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# The Importance of Race and Ethnicity in Congressional Primary Elections

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Research regarding the electoral importance of race and ethnicity in congressional elections is limited by the overwhelming focus on general-election outcomes. This article seeks to extend this research by examining minority candidate emergence and electoral competition in U.S. House primary elections, using a new data set on all U.S. House contests between 1994 and 2004 that includes demographic information on all the candidates in the primary elections. The results indicate that district-level race and ethnicity are associated with minority candidate emergence; furthermore, the presence of minority candidates influences electoral competitiveness in primary elections.

**Keywords:** *African American candidates; Latino candidates; primary elections; primary competition*

In recent decades, political scientists have become increasingly interested in the issue of minority representation in the U.S. Congress (e.g., Canon 1999; Lublin 1997; Swain 1995). A large portion of this research focuses on the relationship between district-level characteristics, such as the size of the African American population, and electoral outcomes in U.S. House general elections. The findings of this literature indicate that the likelihood of minority descriptive representation increases as the district-level minority population increases.

Arguably, the existing research provides a narrow examination of the electoral importance of race and ethnicity. The singular focus on general-election outcomes overlooks the broader electoral implications of race and ethnicity in U.S. House elections. The overwhelming focus on minority candidates in general elections fails to consider the potential importance of race and ethnicity in primary elections. Additionally, the singular concentration on general elections does not offer insight regarding where minority candidates emerge and how the presence of minority candidates influences the competitiveness of primary elections.

This article seeks to address these issues by offering a more comprehensive view of the importance of race and ethnicity in congressional elections. Specifically, this article examines minority candidate emergence and whether the presence of minority candidates is associated with competitiveness of primary elections. I use a data set on all U.S. House contests between 1994 and 2004, which includes information on all primary-election candidates—winners and

losers. I estimate models of minority candidate emergence and electoral competition in congressional primary elections as a function of candidate-level and district-level race and ethnicity. The results indicate that as the district-level African American population increases, the number of African American candidates in the primary election increases; likewise, as the Latino population increases, the number of Latino candidates increases. Furthermore, the presence of African American and Latino candidates leads to more competitive Democratic primaries.

## The Importance of Race and Ethnicity in Congressional Elections

Historically, minority groups have experienced limited descriptive representation in legislative bodies such as the U.S. House. This is not only because of their diminutive size compared to the Anglo population but also because of voting rights practices. During the 1990s redistricting period, majority-minority districts were introduced explicitly to facilitate the election of minority representatives to the U.S. House. This heightened scholarly interest in the subject of descriptive and substantive representation for racial and ethnic minority groups (Lublin 1997; Swain 1995). This research illustrates that as the African American or Latino population increases, the probability of African American or

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Latino descriptive representation likewise increases (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Canon 1999; Lublin 1997; Guinier 1994).

Although this research is overwhelmingly concerned with the electoral implications of majority-minority redistricting, it is arguably limited in scope with regard to the information it provides on the broader importance of race and ethnicity in congressional elections. First, the literature tends to focus on when and where minority candidates are elected to Congress, which, as noted, is a relatively rare event (Canon 1999; Lublin 1997). Second, the current research is limited by the fact that data regarding the race and ethnicity of candidates exist largely only for successful candidates (i.e., those candidates actually elected to the U.S. House).<sup>1</sup>

The singular focus on minority-candidate success in general elections overlooks the preceding obstacles minority candidates face when running for the U.S. House. First, this research generally does not consider how the racial or ethnic composition of a district is associated with the race or ethnicity of the candidates that run for the U.S. House. The current research establishes that minority candidates are most successful in legislative districts containing a sizeable minority population (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; D. Canon 1999; Guinier 1994; Lublin 1997). This reasoning suggests that in these types of districts, multiple minority candidates may emerge to compete. Second, the literature does not consider whether the presence of minority candidates affects the level of competition in congressional primary elections.

To overcome these limitations, this study uses a new data set, which contains demographic information on each candidate in U.S. House primary elections.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on African American and Latino candidates in U.S. House elections between 1994 and 2004. This table illustrates that far more unsuccessful minority candidates run for the U.S. House than successful minority candidates. For example, forty African Americans successfully ran for the U.S. House in 2004, yet forty-three African American candidates were unsuccessful. In the same election, sixty-three Latinos ran for the U.S. House, and only twenty-three were successful candidates. Thus, focusing on general-election outcomes overlooks the broader implications of minority candidates in congressional elections. This data set makes it possible to examine when minority candidates emerge and whether the presence of

**Table 1**  
**Minority Candidates for U.S. House, 1994–2004**

	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Elected to the U.S. House						
Latino	17	19	18	19	22	23
African American	38	37	37	37	37	40
Unsuccessful candidates						
Latino	38	39	35	30	50	40
African American	59	61	45	61	54	43

minority candidates is associated with competitiveness of primary elections.

### The Electoral Implications of Race and Ethnicity

As noted, the existing research illustrates that as the size of the minority population increases, the probability that a minority candidate is elected to Congress likewise increases. This suggests that the racial and ethnic composition of a district may be associated with the racial or ethnic makeup of the candidate pool. Consider the strategic-politician approach, which argues that candidates tend to enter races in which they stand a chance of winning and tend to avoid races in which the likelihood of failure is high (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Cox and Katz 2002). Accordingly, the incentive for a would-be African American or Latino candidate to seek office in districts with a small African American or Latino population may be low, as the likelihood that an African American or Latino candidate will win in this type of district is low. It is plausible to expect that in districts lacking a sizeable African American population, the likelihood of an African American candidate entering the race will be low; likewise, the likelihood of a Latino candidate emerging in a district with a small Latino population will be low.

Consequently, would-be African American or Latino candidates may be more willing to test the electoral waters in districts characterized by a large African American or Latino population, respectively, as this is the type of venue in which they are most likely to win (D. Canon 1999; Krebs 1999). Given that African American candidates win in districts with a large African American population, Latino candidates win in districts with a large Latino population, and a limited number of these districts actually exist

(D. Canon 1999; Lublin 1997), would-be African American and Latino candidates have very few viable options for a run at the U.S. House. When the size of the district-level African American or Latino population is favorable, multiple African American or Latino candidates may choose to enter the primary election.

