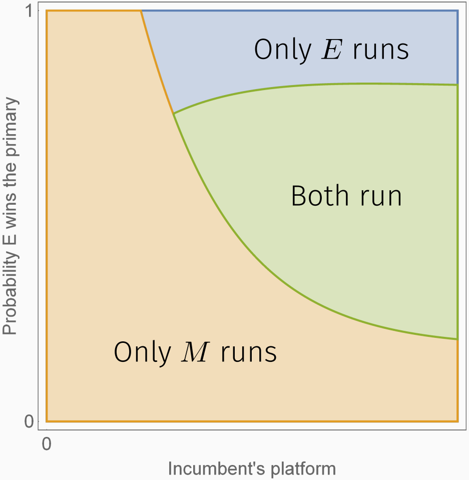

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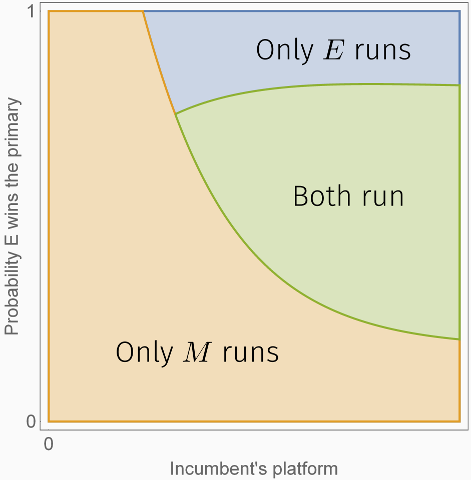


Party elites

When there is a primary advantage for extremists (p high)
or no primary advantage for either candidate (p close to $1/2$),

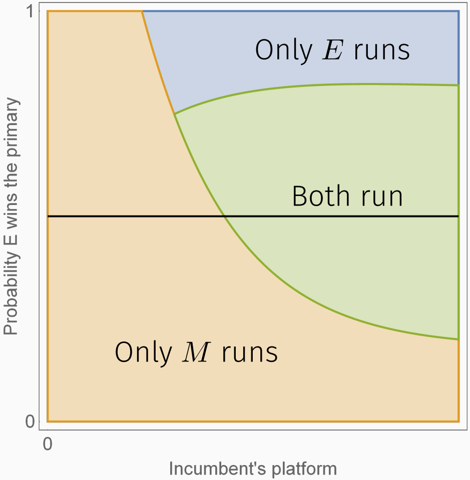
there exists an incumbent platform $\tilde{x}'_I(p)$ such that

Conditions

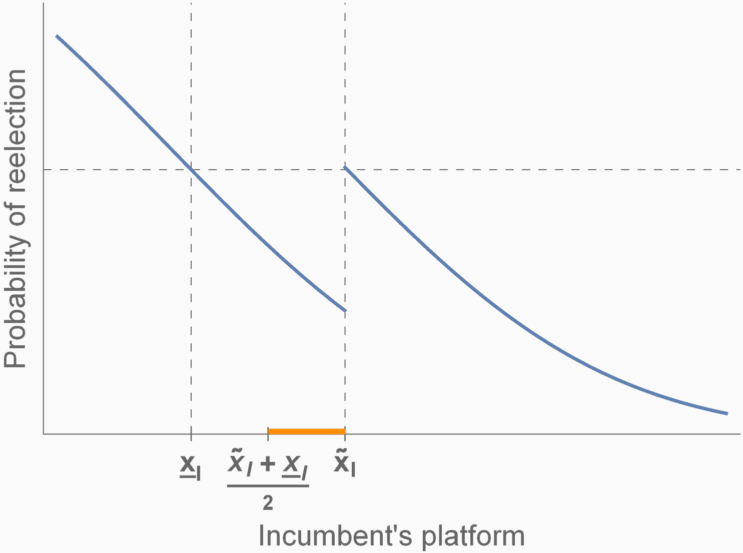
- E enters if and only if incumbent is more extreme than $\tilde{x}'_I(p)$

Proposition

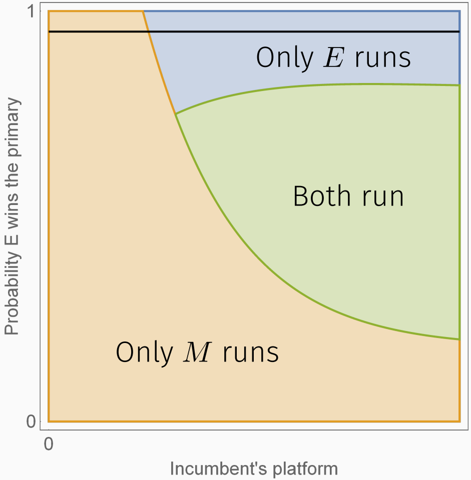
Even primary field



Incumbent improves reelection chances by inducing E's entry



Primary advantage for extremist



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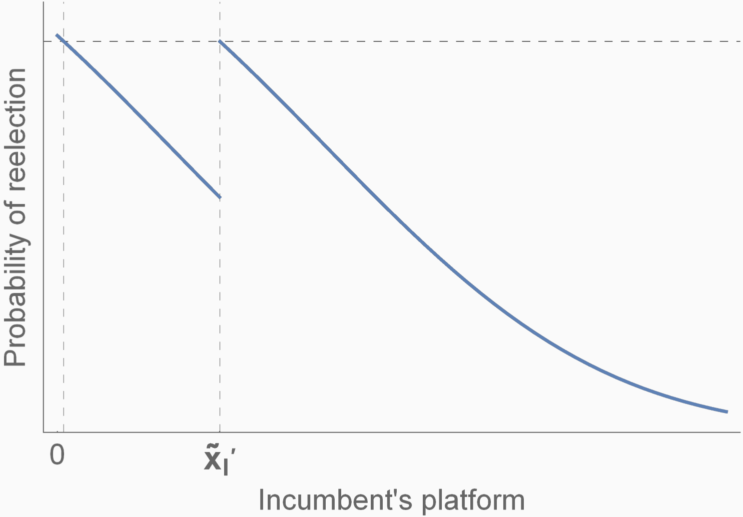


What happens if E runs first?

