We Report, We Decide: Pre-Primary Presidential Campaigns in the New Media Landscape

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For my *zayde*, Samuel Epstein, who unceasingly championed the value of education.

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All remaining errors are, of course, my own.

ABSTRACT

Although it began with two messier election cycles in 1972 and 1976, the contemporary presidential nomination system of binding delegates in public voting contests evinced remarkable stability over the subsequent two decades. Party elites ostensibly adapted by learning how to direct the nomination toward consensus candidates through coordinated public endorsements during the pre-primary period. However, this endorsement-centric theory has encountered several problematic election cycles since the start of the new millennium during which factional, outsider candidates have grown increasingly formidable. This dissertation first charts the twin democratization trends of the political process and the media landscape, explaining how these trends work in tandem to dislodge establishment control over presidential nominations. Then the tenor of pre-primary media coverage is explored, demonstrating how the campaign garners abundant media attention with an increasing emphasis on personality, style, and populist rhetoric. Next, the dissertation examines the extent to which pre-primary media attention independently influences candidate standing and finds evidence of a direct causal relationship between a candidate's media coverage and their poll standing. Finally, two campaign case studies are presented that illustrate how a candidate's media persona, not simply their command of traditional resources, substantially determines their campaign's viability. The resulting presidential nomination system, according to this dissertation, is an increasingly chaotic media-centric process that is not easily managed by the party establishment, and in this way more

closely reflects the concerns an earlier generation of scholars expressed regarding

the pitfalls of the contemporary system.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING

"A Democratic Convention is about to begin...in a police state. There just doesn't seem to be any other way to say it."

– Walter Cronkite[1]

"With George McGovern as President of the United States, we wouldn't have to have Gestapo tactics in the streets of Chicago."

– Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-CT)[2]

In his 1971 debut solo single, "Chicago / We Can Change the World," singer-songwriter Graham Nash—of Crosby, Stills, and Nash fame—reflects upon the protests that came to define the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. "Rules and regulations," Nash asks, "who needs them? Open up the door."[3]

Behind the closed doors of the International Amphitheatre in Chicago, Democratic delegates were in the process of nominating Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey as the party's presidential nominee on the first ballot. Humphrey essentially ignored the primaries altogether, focusing instead on solidifying his support from "party leaders, union bosses, and other insiders" (Cohen et al. 2008: 1). Humphrey's fellow Minnesotan, Senator Eugene McCarthy, mounted an insurgent, grassroots campaign bolstered by opponents of the Vietnam War who shaved their beards and cut their hair to get "clean for Gene" (Rising 1997) while they canvassed

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[1] This Cronkite report is included in the "1968" episode of CNN's documentary series *The Sixties* and can be found at the following link in the video's 32nd minute: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x71awnz.

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPO45s6U6SI

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7PxnT5_P5k

door-to-door. McCarthy, who was even the beneficiary of a campaign song recorded

by folk musicians Peter, Paul, and Mary,[4] won the most primaries of any

Democratic candidate in 1968 (Polsby 1983: 11). Unfortunately for McCarthy,

primary victories were only valuable at that time insofar as they provided party

elites with a barometer of a candidate's public appeal (Polsby 1983: 16). McCarthy's

poor reputation with his partisan colleagues, who broadly dismissed him as "aloof,

arrogant, and personally difficult," (Cohen et al. 2008: 127) meant his primary

showings could do little to earn him the nomination. The ultimate judgement at the

convention was rendered by delegates beholden to the very party establishment

Humphrey had a lock on, as it historically had been in both major parties (Cohen et

al. 2008: 1-2). The anticlimactic nature of Humphrey's nomination belied not only

the violence outside the venue but also the commotion on the convention floor itself,

which saw the "manhandling" of delegates and reporters alike by Chicago Mayor

Richard J. Daley's security personnel (Polsby 1983: 29-30).

    1968 was a particularly violent, tumultuous year worldwide and the United

States was no exception. While the Tet Offensive in Vietnam further soured

American public opinion on the war by recentering its seemingly endless costs in

blood and treasure, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. ignited multiple

days of devastating riots nationwide, including in the nation's capital. Senator

Robert F. Kennedy of New York, McCarthy's main rival in the primaries whose

detractors in party leadership saw his own grassroots campaign as opportunistic

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[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgKI-hytNMs

and self-interested (Cohen et al. 2008: 127), would also be slain by an assassin shortly after delivering his victory speech following the California primary. The violent clashes between police and protestors that erupted in the shadow of the Democratic convention that August were inextricable from that year's wider context of bloodshed (Polsby 1983: 17-18) and from the swelling frustration among both McCarthy and Kennedy supporters that Humphrey's path to the nomination behind closed doors lacked legitimacy (Polsby 1983: 26). As demonstrators in Chicago were cracked with nightsticks through plumes of tear gas and dragged into police vans, the crowd chanted, "the whole world is watching."[5]

The implication, expressed in Nash's lyrics much in the same way it was in real-time by the chanting crowd and in television news coverage decrying party "thugs" (Polsby 1983: 30), was clear: America's political parties were failing to listen to the people and actively locking them out of the political process. It was simply inconsistent with democratic principles for a political party to pick a standard-bearer in a manner so detached from the mass public—or evidently even hostile to them.

Indeed, perhaps in an early example of the power this medium could wield, a key impetus for political reform was the embarrassment these events saddled the Democratic Party with after being broadcast on national television for all to see (Polsby 1983: 32). While the mayhem that took place around the Democratic convention became the flashbulb memory in the public conscience because it had

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[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_9OJnRnZjU

been broadcast on national television (Polsby 1983: 17-18), the Republican convention in Miami Beach, Florida also coincided with a far less publicized demonstration in the predominantly black Liberty City neighborhood against appalling economic and housing conditions (Tscheschlok 1995). Both parties, it seemed, had no choice but to adopt systemic reform if they were to maintain an air of legitimacy in the public eye.

Thus, the contemporary presidential nomination system was born. In 1972, the McGovern-Fraser Commission set out to reform Democratic Party rules and facilitate expanded participation of rank-and file partisans (Bartels 1988: 20). State party officials quickly figured out that selecting delegates via primary election was an elegantly simple way to comply with the new rules—and perhaps also attract spending from news networks and candidate campaigns if their primary became a crucial one (Polsby 1983: 56-57). The Republican Party followed suit shortly thereafter (Polsby 1983: 53-54).

In 1972 and 1976, the parties debuted their newly decentralized presidential nomination system and, promptly, chaos ensued. A far cry from the days of the "smoke-filled room" where parties negotiated a consensus nominee, presidential campaigns were suddenly organized around a specific candidate personality who appealed directly to the mass public (Ceaser 1979: 241). Maine Senator Edmund Muskie entered the 1972 campaign with a sizeable lead in fundraising, endorsements, and public polls, but his inevitability was shattered when he underperformed journalists' expectations in the New Hampshire primary and was

dogged henceforth by images of him "apparently sobbing" in response to harsh media scrutiny (Cohen et al. 2008: 161-163). Party elites watched helplessly as factional candidacies representing the left and right extremes of the party became the two most formidable in the race: Senator George McGovern of South Dakota and Alabama Governor George C. Wallace, respectively (Cohen et al. 2008: 164-166). The 1976 campaign similarly baffled the Democratic Party establishment. Jimmy Carter, "a previously obscure one-term governor of Georgia," catapulted himself to the nomination by strategically parlaying early victories into "breathless" national media coverage (Cohen et al. 2008: 166-168). Early observers noted how Carter's campaign avoided taking clear positions on policy issues (Patterson 1980: 38), as he focused instead on "emphasizing broad themes like efficiency and honesty in government" (Ceaser 1982: 105). This "deliberate ambiguity of the candidates' issue appeals" (Bartels 1988: 101) would become conventional strategy in the coming years. For their part, the Republicans had their own bruising nationwide nomination battle in 1976 between incumbent President Gerald Ford and the conservative former Governor of California, Ronald Reagan (Cohen et al. 2008: 169).

The system of presidential nomination that emerged out of the McGovern-Fraser Commission's reforms was intended to empower the mass public. In practice, the system effectively empowered the mass media for precisely the same reason Walter Lippmann explained over a century ago:

> "For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting
> for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety,

so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we

have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model

before we can manage with it" (Lippmann 1922: 11).

The average citizen—let alone the average primary voter—lacks the wherewithal to

gather firsthand knowledge of every event, or even the capacity to understand and

contextualize them all. Likewise, they are extremely unlikely to have any

interaction with presidential candidates at a personal level or to have an

opportunity to ask them about the issues of the day or their loyalty to important

partisan interests. For these insights, the mass public relies on the media. The

media can exert this influence because the most politically aware partisans are

more reactive to the contours of the presidential primary campaign than are any

other segment of the public: they follow the race intently but—unlike in the context

of general election campaigns—lack the perceptual screen of partisanship through

which to filter the information they receive about the candidates (Zaller 1992: 258).

Although seemingly quaint by today's standards, analog television followed in the

path of previous communicative innovations that provided news consumers

unprecedented access to information—political and otherwise.

Having borne witness to these two messy presidential nomination cycles,

each of which produced nominees who would have never been consensus picks

under the old regime, scholars began to openly question the new system's wisdom.

James Ceaser (1979) feared the diminished parties and personality-driven

campaigns incentivized ambitious candidates to gain popular support by relying on

superficiality, flattery, and demagoguery. Thomas Patterson (1980) worried about the media's new gatekeeping role, highlighting their sensationalist tendencies in prioritizing action, controversy, drama, and competition over values or policy. And Nelson Polsby (1983) warned that the replacement of traditional party intermediaries by the mass media organized the race around "crazes or manias," "fads or social contagion," and "heroes and bums" typecasting in a manner indistinguishable from other mass media marketing campaigns, which ultimately rewards candidates who deliberately mobilize factional, extreme elements. Taken together, this generation of political scientists described a media-driven presidential nomination process that would become defined by vacuous platitudes at best and reactionary extremism at worst.

Contrary to these scholars' warnings, two decades of remarkably stable presidential nomination cycles followed in the 1980s and 1990s. In *The Party Decides*, Cohen et al. (2008) argue party elites—keen on maintaining their influence however they could—adapted to the contemporary system by learning how to nudge the nomination toward the same consensus candidates they would have selected otherwise. Party elites accomplish this feat, Cohen et al. (2008) contend, by strategically leveraging the "invisible primary" period before the voting contests begin: these party leaders, interest groups, and activists deliberate behind-the-scenes to identify their favored candidate well in advance while public attention is low, then promote that candidate to their party's rank-and-file through

endorsements, money, and other resources that signal the candidate's viability (Cohen et al. 2008).

However, this endorsement-centric theory has encountered several problematic election cycles since the start of the new millennium where factional, outsider candidates have mounted increasingly formidable campaigns. If Howard Dean's "noisy anti-war insurgency" in 2004 (Cohen et al. 2016: 702), John McCain and Barack Obama's victories in 2008 (Cohen et al. 2008: 340), and the carousel of anti-Romneys in 2012 (Sides and Vavreck 2013) were each cracks in the dam, then Donald Trump's irreverent upheaval in 2016 was a gaping breach (Cohen et al. 2016: 705). After an ostensible reprieve, presidential nomination campaigns have come to more closely resemble what the previous generation of scholars (e.g., Ceaser, Patterson, Polsby) warned us would be on the horizon.

Just as political processes were evolving, so too was the media landscape. What was once defined by three nationally focused television channels has exploded into a constellation of cable networks, blogs, and social media that can afford to cater their programming to niche audiences representing the most partisan and the most politically active segments of the electorate (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Prior 2007). Media attention on the "invisible primary" period also exploded over this span, rendering that label of the pre-primary period a misnomer and blowing the cover of maneuvering party elites (Cohen et al. 2016).

The end result, this dissertation argues, is a media-centric presidential nomination system largely consistent with the expectations of its earliest

researchers but facilitated by a media landscape they could not have foreseen. Updating the literature to address this reality by synthesizing different strands of research and conducting wide-ranging original empirical analyses would already be a significant independent contribution to political science and our collective understanding of this crucial political process. However, there is also a normative question worth bearing in mind from chapter to chapter: are we doing a poor job of picking our presidents?

Plan of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation will aim to address several key questions that arise from its central premise of a media-driven presidential nomination system.

Chapter 2 charts the twin democratization trends of the political process and the communicative ecosystem, explaining how these trends work in tandem to dislodge establishment control over presidential nominations. This extensive literature review and theory-building chapter begins with a historical overview of presidential nomination campaigns and explores scholars' longstanding normative concerns about them. Then the chapter delves into the evolution of the media landscape, the tenor of its campaign coverage and influence on consumers, and its underlying motivations. The chapter closes by briefly reevaluating notions of elite influence on the nomination process in light of this technological and political democratization.

Chapter 3 describes the tenor of pre-primary media coverage, wherein the campaign garners abundant media attention with an increasing emphasis on personality, style, and populist rhetoric. This chapter first introduces and validates a large collection of news articles and transcripts covering the pre-primary presidential nomination campaign. It then turns its attention to several content analyses focused on identifying which frames of coverage—such as horserace, game, strategy, policy, and populism—are most prevalent. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of why party leaders reasonably struggle to shepherd consensus candidates to the nomination in the contemporary media environment where horserace coverage emphasizing candidate personality and style abounds and policy considerations are couched in populist rhetoric.

Chapter 4 examines the extent to which pre-primary media attention independently influences candidate standing and finds evidence of a direct causal relationship between a candidate's media coverage and their poll standing. This chapter marshals daily observations of candidates' media coverage, poll support, endorsements, and fundraising to explore the causal relationships at play during the pre-primary period. After examining correlational relationships between these factors during the pre-primary period, this chapter uses vector autoregression (VAR) modeling with Granger causality tests to uncover causal dynamics and explore potential differences between Democrats and Republicans in their partisan media ecosystems.

Chapter 5 presents two campaign case studies that demonstrate how a candidate's media persona—not simply their command of traditional resources—substantially determines their campaign's viability during the pre-primary. One candidate, entering with minimal support, endorsements, and funding, rises to prominence due to media attention, while another candidate, despite a strong foundation, fails to navigate the media environment and fades into obscurity. These illustrative examples highlight the influential role of the media ecosystem in shaping campaign outcomes independent of a candidate's command of traditional resources.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by taking stock of the preceding chapters' key findings, suggesting areas ripe for future research by noting the limitations of the analyses conducted herein, and culminating in a brief consideration of this project's normative implications. By making its case that the presidential nomination system is an increasingly chaotic, media-centric process that is vulnerable to insurgent candidates not easily neutralized by the party establishment, this dissertation harkens back to the concerns of an earlier generation of scholars whose predictions deserve reconsideration. If, as contended, this system produces suboptimal outcomes, one should naturally ask what, if anything, can or should be done to fix it.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SMOKE-FILLED LIVING ROOM

"Men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs, may, by intrigue, by corruption, or by other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people."

– James Madison, *Federalist No. 10*

"Could I interest you in everything, all of the time?"

– Bo Burnham, "Welcome to the Internet"

This project is situated in several broad literatures spanning political science, communication, history, and psychology, among others. Sometimes these literatures address presidential nominations directly. Often, they do not. But each of these existing research trails speaks to a key facet of the contemporary presidential nomination process in the new media landscape. Therefore, this literature review is organized thematically rather than by academic discipline to facilitate a comprehensive explanation of the project's theoretical development.

This chapter will consist of three major sections. The first section sketches the history of presidential nomination campaigns and describes the voters who ultimately come to decide them—contextualized in the normative concerns some scholars have raised about features of the contemporary system. The second section traces the historical evolution of the American media landscape, what tendencies researchers have observed in news coverage of presidential nomination campaigns, what effect this coverage has on its consumers, and what motivates these patterns of coverage. The review concludes with a brief third section reevaluating notions of

elite influence on the presidential nomination campaign in light of these parallel

movements toward democratization in both technological innovation and political

reform.

Observed together, each of these sections helps paint one comprehensive

picture that forms the impetus for this project. The political process—in the name of

democratization—gives nominating authority to rank-and-file voters in primaries.

The communicative ecosystem—also in the name of democratization—affords these

same citizens an unprecedented ability to receive frequent information flows that

align with their personal preferences and have demonstrable effects on its

consumers. These primary voters are especially susceptible to influence because

they are disproportionately politically active and attentive, and their partisanship is

of little help to them as a heuristic in differentiating the candidates from each

other. Party elites are supposed to coordinate during the "invisible primary" and use

their endorsements as a cue for popular support and resources, but they have

visibly struggled to do so as the pre-primary period has attracted more public

attention. The result is a process increasingly shaped by the media landscape,

which sets the table for the voting contests and leaves party elites with shrinking

opportunities to exert their influence.

Presidential Nomination Campaigns in Historical Perspective

The Boiling Frog

Tracing the historical path of how the presidential nomination process

reached its contemporary form conveys a story akin to the fable of the boiling frog,

wherein a frog fails to jump out of boiling water because gradual increases in heat obscured the ultimate danger of boiling alive. Likewise, the presidential nomination process' incremental trend toward democratization belied the potential for undesirable consequences that made popular input in presidential elections unthinkable to early American political visionaries.

The Constitution says nary a word regarding political parties, and thus provides no direct guidance on how a party is to nominate candidates for public office. Without existing parties to color their expectations, the Framers—ever skeptical of the danger "popular passions" posed to the presidency (Ceaser 1979)—assumed presidential selection would be made by electors from a limited list of obviously well-qualified candidates (Davis 1997) whose reputations—determined by previous public service (Ceaser 1979) and not by divisive and demagogic appeals (Ceaser 1982)—rose above factional divisions in a similar fashion to George Washington: universally lauded as a "patriot king" whose wartime leadership was incontrovertible proof he would rule in the best interest of all Americans (Watson 1980: 6). By some accounts, the Framers expected the Electoral College to serve this function as a vehicle for presidential selection, and the House of Representatives would then exercise the final decision from this shortlist of worthy candidates if a consensus choice was not already clear (Cook 2004: 12). Nevertheless, the incentive for a presidential aspirant in the infancy of the republic was to establish a distinguished record of leadership and legislative accomplishment—not to make popular emotive appeals.

But the Founders' vision of a nonpartisan presidential selection process quickly dissolved over the course of the 1790s (Ceaser 1982: 13), as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton formed rival political parties necessitated by fundamental policy divergences in Congress (Watson 1980: 6). This formation of political parties would set the stage for the opening salvo in efforts to wrestle presidential selection away from political elites (Watson 1980: 6). The country's nascent political parties needed to devise a process by which they would choose a single presidential candidate (Ceaser 1982: 14) to run under their party's brand (Watson 1980: 7), and they needed to reach this agreement well in advance of the selection of presidential electors (Ceaser 1979). The resulting process—derided as "King Caucus" by its detractors—was a meeting held among the party's members of Congress where participants would deliberate based on their existing understandings of both their own constituents' sentiments and the aspirants' qualities (Ceaser 1982: 14; Watson 1980: 7). This congressional caucus would be the exclusive vehicle for the Democratic-Republicans' presidential nominations of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe during their period of national political dominance (Ceaser 1982: 14; Davis 1997: 10).

But this period of one-party political monopoly would eventually expose the caucus system of presidential nomination to mounting criticism on multiple fronts. On constitutional grounds, detractors worried that the caucus model undermined separation of powers by making the leader of the executive branch beholden to the members of the legislative branch (Cook 2004: 13; Watson 1980: 7)—an especially

pertinent concern when one-party dominance meant the caucus' nomination was tantamount to election (Ceaser 1982: 16). On representative grounds, critics objected to the caucus' failure to give voice to any constituencies that had not elected members of that party to Congress in the previous election (Ceaser 1982: 16; Watson 1980: 7). And on participatory grounds, many complained the "King Caucus" smacked of the "aristocratic privilege" associated with the effectively defunct Federalists (Davis 1997: 11) by failing to incorporate any input from citizen participants in grassroots campaigns (Watson 1980: 7) and thus rendering itself "too small in number, too elitist in character, and often too secretive in its deliberations" (Cook 2004: 13).

By 1824, the congressional caucus model had buckled under the weight of these escalating criticisms and of intraparty factional rivalries in what was by then essentially a one-party system (Davis 1997: 11) that no longer provided the incentive for coalescence (Ceaser 1982: 16). Supporters of Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams in the 1828 campaign—rapidly sorting into two new rival political parties—experimented with vesting nominating authority in state legislatures and state party conventions (Davis 1997: 11) but quickly found this approach too decentralized to effectively make decisions with national implications (Watson 1980: 8).

What parties sought was a system that could fulfill the demands of a national scope without sacrificing state and local input, and the answer to this dilemma was to be found in the adoption of national party conventions. At these events, delegates

representing every state would meet to nominate presidential candidates, but also could accomplish other vital functions like adopting a policy platform, settling rules questions, and strategizing about ways to grow and strengthen the party (Cook 2004: 18). In the run-up to the 1832 presidential election, all three major parties of the day—the Democrats, National Republicans, and Anti-Masons—held their own national conventions in Baltimore (Cook 2004: 15). This system would put separation of powers concerns to rest and ensure a broader base of support for a unified party ticket than the congressional caucuses had (Ceaser 1982: 17; Davis 1997: 11), but the national conventions would also have the effect of securing considerable decision-making power in state and local party officials who would come to assert themselves as powerbrokers in presidential nominations (Ceaser 1982: 17-18). Rank-and-file voters, however, still found themselves largely shut out of this process (Cook 2004: 18), and many party functionaries maintained the belief that the presidential selection process should be insulated from dangerous popular appeals (Ceaser 1979). Consistent with this notion, candidates for the nomination in this period largely respected a norm against open pre-convention campaigning, which left delegates with little tangible evidence regarding the strengths and weaknesses of potential candidates among the general electorate (Norrander 2015).

The national conventions were the parties' dominant mode of nominating candidates until about 1910, when they began to face similar criticisms to those leveled at congressional caucuses; namely, "as an institution at war with aspirations toward 'democratic' government" (Key 1964: 373). The Progressive

movement sweeping the nation at the time rallied public opinion behind calls for a more democratic nomination process (Ceaser 1982: 23), which promised to cleanse political corruption (Cook 2004: 21) at least in part through the adoption of presidential primaries (Davis 1997: 12), which would take the form of either a direct election of convention delegates, a presidential preference election, or a combination of both elements (Overacker 1926). Woodrow Wilson, embodying the Progressive movement's philosophy in proposing a national primary (Ceaser 1982: 23), hoped candidates would have more leeway to build their own constituencies, and thus be less constrained by those already brokered by parties; certainly, Wilson knew the longstanding warnings of demagoguery and popular passions, but ultimately trusted in the good sense of the people and self-restraint of the presidential aspirants (Ceaser 1979). In 1912, when the first real presidential primary campaigns emerged, featuring a pitched battle between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, a dozen states held primary elections (Cook 2004: 23). By 1916, this number would swell to twenty-six, constituting a majority of the states, but shrank to twenty-one in 1920 and sixteen by 1936 (Ceaser 1982: 23).

The Progressive era's movement had failed to completely dislodge the convention system and hit a period of "ebbtide" roughly between the World Wars, which scholars attribute to a combination of the high cost of conducting standalone presidential primaries, low levels of voter turnout, the tendency of leading candidates to ignore primaries, the general lack of concern with reform in the Roaring Twenties and preoccupation with more urgent issues in the Great

Depression and World War II, and, of course, opposition from party leaders (Davis 1997: 16).

Thus, began the "mixed system," an uneasy but workable balance from the end of the Progressive era through the 1960s, where primary elections existed in some states for rank-and-file voters to express their preferences for nomination, but nominating authority essentially remained in the hands of party elites at national conventions (Ceaser 1979). In this way, the mixed system reflected both progressive nods to popular input and partisan interests that had initially formed the conventions (Ceaser 1982: 26). From around the end of World War II onward, especially, interest in presidential primaries reemerged with increases in voter turnout and the advent of television giving a national audience unprecedented access to conventions and the candidates they chose from (Davis 1997: 16). During this period, primaries "constituted a high-risk strategy," through which candidates like Estes Kefauver and John F. Kennedy could leverage popular appeal and demonstrate their campaign's formidability if they lacked the initial support of party elites (Polsby 1983: 16), but which also had the power to cripple a campaign that performed poorly, as Wendell Willkie's disastrous 1944 Wisconsin primary performance demonstrated (Cook 2004: 31-32). Candidates who already had strong support among party elites had the option to sidestep the primaries and run an "inside strategy" appealing directly to party leaders and delegates (Ceaser 1982: 26).

The mixed system's balancing act would meet its demise after the tumultuous, contentious nomination campaign of 1968 (Polsby 1983) characterized by Eugene McCarthy's anti-Vietnam insurgency (Herzog 1969), the withdrawal of incumbent president Lyndon B. Johnson, the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, the violent clashes between protestors and police around the Democratic convention in Chicago, and which culminated in "the outrageous nomination of Hubert Humphrey" who had not competed in the primaries (Cohen et al. 2008). The Democratic Party responded to their embarrassing 1968 debacle by enacting an assortment of reforms meant to democratize the nominating process. The McGovern-Fraser Commission's modifications, which the Democratic Party implemented in 1972 and the Republican Party was quickly incentivized to follow suit in adopting (Polsby 1983), made voters the direct arbiters of presidential nominations by allowing ordinary voters to choose most convention delegates through primary and caucus elections (Kirkpatrick 1978; Shafer 1983). In turn, in this new system, candidates no longer had to rely heavily on appeals to state and local party leaders, who had been essential to mobilize grassroots support via caucuses or state party conventions (Davis 1997; Polsby 1983).

Though its democratizing reforms did not emerge in a vacuum, McGovern-Fraser marked the dawn of the contemporary presidential nomination system, which brought full-circle an incremental departure from the Founders' wariness of popular appeals nearly 200 years in the making.

Was Reform a Mistake?

Democratization is not without its shortcomings (Achen and Bartels 2017),

and several scholars have openly worried the McGovern-Fraser reforms to

presidential nomination are no exception. Perhaps most directly, national party

conventions have had their consensus-building power sapped, and now serve almost

solely as a nationally televised "infomercial" advertising the presumptive nominee

who delivers a prepared speech to a large arena crowd (Shafer 2010).

Scholars were bothered by how easily the new nomination process could open

the door to factional candidates and demagogues considerably wider than did the

old system. Political parties themselves can be best understood in this context as

coalitions of "intense policy demanders," where interest groups and activists are the

key actors (Bawn et al. 2012). While the old presidential nomination system

gathered party leaders in a convention hall to settle on a broadly appealing

consensus nominee, the new system could incentivize candidates to appeal to

particular intraparty factions in the hope that they constitute enough of a plurality

to outlast the favorite candidates of other intraparty factions (Polsby 1983).

Consistent with this fear, though not in a national context, scholars have linked

polarization in contemporary legislatures with candidates' incentives in primary

elections to appease activists and interest groups by adopting more extreme policy

positions (Masket 2011). Moreover, scholars warned, the modern presidential

nomination system could incentivize candidates to build a popular following with

empty image appeals, flattery, and the exploitation of dangerous or ungovernable

passions (Ceaser 1979). Through this avenue, a candidate could theoretically build a formidable "populist" campaign by marketing oneself through celebrity status or pop-culture characterizations (Scammell 2014).

The key vehicle for these vicissitudes was the mass media through which all the deliberation over potential nominees would now take place. Scholars recognized how the McGovern-Fraser reforms opened the door for a much more substantial media role in presidential nominations than existed in the days of "smoke-filled rooms" (Keeter and Zukin 1983; Marshall 1981; Matthews 1974; Polsby 1983). The proliferation of direct primaries fundamentally altered presidential nomination campaigns by shifting candidate focus from interpersonal interactions to mass communication—particularly through television—as "soundbites and media consultants ha[d] taken precedence over handshakes and party officials" (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1991: 111). In this new reality, masses of individual voters could make their choices in a largely indistinguishable manner from how they pick among alternatives in other mass media marketing campaigns (Polsby 1983: 133). With the media taking on this role as political intermediaries, Polsby (1983: 146-149) warned of five consequences: "crazes or manias" that amplify short-term opinion trends; "fads or social contagion" whereby a sentiment spreads to potentially ill-fitting contexts; "the resuscitation of ideology" through elite invocations of doctrines with the intent to elicit mass attention and compliance; elites who are constrained by "popular fashion" and less accountable to each other;

and an emphasis on name recognition, celebrity, and maneuvering one's campaign to a favorable position in the media's durable "heroes and bums" typecasting.

The contemporary presidential nomination system gives primary voters and caucus-goers considerable agency over their party's presidential nominee. However, these voters are not omnipresent and almost universally lack the firsthand experience with any of the candidates that many convention delegates would have had, so they have no choice but to rely upon the press as their conduit to this unseen world (Lippmann 1922: 203). Voters' decisions are no better than the information they receive (Key 1966) and even "thin citizenship" requires a certain baseline of information in order for democracy to function as intended (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Scholars have long feared the average citizen lacks the ability to determine which topics warrant deliberation and are ill-equipped to engage in those deliberations anyway; instead, they are more likely to be riled up about the topics marketed to them (Lippmann 1922).

The news media seem particularly ill-suited for the role of informing voters' choices in presidential nomination campaigns. The core function of news is to illuminate areas of knowledge vital to democratic citizenship—such as policy, power, ideology, and self-interest (Entman 2005: 49). Yet some scholars, skeptical of how well news outlets fulfill these "gate-keeping" functions, accuse news media of directing coverage toward action, controversy, drama, and competition instead of on values or policy, which degrades the quality of coverage to a point where it becomes difficult to even identify the candidates' policy agendas (Patterson 1980). Scholars

have long considered how advancements in communication technology—ranging from the gramophone to the typewriter—influence the language and behavior of those who engage with them (Kittler 1999). For example, some have worried that television by its very nature imposes a degradation in the quality of information conveyed to its consumers (McLuhan 1964), as rational argument takes a backseat to entertainment (Postman 1985). This argument is not without empirical support, as scholars demonstrate the audiovisual content of television disproportionately attracts image-oriented voters (Lowden et al. 1994) and conveys emotional intensity with unique potency (Mutz 2015). Social media have undergone similar scrutiny, whereby researchers have demonstrated how the mechanism of 'likes' and 'shares' themselves incentivize users to express more moral outrage over time (Brady et al. 2021). Even before the McGovern-Fraser reforms, scholars had begun to notice how television "projects personalities better than it demonstrates issues" (Thomson 1956: 137), and candidates—in an effort to compete with entertainment programming for the average voter's attention—were counseled "to be brief, to be quotable, and not to put too many ideas into any one speech or program" (Thomson 1956: 138). One observer worried aloud whether "we are approaching a condition where celebrities outside of politics—Hollywood, television and radio stars, sports heroes, and fiction writers—or even the wives of celebrities (they bear the "name," do they not?) carry greater weight in political campaigns than do long-time congressional leaders or state governors" (Carleton 1957: 233). Historians have since identified how American politicians as early as the 1920s had begun

integrating "Hollywood styles, structures, and personalities" into their political activities (Brownell 2014: 8).

One early account of the news media's new post-reform behavior presciently illustrated the burgeoning power of the press, citing George Romney and Ed Muskie as examples of how "flocks of reporters had started looking into the embryonic stages of presidential campaigns, scrutinizing aspirants even before the primaries, killing candidacies with untimely exposure" (Crouse 1973: 34). Evidently, "the press was no longer simply guessing who might run and who might win; the press was in some way determining these things" (Crouse 1973: 37). Extensive interviews with journalists and campaign personnel demonstrated linkages formed between campaigns and media at a "personal, organizational, and substantive" level (Arterton 1984: 37). When the news media became the vetting mechanism for presidential candidates under the contemporary system, the boundaries between what was publicly relevant and what was private became blurred, as the press probes for any information and then lets the public decide what is pertinent to the campaign and what is not—as if the decision to report it has no consequences of its own (Rosenstiel 1993: 57-63).

Two chaotic presidential nomination cycles in 1972 and 1976 leading to ideologically extreme and outsider Democratic nominees, respectively, seemed to lend credence to these scholars' apprehensions about the new process of presidential nomination.

The Party Strikes Back?

Despite the initial chaos and normative apprehensions, researchers largely observed remarkable stability in nomination campaigns during much of the period since McGovern-Fraser (Cohen et al. 2008). Scholars have generally attributed this relatively stable period to the adjustments of political party insiders who adapted to the new system by regularly tweaking party rules and directing the process with their own endorsements at the outset of the campaign.

Scholars have traced how political party insiders learned to direct the new system through a series of adjustments to party rules that—in their own perceived successes and failures—shape subsequent modifications to the presidential nomination framework (Kamarck 2019). Parties and states routinely tweak their nomination process' rules based on the events that transpired in the most recent election cycle—often with the goal of providing favorable conditions for their preferred candidate in the future (Jewitt 2019). And these rules, put in place by national and state party organizations, can sometimes have decisive effects on elements of the nomination process. Lengle and Shafer (1976) use the 1972 Democratic primaries to demonstrate that different delegate allocation rules would have produced three different winners; in that year's example, George McGovern benefitted from districted delegate allocation, Hubert Humphrey benefitted from winner-take-all, and George Wallace benefitted from proportional delegate allocation. More recently, scholars have identified differences between open and

closed primaries (Kaufman, Gimpel, and Hoffman 2003) or primaries and caucuses (Shafer and Wichowsky 2009) in the types of voters they attract.

The rules of the process themselves—be they regarding delegate allocation or access to debates—play a crucial role in informing candidate strategy in a given election cycle (Kamarck 2019). Candidates seeking a presidential nomination under the contemporary system must ambitiously adopt strategies years in advance of the actual contests in order to outmaneuver other ambitious candidates seeking the same prize. In order to put oneself in the best position to succeed over the course of the long process, candidates must develop a powerful campaign organization, adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, avoid embarrassing errors, and adeptly read the preferences of the primary electorate (Aldrich 1980: 214). Rule changes represent an additional strategic consideration for candidates who, for example, must focus on qualifying for debates through high enough poll standing or number of unique campaign donors, but these strategic shifts on the part of candidates must still pursue those aims through whichever tools and avenues are available to build public support. A rule change alone cannot help a candidate who has done nothing else to generate support or who does not strategically take advantage of the opportunity it creates.

Some contend these rule changes have gradually undermined the influence of the citizen-voter at the benefit of the "nomination elite" consisting of "officeholders, activists, resource providers, campaign specialists, media personnel" and other influential players in the process (Aldrich 2009). But to assume all rule changes

work against the tide of democratization would be hasty, as these rule changes are

not always made with the intention nor effect of aiding the party establishment.

While the 1981 Hunt Commission instituting "superdelegates"[1] in the Democratic

process was intended to soften the democratizing effects of the McGovern-Fraser

Commission (Price 1984), it has itself been subsequently reformed in the face of

popular pressure from former supporters of Senator Bernie Sanders' insurgent

campaign for the Democratic nomination in 2016 who cried afoul at what they

perceived as a "rigged" system (Kamarck 2019: 199). The Republican Party never

adopted superdelegates in the first place, but their post-2012 rule changes meant to

ease the path to nomination for an establishment-backed frontrunner backfired

tremendously in 2016 when they helped the quintessential outsider Donald Trump

neutralize intraparty resistance en route to the nomination (Kamarck 2019).

Although many rule changes may be intended to favor party insiders, they

may backfire and effectively favor outsiders, they may directly intend to appease

these factional or outsider groups, and they do not themselves generate support for

a given candidate. Moreover, the constantly shifting nature of rule changes itself

seems to indicate that the parties are perpetually reacting to the perceived failures

of the previous set of rules. Party elites would simply not fix something that they do

not consider broken. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Democratic zeal to "fix"

their nomination system with the right set of rules tended to follow embarrassing

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[1] Aldrich (2009) succinctly defines superdelegates as "party and elected officials receiving automatic delegate slots and being formally uncommitted to any candidate."

losses at the ballot box (Kamarck 2019: xii). These tweaks appear to mostly reflect reactions to previous failures of party control—not proactive maneuvers to remain ahead of the game. Rule changes also occur almost exclusively after a cycle has run its course based on retrospective evaluations of the previous campaign, so they do not represent an adequate recourse for a party attempting to provide a bump to a specific candidate during the heat of a campaign itself.

Perhaps the most important adaptation of party elites to the new nomination process has been their use of the "invisible primary" period preceding the first public voting contests (Hadley 1976) to identify and promote candidates favorable to the party establishment before most people are paying attention to the race. Specifically, these party leaders and interest groups often engaged in public and private meetings to deliberate about potential candidates, and ultimately these party elites made public endorsements of their preferred candidates—typically offering said candidates money and labor as well (Cohen et al. 2008). By engaging in this deliberation well in advance of any actual voting, party elites can use their endorsements to signal the legitimacy of a candidate and help lift them above the fray before much public attention is being paid to the campaign. Therefore, "the party decides" who their presidential nominee will be through their own elite endorsements and will use this power during the invisible primary to steer the nomination to consensus candidates rather than factional candidates or demagogues (Cohen et al. 2008). "Our argument, then," they explain, "is that party

leaders, associated groups, activists, and other insiders are the main drivers of the invisible primary" (Cohen et al. 2008: 11).

In supporting their argument empirically, Cohen et al. (2008) make three methodological decisions that—while reasonably motivated by accessibility and feasibility issues—could undermine their point by inflating the observed impact of endorsements. First, by splitting their data into only two time periods they are greatly limited in their ability to observe more variation in a protracted, inherently dynamic process (Cohen et al. 2008: 259-260). Second, the two time periods are partitioned based on the rate of accumulation of endorsements, so the cut always comes at the point when half of all endorsements in a given invisible primary have occurred (Cohen et al. 2008: 375n14); consequently, the two periods could show a strong association among their endorsements measures simply because they have been split at precisely a point when endorsement behavior had peaked. Third, their consideration of media coverage measures only the number of times a candidate was mentioned in the newsmagazines *Time* and *Newsweek*—and only *Time* in 2004 (Cohen et al. 2008: 251, 374n6). Not only does this analysis wholly ignore the tone of candidate coverage, but it also ignores the vast majority of the media landscape— even as it existed during those election cycles—and assumes *Time and Newsweek* can adequately stand-in as representatives of the entire media apparatus. For these reasons, the Cohen et al. (2008) statistical analysis does not definitively answer questions about what drives presidential nominations.

Nevertheless, this endorsement-centric theory seemed to fit quite neatly during the period from 1980 to 2000, as both major parties staged "rather tame" contests (Cohen et al. 2016). However, this endorsement-driven theory has since encountered several increasingly problematic election cycles. Howard Dean's "noisy anti-war insurgency" in 2004 (Cohen et al. 2016: 702), John McCain's victory in 2008 (Cohen et al. 2008: 340), Barack Obama's triumph over Hillary Clinton in 2008 (Whitby 2014), and Donald Trump's rise in 2016 (Cohen et al. 2016: 705) represent some prominent recent examples of how parties have visibly struggled to assert their control and keep factional or outsider candidacies from thriving in the presidential nomination process. Scholars have argued that party elite influence has declined since the new millennium (Steger 2016), and these party figures are less likely to even make public endorsements at all when the party is divided or uncertain about the candidates' appeal, opting instead for a "wait-and-see" approach (Ryan 2011; Whitby 2014). Even the endorsement-driven theory's architects themselves acknowledge that "insider favorites have not usually prevailed in nominations since 2000, and even when they have, their victories over factional and outsider candidates have been less decisive than in the preceding 20 years" (Cohen et al. 2016: 703).

In order to influence voters, elite endorsements seem to require a mediator. Cohen et al. (2008) float the possibility that endorsements precede the commitment of impactful campaign resources while conceding this argument requires "more

systematic study" (Cohen et al. 2008: 292-295), and they devote relatively more attention to endorsements as cues to voters (Cohen et al. 2008: 296-303).

Unlike in general elections, typical individual-level cues such as partisanship or systemic-level factors such as economic growth or incumbent party are not directly helpful in predicting voter behavior in presidential nomination campaigns (Steger, Dowdle, and Adkins 2012). Elite endorsements ostensibly provide a cue for voters when they otherwise would struggle for a heuristic to guide their candidate support. Jamieson and Brady (2009) provide evidence of this path by demonstrating how media consumption explains people's knowledge of endorsements, which voters use as cues to update their perceptions of the endorsed candidates' ideologies. Therefore, endorsements appear to require a considerable degree of media coverage in order to influence primary voters. Put simply, "an endorsement cannot matter if voters do not know about it" (Jamieson and Brady 2009: 67). This path of endorsement influence comports with indexing theory (Bennett 1990), or the notion that reporters and editors tend to "index" news coverage to the positions advocated by elite officials. Notably, empirical support for indexing during the invisible primary has been mixed at best, with media coverage deviating substantially from candidates' levels of elite support (Cohen et al. 2008; Sides and Vavreck 2013).

While *The Party Decides* may concede the crucial role of media coverage as a conduit of endorsement signals, they maintain these endorsements are the public manifestation of internal coordination by party leaders intended to nudge voters toward a consensus candidate and thus the effects of their coverage are still

attributable to the collective decision-making of party leaders. However, *The Party Decides* includes endorsement information for various celebrities who likely were not privy to the private coordination of party insiders that they contend sets these endorsements into motion. If Willie Nelson and Michael Jordan, for example, were not included in these deliberations and thus function outside of the party's coordination, how can they be considered a component of the same effort? Furthermore, if endorsements function primarily as cues to voters through media outlets, why would the endorsement of a virtually anonymous state legislator or a candidate's own relative be given more weight in the Cohen et al. (2008) analysis than the endorsement of a non-office-holding personality like Whoopi Goldberg or Kris Kristofferson when the celebrity endorsement would undoubtedly generate more attention? Indeed, scholars have found evidence that celebrity endorsements can be significant influences on political attitudes (Jackson and Darrow 2005; Jackson 2008). This conundrum raises the important question of what exactly media coverage of endorsements is a cue of. Endorsements may have most crucially served as an amplified signal of a candidates' acceptance from within the party, but they may simply increase the public visibility of the endorsed candidacy. One could also reasonably question whether this signal of broad intraparty appeal is impactful or even necessary in the new media landscape, which this project considers more thoroughly in a later section.

Regardless of whether elite endorsements did in fact drive presidential nominations in the past but have waned in effectiveness, or whether this

relationship was in truth less clear than previously believed, traditional party insiders evidently lack a firm grip on the process today. Without the potency of endorsements, and with rule tweaking a flawed strategy, parties appear to be victims of a "Pandora's box" of democratization that is difficult to effectively reverse.

Beyond endorsements, scholars have provided few other comprehensive explanations for presidential nomination campaigns and each of them appears to considerably rely on media attention in order to impact the race. Some scholars observe a general tendency for the candidate who raised the most money during the "invisible primary" to ultimately win their party's nomination (Adkins and Dowdle 2002; Goff 2004; Adkins and Dowdle 2008) and find a significant relationship between the amount of cash on hand a campaign has at the end of the "invisible primary" and success during the nomination contests themselves (Adkins and Dowdle 2000; Steger 2002). Other scholars push back on this posited impact of fundraising and instead argue that money may have the potential to buy a candidate attention, but it does not directly lead said candidate to the nomination (Robinson, Wilcox, and Marshall 1989; Norrander 1993; Wayne 2001). A candidate's viability and success through fruitful fundraising depends in no small part upon the extent to which these donation figures generate favorable media coverage— especially in horserace coverage comparing their fundraising with that of their opponents (Goff 2004). In this way, media coverage serves as an "echo" of either bountiful or lean fundraising (Goff 2004: 144). Though much of this empirical research predates *Citizens United*, the fizzling of several extraordinarily well-

financed candidates like Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer provide useful, though admittedly anecdotal, examples of how money does not appear to buy a candidate the nomination—even in the era of Super PACs.

Scholars have also found poll standing in the preprimary season (Beniger 1976; Mayer 1996; Dowdle et al. 2016) and winning the traditional early contests of Iowa and New Hampshire (Buell 2000; Dowdle et al. 2016) predictive of presidential nomination success. However, these variables are considerably less substantively informative than exploring what factors explain those variable values in the first place. In other words, this tells us nothing about what predicts who leads those polls and wins those crucial first contests.

While scholars may have developed a decent understanding of what occurs once the statewide contests have kicked off (e.g. Shafer and Sawyer 2021), a sufficient analytical explanation of how and why candidates finish the pre-primary period—and thus begin the voting period—at different levels is still largely lacking (Aldrich 2009: 37). Therefore, it is crucial for scholars who want to understand the presidential nomination process as a whole to more thoroughly explain how voters' pre-primary expectations are formed.

Distinguishing the Primary Electorate

With democratization as its aim, the McGovern-Fraser Commission gave new authority to voters in presidential nomination contests. But who are the citizens who constitute this primary electorate? In answering this question, one must

consider the extent to which the voters who participate in statewide presidential nomination contests fundamentally differ from the general public.

While the mass public does appear to have sorted themselves into more cohesive party allegiances over the past several decades (Hetherington 2001; Layman and Carsey 2002; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005; Abramowitz, Alexander and Gunning 2006; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Levendusky 2009), most of the general electorate still maintains relatively moderate political preferences (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006; Clinton 2006; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Levendusky, Pope and Jackman 2008; Bafumi and Herron 2010), and tend to reward more moderate candidates at the ballot box in legislative general elections (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart III 2001; Hall 2015). But the Americans who tend to participate in primary elections, and thus reflect a small and possibly declining subset of the general electorate (King 2003), could engage with politics in a fundamentally different way than Americans at-large.

Numerous scholars spanning several decades contend primary voters are not ideologically representative of the broader public (Lengle 1981; Marshall 1981; Ceaser 1982; Polsby 1983; Sinclair 2006; Brady, Han, and Pope 2007; Jacobson 2012; Hill 2015), which exacerbates divisions in the electorate and can hurt eventual nominees' efforts to be representative of the general electorate's concerns (Burden 2001; Burden 2004). In one example, scholars find evidence that the availability of open primaries does indeed result in more moderate primary electorates than when primaries are closed to all who are not already committed co-

partisans (Kaufman, Gimpel, and Hoffman 2003). While extremism is not a necessary component of ideologically driven political reasoning (Norrander 1989), more ideologically extreme citizens would theoretically feel a stronger psychological attraction towards voting by perceiving the stakes to be higher (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Fiorina 1999). Scholars have also found that political issues matter as priorities to primary voters, who are thus more likely to support the candidate who shares their concerns about the important problems facing the nation, and to shun candidates who are emphasizing uninteresting topics in their campaigns (Aldrich and Alvarez 1994).