*Hypothesis 1:* As the African American (Latino) population increases within a congressional district, the number of African American (Latino) candidates running in the primary election increases.

Based on this logic, it seems plausible that the African American or Latino composition of a district may be associated with the type of African American or Latino candidates entering the primary election. As the strategic-politician theory demonstrates, quality candidates—those with prior office-holding experience—are more likely to emerge when the odds of electoral success are high, that is, when an incumbent is vulnerable or when a race excludes an incumbent (e.g., Jacobson 1997; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). In essence, politically experienced would-be candidates tend to be most selective about when and where they run for office (Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). For African American quality would-be candidates, the decision to enter a congressional primary is not only based on the strength and/or presence of an incumbent but also on the African American composition of a district. For Latino quality would-be candidates, the decision to enter a congressional primary is not only based on the incumbent but also on the Latino composition of a district. Given that the success of African American and Latino candidates is greater in districts containing a large African American or Latino population, respectively, it seems reasonable to expect that the racial or ethnic composition not only induces African American and Latino candidates to emerge but that it also induces African American and Latino quality candidates to emerge.

*Hypothesis 2:* As the district-level African American (Latino) population increases, the probability of a quality African American (Latino) candidate emerging in a primary election increases.

The aforementioned hypotheses lead to questions regarding the influence of minority candidates on primary-election outcomes. Particularly, does the presence of African American or Latino candidates influence electoral competition?

To develop expectations regarding the influence of candidate-level race and ethnicity on primary-election competition, I rely on two areas of research. One variant

considers the influence of minority candidates on minority political participation. This research notes that the presence of one or more minority candidates serves to increase turnout among minority groups (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Leighley 2001; Lublin and Tate 1995; Kaufmann 2003). For example, Lublin and Tate (1995) and Kaufmann (2003) demonstrate that the presence of an African American candidate leads to higher rates of turnout among African Americans, while Barreto, Segura, and Woods (2004) and Leighley (2001) find that the presence of a Latino candidate leads to heightened participation among Latinos.

A second variant of research highlights strategic voting among racial groups when minority candidates are present. As previously noted, Anglo and minority groups tend to vote for candidates of their own racial or ethnic group. This preference for descriptive representation leads to some degree of racially polarized voting when an election includes a minority candidate (Guinier 1994; Swain 1995). In other words, Anglo voters support an Anglo candidate, while minority voters support a candidate of their own race or ethnicity.

Furthermore, as the proportion of minority primary candidates increases, and by default, the proportion of Anglo candidates decreases, Anglo and minority voters are faced with choices involving descriptive and substantive representation. Liu and Vanderleeuw (2001) find that Anglos residing in predominantly African American districts, recognizing the low probability of an Anglo candidate winning, strategically vote for the African American candidate that is most sympathetic to Anglo interests. As the number of African American candidates increases, African American voters are able to pursue both descriptive and substantive representation.

Together, this research illustrates that the presence of African American and Latino candidates leads to increased African American and Latino political participation and strategic voting across racial groups. Therefore, elections including African American or Latino candidates may be more competitive as the various groups participate in hopes of gaining—or maintaining—descriptive representation. Furthermore, as the proportion of minority candidates increases, Anglo and minority voters may act strategically to maximize their representational benefits. As the proportion of African American or Latino candidates increases, Anglos may strategically vote for an African American or Latino candidate who is more in line with their substantive preferences. As the proportion of African American candidates increases, African American voters with the guarantee of

descriptive representation may vote for the candidate offering the most substantive representation; similarly, as the proportion of Latino candidates increases, Latino voters may vote for the Latino candidate who offers the greatest substantive representation. As such, the presence of African American or Latino candidates may split the vote across multiple candidates, leading to competitive primary elections.

*Hypothesis 3:* As the proportion of African American and Latino candidates in a primary election increases, the level of competition will likewise increase.

### Data Used to Examine Race, Ethnicity, and Elections

To evaluate the importance of African American and Latino candidates in primary elections, I use several different categories of variables: candidate attributes, district demographics, incumbent attributes, and national factors.

*Candidate attributes.* To account for a variety of candidate attributes, I compiled information on all candidates for the U.S. House between 1994 and 2004. This information includes the race or ethnicity, partisan affiliation, prior office-holding experience, and primary vote totals for all 7,581 candidates. This data set is unique because it contains information on multiple stages of congressional elections, which allows one to account for the emergence of African American and Latino candidates in primary elections.

Several sources were used to construct the candidate-level data set. First, I consulted *CQ Weekly Report* and Federal Election Commission (FEC) primary-election reports.<sup>3</sup> The reports provided the names of all primary-election candidates, their partisan affiliation, and their vote share in the primary election. Second, I used *CQ Weekly Report*, *The Almanac of American Politics*, and *Politics in America* to compile additional information on each candidate. These sources offered partial information regarding candidates' race/ethnicity and prior electoral experience. Finally, to complete the data collection process, I relied on content analysis of local and state newspapers, intensive Internet searches, and personal interviews with the remaining candidates.<sup>4</sup>

These candidate-level data were used to create the district-level variables needed to examine African American and Latino candidate emergence and electoral competition in primary elections. First, to examine the hypothesis regarding African American and Latino candidate emergence, I created a series of

dependent variables: the number of African American candidates and the number of Latino candidates. The measures reflect the number of nonincumbent African American candidates and nonincumbent Latino candidates present in the Democratic and Republican primary in each congressional district for each election. The African American candidate variable ranges from 0 to 3 for Republican primaries, with a total of 150 African American candidates running in a Republican primary. The African American candidate variable ranges from 0 to 8 for Democratic primaries, with a total of 192 African American candidates running in a Democratic primary. The Latino candidate variable ranges from 0 to 2 for the Republican primaries and 0 to 5 for the Democratic primaries. A total of 111 Latino candidates ran in the Republican primary elections, and 130 Latinos ran in the Democratic primary elections.

Second, to examine the hypothesis regarding the emergence of quality challengers, I generated a series of dichotomous dependent variables reflecting the presence of a Latino quality challenger and an African American quality challenger by partisan affiliation. The measures are coded 1 if the primary election included a minority candidate with prior office-holding experience (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Cox and Katz 1996; Jacobson 1989).<sup>5</sup> During the observed time period, 62 Democratic primaries included a nonincumbent African American quality candidate, and 31 Democratic primaries included a nonincumbent Latino quality candidate. Of the 2,416 Republican primary elections observed, 23 included an African American quality challenger, and only 12 races included a Latino quality challenger.