Incumbent improves reelection chances by inducing E's entry

Proposition 5

When there is a primary advantage for extremists or no primary advantage for either side, the incumbent's ideal point is more moderate than but sufficiently close to $\tilde{x}'_I(p)$*, and office rents* B *lie in an intermediate range, the incumbent provokes the opposition by choosing* $\tilde{x}'_I(p) > t$*.*

Combined Model

Endogenous candidate entry with primary elections

Primary voters vote for a candidate in the race

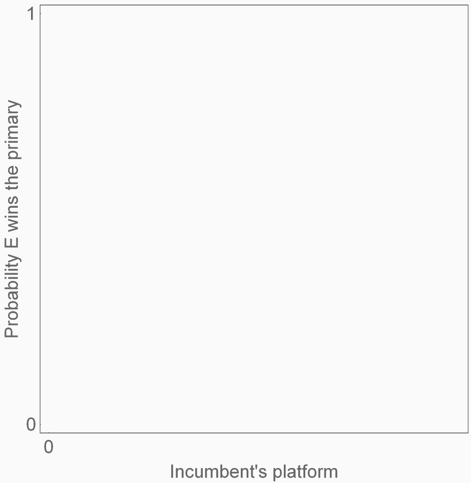
Recall that the median primary voter is decisive

E and M announce their candidacies accordingly, sequentially

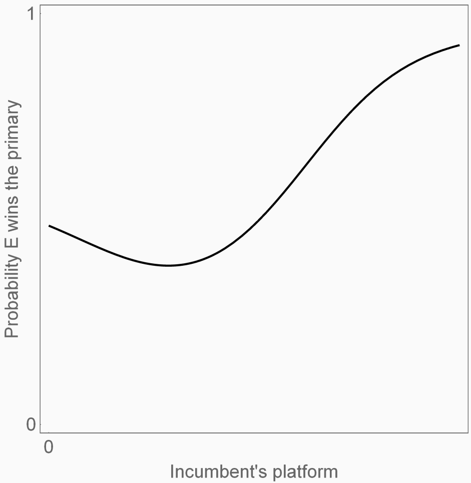
Suppose primary voters also receive a stochastic shock

- Independent from the general election shock

Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent's platform

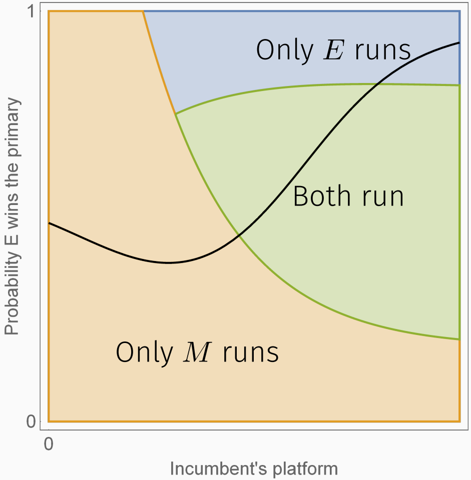


Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent's platform



$v_p < x_E < x_M$

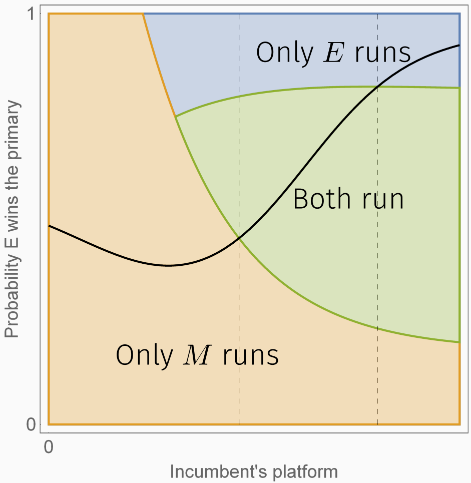
Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent's platform



Quadratic loss

$v_p < x_E < x_M$

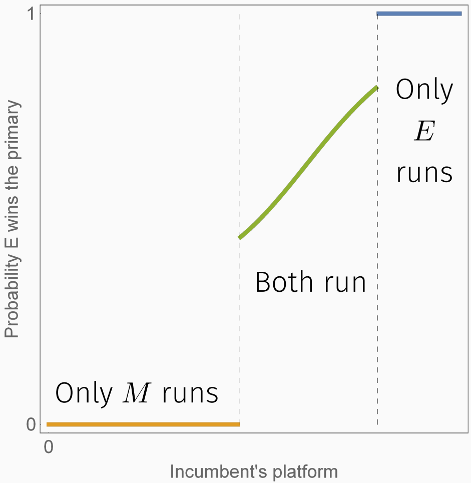
Who enters depends on the incumbent's platform



Quadratic loss

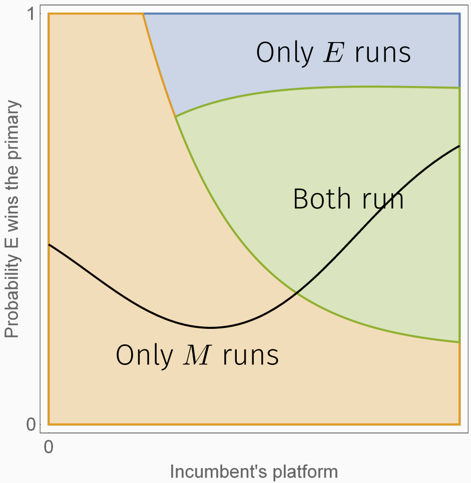
$v_p < x_E < x_M$

Who wins the primary depends on the incumbent's platform



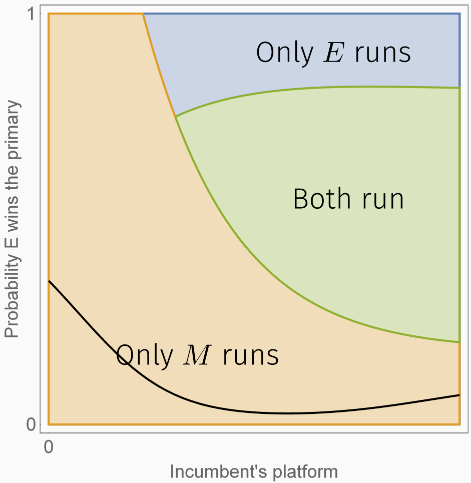
$v_p < x_E < x_M$

Who wins the primary depends on the incumbent's platform



$$x_E < v_p < \frac{x_E + x_M}{2} < x_M$$

Who wins the primary depends on the incumbent's platform



$$x_E < \frac{x_E + x_M}{2} < v_p < x_M$$

Discussion

Provoking the opposition can only happen when

General and primary election voters are far apart

> *"divergence of primary from general electorates is six times larger in 2012 than in 1958"*
>
> *Hill and Tausanovitch (2018)*