Even scholars who attempt to push back against this overall description of primary voters as more ideologically motivated than general election voters tend to concede that primary voters are indeed more ideologically focused than their counterparts in the public at-large (Geer 1988; Norrander 1989; Abramowitz 2008). Moreover, when defined beyond simply representing a shorthand for partisan extremism, but instead as either a psychological or symbolic identification (Levitin and Miller 1979; Conover and Feldman 1981), or a degree of political sophistication whereby one demonstrates the ability to discuss and think about politics abstractly and consistently (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964), ideological differences between primary voters and general election voters emerge (Norrander 1989).

Primary voters consistently reflect a disproportionately politically active and attentive subset of the American public, and the more politically active and knowledgeable one is, the more likely they are to seek out information from the

news media (Kennamer and Chafee 1982; Lenart 1997). Indeed, unweighted

responses to the 2020 American National Election Studies reflect a similar pattern.[2]

As shown in Table 2.1, respondents were most likely to have voted in a presidential

primary or caucus that year if they reported closely following politics in the media;

likewise, respondents were decreasingly likely to have voted in a primary or caucus

as their attention to political news decreased.[3]

Table 2.1: Mean primary/caucus turnout by respondent's attention to political news in media, 2020

Media Attention	Mean Primary Turnout
Very close	68%
Fairly close	53%
Not very close	37%
Not at all	27%

Whereas the most politically active folks tend to have rigid priors that serve

as a perceptual screen sifting out inconsistent information, and the least politically

active folks do not pay much attention to political media and thus tend not to be

affected by it, the most susceptible consumers to media influences are politically

active folks who consume political information but lack the rigid beliefs about the

issues or candidates in question to act as a stout perceptual screen (Zaller 1992).

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[2] These analyses did not use any sets of ANES weights because each considered responses from only one cycle's survey at a time, and thus the cross-sectional, equal probability, sample should be sufficiently representative of the population. The ANES sampling technique and its "self-weighting" properties are described in greater detail on their website: https://electionstudies.org/data-center/anes-time-series-cumulative-data-file/

[3] Primary voting was recoded to an indicator variable with '1' representing having voted in a presidential primary or caucus, and '0' representing not having done so.

This scenario is particularly applicable to a presidential nomination context where numerous candidates begin the process virtually indistinguishable from each other and unknown to the electorate, but where likely primary voters are eager to learn about the field. And, consistent with this expectation, Tables 2.2 and 2.3 indicate co-partisan regular viewers of *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *The O'Reilly Factor*, respectively, are the most likely to have voted in a presidential primary or caucus in 2016.[4]

Table 2.2: Mean primary/caucus turnout by respondent's party identification and regular viewership of *The Rachel Maddow Show*, 2016

Maddow Viewer?	Party ID	Mean Primary Turnout
No	Democrat	49%
Yes	Democrat	74%
No	Republican	52%
Yes	Republican	62%
No	Independent	30%
Yes	Independent	55%

Table 2.3: Mean primary/caucus turnout by respondent's party identification and regular viewership of *The O'Reilly Factor*, 2016

O'Reilly Viewer?	Party ID	Mean Primary Turnout
No	Democrat	53%
Yes	Democrat	46%
No	Republican	45%
Yes	Republican	71%
No	Independent	30%
Yes	Independent	39%

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[4] These tables rely on the 2016 ANES rather than 2020 because 2016 was the last cycle with competitive presidential nomination campaigns occurring in both major parties. In constructing these tables, I tested the analysis from Table 2.1 and its finding was replicated using the 2016 ANES.

Put differently, Democrats were more likely to vote in presidential primaries if they regularly watched *Maddow*; likewise, Republicans were more likely to turn out in the primaries if they regularly watched *O'Reilly*. While an admittedly cursory glance, these findings provide surface-level evidence that partisan news consumers and voters in presidential primaries tend to be one and the same.

While observed stability in general election vote choice is undergirded by party identification and evaluations of incumbent performance, the potential for external effects on vote choice would theoretically be much larger in nomination campaigns where these factors are of relatively little importance and candidates are often not well known (Finkel 1993; Patterson 1993). Perceptual screens like partisanship do still affect one's receptivity to political information in the presidential nomination context though; in one example, partisan attachments were responsible for muting Democrats' reactions to information about Gary Hart after the Donna Rice scandal, rendering their moral commitments on these issues insignificant (Stoker 1993). Essentially, these priors do not disappear during presidential nomination campaigns, but are simply less useful as an immediate distinguisher between candidates of the same party. In this way, Zaller's (1992) RAS model faces a uniquely exceptional scenario in presidential nominations. The RAS model dictates that high awareness people are typically the most likely to be exposed to political messages but also are the least likely to be persuaded by them; however, the relative anonymity of candidates, lack of partisan differentiation, visible cues of opinion leaders, and novelty of the process and its events could

conceivably allow high awareness participants to exhibit dynamic opinion change over the course of the campaign. And, indeed, Zaller (1992: 253-258) himself presents evidence from the 1984 Democratic presidential race that the most aware partisans are more reactive to the contours of the campaign than are any other segment of the public.

Voters are reluctant to back candidates they do not know (Bartels 1988; Patterson 1980), so the amount of media coverage a candidate receives would stand to influence their level of public support; furthermore, this effect may be strongest in the earliest stages of a presidential nomination campaign when candidates are less well known (Pfau et al. 1993). Jimmy Carter's campaign for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination serves as an early testament to the importance of name identification to a candidate and media's vital role in providing it, as Carter's presidential candidacy overcame his initial obscurity to a national audience by eventually dominating news coverage (Patterson 1980: 107-109). Rather than being naïvely manipulated by media, voters in presidential nomination contests appear to use the information provided by media to aid their political learning, conditional not only upon the individual voter's level of political interest and partisan intensity, but also upon the nature of the news source and the nature of the coverage they provide.

The Evolving Media Landscape

Technological Advancements & Political Communication

Across the broad strokes of American political history, innovations in communication technology have tended to shift the locus of campaign activity further from the elites and closer to the masses. Whether the advent of print and transportation technologies in the 19th century, broadcast radio and television in the 20th century, or internet adoption into the 21st century, each innovation helped refocus political communication from elites to the mass public in increasingly personalized ways (Epstein 2018).

The earliest American presidential elections featured very little public campaigning with surrogates and supporters of parties expressing themselves through handbills and other print publications (Stromer-Galley 2019: 8). The campaign of 1824 coincided with advancements in transportation, political participation, and party organization: Surrogates of John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay still stumped for them across the country (Denton, Trent, and Friedenberg 2019: 57), but the general public voted for electors they knew were committed to a particular candidate (Jamieson 1996). By 1840 there was a post office for every thousand people (Bimber 2003: 51), and by 1850 the country had over two thousand newspapers in circulation, of which a quarter were dailies (Schudson 1998: 119). Truly mass political communication—through the expanding postal service and proliferating penny press—was born.

Political campaigns of the latter half of the nineteenth century largely sidestepped complex policy discourse in favor of "a form of national jamboree replete with orchestrated parades, banners, torches, transparencies, and flags, omnipresent

log cabins and hard cider, and coonskin caps" (Jamieson 1996: 9). In this era, presidential candidates were akin to "a central character in a drama," and the public was the audience seeking to be entertained" (Stromer-Galley 2019: 10). Political parties of this era, therefore, essentially faced a choice of lead actor in selecting a presidential nominee: someone for voters to passively see, hear, and identify with. This casting became even more valuable by the 1890s with the introduction of the motion picture, phonograph, telephone, and even the stereopticon—all of which became crucial tools for presidential campaigns to communicate with the electorate (Musser 2016). In an "age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin 1936), the mass dissemination of controlled, strategic messages was becoming a focal point of presidential candidates' efforts to construct a political brand. Both the advent of radio around 1920 (Craig 2000) and the nearly universal[5] adoption of television in the 1950s (Parry 2014) opened even more intimate and ubiquitous avenues of mass communication through which candidates could convey their carefully crafted personas, as well as laying the groundwork for more concentrated corporate ownership of outlets.

By the time the contemporary presidential nomination process emerged in the early 1970s, the media environment had shifted dramatically. When Americans could only choose from three major broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC— they experienced news coverage that did not differ greatly between networks, and

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[5] The Library of Congress reports the number of American households with a television set rose from only 9 percent in 1950 to 90 percent in 1960. That statistic can be accessed at: https://guides.loc.gov/american-women-moving-image/television.

which took advantage of its captive audience to encourage more political participation from less politically attentive and less partisan citizens by exposing them to more political coverage (Prior 2007: 164). One proposed explanation for this relative consistency of coverage across media was the function of major daily newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, in shaping the nature of broader news coverage (Haynes and Murray 1998). While the pre-internet media environment did not exclusively consist of the big three television networks, as periodicals like newspapers and magazines also bore importance to primary voters and party activists, these outlets reflected a more consistent pattern of coverage in the overall media landscape.

The subsequent "fragmentation" of media and content choices, initially enabled by cable television and perhaps hastened by the demise of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 (Zelizer 2017), has led to a decrease in the political participation of casual entertainment seekers—who can now easily watch ESPN or the latest Kardashian-related escapades—and an increase in partisan polarization (Prior 2007: 244). Subscription-based cable networks like Fox News and MSNBC, for example, can afford to cater their programming to a small, well-defined audience representing the most partisan and the most politically active segments of the electorate (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013: 34-35, 52; Prior 2007: 23). With a wide array of outlets appealing to different news-seeking groups through more narrowcasting or niche reporting, the resulting overall news environment has become more biased and more heterogeneous than what existed in a simpler analog

time (West 2001) when the major broadcast networks had to cater their news coverage to a much broader audience and could not afford to alienate viewers by blatantly taking sides in their political coverage (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013: 34-35). Notably, the proliferation of news outlets has not led to a proportionate broadening of proprietorship, as media ownership has largely consolidated behind a handful of corporate entities (McChesney 2015). Beyond this "fragmentation of audience news exposure" where smaller audiences are diffusing across more widely distributed outlets, Tewksbury and Rittenberg (2012: 123) also draw attention to the "fragmentation of public-affairs knowledge" where audiences know more about the topics that most interest them or that they agree with, and the "fragmentation of the public agenda" where the mass public lacks a shared sense of what issues most merit government attention.

Unfortunately, much of the existing research on media influence in presidential nominations treat the media as a monolith (e.g. Sides and Vavreck 2013; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). Consequently, this broad, one-size-fits-all conception of "the media" may represent a grey area that obscures the potentially increasing differences in attention and influence between different sources of information regarding the presidential nomination campaign. Notwithstanding the eventual explosion of content choices, one would be remiss to assume media coverage of presidential nominations was ever perfectly homogenous. Scholars in the 1980s found those who relied mostly on television for their political information perceived fewer differences between the candidates than did those who primarily

read newspapers—even controlling for sex, age, education, social class, income, partisanship, time of decision, and interest in politics (Wagner 1983). This result does nothing to assuage the concern that the very nature of television renders it an ill-suited medium for political and civic deliberations (e.g. McLuhan 1964; Postman 1985; Hart 1994). Scholars in the 1990s found media congruence varied at different stages of the presidential campaign. During the primary period, the amount, tone, and content of coverage dedicated to each candidate differed a great deal across news outlets; however, these disparities shrank as the campaign rolled on, and these aspects of coverage appeared to converge by the time the general election campaign began (Just et al. 1996). Even between national and local media, differences in coverage had emerged. Local television coverage of candidates was generally more positive than was local newspaper coverage (Just et al. 1996), and state press exhibited more openness to issue-based coverage of lower-tier candidates (Flowers et al. 2003). One could even highlight variations in coverage within media outlets, as political commentary seems to exhibit lower levels of horserace framing than does news reporting and appears more likely to dedicate attention toward policy issues and campaign themes (Steger 1999). Ultimately, research classifying media as a monolith could be especially problematic in the new media landscape, and there is an extent to which it may have always obscured important differences in news coverage of presidential nomination campaigns.

The advent of the internet and social media represented a revolutionary new frontier in the media environment. Scholars had long argued people purposefully

attempt to construct social networks that correspond with their existing attitudes and seek out these social interactions as sources of low-cost, customized political information (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). While this earlier research pointed to contextual constraints imposed by varying levels of opportunity for interaction, these possibilities increased considerably with the growth of the internet and social media. Multi-issue online campaigning organizations (e.g. MoveOn), political blogs (e.g. Daily Kos), and neo-federated groups (e.g. Democracy for America) have leveraged the lower transaction costs of participation into their emergence as important political players (Karpf 2012). Whereas political organizations previously had no choice but to rely on instinct or firsthand experiences, they can now use digital tools to test engagement strategies and adapt to their constituencies through the resulting data (Karpf 2016). Even digital spaces that are not purposefully political can be highly conducive to political mobilization by providing users "high levels of anonymity, low levels of formal regulation, and minimal access to small-group interaction" (Beyer 2014: 4). An essentially boundless number of information sources now perpetually compete for one finite resource: public attention (Webster 2011).

Though some argued this development would "enrich and strengthen democracy" (Gilder 1992: 32) by broadening the community of people one could interact with (Benkler 2006) and enabling a new era of "participatory civics" where citizens use new digital media as a tool to passionately seek change (Zuckerman 2014), others worried whether "we may be moving toward a society where we are

less and less exposed to…disagreement and viewpoints that are different from our own" (Scheufele and Nisbet 2013: 8), where "those loudest and most effective in advocating for their causes set the agenda for those who are quieter" (Zuckerman 2014: 165), and where people would ultimately "restrict themselves to their own points of view—liberals watching and reading mostly or only liberals; moderates, moderates; conservatives, conservatives; Neo-Nazis, Neo-Nazis," thus limiting the "unplanned, unanticipated encounters [that are] central to democracy itself" (Sunstein 2001: 9). Lowering the transaction costs of online communication allows us to see a more accurate demand curve of political participation by highlighting who it fails to activate, such as adolescents and young adults (Bauerlein 2008). Even if politics becomes easier to engage with, it does not necessarily mean more people will "develop a taste" for it (Karpf 2012: 158). The result is a political environment increasingly characterized by a constellation of niche audiences rather than by any newly engaged groups of relatively moderate citizens.

While some scholars have attempted to claim the level of ideological segregation online is low in absolute terms, even they concede ideological segregation online was higher than in most offline news consumption (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011). Furthermore, this approach only explored the content people encounter—not the way they integrate that content into beliefs—and people with divergent attitudes may interpret identical information differently (Acemoglu, Chernozhukov, and Yildiz 2016; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; Lord, Ross, and Lepper 1979; Zaller 1992).

Several studies illustrate the extent to which online behavior reflects a tendency of users to isolate themselves into likeminded networks. Research on political blogs in the early 2000s demonstrated that prominent bloggers were far more likely to link to other bloggers with similar ideologies than they were to link to ideologically opposed bloggers (Adamic and Glance 2005). Social media users in general are more likely to prefer one-sided news and hold more extreme views than those who do not use social networking sites (Gainous and Wagner 2013: ch. 2, 8). More recent research demonstrates how Facebook and YouTube users tend to select information that confirms their existing beliefs and to ultimately form echo chambers. Scholars find users who encountered conflicting narratives on Facebook or YouTube tended to subsequently aggregate into homogeneous groups whose members engage in similar behavior online and rarely leave the group—irrespective of the online social network or the algorithm of content promotion (Bessi et al. 2016; Del Vicario et al. 2016). These scholars have also connected these echo chambers and users' sentiments by demonstrating that the most active members of a group tended to express the most negative comments, and that more active users tended to become more negative more quickly than less active ones (Del Vicario et al. 2016). Twitter behavior regarding political issues—such as a presidential election—also closely resembles an echo chamber attributable to selective exposure and ideological segregation (Barberá et al. 2015).

As one would likely have assumed, patterns of online news consumption reflect clear generational differences. Scholars demonstrate in both the 2012 and

2016 nomination campaigns that young adults disproportionately use social media

to gather political information (Baumgartner et al. 2015; Edgerly et al. 2018). This

online behavior has also been connected to one's sense of 'skin in the game', as

politically engaged citizens in battleground states were most likely to post their

opinions on social networking sites and to feel like they could influence others—and

be influenced themselves—by sharing opinions on social media (Yun et al. 2015).

Even beyond active selectivity in one's online information exposure, scholars noticed

the way algorithms essentially serve as content editors, curating a site's

presentation of information based on prior user preferences (Scheufele and Nisbet

2013: 5), or contributing to partisan narratives (Duan et al. 2022) and journalistic

practices (Wells et al. 2020) through "bot" accounts on social media.

Thorson and Wells (2015) introduce a framework for mapping information

exposure in the new media landscape. They conceptualize "curated flows" where

each actor in an individual's personal communication network organizes and

presents a stream of content for the individual's consideration (Thorson and Wells

2015: 313). Each of these actors—be they traditional journalists, strategic

communicators, social contacts, algorithms, or the individual users themselves—

offer their own flow of information to an individual (Thorson and Wells 2015: 314).

Even average citizens play a "curatorial role" in their "selective forwarding" of

content to their peers (Penney 2017: 31) or political talk with others in their

geographic location (Wells et al. 2021). Personal curation is typically motivated by

individual-level characteristics such as partisanship, level of interest in politics, and

the ability to customize digital flows on a given platform; however, the actual flows of content resulting from acts of personal interest are not under the individual's control (Thorson and Wells 2015: 315-316). Therefore, within this curated flows framework, individuals have an increasing capacity—both actively and through algorithms—to filter out dissonant information or traditional journalistic curations while simultaneously elevating the curations of social contacts and strategic communicators who are less likely to craft their information flows based on "normative logic" than on "market logic" (Landerer 2013). Benkler (2006) argues this new "folk culture," where anybody with an internet-capable device can take part in producing, distributing, and consuming information, is an increasingly democratic one by empowering citizens to publicly share their own opinions and ultimately become more self-reflective and participatory. As discussed earlier, some scholars have maintained deep skepticism of even traditional journalistic curations' normative efficacy when disproportionately emphasizing controversy and competition—especially in the context of presidential nominations (e.g. Patterson 1980).

These changes in information flows would seem to disproportionately affect those most likely to participate in aspects of the presidential nomination campaign. Levels of civic engagement are highest among "news omnivores" and those with ideology-centric news repertoires, and lowest among "news avoiders" (Edgerly 2015). Those who seek more information via social networking sites are more likely to engage in civic and political participatory behaviors, online and offline (Gil de

Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012). These curated flows of information could be particularly potent in the earliest stages of a presidential nomination campaign when candidates are relatively unfamiliar, usual heuristics are consequently less useful, and likely voters are exposed to curated flows of applicable information. Indeed, when compared to television advertising, online political advertising reflects many of the trends associated with messier presidential nomination campaigns; namely, showcasing a wider range of candidates, occurring earlier in the campaign, focusing less on issues, and emphasizing more partisan cues (Fowler et al. 2020). Through interpersonal communication with social contacts—either in person or on social media—these flows of information could even exert influence over those who did not consume it directly but were exposed to its content secondhand (Druckman et al. 2018). This secondhand influence could amplify the original content by reintroducing itself in the information flow of one's social contacts, and could help explain a viral effect on folks who had not as actively sought out information about the campaign but have nevertheless taken notice of a candidate's buzz.

While television remains the primary source of political information for many publics (Chadwick 2017), newspapers still break the majority of stories that subsequently cross platforms (Jones 2009), and talk radio maintains a devoted following (Barker 2002; Barker and Lawrence 2006), evidence of partisan selective exposure on these outlets as well is vast (Coe et al. 2008; Hollander 2008; Jamieson and Cappella 2008; Garrett 2009; Stroud 2011; Holbert et al. 2012). Therefore, regardless of which newer media forms one relies upon, they appear more likely to

receive information flows that align with their priors than they would have several decades ago and are thus reasonably more likely to see their perceptions of relatively unfamiliar presidential candidates affected by this information.

While the explosion of content choices has certainly signified a seismic change in the media landscape, scholars of presidential nominations were initially skeptical that the new media represented anything remarkably divergent from traditional coverage in the aggregate. Haynes and Pitts (2009) argued the new media, which they represented through blogs, appear to focus their coverage largely on the same candidates as do the traditional media, which they represented through an assortment of television news networks. Another study found coverage remarkably similar across a wide range of traditional and new media, including newspaper, radio, television, cable, legacy and web-native Internet news, and talk shows (Belt et al. 2012). The coverage itself may predominantly originate from the same sources, as major commercial news enterprises—CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CBS News—sit at the nexus of connections between websites covering presidential nominations (Haynes 2008). This assessment reflected scholars' conclusions about broader news consumption. Although people turn to a variety of sources for information online, their consumption patterns seemed consistent with those of offline media; namely, sources associated with traditional news organizations remained the most easily accessible (Hargittai 2007).

In describing the new media landscape's potential effects on presidential nomination campaigns, one must reconcile the extent to which new media present

new opportunities for campaign communication with the apparently continued reliance on traditional news outlets. Contemporary political communication is shaped by a "hybrid media system" where organizations, groups, and individuals must blend older and newer media logics in order to successfully create, tap, or steer information flows (Chadwick 2017).

Donald Trump's 2016 campaign represents a vivid illustration of this new media landscape in practice. Trump does not appear to have simply bypassed traditional media through his social media use, but Trump evidently employed a hybrid media strategy by using social media as a tool to influence professional media coverage (Chadwick 2017: 262-263). Specifically, Trump directly interacted with traditional media through typical "information subsidies" (Gandy 1982) such as rallies, press conferences, and interviews, but he also employed social media through his "tweetstorms" that elicited reactions in the form of retweets or replies and created new stories for traditional media to pick up (Wells et al. 2016). Presidential nomination candidates overall tend to focus their tweets on self-advocacy rather than on partisan or ideological labeling (Kenski et al. 2017), and in this regard Trump's strategy resembled an "intensified and distorted version" of the Obama campaign's model, which had also effectively used social media as part of a hybrid media strategy to attract "serious" political coverage and build an air of viability (Chadwick 2017: 256). Trump's brash, transgressive political style likely contributed to this strategy's potency. Trump also had the benefit of entering the race with a cemented media persona and large preexisting social media following,

most notably through his starring role on *The Apprentice* and *The Celebrity Apprentice*, but also including highly visible ventures like *The Art of The Deal*, the *Miss Universe* pageant, and even a brief stint in a *World Wrestling Entertainment* storyline.[6] Trump's debate performances channeling a similarly combative, no-holds-barred style resonated with viewers and garnered him substantial social media attention (Bucy et al. 2018). This strategy appeared effective in practice, as increases in the volume of retweets of Trump's tweets led to increases in news articles and blog posts about Trump—but not the other way around (Wells et al. 2016: 3). Furthermore, once the statewide contests began, Trump's delegate count bore no significant causal relationship to his coverage, suggesting his media attention cannot be explained away as a function of his electoral success (Wells et al. 2016: 7).

Though a captivating contemporary example, Donald Trump is far from the only political aspirant to take advantage of an evolving media landscape. Throughout American political history, challengers or outsiders are typically the earliest candidates to incorporate new communication technologies into their campaigns—once these new tools have become sufficiently widespread and affordable (Epstein 2018).

Howard Dean's 2004 campaign broke ground in its embrace of the new media landscape as what campaign manager Joe Trippi described to be "a tool to counter

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[6] Leveraging sports to bolster relatability is a longstanding tool of presidents and presidential aspirants (Cillizza 2023), so Trump's cameo appearance at *Wrestlemania 23* is not necessarily as unheard of as it may appear at first blush.

the organizational capacity of the Kerry campaign" (Kreiss 2012: 37). While the innovative strategy of Trippi and others would certainly help the campaign establish itself through online fundraising and event planning, the Dean campaign also found itself in a fertile political context as an anti-Iraq War progressive insurgent candidacy with visible support on blogs like *Daily Kos* and *MyDD* as early as the summer of 2002 (Kreiss 2012: 36). Blogs like these were devoting attention toward the presidential campaign—albeit with writers and commenters of a decidedly progressive flavor—while coverage of the presidential campaign in traditional national publications was still relatively scarce (Kreiss 2012: 36-37). By the summer of 2003, Dean's campaign had parlayed their online fundraising and presence in the blogosphere into increasing journalistic attention, culminating in cover appearances on *Time* and *Newsweek*, and Dean was regarded as a bona fide frontrunner for the Democratic nomination (Kreiss 2012: 30).

These new approaches to campaigning proliferate from one cycle to the next; for instance, staffers, consultants, and technologies flowed from the 2004 Dean campaign to the 2008 Obama, Clinton, and Edwards campaigns (Kreiss 2012: 13). While integrating the previous cycle's innovations, campaigns continue to evolve and find new ways to navigate the ever-changing landscape. Wells (2015: 119) explains how a combination of careful branding from within the campaign and

supportive viral videos[7] from outside the campaign gave Obama's 2008 presidential run a unique aura of interactivity and coolness.

Kreiss (2012: 11) explains how the Dean and Obama campaigns developed the general approach of "structured interactivity," whereby a campaign encourages citizen participation as part of its ethos while simultaneously keeping it at arm's length. For example, while a campaign certainly wants to encourage broad participation in campaign donations, they do not want their rank-and-file supporters to participate in drafting campaign policy statements. Stromer-Galley (2019) defines this same approach as "controlled interactivity" with a very similar explanation of how campaigns strategically encourage citizen involvement in some forms but not in others despite digital communication technologies enabling much more extensive interactivity. Successfully managing this balancing act is the key for contemporary campaigns to avoid the pitfalls of increasing democratization.

In one more recent but comprehensive analysis, challengers in the 2010 midterm elections used Twitter more often than did incumbents (Gainous and Wagner 2013: ch. 5). Beyond simply navigating technological advancements, successful campaigns still must innovate in more purely traditional realms; for example, the Obama campaign also revolutionized field canvassing operations (McKenna and Han 2014). But despite these upstart campaigns not always ultimately winning their races, their surprising performances lead to widespread

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[7] Wells specifically mentions Barely Political's "I've got a crush on Obama" and will.i.am's "Yes We Can" as examples of hit videos that helped lend Obama's campaign a sense of visibility and celebrity endorsement.

imitation and incorporation of novel approaches that fundamentally changes the communication activities of campaigns at large.

The media landscape is constantly evolving, but understanding how voters, outlets, and candidates interact amidst these changing circumstances is crucial to studying presidential nominations.

Patterns in State and Candidate Coverage

After the McGovern-Fraser Commission ushered in the contemporary nomination process, observers noticed how journalists were changing the way they covered presidential nomination campaigns, with a focus on the burgeoning importance of press-candidate relations, pack journalism, and press crises (Arterton 1978a; Arterton 1978b; Bicker 1978; Marshall 1981). The earliest research on media in this process tended to focus on describing patterns of media coverage during the campaigns rather than on exploring the effects of media coverage on voters and overall outcomes (Norrander 1996; Haynes 2008).

Despite the nationwide adoption of mostly binding state-level primaries or caucuses, reporters itching for the first real indications of voter preferences devoted disproportionately large amounts of attention to the initial contests in Iowa and New Hampshire (Adams 1987; Bartels 1988: 36; Buell 1987; Lichter, Amundsen, and Noyes 1988; Marshall 1983; Robinson and McPherson 1977; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Overall, state contests tend to receive more media coverage if they hold primaries rather than caucuses, constitute a larger number of delegates, and occur earlier in the nomination calendar (Brady 1989; Castle 1991; Marshall 1981;

Marshall 1983; Robinson and McPherson 1977; Steger 2002), while some scholars argue the number of delegates becomes the sole force beyond the two first-in-the-nation primaries and caucuses in New Hampshire and Iowa (Adams 1987; Robinson and Lichter 1991).

Individual states quickly took notice of this trend, with many adopting primaries and moving up the dates of their contests in order to attract more media attention (Robinson 1980). In one prominent example, several southern states coordinated to create a regional primary, "Super Tuesday" (Stanley and Hadley 1987), which garnered significant news coverage for the event as a whole (Gurian 1993; Hadley and Stanley 1989; Norrander 1992). Nevertheless, increases in media attention do not appear to greatly alter the substantive focus of news coverage in these states. Vinson and Moore (2007) found in their study of the 2000 Republican presidential primary in South Carolina that both local and national media covered the campaign process more than they did substantive issues, echoing previous studies concluding—despite possible divergence in the quality of coverage—the news agenda between local and national sources is fairly consistent (Just et al. 1996: 118).

Voters themselves also appear to adapt their behavior based on their state's perceived importance. Those in more competitive states absorb more information about the candidates and issues than do those in less competitive states (Kahn and Kenney 1997). Television commercials exert their greatest influence on voter preferences during the "localized" phase just prior to their state contest, which is

both when candidates have directed campaign efforts to their state and when the state's voters imminently face Election Day (Pfau et al. 1995). Scholars attribute this phenomenon to both the deluge of election coverage and the increased prevalence of election-related interpersonal discussions among those who live in these competitive states (Jamieson et al. 2000; Lenart 1997). And the results of early state contests can produce "momentum" by affecting the perceptions of candidate viability and vote choice of those casting ballots in subsequent contests (Bartels 1988; Collingwood et al. 2012).

Certainly, media coverage is somewhat constrained by a dynamic world, where crises could just so happen to occur, and news outlets would be forced to devote coverage toward that urgent issue rather than the preferred agenda of a particular campaign; for example, equal amounts of coverage for all candidates has ostensible normative appeal, yet devoting equal coverage to all of the 1988 Democratic presidential candidates during the peak of Gary Hart's Donna Rice scandal would seem downright silly (Ramsden 1996: 81). Although, one should note the media's determination of which stories deserve reporting—let alone what constitutes a scandal—is evidently not a static one (Bai 2014) and it has evidently become considerably broader in the post-reform era (Crouse 1973; Rosenstiel 1993).

Media outlets, embracing their new interpretive role in the nomination process, began to shift their focus away from lengthier soundbites of candidates (Hallin 1992) or explanations of candidates' policy positions (Patterson 1993) and instead develop a more mediated, journalist-centered portrayal of the campaign as a

"horserace" (Robinson and Lichter 1991; Bartels 1988; Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Marshall 1981; Patterson 1980), wherein most reporting and analysis focuses on candidates' "image, personality, staff relations, and strategy," and candidates are judged based on whether they appear to be winning or losing the race (Broh 1980). This thematic frame has persisted from cycle-to-cycle (Kendall 2000). Scholars have also examined horserace coverage under slightly different names, such as "game schema" or "strategy schema" (Aalberg, Strömbäck, and De Vreese 2012), but the core emphasis remains largely the same. While the horserace is not the exclusive frame of news coverage (Haynes et al. 2002; Just et al. 1996), and some have questioned whether it is truly cause for concern (Geer 1989), it is still evidently the dominant frame (Belt et al. 2012), and more recent research has demonstrated how this horserace coverage can confuse, demoralize, and even demobilize its consumers (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Westwood, Messing, and Lelkes 2020; Zoizner 2021). Scholars essentially point a finger at the public for the pervasiveness of horserace news coverage, as they demonstrate news consumers—especially those with higher levels of political engagement—are actively drawn to reports on horserace and strategy rather than policy issues, which creates a market-based incentive to focus coverage on this conflictual frame (Iyengar et al. 2004; Patterson 1993).

Horserace coverage informs voter assessments of candidate viability while also potentially triggering voters' perceptions of media bias (Just et al. 1996). Indeed, there is reason to believe horserace coverage is not homogenous across media outlets, as scholars have discovered ideological biases influence a news

source's decisions over which polls to cover (Searles et al. 2016) and how they are portrayed (Tremayne 2015). Scholars have linked the horserace frame of news coverage to campaign contributions (Belt et al. 2012; Mutz 1995), found its effect is strongest for longshot candidates (Damore 1997), and demonstrated its importance in winnowing the field (Bartels 1988: 40-41) as it is far more critical to the decisions of longshot candidates early in the campaign than it is to frontrunners later in the process (Haynes et al. 2004). Scholars have found voters can more easily recall candidate standing in the horserace than they can recall the candidates' issue positions (Patterson 1980; Robinson and Clancy 1985) though they may still retain significant amounts of other information (Bartels 1988; Bartels 1993). Coverage tends to focus on three key considerations in assessing candidate viability: polls, fundraising, and journalists' evaluation of how closely the candidate's ideology matches their party's (Belt et al. 2012). Of those three areas, public poll results represent the most prevalent starting point for media handicapping of candidate standing (Adams 1987; Buell 1991; Buell 1996; Broh 1983; Lichter et al. 1988; Patterson 1980; Ross 1992).

Patterns of media coverage tend to treat a perceived "frontrunner" differently than the rest of the pack. Zaller (1999) coins the "rule of anticipated importance" to describe the media's tendency to selectively focus their coverage on a handful of candidates who are deemed most likely to succeed (Zaller 1999: 60-61). He also demonstrates that a candidate's amount of coverage will be roughly proportional to his or her standing in the polls (Zaller 1999: 91), and confirms that some candidates

will garner more press attention than polling would dictate while others will receive less coverage than they seem to deserve (Zaller 1999: 93). National media outlets are most receptive to logistical messages detailing the frontrunner's schedule and availability and are most hostile to issue-based messages regardless of their campaign of origin (Flowers et al. 2003). When a candidate emerges as a frontrunner, their news coverage tends to increase in amount but become more negative in tone (Matthews 1978; Robinson and Lichter 1991), which is explained at least in part by their competitors focusing their attacks on the frontrunner (Hagen 1996) and these attacks being incorporated into the frontrunner's news coverage (Haynes and Rhine 1998). If no existing frontrunner exists, news coverage is more likely to be relatively equal between candidates at the outset of the pre-primary period (Johnson 1993) but becomes more focused on frontrunners as the results of statewide contests become available (Patterson 1980).

Variation in coverage exists even among these top-tier presidential candidates, as the highest proportion of press-initiated criticism tends to focus on stronger but less known candidates (Bartels 1988: 39; Zaller 1999: 96). In this way, media coverage of presidential nomination campaigns can exhibit a cycle of positive and negative coverage that drives the rises and declines of candidates such as Gary Hart (Zaller 1999: 144). Sides and Vavreck (2013) noticed a pattern of "discovery, scrutiny, and decline" in media coverage of several 2012 Republican presidential hopefuls, as individual candidates surged to prominence only to endure increased criticism and ultimately falter (Sides and Vavreck 2013: 42-43).

Voters can learn which candidates are ahead or behind in the horserace with much less time and effort expended than they would learning the candidates' policy positions (Brady and Johnston 1987), and these assessments of candidate viability and electability can affect vote choice (Abramowitz 1989)—even by inspiring strategic voting behavior (Abramson et al. 1992). If a voter's top choice candidate was not considered a truly viable candidate, the voter would likely throw their support behind a less preferable but more viable candidate so as not to "waste" their vote (Bartels 1988). Crucially, media coverage has the power to define what constitutes "winning" as candidates who perform "worse than expected" or "better than expected" in a given poll or contest could face divergent coverage despite nearly identical levels of support (Bartels 1988: 35; Ridout 1991). A prominent example of such an effect is Bill Clinton's second place finish in the 1992 New Hampshire primary cementing his status as the "Comeback Kid" (Scala 2003).

There are also other opportunities for candidate exposure in the mass media environment outside of simple news coverage. Televised primary debates exert a significant influence on primary voters' evaluations of candidates (Yawn et al. 1998) and do so mainly through the viewers' assessments of the candidates' images and debating "styles" rather than their presentations of substantive policy content (Lanoue and Schrott 1989). These sorts of television broadcasts can provide primary voters with visual cues of candidates' personalities and character (Pfau et al. 1993; Popkin 1991).

The "invisible primary" also features numerous events that can contribute to winnowing the field of candidates. Milestones like the Iowa Faith and Freedom Forum, or informal popularity contests such as the Ames straw poll, Netroots Nation conference poll, and CPAC straw poll represent opportunities for campaigns to publicly test their mettle. Even party rules dictating debate qualifications can effectively cripple candidacies before they have a chance to present themselves to the vast majority of the voting public.

Voters' information levels and preferences are also influenced by interpersonal communications (Meyer 1994; Pfau et al. 1995). Scholars have found Americans felt free to discuss a wide swath of political topics and engaged in these conversations most frequently at their homes, their friends' homes, and at work (Wyatt et al. 2000). This may not be easy to dismiss as simply "cheap talk," as these scholars also noticed this political conversation significantly correlated with opinion quality and political participation. This interpersonal communication is also relevant to media influence. Partisan media exposure affects its consumers' but also has been demonstrated to exert remarkable secondhand influence over those who did not consume it directly but were exposed to its content via discussion with those who did—especially within homogenous groups of co-partisans (Druckman et al. 2018).

Some candidates experience coverage that deviates from expectations due to unique "predispositions" that reasonably affect their chances of success (Bartels 1988), but a candidate's coverage could also be affected by idiosyncratic or personal

traits beyond their control. For instance, scholars demonstrate how media coverage of Elizabeth Dole's 2000 presidential run differed from that of her male counterparts; specifically, Dole faced more coverage of her personal traits and less of her policy positions, and was much more frequently paraphrased rather than quoted directly (Aday and Devitt 2001; Heldman et al. 2005). In these circumstances, otherwise well-qualified contenders can struggle to break their media portrayal as a novelty candidacy. There is also reason to suspect these less-visible attributes of candidates—such as biographical information—may be easily misperceived and can affect voters' overall assessments of candidates (McDonald, Karol, and Mason 2020). This information is not easily dismissed as "cheap talk" if it affects voter perceptions, and one could reason these less-visible candidate attributes are most impactful earlier in the primary season when candidates are first being introduced to voters.

In sum, McGovern-Fraser ushered in an era where the patterns and tendencies of media coverage had new opportunities to potentially affect aspects of the nomination campaign such as which candidates are viable, which primaries are important, and what "winning" a contest even means (Patterson 1993: 189). While these broad patterns of coverage have been relatively consistent over time, the communication technologies and information sources that constitute this media landscape have been much more dynamic.

Evidence of Media Effects

The new media landscape represents a prominent player in the game and deserves consideration for the ways it may exert an influence on the presidential nomination process. Some examples of these media effects exist—both inside and outside of the presidential nomination context.

Scholars have indeed provided evidence of media effects on news consumers relevant to forms of political participation and perceptions of political objects—especially among those who are not already unreceptive to the perceived slant of the outlet. Rozado, Al-Gharbi, and Halberstadt (2021) present evidence that the increasing prevalence of prejudice-denoting terms in news coverage is predictive of increases in public awareness of societal prejudice. Wojcieszak et al. (2016) find exposure to congenial news increases intended political participation, and identify issue understanding, positive emotions, anger, anxiety, and attitude strength as significant mediators in this relationship. Emotions appear to be an increasingly important avenue for media effects, as citizens consuming news through social media are largely "feeling their way into" the issues and events being discussed there (Papacharissi 2015: 117). These visceral reactions can have tangible effects on political preferences; in one study, a respondent's emotional reactions to political events helped explain their presidential approval over the same period (Gonzalez-Bailon et al. 2012).

A field experiment conducted before the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election indicates a statistically significant increase in Democratic support among those who had been treated with a *Washington Post* subscription (Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan

2009). Druckman and Parkin (2005) find the editorial slant of newspaper coverage strongly impacts voter perceptions of candidates in a Senate campaign. And Hetherington (1996) demonstrated how the more media coverage voters consumed about the 1992 presidential campaign, the worse their retrospective assessments of the economy were. Not only does this research support the existence of media effects on consumers' perceptions of national conditions, but it also lends credence to scholarly concern over the impact of media's increasing tendency to couch coverage toward negativity, anger, fear, disgust, and sadness (Rozado, Hughes, and Halberstadt 2022), which evidently can maintain its potency even after the negative external circumstances themselves have subsided (Patterson 1993; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). In one example highlighting this potency of negative coverage, Garz and Martin (2021) leverage left-digit bias in the coverage of unemployment figures to demonstrate how bad milestone events hurt incumbent governor vote shares roughly twice as much as good milestone events help them.

Even outside of the United States, the rare circumstances of an endorsement switch to the Labour Party by several prominent British newspapers before the 1997 United Kingdom general election revealed evidence of substantial news media influence on mass political behavior (Ladd and Lenz 2009). Certainly, these findings are not evidence of automatic nor universal media effects, but they do represent significant findings of the potential for media influence given the right set of circumstances.

Directly exploring media influence on presidential nomination campaigns, scholars have drawn links between reading opinionated coverage in the *Manchester Union Leader* and some New Hampshire primary voters' preferences, such as support for the paper's favored 1996 candidate, Pat Buchanan (Farnsworth and Lichter 2003; Moore 1987). One study considering conservative talk radio found that listening to *The Rush Limbaugh Show* caused more extreme perceptions of how liberal the Democratic candidates were (Jamieson and Capella 2008: 227-229), and another study found that the more frequently one listened to Limbaugh, the more likely one was to support George W. Bush for the Republican nomination over John McCain—especially among the most politically knowledgeable (Barker 2002). The impact of partisan outlets like Limbaugh can work effectively in the opposite direction of traditional media. While reception of disproportionately pro-McCain coverage in mainstream media tended to influence respondents to prefer McCain, reception of partisan coverage via Rush Limbaugh was strongly associated with preference for Bush among Republican primary voters, and for Bill Bradley among Democratic primary voters (Barker and Lawrence 2006). These findings point to both the impact of subjective media coverage of candidates in presidential nomination campaigns and to the potential for partisan media influence to overcome a mainstream media favorite.

Some scholars have even considered the ways "soft news" show, such as late-night and political comedy programs, present skewed coverage and explored the effects these patterns of coverage have on their viewers' political behavior.

According to one study, a Democratic candidate's appearance on *The Colbert Report* appears to increase that candidate's fundraising figures, while a Republican's contributions appear to stay flat or even decline after an appearance (Fowler 2008). Evidently, the "Colbert bump" only benefitted Democratic candidates. Another study comparing *The Daily Show*'s coverage of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in 2004 found the program directed much harsher ridicule toward Republicans and focused on policy and character flaws, whereas humor aimed at Democrats was relatively subdued and tended to emphasize more innocuous physical attributes, and found that—even when controlling for viewers' partisanship and ideology—exposure to *The Daily Show*'s convention coverage was associated with increased negativity toward the Republican ticket while attitudes toward the Democratic ticket remained consistent (Morris 2009). Specifically, in a presidential nomination context, scholars have found possible effects of soft news coverage on viewer learning about the campaign. Seeing a candidate appearance on a late-night or political comedy show—such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*—was positively related to knowledge (Brewer and Cao 2006), and viewers of late-night comedy programs increased their national network and cable news attention over the course of the primary season at a higher rate than those who did not watch any late-night comedy (Feldman and Young 2008).

Fox News in particular has garnered considerable scholarly attention for its perceived influence over Republican politics, and thus deserves to be momentarily

described separately. A natural experiment, taking advantage of the largely idiosyncratic introduction of Fox News by some cable television carriers by the 2000 general election, determines Fox News increased George W. Bush's vote share in the 2000 presidential election by 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007). A similar study locates most of this increase in Bush's support among Republicans and pure independents (Hopkins and Ladd 2013). And yet another study took advantage of channel position in cable television lineups to estimate Fox News increases Republican vote shares in presidential elections by 0.3 points among viewers induced into watching 2.5 additional minutes per week (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017).

Consideration of Fox News in a presidential nomination context has thus far consisted mainly of descriptive anecdotes. Previous attention has pointed to several examples of Fox News injecting itself quite visibly into Republican nomination politics. One description outlines the so-called "Hannity Primary" where Sean Hannity hosted numerous Republican presidential candidates shortly after their campaign announcements with a largely sympathetic interviewer and appealing audience of politically active co-partisans (Levendusky 2013: 147). Another examination finds that—with the exception of Mitt Romney—every major potential 2012 Republican presidential candidate was under contract with Fox News in 2010 (Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012: 243-244). Most recently, observers have blamed Fox News for validating Donald Trump as a legitimate political figure (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018: 53). For his part, Fox News' longtime Chairman and CEO Roger

Ailes believed he possessed this influence, declaring to executives, "I want to elect the next President" (Sherman 2014: 344). During the 2012 campaign, Ailes worked to ensure candidate announcements occurred on Fox programs (Sherman 2014: 376), openly questioned the "spine" of 2012 Republican frontrunner Mitt Romney (Sherman 2014: 376-377), attempted to convince Chris Christie and David Petraeus to run against Romney (Sherman 2014: 372-373) and seemed to be "using Fox to manufacture moments of excitement around alternative candidates" (Sherman 2014: 377).

Fox News appears to possess an avenue to the Republican base that simply did not exist in an older media environment. Republicans exhibit a tendency to cluster more uniformly behind fewer information sources than do Democrats: forty percent of Trump voters named Fox News as their "main source" for news about the campaign (Pew Research Center 2017). With respect to both political and nonpolitical issues, liberals were more likely than conservatives to engage in cross-ideological dissemination on Twitter (Barbera et al. 2015). Even before social media sites took off, conservative blogs reflected a denser pattern of interconnectedness than did liberal blogs (Adamic and Glance 2005). Evidently, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to share an information source. For this reason, Republicans could exhibit disproportionate susceptibility to media effects on their evaluations of presidential nomination candidates at a macro level. At a micro level, attitudinal distinctiveness among Republicans—namely their skepticism of mainstream

media—could manifest itself through their levels of openness to candidate handicapping based on the source of the information.

Beyond the outsized influence of Fox News in Republican politics, there are other possible reasons nominations may simply work differently between the two parties. Procedurally, Democrats tend to use more proportional rules for delegate allocation that encourage candidates with lower ceilings to remain in the race, whereas Republicans typically hold winner-take-all contests that elevate the importance of achieving pluralities of support among voters (Kamarck 2019). Or perhaps the Democratic focus on factional or group interests and Republican focus on broad ideology pull the parties' nomination campaigns in different directions (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). The two major parties have also exhibited asymmetries in developing digital campaign infrastructures. As Kreiss (2016) explains, parties tend to treat winning campaigns as a "prototype" upon which to model future campaigns, and Democrats had numerous successful tech-centric campaigns to build upon, while Republicans mostly lacked this extensive foundation.

While it is possible the parties fundamentally behave similarly in presidential nominations, one should remain open to the possibility that other factors could lead their nomination campaigns in notably different directions.

Studies of media effects have had to grapple with a substantial risk of measurement error in the self-reporting of media consumption. Working in one direction, people generally tend to struggle remembering past events, especially in

the context of political campaigns (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1998; Bradburn et

al. 1987; Pierce and Lovrich 1982), so self-reporting of media consumption could

conceivably under-count media exposure that the respondent had since forgotten.