Finally, to assess the influence of minority candidates on electoral competition, I rely on a measure of primary competition derived from Rae's (1967) measure of legislative fractionalization (see Herrnsen and Gimpel 1995). The measure is calculated as

$$PC = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^n (p_i)^2,$$

where  $n$  denotes the number of candidates and  $p_i$  denotes the proportion of the vote won by  $i$ th candidate. The measure, theoretically, ranges from 0 to 1; lower values indicate less competitive elections, and higher values indicate more competitive elections.

*District demographics.* The independent variables of interest in the African American and Latino candidate-emergence model and the African American

and Latino quality-challenger model are district-level racial/ethnic context.<sup>6</sup> In the models concerning the emergence of African American candidates and African American quality challengers, the indicator of interest is the district-level percentage of African Americans. In the models concerning the emergence of Latino candidates and Latino quality challengers, the indicator of interest is district-level percentage of Latinos. As the African American and Latino population increases, the number of African American and Latino primary candidates is expected to increase (Hypothesis 1), and the probability that an African American and a Latino quality challenger will emerge is expected to increase (Hypothesis 2).

The main independent variables in the primary-competition model reflect the proportion of the candidates who are African American and the proportion who are Latino. These measures are the number of nonincumbent African American and Latino candidates divided by the total number of primary candidates by party. As the proportion of African American and Latino candidates increases, the level of primary competition is expected to increase (Hypothesis 3).

The models also include control variables for district-level region and partisan context. The models include a dummy variable denoting whether a district is in the South. The inclusion of this measure is intended to control for any effects caused by the Republican Party's electoral advantage in the South. Additionally, the models include Presidential Vote, which reflects each district's vote share for the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party in the most recent presidential election. This measure controls for the influence of district-level partisan leanings (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002).

Research suggests that congressional redistricting leads to more open seats, an increased number of challenger candidates, and fewer uncontested seats (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; Jacobson 1997; Kiewiet and Zeng 1993). As such, the models include a dichotomous variable, Redistricted, which is coded 1 if a district was newly created or redrawn.

*Incumbent attributes.* The high rate of incumbent re-election serves to discourage prospective candidates (Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Green and Krasno 1988). Thus, the models include a dichotomous independent variable, Open Seat, which is coded 1 if an incumbent is not present and 0 if an incumbent is present. Furthermore, primary elections including an incumbent tend to be less competitive and have fewer challengers than primary elections lacking an incumbent (Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Herrnson and Gimpel 1995). The models include a dichotomous measure,

In-Party Incumbent, which indicates whether an incumbent is present in the primary election. Additionally, following, D. Canon, Schousen, and Sellers (1996), the measure is structured to account for the presence of an African American incumbent or Latino incumbent. For example, in the model predicting African American candidate emergence in the Democratic primary, In-Party Incumbent is coded 1 if the incumbent is a Democrat and non-African American, while Black Incumbent is coded 1 if the incumbent is a Democrat and African American.

A narrow victory in the prior election encourages strong challengers to emerge, which may result in competitive primary elections (Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Green and Krasno 1988; Jacobson 1989). As such, the models include a binary variable, Marginal Election, which denotes whether or not the incumbent received 55 percent of the total vote or less in the previous general election.

*National factors.* Finally, the models also control for two national-level factors: economic and political conditions. To account for changes in national economic trends, the model includes change in per capita income (CPI), which reflects the change in national real disposable per capita income between the year of the election and the year before the election. Furthermore, it is plausible that the partisan asymmetry of a House incumbent and the president may influence election outcomes (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989). Thus, to capture the differential effects of national economic conditions, CPI is multiplied by  $-1$  when the House incumbent and president are of opposing parties.

Prior research indicates that presidential approval is associated with candidate emergence and congressional election outcomes (e.g., Jacobson 1989). As such, the models include a measure of presidential approval.<sup>7</sup> Again, to control for the differential impact of presidential approval on primary elections because of partisan asymmetry, this measure is multiplied by  $-1$  when the House incumbent and president are of opposing parties.

Finally, each model includes year dummy variables, with 1994 serving as the baseline category. Year dummy variables are included to control for events in an election year that may influence candidate emergence or primary competition (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998).<sup>8</sup>

## African American and Latino Candidate Emergence

Between 1994 and 2004, 93 percent of primary elections did not include an African American candidate,

and 96 percent did not include a Latino candidate, which means that the African American and Latino candidate count variables are dominated by zeros. To assess African American and Latino candidate emergence, I use zero-inflated Poisson regression, which allows for the absence of African American and Latino candidates to be produced by two processes (Long 1997; Zorn 1998). The first stage estimates the probability that the event count is always zero, meaning that a minority candidate never emerges in a district. The first stage is modeled as a binary outcome using a logit model, in which the probability of a zero count is 1. The second stage estimates the number of minority candidates that emerge and is modeled using Poisson regression. The zero-inflated Poisson distinguishes between districts in which an African American or Latino candidate will never emerge and districts where African American and Latino candidates sometimes emerge. The Vuong test indicates that the zero-inflated Poisson is the appropriate specification for each model except the model of African American candidate emergence in the Republican primary, which is estimated using Poisson regression.

Table 2 presents the results of African American and Latino candidate emergence in Democratic and Republican primary elections. The top section, labeled *first-stage estimates*, reflects the logit estimates, and the bottom section, labeled *second-stage estimates*, reflects the Poisson estimates. The first phase of the estimation includes two covariates: in-party incumbent and district-level percentage of African Americans or Latinos (racial/ethnic context). District-level percentage of African Americans and percentage of Latinos are included based on the rationale that African American or Latino would-be candidates are unlikely to emerge in districts lacking a sizeable African American or Latino population. Likewise, there may be a subset of districts represented by individuals of another racial or ethnic group (in-party incumbent) and unlikely to be districts in which an African American or Latino candidate can win; thus, the likelihood of an African American or Latino candidate actually emerging is low.