Parties are constrained in their choice of candidates

Party control decreasing John W. Davis

> *"In 1968, 57 percent of all Democratic delegates were chosen through devices that were essentially party-based; by 1980, none were."*
>
> *Shafer (2014, p. 89)*

> *"Primary voters' choices are constrained to the extent that money, organization, and media attention concentrate"*
>
> *Steger (2000)*

Conclusion

Provoking the Opposition

Incumbent hurts her appeal to the median voter

Embolden the opposition party, especially extremists

Extremists run/win more in primaries

Incumbent is reelected more often

Only possible if

- Primary and general electorate are far
- Parties are constrained in choice set

Conclusion

Thank you

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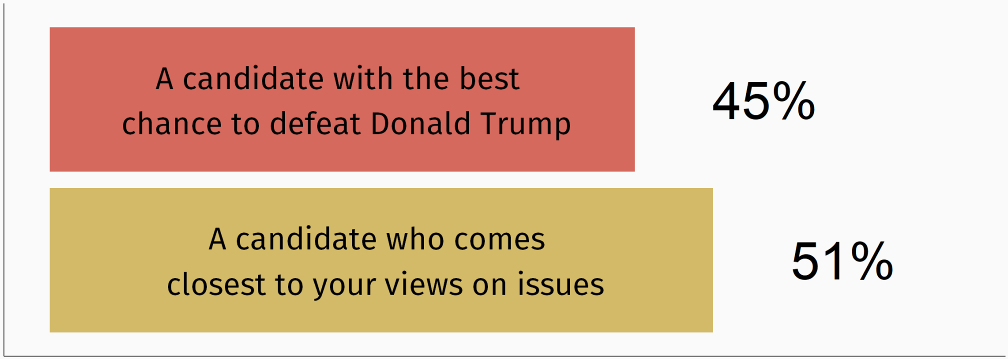
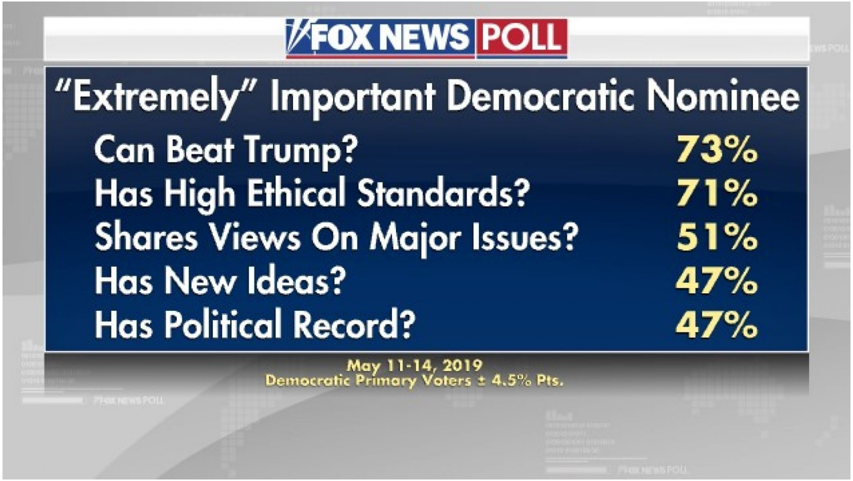
Electability and congruence

In selecting a presidential nominee for the Democratic Party, which of the following is most important to you?



NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey, July 7-9, 400 Democratic primary voters

Electability vs. congruence

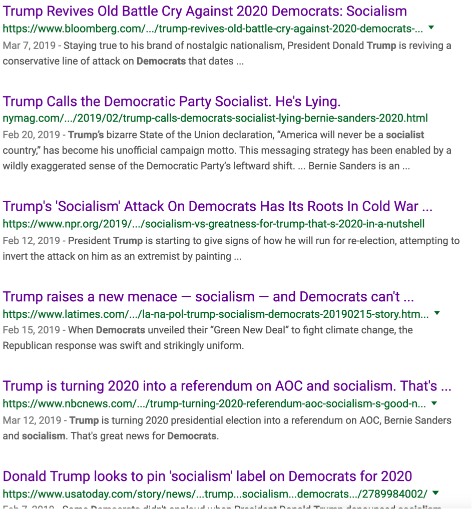

FOX NEWS POLL

“Extremely” Important Democratic Nominee

Can Beat Trump?	73%
Has High Ethical Standards?	71%
Shares Views On Major Issues?	51%
Has New Ideas?	47%
Has Political Record?	47%

May 11-14, 2019
Democratic Primary Voters ± 4.5% Pts.

Trump frequently calls Democrats “socialist” and “radical”



Trump Revives Old Battle Cry Against 2020 Democrats: Socialism
https://www.bloomberg.com/.../trump-revives-old-battle-cry-against-2020-democrats-...
Mar 7, 2019 - Staying true to his brand of nostalgic nationalism, President Donald **Trump** is reviving a conservative line of attack on **Democrats** that dates ...

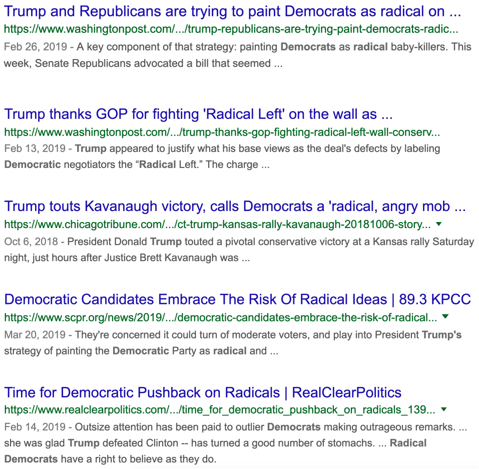
Trump Calls the Democratic Party Socialist. He's Lying.
nymag.com/.../2019/02/trump-calls-democrats-socialist-lying-bernie-sanders-2020.html
Feb 20, 2019 - **Trump's** bizarre State of the Union declaration, “America will never be a **socialist** country,” has become his unofficial campaign motto. This messaging strategy has been enabled by a wildly exaggerated sense of the Democratic Party’s leftward shift. ... Bernie Sanders is an ...