Yet working in the opposite direction, survey respondents may over-report their

exposure to signal their own civic virtue (Iyengar and Simon 2000). Notably, by

correcting for measurement error, scholars found significant evidence of media

exposure effects—particularly through network television—over the course of a

presidential campaign (Bartels 1993).

Mechanisms of Media Effects

In order to responsibly describe *how* media handicap candidate standing, one

must pull from previous strands of research on framing, priming, agenda setting,

and filtering with care not to shoehorn the mechanism into only one ill-fitting or

overly broad terminology but instead to highlight the areas of conceptual overlap

between them (Cacciatore et al. 2016).

Attention to framing traces its scholarly roots primarily to the work of

Kahneman and Tversky (1979; 1984) in psychology and Goffman (1974) in sociology.

Unfortunately, each of these research paths led scholars to adopt substantially

different definitions of framing (Cacciatore et al. 2016), although each of these

conceptualizations refers to an effect of presentation on judgment and choice

(Iyengar 1996). *Equivalence framing*, the narrower definition from the psychological

tradition, explains *how* equivalent information is presented to its audience;

emphasis framing, a broader definition borne out of the sociological tradition,

explains *what* content an audience receives (Cacciatore et al. 2016: 10).

Equivalence framing has been demonstrated to influence viewers' political

assessments (e.g. Iyengar 1996). Television news has been criticized for its reliance

on "episodic" frames, which depict issues in terms of specific singular instances,

rather than "thematic" frames, which depict issues more abstractly and

contextualize them more broadly (Iyengar 1996: 62). Another study found that

viewers expressed divergent levels of tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan depending on

whether they were shown a news story about a KKK rally portrayed as a free

speech issue or as a disruption of public order (Nelson et al. 1997). In presidential

nomination campaigns, specifically, one study found Republican primary voters

were more responsive to candidates when they employed individualistic frames

than when they used egalitarian frames of the same policy proposal, and found this

effect particularly pronounced among more educated participants (Barker 2005).

Emphasis framing bears a stark resemblance to the concept of agenda

setting, which rests upon the argument that the decisions of media figures such as

editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters regarding which topics to emphasize in

their coverage determine which issues news consumers learn about and how much

importance to attach to them (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Scholars have indeed

pointed to evidence that news consumers' perceptions of candidates can be affected

through this function, as candidate attributes receiving extensive media attention

were more likely to affect attitudinal judgments about those candidates for heavy

newspaper readers than they were for light newspaper readers (Kim and McCombs 2007). The new media landscape further complicates this agenda setting function. While earlier considerations of agenda setting focus on a unidirectional flow from traditional media to the public, digital technologies offer more opportunities for the public to respond and potentially influence the media through a reverse agenda setting where "journalists may be responding to actual or perceived public interests and thus the public agenda could be seen as preceding and influencing the media agenda" (Neuman et al. 2014: 195). In the presidential nomination context, scholars have found initial evidence indicating an intermedia agenda setting relationship between political activists, partisan media outlets, and candidates' official campaigns (Ragas and Kiousis 2010). Scholars describe a symbiotic relationship between older and newer media logics consistent with the Chadwick (2017) theory of a hybrid media system where newspapers still tend to predict the Twitter agenda to a greater extent than the reverse in the 2012 and 2016 nomination campaigns, but candidates do exhibit a growing capacity to use social media as an agenda setting tool (Conway et al. 2015; Conway-Silva et al. 2018).

Priming can largely be conceived as an extension of the agenda setting process whereby news coverage serves to increase the salience of an issue in a person's mind (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). News priming does not typically occur through media taking advantage of politically naïve citizens; instead, politically knowledgeable consumers who trust the media outlet infer their coverage of an issue indicates its general importance, which leads them to subsequently place

greater emphasis on that issue when making political evaluations (Miller and Krosnick 2000). In this way, an information source would reasonably have its greatest influence on the subsequent candidate perceptions of those who trust them to provide a congenial perspective on a campaign they actively care about.

This conceptualization fits the recent scholarly push toward preference-based effects models, which combine elements of previously dominant strong and weak effects paradigms (Cacciatore et al. 2016). Preference-based effects models have two key elements, *preference-based reinforcement* and *tailored persuasion*, as an increasingly fragmented media landscape matches audiences primarily with information that conforms to their prior beliefs (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). Preference-based reinforcement is driven not only by media outlets' increasing motivation to narrowcast information toward niche audiences (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Prior 2007) or even specific individuals (Scheufele and Nisbet 2013) in order to foster more lucrative advertising environments, but also by increasing opportunities for both voluntary and involuntary user input leading individual information consumers to experience increasingly narrow information curation (Cacciatore et al. 2016: 19). Preference-based effects models also direct attention toward situations where media effects may be stronger among consumers for whom the content is primarily designed. Conceptually, scholars compare this tailored persuasion to "the idea of personalized medicine, that is, treatments that are tailored toward a patient's genome or other characteristics and therefore are much

more effective than traditional medicines or treatments would be" (Cacciatore et al. 2016: 19).

Media outlets—particularly of the partisan variety—also serve a filtering function, whereby they will selectively report information depending on how it reflects upon their aligned interests (e.g. Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). Thus, as Brookman and Kalla (2022) explain, "a media outlet is more likely to report information flattering to politicians and causes on their ideological or partisan side, and not to report information unflattering to the same." Though the fault lines are considerably less defined in intraparty competition than in interparty elections, partisan media may still exhibit filtering behavior that reflects their preferences for or against a given candidate for their favored party's presidential nomination.

Each of the theoretical strands described above appear intertwined in the context of presidential nominations, and one must therefore consider these mechanisms together in order to provide a description of media influence at an individual level. One's prior political interest, partisan intensity, and ideology affect the information sources they encounter. These outlets provide emphasis framing or agenda setting functions through their decisions of which candidates to focus coverage on, engage in equivalence framing through their decisions of how to cover said candidates and filtering through their inclusion or exclusion of certain information, and the consumer's existing priors moderate their receptiveness to that information source's priming effects on subsequent candidate evaluations.

<u>Motivations of Media Coverage</u>

    In studying this topic, one must devote explicit attention toward the incentive structures motivating media coverage of presidential nominations and how they have evolved along with changes in the media landscape. While news construction represents a "negotiated process" rather than an absolute one (Bennett and Livingston 2003), information sources generally face three competing logics in determining their content focus. Landerer (2013) outlines the first two logics as the competing concepts of "normative logic" motivated by traditional gatekeeping interests in protecting the welfare of democratic society, and "market logic" motivated by a self-interest in the maximization of circulation and thus profit. The third consideration is an ideological logic motivated by the advancement of a particular political agenda (Sherman 2014), which can be driven by the journalists themselves (Baron 2006) or by the outlet's ownership (Djankov et al. 2003). Some have described a general journalistic proclivity for "adversary culture" (Trilling 1965), casting journalists as "progressive reformers, deeply skeptical of all the major institutions of society except our own" (Taylor 1990: 23) whose "antagonism is interpreted…as validating their independent professionalism" (Polsby 1983: 143).

    In a presidential nomination context, each of these logics would ostensibly pull reporting toward three different types of candidate. Coverage from a normative logic would stand to benefit pragmatic, establishment candidates who represent relatively experienced and safe options least likely to threaten democratic societal welfare. Coverage from a market logic would stand to benefit exciting or interesting

candidates at best, but at worst could benefit vacuous celebrity candidates or demagogues. And coverage from an ideological logic would stand to benefit factional or extreme candidates who may excite the most ardent co-partisans but alienate many of those outside the tent.

In a simpler media environment, typified by three nearly identical broadcast networks with broadly national audiences, traditional gatekeeping journalism had more opportunity to direct the presidential nomination process toward consensus, pragmatic candidates—though some scholars would question how much this motivation was ever exclusively exhibited in the preponderance of coverage (e.g. Patterson 1980; 1993). But these relatively boring candidates are at an increasing disadvantage as the media landscape continues to evolve. If candidates after McGovern-Fraser ever could succeed in capturing the nomination through experience and pragmatism alone—and without somehow resonating in news coverage through ideology or personality—this avenue could be gradually shrinking along with other traditional journalistic tendencies. Indeed, resources devoted to the production of reporting continue to decline, as has habitual consumption of mainstream news media, particularly among younger cohorts (Patterson 2008), who generally exhibit low levels of political attention and participation (Wattenberg 2020).

In the new media landscape where the number of choices for news has exponentially grown, market and ideological motivations are difficult to disentangle, as ideological and commercial interests are one and the same for many

outlets. Specifically, coverage decisions are motivated primarily by weighing the economic incentive to cater their programming to a small, well-defined partisan audience in order to maximize their own circulation and ultimately profit (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013: 34-35; Prior 2007: 23). Further, as the proliferation of information sources continues to expand, ideological and market logics will become ever more deeply entangled with each other, as the path to profit runs through even more niche, fragmented audiences. Notably, this calculation is not unique to news outlets or political contexts: countless other commercial or cultural goods have become more easily vendible to niche markets with steady demand (Anderson 2006).

The economic incentives at play are consistent with the scholarly attention given to media branding. Any given news report is essentially an "experience good," as potential consumers can only discover its properties upon exposure to it (Prior 2013); therefore, news producers have an interest in crafting brands for their outlets that will communicate in advance what consumers can expect from the outlet's programming (Hamilton 2004; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). Moreover, scholars argue news producers bias their content in the direction of their audience in order to maintain their brand's appeal (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). Even media outlets with partisan political coverage certainly stand to benefit in general by crafting and sustaining these brands; for instance, scholars provide evidence that considerable partisan divides in selecting which media outlets to consume persist even in exposure to coverage of "soft news" topics like sports and travel (Iyengar

and Hahn 2009), which appears driven by either an innocent force-of-habit or an

actively sustained loyalty to the brand's presentation style (Mutz and Young 2011).

Overall, these media outlets appear to have a broad economic incentive to craft

brands that appeal to their audience's existing attitudes, ensure content is mostly

consistent with these beliefs, and benefit from the resulting viewership across a

wide array of programming. This demonstration of alignment with viewers' priors,

in turn, builds the information source's power to consequently influence viewer

perceptions. As two inherently self-interested goals, ideology and market logics

function neatly together.

In an even more contemporary illustration of this tendency, the array of

hyper-partisan Facebook news pages, such as *Occupy Democrats* or *The Angry

Patriot*, have the principal goal of producing single headlines and memes that grab

attention and elicit likes and shares to news feeds and can do so without traditional

journalistic norms or the oversight of an editorial staff demanding factual reporting

(Herrman 2016; Silverman et al. 2016). Even individual social media users possess

this incentive to rapidly share information with friends and consume the

information their social contacts share all the while hoping to be the beneficiary of

more likes or retweets (Yun et al. 2015). If users had no interest in this social

networking, they would have little reason to join social networking sites and

vanishingly few reasons to expose themselves much to the information flows

contained therein. Evidently, market logics are not exclusive to the traditional

media domains of television or radio, nor are the growing entanglements between this commercial motivation and ideological gestures.

This tendency cannot be simply derided as the fault of upstart players in the game. Most media outlets are owned by a handful of conglomerates whose chief interest is in appealing to the masses through entertaining programming that keeps them tuning in and susceptible to advertising (McChesney 2015). Ownership does have the potential to exert more ideological and partisan influence over media content; in one example, scholars found the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page became far less supportive of government intervention in the economy, much more negative to Democrats, and much more positive to Republicans after being purchased by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation (Wagner and Collins 2014).

Matthews (1978) distinguishes between "manifest effects," which are intentional outcomes devised by the media, and "latent effects," which occur coincidentally with reporters motivated chiefly by the search for a good story to cover. While presumably few news outlets would manifestly desire to aid presidential candidates who represent potential harm to the welfare of a democratic society, they may activate this latent effect by prioritizing the pursuit of exciting stories that generate the audience attention required for the outlet's sustenance—a quest increasingly entangled with ideological motivations as media choice continues to swell and the influence of individual users or strategic communicators continues to grow. One could reasonably look down this road and plainly see the worst fears of Ceaser (1979) and Polsby (1983) taking shape.

The New Media Landscape as "Context for Action"

Media are a ubiquitous part of people's life experience—not simply a discrete tool or set of tools—which complicates our ability to meaningfully isolate and quantify its relationship with other aspects of life (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012). Even those actively participating in highly contentious political expressions like the Occupy movement (Ganesh and Stohl 2013) or the Arab Spring (Tufekci and Wilson 2012) struggle to pinpoint precisely which medium informed them about these events, with some simply explaining they heard about it "everywhere" (Bimber 2016). Even at the advent of digital media, Bolter and Grusin (1999) observe how "no medium today…seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces" (15). Research in this vein should therefore not be bogged down in measuring the specific technological features employed by organizations to capture their members' input, but rather should focus on measuring the ways in which members experience the organizations to which they have chosen to belong (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012).

Bimber (2016) instead conceptualizes the digital media environment as a change in the "context for action" rather than as an individual-level variable. This changed context is relevant to political behavior in how it provides "expanded opportunities for action due to lowered costs of communication and information" (Bimber 2016: 16). Considering the media landscape through this lens recognizes both the ubiquity and hybridity (Chadwick 2017) of digital media in a way that

emphasizes their overall presence over their precise distribution (Bimber 2016: 7). This consideration also acknowledges the process of "remediation," whereby new media "refashion prior media forms" (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 273).

Technological advancement then can be thought of as the removal of barriers to action and thus the return of agency to the people (Bimber 2016: 8). Through its eventual ubiquity, emerging technologies weaken traditional boundaries to power. This new technological context makes it easier for people to interact with both one another and with formal organizations in a "collective action space" where members exhibit different participatory styles (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012). By "locat[ing] power at edges and ends of networks rather than at centers" regardless of precisely which technological features a given member chooses to employ, the new media context increasingly places organizational power "in the hands and minds of citizens" (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012: 21).

While this theoretical framework is typically applied to social movements, this project conceptualizes the presidential nomination process in a similar fashion; namely, the campaign represents a broader digital context in which politics occurs and all campaigns operate, and where the declining costs of communication provide expanded opportunities for action. These technological advancements coincide with political reforms pushing in the same direction: democratization.

For political campaigns, new media tools have lowered the costs of traditional campaign activities—like canvassing or soliciting donations—by serving as "coordinating machinery" that mobilize those with relevant partisan and ideological

commitments to deliver these financial, human, and political resources (Kreiss 2012: 26). The "basic argument…is that the practices of political campaigns change as the communication environment changes" (Stromer-Galley 2019).

Reevaluating Elite Control

The democratization of presidential nominations dovetails with evolution in the media landscape to complicate traditional notions of party elite control over the presidential nomination process. A key element of this influence was party members' ostensible coordination during the "invisible primary" period before most voters were paying much attention (Cohen et al. 2008). However, coverage of the invisible primary has increased ever since the contemporary nomination system's implementation, as has the number of public debates taking place before the first contests, with both trends evidently accelerating around 2000 (Cohen et al. 2016). Whereas general election debates have minimal impact upon voter choice and tend to reinforce preexisting partisanship and attitudes, scholars have found primary debates—which take place when voters possess relatively limited information and hold more malleable preferences—exert a significant influence on voter assessments of candidates' viability and electability and produce significant changes in vote preferences (Yawn et al. 1998; Shaw and Roberts 2000). In fact, debates held earlier in the primary election cycle have the greatest capacity to influence viewers' campaign engagement, issue appraisals, and candidate evaluations (Best and Hubbard 1999). The coalescence of party elites behind a frontrunner—and thus the potency of elite endorsements during the pre-primary period—have visibly declined

since 2000 (Steger 2016). Consequently, the "invisible primary" is not so invisible anymore. Likewise, given the phenomenon of states "front-loading" their contests earlier in the calendar year (Mayer and Busch 2003), party establishments have even less time in which to course-correct once the primaries have begun if a less desirable candidate has amassed early momentum.

Given the conception of political parties as not simply formal organizations made up of officeholders and campaign officials, but rather as a coalition of activists (Masket 2011), interest groups, and other organizations that share political goals (Bawn et al. 2012), one could reasonably consider partisan leaning news sources as a part of their aligned party's assemblage of associated entities (Barker 2002; Azari 2017) and the new media landscape fertile ground for the increased influence of existing party phalanges. The evolution of the new media landscape has therefore shaped two key developments in party politics. Firstly, it added the purveyors of partisan aligned information flows to their party's assemblage. Secondly, it substantially opened the door for both candidates themselves and interest groups or activists to reach the mass public as strategic communicators in ways that were frankly impossible decades ago (Thorson and Wells 2015).[8]

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[8] In most cases, it is probably safe to assume the social media accounts or other online presences in a candidate's name are not commonly used by the candidates themselves and are instead handled principally by campaign staff. Although, @realDonaldTrump certainly appears to be a crucial exception to this general tendency, and as explained by Chadwick (2017) and Wells et al. (2016), this perception and its associated sense of authenticity apparently played to Trump's advantage as an outsider candidate by helping him resonate with a segment of voters who were fed up with professionalized politicking. These outsider candidates are precisely the type of candidates Aldrich (2009) dismisses as less competitive in the contemporary system because of increasing costs to campaigning, so for the cheaper and less professionalized option to also be the more visibly

In considering what this new media landscape means for endorsements, one must recall how elite endorsements were purported to operate. Cohen et al. (2008) argued endorsements could provide a candidate two valuable assets: cues to the electorate and resources to campaigns.

Endorsements served a purpose as cues of intraparty appeal and support, but there are now countless other, more effective ways for this information to reach the electorate. Foremost among these avenues of signaling a candidate's viability and appeal is the conferring of positive attention toward said candidate by partisan aligned information sources. Because the information's outlet is likely consistent with its consumer's priors, the positive coverage provided serves as a cue of the candidate's viability and appeal—let alone simply alerting the consumer to the candidate's existence. Put differently, a voter does not need an endorsement to tell them which candidate is acceptable to the party if their favorite news network already did by having that candidate on their screen or if their Facebook newsfeed is packed with family and friends buzzing about that candidate. In this way, candidate coverage within the new media landscape has effectively replaced endorsements as the crucial signal of a candidate's viability and intraparty acceptability, and it is through this attention—rather than through traditional means of fundraising or official endorsement—that partisan aligned information sources contribute to a candidate's campaign.

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effective specifically because it supports one's outsider bona fides, is a significant development that undermines Aldrich's central assertion.

One must also briefly consider what may occur when news seekers happen to encounter information sources that do not align with their priors. Scholars have demonstrated how more opinionated news coverage can indirectly affect attitudes via hostile media perceptions and anger responses—particularly among those who have political preferences incongruent with the opinionated news item (Boukes et al. 2016). Consequently, negative coverage of a candidate in an opposed information source could increase a consumer's perceptions of the candidate's appeal and perhaps even of theirs and the candidate's value congruence. Notably, Barker and Lawrence (2006) provided evidence of the opposite effect when they found Democratic support for Bill Bradley in 2000 increased through listening to Rush Limbaugh, whose coverage was critical of Al Gore.

Regarding their second possible asset, public endorsements cannot confer campaign resources if they are not made early enough in the process to make a difference, and certainly cannot do so if they are not made at all. The very effect of endorsements is conditional upon how united and proactive party elites are in making them (Steger 2016). Party figures are less likely to make public endorsements when the party is divided or uncertain about the candidates' appeal (Ryan 2011; Whitby 2014) despite precisely that circumstance representing the greatest opportunity for an endorsement's resources to have its largest impact. Bandwagon endorsements that merely pile onto a candidate after they have already built a mass following or have all but clinched the designation of "presumptive

nominee" would do quite little to provide resources for a campaign to use against their opponents for the nomination.

Ultimately, the twin democratization of the political process and the communicative ecosystem have given the mass public an unprecedented level of authority in presidential selection. With the ability to receive more frequent information flows that more closely align with their personal preferences, these highly engaged voters are particularly susceptible to media influence. While party elites traditionally play a significant role in coordinating and shaping the invisible primary through their endorsements, their influence has been waning as the pre-primary period attracts more public attention. The media landscape now sets the table for voting contests, leaving party elites with limited opportunities to exert their own influence.

CHAPTER THREE: WE REPORT

"Politics will eventually be replaced by imagery. The politician will be only too happy to abdicate in favor of his image, because the image will be much more powerful than he could ever be."

– Marshall McLuhan[1]

"We hardly need to be reminded that we are living in an age of confusion. A lot of us have traded in our beliefs for bitterness and cynicism, or for a heavy package of despair, or even a quivering portion of hysteria. Opinions can be picked up cheap in the marketplace while such commodities as courage and fortitude and faith are in alarmingly short supply."

– Edward R. Murrow[2]

Before considering the relationship between media coverage and other potential markers of candidate viability, this project must first explore the content of pre-primary presidential nomination coverage in the new media landscape; namely, what are they covering, and how are they covering it? To answer these questions, this project compiled an original database of news articles and transcripts that will form the basis for this chapter's content analyses and will contribute to subsequent chapters' inquiries as well.

I begin this chapter by describing my procedure of collecting, organizing, and processing the documents. To validate the resulting database of coverage, I briefly explore some general observations ranging from the most discussed candidates and events to the most commonly used words. Next, I demonstrate the results of

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[1] https://macleans.ca/society/life/the-lost-mcluhan-tapes-2/
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMNw7M-eUdU

multiple dictionary-based content analyses focused on identifying which frames of coverage—horserace, game, strategy, policy, and populism—are most prevalent across the period of analysis. I then assess the balance of positive and negative coverage. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion of how these analyses elucidate why party leaders may struggle to shepherd consensus candidates toward the top of their party's preferences in this partisan media landscape where the pre-primary attracts an abundance of horserace coverage that increasingly emphasizes candidate personality and style, may entangle policy considerations with populist rhetoric, and ultimately may fail to effectively apply adequate scrutiny to risky candidates.

Building the Database

While some previous studies have had access to proprietary data from companies like Crimson Hexagon (e.g. Sides and Vavreck 2013; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018; Patterson 2016a), those venues were unappealing to this project for two reasons. First, these commercial data sources tend to be prohibitively expensive to those without substantial research budgets. Second, and more crucially, those sources do not afford researchers the flexibility and transparency that more direct control over data collection and processing provides. While certainly convenient, the opacity inherent to outsourcing tasks like sentiment analysis to an external company is not ideal. These considerations made it clear this project's best path forward would be to manually compile transcripts and articles from as broad a

variety of media as feasible, and then to conduct original content analyses with them.

<u>Collecting the Documents</u>

To facilitate the project's goals, I drew from the LexisNexis archives through batch downloads via Nexis Uni (formerly LexisNexis Academic). The collection window only included articles and transcripts from the full calendar year preceding the first voting contest in the campaigns for the 2000-2020 Republican and Democratic presidential nominations.[3] Collecting documents from the year before voting begins matches the definition of the pre-primary period adopted by previous scholars (e.g., Cohen et al. 2008; Dowdle, Adkins, and Steger 2009) and safely covers the timespan in which the vast majority of relevant political activity occurs. A focus on the 21st century[4] nomination campaigns enables this project to consider a comprehensive glimpse of the media landscape given Nexis Uni's available years for most media outlets. Stretching beyond these time horizons into multiple years before voting contests or into a lengthier number of election cycles could be tasks for future research.

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[3] In the interest of centering this project's focus on competitive races, those that featured an incumbent President running for renomination were excluded. While there have been a handful of prominent historical examples of intra-party challenges to incumbents during the post-reform era (e.g. Ronald Reagan in 1976, Ted Kennedy in 1980, Pat Buchanan in 1992), none of these candidacies have ultimately been formidable enough to successfully defeat an incumbent and none have arisen in the 21st century.

[4] Though I refer to the "21st century" campaigns because of when the elections actually take place, it is worth clarifying that most of the data for the 2000 campaign is technically collected from the year 1999 because that is when the bulk of the pre-primary period took place.

The final list of sources included in the collection arose out of two main considerations: their prominence in national political discourse, and their availability from LexisNexis during this project's data collection period. Several public surveys (such as those conducted by Pew Research Center and YouGov) demonstrate the consumption of and trust in specific outlets for political news.[5] Republicans and Democrats differ widely on their levels of trust in specific outlets, and while both still consistently get more of their news from broadcast and cable television than from any other source, they also consume significant amounts of political information from print, radio, and online sources. Therefore, a study of this media landscape must endeavor to include as wide a range of ideologies and modes as possible with an eye towards including the outlets with the most reach.

Applying these criteria garnered a list of 17 sources across broadcast television, cable television, magazines, newspapers, radio programs, and online content, which is provided in Table 3.1 below. A handful of exceptions aside, these sources have full coverage over the whole period of analysis.[6] While several local newspapers were originally considered for inclusion, they were ultimately excluded because they heavily mirrored syndicated content from the Associated Press and to

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[5] The most recent YouGov study of American media consumption and trust habits can be found at: https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/04/05/trust-media-2022-where-americans-get-news-poll

[6] 2000 does not include CNN, *CNN.com*, *Politico*, or *The New York Times* Blogs; 2004 does not include *Politico*, or *The New York Times* Blogs; and 2020 does not include *The New York Times* Blogs or *National Review*.

include them would have dramatically prolonged an already lengthy data collection timeline.

Table 3.1: News Sources Included in the Database[7]

Outlet Name	Mode
ABC News Transcripts	Broadcast TV
CBS News Transcripts	Broadcast TV
CNN Transcripts	Cable TV
CNN.com	Online
Fox News Network	Cable TV
MSNBC	Cable TV
National Review	Magazine
NBC News	Broadcast TV
NPR "All Things Considered"	Radio
NPR "Morning Edition"	Radio
Politico.com	Online
Slate Magazine	Magazine
The Associated Press	n/a
The Hill	Local Newspaper
The New York Times	National Newspaper
The New York Times Blogs	Online
USA Today	National Newspaper

This final constellation of outlets, while admittedly far from universal, is still substantially larger than other considerations of media coverage employed in other studies of presidential nomination campaigns and is more than sufficient to reflect the broader "context for action" (Bimber 2016) in which the political process occurs and opportunities for communication are expanded.

Candidates were included in the database if they had participated in at least one public debate during the campaign. Restricting the analysis to fewer candidates

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[7] While *The Hill* is technically considered a "local" newspaper of Washington, D.C. by Nexis Uni because of its 24,000 print readers on and around Capitol Hill, that description belies their considerable online presence which spans nationally.

than these would constitute a potential exclusion of major candidates; a threshold

more inclusive would likely flood the database with candidates who register zeroes

across the board. Markers beyond debate participation could be used to determine

the pool of candidates, but they suffer from other flaws. Fundraising information,

for example, is not particularly useful as a criterion: including anyone who had filed

a presidential campaign is far too wide a net to cast and setting some dollar amount

as a threshold would be entirely arbitrary. Using debate participation represents a

happy medium that is the most likely to avoid pitfalls that could potentially bias the

project's findings. A full list of candidates included in the database can be found in

Appendix A.

To access the news coverage devoted to each candidate, this project relied on

keyword searches from LexisNexis for each candidate's name.[8] Nexis Uni allows

searches filtered by start date, end date, and source. This made batch downloads of

the full text of each article/transcript—not simply a headline or superficial

summary—easier to conduct. One considerable constraint in document collection

was the 100-document limit per batch download. Therefore, this project required N

total searches, doing so for each candidate, for each source, and each grouped

download such that:

$$N = C*S*x$$

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[8] These keyword searches were careful to account for nicknames, accents, or common names that could distort the search results. For example, mentions of either "Joseph Lieberman" or "Joe Lieberman" were included in searches pertaining to his 2004 campaign.

where C is the number of candidates, S is the number of sources, and x is measured as:

$$x = [z_{c,s}/100]$$

where z is the number of search results for candidate c in source s. The batch downloads were saved as folders containing individual documents in Rich Text Format and named in a consistent manner to keep careful track of download batches.[9]

Ultimately, this document collection approach yielded a database of 475,698 candidate mentions in 161,504 unique articles and transcripts.

Cleaning the Documents

Document preparation for text-as-data content analyses typically require a few key modifications in the preprocessing stage. First, the documents underwent a process of "stemming," which removed the ends of words to map words that refer to the same basic concept to a single root; for example, *family*, *families*, *families'*, and *familial* all became *famili* (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 6). Next, the documents had several types of words removed from them to improve the subsequent analysis (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 7); for the purposes of this project, the documents were stripped of punctuation, capitalization, numbers, symbols, white space, and "stop words" that do not convey meaning but primarily serve grammatical functions.

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[9] File names were given as: Year_party_lastname_source_downloadcount (e.g. 2016_r_trump_cbs_1)

While ostensibly much information has been left on the proverbial cutting-room floor in this preprocessing stage, scholars have demonstrated these simplified documents are consistently preferable for inferring substantively interesting properties (Hopkins et al. 2010).

After this data preparation, each document i ($i = 1, \ldots, N$) is represented as a vector that counts the number of times each of the M unique words occur, $W_i = (W_{i1}, W_{i2}, \ldots, W_{iM})$ (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 7). Each W_{im} counts the number of times the m-*th* word occurs in the i-*th* document, and this collection of count vectors into a matrix is typically referred to as the *document-term matrix* (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 7).

Validation

Before diving headlong into more intensive analyses, this project first considers summary statistics and some simple counts to validate the dataset and perhaps substantiate the project's theoretical motivations. Table 3.2 presents these summary statistics sorted by candidacies.[10]

Table 3.2: Summary Statistics for Candidate Mentions (1999-2020)

Min.	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	Max.
121	1492	3700	5115	7322	22162

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[10] For the purposes of this project, a "candidacy" refers to one campaign for the presidential nomination of either major party in a given cycle; therefore, Hillary Clinton's 2008 and 2016 presidential runs would be considered two separate candidacies—Clinton 2008 and Clinton 2016— despite the candidate herself being the same person.

In the period of study, from January 1st of the year before the elections through the date of the first contest, candidacies received a mean of 5,115 mentions and a median of 3,700 mentions across all sources in the dataset. The low mark of 121 mentions was set by Alan Keyes' 2008 Republican campaign, and the high mark of 22,162 reached by Hillary Clinton in her 2016 run, though her large volume of coverage could be partially explained by the de facto two-candidate race between herself and Bernie Sanders. Appendix B lists every candidacy by their total number of mentions over this period, as well as a bar graph visualizing the same information. Evidently, as other scholars have recently noted (e.g. Cohen et al. 2016), the "invisible primary" is not invisible anymore. One could reasonably doubt—as some scholars have—whether party elites can stealthily maneuver under the glare of this much public attention, but that question will be addressed directly in this project's following chapter.

Consistent with other studies, media attention on the pre-primary period also appears to have increased over time in this dataset. Figure 3.1 (and Table C1 in Appendix C) presents the total candidate mentions for each party's nomination campaign and demonstrates how, for example, candidates for the 2020 Democratic nomination received more than ten times as many mentions as their 2000 Democratic counterparts overall, more than three times the 2004 lineup, and over double those in 2008. Even if 2000 and 2004 are discounted because they are based on slightly fewer media sources, the escalation over time is apparent.

Figure 3.1: Candidate Mentions by Election Year and Party (1999-2020)
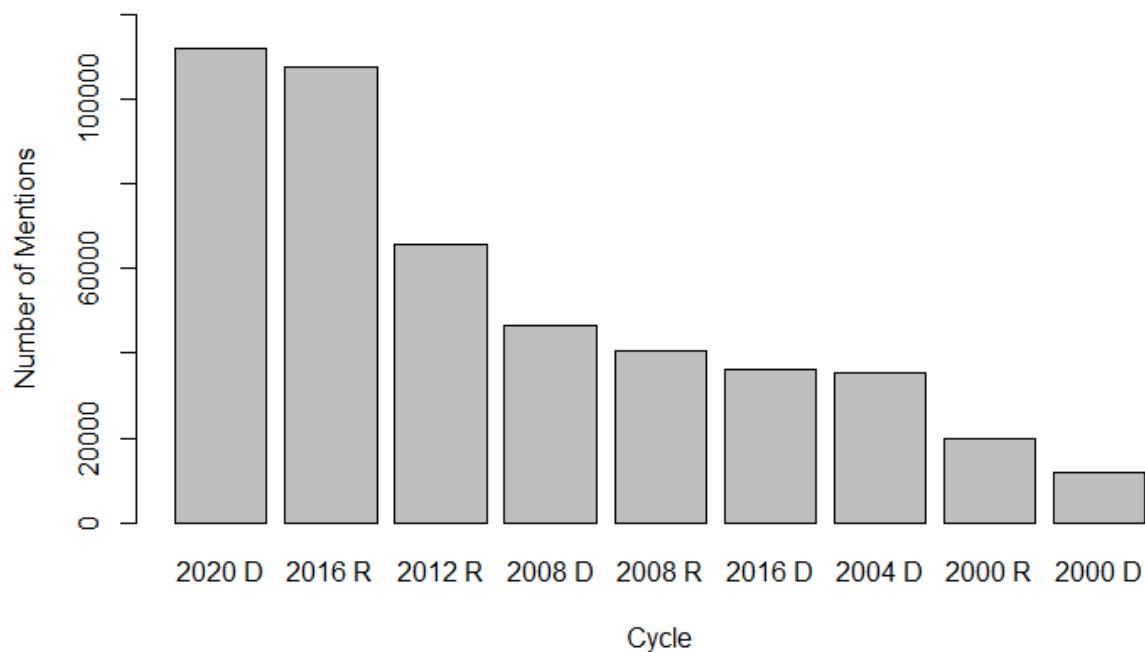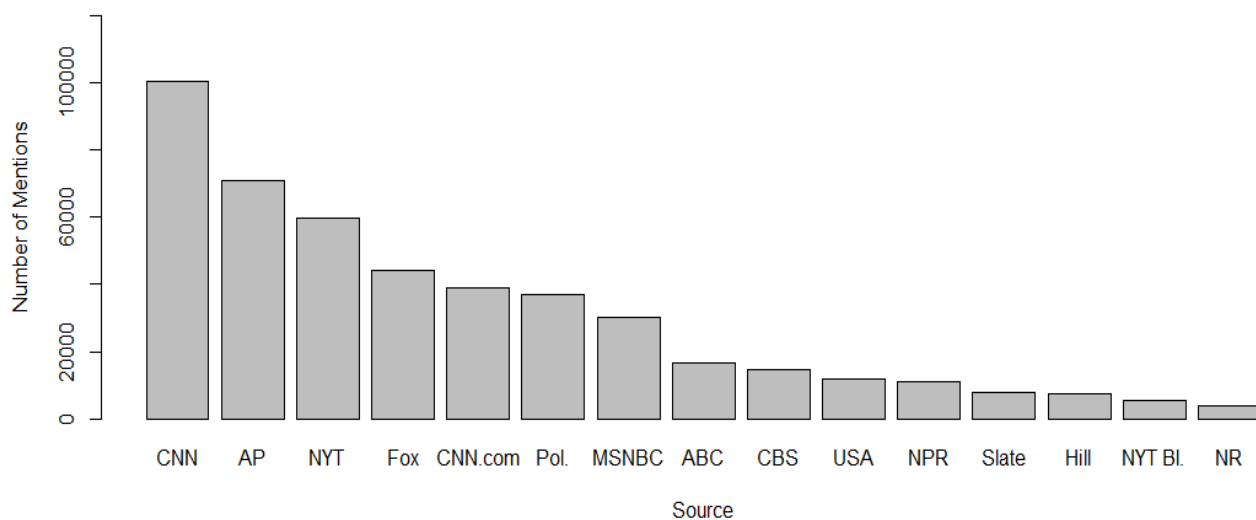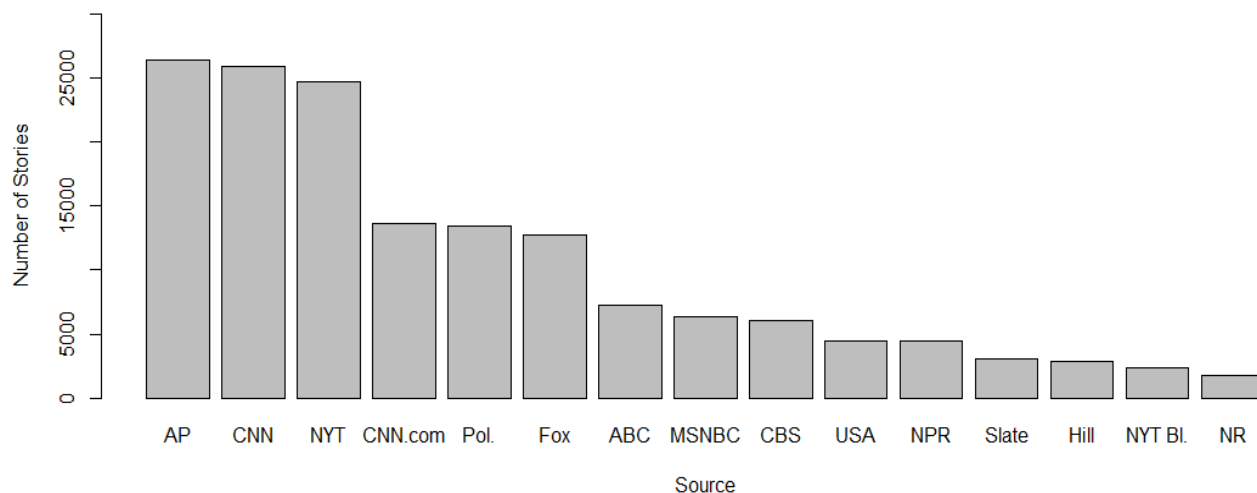

Figure 3.2a: Presidential Nomination Candidate Mentions, by Source (1999-2020)

This dataset reflects a wide swath of the media landscape, and Figure 3.2a and

Figure 3.2b (and Table C2 in Appendix C) illustrate how the sources included each

make a substantial contribution to the number of observations overall, and one

roughly consistent with their share of 'bandwidth' in the contemporary media landscape given their publication or broadcasting schedules.

Figure 3.2b: Presidential Nomination Stories, by Source (1999-2020)

In another validation check of this dataset, Table 3.3 lists the top ten most mentioned candidates on any single date during the period of study. Across all of the 21st century's competitive presidential nomination campaigns, the most mentioned candidate on a single day in this dataset was Howard Dean on January 19th, 2004: the day of the Iowa Caucuses and his infamous "scream" while speaking to a crowd of disappointed supporters that evening. One would assuredly struggle to justify how an awkward yell at a campaign rally from a candidate who had already been dealt a crippling defeat deserves more attention than a candidate being the target of a sitting president's impeachable efforts to find dirt on them and eliminate them as a political threat—let alone more coverage than the countless other stories that have emerged in each nomination cycle.

Table 3.3: Top Ten Most Mentioned Candidates on a Single Day

Cand. Name	Party	Election Year	Date	Num. Cand. Mentions	Topic
Dean	D	2004	1/19/2004	197	Day of Iowa Caucuses; the "scream"
Biden	D	2020	9/25/2019	193	1st Trump impeachment inquiry
Harris	D	2020	6/28/2019	178	Harris-Biden debate clash over busing
Biden	D	2020	6/28/2019	175	Harris-Biden debate clash over busing
Trump	R	2016	9/17/2015	173	2nd GOP debate of campaign
Biden	D	2020	9/26/2019	173	1st Trump impeachment inquiry
Trump	R	2016	12/9/2015	172	Trump "Muslim Ban" proposal
Biden	D	2020	10/4/2019	172	1st Trump impeachment inquiry
Kerry	D	2004	1/19/2004	170	Momentum into day of Iowa Caucuses
Biden	D	2020	10/3/2019	165	1st Trump impeachment inquiry
Clinton	D	2016	4/13/2015	163	Clinton officially enters campaign
Trump	R	2016	12/8/2015	162	Trump "Muslim Ban" proposal

Though these are exceptional events that may not be indicative of general patterns, and the amount of coverage afforded may depend on the number of active candidates and the competitiveness of the race, this discovery helps motivate the project's interest in further exploring what the media landscape tends to focus on, how it does so, and what effect these tendencies have on our political system.

Finally, this dataset neatly matches external measures of media coverage over the same period. *Media Cloud*, "an open-source platform for studying media ecosystems" co-founded by Yochai Benkler and Ethan Zuckerman,[11] provides an independent external point of comparison for much of the period of interest. *Media Cloud* tracks millions of stories published online through a Python application that regularly fetches online news stories by their URLs from RSS feeds associated with the over 50,000 online news media, blogs, and other sources in their directory.[12]

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[11] https://mediacloud.org/about
[12] https://mediacloud.org/open-source

Numerous spot-checks producing closely aligned results provide a good degree of confidence in the robustness of this project's data compilation.

For an illustrative example, Figures 3.3a and 3.3b chart coverage of Michele Bachmann's campaign for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination based on this project's original dataset and that of *Media Cloud*, respectively. While the volume of stories is not identical due to *Media Cloud*'s larger dataset, the patterns are closely related with the same peaks and valleys forming. In Bachmann's case, for instance, her attention reaches its zenith according to both sources over the weekend of the Ames Iowa Straw Poll held on August 13, 2011, where her victory in that event launched her into the national conversation; however, unfortunately for Bachmann, her campaign never was quite able to recapture that moment's level of focus.

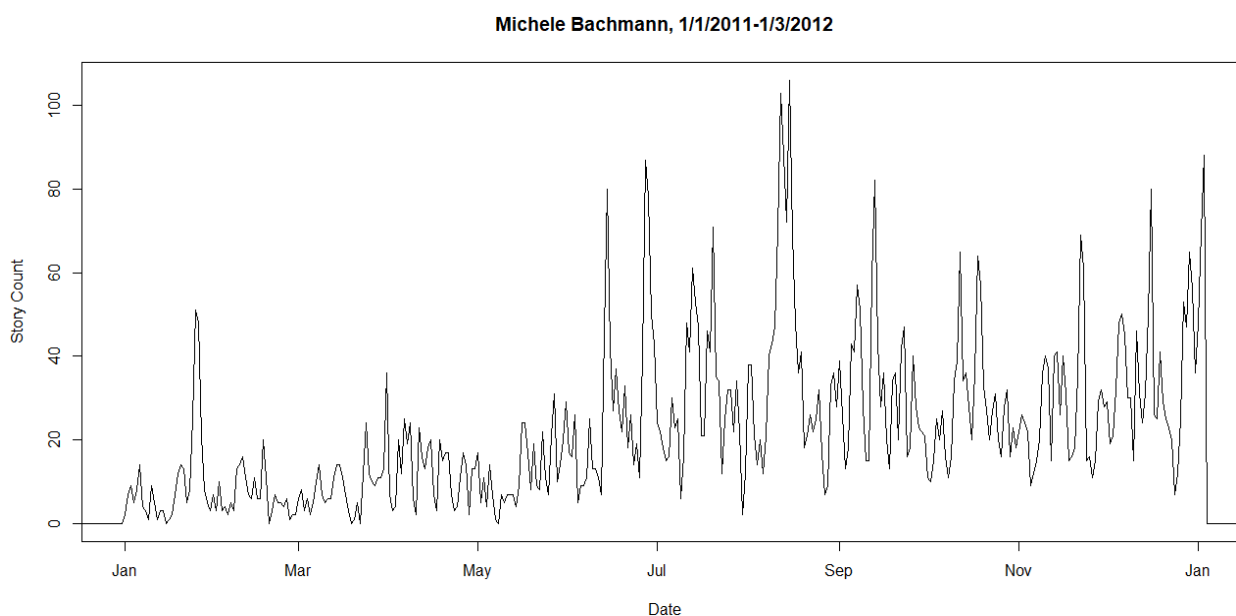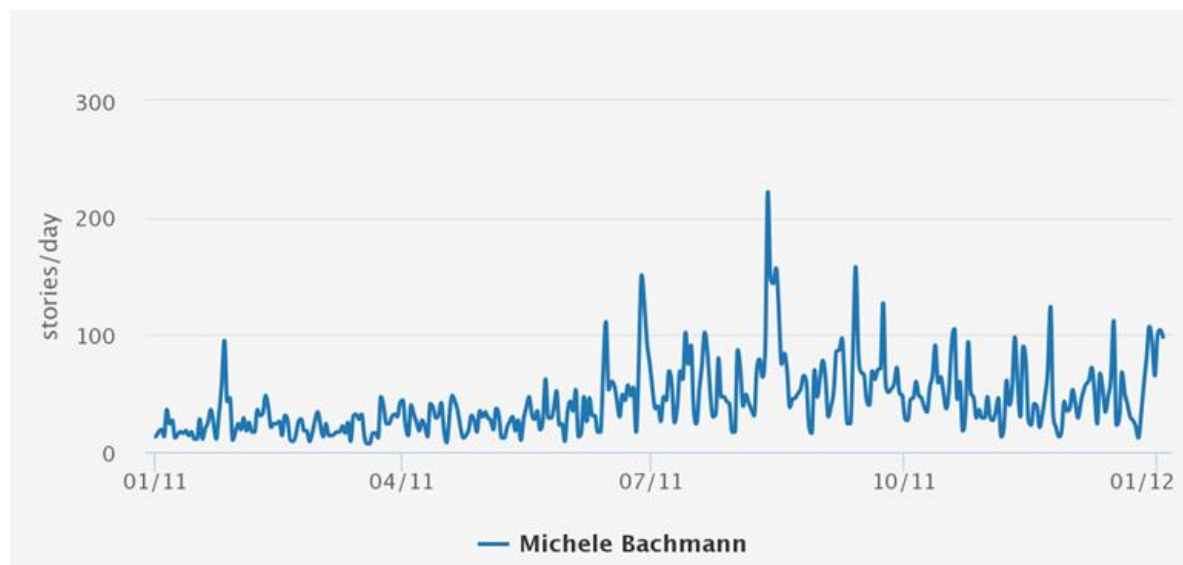**Figure 3.3a: Michele Bachmann Stories Over Time via Original Dataset**

Michele Bachmann, 1/1/2011-1/3/2012

Figure 3.3b: Michele Bachmann Stories Over Time via _Media Cloud_

Common Words

One of the most straightforward questions to answer about media coverage of the pre-primary is which words are most frequently used in discussing the campaign. From this basic information we can begin our consideration of how, broadly, media tend to cover this stage of presidential nomination campaigns. Across multiple different outlets, the words "think," "say," "know," "people," "right," and "now," lead the pack. As demonstrated by the panel of word clouds in Figure 3.4, sources as ideologically distinct as Fox News Network and MSNBC share these most frequently used words. Figure 3.4 also indicates this similarity in language holds even when crossing into the realm of broadcast television or more "straight news" rather than simply being an artifact of cable television or more overtly partisan programming.