To begin, consider African American and Latino candidate emergence in Democratic primaries. A positive parameter estimate in the first-stage results indicates an increased probability that an African American or Latino candidate never emerges. The estimates indicate that the presence of a non-African American Democratic incumbent increases the odds that an African American candidate never emerges by

a factor of 21, while the presence of a non-Latino Democratic incumbent increases the odds that a Latino candidate never emerges by 134. Furthermore, the odds that an African American candidate never emerges decrease by 15 percent with every 1-unit change in district-level percentage of African Americans, while the odds that a Latino candidate never emerges decrease by 27 percent with every 1-unit change in district-level percentage of Latinos.

Next, I move to the second-stage results. Generally speaking, the findings indicate that the size of the district-level African American and Latino population is positively related to African American and Latino candidate emergence in the Democratic primary, which supports Hypothesis 1. Holding all other variables constant, a 1-standard-deviation increase in district-level percentage of African Americans results in a 151 percent rise in the number of African American candidates, and a 1-standard-deviation increase in the district-level percentage of Latinos results in an 85 percent increase in the number of Latino candidates.

The results also suggest that incumbent attributes and district demographics influence minority candidate emergence. The presence of an African American Democratic incumbent results in a 77 percent decrease in the number of African American candidates, and the presence of a Latino Democratic incumbent leads to an 85 percent decrease in the number of Latino candidates that emerge. The presence of a non-Latino Democratic incumbent results in a 70 percent decrease in the number of Latino candidates. Furthermore, with every 1-unit increase in the presidential vote share, there is a 2 percent decrease in the number of African American candidates in the Democratic primary. Finally, open-seat elections lead to an 86 percent increase in the number of African American candidates that emerge in the Democratic primary.

Figure 1A plots the expected number of African American candidates in the Democratic primary as a function of district-level percentage of African Americans, and Figure 1B plots the expected number of Latino candidates as a function of district-level percentage of Latinos.<sup>9</sup> Note that the scales on Figures 1A and 1B differ because of the differences in the expected number of African American and Latino candidates. The expected number of African American candidates ranges from zero to fifteen, while the expected number of Latino candidates ranges from zero to three.

The solid line in Figures 1A and 1B indicates that the presence of a minority Democratic incumbent limits the expected number of minority Democratic

**Table 2**  
**African American and Latino Candidate Emergence in U.S. House Primary Elections**

	<i>Democratic Primary</i>		<i>Republican Primary</i>	
	African American	Latino	African American	Latino
First-stage estimates				
Racial/ethnic context	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.32*** (0.10)		-0.36 (0.25)
In-party incumbent	3.02** (1.01)	4.90** (1.96)		1.02 (1.55)
Constant	0.72 (0.61)	2.63*** (0.55)		-2.20** (0.70)
Second-stage estimates				
Racial/ethnic context	0.06*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
% African American				
% Latino	0.01* (0.00)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Incumbent attributes				
Open seat	0.62** (0.24)	0.34 (0.27)	0.45* (0.20)	-0.87* (0.43)
In-party incumbent	-0.71 (0.45)	-1.19** (0.42)	-4.04*** (1.02)	-2.59*** (0.60)
Black incumbent	-1.51*** (0.35)			
Latino incumbent		-1.89*** (0.40)		
Marginal election	-0.20 (0.23)	0.06 (0.25)	0.25 (0.26)	0.26 (0.28)
District demographics				
South	-0.52** (0.18)	0.09 (0.21)	0.23 (0.24)	-0.71** (0.29)
Pres. Vote	-0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.01)
Redistricted	0.19 (0.31)	0.28 (0.36)	-0.22 (0.49)	0.17 (0.39)
National factors				
CPI	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Pres. approval	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.05* (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Constant	-1.82** (0.55)	-2.50*** (0.71)	-4.20*** (0.77)	-1.00 (0.83)
$\chi^2$	99.94***	77.21***	244.83***	35.61***
<i>N</i> cases	2,363	2,363	2,416	2,416

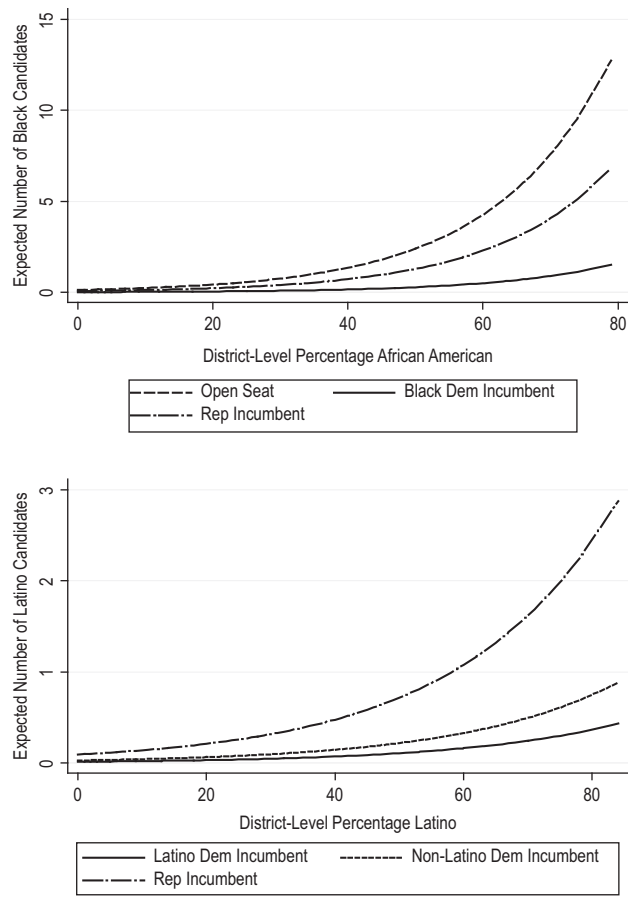
Note: Entries, except for the African American Republican candidate emergence model, are zero-inflated Poisson estimates adjusted for inflation caused by the racial or ethnic context of the congressional district. Additionally, the estimates for the two Democratic primary models are adjusted for inflation caused by the presence of an out-group Democratic incumbent. The Latino candidate emergence in the Republican primary is adjusted for inflation caused by the presence of a Republican incumbent. Finally, results for the African American Republican candidate emergence model are Poisson coefficients with standard errors estimated using the Huber-White method (Huber 1967) and are clustered by congressional district. CPI = change in per capita income.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

candidates, regardless of the size of a district's minority population. The dash line in Figure 1A demonstrates that as the African American population increases, open-seat elections appear to be the most attractive venue for African American candidates. The dotted

line in Figure 1B highlights that when the Democratic incumbent is a member of another racial or ethnic group, the expected number of Latino candidates increases when the Latino population exceeds 40 percent; however, even in the most highly Latino districts,

**Figure 1**  
**Candidate Emergence in Democratic Primaries**



the expected number is approximately one. The dash-dot line in Figure 1B demonstrates that as the Latino population increases, the largest expected number of Latino candidates emerges in districts with a Republican incumbent. Finally, the expected number of African American candidates in the presence of a Republican incumbent, presented in Figure 1A, must be interpreted with some caution, given that the largest district-level African American population represented by a Republican is 41 percent.