Trump's 'Socialism' Attack On Democrats Has Its Roots In Cold War ...
https://www.npr.org/2019/.../socialism-vs-greatness-for-trump-that-s-2020-in-a-nutshell
Feb 12, 2019 - President **Trump** is starting to give signs of how he will run for re-election, attempting to invert the attack on him as an extremist by painting ...

Trump raises a new menace — socialism — and Democrats can't ...
https://www.latimes.com/.../la-na-pol-trump-socialism-democrats-20190215-story.htm...
Feb 15, 2019 - When **Democrats** unveiled their “Green New Deal” to fight climate change, the Republican response was swift and strikingly uniform.

Trump is turning 2020 into a referendum on AOC and socialism. That's ...
https://www.nbcnews.com/.../trump-turning-2020-referendum-aoc-socialism-s-good-n...
Mar 12, 2019 - **Trump** is turning 2020 presidential election into a referendum on AOC, Bernie Sanders and **socialism**. That's great news for **Democrats**.

Donald Trump looks to pin 'socialism' label on Democrats for 2020
https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/...trump...socialism...democrats.../2789984002/
Feb 7, 2019 - Some **Democrats** didn't applaud when President Donald **Trump** denounced socialism



Trump and Republicans are trying to paint Democrats as radical on ...
https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../trump-republicans-are-trying-paint-democrats-radic...
Feb 26, 2019 - A key component of that strategy: painting **Democrats** as **radical** baby-killers. This week, Senate Republicans advocated a bill that seemed ...

Trump thanks GOP for fighting 'Radical Left' on the wall as ...
https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../trump-thanks-gop-fighting-radical-left-wall-conserv...
Feb 13, 2019 - **Trump** appeared to justify what his base views as the deal's defects by labeling **Democratic** negotiators the “**Radical** Left.” The charge ...

Trump touts Kavanaugh victory, calls Democrats a 'radical, angry mob ...
https://www.chicagotribune.com/.../ct-trump-kansas-rally-kavanaugh-20181006-story...
Oct 6, 2018 - President Donald **Trump** touted a pivotal conservative victory at a Kansas rally Saturday night, just hours after Justice Brett Kavanaugh was ...

Democratic Candidates Embrace The Risk Of Radical Ideas | 89.3 KPCC
https://www.scpr.org/news/2019/.../democratic-candidates-embrace-the-risk-of-radical...
Mar 20, 2019 - They're concerned it could turn of moderate voters, and play into President **Trump's** strategy of painting the **Democratic** Party as **radical** and ...

Time for Democratic Pushback on Radicals | RealClearPolitics
https://www.realclearpolitics.com/.../time_for_democratic_pushback_on_radicals_139...
Feb 14, 2019 - Outsize attention has been paid to outlier **Democrats** making outrageous remarks. ... she was glad **Trump** defeated Clinton -- has turned a good number of stomachs. ... **Radical Democrats** have a right to believe as they do.

General Election

i votes for challenger J if

$$-\ell(|v - x_J|) > -\ell(|v - x_I|) + \psi$$

or with probability $F(\ell(|v - x_I|) - \ell(|v - x_J|))$

Back

Non-monotonicity

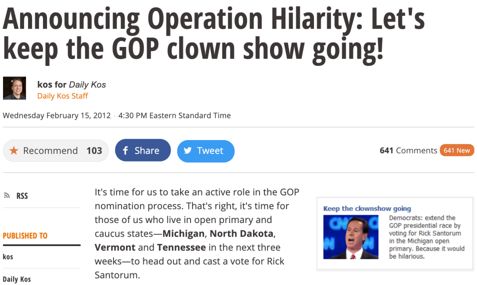
Standard normal, incumbent at 3, and loss given by

$$\ell(x-v) = \begin{cases} |x-v| & \text{if} \quad |x-v| \leq 5 \\ (x-v)^2 - 9(x-v) + 25 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Suppose three primary voters with ideal points -6, -2, and -1. Here, the median primary voter's optimal candidate, located at -1.8, loses the primary election against a candidate at -1, who is the optimal candidate of both the centrist and the extremist primary voter.

Back

Daily Kos and Rush Limbaugh urged voters to raid the other party’s primary



Announcing Operation Hilarity: Let's keep the GOP clown show going!

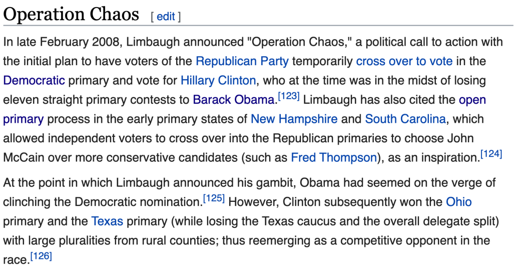
kos for *Daily Kos*
Daily Kos Staff

Wednesday February 15, 2012 · 4:30 PM Eastern Standard Time

It's time for us to take an active role in the GOP nomination process. That's right, it's time for those of us who live in open primary and caucus states—**Michigan**, **North Dakota**, **Vermont** and **Tennessee** in the next three weeks—to head out and cast a vote for Rick Santorum.

Keep the clownshow going

Democrats: extend the GOP presidential race by voting for Rick Santorum in the Michigan open primary. Because it would be hilarious.