These results indicate a striking similarity in how presidential nomination campaigns are discussed. If the outlets diverge significantly, it is not evident at the

shallowest surface level of their coverage. The basic formula of reporting is remarkably consistent and boilerplate across outlets: highlight that candidates have said things and that people think things about them. If differences are to be discovered, this project will need to employ a methodological approach that can reach beyond this obviously superficial level.

Figure 3.4: Most Frequent Words Used in Coverage of Presidential Nomination Pre-Primary, 1999-2020

Fox News Network   MSNBC   NBC News

Classifying Documents

Dictionary-Based Approach

To burrow deeper into which topics pre-primary coverage tends to focus on, this project employs a dictionary method of content analysis to construct four original dictionaries designed to identify specific frames of coverage: "horserace," "game," "strategy," and "policy." Additionally, this project employs a fifth dictionary developed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) to identify a "populist" frame. Each unique document is tested for a match with each distinct dictionary, and thus can match with multiple dictionaries.

While the preceding chapter discussed and contextualized framing in much more detail, it is worth reintroducing briefly here. Framing refers to the effect of presentation on judgment and choice (Iyengar 1996). As Entman (1993: 52) describes, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient…in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." Framing is of interest to a study of presidential nomination campaigns because it has been demonstrated to influence viewers' political assessments (Iyengar 1996) and attitudinal judgments about candidates (Kim and McCombs 2007).

Under a dictionary method of content analysis, a document's classification is determined by the frequency of key words (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 2). This approach bears a similarity to other text-as-data methods in that it, too, typically relies on a "bag of words" assumption where word order does not inform the analysis (Jurafsky and Martin 2009); empirically, instances of word order fundamentally changing the nature of a sentence are rare, so a simple list of words is typically sufficient to convey the general meaning of a text (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 6).

A dictionary method is ideal for the purposes of this project because it demands substantially less intensive human coding or powerful computing resources than supervised methods or fully automated clustering would (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 8). It also is an appropriate methodological choice to assume a

well-defined set of categories at the outset: prior scholarship has already developed an exhaustive set of expectations for the types of coverage afforded to candidates for presidential nomination, and exploring the relative prevalence of those foci is a core interest of this research project (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 14).

This project's dictionaries each comprise a list of single words or word stems. The words or word stems included in the four original dictionaries were manually selected as follows. First, I considered the core research interest of each dictionary clearly identifying the frame I intended to capture. Next, I scoured the relevant literature to that frame, with an eye toward the specific language or topics scholars associated with the frame of interest. Then, as a verification step, I tested the resulting dictionary on a small sample of documents that I could manually characterize to ensure the dictionary is effective, reliable, and consistent. While one could reasonably quibble with a word here or there in any dictionary, this project's original dictionaries accurately capture the frames they are intended to. Each of these four original dictionaries can be found in their entirety in Appendix D.

The first dictionary tests for the general concept of the "horserace" frame of coverage based on existing literature, and then subsequently splits this horserace dictionary into two separate component dictionaries: one searching for matches to a "game frame," and the other for a "strategy frame." While both strategy and the game are elements of horserace coverage broadly defined, Aalberg, Strömbäck, and De Vreese (2012: 167) differentiate the two neatly: the "game frame" emphasizes opinion polls, election outcomes, winner and losers, and analogies to sports and

warfare, whereas the "strategy frame" emphasizes campaign strategies and tactics, motives and instrumental actions, metacoverage, and candidate personality and style. Next, this project employs a dictionary designed to capture the "policy frame" of coverage, or stories that mention the candidates' ideologies or positions on policy issues. Finally, the "populism frame" dictionary developed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) identifies stories that contain populist language and themes, which could evince an increasingly formidable challenge to party elite influence over the presidential nomination process. Rather than identifying any consistent set of policies, scholars have developed an ideational definition of populism constructed primarily around a discursive style "that posits a cosmic struggle between a reified 'will of the people' and a conspiring elite," (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017) and a rhetoric "distinctive in its simplicity, anti-elitism, and collectivism" (Oliver and Rahn 2016).

<u>Outlet Ideology</u>

For ideological classification of each media outlet, this project relies upon the AllSides organization's Media Bias Ratings,[13] which have been used for this purpose by scholars in numerous existing studies (e.g. Rathje, Van Bavel, and Van Der Linden 2021; Rozado, Al-Gharbi, and Halberstadt 2021; Rozado, Hughes, and Halberstadt 2022). AllSides rates media outlets on a range consisting of left, lean

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[13] https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/ratings

left, center, lean right, and right.[14] These classifications are primarily based on editorial reviews conducted by a multipartisan panel of 6-9 reviewers and blind bias surveys taken by average Americans across the political spectrum without knowing what source they are rating. Sometimes, AllSides takes third-party data from academic research into account, and uses community feedback as a warning sign that a particular rating deserves additional review. AllSides ratings are consistent with both conventional wisdom and the self-described preferences of partisan news consumers in public polling, such as YouGov's latest "Trust in Media" survey.[15]

Content Analyses

### Horserace, Game, & Strategy Frames

Testing for the general horserace frame first, Figure 3.5 provides a stark image of what pre-primary coverage has nearly universally become: over 90 percent of overall stories in each election cycle match the horserace frame of coverage. This extremely high rate of horserace journalism closely matches other similar analyses on the topic (e.g. Patterson 1993; Patterson 2016a), but also demands more specificity in which component elements of the horserace are being emphasized in coverage. As described earlier, the horserace frame comprises both the game frame and strategy frame, but stories were also tested for each of those component frames separately. Thus, stories can be assigned to multiple categories. Figure 3.5a also

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[14] Additional explanation of AllSides rating methods can be found at:
https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-rating-methods.
[15] https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/04/05/trust-media-2022-where-americans-get-news-poll

includes these matches to the separated dictionaries for the game frame and strategy frame. The game frame is evidently the primary lens of the horserace, as it is nearly as ubiquitous as horserace coverage in sum; put differently, nearly every story that employed a horserace frame did so through a game frame. Yet the strategy frame—along with its emphases on personalities and metacoverage—is still a demonstrably common element of horserace coverage and has grown from 67 percent in the 2000 race to over 85 percent in the 2020 pre-primary campaign.

Figure 3.5a: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Horserace, Game, and Strategy Frames in Each Election Year (1999-2020)
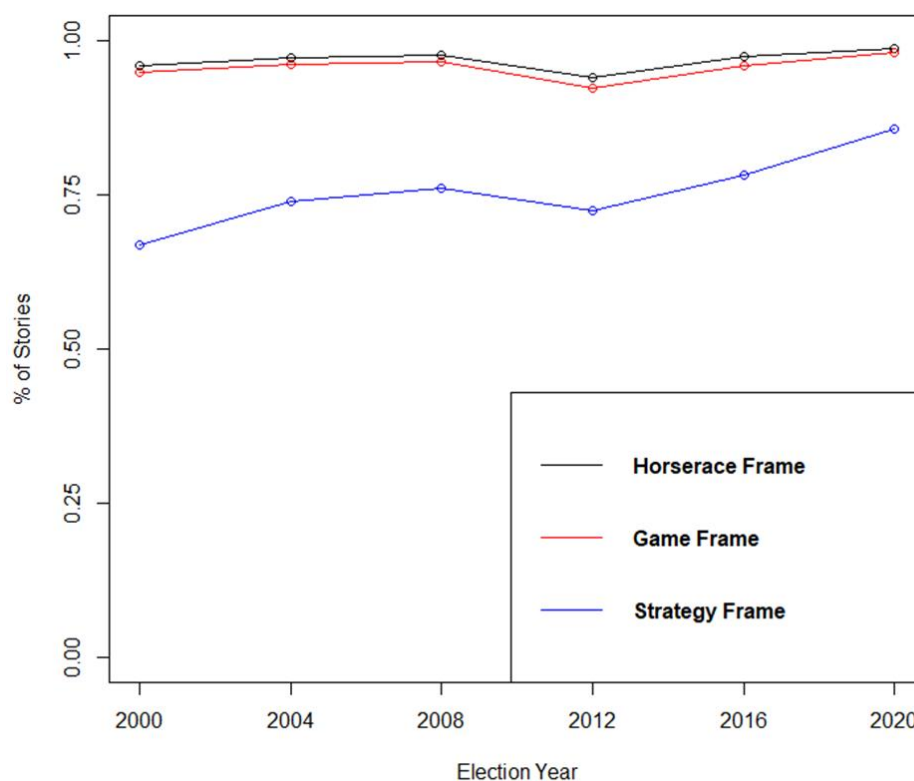

The strategy frame deserves a deeper examination given the concerns of some scholars (e.g., McLuhan 1964; Postman 1985; Hart 1994) that the quality of public

discourse is inherently degraded by television with its disproportionate prioritization of personality and style. As Postman (1985: 135) complained aloud:

> "In the shift from party politics to television politics, the same goal is sought. We are not permitted to know who is best at being President or Governor or Senator, but whose image is best in touching and soothing the deep reaches of our discontent. We look at the television screen and ask, in the same voracious way as the Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?' We are inclined to vote for those whose personality, family life, and style, as imaged on the screen, give back a better answer than the Queen received."

As far as substantiating these fears, Figure 3.5b presents mixed results.

Figure 3.5b: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Strategy Frame in Each Election Year, by Mode (1999-2020)
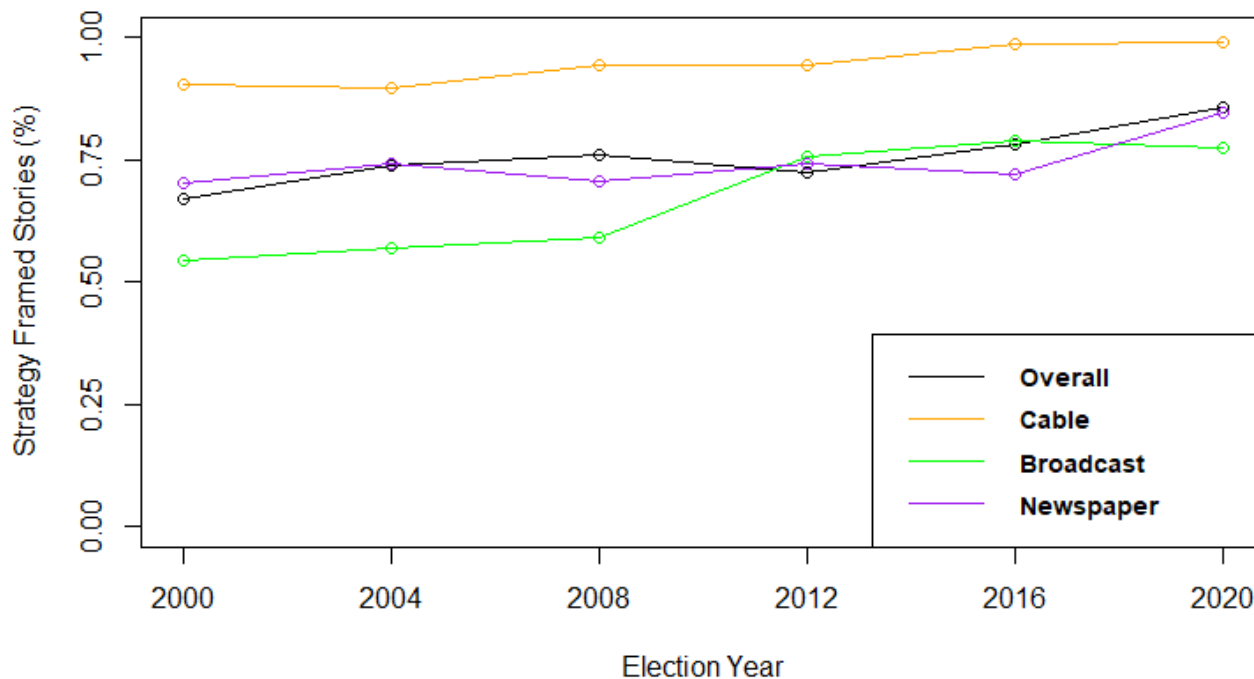
While cable television consistently employed the strategy frame at extremely high rates across pre-primary cycles and broadcast television employs it quite heavily as well, print media does not appear to have resisted this urge to emphasize candidate style and personality to any noticeable extent. Of course, the upward trend in this data could be consistent with a media landscape that has experienced a contagion of the strategy frame that predates my observations and is rooted in the era those scholars were observing. Ultimately, though, unraveling that puzzle is beyond this project's scope.

Policy Frame

Moving next to test documents for the policy frame, Figure 3.6 presents a fascinating result: both left and right wing aligned media use a policy frame in their coverage of the pre-primary more frequently than do media outlets overall. One possible explanation is partisan media's incentive to act as ideological gatekeepers for their respective party by informing their audiences which candidates conform to party orthodoxy and which do not; conversely, more traditional journalistic outfits are incentivized to focus much less on ideologically divisive or judgmental coverage and instead tend to highlight tangible, empirical elements of the campaign such as poll results. It is worth noting, however, that these stories describing candidates' positions on substantive policy issues do so almost entirely concurrent with the larger horserace frame.

Figure 3.6: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Policy Frame in Each Election Year, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2020)
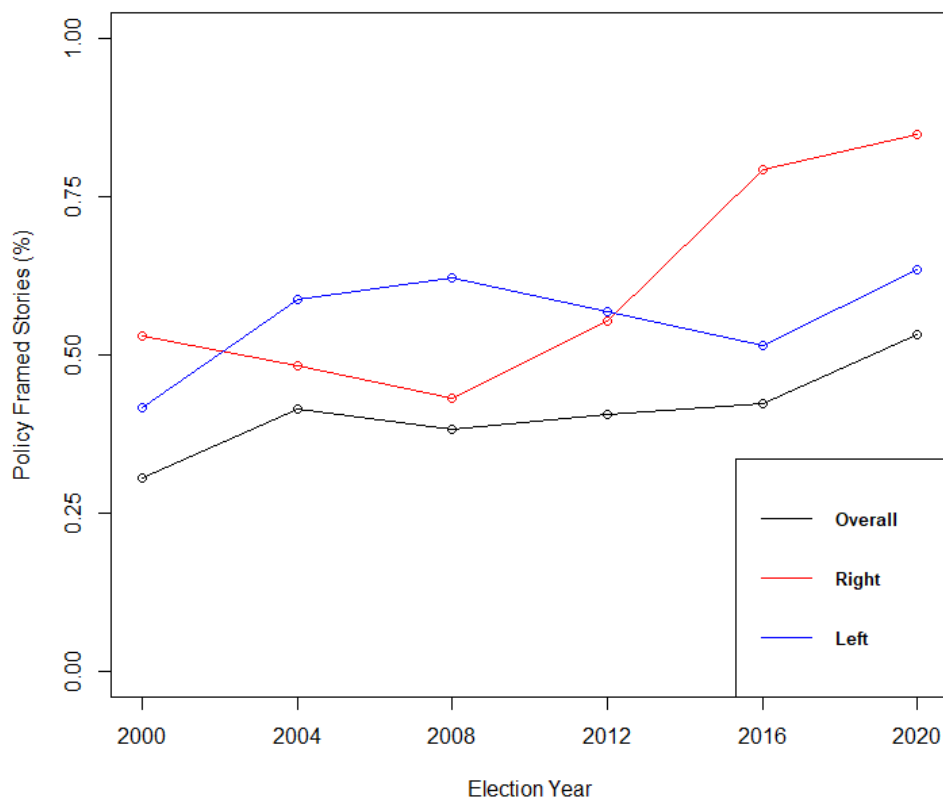

A candidate's policy views primarily warrant coverage insofar as they can signal their strategic overtures to potential voters or the likelihood the maneuvering will ultimately pay off at the ballot box—not necessarily for their raw informational content.

Populist Frame

As demonstrated in both Figures 3.7a and 3.7b, this populist frame has become more prevalent over the period of analysis: what constituted 33 percent of overall coverage in 2000 swelled to 53 percent by 2020. Figure 3.7a highlights how this increase has been driven disproportionately in recent years by its heavy usage in right wing media outlets, and how partisan aligned media of both sides couch

their coverage in more populist language than the overall media landscape. Figure 3.7b reveals how the populist frame of coverage consistently dominates cable news while broadcast television and print newspapers have seen slight increases of their own.[16]

Figure 3.7a: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Populist Frame in Each Election Year, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2020)

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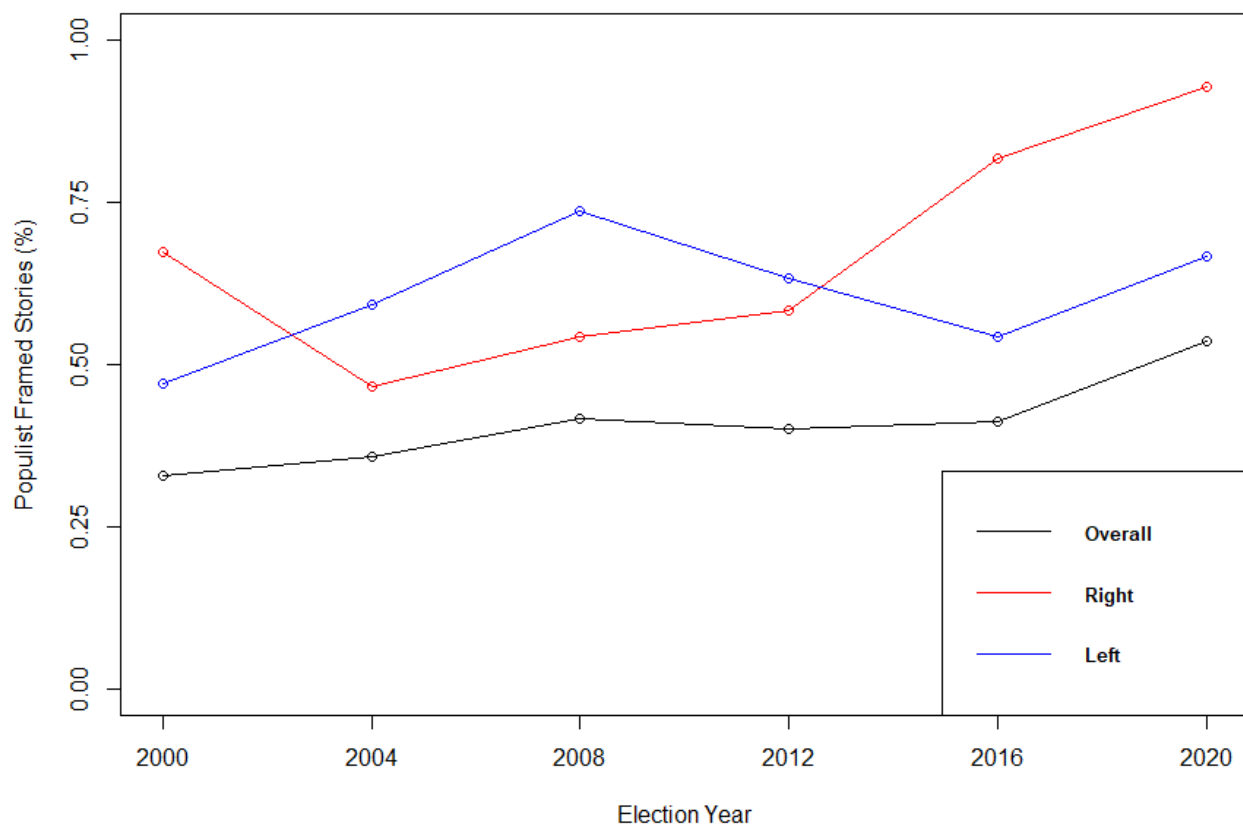
[16] Consistent with this evidence of rising populist currents, preliminary analyses employing the 'F-score' measure of language formality developed by Heylighen and Dewaele (1999) found cable television consistently uses simpler language than their counterparts in broadcast television, which is itself simpler than print media. This insight lends credence to the robustness of this project's findings of populist themes in pre-primary coverage, but also perhaps validates some scholars' (e.g. McLuhan 1964; Postman 1985; Hart 1994) concerns that newer modes of communication by their very nature present political content in increasingly simplistic terms.

The populist frame's usage demonstrated in Figure 3.7a bears a striking resemblance to that of the policy frame from Figure 3.6 despite having no dictionary terms in common, and thus raises an interesting question about how these two trends appear to overlap with each other and what that interaction can tell us about the direction of pre-primary presidential candidate coverage.

Figure 3.7b: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Populist Frame in Each Election Year, by Mode (1999-2020)
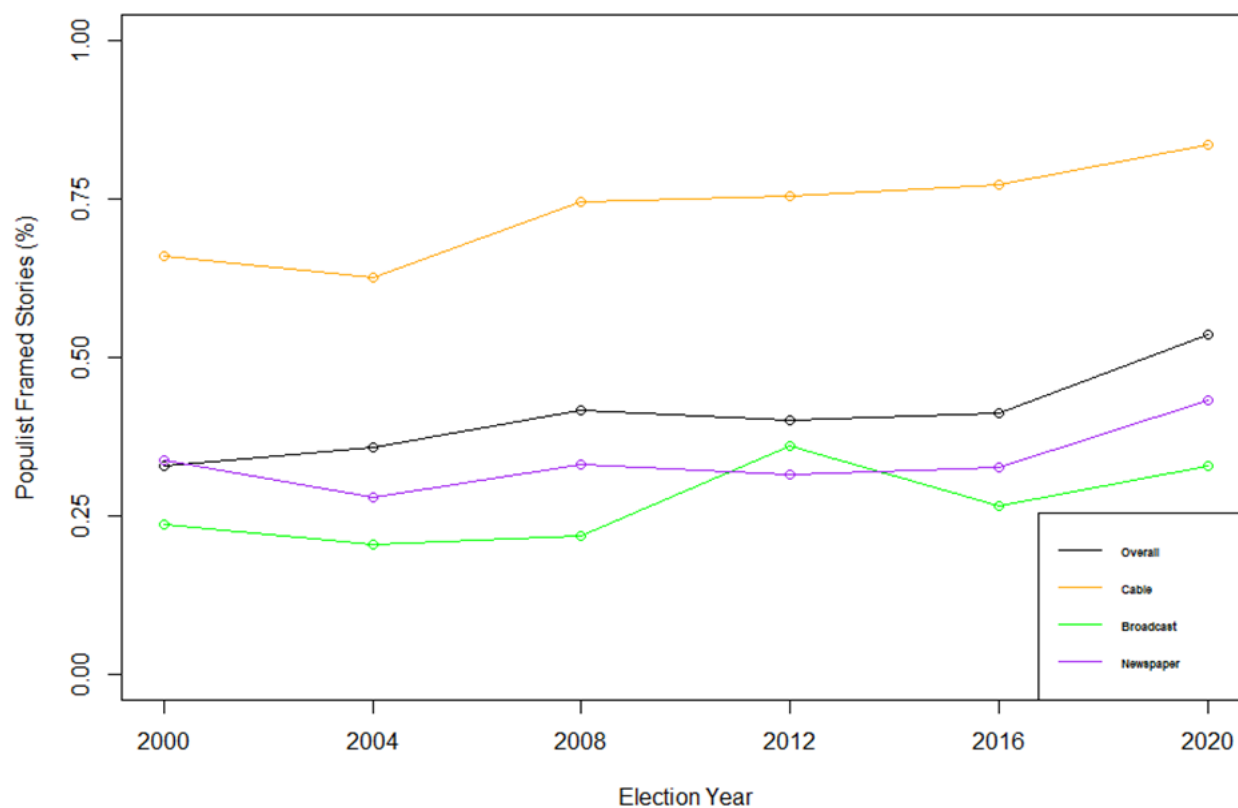
At first blush, populist and policy frames may seem contradictory: the former pitting "the people" against "the elite" in simplistic terms, the latter meticulously weighing issues and the candidates' stances on them. However, one possible explanation for their association is that these frames may reinforce one another in public discourse. The mass public tends to want policy outcomes that match their

own idealized preferences and believe the obstacle to accomplishing them is an overpowered elite rather than any substantial dissent from "real" people (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998). This is itself a policy-rooted complaint about political realities, albeit conveyed in simple and often erroneous anti-elitist terms. If these voters are sufficiently convinced that a given candidate will overcome the entrenched establishment in Washington, then it is sensible for them to assume their idealized policy outcomes will soon follow if that candidate wins office. In this way, a voter may associate the extent to which a candidate challenges the establishment with the extent to which a candidate will enact ideal policies. The general journalistic tendency towards "adversary culture" (Trilling 1965), whereby journalists perpetuate skepticism of cultural institutions (Taylor 1990), is certainly consistent with the role of news outlets as "transmitters and amplifiers of such ideas" (Polsby 1983: 143).

<u>Sentiment Analysis</u>

One more element of pre-primary media coverage worth investigating is the sentiment and emotion being expressed. Perhaps the tenor of this coverage is becoming more negative and evoking more negative emotions in each passing cycle; if this is the case, perhaps this negativity is concentrated among outlets of a specific ideological bent or mode of communication.

To evaluate these possibilities, this project applies the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon[17] through the "Syuzhet" R package.[18] This approach captures the extent of a text's association with eight basic emotions (anger, fear, anticipation, trust, surprise, sadness, joy, and disgust) and categorizes them under two sentiments (negative and positive). Each document can thus be classified as either net positive or net negative, where a positive designation means the document had more instances of positive emotion than negative, and likewise for a negative designation.

According to the results displayed in Figure 3.8, pre-primary media coverage has become slightly more negative overall from the 2000 cycle through 2020, but this shift has been driven primarily by right-wing media and accelerated in the 2016 and 2020 campaigns. Negative sentiment—reflecting negative emotions like anger, fear, sadness, and disgust—grew very slightly overall from 40 percent in the 2000 campaign to 42 percent in 2020; however, among right-wing media, that increase was from 41 percent to 46 percent. Both right-wing and left-wing media outlets typically outpace the overall media landscape in their negativity. While these are not huge shifts, they are still noteworthy given the typical effective range of negative coverage in presidential primary campaigns.[19]

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[17] http://saifmohammad.com/WebPages/NRC-Emotion-Lexicon.htm
[18] https://github.com/mjockers/syuzhet.
[19] For instance, over the course of the entire 2016 presidential primary campaign, Patterson (2016a) finds a maximum value of 59% negative coverage and a minimum of 46% across the six most competitive candidates in both parties that cycle.

Figure 3.8: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Net Negative Sentiment in Each Election Year, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2020)
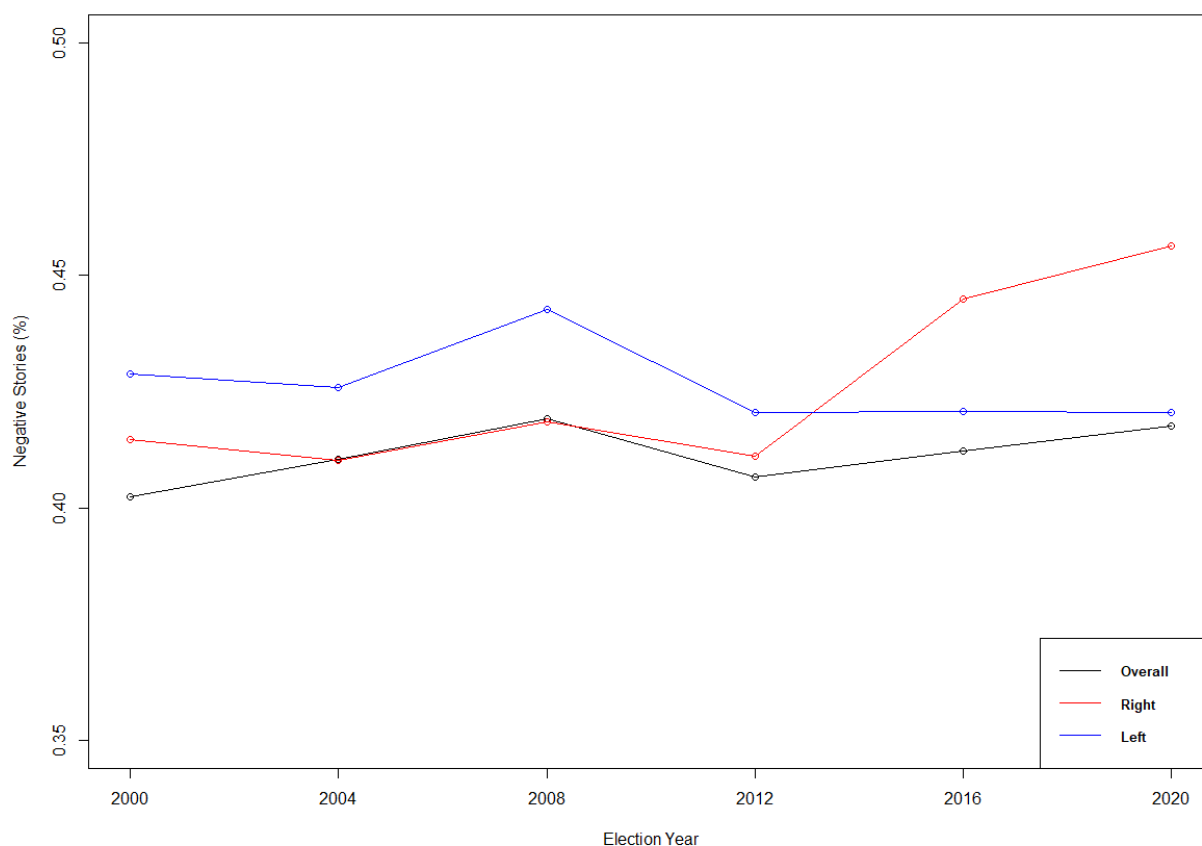
Despite this modest increase, the majority of pre-primary stories remain net positive overall and across all outlets, which could reflect the way discussion of candidates uses language that centers trust and horserace coverage uses language that evokes anticipation.

Discussion

Taken together, the content analyses in this chapter paint the picture of a contemporary media landscape that covers the presidential pre-primary in a troubling manner. The amount of attention paid to the "invisible primary" has undoubtedly rendered the label a misnomer (Cohen et al. 2016), and this chapter's

analyses indicate that the abundant exposure candidates receive is ubiquitously focused on horserace coverage, much in the same way candidate coverage has been for much of the 20th century.[20] Additionally, this wealth of coverage increasingly emphasizes a frame organized around personality and style, and may wed policy considerations to populist rhetoric. Negative coverage has very modestly increased but has arguably failed to keep pace with candidates who deserve more exacting press scrutiny and instead coast through the process with positive coverage of their poll standing (Patterson 2016b). These combined tendencies could complicate the role of party leaders in their efforts to shepherd the nomination toward a preferred consensus candidate—especially given how these tendencies are even more pronounced in more partisan media. Partisan-aligned media outlets outpace the overall media landscape in their negativity, as well as in their usage of strategy, policy and populist frames. And, as demonstrated in Appendix E, this tendency holds regardless of the party being covered. More public attention on this stage of the nomination process is problematic enough for party elites to navigate, but they face an ever more formidable challenge when this attention skews in a direction

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[20] Evidence of substantial and increasing media attention on the horserace—at the expense of policy coverage— for general election presidential candidates dates back over half a century (Patterson 1993: 74). Presidential nomination campaigns have faced similar trends (e.g., Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Lichter, Amundsen, and Noyes 1988), and have exhibited a tendency to do so at a significantly higher rate than general election campaigns (Patterson 1993: 74). In the pre-primary period specifically, Arterton (1984: 46) found that 77 percent of stories in a sample of outlets from October through mid-December 1979 covered campaign events, and even coverage of the Iran hostage crisis tended to focus on how the events may affect the horserace rather than evoking analysis of the candidates' foreign policy stances. Brady and Johnston (1987: 144-145) similarly find evidence that only 15 percent of pre-primary coverage of the presidential candidates is devoted to policy positions, while the remaining attention is distributed among candidate events, comments about each other, personal qualities, sources of support, and potential success.

that increasingly prioritizes style and personality—or, even worse, conflates policy success with defiance of their preferences.

The following chapter will attempt to isolate the effect of this media coverage on candidate standing during the pre-primary. If this coverage is just "cheap talk" that has no impact on the race, then the descriptive results of this chapter are mildly interesting as a barometer of the political climate but scarcely speak to any considerable influence on a political process. However, if the amount or character of media attention actually drives candidate success in some way, then it would be effectively commandeering the exact role party elites were purported to serve all while disparaging them and riling up rank-and-file partisans. This was precisely the concern expressed by observers when democratizing reforms to the presidential nomination process were implemented in the early 1970s, yet more recent scholars have claimed that party insiders have combatted media control over the process by coordinating their activities during the "invisible primary" stage. With multiple measures of media coverage of pre-primary presidential campaigns now in hand, this project next turns to estimating their influence in contemporary election cycles.

CHAPTER FOUR: WE DECIDE

"Oh, yes, that is a good way to do up the so-called bosses, but have you ever thought what would become of the country if the bosses were put out of business, and their places were taken by a lot of cart-tail orators and college graduates? It would mean chaos."

– George Washington Plunkitt, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (Riordon 1995: 81)

"Camera crews search for clues amid the detritus, and entertainment shapes the land the way the hammer shapes the hand."

– Jackson Browne, "Casino Nation"

Consistent with the findings of earlier analyses (e.g., Patterson 1993; Patterson 2016a), this project's previous chapter illustrates how media coverage of the presidential nomination campaign ubiquitously emphasizes the horserace, whereby—in the broadest sense—candidates are judged based on whether they appear to be winning or losing the race (Broh 1980). This journalistic focus could reasonably influence the voting public—primarily those with stronger partisan attachments and higher levels of political attention (Zaller 1992: 253-258)—by setting their expectations about the race and the viability of the candidates in advance of the voting contests. Therefore, by exploring the influence of media coverage on candidate standing, this chapter addresses how expectations about the campaign are formed, which Aldrich (2009: 37) identifies as "the largest remaining challenge for scientific understanding of presidential nominations."

I hypothesize attention across the media landscape helps shape candidates' pre-primary poll standing. Generally, I expect a candidate's support in public polls

to change as they receive more frequent coverage in the news. By leveraging the collection and measurement of pre-primary media coverage from the previous chapter, this project now turns its attention towards estimating media influence in contemporary election cycles by emulating key aspects of previous scholars' analyses of the "invisible primary" (e.g., Cohen et al. 2008; Dowdle et al. 2016; 2020).

This chapter begins with a description of wide-ranging, granular data collected to facilitate analyses of key presidential nomination campaign factors: media coverage, poll support, endorsements, and fundraising. Next, I investigate correlational relationships between these factors in the pre-primary period. Then, to clarify the messy causal puzzle between these variables of interest, I utilize vector autoregression (VAR) modeling with Granger causality tests to elucidate the relationship between these key dynamics of the pre-primary overall, and then explore whether Democrats and Republicans exhibit fundamentally different relationships with their own partisan media ecosystems. Finally, having demonstrated the causal influence of media coverage on candidate standing, this chapter concludes with a consideration of what micro-level processes could be undergirding these macro-level findings and how this contributes to our understanding of presidential nomination campaigns.

Data

Data compiled for this project make two crucial contributions beyond *The Party Decides,* before even reaching their final results. First, rather than only using

broad units of time such as the "early" versus "late" categorization in the Cohen et al. analysis of the pre-primary period, I collect data using a daily unit of analysis to develop as finely-grained an analysis of such a dynamic process as possible. Second, in contrast to the focus on a limited set of media outlets examined by Cohen et al., I consider a far wider swath of media outlets than those included by Cohen et al. to capture more of the campaign media environment. To illuminate as much of the ever-lengthening pre-primary as feasible, the timeframe for each cycle included in the data collection for each variable spans from January 1st of the year before the first voting contests through the day of the first vote.[1] Consistent with other parts of this project, only nomination campaigns without an incumbent running were considered.[2]

Media

My media coverage data collection process is explained in considerable depth in the previous chapter, and the analyses conducted in this chapter use that resulting dataset as a base from which to calculate each candidate's share of media coverage among all the candidates in their race. More specifically, the measure captures the number of times each candidate's name is mentioned on a given day and then divides that number by the total number of times any candidate for that nomination's name was invoked in news coverage on that day.

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[1] In total, the data ranges from January 1st, 1999 through February 3rd, 2020, just as it did for the previous chapter's analysis.

[2] This analysis, therefore, considers exactly the same nine nomination cycles as those listed in Table C.1 of Appendix C.

This simple count of mentions is a preferable way to operationalize media attention for two key reasons. First, it is a parsimonious measure that does not require running the articles and transcripts through any additional models or filters to classify them as positive or negative coverage. While helpful in some contexts, these classification or weighting methods are far from perfect and impose additional manipulations and assumptions on the documents and their resulting measures, which would substantially complicate the interpretation of what are already complex models without providing congruently valuable additional insights.[3] Second, the effects of tone are assessed in other, more insightful ways that allow the data to speak for itself. Rather than classifying coverage as positive or negative at the outset and separating them artificially as if they are entirely distinct, this analysis is equipped to produce impulse response functions that will illustrate the persistence and dynamic directionality of media coverage's effect on candidate standing.

Polls

This project calculates a LOESS average of each candidate's support among self-identified co-partisans in verifiable public polls asking for their preferred presidential nominee. LOESS, or locally estimated scatterplot smoothing, is a nonparametric regression model which can be implemented in R (Fox and Weisberg

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[3] Previous scholars across multiple campaign cycles have already demonstrated how negative coverage hurts presidential nomination candidates and positive coverage helps them (e.g., Sides and Vavreck 2013; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018; Sides, Tausanovitch, and Vavreck 2022), so this would hardly represent a groundbreaking discovery. Some have even found that these effects persist regardless of both consumer and source partisanship (Barker and Lawrence 2006), so I also found little opportunity to add to this conversation by considering partisanship.

2018) to produce a "poll of polls" measure for each candidate on any given day over the course of the race (Bergman and Holmquist 2014). This LOESS approach provides a more robust estimation of each candidate's underlying polling trend by accounting for outlier polls and the sporadic timing of public poll releases.

Between *FiveThirtyEight*, *RealClearPolitics*, *PollingReport*, and even Nexis Uni, I compiled the results of 2,029 polls spanning the pre-primary periods of interest. These public polls appear to reach far enough in time and with sufficient density to enable a comprehensive analysis of the periods of interest. While poll results do not themselves necessarily capture the "true" public levels of candidate support precisely, they are as Zaller (1999: 113) put it, "[t]he most obvious indicator of a candidate's strength in the Invisible Primary."

<u>Endorsements</u>

These analyses also require a measure of endorsements received by each candidate from prominent party figures. Consistent with previous studies of presidential nomination campaigns (e.g. Dowdle et al. 2016; 2020), the measure reflects an unweighted share of endorsements from incumbent U.S. House representatives, U.S. senators, and state governors out of all those given to candidates in the race. To compile this data from pre-primary periods spanning from 1999 through 2020, I relied upon Marty Cohen's website for endorsements from the 2000 and 2004 campaign cycles,[4] Eric Appleman's *Democracy in Action* for

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[4] http://www.martycohen.net/-/

endorsements from 2008 and 2012,[5] and *FiveThirtyEight* for endorsements from

2016 and 2020.[6] I then supplemented this data with my own news archive search to

verify listed endorsements and fill in any missing or ambiguous dates of

endorsement. If an endorsement was listed but could not be independently verified,

it was removed from the dataset—though this was a markedly rare occurrence. I

ultimately was able to compile 1,559 endorsements over the full period of interest.

Even though some of these sources provide observations of more endorsements at

lower levels of politics, scholars have tended to shy away from including the

endorsements of these state and local officials because their reporting tends to vary

significantly from state to state and cannot be measured reliably (Steger 2007).

Celebrity endorsements are even included in some of these sources, and despite

some evidence that celebrities can be significant influences on political attitudes

(Jackson and Darrow 2005; Jackson 2008), my analysis excludes them. Celebrities

are simply a poor representation of the party elite that endorsements are meant to

proxy for because they are not privy to the party's internal deliberations (Cohen et

al. 2008), nor are they a function of this coordinated effort. The exclusion of

celebrities and low-level party officials from the analyses is consistent with the

preponderance of the existing literature (e.g. Dowdle et al. 2016; 2020; Sides and

Vavreck 2013; Summary 2010).

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[5] https://www.democracyinaction.us/
[6] https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-endorsements/democratic-primary/

<u>Fundraising</u>

The final variable this project leverages is a measure of each presidential campaign's pre-primary fundraising. To paint a broad picture of fundraising prowess across multiple sources and at a daily unit of analysis, I used the bulk data files that are publicly available from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) website[7] to capture funds through individual campaign contributions, committee contributions, and independent expenditures. Reflecting this diversity of funding sources is crucial for an analysis of the pre-primary, as any measurement must be able to reflect contributions from rank-and-file donors, groups aligned with the candidate, and candidates who substantially finance their own campaigns like Steve Forbes, Michael Bloomberg, or Tom Steyer. This data collection task was quite intensive and required matching back to the candidate-committee linkages file, but ultimately the effort provides a comprehensive measure of money given to presidential candidates or spent on their behalf and does so with accuracy in attributing a specific date to each expenditure. Ultimately, the project's fundraising measure reflects the share of contributions to a given candidate up to that date divided by the total amount contributed to candidates in the race up to that point.

The 'Rule of Anticipated Importance,' Revisited

Before engaging in more complex examinations, my first step is to establish some *prima facie* indication of a relationship between media coverage and candidate

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[7] The base webpage for the FEC bulk data files can be accessed at: https://www.fec.gov/data/browse-data/?tab=bulk-data.

standing in the pre-primary period. Zaller (1999: 40) introduces the "Rule of Anticipated Importance," whereby journalists tend to "devote attention to occurrences in proportion to their anticipated importance in American politics." To demonstrate this dynamic at work during the invisible primary, Zaller (1999: 114) presents evidence of a strong correlation between a candidate's share of December media coverage and their standing in the last pre-December Gallup poll, and crucially, also finds an even stronger correlation between December coverage and January poll standing.[8] While Zaller (1999: 114) suggests journalists covering the invisible primary may merely be "doing a better job of anticipating the future than reflecting the present," I aim to demonstrate the media are "no longer simply guessing who might run and who might win; the press [is] in some way determining these things" (Crouse 1973: 37).

To extend Zaller's approach from the 1980-1996 candidates he studies to the daily observations in this project, Table 4.1 presents a correlation matrix for a candidate's daily share of media coverage, poll standing, endorsements, and fundraising during the pre-primary period. The simple correlation between a candidate's media coverage and poll standing on a given day during the pre-primary is .87, which is the strongest relationship in the matrix between two different factors. While this connection does not inform us which direction the causal arrow

[8] Cohen et al. (2008: 253) find a similar correlation between a candidate's share in a poll in January the year before election year and their share of mentions in *Time* or *Newsweek* in the year prior to the primaries.

points, it is an early smoke signal for a worthwhile investigation if we want to understand the dynamics of this period.

Table 4.1: Correlation Matrix for Daily Candidate Shares, 1999-2020

	Media	Polls	Endorsements	Fundraising
Media	1	0.87	0.81	0.76
Polls	0.87	1	0.78	0.65
Endorsements	0.81	0.78	1	0.68
Fundraising	0.76	0.65	0.68	1

Zaller (1999: 114) found a stronger correlation between a candidate's December *New York Times* coverage and January poll standing than between both December measures, and we can similarly explore correlations based on a 30-day lag to understand the relationships between each variable and their values a month later. Table 4.2 presents a correlation matrix that includes 30-day lagged observations of each variable. Consistent with Zaller (1999), media coverage has a stronger relationship with the poll standing of 30 days later, .88, than it does with the poll standing of the same day and beats out all other variables except poll standing itself for an effect on this outcome. Furthermore, as longer lags are applied, this relationship between media coverage and subsequent poll standing appears to gain strength all while still outpacing other factors: the correlation of media to polls 60 days later is .89, to 90 days later is .90, and by 180 days later it is .91—just surpassing that of poll standing 180 days earlier.

Table 4.2: Correlation Matrix for Daily Candidate Shares and 30-Day Lagged Shares, 1999-2020

	Media	Polls	Endorsements	Fundraising	Lagged Media	Lagged Polls	Lagged Endorsements	Lagged Fundraising
Media	1	0.87	0.83	0.79	0.99	0.88	0.8	0.76
Polls	0.87	1	0.81	0.68	0.85	0.98	0.77	0.63
Endorsements	0.83	0.81	1	0.71	0.83	0.82	0.95	0.66
Fundraising	0.79	0.68	0.71	1	0.78	0.69	0.72	0.92
Lagged Media	0.99	0.85	0.83	0.78	1	0.87	0.81	0.76
Lagged Polls	0.88	0.98	0.82	0.69	0.87	1	0.78	0.65
Lagged Endorsements	0.8	0.77	0.95	0.72	0.81	0.78	1	0.68
Lagged Fundraising	0.76	0.63	0.66	0.92	0.76	0.65	0.68	1

The last piece of this initial correlational investigation is an exploration of whether Democratic and Republican candidates appear to experience different relationships with their partisan-aligned media outlets. One may expect the rank-and-file identifiers with each party to consume more partisan media coverage, be more receptive to the information being conveyed, and ultimately be more visibly influenced by them. For Republicans, partisan media coverage indeed exhibits a stronger relationship with later poll standing: the simple correlation between a candidate's share of right-wing media coverage and their poll standing on the same day is .82, rises to .85 with the poll standing of 30 days later, and swells to .88 for polling 180 days later, by which point it represents the strongest correlate with candidate standing. For Democrats and left-wing media coverage, on the other hand, the correlation with poll standing is higher than their opposite partisans' but

does not exhibit the same upward trend: it starts at .94, stays at .94 30 days later, and slips to .92 after 180 days.[9] These correlations are consistently quite high, so they could simply be evidence of Democrats experiencing less volatile pre-primary periods than Republicans with media still playing a key role in stabilizing the field. But this introduces several fascinating questions: Are left-wing media just less persuasive than their right-wing counterparts? Are rank-and-file Democrats somehow less persuadable than Republicans? Are left-wing media simply promoting safer, stabler candidates? These potential partisan disparities are worth pondering as this chapter moves on to more intensive analytical methods.