The last two columns in Table 2 present the findings for African American and Latino candidate emergence in Republican primary elections.<sup>10</sup> The first-stage estimate, indicating the probability that a Latino candidate never emerges in the Republican primary, is not related to the ethnic context of the district nor the presence of a Republican incumbent.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that there are partisan differences regarding the absence of Latino candidates in U.S. House primary elections. As the district-level Latino population increases, the likelihood that no Latino

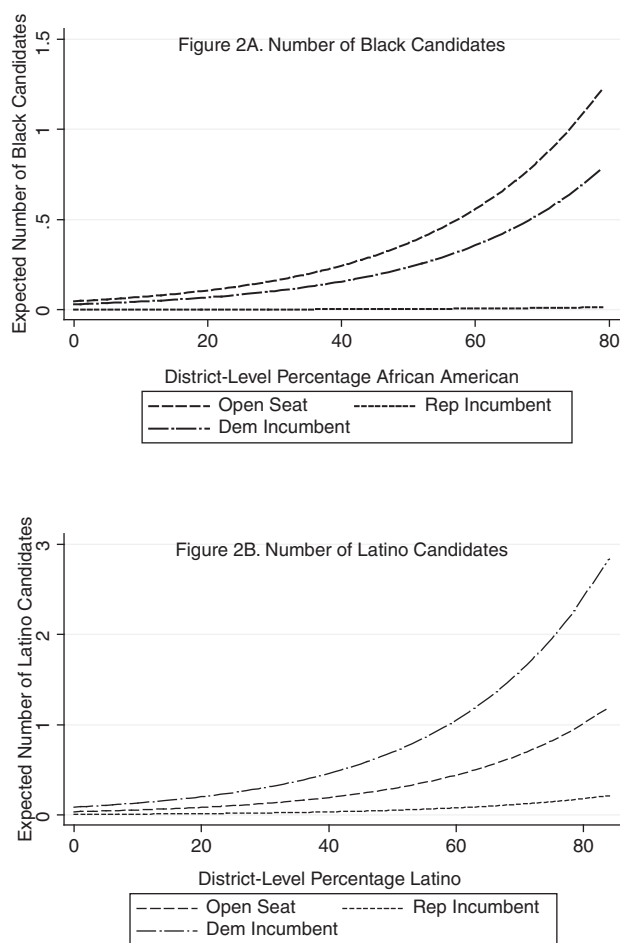
candidates emerge in the Democratic primary decreases, whereas in Republican primaries, the absence of a Latino candidate may occur regardless of the size of the district-level Latino population. This partisan difference may be produced by the fact that a growing Latino population does not necessarily lead to success of a Latino Republican candidate. Thus, in districts with a sizeable Latino population, the likelihood that no Latino candidate emerges in the Republican primary is similar to the likelihood of emergence in districts with a small Latino population.

The second-stage results support Hypothesis 1, meaning that as the size of the African American population increases, the number of African American candidates present in the Republican primary increases. Furthermore, as the Latino population increases, the number of Latino candidates in the Republican primary increases. In essence, holding all variables constant, a 1-standard-deviation increase in the district-level African American or Latino population results in an 85 percent rise in the number of African American or Latino Republican candidates, respectively.

The presence of a Republican incumbent leads to a 98 percent decrease in the number of African American candidates and a 92 percent decrease in the number of Latino candidates in the Republican primary. Open-seat elections are positively associated with African American candidate emergence and negatively associated with Latino candidate emergence in Republican primary elections. The number of Latino candidates emerging in Republican primaries is 51 percent lower in the South. Finally, with every 1-unit change in the presidential vote share, there is a 3 percent reduction in the number of Latino candidates who emerge in the Republican primary.

Figure 2 graphs the expected number of African American and Latino Republican primary candidates. Again, note that the scales on Figure 2A and 2B differ, which reflects the fact that the expected number of African American and Latino Republican candidates differs. First, comparing Figure 1A and 2A illustrates that fewer African American candidates emerge in the Republican primary than in the Democratic primary. Even in the most heavily African American-populated district with an open-seat election, just more than one African American candidate is expected to emerge in the Republican primary. Second, the dotted lines in Figures 2A and 2B demonstrate that regardless of the district-level African American and Latino population, the expected number of African American and Latino

**Figure 2**  
**Candidate Emergence in Republican Primaries**



Republican candidates hovers around zero when the primary includes a Republican incumbent. Third, Figures 2A and 2B illustrate that when there is a Democratic incumbent or an open-seat election, as the district-level African American and Latino population increases, the expected number of African American and Latino candidates increases.

### African American and Latino Quality-candidate Emergence

The emergence of African American and Latino candidates with prior office-holding experience is a relatively rare event.<sup>12</sup> Given that there are many more zeros (no quality minority candidate) than ones, I use rare-events logit to estimate the models of African American and Latino quality-candidate emergence (See King and Zeng 2001).<sup>13</sup> The results presented in Table 3 indicate that district-level minority context is

positively associated with the emergence of a minority quality challenger in Democratic primary elections, which supports Hypothesis 2. As the African American population increases, the risk of an African American quality candidate emerging in the Democratic primary increases, and as the Latino population increases, the risk of a quality Latino candidate emerging also increases. Furthermore, in open-seat elections, the risk of African American and Latino quality-candidate emergence increases. Finally, the presence of a Democratic incumbent, regardless of race or ethnicity, decreases the risk of African American and Latino quality-candidate emergence.