Operation Chaos [edit]

In late February 2008, Limbaugh announced "Operation Chaos," a political call to action with the initial plan to have voters of the Republican Party temporarily cross over to vote in the Democratic primary and vote for Hillary Clinton, who at the time was in the midst of losing eleven straight primary contests to Barack Obama.[123] Limbaugh has also cited the open primary process in the early primary states of New Hampshire and South Carolina, which allowed independent voters to cross over into the Republican primaries to choose John McCain over more conservative candidates (such as Fred Thompson), as an inspiration.[124]

At the point in which Limbaugh announced his gambit, Obama had seemed on the verge of clinching the Democratic nomination.[125] However, Clinton subsequently won the Ohio primary and the Texas primary (while losing the Texas caucus and the overall delegate split) with large pluralities from rural counties; thus reemerging as a competitive opponent in the race.[126]

Conditions for the existence and uniqueness of $\tilde{x}_I$

Existence:

$$\ell(x_M - v_p) > \ell(|v_p - x_E|) \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{F(-\ell(-x_M))}{F(-\ell(-x_E))} > \frac{\ell(-v_p) - \ell(|x_E - v_p|)}{\ell(-v_p) - \ell(x_M - v_p)}.$$

Uniqueness:

$$(\ell(x_I - v_p) - \ell(x_I - x_M))\frac{\ell'(x_I)}{\ell'(x_I - v_p)} > \frac{(F(x_I, x_M) - F(x_I, x_E))F(x_I, x_E)}{F(x_I, x_M)f(x_I, x_E) - F(x_I, x_E)f(x_I, x_M)}.$$

Back

Conditions for the existence and uniqueness of $\tilde{x}'_I$

Existence:

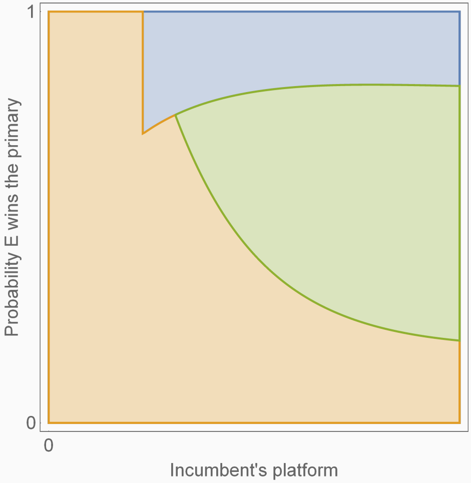
$$\frac{F(-\ell(-x_M))}{F(-\ell(-x_E))} > \frac{\ell(-x_E) + B}{\ell(-x_E) - \ell(x_M - x_E)}.$$

Uniqueness:

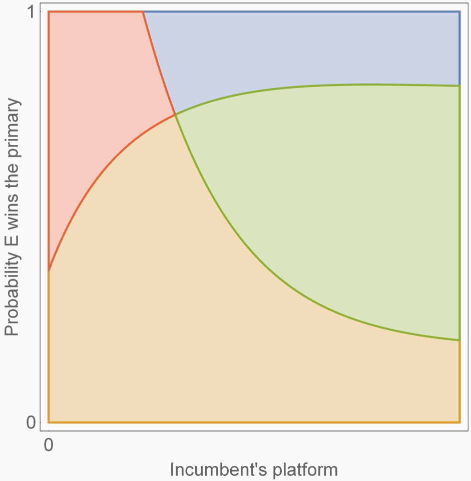
$$(\ell(x_I - x_E) - \ell(x_I - x_M))\frac{\ell'(x_I)}{\ell'(x_I - x_E)} > \frac{(F(x_I, x_M) - F(x_I, x_E))F(x_I, x_E)}{F(x_I, x_M)f(x_I, x_E) - F(x_I, x_E)f(x_I, x_M)}.$$

Back

E runs first



Multiple equilibria when candidates announce simultaneously



Back

Who wants to run?

$F \sim \mathcal{N}(0,1)$

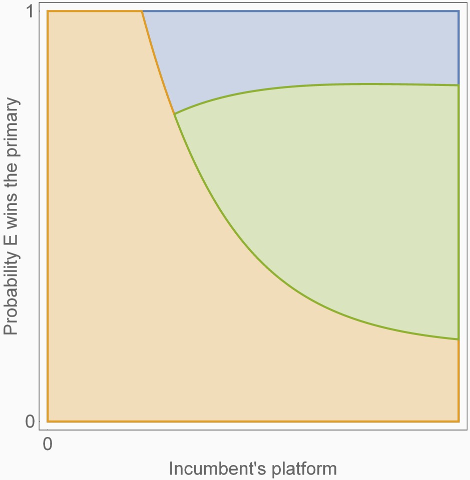
$\ell = |v - x|$

$\text{cost} = 0.5$

$\text{rent} = 2$

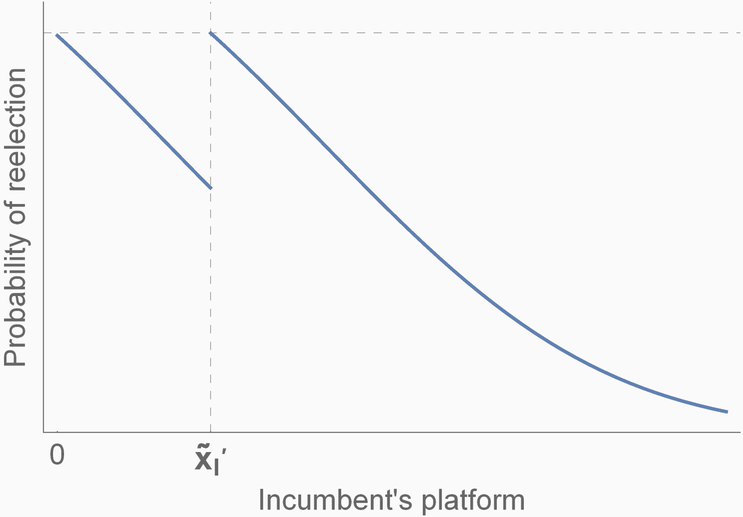
$x_E = -1.2$

$x_M = -0.5$



Back

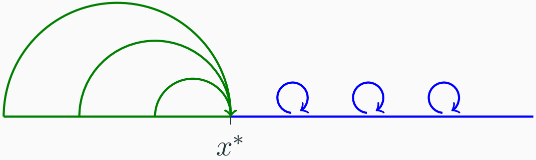
E advantage in primaries, and E runs first