Model Specification

<u>The Chicken & The Egg</u>

These initial correlational findings present a complicated puzzle for research to disentangle. Media coverage might cause subsequent changes in the presidential candidates' poll standing, but media coverage might merely have a knack for anticipating which candidates will ultimately flourish in the pre-primary. Or, as Cohen et al. (2008: 254) pose it, "Does media coverage create front-runners in the invisible primary, or does media coverage flow to candidates who are front-runners independent of the media?"

The presidential nomination process is undeniably a dynamic one, with various actors—journalists, elected officials, donors, prospective voters—

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[9] The full correlation matrices referenced here are included in Appendix F.

continuously adapting their behavior in response to other developments. In this way, it is not unlike any other election campaign. Yet the causal inference methods traditionally applied in political science rely on the assumption that these dynamic decisions are actually made all at once, which could essentially box researchers into a dilemma between introducing omitted variable bias or posttreatment bias. The traditional approach would only be appropriate if a "candidate would plan all of their rallies, write all of their speeches, and film all of their advertisements at the beginning of a campaign, then sit back and watch them unfold until Election Day," which is fundamentally not how political campaigns transpire (Blackwell 2013: 504).

The presidential pre-primary represents a process steeped in endogeneity that would thwart more typical statistical research methods. Candidates may succeed in the polls because they are the subject of substantial media coverage, but perhaps that level of coverage is itself driven by previous poll standing or rising fundraising numbers or a mounting slate of endorsements. Donors may take cues from endorsers, but endorsers may follow the donors' lead. Maybe both are swayed by media coverage to back a surging candidate or abandon a struggling one. Due to these complications, or potential others, the variables of interest to scholars of the pre-primary could find themselves caught in a "chicken and egg" problem with one another, leaving their causal relationship unclear. While Cohen et al. (2008) commendably recognize this problem and attempt to rectify it, their approach splits their data into only two time periods partitioned based on the rate of accumulation

of endorsements (Cohen et al. 2008: 259-260, 375n14), which greatly limits their ability to observe the amount of variation that occurs in this protracted, inherently dynamic process.

Therefore, this project's methodology must be able to navigate these endogeneity concerns by employing a modeling approach capable of testing the direct causal effects of each of the explanatory variables on each other over time, but also doing so with as granular a time unit of analysis as possible and a unit not determined by any particular variable of interest. By doing so, a clearer picture of the presidential pre-primary will emerge.

<u>Vector Autoregression & Granger Causality</u>

Given the complications discussed above, the project's central goal of identifying any significant causal relationships between the variables of theoretical interest, and the time-series cross-sectional data compiled, this project employs vector autoregression (VAR) modeling with Granger causality tests. VAR is a modeling technique widely used to analyze or forecast endogenous macroeconomic and financial data (e.g., Hamilton 1994; Enders 2014), and has seen notable application in political science contexts as well (e.g., Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014). VAR is comprised of simultaneously estimated Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions where each of the variables in their system are regressed on the lags of those variables and on the lags of all the remaining variables (Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989: 845).

VAR represents an excellent methodological fit for studying the dynamics of the pre-primary period. We need not presume which variables are exogenous (Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989: 844). We can let the literature and theory guide our variable selection and then let the data itself determine specifications like the lag length of the equations (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014: 106). This methodological approach shields analyses from numerous, burdensome structural assumptions about the interactions among the variables that traditional modeling approaches would force us to impose (Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell 2009: 316).

One additional consideration when specifying VAR models is to identify the appropriate lag lengths for each model (Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell 2009: 316-7), and these can be estimated using one of several statistics. This project relies upon the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), which penalizes for additional parameters, to determine optimal lags for each VAR model. The purpose is to identify the most parsimonious model that still captures as much of the internal dynamics of the series as possible.

Hypothesis testing in this approach is not based on the fit, statistical significance, or magnitude of individual coefficients in the VAR models themselves (Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989: 845). Instead, Granger causality tests (Granger 1969; 1988) are performed on the VAR model to assess the statistical significance of the dynamic relationships between series. These tests can be considered formal hypothesis tests of whether a variable is a significant causal factor explaining another variable. As Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell (2009: 316) explain,

Granger causality testing is designed to "estimate an equation in which y is regressed on lagged values of y and lagged values of x and the null hypothesis is that x does not Granger cause y," and "[i]f one or more of the lagged values of x are statistically significant, we reject the null and conclude that x Granger causes y." Put differently, "[a] variable x is said to 'Granger cause' another variable y, if y can be better predicted from the past of x and y together than the past of y alone, other relevant information being used in the prediction" (Freeman 1983: 328; Pierce 1977). This project utilizes the "vars" R package to implement these modeling techniques.[10]

Of course, no method is a panacea, and choosing VAR with Granger causality tests has some inherent trade-offs. Most notably, this approach sacrifices the ability to make precise statements about the values of individual structural coefficients (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014: 106). This project's goal, though, is to determine if the media exert a significant influence on pre-primary candidate standing at all. Whether this constitutes the single largest influence on the candidates is an important question, but one that can be set aside for future research to tackle through different means. VAR and Granger causality tests enable analysis of the project's main theoretical motivations by demonstrating whether media coverage directly influences other facets of the nomination campaign.

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[10] https://www.rdocumentation.org/packages/vars/versions/1.5-9

Findings

<u>Overall</u>

The first VAR model considers observations of candidates from both parties across all cycles included in the analysis. In this sense, it reflects an overall model of candidate dynamics in the pre-primary. This model was specified with 10 lags, in accordance with the AIC. Results of the Granger causality tests on this VAR model are reported in Table 4.3. These results are displayed in a manner consistent with previous political science research using these methods (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell 2009; Freeman, Williams, and Lin 1989). The first column reports the dependent variable for the equation, the second column reports the variable being tested for a significant causal impact on the outcome, the third column reports the F statistic for the block of lagged values, and the fourth column reports the p-value with statistically significant results bolded for clarity.[11]

Crucially, this analysis demonstrates that a candidate's media coverage Granger-causes all three of fundraising, endorsements, and poll standing; moreover, none of these other explanatory variables can be said to Granger cause media coverage. Polls appear to influence endorsements and fundraising, but are not themselves moved by fundraising as they are by media and endorsements.

[11] As an additional diagnostic check of the models' adherence to key assumptions, I performed Breusch–Godfrey tests (Breusch 1978; Godfrey 1978) to diagnose any presence of autocorrelation, or serial correlation. The tests' non-significance indicates the absence of autocorrelation is indeed safe to assume and thus provides compelling evidence of the models' robustness.

Endorsements respond to changes in all three other variables but do not drive

media coverage as they do fundraising and polls. Fundraising also reacts to inputs

from the other three variables, but only seems to exert its own influence on

endorsements. Figure 4.1 provides a summary visualization of these statistically

significant Granger causalities.

Table 4.3: Granger Causality Tests for VAR Model of Pre-Primary

| Dependent	Potential Granger Cause	F	p
Polls	Media	37.92	**0.00**
	Endorsements	7.57	**0.00**
	Fundraising	1.26	0.25
Media	Polls	1.44	0.23
	Endorsements	1.19	0.28
	Fundraising	0.27	0.99
Endorsements	Polls	18.05	**0.00**
	Media	9.23	**0.00**
	Fundraising	3.10	**0.00**
Fundraising	Polls	5.46	**0.00**
	Media	10.25	**0.00**
	Endorsements	3.28	**0.00**

Lastly, Figure 4.2 assesses the effect of media coverage on poll standing over

a 30-day period by plotting their impulse response function. An impulse response

function illustrates the extent to which a change or shock in media coverage affects

the poll standing of a candidate over time—either positively or negatively.

Figure 4.1: Visualized Summary of Significant Causal Relationships in Overall Results[12]
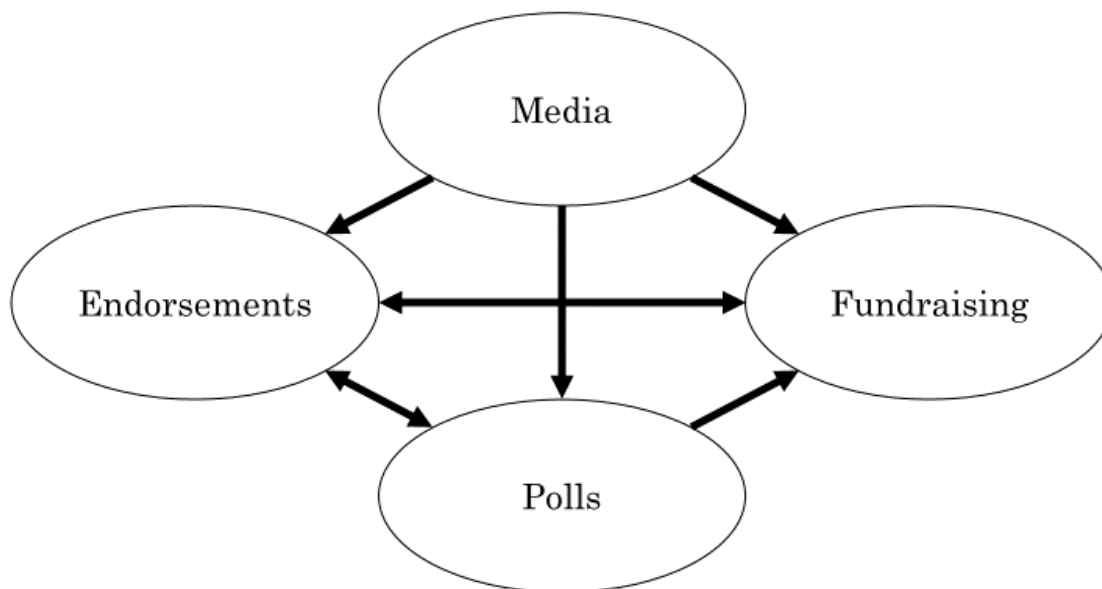
Interestingly, this impulse response function reveals that media coverage tends to inflict a decidedly negative effect on poll standing in the short term. This suggests that short-term spikes in media attention often reflect scandals and gaffes that harm a candidate's campaign. However, after about five days, the response shifts to a positive trajectory and maintains that trend for the remainder of the month. This indicates that a sustained media presence is typically associated with candidates who are consistently relevant to the race and have thus reached a critical mass of viability.

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[12] Arrows depict statistically significant relationships between predictors ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 4.2: Impulse Response Function for Effect of Media on Polls
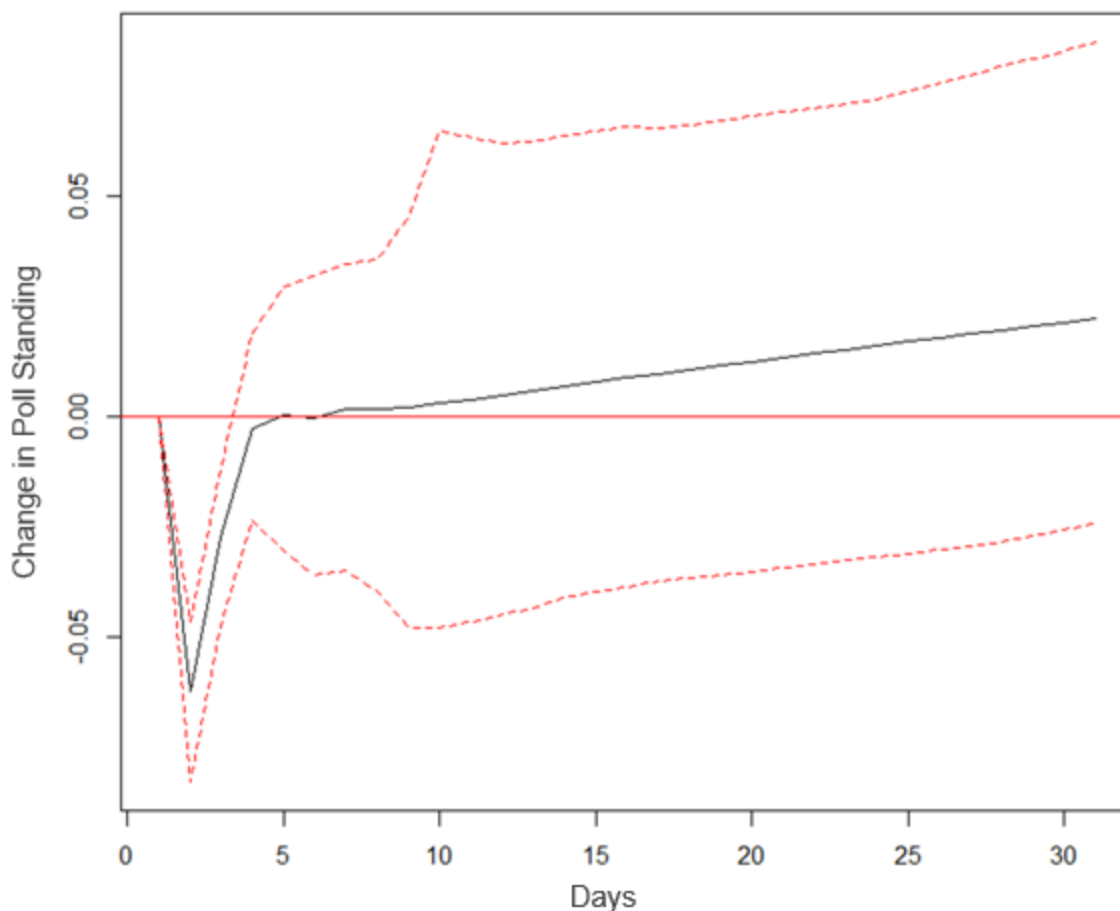
These results paint a complicated picture of the presidential pre-primary period as an intricately connected web of relationships between journalists, public officials, donors, and the general public. While party elites such as endorsers and donors hitch themselves to candidates who have already constructed national followings and filled their war chests, and do display signs of coordination with each other, journalists appear to operate in service of their own independent motivations and judgements. Although methodologically constrained from identifying the relative strength of these statistically significant causal relationships, it is

fascinating that—in this complex web of influences—media coverage is the only variable to have its effects felt everywhere and yet feel effects from nowhere else.

This is a very different conclusion than that reached by Cohen et al. (2008), who find endorsements to be the most important independent drivers of candidate fortunes in the pre-primary. However, the results in this analysis are consistent with the work of an earlier generation of scholars (e.g., Patterson 1980, 1993; Polsby 1983), who witnessed the chaotic nominations of George McGovern and Jimmy Carter and worried mass media coverage was driving presidential politics to factional candidates rather than the consensus-builders who typically emerged from the calculated, behind-the-scenes maneuvering of party elites. On the one hand, the discrepancy between my findings and those of Cohen et al. (2008) in *The Party Decides* could be explained by methodological differences: the far wider range of media sources and more granular time periods in this analysis could simply provide a more accurate assessment of pre-primary dynamics that endure from cycle to cycle. Perhaps media coverage has simply been the driving force behind candidates' fates all along. But on the other hand, the relative power of these factors may not be perfectly static across election cycles. Conceivably, the state of the world may have changed in the time since Cohen et al. (2008) examined it. While their endorsement-centric theory seemed to fit the period from 1980 to 2000 quite neatly, Cohen et al. (2016: 703-704) themselves contend that the more chaotic period starting soon thereafter was at least partially a byproduct of the new media landscape enabling factional, outsider candidates in their challenges to the party establishment. And

this shift would also be consistent with communications scholars, who have demonstrated the ability of evolving media technology to progressively remove barriers to action (Bimber 2016) and place increasing amounts of organizational power "in the hands and minds of citizens" (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012: 21).

Whatever the underlying explanation, the results in this analysis—while at odds with *The Party Decides*–are compatible with both earlier scholars of the process and the postmortem arguments of *The Party Decides*' authors.

Partisan Heterogeneity

One may reasonably wonder if the two major parties experience exactly the same pre-primary dynamics, or if there is some underlying heterogeneity between the gauntlets their respective candidates must run to have a seat at the table when the voting period begins. Republicans tend to inhabit a more insular information ecosystem than do Democrats, which is a consistent phenomenon across blogs (Adamic and Glance 2005), television (Pew Research Center 2017), and social media (Barbera et al. 2015). Evidently, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to share an information source, which could mean they will exhibit disproportionate susceptibility to media effects on their evaluations of presidential nomination candidates.

To explore this question, I estimated separate VAR models and subsequent Granger causality tests for Democratic and Republican presidential candidates.[13] I

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[13] The Republican VAR model was specified with 15 lags, and the Democratic model with 11 lags, both in accordance with their AIC.

also replaced the candidates' overall media share with their share of coverage among their party's respective aligned media outlets.[14] While this subsetting of media to only include the party's aligned sources means these analyses are not perfectly comparable to the pooled analysis conducted earlier, this substitution importantly proxies for the selective exposure partisan news consumers undertake and thus is central to the question of whether the parties truly operate in fundamentally different ecosystems.

Tables 4.4a and 4.4b present the Granger causality test results based on VAR models for Democrats and Republicans, respectively.[15] Likewise, Figures 4.3a and 4.3b present a visualization of these causal relationships evident in each party's pre-primary dynamics. While both parties still exhibit a crucial role for media in the process, the parties do appear to evince somewhat different ecosystems. On the Democratic side, endorsements exert an influence over media coverage, which could be evidence of coordination—or at least agreement—between party elites and friendly media figures. At the same time, Democratic endorsements do not significantly encourage fundraising, but fundraising influences the polls. In the big picture, Democrats appear to experience a largely media-driven process but one in which, for the most part, the other factors are a part of the conversation and are generally sympatico.

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[14] Consistent with the ideological classification of media outlets in Chapter 3, this chapter's analyses rely upon the AllSides organization's Media Bias Ratings, which have been used for this purpose by scholars in numerous existing studies (e.g. Rathje, Van Bavel, and Van Der Linden 2021; Rozado, Al-Gharbi, and Halberstadt 2021; Rozado, Hughes, and Halberstadt 2022).

[15] The Republican model includes 45 candidacies across four campaign cycles; the Democratic model includes 48 candidacies across five cycles.

Table 4.4a: Granger Causality Tests for VAR Model of Pre-Primary, Democratic Candidates and Left-Wing Media Only

Dependent	Potential Granger Cause	F	p
Polls	Media	10.54	**0.00**
	Endorsements	18.97	**0.00**
	Fundraising	2.24	**0.01**
Media	Polls	0.39	0.98
	Endorsements	2.73	**0.04**
	Fundraising	1.18	0.29
Endorsements	Polls	18.97	**0.00**
	Media	29.23	**0.00**
	Fundraising	5.00	**0.00**
Fundraising	Polls	12.79	**0.00**
	Media	34.14	**0.00**
	Endorsements	0.99	0.45

On the other hand, in Republican contests, these elements do not share as many linkages. Endorsements and fundraising have a symbiosis that likely reflects an elite class of the party, but they evidently fail to influence anything beyond themselves. For Republicans, only media attention significantly drives the polls.

Table 4.4b: Granger Causality Tests for VAR Model of Pre-Primary, Republican Candidates and Right-Wing Media Only

Dependent	Potential Granger Cause	F	p
Polls	Media	2.11	**0.04**
	Endorsements	0.29	0.99
	Fundraising	0.24	0.99
Media	Polls	0.72	0.65
	Endorsements	0.34	0.98
	Fundraising	0.38	0.96
Endorsements	Polls	4.97	**0.00**
	Media	5.90	**0.00**
	Fundraising	4.70	**0.00**
Fundraising	Polls	0.91	0.53
	Media	1.05	0.39
	Endorsements	4.26	**0.00**

One more interesting difference between the parties emerges in Figures 4.4a and 4.4b, where Democratic candidates produce an impulse response function that is very similar to the overall pattern, but Republicans find their poll standing consistently hurt by more media scrutiny.

Figure 4.3a: Visualized Summary of Significant Causal Relationships in Results for Democratic Candidates and Left-Wing Media Only
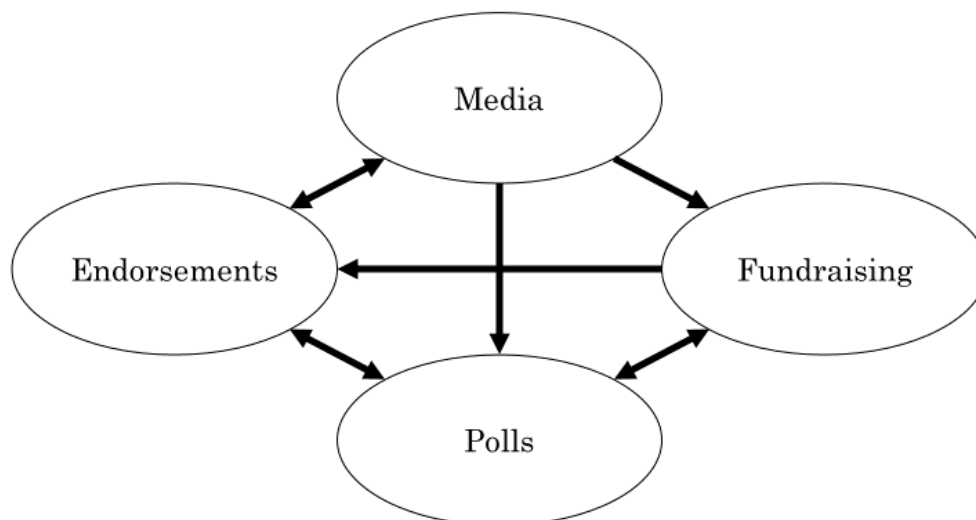

Figure 4.3b: Visualized Summary of Significant Causal Relationships in Results for Republican Candidates and Right-Wing Media Only
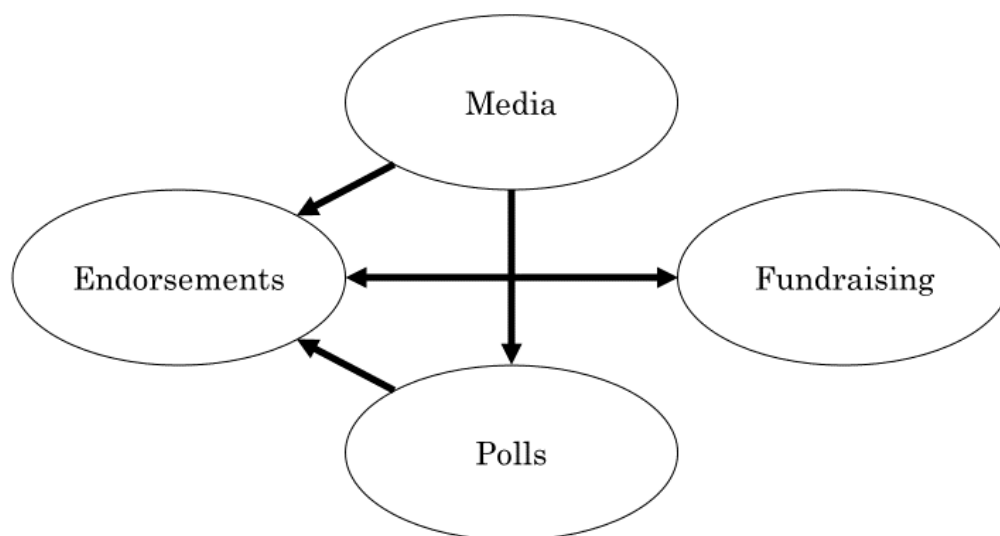
Figure 4.4a: Impulse Response Function for Effect of Media on Polls, Democratic Candidates and Left-Wing Media Only
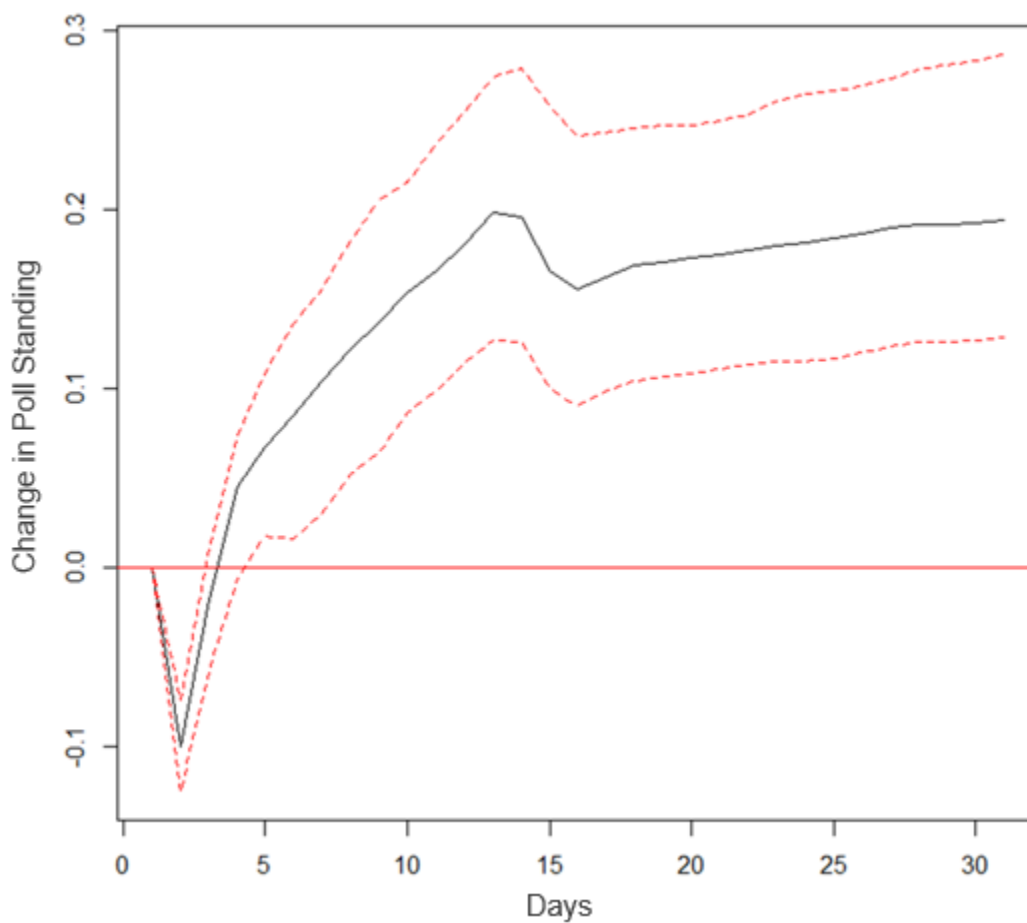
This difference is perhaps yet more evidence of an adversarial reality between Republican elites and their media atmosphere that evidently hamstrings their own candidates.[16]

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[16] Donald Trump only accounts for 8% of all Republican candidate mentions that were included in this analysis, so this result cannot be easily explained as a Trump phenomenon.

Figure 4.4b: Impulse Response Function for Effect of Media on Polls, Republican Candidates and Right-Wing Media Only
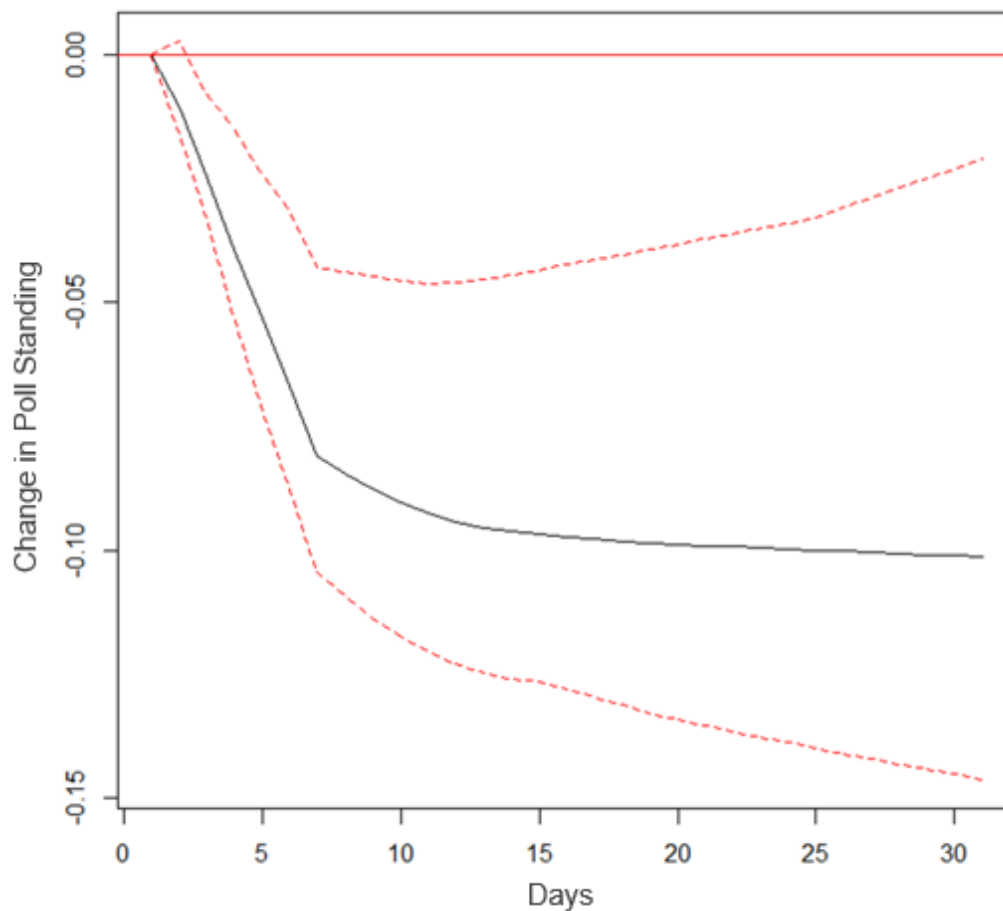
Discussion

Zaller (1999: 115) quotes Jules Witcover, a veteran journalist, describing his decision-making process regarding which presidential candidates to cover and which to ignore:

"If a guy is a bomb, it's our job to ignore him... If I have decided that a guy doesn't deserve any more attention than I give him, it's not because of the polls. It's because I've been out there... I've heard what people say, and I've

heard what [the candidate is] doing, and I've made a judgment that this guy

is just not cutting it."[17]

Witcover's description is a useful touchstone for what this chapter has laid bare:

across both parties, the media are a significant causal force behind candidate poll

support. Indeed, journalists are not merely good guessers, but are their own distinct

force in the pre-primary, evaluating candidates and setting expectations for their

campaigns. Zaller (1999: 115-116) aptly explains these determinations are precisely

the "kinds of judgments…that rationally ignorant citizens want reporters to make

and that reporters relish making." Thus, the mediatized pre-primary process cannot

be easily dismissed as "cheap talk."

While this media-centric finding is at odds with the endorsement-centric

conclusion of Cohen et al. (2008), it is consistent with the warnings posed by early

scholars of the contemporary presidential nomination system (e.g., Ceaser 1979;

Patterson 1980, 1993; Polsby 1983) and even by the Cohen et al. (2016) reevaluation

of *The Party Decides*, which all acknowledge the significant role the media

landscape plays in structuring the presidential nomination campaign.

The macro level observations of this chapter are also compatible with the

micro level operations described by previous researchers; particularly, how

individuals process information regarding the presidential nomination campaign.

In the new media landscape, individuals have the ability to choose the information

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[17] Zaller (1999) cites this Witcover quote to "The Campaign for Page One," a 1984 *PBS Frontline* documentary report.

sources that align with their existing interests and beliefs (e.g., Arceneaux and

Johnson 2013; Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Prior 2007; Thorsen and Wells 2015).

and, in a unique exception to the usually stubborn preferences of the most

politically aware (Zaller 1992: 253-258), the most likely primary and caucus

participants—those with the highest levels of partisan intensity and political

knowledge—are also the most likely to rely on more narrowly tailored information

sources, to actively seek this coverage of the nomination campaign to learn about

the candidates, to be impacted by its handicapping of candidate capabilities, and to

express a desire to share these impressions with social contacts.

By leveraging more granular observations and a much wider swath of media

in its analyses than previous scholars, this chapter demonstrates the complex

dynamics of the pre-primary period. Taken together, this chapter's analyses supply

vital evidence that media attention during the pre-primary cannot be easily

dismissed as "cheap talk" nor as simply a vehicle for elite signals. In fact,

Republicans appear to have disproportionately stumbled into a process untethered

to their party's elite—an ironic fact given how the contemporary nomination system

was born of the Democratic Party's relatively volatile history. Instead, the overall

media landscape, as evidenced in these analyses, deserves to be considered a crucial

ingredient of candidate viability in advance of primaries and caucuses.

With both the tenor of media coverage and its effects on the process now

clarified, the next chapter will explore illustrative case studies of presidential

campaigns that navigated this pre-primary landscape as motivating examples of the

ways in which these dynamics of the pre-primary play out in practice, highlighting which kinds of candidates stand to benefit from a media-centric system and which can expect to struggle.

CHAPTER FIVE: HEROES AND BUMS

"My presence in the social media and on the Internet is much bigger than many of the other candidates, including Mitt Romney. So, when you take the social media and you take the Tea Party citizens movement, you have a combination there that, quite frankly, ten years ago, I wouldn't have had a chance. And this is what is being discounted by members of the establishment media and some members of the Republican Party. But the people are hearing me."

– Herman Cain[1]

"This branding thing—you know, branding people—is kind of a new idea. It didn't exist, per se, ten years ago. Now, we're all branded. We're all a brand. We're like toothpaste."

– Jeb Bush[2]

This project has explored how media coverage in the pre-primary period tends to focus on horserace coverage—increasingly through populist rhetoric and an emphasis on personality and style—and it has also examined the extent to which this media coverage plays a significant role in determining candidate standing in advance of the voting period. But these analyses have generally taken a large-*N* approach to exploring these facets of the campaign. If the presidential pre-primary is indeed a media-driven process, which kinds of candidates stand to gain or lose? Does it favor the factional, personality-driven, outsider candidacies that early scholars (e.g., Ceaser 1979; Patterson 1980, 1993; Polsby 1983) of the contemporary system warned about? What does it look like in practice when a candidate cultivates substantial media attention—particularly from their most partisan favored

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[1] https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/exclusive-herman-cain-unveils-job-creation-plan
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4yTaP6roTw

sources—but lacks virtually anything else? Can that candidate still cultivate

viability? By contrast, how does a candidate who enters the race with a large swath

of endorsements, money, and pre-existing support fare if their media persona is

lacking? Can that candidate still thrive?

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate what navigating this landscape looks

like in practice through a case study comparing two presidential campaigns as

illustrative examples. One candidate, Herman Cain running for the 2012

Republican nomination, entered the pre-primary period with no existing support, no

notable endorsements, and no money in the bank, yet media attention would

eventually propel him from relative obscurity to the top of his party's polls. The

other candidate, Jeb Bush's run for the 2016 Republican nomination, began the

campaign with a formidable pedigree, leading poll numbers, a litany of

endorsements, and a full war chest, but he failed to navigate the media

environment and faded into obsolescence. These campaign trajectories, this chapter

will contend, are only possible in a process where the media landscape holds

considerable explanatory power.

Case Selection

Before engaging in the case study itself, I must justify my case selection.

After all, there are 1,319 candidates who officially filed with the Federal Election

Commission (FEC) to run for president as either a Democrat or Republican in the

2000-2020 election cycles.[3] Surely, the vast majority of these candidacies are irrelevant and lack perceptible quantities of any variables of interest, which is why they were excluded from the analyses conducted in previous chapters. But, as is of particular importance for my case selection in this chapter's study, this condition also would fail to demonstrate how the key inputs to a campaign affect the process because every variable is stuck at zero. Given the theoretical interest of this chapter, especially in light of the previous chapters' large-N analyses, a more purposive mode of case selection is appropriate for this small-N case study (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

A comparative case study of two types of candidates stands to provide the most valuable insight into how these factors operate in practice. First, case studies can spotlight nuances in the process that would otherwise slip through the cracks of a large quantitative analysis as distinctions are blurred and peculiarities of a given campaign cycle are at best simplified and at worst disregarded entirely. There is no "charismatic speaker" variable in the regression, nor is there a variable denoting "candidate was previous subject of a WWE storyline," or "candidate has unpopular brother," and including variables like these would be difficult to objectively quantify, require the inclusion of an overwhelming number of features, and ultimately struggle to provide any valuable insight anyways. Rather than relying solely on operationalizations of key factors as variables in regression models, case

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[3] The number of candidates, and a full listing of them, can be accessed here:
https://www.fec.gov/data/candidates/?election_year=2000&election_year=2004&election_year=2008&election_year=2012&election_year=2016&election_year=2020&office=P&party=DEM&party=REP

studies enable us to qualitatively follow how the process played out in real time so that complex dynamics can be recognized. Second, case studies can help identify the causal power of a given factor. If a presidential candidate can surge to the front of the pack solely based on media presence, and if another candidate can become an afterthought despite substantial advantages in other key factors, then the significance of media coverage to candidate viability becomes exceedingly difficult to deny. For this reason, Herman Cain and Jeb Bush are informative cases to study. Cain represents a candidate with a robust media presence but little else of note, whereas Bush represents a candidate with lots of traditional resources but a lackluster media presence. Each of their respective political fortunes were owed in some significant manner to their treatment in the media landscape—regardless of their levels of traditional support from elites. While one could conceivably quibble with most any case selection based on particularities,[4] and the campaigns discussed in this chapter are by no means the only ones that could have fit the bill,[5] I am

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[4] Jeb Bush's selection in particular may generate some pushback based on his distinctive pedigree; namely, the Bush name may have simply been uniquely toxic in a manner exogenous to the typical variables of interest. I counter that concern with two points. First, there is little evidence this legacy significantly concerned party elites, who still saw fit to lavish Jeb with the lion's share of donations and endorsements. Second, regarding the mass public, Jeb's reluctance to embrace his family name likely said more about his prospectively looking ahead to a general election campaign than it did concerns about appealing to the Republican rank-and-file. George W. Bush's legacy among Republicans was still quite consistently strong at the time Jeb ran, with more than 7-in-10 Republicans holding a favorable opinion of George W. Bush in both March 2009 and July 2016. (These Gallup poll results can be found at: https://news.gallup.com/poll/212633/george-bush-barack-obama-popular-retirement.aspx.) Even the Iraq War itself was not a clear liability in a Republican primary, as only 3-in-10 Republicans considered the war a mistake in June 2015 (This Gallup poll result can be found at: https://news.gallup.com/poll/183575/fewer-view-iraq-afghanistan-wars-mistakes.aspx.) The Bush brand, and its most infamous blemish, represented clear liabilities with a general electorate, but far less so with a Republican primary electorate.

[5] David Karol, co-author of *The Party Decides*, cites Cain as an example of a candidate catapulted by media attention in a manner that would have been improbable before the contemporary media landscape (https://www.vox.com/2014/12/29/7450793/invisible-primary). But

confident both Bush and Cain are cases that responsibly approach the situation of interest and thus stand to elucidate the role of media in the presidential pre-primary.

Canary in the Cable Box: The 2012 Herman Cain Campaign

Nothing about Herman Cain's humble beginnings would have predicted he would go on to a successful career in business—let alone a national political career. The son of a domestic worker and chauffeur,[6] Cain occupied no prominent position in the Republican Party. He never served in elected office, had no record implementing any conservative policy priorities, and was largely an afterthought in national politics. Nevertheless, Herman Cain's pre-primary experience in the 2012 presidential campaign cycle would be an ascent from obscurity to celebrity.

<u>Life, One Bite at a Time</u>

Herman Cain graduated from Morehouse College in 1967 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and from Purdue University in 1971 with a master's in computer science after a brief stint in the United States Navy (Oster 2001: 56). His first corporate career was as a business analyst for Coca-Cola in 1973, then ascending to management roles with Pillsbury and their then-subsidiary Burger

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there are certainly others who could also have warranted selection: Sides, Tausanovitch, and Vavreck (2022: 93) refer to both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in 2016 as "media-driven candidacies" that found success during the pre-primary period "even without much preexisting support in the party." While Donald Trump is certainly a cardinal example of the high ceiling a media-driven campaign has in the contemporary system, his subsequent electoral success has already made his campaign a heavy focus of analysis. Selecting a non-Trump case allows this project to spotlight how elements of his success were previewed by others who lacked his billionaire resources and are not easily dismissed as simply a unique Trump-specific phenomenon.
    [6] https://www.ibtimes.com/herman-cain-2012-story-self-made-man-285259

King well into the 1980s.[7] Cain was assigned Burger King's 400 Philadelphia region locations and succeeded in righting their ship through a hands-on leadership style that saw him personally flipping burgers on occasion.[8] Granted, this engagement in frontline work was most likely a gimmick to demonstrate to employees that he understood even the grittiest aspects of the business, but this kind of appeal—one in which he centers his relatability and folksiness—would become characteristic of Herman Cain's eventual political career. Cain even had a brief foray into the academic world, authoring a peer-reviewed journal article about management science based on his experiences at Pillsbury (Cain 1979), but his corporate path was undeniably his most fruitful endeavor and the one in which his reputation was growing.

In 1986, based on his turn-around at Burger King, Pillsbury made Herman Cain president of Godfather's Pizza and described the chain's situation at the time as having "one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel." [9] In turning around this business as well, Cain yet again applied his characteristic hands-on management approach by personally baking pies on a weekly basis,[10] but he also demonstrated his charismatic persona—picking up some media attention in the process. A July 26, 1987, newspaper article syndicated across the Scripps Howard

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[7] https://books.google.com/books?id=vaLyEawnE9UC&q=herman.cain%20pillsbury&pg=PA89#v=onepage&q=herman%20cain&f=false

[8] https://www.ibtimes.com/herman-cain-2012-story-self-made-man-285259

[9] https://web.archive.org/web/20111012144214/http://www.omaha.com/article/20111011/NEWS01/710119907/0

[10] Ibid.

News Service lauded Cain as a "handsome, analytical man" with an "affable, quick-witted personality," who "clearly likes the role of underdog," all under the headline, "Executive resuscitates faltering Godfather's," and sub-header "Herman Cain uses honest style to guide employees of pizzeria."[11] Cain was also featured in the February 1988 edition of *Black Enterprise* magazine, which highlighted his successes at the helm of Godfather's Pizza. The feature describes Cain personally as "speaking with the commanding cadence of a Baptist preacher," and "an enthusiastically friendly person with the rare knack of being a lighthearted and entertaining conversationalist without ever allowing his audience to forget how serious and determined he is about his work."[12] And when Herman Cain led a group that purchased Godfather's Pizza from Pillsbury in 1988, the transaction garnered the attention of *The New York Times*.[13] Cain worked directly on marketing strategy in his role at Godfather's Pizza,[14] and was responsible for the brand launching some inventive advertising campaigns and streamlining the menu.[15] By 1989, Herman Cain had become the undisputed public face of the Godfather's Pizza brand, starring in multiple television commercials to promote the product's ample toppings

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[11] https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=rfklAAAAIBAJ&pg=6789,6964254

[12] https://books.google.com/books?id=vaLyEawnE9UC&q=herman.cain%20pillsbury&pg=PA89#v=onepage&q=herman%20cain&f=false

[13] https://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/20/business/godfather-s-pizza-sold-by-pillsbury.html

[14] https://web.archive.org/web/20111012144214/http://www.omaha.com/article/20111011/NEWS01/710119907/0

[15] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-explained/2011/09/26/gIQA5KoNzK_blog.html

and affordable price point, closing personally with a slogan imploring the viewer to "enjoy your Godfather's pizza, and take life one bite at a time."[16]

These moments of public exposure did not appear to turn Cain into a truly national figure at the time, but they did garner him considerable industry recognition. Cain received the International Foodservice Manufacturers Association's Operator of the Year/Gold Plate Award (Oster 2001: 56) and a Horatio Alger Award in recognition of his life's proverbial "rags-to-riches" story.[17] In addition to his Godfather's post, Herman Cain served on several other companies' board of directors, such as Whirlpool, Nabisco, Hallmark, and Utilicorp.[18] And from 1992 to 1996, Cain also served as a director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, including nearly a year and nine months as its Chairman.[19] Cain eventually sold his Godfather's Pizza shares in 2006,[20] but his business career served as an early indicator of his ability to capture attention and cultivate his persona.

<u>The Hermanator</u>

As early as the mid-1990s, Herman Cain was openly expressing political aspirations ranging from state office to Congress all the way up to president, and

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[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zthK96RCy3g
[17] https://horatioalger.org/members/member-detail/herman-cain
[18] https://web.archive.org/web/20111011123118/http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/people/person.asp?personId=638159&ticker=WHR:US&previousCapId=314515&previousTitle=WHIRLPOOL%20CORP
[19] https://web.archive.org/web/20110617100029/http://www.kansascityfed.org/publicat/newsroom/2011pdf/press.release.05.26.11.pdf
[20] https://web.archive.org/web/20111012144214/http://www.omaha.com/article/20111011/NEWS01/710119907/0

his lobbying activities with the National Restaurant Association gave him the

opportunity to build relationships with party insiders.[21] Perhaps even more

importantly, Cain's lobbying experience gave him the opportunity to demonstrate

his charisma, speaking skills, and "knack for simple titles and catchy names."[22] But

these interactions rubbing elbows on Capitol Hill would not pave Cain's path to

prominence.

Cain's "auspicious debut on the national political stage" came in April 1994,

when he sparred with President Bill Clinton over health care reform in a nationally

televised town hall meeting.[23] After the encounter, Cain was described as "the

lightning rod," and his "The Hermanator" moniker was born.[24] One July 1996

article from *The New York Times* even names Herman Cain as a potential vice-

presidential pick for Bob Dole on the back of this appearance:

> "Or what about Herman Cain, the charismatic president of Godfather's Pizza
>
> in Omaha, who caught Mr. Dole's advisers' eyes by challenging President
>
> Clinton on his health care plan at a televised town meeting?"[25]

Jack Kemp, who Dole eventually picked as his running mate, reportedly was

intrigued by Cain's "corporate success and frank style," chartered a plane to meet

with him, and came away glowingly describing him as possessing the "voice of

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[21] https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/10/private-citizen-cain-katrina-trinko/
[22] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/us/politics/herman-cain-running-as-outsider-came-to-washington-as-lobbyist.html
[23] https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/01/watch-herman-cain-battle-bill-clinton-on-health-care/69683/
[24] https://www.newsweek.com/lost-chance-188330
[25] https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/28/weekinreview/looking-for-no-2-try-an-unknown-catholic-female-governor.html

Othello, the looks of a football player, the English of Oxfordian quality and the

courage of a lion." Kemp soon recruited Cain to serve on the Economic Growth and

Tax Reform Commission and later as an adviser to his and Dole's 1996 presidential

campaign.[26]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Herman Cain continued his political

pursuits but found little breakthrough success. Cain very briefly flirted with a 2000

presidential run, and even filed paperwork with the FEC, but quickly bowed out

having raised only the $28,537 he contributed to himself.[27] Cain eventually

endorsed conservative outsider businessman Steve Forbes for president.[28] In 2004,

Herman Cain ran in the Georgia Republican primary to succeed Democrat Zell

Miller in the U.S. Senate, with his campaign funded mostly by a personal loan.[29]

Local newspaper reporting on that race called attention to Cain's relative lack of

political experience and framing of his candidacy as a challenge to the status quo,

but also recognized his "ability to communicate his ideas and his passion for what

he desires to do."[30] Cain ultimately lost that primary race to eventual Senator

Johnny Isakson.[31] If Herman Cain had fostered enduring relationships during his

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[26] https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/herman-cains-kemp-connection-robert-costa/
[27] https://www.fec.gov/data/committee/C00343913/?cycle=2000
[28] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-explained/2011/09/26/gIQA5KoNzK_blog.html
[29] https://archive.ph/20120529192838/http://new.accessnorthga.com/detail.php?n=172858#selection-253.27-253.77
[30] https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=3x5EAAAAIBAJ&pg=2918,3644773&dq=economic-growth-and-tax-reform-commission+cain&hl=en
[31] https://web.archive.org/web/20111021025714/http://sos.georgia.gov/elections/election_results/2004_0720/0000120.htm

lobbying days, they did not manifest themselves in his fundraising efforts for either his short-lived presidential run or his Senate campaign.