Figure 3 illustrates the risk of quality-challenger emergence in Democratic primary elections. Figures 3A and 3B generally demonstrate that as the African American and Latino population increases, the risk of an African American or Latino quality candidate emerging also increases. The solid line in both figures indicates that African American and Latino quality candidates are least likely to challenge an incumbent of their own race or ethnicity. The risk of African American Democratic quality-candidate emergence is greatest when a district is represented by a Republican or a nonblack Democrat. Finally, Figure 3B indicates that as the Latino population increases, the risk of a Latino Democratic quality candidate emerging increases in open-seat elections and in districts represented by a Republican incumbent.

The last two columns in Table 3 provide estimates of African American and Latino quality-candidate emergence in Republican primaries.<sup>14</sup> The positive coefficients indicate that as the district-level percentage of African Americans or Latinos increases, the risk that an African American or Latino candidate with prior office-holding experience will emerge in the Republican primary increases, which also supports Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, open-seat elections are positively related to African American and Latino quality-candidate emergence in the Republican primary.

To illustrate the findings, consider the graphs in Figure 4. The risk of an African American quality candidate emerging in the Republican primary ranges from 0 to .15, while the risk of a Latino quality challenger emerging in the Republican primary ranges from 0 to .60. First, note that the risk of African American or Latino quality-candidate emergence increases, regardless of the nature of the race, as the African American or Latino population increases. Second, Figure 4A indicates that the risk that an African American quality candidate will actually emerge is low. The dash line in Figure 4A demonstrates that the risk of an African

**Table 3**  
**African American and Latino Quality-candidate Emergence in U.S. House**  
**Primary Elections (Rare Event Logit Estimates)**

	<i>Democratic Primary</i>		<i>Republican Primary</i>	
	African American	Latino	African American	Latino
Racial/ethnic context				
% African American	0.12**** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.04**** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.06)
% Latino	0.02 (0.02)	0.10**** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.08**** (0.02)
Incumbent attributes				
Open seat	0.88* (0.46)	1.52*** (0.58)	1.33** (0.44)	1.73*** (0.65)
In-party incumbent	-1.76*** (0.69)	-0.28 (0.91)		
Black incumbent	-4.18****			
Latino incumbent		(0.94) -2.53**		
Marginal election	0.07 (0.38)	-0.10 (0.66)	0.79 (0.58)	0.32 (0.80)
District demographics				
South	-0.81*** (0.31)	-0.72 (0.66)	0.41 (0.54)	-0.62 (0.81)
Pres. vote	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Redistricted	0.19 (0.67)	0.96 (1.09)	0.02 (1.00)	-0.51 (1.25)
National factors				
CPI	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Pres. approval	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)
Constant	-4.70**** (0.79)	-3.93**** (1.25)	-6.68**** (1.19)	-3.66 (1.01)
$\chi^2$	165.58****	287.73****	73.30****	192.51****
<i>N</i> cases	2,363	2,363	2,416	2,416

Note: Entries are rare-event regression estimates (robust standard errors adjusted for clustering by congressional district). The Wald  $\chi^2$  estimates correspond to standard logistic model with the same specification. CPI = change in per capita income.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

American quality candidate running in an open-seat election, in the most heavily African American context, is a meager .15. Finally, the dash line in Figure 4B indicates that in an open-seat race in the most heavily Latino district, the risk of a Latino quality candidate emerging is .60.

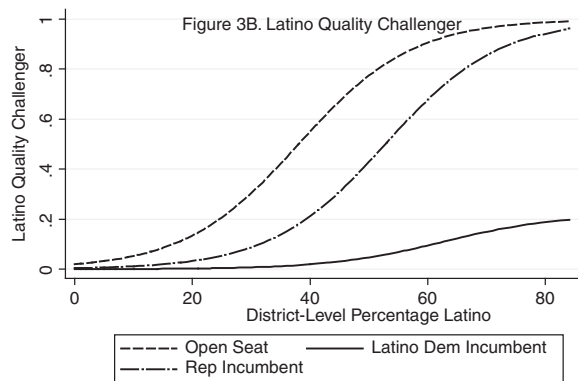
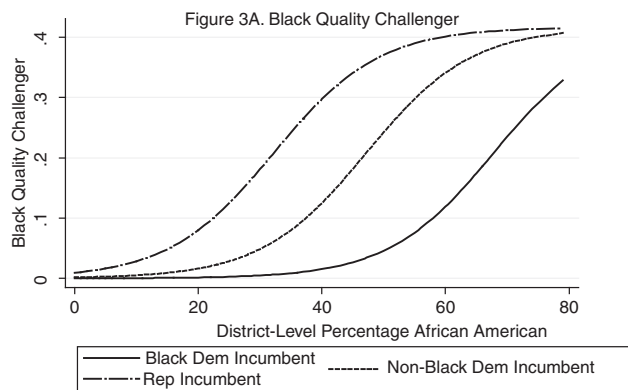
### Competitiveness in Primary Elections

Next, I consider if the emergence of African American and Latino candidates influences electoral competition in congressional primary elections. Specifically, this section examines whether the proportion of African American or Latino candidates

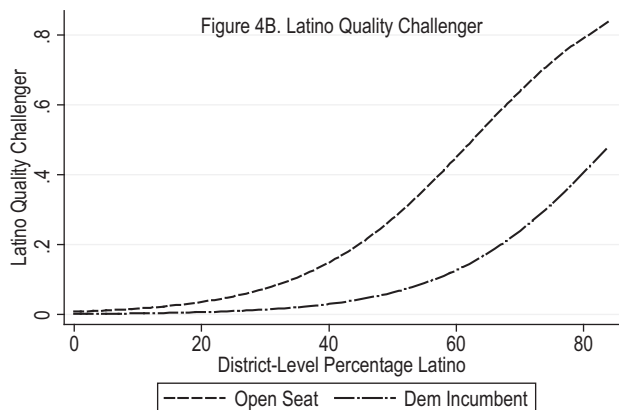
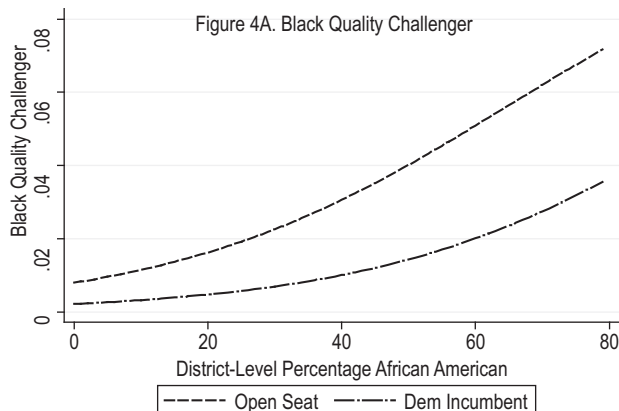
influences the competitiveness of primary elections. Given the large number of unopposed primary elections,<sup>15</sup> the analysis includes only opposed primary elections—meaning primaries with more than one candidate. Table 4 presents the results of electoral competition in the Democratic and Republican primary elections.