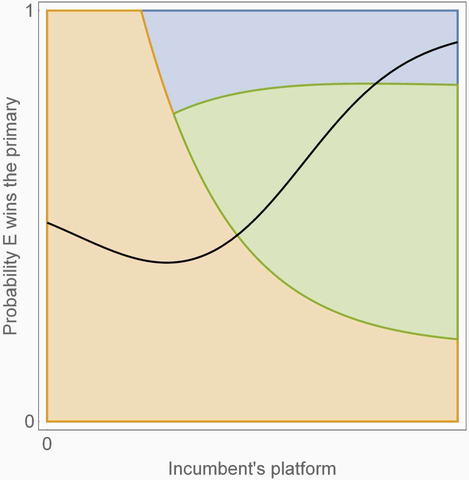
Back

Optimal candidates when losses are linear or exponential

For citizens v in	Their optimal candidate is
$v < x^*$	x^*
$v \geq x^*$	v



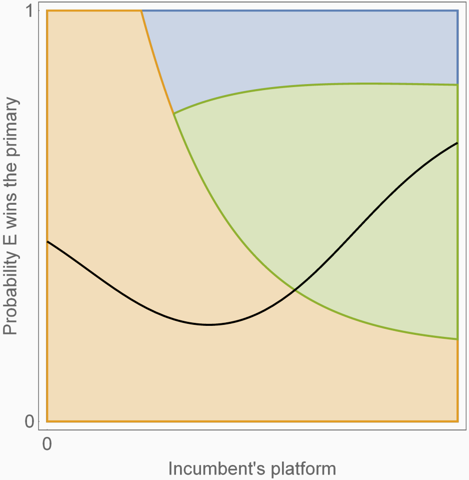
Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent's platform



$v_p = -2 < x_E = -1.2 < x_M = -0.5$

$c = 0.5, B = 2$

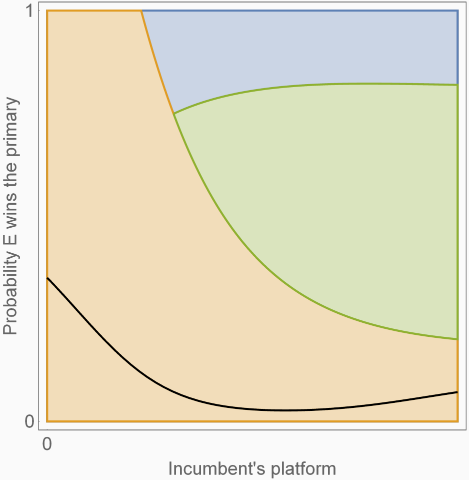
Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent’s platform



$x_E = -1.2 < v_p = -1 < x_M = -0.5$

$c = 0.5, B = 2$

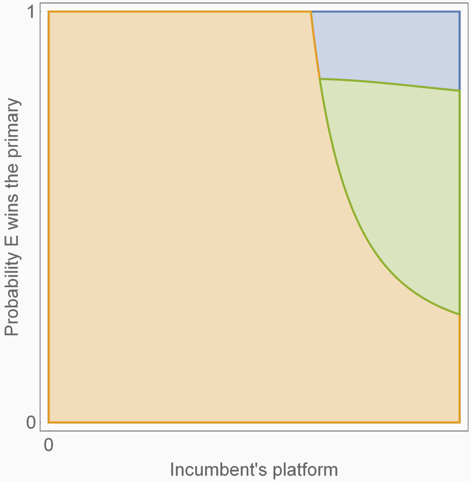
Probability E wins primary depends on incumbent's platform



$x_E = -1.2 < v_p = -0.6 < x_M = -0.5$

$c = 0.5, B = 2$

No office rents



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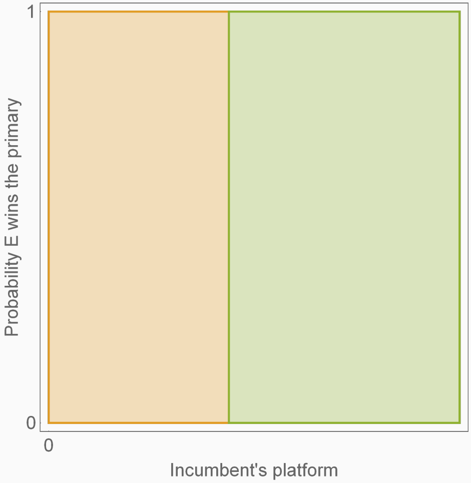
No cost of running



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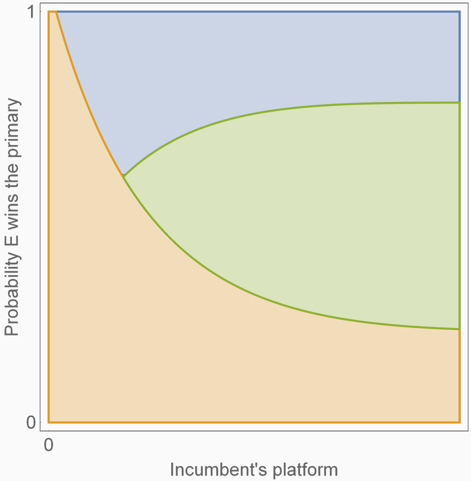
Candidates are ideologically very close



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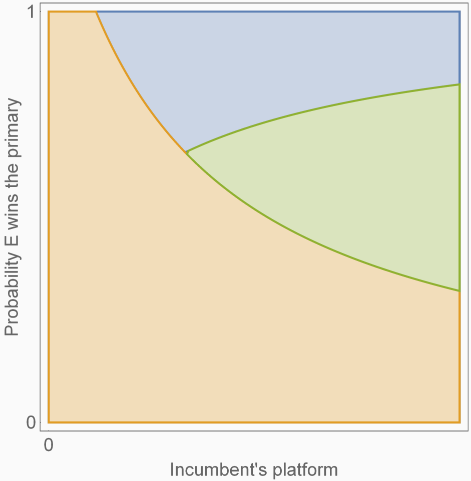
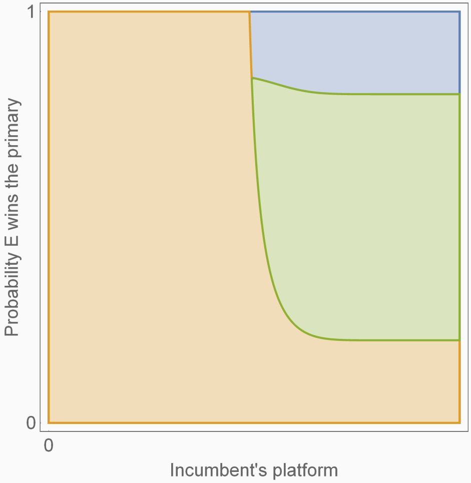
Utility shock drawn from $\mathcal{U}(-2, 3)$