Simultaneous with these political endeavors, Herman Cain cultivated a personal brand as a motivational speaker. Cain created his own personal development consultancy, THE New Voice, Inc., to promote his keynote speeches, motivational DVDs, and even CDs of himself singing gospel music.[32] As part of this effort to build a self-improvement brand, Cain authored *Leadership is Common Sense* in 1997,[33] *Speak as a Leader: Develop the Better Speaker in You* in 1999,[34] *CEO of Self: You're in Charge!* in 2001.[35]

Herman Cain would eventually merge his motivational speaking and political projects by trademarking the phrase "The Hermanator Experience,"[36] and anointing himself the "Head Coach" of the "Hermanator's Intelligent Thinkers Movement (HITM)," a short-lived conservative pressure group.[37] His 2005 book *They Think You're Stupid: Why Democrats Lost Your Vote and What Republicans Must Do to Keep It* took a sharp turn explicitly into the political arena with Cain's characteristically populist formula for how to counter a "politics-as-usual" where "politicians are talking down to you."[38]

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[32] http://www.rlc2011.com/speakers_list/herman-cain/; https://www.amazon.com/Sunday-Morning-Herman-Cain/dp/B005P39SR8

[33] https://www.amazon.com/Leadership-Common-Sense-Herman-Cain/dp/1930819021

[34] https://www.amazon.com/Speak-Leader-Develop-Better-Speaker/dp/086730782X

[35] https://www.amazon.com/CEO-Self-Charge-Herman-Cain/dp/1930819048

[36] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/03/herman-cain-the-gop-wild-card/308367/

[37] https://www.economist.com/united-states/2011/10/15/rising-cain

[38] https://www.amazon.com/They-Think-Youre-Stupid-Republicans/dp/0979646278

Neither his political nor his motivational ventures had quite panned out yet in their own rights by the late 2000s when Herman Cain's "booming, rich voice" finally caught the attention of a radio executive.[39] Herman Cain hosted a talk-radio show on AM750 and 95.5 FM News/Talk WSB, based in Atlanta, Georgia, from 2008 until the launch of his presidential campaign in 2011.[40] The program, dubbed "The Herman Cain Show," was also widely available in podcast form.[41] This program was only the first of several public-facing perches in the conservative media ecosystem that Cain would occupy in the run-up to his presidential campaign. On cable television, Cain was under contract as a Fox News contributor in 2010 (Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012: 243-244) and an executive profile of Cain from 2011 mentions his appearances as a Fox News business commentator.[42] As an author, Cain wrote a regular opinion column for the *Daily Caller*[43] and a syndicated weekly column through North Star Writer's Group that made its way onto *WorldNetDaily*—the online epicenter of the "birther" movement.[44] Cain's writing style mirrored his

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[39] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-explained/2011/09/26/gIQA5KoNzK_blog.html

[40] https://web.archive.org/web/20120121181253/http://blogs.ajc.com/radio-tv-talk/2012/01/19/herman-cain-re-joins-wsb-radio-with-daily-commentaries/?cxntlid=thbz_hm

[41] https://web.archive.org/web/20110522054106/http://feeds.wsbradio.com/TheNewHermanCainShow

[42] https://web.archive.org/web/20111011123118/http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/people/person.asp?personId=638159&ticker=WHR:US&previousCapId=314515&previousTitle=WHIRLPOOL%20CORP

[43] https://dailycaller.com/author/hermancain/

[44] https://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/herman-cain-written-113-columns-leading-birther-website-193155625.html

populist verbal style: simple, straightforward, and constantly contrasting government elites with "us regular folks."[45]

<u>Aww, Shucky-Ducky</u>

On January 12, 2011, Herman Cain announced the creation of his presidential exploratory committee in an exclusive interview on his friend Neil Cavuto's Fox News program, where he repeatedly made the case that his lack of previous experience in elected office and unconventional candidacy was precisely what the Republican electorate was clamoring for.[46]

Herman Cain announced his presidential campaign in earnest on May 21, 2011, in Atlanta, Georgia's Centennial Olympic Park.[47] Cain's speech was packed with characteristically populist language: he called out "the establishment," and "the politicians," as fundamentally at odds with the will of the people, described policy in simple terms like "[w]e ain't raising the debt ceiling," and employed folksy colloquialisms like "[a]ww, shucky-ducky as the man would say." As *The New York Times* observed in its reporting from that day, "Mr. Cain offered few specific proposals but instead relied on sweeping, Reaganesque themes and allusions to God's role in America" as he promised what he called 'a new American dream.'"[48] The report also noted Cain was already "aggressively crisscrossing the country and trying to build name recognition," which would be aided by his "plainspoken

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[45] https://dailycaller.com/2010/10/18/america-we-have-a-problem/
[46] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkIN4xn0b1U
[47] A full transcript of Cain's announcement speech can be accessed at: https://2012election.procon.org/sourcefiles/cain_candidacy_announcement_may_21_2011.pdf.
[48] https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/21/ex-pizza-executive-joins-presidential-race/

speaking style," and his oratorical abilities as a "graceful public speaker with a deep baritone voice,"[49] or as another reporter put it, Cain's "rich baritone voice that was destined for a microphone."[50]

At the outset of the race, Cain was not considered a serious competitor for the nomination (Coombs 2013: 24; Sides and Vavreck 2013: 49). In contrast to the rest of the Republican field, Cain had never held elected office. But Cain's business background and his past public appearances criticizing the Clinton and Obama administrations afforded him credibility on two cardinal issues of the campaign: health care and the economy. Cain's public persona was built on his ability to energize crowds with his "intangible appeal" despite lacking much in the way of substance (Coombs 2013: 26). Echoing those earlier articles describing his business persona, Cain was described as possessing a "rousing, sermon-style oratory."[51] On occasion, Cain even exhibited his old gospel singing skills.[52] Surely, some candidates have succeeded despite poor public speaking skills, but they tend to have other, more traditional resources to lend their campaign credence. If a candidate like Cain is to garner attention, he must do so on the back of his ability to attract attention through his nontraditional approach rather than by pointing to his war chest or chorus of endorsers. His business background—rooted as it was in pizza and burgers—contributed to Cain's folksiness too, and his "rags-to-riches" personal

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[49] Ibid.

[50] https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/a-cain-do-candidate

[51] https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2096836-1,00.html

[52] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZe75JSXhyU

story as the son of blue-collar workers who clawed his way up to business success was a compelling early frame of his campaign (Coombs 2013: 26). This narrative was also reinforced by Cain's race. As a successful black businessman, Cain was in a unique position to appeal to Republican notions that America was a meritocratic land of opportunity where—despite the naysayers who point to systemic inequalities—hard work and determination are sufficient ingredients for success regardless of one's demographic characteristics. Cain told a crowd in June 2011, "the skeptics…and the critics…were skeptical…and critical, that a guy that did not have high name I.D., did not have a kajillion dollars, had never held public office before…they basically wrote off the dark horse candidate."[53]

In public speaking engagements early on, Cain kept his rhetoric simple and frank, decrying the "stupid people" running the country.[54] At one point, Cain bluntly called President Obama's economic policies "bullshit."[55] Statements like these surely leveraged the Tea Party movement's feverish anti-establishment sentiment, which had been intensifying in conservative circles for years by that point. Cain's campaign exhibited a conspicuous lack of specific policy stances: his book, website, and public appearances largely avoided these things in favor of platitudes (Miller et al. 2013: 108, 110). But Cain seemed aware of the danger that being typecast represented. In one interview, he was asked what he would say to those who

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[53] https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/a-cain-do-candidate
[54] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoM9Xak_1vw
[55] https://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/cain-nearly-quit-campaign-florida-straw-poll-says-115734617.html

question the substance of his campaign, and Cain remarked, "I have to tell them that there's more between these ears than pepperoni and pizza sauce… People who say I was just going out and giving the speeches and smiling, they have no idea how I manage and lead."[56]

<u>Straw Polls & Debates</u>

Herman Cain successfully leveraged his charisma and oratory skill to notch wins in straw polls and debates that generated media buzz and thus contributed to his viability despite his dearth of endorsements, resources, or existing popularity.

At the first Republican debate on May 5, 2011, Herman Cain was asked why he believed he even stood a chance to win the presidential nomination when he had never held public office, to which he responded:

"First of all, the people of the United States are gonna elect the person that I believe projects the greatest amount of leadership strength, not the person that has the greatest amount of money, not the person that necessarily has held public office before, and I'm proud of the fact—quite frankly—that I haven't held public office before. Because I ask people, most of the people that are in elective office in Washington, D.C., they have held public office before: how's that workin' for ya? We have a mess! How about sending a problem solver to the White House? How about someone who has a career of defining

[56] https://web.archive.org/web/20111012144214/http://www.omaha.com/article/20111011/NEWS01/710119907/0

the right problem, assigning the right priority, surrounding himself with the

right people?"[57]

Cain's response elicited thunderous applause from the audience and a chuckling

smile from debate moderator Chris Wallace. On Fox News, immediately following

the debate's conclusion, a live focus group led by Republican pollster Frank Luntz

declared Cain the overwhelming winner and his response above was singled out by

the participants as his "home run" moment.[58] When asked to describe Cain, the

descriptions offered included "a breath of fresh air," "answers the question most

direct," "common sense," "clear and concise," "very impressive," "articulate,"

"likeable," "honest," "does not talk like a politician—he talks straight," and "he won

us over, I think he can win America over."[59] While presumptive frontrunner Mitt

Romney chose to skip the first debate, Herman Cain seized the opportunity to grab

public attention and did so in a performance Luntz called "special."[60]

Putting his populist bona fides front and center again, Herman Cain

introduced himself at the June 2011 Republican debate by saying, "Hello, I'm

Herman Cain. I am not a politician. I am a problem-solver with over 40 years of

business and executive experience."[61]

Displaying another element of his public appeal, at the September 2011

debate, Cain said he "would bring a sense of humor to the White House, because

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[57] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-4uEfEakxs
[58] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOmtO7DbyDM
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/10/private-citizen-cain-katrina-trinko/

America's too uptight!"[62] One reporter from *The New York Times* explained how

Cain's "charming" use of "silky silliness" distinguished him from the rest of the field

and lent him "an air of folksiness and authenticity."[63]

Herman Cain experienced another spike in the polls after his performance in

the October 11, 2011, debate. Frank Luntz explained, "My focus groups have

consistently picked Herman Cain as the most likeable candidate in the

debates…Don't underestimate the power of likability, even in a Republican

primary. The more likeable the candidate, the greater the electoral potential."[64]

Herman Cain also triumphed in several straw polls during the pre-primary

period. Cain's speeches at these events routinely resonated with audiences with his

typical populist bravado; in one instance, a prominent conservative radio

broadcaster remarked, "That guy played the audience like a violin."[65] In February

2011, Herman Cain notched an early straw poll victory at the American Policy

Summit in Phoenix, Arizona.[66] He tied with former Speaker of the U.S. House Newt

Gingrich in a straw poll at a party convention in Georgia's 3rd Congressional

District on April 16, 2011.[67] Cain won outright at the Washington state Republican

Party's 29th Annual Spring Gala on May 9, 2011.[68] On May 15, 2011, Cain emerged

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[62] http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/09/12/debate.cain.humor/index.html
[63] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/19/us/politics/behind-herman-cains-humor-a-question-of-seriousness.html
[64] https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203388804576614962556506804
[65] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/19/us/politics/behind-herman-cains-humor-a-question-of-seriousness.html
[66] https://talkingpointsmemo.com/?p=114169
[67] https://thecitizen.com/2011/04/21/cain-gingrich-win-west-ga-gop-straw-poll/
[68] http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2011/05/09/herman-cain-wins-gop-straw-poll/

victorious from a Kuwaii County, Hawaii straw poll conducted during that year's

Hawaii Republican Party State Convention.[69] Cain continued compiling straw poll

victories throughout the summer, including a landslide at the Western Conservative

Summit in Denver, Colorado on July 31, 2011,[70] and a win in his home state of

Georgia on August 27, 2011.[71] Although these events all helped bolster Cain's

visibility and viability, one particular straw poll victory stood above the others in its

contributions to Cain's public profile.

On September 24, 2011, the Florida Republican Party held a non-binding

presidential straw poll at their "Presidential 5" conference; Herman Cain shockingly

won with 37 percent of the vote—a victory widely framed as coming at Texas

Governor Rick Perry's expense (Sides and Vavreck 2013: 49). Reporters attributed

Cain's strong performance to his rousing speech at the event, where he implored the

audience to support his long-shot bid for the White House as a "problem-solver" who

could "hit the target called fix-it."[72] Cain reportedly "whipped up those in

attendance with a fiery speech…that had the crowd on their feet for an extended

standing ovation."[73] Cain, acknowledged the enthusiastic crowd on Twitter that

same day: "10 standing ovations is a clear sign of momentum!"[74] Cain's media star

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[69] http://www.hawaiifreepress.com/Articles-Main/ID/4307/RESULTS-Cain-tops-Hawaii-GOP-Presidential-Straw-Poll

[70] https://www.denverpost.com/2011/07/31/cain-wins-straw-poll-at-western-conservative-summit-in-denver/

[71] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/08/georgia-gop-votes-for-native-cain-062188

[72] http://content.usatoday.com/communities/onpolitics/post/2011/09/florida-straw-poll-2012-perry-romney-paul/1#.ZD8ms3bMLq6

[73] https://archive.nytimes.com/query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage-9403E5D7143EF936A1575AC0A9679D8B63.html

[74] https://twitter.com/THEHermanCain/status/117707583975981056

was suddenly soaring: his Florida straw poll victory garnered him headlines from outlets as ideologically polarized as Fox News[75] and the Huffington Post,[76] and the tone of his media coverage became more positive (Sides and Vavreck 2013: 50).

The Florida news also gave Herman Cain's campaign a jolt in several subsequent straw polls which only further cemented his stature in the race. Cain received nearly half the vote in a National Federation of Republican Women survey on October 1, 2011,[77] and won the TeaCon Midwest straw poll in Schaumburg, Illinois on the same day.[78] Later that month, Cain would pick up straw poll victories at the Orangeburg County Fair in South Carolina,[79] Republican Midwest Leadership Conference in Saint Paul, Minnesota,[80] a Tea Party event in Columbia, South Carolina,[81] a "Tea Party and a Plate" dinner in Bismarck, North Dakota,[82] the Western Republican Leadership Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada,[83] a party survey in Anderson County, Tennessee,[84] and the West Alabama Straw Poll in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.[85]

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[75] https://www.foxnews.com/politics/herman-cain-upsets-gov-rick-perry-to-win-florida-gop-straw-poll#ixzz1Yug3RtJX

[76] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/herman-cainflorida-straw-poll-results-2011_n_979096

[77] https://web.archive.org/web/20111003081701/http://www.myfoxny.com/dpps/news/cain-wins-gop-women-straw-poll-dpgonc-km-20111002_15296668

[78] https://web.archive.org/web/20120612105659/http://www.560wind.com/pages/strawpoll

[79] https://thetandd.com/news/article_eab54294-f551-11e0-81a1-001cc4c03286.html

[80] https://www.startribune.com/cain-tops-in-midwest-leadership-conference-straw-poll/131397013/

[81] https://www.postandcourier.com/free-times/archives/cain-wins-s-c-tea-party-straw-poll/article_9b8870b5-a24f-5162-b0e1-41eaf9ba216c.html

[82] https://web.archive.org/web/20120501213609/http://plainsdaily.com/entry/herman-cain-bette-grande-rick-berg-and-jack-dalrymple-win-nd-tea-party-straw-poll/

[83] https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/gop-presidential-primary/176457-herman-cain-wins-straw-poll-in-nevada/

[84] https://web.archive.org/web/20120810054547/http://andersoncountyrepublican.com/?p=1223

[85] https://www.al.com/tuscaloosa/2011/10/herman_cain_tuscaloosa.html

<u>I Am America</u>

By June 2011, Cain had already captured enough attention that *National Review* asked the question, "Is Cain Able?"[86] Cain, the magazine noted, had "managed to turn his lack of experience…into an asset," but the article also wondered if Cain's "unsettling capacity for incitement" would begin to make his "refreshing honesty" simply appear "amateurish."[87] In the June 20, 2011, edition of *The Weekly Standard*, John McCormack wrote similarly that Cain's "rhetoric can be both uplifting and strident."[88] Beyond these conservative magazines, Cain was also becoming a hit with Fox News personalities who seemed particularly willing to patiently grade him on a curve: Sean Hannity declared "I love the guy," and Dana Perino willed on his campaign's momentum observing he was "the most personable and success agrees with him. Every time he does a little bit better, a little more confidence, a little bit more relaxed and a little bit more able to explain his policies" (Coombs 2013: 81). But Cain would have to navigate a media landscape already becoming attuned to his unpolished and ill-prepared policy pronouncements. Cain flip-flopped within the same day on whether he would ever negotiate with terrorists,[89] and in one interview, Cain was unfamiliar with the term "neoconservative."[90] Though it would be a less frequent thorn in his side than

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[86] https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2011/06/20/cain-able/
[87] Ibid.
[88] https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/a-cain-do-candidate
[89] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-could-be-haunted-by-hostage-question-from-las-vegas-republican-debate/2011/10/18/gIQA7fv3vL_blog.html
[90] https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/10/herman-cain-doesnt-know-what-neoconservative/336726/

foreign policy, Cain also struggled throughout the campaign to define and maintain a consistent position on social issues like abortion[91] and same-sex marriage.[92]

As the pre-primary campaign progressed, Herman Cain would indeed continue to raise eyebrows with his public statements on numerous topics but would then typically follow up shortly thereafter—often in a softball interview with a sympathetic forum—where he would counteract the outrage by falling back on his populist persona or chalking it up to mainstream media bias. Cain represented a blunt, passionate, and often erratic alternative to the blander establishment choice, Mitt Romney, and these contrasting qualities were precisely what made him appealing to a partisan audience itching for a straight-talking fighter (Miller et al. 2013: 114). In this way, Herman Cain developed a blueprint for insurgent candidates of the future to follow.

On multiple occasions, Herman Cain expressed a distrustful attitude toward Muslims. In a March 21, 2011, article from *Christianity Today*, Cain expressed his fear that "based upon the little knowledge that I have of the Muslim religion, you know, they have an objective to convert all infidels or kill them."[93] In November 2011, Cain told an audience how he was concerned about receiving care from a doctor whose name, "Dr. Abdallah," sounded "too foreign," until he was assured the doctor was a Lebanese Christian.[94] Most notoriously, on multiple occasions, Cain

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[91] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/herman-cain-and-abortion-flip-flop-flip/2011/10/24/gIQAZ16NDM_blog.html
[92] https://theweek.com/articles/480745/herman-cains-latest-flipflop-federal-gaymarriage-ban
[93] https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2011/jun/08/herman-cain/cain-denies-claims-he-said-he-would-not-appoint-mu/
[94] https://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/herman-cain-holy-land-experience-130621445.html

raised the specter of Sharia law becoming "infused" into American law and politics,[95] and used this concern as a justification for applying additional scrutiny to any potential Muslim members of his administration—or perhaps barring Muslims from consideration entirely.[96] Explaining his logic to Neil Cavuto on Fox News shortly thereafter, Cain justified his litmus test as a necessary—and somehow patriotic—breach of political correctness:

> "A reporter asked me would I appoint a Muslim to my administration. I did say 'No' and here's why, but the reporter didn't tell you this: I would have to have people totally committed to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of this United States, and many of the Muslims, they are not totally dedicated to this country, they are not dedicated to our Constitution, many of them are trying to force Sharia law on the people of this country. And so, yes, I did say it, and that is because I don't have time to be watching someone on my administration if they are not totally committed to the Declaration, and the Constitution of the United States, and the laws of this country … We have become a nation of crises, Neil, and being politically correct isn't something I'm gonna spend a whole lot of my time worrying about when we've got all of these other problems that we're facing right here in this country."[97]

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[95] https://www.politico.com/blogs/politico-now/2011/10/cain-sharia-law-could-come-to-us-039639
[96] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/herman-cain-muslims-right-online_n_879852#s294502&title=John_LaRosa
[97] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8jGnpbED9E

At times, Cain attempted to neutralize foreign policy and security issues by claiming he could not make decisions or commit to any specific plans until he was privy to information and intelligence reports that he lacked access to before he would be elected.[98] In one interview, Cain made this excuse through a folksy reference, saying his "foreign policy is not an instant-grits policy," and in another instance bluntly told a reporter "I'm not going to pull a plan out of my ass."[99]

Cain drew a blank in May 2011 when asked by Fox News' Chris Wallace about his position on the Palestinian right of return.[100] Cain had the opportunity to do damage control on Hannity two nights later, when he admitted "I didn't understand the right of return," and tried spinning the ordeal as a positive reflection of his own candor, saying in the third-person: "The thing that you're gonna learn about Herman Cain, if he doesn't know something, he's not going to try and fake it, or give an answer that he doesn't know what he's talking about."[101]

Explaining in an October 8, 2011, interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network how he would handle "gotcha" questions from journalists quizzing him on details of "small insignificant states around the world," Cain remarked: "When they ask me who is the president of Ubeki-beki-beki-beki-stan-stan I'm going to say, 'You know, I don't know. Do you know?'[102] This remark drew backlash from some who

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[98] https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/may/22/cain-no-talk-about-security-until-elected/
[99] https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2011/06/20/cain-able/
[100] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/05/cain-stumbles-on-palestinian-question-055484
[101] https://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/cain-i-didn-t-understand-the-right-of-return-video
[102] http://blogs.cbn.com/thebrodyfile/archive/2011/10/08/exclusive-hermain-cain-feeling-like-moses-and-ready-for-media.aspx

pointed out Uzbekistan's strategic importance to the U.S.,[103] and even drew the

attention of Hamid Karzai, then-president of Afghanistan.[104]

On October 15, 2011, Cain told a crowd at a Tennessee campaign rally that

he would build a 20-foot-tall electrified barbed wire fence on the U.S.-Mexico

border.[105] He also floated that he would be willing to deploy the military "with real

guns and real bullets."[106] Anticipating critics who would call his proposal

"insensitive," Cain explained, "It's insensitive for them to be killing our citizens,

killing our border agents. That's what's insensitive. And that mess has to stop."[107]

The crises facing the country, Cain insisted, were too severe to be handled with

typical elite complacency and must instead be handled forthrightly with common

sense by a bold leader. Though Cain briefly attempted to brush off this border

proposal as a "joke," he later said in the same news conference "it might be

electrified…I'm not walking away from that," and immigration hawk Maricopa

County, Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio offered public support for Cain, explaining,

"He's controversial…He tells it like it is."[108]

In an October 31, 2011, PBS NewsHour interview with Judy Woodruff, Cain

claimed that China had "indicated that they're trying to develop nuclear capability,"

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[103] https://www.politico.com/blogs/ben-smith/2011/10/uzbek-bek-outrage-at-cain-040069
[104] https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/20/herman-cain-hamid-karzai-knows-your-name/
[105] https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/cain-proposes-electrified-border-fence/
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] https://www.ajc.com/news/national/cain-seeks-clarify-fence-comment/2aJK6Oby6mN1iAY4Pa7zNJ/

which they had accomplished nearly fifty years prior.[109] Again, Cain was given an

opportunity in a sympathetic venue to atone for his mistake; in a subsequent

interview with the Daily Caller, Cain explained he may have "misspoke" and simply

meant to point out "China does not have the size of nuclear capability that we

have."[110] Cain used the interview as yet another opportunity to brandish his

populist brand and blame his media scrutiny on the transgressive threat he posed

to an elite establishment: "That is the D.C. culture," Cain said. "Guilty until proven

innocent."[111]

Herman Cain appeared stumped by a question about Libya in a November

14, 2011, interview with the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*; to make matters worse

for Cain, the interview segment was circulated on YouTube.[112] Cain's campaign

spokesperson, J.D. Gordon, blamed the mishap on Cain only having four hours of

sleep the previous night and then attacked the journalists' credibility by vaguely

implying the uproar may have been fueled by "how the video was edited."[113]

Speaking in June 2011, Cain drew on frustrations with Congress and the

legislative process, telling an Iowa crowd:

"Engage the people. Don't try to pass a 2,700 page bill — and even they didn't

read it! You and I didn't have time to read it. We're too busy trying to live —

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[109] https://hotair.com/allahpundit/2011/11/01/cain-on-china-theyre-trying-to-develop-nuclear-capability-n181681
[110] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/11/cain-and-thomas-together-at-last-067515
[111] https://dailycaller.com/2011/11/03/dc-exclusive-interview-with-herman-cain-guilty-until-proven-innocent-video/
[112] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WW_nDFKAmCo
[113] https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-stumbles-badly-on-libya-question/2011/11/14/gIQADxpoLN_blog.html

send our kids to school. That's why I am only going to allow small bills —

three pages. You'll have time to read that one over the dinner table."[114]

Soon backtracking from this three-page threshold, Cain claimed he was

exaggerating for rhetorical effect to make the point that every bill should include an

executive summary for the public "so that they will know what's in it."[115]

Perhaps no policy proposal from any candidate drew as much attention as

Herman Cain's "9-9-9 Plan" for comprehensive tax reform. The core pitch of the plan

was to replace the vast majority of the federal tax code with three flat 9 percent

taxes each on corporate income, personal income, and sales.[116] The 9-9-9 Plan was

an instant conversation-starter. A few conservatives expressed support for at least

some aspects of the proposal: Larry Kudlow wrote a defense of the plan's intentions

and cited the approval of Paul Ryan, Art Laffer, and the Club For Growth.[117]

But the 9-9-9 Plan also garnered intense opposition across the political

spectrum: anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist slammed the plan's creation of a new

national sales tax,[118] liberal economist Paul Krugman objected to the corporate tax

as functionally a tax on wages,[119] National Review's Kevin D. Williamson expressed

skepticism of the plan's revenue neutrality,[120] and the nonpartisan Tax Policy

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[114] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/herman-cain-three-page-limit-legislation_n_873128
[115] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/herman-cain-retreats-from-three-page-bill-promise/
[116] https://web.archive.org/web/20110926051459/http://www.hermancain.com/999plan
[117] https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/10/15/cain_the_tax-code_killer_111695.html
[118] https://money.cnn.com/2011/10/17/news/economy/herman_cain_taxes/index.htm
[119] https://archive.nytimes.com/krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/a-bit-more-about-cain/
[120] https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/09/nein-nein-nein-kevin-d-williamson/

Center conducted an analysis that found 84 percent of households would pay more in taxes under the plan.[121] One widespread criticism of the 9-9-9 Plan even accused it of being lifted from the default tax rates in the 2003 video game *SimCity 4*.[122] Despite these dismissals of his 9-9-9 Plan as "too simplistic" or regressive (Coombs 2013: 80), Cain "uttered the triple digits repeatedly, metronome-like, in speeches and debates, until they had acquired the catchy power of a brand."[123] This catchy brand was no accident and Cain himself was its progenitor: when campaign advisor Rich Lowrie proposed the name "Optimal Tax," Cain himself decided "We're just going to call it what it is: 9–9–9 Plan."[124]

Cain's presidential rivals attacked the 9-9-9 Plan in the October 2011 debate: Rick Perry and Mitt Romney both predicted opposition in states that had no existing state sales tax and would effectively have their taxes raised under the plan, Michele Bachmann worried aloud whether "liberal" politicians of the future could be trusted not to dramatically raise the national sales tax rate past 9 percent, Rick Santorum expressed displeasure with how the plan eliminated tax benefits designed to incentivize raising families, and Ron Paul panned the plan's regressivity.[125] Cain responded to these attacks by accusing opponents as speaking for "lobbyists accountants, [and] politicians" who benefit from the existing tax code, which he claimed "manipulate[s] the American people with a ten million word

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[121] https://money.cnn.com/2011/10/18/news/economy/cain_999_plan/
[122] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/herman-cain-999-sim-city_n_1008952
[123] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/us/politics/herman-cains-tax-plan-changes-gop-primary-math.html
[124] https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204774604576629433751126652
[125] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kivX5zqQLp0

mess."[126] Cain explained further: "Therein lies the difference between me, the nonpolitician, and all of the politicians…They want to pass what they think they can get passed rather than what we need, which is a bold solution. 9-9-9 is bold, and the American people want a bold solution."[127]

Although Cain's 9-9-9 Plan became a cornerstone of his campaign, it was bafflingly missing from his book, which instead advocated adopting two previously existing conservative tax reform proposals: Congressman Paul Ryan's tax plan, and then eventually the FairTax proposal (Boortz and Linder 2005), which would replace all federal taxes with a national retail sales tax (Cain 2011). That 2011 campaign autobiography, *This is Herman Cain!*, couched his defiant business successes from Coca-Cola to Pillsbury to Burger King to Godfather's Pizza as evidence of his tenacity and management skill. As one summary of the book put it, Cain's "message was one of simple and direct approaches to problems, and he argues in his book that his dynamic leadership, rather than any specific policy proposals, could cure what ills the American spirit and economy" (Miller et al. 2013: 106). Parts of the book are written from an imagined future as if he has already won the presidency and spends an entire chapter describing the significance of the number "45" to him—a not so subtle reference to how he would be the 45th President of the United States (Cain 2011).

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[126] Ibid.
[127] https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2096836-1,00.html

Cain's ability to connect with voters despite such glaring policy shallowness baffled many observers (Miller et al. 2013: 121). As *Time* magazine put it on October 24, 2011, Cain "until recently was a punch line for political insiders," but "now the joke is on the establishment."[128] *The Weekly Standard*'s John McCormack wrote the same day handicapping Cain's odds in the race going forward:

> The big question now is whether Cain can consolidate his gains and actually win the nomination. There are reasons to believe that, yes, he can. Cain is the most charismatic candidate in the GOP race. He's a great speaker and has a good sense of humor. He is ideologically in tune with conservatives, who make up the base of the Republican party. Cain is the only candidate to offer a bold and specific plan to transform the tax code—his 9-9-9 plan, a 9 percent sales tax, 9 percent flat income tax, and a 9 percent business tax. And the polls indicate that his surge may have legs."[129]

National Review's Rich Lowry lamented what Cain's prominence revealed about the contemporary presidential selection process:

> "Cain's candidacy reflects the ever-lowering bar for running for president. Pat Buchanan was a media figure who ran for president; now some people run for president to become media figures. Cain is such a winsome personality that he gets away with shameless excesses of self-promotion."[130]

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[128] https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2096836-1,00.html
[129] https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/the-cain-surge
[130] https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/11/cains-knowledge-deficit-disorder-rich-lowry/

Herman Cain was given an opening by favorable treatment that highlighted how his "good humor and crowd-pleasing oratory skills added entertainment value to the field" (Coombs 2013: 165). While he—and many others who have experienced similar surges–ultimately faced press scrutiny that helped tie an anvil to his presidential aspirations, there is no guarantee a decline will automatically follow. Cain's own example provides some evidence that his campaign's demise was neither absolute nor inevitable.

Where's The Beef?

Herman Cain's meteoric ascent to the top of the polls was not immediately undermined by his numerous aforementioned policy stumbles, but it also occurred despite Cain's dearth of elite backing, unorthodox campaign organization, and even questions regarding how seriously he took his own candidacy. There had been no closed-door meeting of large dollar donors and elected officials months or years earlier to anoint Herman Cain and organize the Republican Party apparatus behind him.

Cain was undeniably surging despite clearly lacking "campaign funds, a seasoned campaign team and the support of key party leaders."[131] But, as one October 2011 article explained as it described Cain's packed schedule of media appearances in New York City, "in a campaign that can seem like reality television, the Hermanator, as he likes to call himself, simply puts on a great show."[132] Cain

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[131] https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2096836-1,00.html
[132] Ibid.

was demonstrating how mass appeal was a potentially fruitful tactic if your candidacy hinged on doing an end-run around party elites, as Michael Steele explained: "He has managed to outwit the smart intelligentsia of the GOP and position himself with the base, the people actually doing the voting."[133]

Critics[134]—even some former members of his campaign staff[135]—disapproved of his strategy of eschewing states with the earliest voting contests for parts of his book tour and accused Cain of being more focused on promoting himself to a national audience than truly trying to win the nomination.[136] Yet Cain explained how his itinerary was motivated by a synthesis of those two goals, which included appearances that day on *Hannity* and *The View*: "I have to try and increase my national name I.D., which is why I have to take advantage of some of this media."[137] Cain, one report at the time indicated, was "operating on a shoestring," and had to bank on bringing his "fiery conservative populism" to a mass audience through media appearances and his book tour as a "proxy" for any traditional retail politicking effort in Iowa and New Hampshire.[138] The effort seemed to be paying off:

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[133] Ibid.

[134] https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/10/herman-cain-skips-out-on-early-states-to-push-his-new-book/246260/

[135] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/us/politics/as-cain-touts-management-skills-ex-aides-tell-of-chaos.html

[136] https://swampland.time.com/2011/10/06/herman-cain-flash-in-the-pan-or-serious-candidate/

[137] Ibid.

[138] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/us/politics/gop-hopeful-herman-cain-on-book-tour-not-campaign-trail.html?_r=2&hp

Cain's book had become the ninth-best seller on Amazon.com within a day of its release.[139]

While his public persona was that of a business titan, Cain did not have nearly the level of personal wealth at his disposal as did other similar personalities like Steve Forbes, Donald Trump, Michael Bloomberg, or Tom Steyer (Miller et al. 2013: 112).[140] Cain's fundraising operation also lacked the significant support of traditional big check Republican donors: 54 percent of Cain's total campaign contributions came from contributions under $200 each, which was the largest percentage of small donations in the field; by contrast, only 11 percent of Mitt Romney's campaign contributions were made by small donors (Miller et al. 2013: 211). This fundraising reality prevented him from building the sort of extensive campaign operation that is typical at the presidential level.

In fact, Herman Cain's key campaign staff—who held corporate sounding titles like Director of Development—was largely a team of obscurities and cast-offs (Miller et al. 2013: 112-113). His campaign's "Chief of Staff," Mark Block, had a checkered past from his previous political activities in Wisconsin, including having been caught stealing opponents' campaign signs and creating a slush fund for the reelection campaign of Supreme Court Justice Jon Wilcox, which cost him a $15,000 fine and an agreement not to work on any campaigns until 2004.[141] Allegations of

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Miller et al. (2013) writes that Herman Cain reported a net worth between $2.9 million and $6.8 million, which pales in comparison to billionaires like Trump, Bloomberg, and Steyer—or even to Forbes' $450 million.
[141] https://www.milwaukeemag.com/TheStrangeLifeofMarkBlock/

campaign finance impropriety on Block's part at one point dogged Cain's

campaign.[142] Rich Lowrie, the architect of the 9-9-9 Plan whom Cain called his "lead

economist," routinely dodged questions seeking more details about the proposal; he

also lacked any formal academic training in economics and leaned into this fact by

stating, "I've never hung out in a faculty lounge."[143] The campaign routinely faced

"problems in hiring, scheduling, fund-raising, and messaging," including a fuss over

the campaign's directive for staff not to speak to Cain unless spoken to.[144]

Even the Cain campaign's attempts at advertising were at best sparse and at

worst comically bizarre (Miller et al. 2013: 119). In one now infamous commercial,

Cain's campaign chief Mark Block awkwardly stares into the camera and takes a

drag from a cigarette,[145] which became the subject of widespread parody,[146]

including by Cain's presidential rival Jon Huntsman,[147] and led some reporters to

ask the campaign if the ad was itself satirical.[148] Another web video posted to

Herman Cain's YouTube channel, which also generated media buzz,[149] features a

fourth-wall breaking celebrity endorsement from actor Nick Searcy nestled in a

strange Western-themed scene where a cowboy confronts two inebriated "card-

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[142] https://archive.jsonline.com/watchdog/noquarter/state-firms-cash-to-herman-cain-may-breach-federal-campaign-tax-laws-132898423.html/

[143] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/us/politics/herman-cains-tax-plan-changes-gop-primary-math.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha2

[144] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/us/politics/as-cain-touts-management-skills-ex-aides-tell-of-chaos.html

[145] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwawPMSJins

[146] https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204777904576653341511408706

[147] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOYVB2hc0HA

[148] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/us/politics/as-cain-touts-management-skills-ex-aides-tell-of-chaos.html

[149] https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/herman-cains-other-viral-vide/

carrying" liberals.[150] Cain's was also the only Republican presidential campaign to have produced its own original music video, complete with a country-rock theme song and a cameo appearance from Joe "The Plumber" Wurzelbacher.[151]

Evidently, Herman Cain's candidacy received little, if any, help from elite resources, his personal fortune, or even his own campaign team. Instead, Cain consciously embraced a mass media strategy.

Discovery, Scrutiny, Defense

On October 30, 2011, Politico dropped an exclusive bombshell report: while leading the National Restaurant Association in the 1990s, Herman Cain had been accused of sexually inappropriate behavior by two women who were ultimately given financial settlements to leave their jobs at the organization and were prohibited by terms of the agreements from commenting further on their circumstances.[152] The report also detailed ten days of the Cain campaign making evasive and contradictory statements on the matter; in one instance, Cain himself was asked whether he had ever been accused of sexual harassment, and then "breathed audibly, glared at the reporter and stayed silent for several seconds. After the question was repeated three times, he responded by asking the reporter, "Have *you* ever been accused of sexual harassment?"[153] The following day, Cain publicly contradicted himself by first claiming he was not aware of the settlements,

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[150] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSlC7BxmSqY
[151] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOFB-2yJzCY
[152] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/10/exclusive-2-women-accused-cain-of-inappropriate-behavior-067194
[153] Ibid.

but then acknowledging later that day in another interview that he was indeed

aware of them, but dismissively referred to the underlying accusations of

impropriety as a "witch hunt" based on "anonymous sources."[154] Before walking off

stage from his speech at the American Enterprise Institute that day, Cain defiantly

assured the crowd, "By the way, folks, yes I am an unconventional candidate. Yes, I

do have a sense of humor. Some people have a problem with that. Herman is going

to stay Herman. Thank you very much."[155]

The story would continue to snowball as more accusers emerged. On

November 3, 2011, a third woman accused Cain of sexual harassment, alleging that

he commented suggestively about her appearance and invited her to join him in his

apartment.[156] Cain responded to this accusation by comparing himself to Clarence

Thomas, and accusing a liberal media of attacking him for being a black

conservative.[157]

On November 7, 2011, a fourth woman accused Cain of sexual misconduct,

alleging that Cain had sexually assaulted her in his car in 1997 as a quid pro quo

for her employment.[158] The following day, Cain told a press conference "I don't even

know who this lady is,"[159] but the accuser's account was corroborated by her then-

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[154] https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/cain-campaign-prepares-for-scrutiny-of-harassment-allegations/
[155] Ibid.
[156] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/11/gop-pollster-makes-cain-accusation-067473
[157] https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2011-nov-04-la-na-cain-race-20111105-story.html
[158] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-11-07/cain-accused-of-sexual-harassment-by-ex-restaurant-group-employee-bialek
[159] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/herman-cain-addresses-sharon-bialeks-charges-as-he-meets-the-press-in-arizona-on-tuesday/2011/11/08/gIQATeB01M_story.html

boyfriend,[160] and it was becoming abundantly clear that Cain's campaign had an existential problem on its hands.

Cain seemingly hoped he could do damage control on this scandal the way he had numerous times before: blame it on political correctness and media bias, fall back on defenses from allies in sympathetic media, and just keep blazing the campaign trail as if nothing happened. For much of this scandal, that approach was surprisingly effective in shielding Cain from its consequences—despite the retrospective narrative that Cain simply experienced a period of scrutiny and decline.[161]

The initial reaction to the accusations in conservative circles—both among the elite and the rank-and-file—was shockingly positive for Herman Cain. The day after the first allegations of sexual harassment surfaced, Fox News reported:

> "Ka-ching, ka-ching! Now, that is the sound of Herman Cain's campaign cash register. . . . It all started yesterday when presidential candidate Cain began facing questions about two allegations of sexual harassment. How busy is the cash register? Well, Mr. Cain made $300,000 on line yesterday, the biggest one-day haul of his campaign" (Coombs 2013: 96).

Several prominent conservative commentators vocally defended Cain against the accusations, including Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, and Donald Trump, who told

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[160] http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/14/politics/cain-allegations/index.html
[161] Sides and Vavreck (2013) in particular develop the "discovery, scrutiny, decline" framework and consider Cain one prime victim of it. While a fair and insightful general theory, it overlooks some valuable nuances in specific cases like Cain's.

Fox News' Greta Van Susteren: "I think it's a very ugly witch hunt and I think it's very unfair. You say, Oh, hello, darling, how are you? And you get sued because you've destroyed somebody's life. It's ridiculous. And I think it's very unfair to him" (Coombs 2013: 96-97). Celebrity endorser Nick Searcy publicly came to Cain's defense as well.[162]

The scandal did nothing to dampen Herman Cain's appeal to audiences either. In one example, Cain gave a speech on November 4, 2011, at the Americans for Prosperity's Defending the American Dream Summit in Washington, D.C. that reportedly "tore the house down," inducing the audience to go "bananas," and shower Cain with "multiple standing ovations," which stood in clear contrast to the "tepid applause" Mitt Romney had received minutes earlier.[163] Even into November, after sexual harassment allegations had been reported about him, Cain was racking up straw poll victories, such as at the Republican Party State Dinner in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on November 5,2011,[164] and in a Missouri Tea Party survey on November 19, 2011.[165] Cain's poll standing also increased slightly in the days following the initial allegations.

Despite being held during the swirling scandal, the November 9, 2011, debate in Michigan did not expose Herman Cain to attack from opposing candidates; in

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[162] https://variety.com/2011/biz/opinion/nick-searcy-on-herman-cain-ad-a-satire-on-celebrity-endorsements-37164/

[163] https://www.businessinsider.com/cain-i-am-the-koch-brothers-brother-from-another-mother-2011-11

[164] https://madvilletimes.com/2011/11/05/herman-cain-wins-south-dakota-straw-poll-sdgop-wants-to-raise-your-taxes/

[165] https://www.fultonsun.com/news/2011/nov/20/cain-wins-state-poll-tea-party-members/

fact, the crowd booed the moderator for asking a question about the allegations, and even Mitt Romney—his main rival at the top of the polls—refused to offer a criticism, instead saying, "Look, Herman Cain is the person to respond to these questions. He just did. The people in this room and across the country can make their own assessment."[166] The debate would instead come to be largely defined by Rick Perry's infamous "oops" moment. Another candidate forum held in the days following the allegations, a Lincoln-Douglas style debate featuring Herman Cain and Newt Gingrich hosted by the Texas Tea Party Patriots PAC, ignored the subject entirely at the behest of the organizers,[167] with the group's president telling reporters, "The focus of this event is not about gossip."[168]

Even elected officials seemed unfazed by the scandal. It produced no notable condemnation from the Republican side of the aisle; in fact, Herman Cain's sole endorsement from a member of Congress over the entirety of his presidential campaign, courtesy of Michigan Representative Dan Benishek, came on November 5, 2011—five days after the initial sexual harassment allegations against Cain were publicly reported and two days after the third accuser stepped forward.[169]

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[166] https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-campaign-debate/update-4-cain-escapes-serious-damage-in-republican-debate-idUSN1E7A810I20111110

[167] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/for-gingrich-and-cain-its-a-friendship-and-a-contest/2011/11/05/gIQAvWTBqM_story.html

[168] https://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/cain-gingrich-debate-organizer-no-harassment-gossip-event-190539594.html

[169] https://www.politico.com/story/2011/11/cain-lies-low-snags-endorsement-067675

On November 13, 2011, nearly a full week after the fourth accusations, *GQ Magazine* ran a story under the headline "A Pizza Party with Herman Cain" wherein they describe Cain's standing in the race at that point:

"No matter where you stand on Herman Cain—whether, in your evolving estimation, he's a populist hero, a charming buffoon, or a thuggish sexual predator—let's all agree that American presidential politics has never seen anything like him. The former CEO of Godfather's Pizza is the political equivalent of anti-gravity; he'd do or say something dumb (pick your oughta-be-fatal head-slapper: the abortion flip-flop, the gay-marriage confusion, the negotiating-with-terrorists gaffe, that loopy cigarette campaign spot) and his poll numbers would go up.

After two weeks of ugly sexual-harassment allegations against Cain, almost all dating back to his tenure as president of the National Restaurant Association in the late 1990s, Cain's popularity has finally begun inching downward. Inching. Not plummeting. And the man's certainly not withdrawing from the race—not when he's still improbably atop the GOP field. What in the name of 9-9-9 is his secret?[170]

Taken together, this evidence hardly paints the picture of a candidate who immediately floundered under overwhelming condemnation and abandonment. Quite the opposite, the impulse across the conservative world was evidently to either dig into a defensive posture or wait for the scandal to blow over.