The first column in Table 4 presents the results for the model of Democratic primary competition as a function of the proportion of the candidates who are African American and Latino; the second column reflects the results for the Republican primary. The estimates indicate that the proportion of minority candidates in the Republican primary is not significantly

**Figure 3**  
**Quality-candidate Emergence in Democratic Primaries**



**Figure 4**  
**Quality-candidate Emergence in Republican Primaries**



associated with electoral competition. However, the proportion of African American and Latino candidates in the Democratic primary is positively and significantly related to electoral competition, which supports Hypothesis 3. Substantively, the results indicate that Democratic primaries with no African American or Latino candidates (i.e., primaries with only Anglo candidates) are .10 less competitive than primaries composed completely of African American or Latino candidates.

Although African American and Latino candidates are more likely to win in districts with a large African American or Latino population, respectively, these findings suggest that the path to the general election for an African American or Latino Democratic candidate is more difficult when the primary includes other African American or Latino candidates. Furthermore, the findings indicate that Anglo Democratic candidates likewise face a more competitive primary election as the proportion of African American (Latino) candidates increases.

Again, the results reflect partisan differences in primaries that are associated with race and ethnicity.

The presence of African American and Latino candidates in Democratic primaries heightens electoral competition; yet, the presence of African American and Latino candidates yields no significant impact on competition in Republican primary elections. It is possible that Democratic primaries attract more “viable” African American and Latino candidates than Republican primaries (Hernnson and Gimpel 1995). This results in competitive Democratic primary elections while rendering no effect on Republican primaries.

The estimates also indicate that Democratic and Republican primary elections including an incumbent are less competitive, regardless of the race of the incumbent. Furthermore, open-seat elections lead to a .08 more competitive Democratic primary and a .10 more competitive Republican primary. Finally, the results indicate that when an incumbent reveals vulnerability in the prior general election, the level of competition in both the Republican and Democratic

**Table 4**  
**Primary-election Competitiveness: Proportion**  
**of African American and Latino Candidates**  
**(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates)**

	<i>Democratic Primary</i>	<i>Republican Primary</i>
Minority Candidates		
Prop. African American	0.10**** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Prop. Latino	0.10*** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)
Incumbent attributes		
Open seat	0.08**** (0.01)	0.10**** (0.01)
In-party incumbent	-0.21**** (0.02)	-0.18**** (0.01)
Black incumbent	-0.21**** (0.03)	
Latino incumbent	-0.19**** (0.03)	
Marginal election	0.02* (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
District demographics		
South	0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Pres. Vote	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Redistricted	0.05* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)
National factors		
CPI	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Pres. approval	-0.001** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.50**** (0.04)	0.53**** (0.04)
$R^2$	0.43	0.37
$N$ Cases	789	857

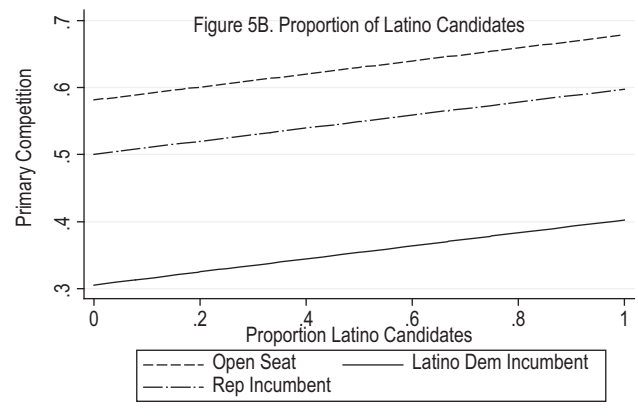
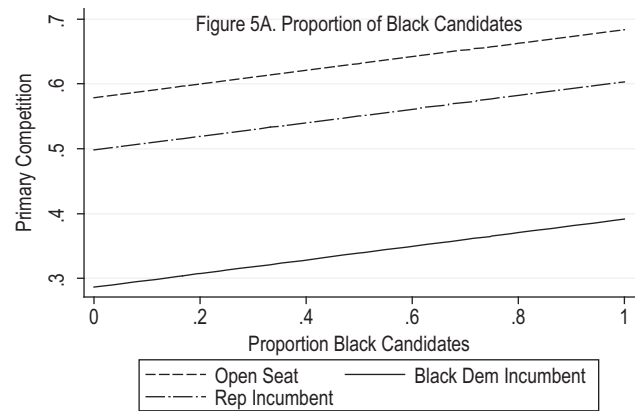
Note: Entries are ordinary least squares (OLS) regression estimates (robust standard errors adjusted for clustering by congressional district). CPI = change in per capita income.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

primary election increases. These findings are consistent with a voluminous body of congressional election research (e.g., Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Jacobson 1989).

Figure 5 illustrates the importance of the proportion of Democratic candidates that are African American and Latino. Figure 5A plots the expected level of Democratic primary competitiveness as a function of the proportion of the candidates who are African American, while Figure 5B plots the influence of the proportion of Latino candidates. Both figures indicate that as the proportion of African American and Latino candidates increases, the level

**Figure 5**  
**Electoral Competition in Democratic Primaries**



of primary competitiveness increases. Furthermore, the figures demonstrate that although the proportion of African American or Latino candidates does influence the level of primary competitiveness, other features have a large impact. For example, the solid line in Figures 5A and 5B demonstrates that the presence of a Democratic incumbent results in the lowest level of primary competition. The dash lines indicate that open-seat elections lead to the highest level of competition in Democratic primary elections.