Quadratic loss



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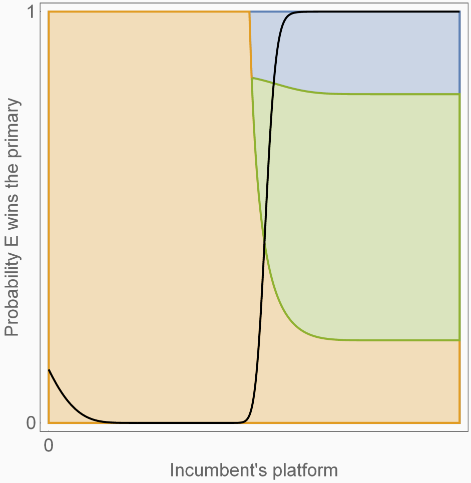
Quadratic loss



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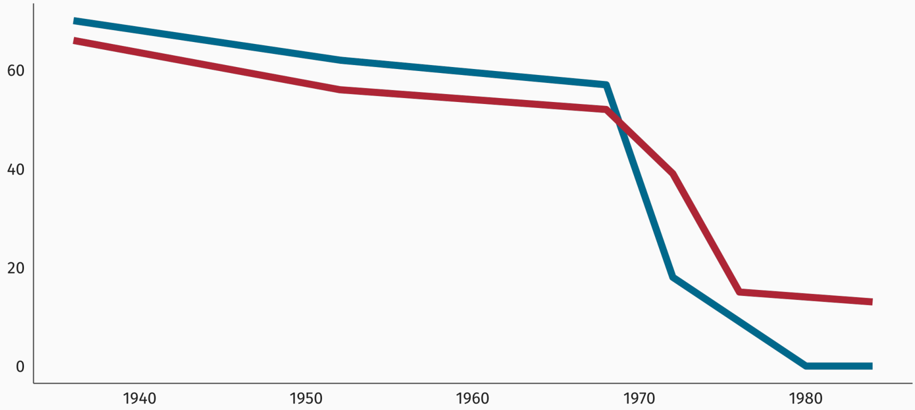
Decline of party control on delegate selection

Candidate-based delegate selection



Shafer 1988

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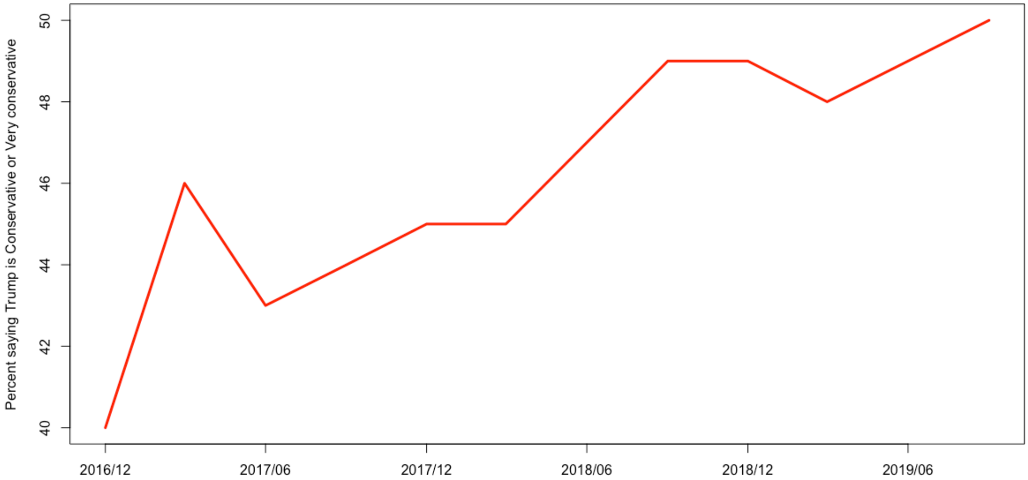
More people rate Trump as conservative



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Presidents tend to move away from center for reelection

Year	Winner	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Net
1980	Ronald Reagan	17	15	50	+33
1984	Ronald Reagan	14	17	52	+38
1988	George H.W. Bush	7	26	50	+43
1992	Bill Clinton	38	37	13	-25
1996	Bill Clinton	45	37	10	-35
2000	George W. Bush	10	27	52	+42
2004	George W. Bush	8	16	66	+58
2008	Barack Obama	60	25	12	-48
2012	Barack Obama	60	22	12	-48
2016	Donald Trump	10	21	40	+30
2019	Donald Trump	8	14	50	+42

2010 Senate Election in NV: Harry Reid & Sharron Angle

Moderate Sue Lowden vs. Extremist Sharron Angle

In the last 10 polls before the primary

- Lowden led Reid by an average of 7.7 points
- Angle led Reid by an average of 3.6 points

Reid sidelined stronger opponents by intimidation and with attack ads

Angle won primary, lost general election

> *"We clearly see his fingerprints and meddling throughout our Republican primary"*
>
> *Lowden's campaign manager on Reid*

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2012 Senate Election in MO: Claire McCaskill and Todd Akin

Frontrunner John Brunner, outsider Sarah Steelman, and extremist Todd Akin

Brunner and Steelman both led McCaskill by $\approx$ 9 points, Akin by $\approx$ 5 points

McCaskill decided she'd rather face Akin

- Ran dog-whistle ads calling Akin "too conservative"
- Unlike other Democrats from purple states, didn't distance from Obama

Akin won primary, lost general election

> *"I had just made the biggest gamble of my political career—a $1.7 million gamble—and it had paid off. Running for reelection to the U.S. Senate as a Democrat from Missouri, I had successfully manipulated the Republican primary so that in the general election I would face the candidate I was most likely to beat."*
>
> *McCaskill and Ganey, 2016*

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Democratic National Convention of 1924

William Gibbs McAdoo won 9/12 primaries, 60% of popular vote

Delegates not bound to vote in line with primary results

2/3 of delegates required for nomination

Supporters of McAdoo and Al Smith found each other unacceptable

After 102 deadlocked ballots, McAdoo and Smith dropped out

Compromised on dark horse candidate John W. Davis on 103rd

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Electoral penalty for extremism has been decreasing for incumbents

Bonica and Cox (2018) and Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2018) argue

- Voters are more party-centered, and thus less candidate-centered
- Individual members of congress can get away with extremism