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[170] https://www.gq.com/story/herman-cain-interview-alan-richman-chris-heath-devin-gordon

Nevertheless, the Cain campaign realized the potential threat this escalating

situation could present. Cain retained attorney Lin Wood to handle the situation,

but Wood himself contributed to the media firestorm when he told the Associated

Press that anyone should "think twice" before making these accusations, which

some interpreted as an intimidation tactic.[171] Wood, echoing Cain and his

prominent defenders, seemed to blame media bias for the scandal, saying "Mr. Cain

is being tried in the court of public opinion based on accusations that are

improbable and vague. The media — bless your heart — you turn our system of

justice into one of guilt by accusation."[172]

On November 28, 2011, Cain was accused by a fifth woman, Ginger White, of

engaging in an extramarital affair with her for thirteen years and giving her money

to support her.[173] Though Cain claimed White was merely a friend whom he had

given money because he is "a soft-hearted person," he also acknowledged the

political maelstrom of the preceding month had taken its toll on his family and he

would be spending a few days with his wife to consider dropping out of the

presidential race.[174] Even at this point, after the fifth accusation against Cain had

been leveled and his campaign was openly previewing its imminent demise, Fox

News correspondent James Rosen, a straight journalist at the network, implied

Ginger White was an unreliable accuser, describing her as "an unemployed single

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[171] https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna45249802
[172] Ibid.
[173] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/ginger-white-accuses-herman-cain-of-long-affair/2011/11/28/gIQA6H6T6N_story.html
[174] https://archive.nytimes.com/query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage-9D05E3D71439F931A35751C1A9679D8B63.html

mother," who had "once settled a sexual harassment claim against someone else and has a history of litigation" (Coombs 2013: 104).

On December 3, 2011, Herman Cain announced he was suspending his presidential campaign at the behest of his family.[175] At his "defiant" announcement, Cain walked to the podium holding hands with his wife, Gloria, and insisted once more that the allegations against him were "false and untrue."[176] Cain concluded his remarks by quoting inspirational lyrics from the theme song of *Pokémon: The Movie 2000* that he had previously misattributed to a poet and to the closing ceremony of the 2000 Summer Olympics.[177]

Maybe his family really did insist he end his campaign to stop the accusations. Maybe five accusations was just one scandal too many to bear. Cain's drastic decision to end his campaign did come as a reaction to the mounting sexual harassment scandal, but it would be an oversimplification to conclude that Cain had no choice but to do so because he had been hopelessly abandoned by either his media allies or the rank-and-file Republican electorate. Notably, Cain decided to drop out of the race while still polling at 14% in the RealClearPolitics average. Had Cain decided to stubbornly stick it out, one may reasonably wonder if he might have experienced another renaissance later in the campaign as Romney struggled to pull away from the pack.

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[175] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/us/politics/herman-cain-suspends-his-presidential-campaign.html
[176] https://www.cnn.com/2011/12/03/election/2012/cain-campaign/index.html
[177] https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2011/08/did_herman_cain_know_he_was_qu.html

As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, Herman Cain's overall media trajectory over the course of the pre-primary campaign was a decidedly upward one before he decided to step aside. While Cain's season of dominance in the fall certainly stands out, Cain's momentary early spikes and steadily rising baseline in the spring and summer are a testament to the strength of his media presence.

Figure 5.1: Cain Daily Share of Candidate Mentions (Jan. 2011-Jan. 2012)
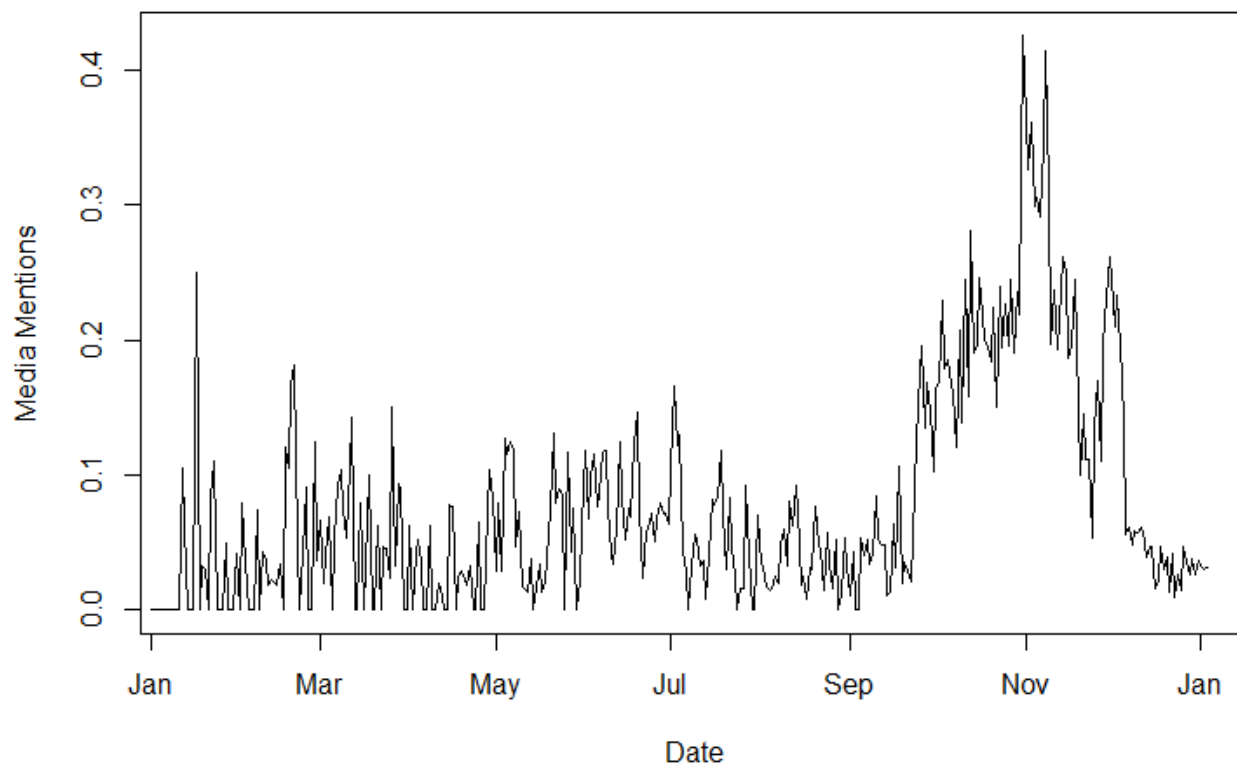
Figure 5.2 illustrates a few more insights into Cain's experience.[178] Cain's right leaning media coverage consistently outpaced his coverage in left-leaning media by a substantial margin—with the exception being the few days surrounding

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[178] Cain was not included in a public poll until April 2011, so this graph can only begin exploring the relationship between media coverage and polls at that point. The fact that he was obscure enough before then not to even be included in public polls is itself an indicator that Cain was not considered a viable candidate by any traditional metric of formidability at the outset of the campaign or even in much of its early going.

when the sexual harassment allegations against him first occurred. Notably, his right-wing media attention would surge a few days later as they increasingly stepped up to defend him. Cain's right wing media coverage also seems to precede his October 2011 surge, while his left-wing media attention was comparatively muted. These findings are certainly consistent with a world in which Cain's surge was enabled by the avenue to Republican primary voters afforded by his partisan-aligned media. By cultivating a formidable presence in the emergent conservative media ecosystem, Herman Cain could effectively bypass the elite gatekeepers who wield traditional resources and instead make his appeals directly to the mass public. In an earlier era, this avenue simply did not exist.

Figure 5.2: Cain Daily Polling Average and Share of Mentions in Right-wing and Left-wing Media (Apr. 2011-Dec. 2011)
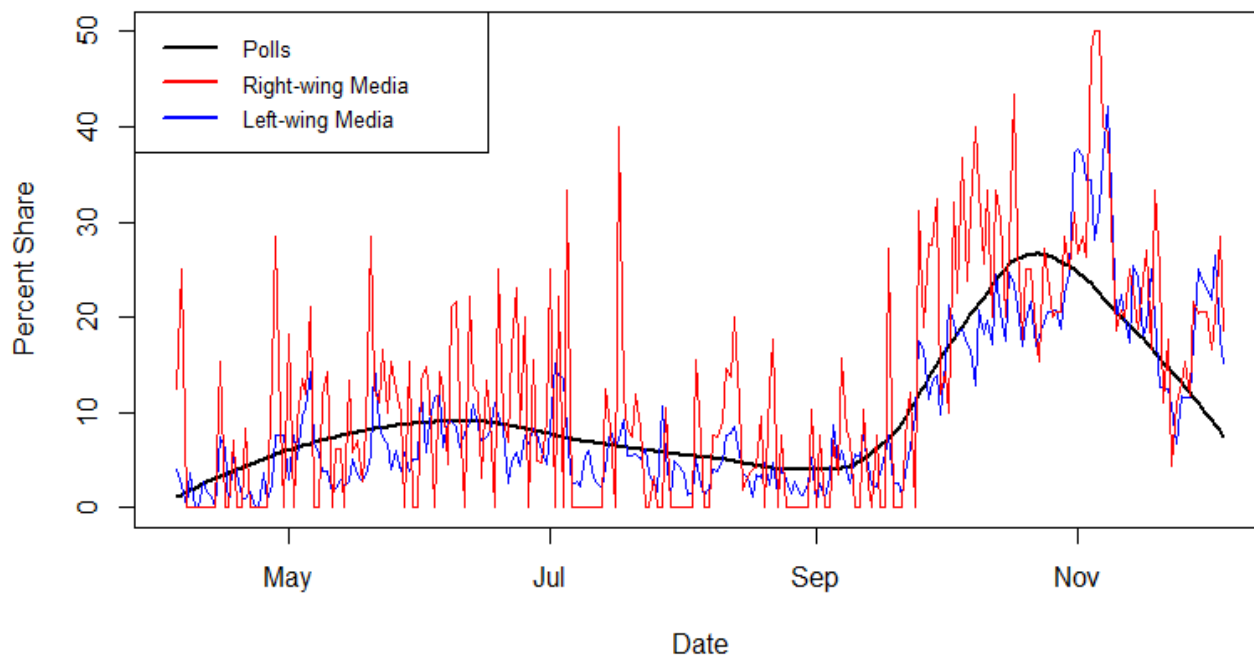
Although it was appealing for some to dismiss Herman Cain as an anomalous mirage, a bizarre aberration in an otherwise orderly process, this dismissive

interpretation divorces Cain's campaign from the successes of outsider candidates like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in subsequent campaign cycles following a strikingly similar blueprint. Cain should be remembered more as a canary in the coal mine than as a unicorn in the garden. Even without compiling the traditional resources of endorsements and high-dollar donors, insurgent presidential candidates have a very real path to viability by exuding charisma at highly publicized events, bucking establishment consensus-building through populist appeals to factional interests and allowing these moments—even the negative ones—to be framed and amplified by sympathetic voices in their party's media landscape.

Bushwhacked: The 2016 Jeb Bush Campaign

Nearly everything about Jeb Bush's prominent pedigree would have predicted his own ascent to a successful national political career. The son and brother of two previous Presidents with access to their extensive network of acolytes, Jeb Bush occupied a unique position in the Republican Party. He was also a two-term Governor of Florida from 1999 to 2007 who had succeeded in implementing several conservative policy priorities, built a national profile intervening in the Terri Schiavo case, established a tech-savvy reputation as the "eGovernor,"[179] and left office with a 64 percent approval rating.[180] Bush's

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[179] https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/jeb-bush-e-governor-kathryn-jean-lopez/
[180] https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2015/03/05/jeb-bush-record-florida-governor/24473497/

reputation expanded beyond the political arena: he had also led an annual charity golf event that raised money for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation,[181] served on numerous corporate boards[182] including Tenet Healthcare[183] and Lehman Brothers,[184] and even garnered interest from the National Football League to serve as their next Commissioner.[185] Nevertheless, Jeb Bush's pre-primary experience in the 2016 presidential campaign cycle would be a decline from celebrity to obscurity.

<u>Can I Do it Joyfully?</u>

The 2016 election cycle was not the first time Jeb Bush's name was circulated as a potential candidate; in fact, he had been courted in the run-up to the 2012 campaign, but publicly turned the opportunity down.[186] Speaking that year, Bush lamented "how immature and unstatesmanlike it was that these aspiring leaders of the free world were duking it out on Twitter with sarcastic hashtags and so-called memes" (Coppins 2015: 14). At the outset of his 2016 campaign, Bush was still perturbed about the sensationalist arena he would be entering. Describing his thought process on launching a presidential campaign to reporters in January 2014, Jeb Bush explained "the decision will be based on, can I do it joyfully, because I

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[181] https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fort-lauderdale/fl-cn-beachbash-1214-20141217-story.html

[182] https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/us/politics/jeb-bushs-rush-to-make-money-may-be-hurdle.html

[183] https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/economy/2007-05-10-3254091799_x.htm

[184] https://www.reuters.com/article/fundsFundsNews/idUSN3046902620070830

[185] https://web.archive.org/web/20060602111107/http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,196801,00.html

[186] http://web.archive.org/web/20121117170249/https://www.nationalreview.com/articles/259099/bush-2012-rich-lowry

think we need to have candidates lift our spirits. It's a pretty pessimistic country right now."[187] Bush's posture was already crystalizing: the national political discourse had become undignified and cynical, but he—much like his brother before him[188]—would cut through the gloom with a hopeful and optimistic campaign.

The Party Decides on Jeb

As early as March 2014, just under two years before the first caucus-goers would ultimately cast their votes, Republican elites were already actively assessing the field of potential presidential nominees as they typically had in the "invisible primary" for several cycles. But this coordination effort was not so "invisible" after all: the *Washington Post*'s Philip Rucker and Robert Costa reported extensively on these elite maneuvers that month based on interviews with 30 senior Republicans.[189] As Rucker and Costa explained, "prominent donors, conservative leaders and longtime operatives" were "concerned" and "alarmed" with the stable of likely candidates. For instance, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie found himself politically crippled by the "Bridgegate" scandal, and Kentucky Senator Rand Paul appeared to be amassing a formidable anti-establishment following. So, the article informed the public, "the Republican Party's most powerful insiders and financiers have begun a behind-the-scenes campaign to draft former Florida governor Jeb Bush into the 2016 presidential race." One bundler quoted in the piece declared,

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[187] https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/jeb-bush-still-undecided-on-2016-presidential-run/
[188] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pjqKy0vzMk
[189] http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/influential-republicans-working-to-draft-jeb-bush-into-2016-presidential-race/2014/03/29/11e33b06-b5f2-11e3-8cb6-284052554d74_story.html.

"[e]verybody that I know is excited about it," calling Bush "the most desired candidate out there." One Vox article written shortly thereafter referred to Bush's recruitment as an illustration of how *The Party Decides* theorizes the "invisible primary" plays out; namely, as an example of how "party insiders' actions during this phase play a hugely important and often decisive role in determining the nominee."[190]

For his part, Jeb Bush was not exactly a reluctant presidential candidate. A year earlier, he had co-authored a book about immigration policy, upon which his portrait was affixed as the cover image.[191] In addition to the credentials mentioned in the previous section, Bush had kept himself actively engaged in the national conversation—both public and private. Bush spent the better part of 2014 crisscrossing the country publicly speaking about political issues and barnstorming for midterm candidates,[192] while privately meeting with key party figures, including at a lavish VIP dinner hosted in Las Vegas by megadonor Sheldon Adelson.[193] Again, these elite deliberations and recruitment efforts were well-publicized. Neither Jeb Bush nor Republican elites were caught off-guard by the others' interest in them, and the elite coordination taking shape behind Jeb Bush was neither half-hearted nor reluctantly constrained by the existing cast of candidates.

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[190] https://www.vox.com/2014/12/29/7450793/invisible-primary
[191] https://www.amazon.com/Immigration-Wars-Forging-American-Solution/dp/1476713464/
[192] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/possible-2016-race-hangs-in-the-air-as-jeb-bush-and-hillary-rodham-clinton-share-billing/2014/03/24/6f6317a2-b36c-11e3-8cb6-284052554d74_story.html
[193] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2014/03/22/sheldon-adelson-plans-vip-dinner-for-jeb-bush-at-gop-gathering-in-vegas/

The party decided on Jeb in full view of the public, and Jeb was ready and willing to oblige them.

On December 16, 2014, just over two years before the first contests would be held, Jeb Bush announced his decision to "actively explore the possibility of running for President of the United States."[194] At that time, Bush already sat atop the Republican polls.[195] Following this "exploration" announcement, Bush's allies worked behind the scenes in an aggressive effort they dubbed "shock and awe" to quickly consolidate support and vanquish their rivals (Sides et al. 2018: 41). While he was certainly not garnering the near universal levels of elite support that Hillary Clinton was in the Democratic contest, Jeb Bush notched some noteworthy early successes that are typical of elite favored frontrunners.

In one instance, Bush's campaign successfully outmaneuvered Marco Rubio's for the support of Florida's political insiders (Coppins 2015: 325, 35–36). In one fell swoop on June 12, 2015, Bush received endorsements from eleven members of Florida's congressional delegation, including all three Cuban-American representatives from Miami, and three state cabinet members.[196] These endorsements were not only significant in the way any endorsement helps build a candidate's clout, but were specifically intended to kneecap Rubio's campaign and to

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[194] https://www.facebook.com/notes/785591758950204/

[195] This is the case in my own compiled polling average, but is also true of other external polling averages like this one from Real Clear Politics: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/us/2016_republican_presidential_nomination-3823.html

[196] https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/06/12/before-official-announcement-jeb-bush-shows-off-support-inside-florida/

signal to the public that Bush was preferred by those in these candidates' home state who knew them best.

Jeb Bush was also initially a strong enough establishment preference that he demonstrated the ability to keep his clearest early rival off the field entirely. In January 2015, Mitt Romney, the party's 2012 presidential nominee, indicated to donors that he was considering another presidential campaign in 2016.[197] By the end of the month, Romney announced he would not run for president again; reports indicated Bush had already largely consolidated the support of key operatives Romney had previously relied upon and those establishment figures were unwilling to defect.[198] Romney's decision to forgo another presidential run, according to one CNN article, "anoint[ed] Jeb Bush as the clear establishment favorite in the Republican presidential race."[199]

Finally, as is usually the case for elite favorites, Jeb Bush demonstrated prodigious fundraising prowess drawing from the party's typical donor class. His SuperPAC, Right to Rise, raised nearly $122 million over the course of the campaign,[200] which was more outside support than that of any presidential candidate of either party besides Hillary Clinton. Jeb Bush's candidate committee was similarly well-financed: 72 percent of his contributions came from maximum

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[197] https://www.wsj.com/articles/romney-tells-donors-he-is-considering-2016-white-house-bid-1420839312
[198] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/31/us/mitt-romney-2016-presidential-election.html
[199] https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/30/politics/mitt-romney-exit-jeb-bush/index.html
[200] https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/right-to-rise-usa/C00571372/summary/2016

donations of $2,700 (Dominguez 2019), and only 6 percent of Bush's campaign

contributions were smaller than $200.[201]

In these early moments of his nascent campaign, Jeb Bush was doing exactly

what was expected of a candidate recruited, cultivated, and supported by party

elites: hindering rivals by compiling endorsements, amassing funds, and leading

polls. Citing Bush's vast resource network and the unlikelihood of a formidable

conservative opposition, a May 31, 2015, article in Politico Magazine emphatically

shot down any suggestion of suspense in the race under the headline: "Newsflash:

It's Going To Be Hillary vs. Jeb."[202] But these initial displays of strength would

subside as the campaign rolled on and Jeb Bush had to contend with a media

landscape he was ill-equipped to navigate.

Gaffes, Guffaws, & Gaucheries

Almost as soon as he stepped out into the national spotlight, Jeb Bush began

committing a series of blunders in plain view that cumulatively belied his air of

inevitability and contributed to an emerging narrative that he was a lethargic,

repellent anachronism. Over the course of his campaign, Jeb Bush's public persona

devolved from the capable scion of the Republican Party's greatest dynasty to a

tired relic of a bygone era.

In a harbinger of his forthcoming struggles to navigate the new media

landscape, On January 6, 2015, Bush announced the launch of his PAC, Right to

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[201] https://www.opensecrets.org/pres16/candidate?id=N00037006
[202] https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/05/2016-hillary-vs-jeb-118466/

Rise, in a video recorded vertically but inelegantly formatted horizontally.[203] Bush's

early technological fumbles did not stop there. The next month, Bush publicly

released emails from his eight years as Governor of Florida on a website intending

them to be a proactively transparent gesture to the public, but the emails

mistakenly contained "sensitive information about those who corresponded with

Bush, including email and home addresses, Social Security numbers, and details of

personal turmoil."[204] Then, on the same day as the email debacle, the chief

technology officer of Right to Rise PAC—who was primarily responsible for handling

the team's digital presence—resigned after past racist, misogynistic, and

homophobic comments publicly came to light.[205] These early episodes tarnished

Bush's brand as the "eGovernor" and journalists began wondering aloud whether

Bush—who had last run for political office in 2002—was truly capable of navigating

the digital age.[206]

Bush also quickly found himself talking his way into controversy. In a Fox

News interview with Megyn Kelly on May 11, 2015, Jeb Bush was asked whether

"knowing what we know now" he would have authorized the invasion of Iraq, and

he answered, "I would have."[207] Facing media backlash the following day, Bush

claimed through an ally that he misheard the question and then told Sean Hannity

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[203] https://twitter.com/jebbush/status/552485006073806848
[204] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/kyleblaine/jeb-bush-email-dump-contains-sensitive-personal-information
[205] https://www.politico.com/story/2015/02/ethan-czahor-jeb-bush-2016-elections-115106
[206] https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2015/02/11/jeb-bush-floridas-egovernor-gets-a-social-media-f
[207] https://www.npr.org/2015/05/12/406241779/jeb-bush-faces-criticism-over-iraq-war-comments

in an interview that evening, "I interpreted the question wrong, I guess. I was talking about, given what people knew then."[208] On May 13, a visibly frustrated Bush complained to a testy crowd in Reno, Nevada that "hypothetical" questions were a "disservice" to those who had served.[209] Finally, on May 14, Bush fully reversed course, saying, "[k]nowing what we know now I would not have engaged—I would not have gone into Iraq."[210] *The Guardian*'s Ben Jacobs summed up this Iraq snafu and the ensuing media firestorm as Jeb Bush's "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad week."[211]

By the time he officially announced his candidacy on June 15, 2015, Jeb Bush already faced press scrutiny that he was "sorely lacking in pep," and that the "ordeal" of a mass campaign "was wearing on him" (Coppins 2015: 360).

A series of additional missteps in August 2015 would only intensify this perception. During a trip to the U.S.-Mexico border, Bush responded to criticisms of his use of the pejorative term "anchor babies," but exacerbated the outcry with an unforced error when he opined, "Frankly it's more Asian people," who he was referring to—singling out a particular ethnic group.[212] Jeb Bush already faced withering attacks from more conservative candidates for referring to illegal

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[208] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/13/us/politics/jeb-bush-ana-navarro-and-the-question-that-may-have-been-misheard.html
[209] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/05/13/on-the-trail-jeb-bush-faces-hostile-questions-about-iraq-war/
[210] https://time.com/3859074/jeb-bush-iraq/
[211] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/may/15/jeb-bush-iraq-war-ivy-zietrich-isis-george-w-bush
[212] https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/jeb-bush-chill-out-criticism-anchor-baby-term-n415051

immigration as an "act of love," but Donald Trump's Instagram post that month, which included a video criticizing the comment by juxtaposing it with images of mugshots,[213] represented a pivotal moment when Instagram matured from simply a photo-sharing site for "gauzy images of happy people doing cool things," and became a political tool with the capability of inducing mainstream media attention.[214] In one more August gaffe, while speaking about Planned Parenthood's federal funding at the Southern Baptist Forum, Bush remarked, "I'm not sure we need half a billion dollars for women's health issues," necessitating a follow-up statement clarifying that he "misspoke" by not specifying his support for other women's health care providers, but the gaffe was augmented by his campaign clumsily releasing the statement online, emailing a version to reporters without the "misspoke" line, pulling the online statement back, and then emailing a new version to reporters that included the line.[215] Unforced errors are painful enough for a candidate to endure, but they are all the more fatal when the campaign fails to synchronize their message across the multiple communicative media that now exist, or when rival candidates more effectively leverage those emergent media. By the end of the month, the damage had been done; as one journalist put it, Bush "seems incapable of saying anything snappy or memorable."[216]

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[213] https://www.instagram.com/p/7DdvbEmhWG/
[214] http://www.sfchronicle.com/business/article/Trump-and-Bush-attack-ads-turn-Instagram-into-a-6486213.php
[215] https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/250250-jeb-bush-says-he-misspoke-about-womens-health-funding/
[216] http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/the-trials-of-jeb-bush

By September 2015, *The New York Times* called back to Jeb's initial optimistic posture by acknowledging, "Mr. Bush does not seem to be radiating much joy these days."[217] Rather than consolidating support behind a "joyful" campaign as he had once hoped, Jeb Bush found himself sliding into obsolescence and was patently miserable.

Jeb Bush's campaign was clearly moving in the wrong direction. As his public persona eroded, Bush's endorsement and fundraising advantage evaporated too. Rather than insulate him from the gusting media narrative, these elite enclaves responded to Jeb's lackluster media persona and began abandoning ship. By October 2015, the Bush campaign had no choice but to hollow out its operations to cut costs.[218] On October 15, 2015, referencing the campaign's earlier maneuvers, the *Washington Post* declared in a headline, "No more 'shock and awe': Jeb Bush now just another presidential aspirant."[219] Another slew of cringeworthy public statements dogged Bush that October. At a public appearance in Greenville, South Carolina, Jeb Bush was speaking about gun policy a day after a deadly mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon. Bush remarked "Look, stuff happens and the impulse is always to do something and it's not necessarily the right thing to do." His "stuff happens" phrasing prompted a public

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[217] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/us/politics/jeb-bush-donald-j-trump-2016-presidential-election.html

[218] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/10/23/jeb-bush-shakes-up-his-struggling-campaign-with-major-spending-cuts/

[219] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/jeb-bushs-fundraising-pace-dropped-sharply-in-third-quarter/2015/10/15/b7eeaae8-7352-11e5-8d93-0af317ed58c9_story.html?utm_term=.b939caa62288

rebuke from President Obama at a press conference shortly thereafter.[220] Then at a

question-and-answer session in Las Vegas, Bush was given a light-hearted question

asking him to name his favorite superhero. In his answer, Bush said, "I saw that

Supergirl is on TV…she looked pretty hot," and then, after a few seconds of nervous

laughter from the audience, he acknowledged, "That'll make news."[221] And at the

third Republican debate on October 28, 2015, Bush said, "You find a Democrat

that's for cutting taxes -- cutting spending $10, I'll give them a warm kiss."[222]

Perhaps a charismatic, populist candidate jockeying for attention and actively

juxtaposing themselves against the elitist establishment could have gotten away

with these sorts of comments, but they directly undermined the reputation of a

candidate positioned as the establishment's polished, consensus pick.

Even the Bush campaign's aesthetic qualities became a subject of derision.

The campaign logo, simply Jeb's first name followed by an exclamation point,[223]

drew "guffaws that it was unoriginal and lacking in design elements," despite being

a direct throwback to logos Bush used in his gubernatorial campaigns.[224] Bush

attempted to defend his campaign logo to Stephen Colbert in an interview, stiltedly

explaining that "it connotes excitement."[225] Some English linguists have noted that,

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[220] https://www.politico.com/story/2015/10/jeb-bush-oregon-campus-shooting-stuff-happens-214386
[221] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTPzpyPyD40
[222] https://www.politico.com/video/2015/10/bush-promies-democrats-a-warm-kiss-if-they-cut-spending-030929
[223] https://twitter.com/JebBush/status/610063493237084160
[224] https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/06/15/jeb-bush-shows-loyalty-to-a-logo-derided-by-some/index.html
[225] https://www.rawstory.com/2015/09/it-connotes-excitement-jeb-bush-awkwardly-explains-campaign-logo-to-stephen-colbert/

in the digital age, exclamation points are increasingly used as "the adverb of punctuation; if you have to put it in, then maybe the sentence didn't do its job."[226] Likewise, the logo ridicule implied that Jeb himself simply did not organically generate enthusiasm.

<u>Low Energy</u>

Though Jeb Bush continuously found himself struggling with campaign dynamics that had seemingly passed him by, Donald Trump's command of the public conversation enabled him to mockingly typecast Bush as "low energy," which became perhaps the most persistent label of Bush's listless public persona.[227] At one New Hampshire appearance, Trump even facetiously claimed Bush was putting his audiences to sleep.[228]

If Bush subsequently demonstrated moments of gusto, they were dismissively teased as a surprising exception to the rule or a purposeful stunt. The debates became fertile ground for these insults. Donald Trump and Jeb Bush got into a feisty exchange in a September 2015 debate, prompting Trump to quip, "More energy tonight—I like that," triggering laughter in the audience.[229] At the next debate, Trump joked "Jeb wants to be a tough guy tonight…He wants to be a tough guy…and it doesn't work very well," then reverted back to bullying Bush by making

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[226] https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/fashion/exclamation-points-and-e-mails-cultural-studies.html
[227] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/us/politics/jeb-bush-sprints-to-escape-donald-trumps-low-energy-label.html
[228] https://www.msnbc.com/up-with-steve-kornacki/watch/trump--bush-trade-shots-during-nh-town-hall-510987843752
[229] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rDUYZIUUjs

a shushing gesture to him and saying, "Quiet."[230] And at a December 2015 debate, after Bush remarked, "This is a tough business, to run for president," Trump sarcastically said "Oh, I know you're a tough guy, Jeb, I know, real tough," while rolling his eyes and eliciting laughter.[231]

At some points, seemingly because there were few other options, even Jeb Bush himself leaned into this "low energy" label. For instance, he told an audience, "I'll just give you a little taste of the 'low energy' candidate's life this week," and at one debate said he would want his Secret Service code name to be "Eveready—it's very high-energy, Donald," before exchanging a low-five with Donald Trump.[232] These attempts to reclaim ownership of the "low energy" label did little to improve Bush's public image.

The "low energy" label stuck to Bush like glue in large part because of how relentlessly it echoed through the new media landscape. In one example, Trump posted an Instagram video styled after a pharmaceutical commercial showing a woman apparently falling asleep as Bush spoke, and featuring a narrator asking "Having trouble sleeping at night? Too much energy? Need some low energy? Jeb, for all your sleeping needs."[233] This video quickly became viral online, and CNN ran a story about it, explaining in the first line that Trump had "yet again" called Bush

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[230] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG6_5m8RIIg
[231] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MdIri5ji68
[232] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/us/politics/jeb-bush-donald-j-trump-2016-presidential-election.html
[233] https://www.instagram.com/p/7YV_u_mhWB/

low energy.[234] In another example, Trump called into Fox Sports 1's *The Herd with Colin Cowherd* and repeatedly deployed the low energy barbs at Bush's expense, which quickly spawned a Breitbart story amplifying the attacks.[235] Ultimately, Trump's attacks burned in because he tapped into social media's potential as an agenda setting tool (e.g., Conway et al. 2015; Conway-Silva et al. 2018) and effectively employed a hybrid media strategy (Chadwick 2017) that kept older and newer media in conversation with each other.

The "low energy" attack was just one aspect of a consistent Trump effort to emasculate Jeb Bush by highlighting his inability to stand up for himself. In one example, after Former First Lady Barbara Bush had made a public appearance campaigning on behalf of her son, Trump tweeted that Bush "had to bring in mommy to take a slap at me."[236] Trump's strategy, which he would later apply to other rivals,[237] represents a particularly potent application of longstanding tendencies for candidates to strategically invoke gender stereotypes—specifically, the extent to which one's presidential qualities overlap with their ostensible masculinity or "toughness" (Dittmar 2015; Kimmel 2017).[238]

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[234] https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/09/politics/jeb-bush-donald-trump-attacks-fighting-back/index.html
[235] https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2015/11/02/trump-hits-low-energy-bush-lightweight-rubio-in-fox-sports-interview/
[236] https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/695979656617578496
[237] https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/704014599708876800?s=20
[238] Dittmar wrote a blog post in July 2020 further explaining what she coins "The Masculinity Trap in Electoral Politics." That post can be found here: https://cawp.rutgers.edu/blog/masculinity-trap-electoral-politics. This gendered rhetoric, whereby ideal presidential character is framed as a rugged masculinity, has been a surprisingly common occurrence in American political campaigns throughout history. In one early example, James Callender, a journalist aligned with Thomas Jefferson in the 1800 election campaign, lampooned

Trump's attacks also implicated Bush's network of establishment support by implying he needed them out of weakness. For example, at multiple debates, Donald Trump claimed booing audience members were "donors," "lobbyists," and "special interests," affiliated with Bush.[239] Given the way George W. Bush's administration had ended, and many conservative activists' discontent with Bush era policies they felt were elitist and ideologically objectionable, the support of party elites was often a difficult brand for Jeb Bush to carry. Rather than contributing to the viability of Bush's candidacy, the much-publicized elite support of Jeb Bush eventually became a ripe target of criticism and perhaps even a sign of weakness. Trump, after all, did not need an army of endorsers, donors, and consultants to do his fighting for him.

Jeb Can't Fix It

After another "widely panned" and "flat-footed" debate performance in November 2015, Jeb Bush had been firmly saddled with the "low energy" label and compiled a litany of awkward, stilted moments on the campaign trail.[240] Perhaps seeing few other options, Bush outwardly pivoted his persona to that of a policy wonk by launching a "Jeb Can Fix It" tour built around the release of an e-book, "Reply All," that contained a curated collection of emails from his gubernatorial

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incumbent President John Adams as "a hideous hermaphroditical character which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman" (Cummins 2012: 27).
     [239] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwYGHQcYiFw; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG6_5m8RIIg
     [240] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/11/02/jeb-bush-hopes-new-e-book-can-help-relaunch-a-struggling-campaign/

tenure primarily focused on highlighting his engagement with state policy.[241] "I

hope you enjoy reading about medical liability tort reform, because it was one of my

top priorities for 2003," Bush wrote at one point (Bush 2015: 430). Rather than

deftly recalibrate the campaign discourse toward policy issues and governing

experience, the "Jeb Can Fix It" slogan became prime fodder for online ridicule,

trending on Twitter and Facebook as memes of it circulated.[242]

Another problem for Bush's public persona which openly contradicted this

policy wonk pivot, was how he had become visibly irritated with the tenor of the

campaign cycle, and it had started bleeding through in his public comments on

himself, his rivals, and the media. He admonished Marco Rubio's relative youthful

exuberance by warning Republicans not to "roll the dice on another presidential

experiment," rebuked Donald Trump's celebrity persona by maintaining "you can't

just tell Congress 'You're fired' and go to a commercial break," and ultimately

contrasted himself as a candidate ill-suited for a campaign "about sound bites or

fantasy football, or which candidate can interrupt the loudest."[243] Bush complained

about his relative lack of attention, saying "I could drop my pants. Moon the whole

crowd. Everybody would be aghast, except the press guys would never notice."[244] As

the *Washington Post*'s Ed O'Keefe reported, Bush openly questioned the merits of

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[241] Ibid.

[242] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/11/03/jeb-can-fix-it-backfires-horribly-at-the-hands-of-internet-meme-makers-and-trolls/

[243] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/down-in-the-polls-jeb-bush-launches-a-comeback-attempt/2015/11/02/00ce27f2-818b-11e5-a7ca-6ab6ec20f839_story.html

[244] https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2016/02/06/jeb-bush-fighting-for-survival-new-hampshire-symbol-gop-establishment-weakness/u0eRx0ydhhl29N3qrhmqnM/story.html

the contemporary campaign environment that had seemingly passed candidates like him by:

> Toward the end of his speech in Tampa, Bush said he has received "a lot of advice lately . . . more than enough." He wondered aloud what kind of trivial advice Abraham Lincoln would have to endure if he were alive today. "Advisers telling him to shave his beard," quipped Bush. "Cable pundits telling him to lose the top hat. Opposition researchers calling him a five-time loser before the age of 50."
>
> He concluded: "I can't be something I'm not."[245]

On December 8, 2015, while speaking in New Hampshire, an exasperated Bush vented to reporters about their focus on Donald Trump at the expense of more traditional candidates like himself:

> "I've just laid out comprehensive plans to destroy ISIS…and to deal with the refugee challenges and to deal with our entitlement problems and our tax code and all this, and he's playing you guys like a fine Stradivarius violin. This is what he does. He's an expert at this. He's phenomenal at garnering attention."[246]

By the twilight of his campaign, Bush's patience for the contemporary campaign environment appeared to have run out. In February 2016, when a Yahoo News reporter sarcastically asked him if the exclamation point in his logo was appropriate

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[245] Ibid.

[246] https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/12/08/jeb-bush-takes-voter-questions-but-has-no-answer-for-donald-trump/

given his calls for a "quieter president," an aggravated Bush simply responded,

"Take a hike, man."[247] Bush's displeasure was eventually directed at his audience.

While speaking at a February 2016 town hall meeting in Hanover, New Hampshire,

Bush was attempting to convince the gathered crowd that his temperament made

him the right fit for the presidency:

> "So here's my pledge to you: I will be a commander-in-chief that will have the
>
> back of the military. I won't trash talk. I won't be a divider-in-chief or an
>
> agitator-in-chief. I won't be out there blowharding, talking a big game
>
> without backing it up. I think the next president needs to be a lot quieter but
>
> send a signal that we're prepared to act in the national security interests of
>
> this country—to get back in the business of creating a more peaceful world."

His statement, evidently intended to serve as an applause line, was initially

met with silence. Bush then awkwardly implored the audience to "please clap."[248]

This final indignity came to define Jeb Bush's inability to connect with the

electorate.

The Party Undecides

Despite his vast resource network and early signs of formidability, Bush

struggled to escape his anachronistic persona, often described as "out of his depth—

ignorant of what modern campaigning entails" (Sides et al. 2018: 65). The media

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[247] https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/gop-primaries/268502-bush-slams-sarcastic-reporter-take-a-hike-man/

[248] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYau9SZXn54&pp=ygUUamViIGJ1c2ggcGxlYXNlIGNsYXA%3D

landscape had simply passed Jeb by, and it took his path to the Republican nomination with it.

The "invisible primary," supposedly arranged to build support around establishment favorites like Bush, instead saw his campaign wilt under the glaring spotlight. As already demonstrated in multiple analyses (e.g., Patterson 2016b; Sides et al. 2018: 57), Jeb Bush failed to eclipse Donald Trump's sheer dominance of media attention that followed his June 2015 campaign announcement at Trump Tower. To make matters worse, the media attention Bush received became increasingly negative: by December 2015, 70 percent of Bush's news coverage was negative—the worst rate of any major Republican candidate during the pre-primary period—and consistently framing his campaign as "losing ground" (Patterson 2016b). In the wake of this media barrage, Bush's net favorability among Republicans steadily declined over the course of the campaign from a high of nearly 30 points above water in May 2015 to 10 points underwater by February 2016 (Sides et al. 2018: 64). While Jeb Bush's prodigious fundraising and establishment support might have been more useful in a previous era, they likely hampered him in the 2016 environment. By floundering despite his extensive network of elite support and traditional campaign operation, Jeb Bush left little doubt that the problem was simply the candidate himself.

After a fourth-place finish in South Carolina where he received just under 8 percent of the vote, Jeb Bush announced he was suspending his presidential

campaign.[249] In a postmortem of Bush's unsuccessful candidacy, Politico's Eli

Stokols described Jeb as "a rusty and maladroit campaigner" whose critical

shortcoming was "a misunderstanding of a modern media environment ill-suited to

a policy wonk who speaks in paragraphs, not punchy sound bites."[250] Another

campaign autopsy from the *Washington Post*'s Ed O'Keefe called Bush a "technocrat

in a world of noise," who "obsessed over details of his exhaustive policy plans, but

abhorred political stagecraft."[251] And yet another campaign retrospective from *The

New Yorker*'s John Cassidy concluded that Bush "spoke woodenly," and "lacked

charisma, eloquence, passion, enthusiastic supporters, and a distinctive

message."[252]

As demonstrated in Figure 5.3, Jeb Bush experienced a clear downward

spiral in his overall media presence over the course of the whole pre-primary

campaign. Although he garnered typical frontrunner attention very early on, these

moments of dominance became less frequent and their peaks less lofty, as Bush slid

into life as an afterthought.

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[249] https://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-wins-south-carolina-republican-primary-ap-projects-1456014952

[250] https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/jeb-bush-dropping-out-set-up-to-fail-213662/

[251] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/jeb-bush-suspends-2016-campaign/2016/02/20/d3a7315a-d721-11e5-be55-2cc3c1e4b76b_story.html

[252] https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/who-killed-jeb-bushs-campaign-jeb-did

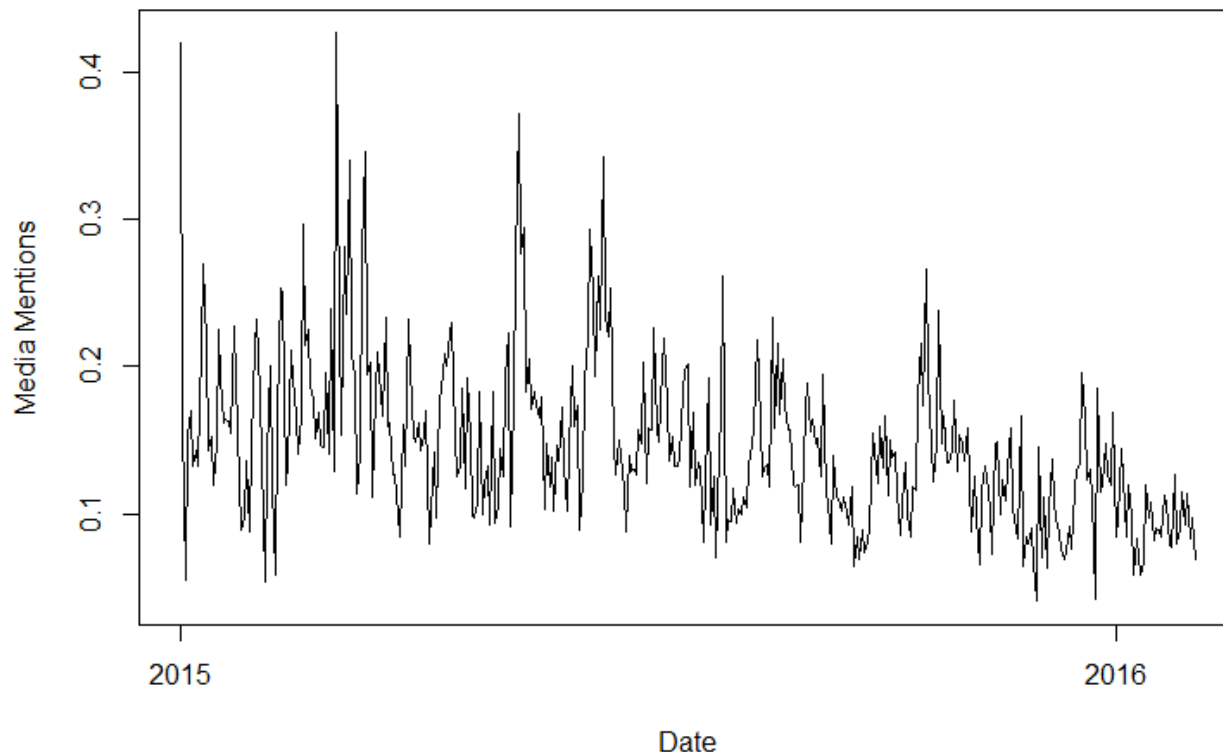**Figure 5.3: Bush Daily Share of Candidate Mentions (Jan. 2015–Jan. 2016)**

Figure 5.4 illustrates Bush's difficulties in his own media home turf, as it were, even earlier on in the race. Despite consistent attention in left-wing media, Bush frequently found himself bottoming out in right-wing media as more exciting candidates captured their attention. For much of the summer of 2015, Bush consistently tended to garner more attention from his opposed media ecosystem than from his partisan aligned outlets, which coincides with the decline in his poll standing. To make matters worse for Bush, by the fall of 2015, he was simply not generating many breakthrough moments of attention anywhere across the media landscape anymore. Although the relative volatility in right-wing media could be related to the slightly lower number of outlets and stories included in the analysis, the overall picture is certainly evidence consistent with a world in which Bush's

failure to generate excitement in right-wing media—or to cultivate a notably capable media persona anywhere across the media landscape—eventually filtered down to the Republican base.

Figure 5.4: Bush Daily Polling Average and Share of Mentions in Right-wing and Left-wing Media (Feb. 2015-Feb. 2016)
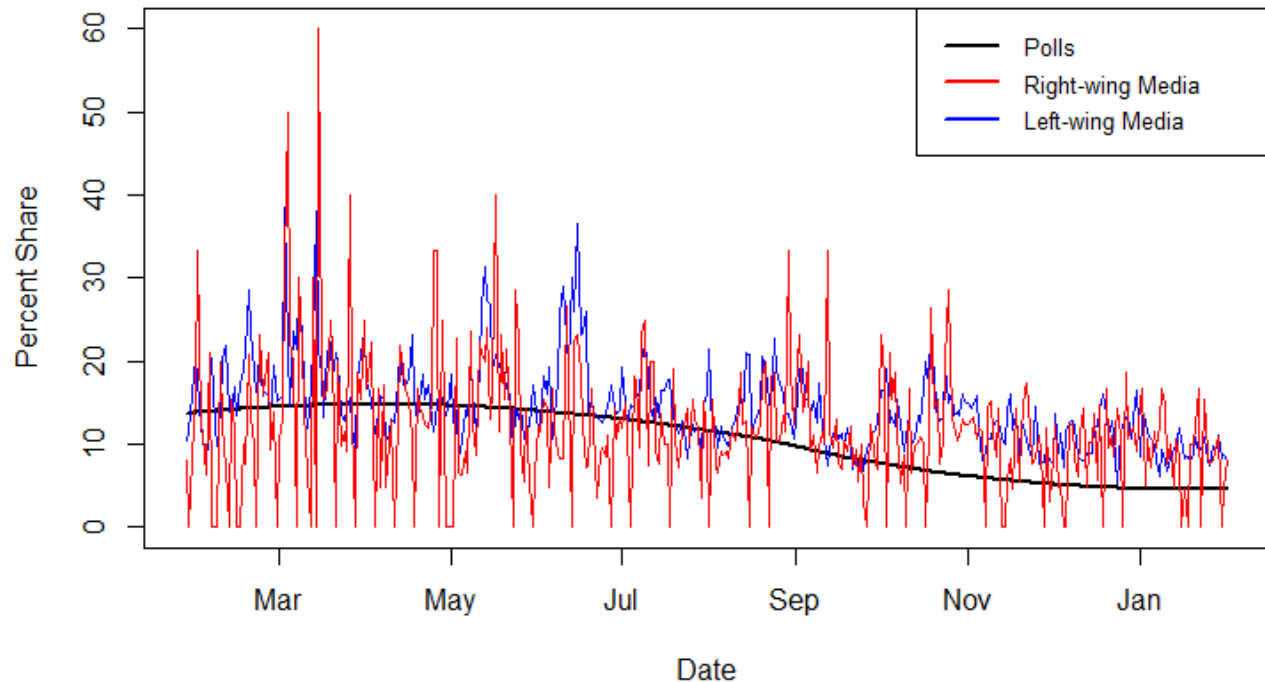
Consistent with how *The Party Decides* describes the dynamics of the pre-primary period, those in Bush's orbit believed their traditional organization, rather than the media discourse, would ultimately breed success in the way consensus candidates had previously flourished. But as Mike Murphy, chief strategist for Right to Rise PAC, explained after Bush's withdrawal: "Our theory was to dominate the establishment lane into the actual voting primaries. That was the strategy, and it did not work."[253] Although they believed their traditional resources would afford

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[253] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/fall-of-the-house-of-bush-how-last-name-and-donald-trump-doomed-jeb/2016/02/21/bc96cc62-d8d1-11e5-925f-1d10062cc82d_story.html

them the luxury of simply riding out the media storm, Jeb Bush's campaign learned the hard way that candidate viability cannot be achieved simply by winning parlor games; if a candidate is to emerge from the pre-primary in a formidable position, they must cultivate—at minimum—a passable public image.