## Conclusion

Extant research offers a wealth of information regarding the conditions under which African American and Latino candidates are successfully elected to the U.S. House. However, this research offers little insight regarding African American and Latino candidate emergence and the electoral implications of African American and Latino candidate

emergence in primary elections. Moreover, the general literature on congressional primary elections examines a variety of topics, including candidate behavior (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), incumbency advantage (Ansolabehere et al. 2007), the impact of gender (Lawless and Pearson 2008; Matland and King 2002), and the impact of divisive primaries on general elections (Abramowitz 1988; Kenney and Rice 1984). However, this area of research overlooks the role of race and ethnicity in congressional primary elections. The dearth of research is likely because of a lack of detailed information on congressional candidates. Using a unique congressional candidate-level data set, this study extends the existing research by focusing on the importance of race and ethnicity in congressional primary elections.

Generally speaking, the results lend strong support for the outlined expectations regarding the importance of race and ethnicity for congressional primary elections. First, the results indicate that as the district-level percentage of African Americans increases, the number of African American candidates in the Democratic and Republican primary elections likewise increases. Additionally, as the district-level percentage of Latinos increases, the number of Latino candidates in the Democratic and Republican primaries increases. Second, the estimates indicate that as the African American or Latino population increases, the risk that an African American or Latino candidate with prior office-holding experience will emerge in primary elections increases. Although the emergence of minority quality candidates is a relatively rare event, African American and Latino quality candidates are more likely to emerge in districts with a large African American or Latino population, respectively. Finally, the findings indicate that as the proportion of African American or Latino candidates increases, the level of competition in Democratic primary elections increases. The results suggest that Democratic candidates face a more difficult path to the general election when the Democratic primary includes minority candidates. Together, these findings demonstrate that the common practice of examining general-election outcomes overlooks important aspects of race and ethnicity in congressional elections.

These findings hold implications for future research regarding race, ethnicity, and congressional elections. First, this research can be extended by examining detailed aspects of the importance of race and ethnicity in congressional elections. For instance, future research should consider if the racial/ethnic

composition of the candidate pool influences turnout, campaign strategies, and campaign spending. Second, and related to point one, the research on general congressional elections can be extended by comparing the differential impact of race and ethnicity in congressional primary elections versus general elections. Existing research offers mixed results regarding the effect of divisive primary elections on general-election outcomes. Some studies find that divisive primaries harm candidates in the general election (Abramowitz 1988; Segura and Nicholson 1995), yet others find mixed or no effect (Born 1981; Kenney and Rice 1984). The results presented here suggest that the race and/or ethnicity of the candidates may offer insight into the relationship between divisive primaries and general-election performance.

Finally, future research might consider the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender in congressional elections. Extant research finds few if any gender differences in rates of success in congressional general elections (e.g., Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997; Smith and Fox 2001); however, Lawless and Pearson (2008) find that female candidates are more likely to compete in crowded primaries and face more competition in primary elections than do male candidates. Based on this research and the findings presented here, it is natural to ask if the impact of gender in congressional primary elections differs across racial and ethnic groups. For example, are Latina candidates more likely to win in heavily Latino districts than are Latino candidates? Do African American male candidates have a higher likelihood of winning in largely African American districts than African American female candidates? This line of research could also examine whether the competitiveness of elections varies along racial/ethnic and gender lines.

## Notes

1. One notable exception is D. Canon (1999), which tracks electoral competition associated with the presence of African American candidates in three elections. However, this piece is limited by the singular focus on African American candidates and a small subset of congressional districts.

2. The analysis includes candidates who received more than 5 percent of the vote (B. Canon 1978).

3. The FEC reports the official election results, certified by state election officials, for the 2000 and 2004 elections (see [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2000/2000house.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2000/2000house.htm) for an example). *CQ Weekly Reports* published the 1994 and 1998 primary-election results for each state.

4. I used Lexis-Nexis and Newsbank to cull information on the remaining candidates. The information was compiled by direct contact with the candidates themselves. Based on information

collected in *CQ Weekly Report* and Internet searches, I was able to determine where each remaining candidate resides. I used this information to track down work or home telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, which were used to contact each remaining person.

5. Ideally, a count measure of African American and Latino quality challengers would be examined. However, there are no instances during this period in which more than one African American or Latino quality challenger emerged in the Republican primary. Although there were nine Democratic primaries that included more than one African American nonincumbent quality challenger and seven races that included more than one Latino nonincumbent quality challenger, there are too few cases to reliably estimate a count model.

6. District-level percentage of African Americans ranges from 0 to 79 with a mean of 12; district-level percentage of Latinos ranges from 0 to 84 with a mean of 10.

7. The Presidential Approval measure is based on the percentage of people who responded positively to the Gallup Poll question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way (President X) is handling his job as president?" The variable measures the change in the average approval rating in January of the election year and January of the year before the election.

8. Because of space constraints, the year-parameter estimates are not presented. The year dummy variables are significant in the primary-competition models and the African American Republican emergence model. In all other models, the year dummies are insignificant.

9. The scenario used for graphs is as follows: redistricted, marginal election, and South are set to zero; percentage of African Americans or percentage of Latinos, pres. vote, CPI, and pres. approval are set to the mean.

10. There are too few African American (two) and Latino (six) Republican incumbents to estimate a separate coefficient for black or Latino Republican incumbent.

11. The Vuong test indicates the zero-inflated Poisson is preferred to the standard Poisson.

12. Only 1 percent of Republican and 3 percent of Democratic primaries include an African American quality candidate; 1 percent of Democratic and Republican primaries include a Latino quality candidate.

13. A standard logit model produces biased estimates because of the skewed distribution of the dependent variable, while the rare-events logit corrects this bias.

14. In-party incumbent is excluded as there are no instances of an African American quality challenger emerging in a Republican primary with a Republican incumbent and only two instances of a Latino quality candidate emerging in a primary that included a Republican incumbent.

15. Sixty-seven percent of Democratic primaries and 65% of Republican primaries are unopposed, resulting in heavily skewed dependent variables. Thus, one of the key assumptions of classic linear regression—normality of the error distribution—is violated, which affects hypothesis testing and confidence intervals. However, the models are also estimated including the unopposed cases, and the findings are consistent with the results presented in Table 4.

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