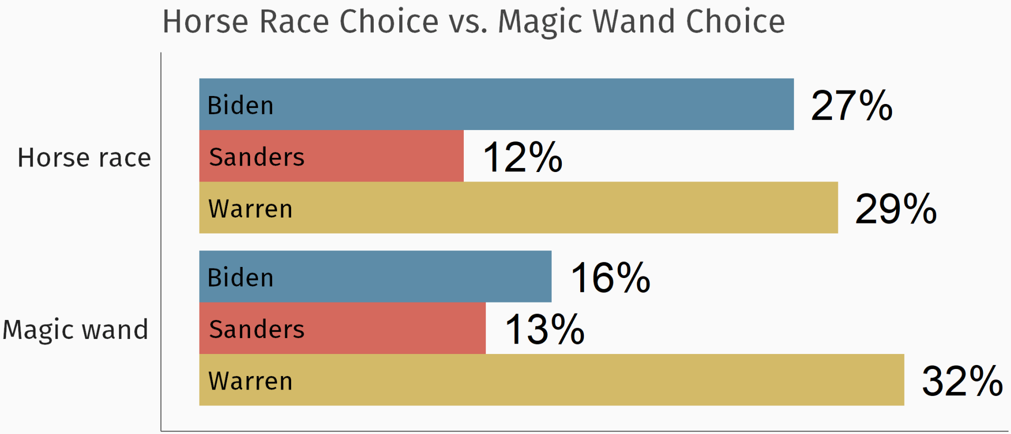
Hall (2015) finds a penalty does exist for non-incumbents

- Stronger for candidates running against incumbents

My model suggests incumbents now can provoke the opposition

- Extreme incumbents face more extreme challengers
- Isolated from electoral penalty because challengers also more extreme

Choices with and without electability concerns diverge



Avalanche Strategy, October 1-4, 1041 likely Democratic voters

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Decisiveness of the median primary voter

Centrists and extremists can unite against the median primary voter to field:

1. A centrist
2. An extremist (e.g. raiding)

Numerical example

Real-life example

Median primary voter is not decisive in general

Log-concavity of marginal loss ensures decisiveness

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Log-concavity of the marginal loss

$$(\ell''(x))^2 \geq \ell'(x)\ell'''(x)$$

Ensures net payoff gain ratio is monotonic, i.e. for any $x_2 > x_1 > x_0 > x_i$:

$$\frac{d\frac{\ell(x_2-x_i)-\ell(x_0-x_i)}{\ell(x_2-x_i)-\ell(x_1-x_i)}}{dx_i} \leq 0.$$

cf. ratio dominance in Kartik, Lee, and Rappoport, 2019

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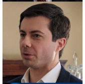
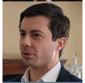
Probability of winning general election / Probability of winning primary election

	Joe Biden	24¢
	Bernie Sanders	12¢
	Pete Buttigieg	8¢
	Andrew Yang	7¢
	Kamala Harris	6¢

	Joe Biden	29¢
	Bernie Sanders	19¢
	Pete Buttigieg	16¢
	Elizabeth Warren	13¢
	Kamala Harris	12¢

Trump vs. Democratic frontrunners in battleground states

Trump

VS.

	Biden	**Sanders**	**Warren**
Michigan (n=501)	Biden +1	Sanders +3	Trump +4
Pennsylvania (661)	Biden +1	Trump +1	Trump +2
Wisconsin (651)	Biden +2	Even	Trump +2
Florida (650)	Biden +2	Trump +2	Trump +4
Arizona (652)	Biden +2	Trump +4	Even
North Carolina (651)	Trump +2	Trump +4	Trump +4

Based on a New York Times/Siena College poll of 3,766 registered voters from Oct. 13 to Oct. 26.

Incumbent can induce primary voters to choose E

Lemma 1

An incumbent whose platform is slightly more moderate than $\tilde{x}_I$ faces the moderate opponent and is reelected with a lower probability than if she chose the more extreme platform $\tilde{x}_I$ and faced the extremist.*

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$^*x_I \in (\underline{x}_I, \tilde{x}_I)$ where $\underline{x}_I := \ell^{-1}(\max\{0, \ell(\tilde{x}_I) + \ell(-x_M) - \ell(-x_E)\})$

Incumbent can induce E to enter

Proposition 3

When there is a primary advantage for extremists or no primary advantage for either side, an incumbent whose platform is slightly more moderate[*] *than* $\tilde{x}'_I(p)$ *faces the moderate opponent and is reelected with a lower probability than if she chose the more extreme platform* $\tilde{x}'_I(p)$ *and faced the extremist with positive probability.*

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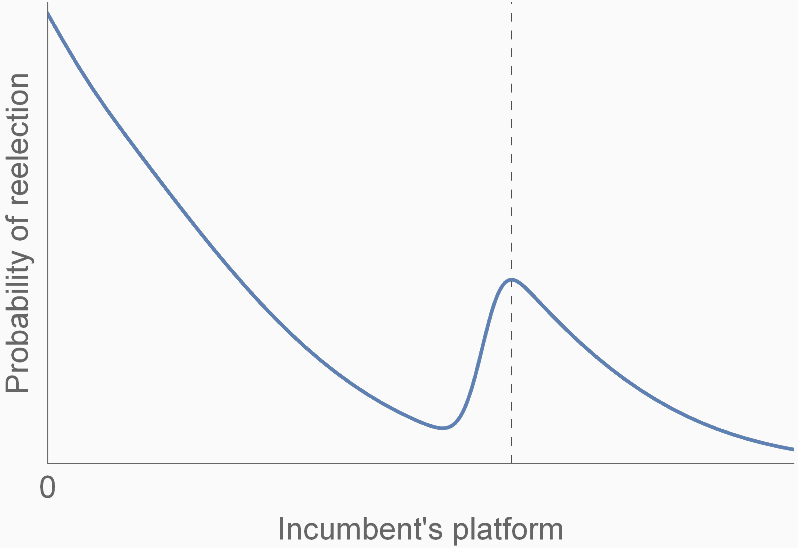
[*] $x_I \in (\underline{x}'_I(p), \tilde{x}'_I(p))$ where

$$F(\ell(\underline{x}'_I(p)) - \ell(-x_M)) = \max\{F(-\ell(-x_M)), p(F(\ell(\tilde{x}'_I(p)) - \ell(-x_E)) + (1-p)F(\ell(\tilde{x}'_I(p)) - \ell(-x_M))\}$$

Incumbent’s reelection probability when primary is stochastic



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