Discussion

Nelson Polsby (1983: 146-149) warned that, as a consequence of changes to the presidential nomination process, candidates would have to proactively position their campaigns to fit into the media's enduring "heroes and bums" narratives. The pre-primary campaign trajectories of Herman Cain and Jeb Bush each exemplify a path that would have been highly improbable before the emergence of the new media landscape but nonetheless bring Polsby's expectations to life. Cain, a candidate known primarily for his captivating media persona and his populist appeals, emerged from relative obscurity to become—at least momentarily—a hero, while Bush, who possessed many traditional resource advantages but lacked a compelling media presence, faded into obsolescence as he became typecast as a bum. Herman Cain built his brand by making himself a consistent presence across the conservative media constellation and repeatedly relied on it as a defense mechanism when he faced scrutiny elsewhere. Jeb Bush, on the other hand, utterly failed to resonate with his co-partisans and his outmoded campaign ultimately became a target of rebuke. The main lesson of Herman Cain and Jeb Bush is that a presidential candidate's media persona, not simply their command of traditional resources, substantially determines their campaign's viability as the voting contests

approach. Although difficult to wholly quantify, these campaign dynamics come into focus through the wider lens of their tangible real-world examples.

This shift in dynamics is enabled by the twin democratization trends in both presidential nomination rules (e.g., Shafer 1983) and the evolving media landscape—in no small part through the ubiquity and partisanship of information sources that have proliferated in the digital media era (e.g., Prior 2007; Levendusky 2013). Through their study of social movements, communications scholars have illustrated how technological advancement in the media environment increasingly removes barriers to action (Bimber 2016) and places ever-growing organizational power "in the hands and minds of citizens" (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012: 21). Whereas the old presidential nomination system relied on party leaders convening to identify a consensus nominee with broad appeal, the new media landscape facilitates a process that increasingly revolves around mass communication and thus incentivizes candidates to cater directly to their party's factional interests— often through image appeals or by seizing on populist fervor—in search of a 'lane' to occupy (e.g., Ceaser 1979; Patterson 1980, 1993; Polsby 1983). Although political science tends to generally view personalities and day-to-day campaign occurrences as less important than journalists or campaign insiders assume (e.g. Campbell 2008; Gelman and King 1993; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992), and other contextual factors can certainly affect a candidate's trajectory,[254] this chapter demonstrates

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[254] One such contextual factor is the field of other candidates in the race. This could impact the race in several ways. A candidate could experience different trajectories depending on whether another candidate in the race is particularly combative towards them, or if another candidate is

how personalities and campaign occurrences are filtered through the mass media landscape and can substantially impact the presidential nomination campaign. This is a unique process where highly partisan and politically attentive rank-and-file voters constantly learn about the candidates (Zaller 1992: 253-258). Chapter 3 demonstrated the high visibility of the race during the "invisible primary," where extensive media coverage increasingly frames the campaign around a candidate's personality, style, and populist rhetoric, and Chapter 4 challenged attempts to dismiss this media coverage as merely "cheap talk" by demonstrating its significant impact on candidate standing. Candidate experiences like those described in this chapter of Herman Cain and Jeb Bush are consistent with these findings and add to our understanding of the pre-primary by illustrating how candidates can succeed or fail in continuously navigating this chaotic reality.

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competing for the support of the same ideological "lane" of the party as them. The sheer size of the field could affect candidates too, as a larger candidate pool tends to make it harder for an individual candidate to compete for the finite bandwidth of those tracking the race. Nate Silver has argued that the growing average number of candidates is associated with chaotic races and successes for candidates who are at odds with their party elites (https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/everyones-running-and-that-could-be-dangerous-for-the-democrats/), and Silver attributes the recently ballooning average candidate fields to the participants learning how a presidential run "gets you a lot of free media coverage that's worth quite a bit on balance despite the very high likelihood of winding up as a loser" (https://twitter.com/NateSilver538/status/1662827955804938240). Any coverage a candidate receives could help boost their campaign, but it also could line them up for a cabinet post or a commentator role, among other possibilities. These are undoubtedly powerful incentives to a political figure, and they are not easily neutralized by party elites.

CHAPTER SIX: AND THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

"In America, anyone can become President. That's the problem."

– George Carlin

This dissertation has put multiple literatures in conversation with each other and applied a mixed-method research approach to present a novel and comprehensive argument that the presidential nomination system is a media-centric process facilitated chiefly through the pre-primary coverage of a media landscape that did not exist when the system's earliest critics raised concerns. In concluding the project, this chapter will begin by briefly summarizing the preceding chapters' key findings. This chapter will then note some crucial limitations of the analyses conducted herein with an eye towards spotlighting fertile areas for future research. Finally, this chapter will culminate with a brief consideration of this dissertation's normative implications.

Key Findings

This dissertation began by tracing the history of presidential nomination campaigns and described the rank-and-file voters who are now entrusted with the authority to determine them. It then surveyed the historical evolution of the American media landscape with an eye towards what tendencies researchers have observed in news coverage and what effect this coverage has on its consumers, and what motivates these patterns of coverage. In both the political and communicative

realms, the trend towards democratization is unmistakable and inherently at odds with notions of elite control over presidential nominations.

This dissertation then began its empirical investigations with content analyses that demonstrated concerning trends in the media landscape's coverage of the presidential pre-primary. Candidates received extensive attention focused on horserace coverage, emphasizing personality and style while blending policy considerations with populist rhetoric. Negative coverage modestly increased but fell short of providing rigorous scrutiny to deserving candidates. Partisan media outlets exhibited even stronger biases, featuring heightened negativity and framing in strategy and populism. This tenor of the media landscape helps explain why party leaders struggle to guide the nomination toward consensus candidates: the ballooning amount of public attention on what was once dubbed the "invisible primary" increasingly prioritizes style over substance and conflates defiance of elite preferences with ideal policy.

Next this dissertation leveraged vector autoregression with Granger causality to cut through the "chicken-and-egg" problem and draw insights from far more granular observations and a much wider swath of media than previous research on pre-primary dynamics. The findings indicated media attention during the pre-primary directly and independently drives candidate viability in the run-up to the voting contests and thus cannot be easily dismissed as "cheap talk" or establishment signaling. There also was evidence of partisan disparity, as Republicans experience a partisan media landscape that influences candidate

standing but is detached from their party's elite endorsements and fundraising. These results demonstrate the influential role of media coverage in determining candidate viability before primaries and caucuses, which they have the capacity to wield in service of their own independent motivations and judgements.

Then this dissertation dove into case studies of two tremendously different pre-primary presidential campaigns to illustrate the substantial influence a candidate's media persona has on their viability. In a contemporary reflection of what Polsby (1983: 148-149) called "heroes and bums" typecasting, Herman Cain rode his captivating media persona and populist appeals to the top of the polls despite his initial obscurity and dearth of traditional resources, while Bush's lack of a compelling media presence led to his decline into insignificance despite his immense resources. Campaign trajectories like these, enabled by the democratization trend in nomination rules and augmented by democratization in the new media landscape, exemplify the tools candidates now wield to cater directly to factional interests and seize on populist fervor in lieu of establishment support.

Taken together, this dissertation provides a comprehensive examination of the intersection between presidential nomination campaigns and the evolving media landscape that has fundamentally altered the pre-primary period. What was once an opportunity for the "invisible" coordination of party establishments is now a glaringly visible competition for public attention characterized by mass appeals from candidates. The empirical analyses reveal concerning patterns in media coverage, which increasingly emphasizes the horserace, personality, and populism

while commonly lacking rigorous scrutiny of candidates. The findings also demonstrate the direct impact of this media attention on candidate viability and the evidence of partisan disparities in media influence. Furthermore, case studies exemplify the significant influence of a candidate's media persona on their campaign's success. In conclusion, this dissertation emphasizes the pivotal role of the media landscape in shaping presidential nomination campaigns through the pre-primary period and provides valuable insights into the obstacles confronted by party elites in steering the nomination towards their favored consensus candidates.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although this dissertation explored many crucial elements of how presidential nomination campaigns operate in the context of the new media landscape, there are certainly some avenues for future study deserving of a brief discussion. The most obvious opportunity for future research is to expand upon the data collection of this project.

One angle of that effort would be to better represent the entirety of the new media landscape. Despite the immense effort this project's manual data collection procedure entailed, and its substantial improvement upon other attempts to study this process, it still was not able to feasibly include every potentially noteworthy outlet or medium. Social media, specifically, warrants further study as it supplants television as Americans' primary mode of news consumption. Network analysis, for example, could illuminate how factional online communities discover favored candidates and then promote them from within. And with communicative

technology ever evolving, there will surely be ample opportunity to reevaluate presidential nomination campaign dynamics in light of whatever new innovations arise in the coming years. Future research could also attempt to classify the ideology of news outlets itself based on collected documents instead of relying on other researchers' evaluations, but this considerable undertaking may struggle to provide insights beyond the fairly obvious (e.g., Fox News is right-leaning, MSNBC is left-leaning).

Another way to improve upon this project's data collection would be to reach further back into past election cycles. Although this dissertation's data collection begins in the 2000 presidential campaign cycle, future analysis could supplement with articles and transcripts back to 1972 when the contemporary system began in earnest. This would also cover many more of the same years Cohen et al. (2008) study in their analysis, which could more directly test their endorsement-centric theory against this dissertation's media-centric one. While the new media landscape may have caused the dynamics of the pre-primary to change in recent years, it is also possible that a more comprehensive analysis would find media always mattered to this considerable extent.

Finally, although the pre-primary is a critical period in determining candidate viability, future research could reexamine campaign dynamics during the voting period to explore whether it functions significantly differently in the new media landscape. Previous research examined the phenomenon of media-driven "momentum" in great detail (e.g., Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988), but also has charted

the apparent demise of momentum (e.g., Norrander 2000; Haynes et al. 2004). Joe

Biden's ability to resuscitate his campaign during the voting period in 2020 serves

as an indicator that there must be some power left in momentum, but analyzing

how that process could play out more effectively in the contemporary media

landscape warrants further development.

Normative Considerations

As this dissertation reaches its end, it can briefly return to a question posed

in its introduction: are we doing a poor job of picking our presidents? To answer this

question, and understand its gravity for American politics in general, we should

begin by consulting the same scholars whose vision of the future proved remarkably

prescient.

Ceaser (1979: 10-27) outlines five "normative functions" that represent the

goals of a presidential selection system: "minimizing the harmful effects of…highly

ambitious contenders," "promoting the proper kind of executive leadership and

power," "securing an able executive," "ensur[ing] an accession of power that

is…legitimate," and "providing for the proper amount of choice and change." Though

the determinative role of the rank-and-file voter in the contemporary nomination

system achieves some ostensible sense of legitimacy and provides ample

opportunities for public input through binding voting contests, Ceaser (1979: 39-40)

openly questions whether this arrangement can justify the susceptibility of this

process to "image politics" and demagogues who could now claim a personal

mandate to ever expand executive authority—even if only to compensate for their leadership shortcomings.

Polsby (1983: 165-166) shares these discomforts regarding candidate quality and executive functioning, but also outlines several reasons why the heavy reliance on primary elections does not necessarily breed democratic accountability; namely, they do not always produce a Condorcet winner or the strongest general election candidate, they fail to account for the order or intensity of preferences, and they are determined by voters who are not representative of either the party or the general electorate. Evidently, one struggles to identify a key principle of presidential selection the contemporary nomination system leaves unscathed.

Polsby (1983: 146-149) also directly addresses what "governing without parties" will look like, as the mass media replaces them as political intermediaries. "Crazes or manias" will overemphasize short-term public opinion trends, "fads or social contagion" will spread viral ideas across the country, "the resuscitation of ideology" will authoritatively interpret and contextualize otherwise isolated events, "heroes and bums" typecasting will place a premium on name recognition and celebrity, and elites retain their importance in this "mass persuasion system" chiefly through how they "feed the mass media" with righteous indignation. Forty years later, Polsby's expectations about the presidential nomination system accord neatly with the findings of this dissertation.

At best, it seems, the contemporary presidential selection process decidedly fails to meet its lofty purposes and thus does a poor job of supplying us with

presidents. This is a serious enough problem. But the societal implications may run deeper. In an even more cynical, alarmist description of media's societal implications, Neil Postman (1985: 155-156) explains:

> "When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience, and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility."

By enabling the mediatization of presidential selection, the contemporary nomination system could be complicit in augmenting the most vacuous societal impulses. Postman voiced this concern over the dominance of television, but the ethos of the internet—and especially social media—would have been beyond even his jaundiced assessment of civic culture.

In closing, this dissertation could briefly outline some proposals for reforming the system by reasserting the authority of political parties and their assemblages of "intense policy demanders" (Bawn et al. 2012), but the honest reality is that—despite its duly noted shortcomings (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2017)—democratization is exceedingly difficult to undo in both the political and technological realms. As Polsby (1983: 181) describes, "metaphors about the futility of turning back the clock, returning the genie to the bottle and toothpaste to the tube abound." Once the opportunity for mass participation in a process has been extended, can elites effectively make the case to the rank-and-file that they cannot

be trusted with this authority after all so it is consequently being revoked? This would seem especially dangerous an argument to make in a decentralized, fragmented media landscape and amid rising populist fervor in both parties. Thus, many of the same forces that make this system a poor method of presidential selection render meaningful change all but impossible—even if Polsby (1983: 185) is correct that a renaissance of the mixed system would be ideal in reasserting the vital role of parties as intermediaries and promoting good governance.

Ultimately, the best prospect for American democracy may constitute encouraging citizens to effectively navigate the challenges posed by this political and technological landscape and equip them with the tools to mitigate its pitfalls. This necessitates fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry through improved civic education and media literacy skills. To the greatest extent that educational and cultural institutions can do so, they have a responsibility to encourage constructive and thoughtful political discourse. Perhaps with enough effort the public can even be convinced of the virtues of a return to the mixed system. The clearest obstacle to this approach is the lack of political awareness or interest on the part of large swaths of the American public (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). But primary voters tend to be more politically active and attentive (Kennamer and Chafee 1982; Lenart 1997), so perhaps there is hope they will be more likely to absorb the message if it reaches them through information flows they already trust (Zaller 1992).

This is admittedly not a strategy easily primed for success. Yet, realism should not be allowed to descend into defeatism. If we throw up our hands here, on this topic, then on what else should we pessimistically assume we can make no discernible difference to civic culture? If we truly have that little faith in the value of education, I venture to say we are in the wrong line of work. We, as educators, would never dream of refusing to teach an Introductory American Government and Politics course simply because many of the students are not political science majors—and are not even terribly interested in politics—and are only enrolled in the course to fulfill a degree requirement. We should not give up on education simply because the task is a challenging one. Just as it began with a song lyric penned by Graham Nash, so too this dissertation closes: "Teach your children well."[255]

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[255] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkaKwXddT_I

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APPENDIX A

Table A.1: List of Candidates Included in the Database

Last Name	First Name	Election Year	Party
Bradley	Bill	2000	D
Gore	Al	2000	D
Bauer	Gary	2000	R
Bush	George W.	2000	R
Forbes	Steve	2000	R
Hatch	Orrin	2000	R
Keyes	Alan	2000	R
McCain	John	2000	R
Clark	Wesley	2004	D
Dean	Howard	2004	D
Edwards	John	2004	D
Gephardt	Dick	2004	D
Graham	Bob	2004	D
Kerry	John	2004	D
Kucinich	Dennis	2004	D
Lieberman	Joe	2004	D
Moseley Braun	Carol	2004	D
Sharpton	Al	2004	D
Biden	Joe	2008	D
Clinton	Hillary	2008	D
Dodd	Chris	2008	D
Edwards	John	2008	D
Gravel	Mike	2008	D
Kucinich	Dennis	2008	D
Obama	Barack	2008	D

Richardson	Bill	2008	D
Brownback	Sam	2008	R
Gilmore	Jim	2008	R
Giuliani	Rudy	2008	R
Huckabee	Mike	2008	R
Hunter	Duncan	2008	R
Keyes	Alan	2008	R
McCain	John	2008	R
Paul	Ron	2008	R
Romney	Mitt	2008	R
Tancredo	Tom	2008	R
Thompson	Fred	2008	R
Thompson	Tommy	2008	R
Bachmann	Michele	2012	R
Cain	Herman	2012	R
Gingrich	Newt	2012	R
Huntsman	Jon	2012	R
Johnson	Gary	2012	R
Paul	Ron	2012	R
Pawlenty	Tim	2012	R
Perry	Rick	2012	R
Romney	Mitt	2012	R
Santorum	Rick	2012	R
Chafee	Lincoln	2016	D
Clinton	Hillary	2016	D
O'Malley	Martin	2016	D
Sanders	Bernie	2016	D
Webb	Jim	2016	D
Bush	Jeb	2016	R

Carson	Ben	2016	R
Christie	Chris	2016	R
Cruz	Ted	2016	R
Fiorina	Carly	2016	R
Gilmore	Jim	2016	R
Graham	Lindsey	2016	R
Huckabee	Mike	2016	R
Jindal	Bobby	2016	R
Kasich	John	2016	R
Pataki	George	2016	R
Paul	Rand	2016	R
Perry	Rick	2016	R
Rubio	Marco	2016	R
Santorum	Rick	2016	R
Trump	Donald	2016	R
Walker	Scott	2016	R
Bennet	Michael	2020	D
Biden	Joe	2020	D
Bloomberg	Michael	2020	D
Booker	Cory	2020	D
Bullock	Steve	2020	D
Buttigieg	Pete	2020	D
Castro	Julian	2020	D
de Blasio	Bill	2020	D
Delaney	John	2020	D
Gabbard	Tulsi	2020	D
Gillibrand	Kirsten	2020	D
Harris	Kamala	2020	D
Hickenlooper	John	2020	D

Inslee	Jay	2020	D
Klobuchar	Amy	2020	D
O'Rourke	Beto	2020	D
Ryan	Tim	2020	D
Sanders	Bernie	2020	D
Steyer	Tom	2020	D
Swalwell	Eric	2020	D
Warren	Elizabeth	2020	D
Williamson	Marianne	2020	D
Yang	Andrew	2020	D

APPENDIX B

Table B.1: List and Bar Graph of Candidacies by Number of Media Mentions

Election Year	Party	Candidate Name	Mentions
2016	D	Clinton	22162
2020	D	Biden	20791
2016	R	Trump	18928
2020	D	Warren	15279
2008	D	Clinton	15097
2020	D	Sanders	14887
2016	R	Bush	14623
2012	R	Romney	13503
2008	D	Obama	11950
2016	R	Cruz	10954
2016	R	Rubio	10541
2020	D	Harris	10058
2012	R	Perry	9900
2016	D	Sanders	9322
2008	R	McCain	9085
2008	R	Giuliani	8918
2012	R	Gingrich	8624
2008	D	Edwards	8612
2012	R	Bachmann	8577
2020	D	Buttigieg	8509
2008	R	Romney	8142
2000	R	Bush	7910
2016	R	Carson	7417

2000	D	Gore	7322
2016	R	Christie	7233
2004	D	Dean	7184
2016	R	Paul	6903
2012	R	Cain	6618
2020	D	Booker	6260
2020	D	O'Rourke	5883
2016	R	Walker	5877
2004	D	Kerry	5680
2012	R	Paul	5450
2020	D	Klobuchar	5274
2016	R	Fiorina	4815
2000	R	McCain	4800
2000	D	Bradley	4513
2008	R	F. Thompson	4510
2004	D	Edwards	4400
2004	D	Gephardt	4303
2012	R	Santorum	4275
2012	R	Huntsman	4100
2016	R	Graham	4006
2012	R	Pawlenty	3910
2004	D	Lieberman	3742
2016	R	Huckabee	3711
2008	R	Huckabee	3700
2016	R	Kasich	3636
2004	D	Clark	3446
2008	D	Biden	3296
2016	D	O'Malley	3115
2020	D	Gillibrand	3068

2016	R	Perry	2959
2020	D	Castro	2924
2020	D	de Blasio	2919
2008	D	Dodd	2907
2008	D	Richardson	2826
2000	R	Forbes	2662
2016	R	Santorum	2496
2016	R	Jindal	2284
2020	D	Bloomberg	2155
2020	D	Yang	2112
2004	D	Sharpton	1992
2004	D	Graham	1892
2004	D	Kucinich	1763
2020	D	Gabbard	1743
2000	R	Hatch	1662
2000	R	Bauer	1616
2008	R	Paul	1510
2008	R	Brownback	1492
2020	D	Steyer	1488
2008	D	Kucinich	1484
2020	D	Swalwell	1481
2020	D	Inslee	1317
2020	D	Bennet	1211
2020	D	Hickenlooper	1143
2004	D	Moseley Braun	1082
2008	R	Hunter	1076
2008	R	Tancredo	1070
2020	D	Bullock	974
2000	R	Keyes	962

2016	R	Pataki	939
2020	D	Ryan	935
2020	D	Delaney	915
2016	D	Webb	855
2020	D	Williamson	835
2016	D	Chafee	691
2012	R	Johnson	649
2008	D	Gravel	566
2008	R	T. Thompson	560
2016	R	Gilmore	307
2008	R	Gilmore	304
2008	R	Keyes	121

Candidacies by Number of Media Mentions, 1999-2020
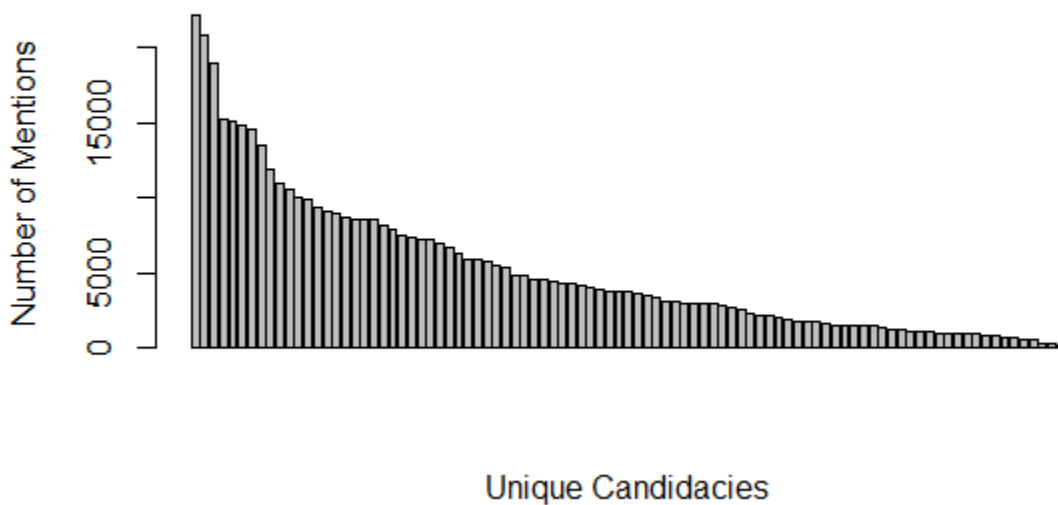
APPENDIX C

Additional Tables

Table C.1: Candidate Mentions by Election Year and Party (corresponding to Figure 3.1)

Election Year	Party	Mentions
2020	D	112161
2016	R	107629
2012	R	65606
2008	D	46738
2008	R	40488
2016	D	36145
2004	D	35484
2000	R	19612
2000	D	11835

Table C.2: Presidential Nomination Stories & Candidate Mentions, by Source (corresponding to Figures 3.2a and 3.2b)

Source	Num. of Stories	Num. of Candidate Mentions
The Associated Press	26470	71004
CNN	25924	100677
The New York Times	24768	59575
CNN.com	13624	39052
Politico.com	13402	37140
Fox News Network	12755	44136
ABC News Transcripts	7216	16684
MSNBC	6350	30140
NBC News	6085	15260
CBS News Transcripts	6036	14641
USA Today	4430	11707
National Public Radio	4406	11051
Slate Magazine	3102	7677
The Hill	2862	7548
The New York Times Blogs	2341	5552
National Review	1733	3854

APPENDIX D

Original Dictionaries

<u>Horserace Dictionary:</u> win, lose, loss, tie, ahead, behind, poll, survey, forecast, predict, better, worse, expect, chance, lead, trail, strategi, tactic, game, climb, rise, fall, point, percent, beat, odds, momentum, sink, fade, hire, fire, quit, raise, crowd, target, demographic, likeli, close, match, head, shift, style, dead, heat, top, bottom, slide, personality, image, staff, scandal, gaffe, blunder, stumble, drama, appear, motiv

<u>Game Dictionary:</u> win, lose, loss, tie, ahead, behind, poll, survey, forecast, predict, better, worse, expect, chance, lead, trail, game, climb, rise, fall, point, percent, beat, odds, momentum, sink, fade, likeli, close, match, head, shift, style, dead, heat, top, bottom, slide

<u>Strategy Dictionary:</u> strategi, tactic, hire, fire, quit, raise, crowd, target, demographic, shift, style, personality, image, staff, scandal, gaffe, blunder, stumble, drama, appear, crowd, motiv

<u>Policy Dictionary:</u> policy, polici, ideolog, stance, issue, position

APPENDIX E

Additional Figures

Figure E.1.a: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Populist Frame in Each Election Cycle for an Open Democratic Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2020)
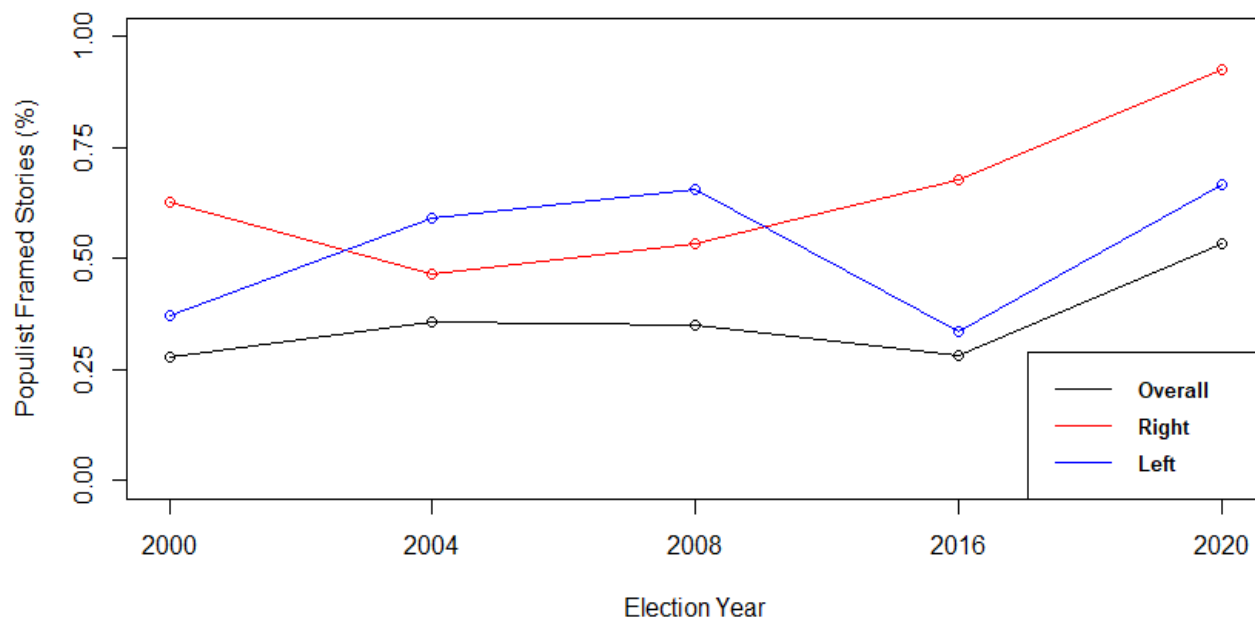
Figure E.1.b: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Populist Frame in Each

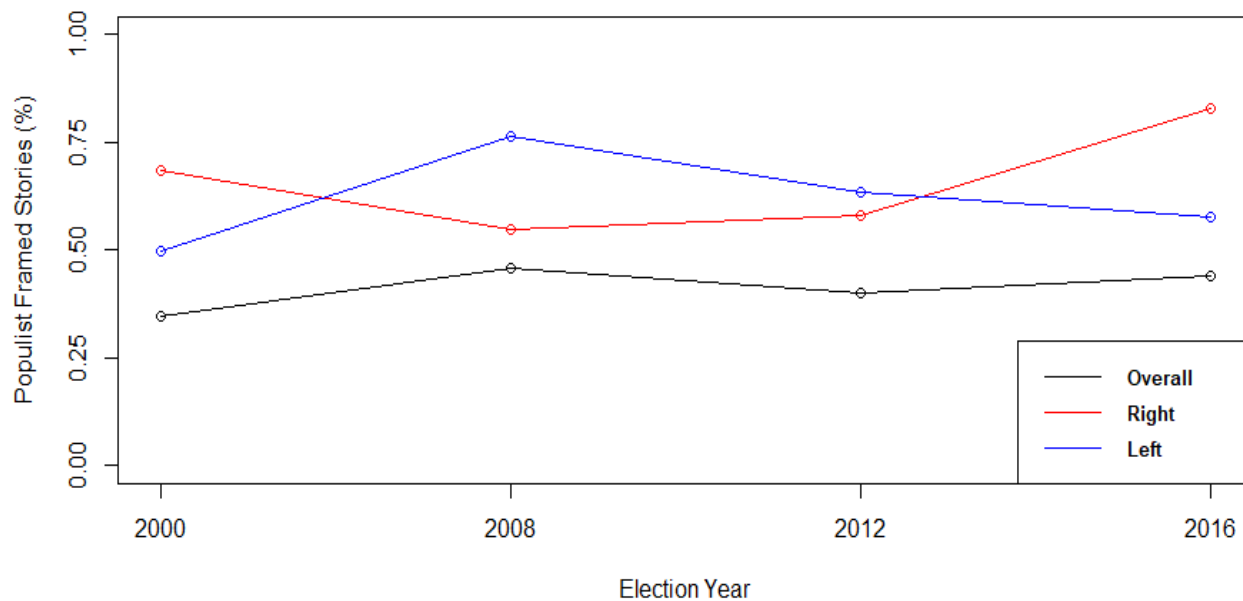Election Cycle for an Open Republican Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating

(1999-2016)

Figure E.2.a: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Policy Frame in Each Election Cycle for an Open Democratic Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2020)
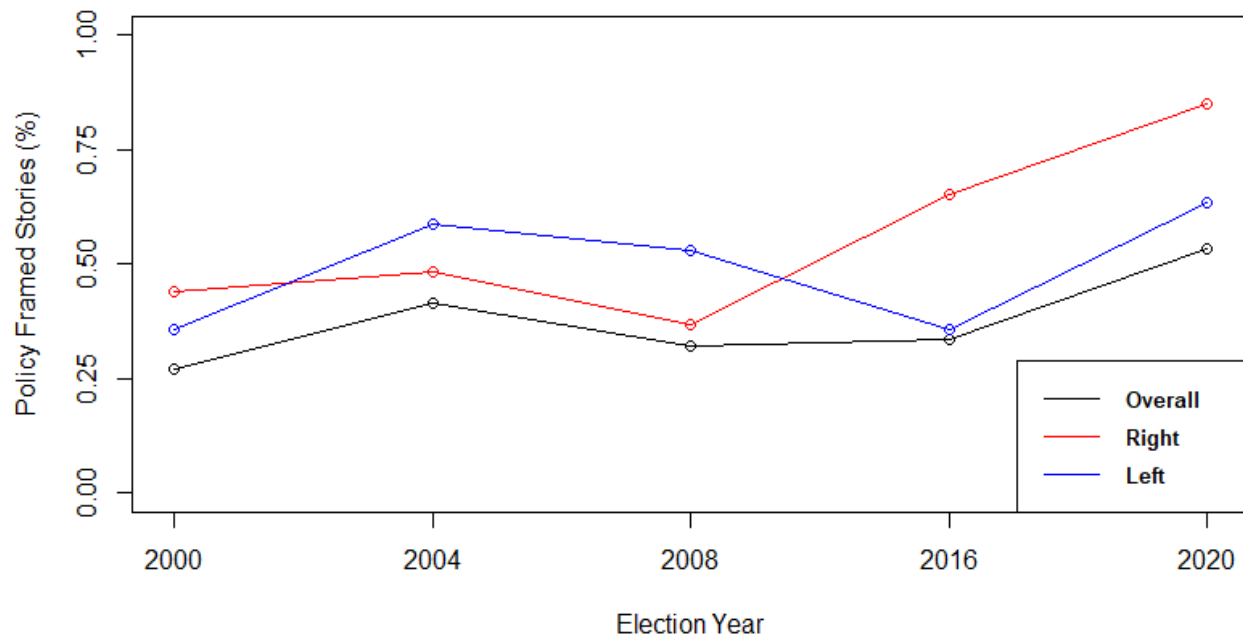
Figure E.2.b: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Policy Frame in Each Election
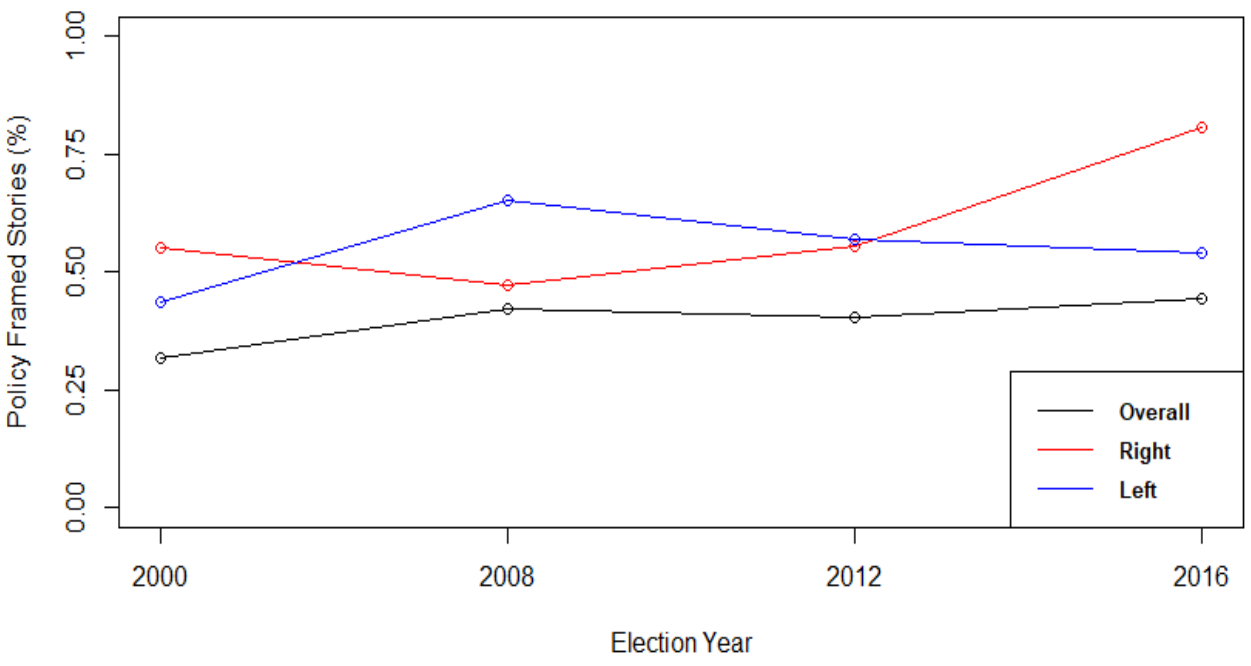Cycle for an Open Republican Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2016)

Figure E.3.a: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Strategy Frame in Each

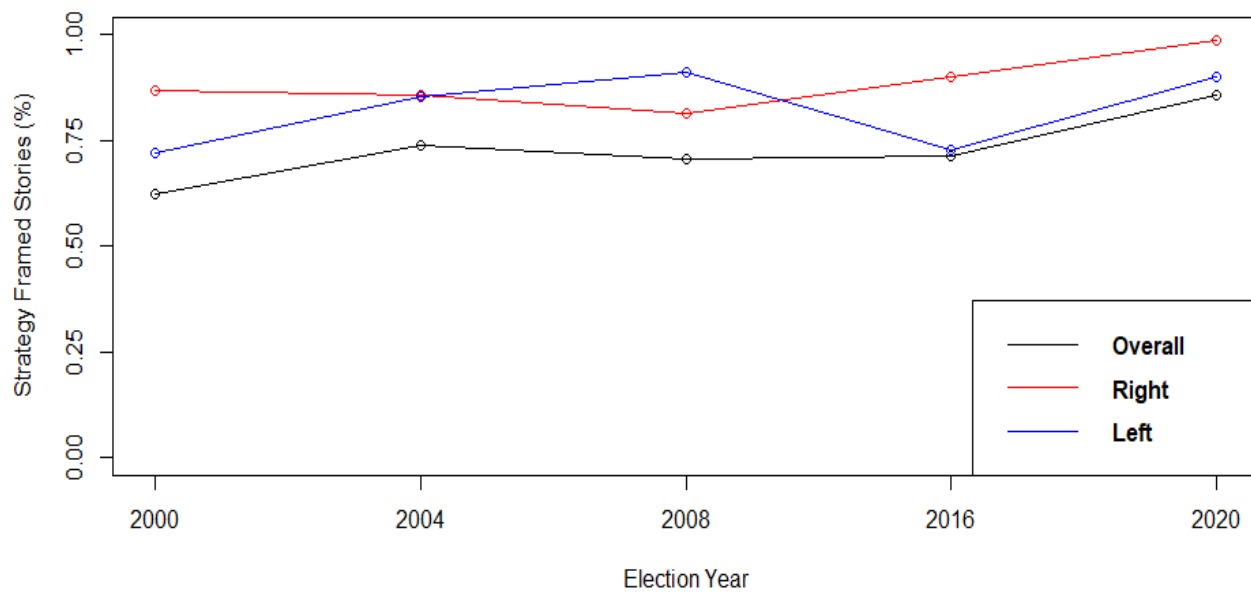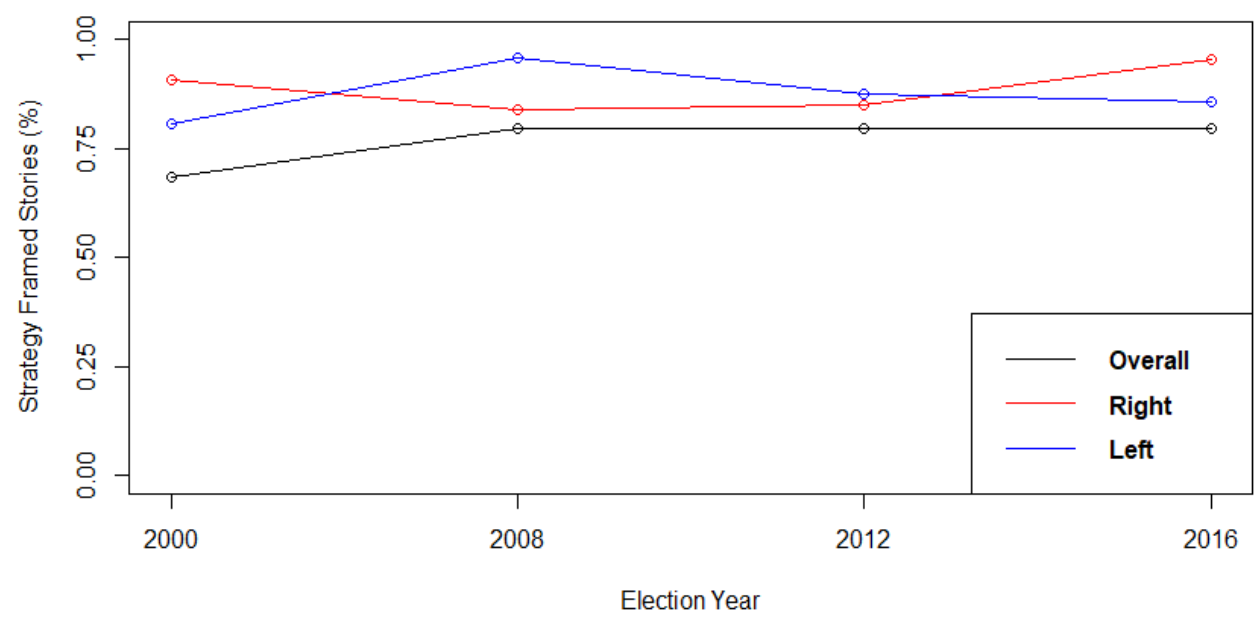Election Cycle for an Open Democratic Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating

(1999-2020)

Figure E.3.b: Percentage of Pre-Primary Stories with Strategy Frame in Each Election Cycle for an Open Republican Nomination, by AllSides Outlet Rating (1999-2016)

APPENDIX F

Lagged Correlation Matrices, by Party

Table F.3.a: Correlation Matrix for Daily Democratic Candidate Shares, with Left

Wing Media and 30-Day Lags (1999-2020)

	Polls	Lagged Polls	Left Wing Media	Lagged Left Wing Media	Endorsements	Lagged Endorsements	Fundraising	Lagged Fundraising
Polls	1	0.99	0.94	0.93	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.86
Lagged Polls	0.99	1	0.94	0.93	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87
Left Wing Media	0.94	0.94	1	0.99	0.88	0.87	0.92	0.92
Lagged Left Wing Media	0.93	0.93	0.99	1	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.92
Endorsements	0.86	0.87	0.88	0.89	1	0.99	0.84	0.85
Lagged Endorsements	0.86	0.87	0.87	0.89	0.99	1	0.84	0.85
Fundraising	0.86	0.87	0.92	0.91	0.84	0.84	1	0.99
Lagged Fundraising	0.86	0.87	0.92	0.92	0.85	0.85	0.99	1

Table F.3.b: Correlation Matrix for Daily Democratic Candidate Shares, with Left

Wing Media and 180-Day Lags (1999-2020)

	Polls	Lagged Polls	Left Wing Media	Lagged Left Wing Media	Endorsements	Lagged Endorsements	Fundraising	Lagged Fundraising
Polls	1	0.94	0.94	0.88	0.86	0.8	0.86	0.74
Lagged Polls	0.94	1	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.86	0.87	0.81
Left Wing Media	0.94	0.92	1	0.96	0.88	0.83	0.92	0.84
Lagged Left Wing Media	0.88	0.92	0.96	1	0.91	0.87	0.9	0.89
Endorsements	0.86	0.92	0.88	0.91	1	0.96	0.84	0.8
Lagged Endorsements	0.8	0.86	0.83	0.87	0.96	1	0.79	0.75
Fundraising	0.86	0.87	0.92	0.9	0.84	0.79	1	0.89
Lagged Fundraising	0.74	0.81	0.84	0.89	0.8	0.75	0.89	1

Table F.3.c: Correlation Matrix for Daily Republican Candidate Shares, with Right

Wing Media and 30-Day Lags (1999-2016)

	Polls	Lagged Polls	Right Wing Media	Lagged Right Wing Media	Endorsements	Lagged Endorsements	Fundraising	Lagged Fundraising
Polls	1	0.96	0.82	0.79	0.76	0.74	0.52	0.48
Lagged Polls	0.96	1	0.85	0.82	0.79	0.77	0.55	0.51
Right Wing Media	0.82	0.85	1	1	0.81	0.81	0.69	0.66
Lagged Right Wing Media	0.79	0.82	1	1	0.81	0.81	0.68	0.66
Endorsements	0.76	0.79	0.81	0.81	1	0.99	0.72	0.69
Lagged Endorsements	0.74	0.77	0.81	0.81	0.99	1	0.72	0.7
Fundraising	0.52	0.55	0.69	0.68	0.72	0.72	1	0.99
Lagged Fundraising	0.48	0.51	0.66	0.66	0.69	0.7	0.99	1

Table F.3.d: Correlation Matrix for Daily Republican Candidate Shares, with Right

Wing Media and 180-Day Lags (1999-2016)

	Polls	Lagged Polls	Right Wing Media	Lagged Right Wing Media	Endorsements	Lagged Endorsements	Fundraising	Lagged Fundraising
Polls	1	0.85	0.82	0.61	0.76	0.53	0.52	0.18
Lagged Polls	0.85	1	0.88	0.78	0.84	0.63	0.6	0.23
Right Wing Media	0.82	0.88	1	0.88	0.81	0.64	0.69	0.36
Lagged Right Wing Media	0.61	0.78	0.88	1	0.71	0.62	0.59	0.39
Endorsements	0.76	0.84	0.81	0.71	1	0.76	0.72	0.28
Lagged Endorsements	0.53	0.63	0.64	0.62	0.76	1	0.6	0.4
Fundraising	0.52	0.6	0.69	0.59	0.72	0.6	1	0.46
Lagged Fundraising	0.18	0.23	0.36	0.39	0.28	0.4	0.46	1