The primary runoff as a remnant of the old South

James M. Glaser*

Department of Political Science, Eaton Hall, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155, USA

Abstract

During the Jim Crow era, the American South developed a distinctive one-party political structure. One important feature of that structure was the primary runoff, which was adopted to require candidates to generate majority support in the nomination process and to stimulate competition within the Democratic Party (thus keeping the Republican Party irrelevant). In this piece, I argue that although the South has become a two-party region and the runoff has lived beyond its original purposes, it continues to do many of the things it was put into place to do. As in decades past, the runoff still has an impact on such things as candidate emergence, the competitiveness of primaries, and the ability for voters to reevaluate their choices.
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Keywords: Southern politics; Primary elections; Runoff elections; Candidate emergence

The contemporary American South, the former states of the Confederacy, is a place where once unimaginable change has come. Since the Civil Rights Revolution, the South's polity has integrated and large numbers of blacks now hold elective office. A once pathetic Republican Party has become a major force in the politics of the southern states. And what was a backward region now looks like the rest of the country in many ways and on many dimensions (Black and Black, 1987; Applebome, 1996). Fifty years ago, V.O. Key titled the final chapter of his tome on southern politics, ''Is There a Way Out?'' (Key, 1949) Even mindful of some of the persistent problems of the region, change has been very dramatic. There was a way out for the South, and it was found.

Political scientists and historians have rightly focused on this change, and have written extensively on the political and racial transformation of the region. In this literature, however, it has been easy to lose sight of some of the continuities in the politics of the region. During the Jim Crow era,

* Tel.: +1 617 627 2055; fax: +1 617 627 3660.
E-mail address: jglaser@tufts.edu

the South developed a very distinctive political structure. I argue here that there are some institutional bits and pieces left over from the old regime, some electoral rules and procedures, that continue to shape the way that politics are practiced in the region. These rules and procedures were initiated in a different context and with a logic that fit that context. They now have lived well beyond their original purpose, but they have lived on in the two-party South. With no obvious or compelling reason to change, the old rules have become custom, the old procedures habit.

In this article, I focus on the primary runoff as one such remnant of the past (elsewhere I look at others). Runoffs came into being in every southern state except for Tennessee and Virginia between 1902 and 1939. Outside the region, only Oklahoma instituted runoff rules in this period. Why was the runoff attractive in the South but not the North? The answer, argued V.O. Key, lay in the region's one-party political system. With but one operative party, the Democratic primary became equivalent to the general election. Under plurality rules, a public official thus could be elected with even a small proportion of the vote, a distinctly undemocratic outcome. According to Key, it was an ''attachment to the abstract idea of majority nomination'' that led southern state legislatures to embrace the runoff (Key, 1949, 422). With a runoff requirement, a candidate could not just win with a minority faction, but had to generate a majority at some point in the electoral process.

Yet there was also a more practical and less lofty purpose for the runoff. Although it does not seem to have been instituted as part of the grander, coordinated plan to support white supremacy, the runoff did help sustain the supremacist, one-party political system, and that had to have been recognized. Looking at timing, runoffs were adopted roughly 20 years after poll taxes, literacy tests, and other features of the white supremacist polity. But the direct primary itself, in Walter Dean Burnham's words, ''sapped the minority party's monopoly of opposition'' in the one-party South (Burnham, 1965, 19–20), and the runoff was especially important to that for it fostered more vigorous intra-party competition. Individual candidates and factions could look ahead to an election and perceive that their chances were better given runoff rules. And they were, according to Key, as more than one-third of runoffs were won by second place candidates who would have lost under a one-shot nomination process.

Later, as blacks entered the electorate, and entered as Democrats, the runoff also helped to delay ''white flight'' from the Democratic Party. If blacks could forge a plurality behind a single black candidate in the first round, whites could still rally around the surviving white candidate in the second round—and, predictably, they did.[1] The procedure thus held many white politicians in the Democratic Party, blocked blacks from office, and allowed the old political regime to linger longer than it otherwise would have. It served a purpose for those invested in the party and its dominance.

It now has been several decades since the Democrats were completely dominant in the South. They have not been able to blindly count on southern electoral votes in presidential elections for almost half a century. While the party took decades to organize, southern Republicans have been at least viable down the ticket since the 1970s, and truly competitive since 1980. The one-party conditions that fostered the runoff primary have not existed for many years. Yet the

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[1] Frank Parker (1990) writes of 1967 Mississippi, where the runoff kept blacks from winning Democratic nominations. Throughout the state that year, eight black candidates for state legislature emerged as plurality candidates in the first round of elections. Every single one of them lost the head-to-head contest with the white candidate who emerged from the first election. Twelve other black candidates made the runoff with a second-place finish, only to lose the runoff to their white opponent. No black candidates came from behind to win a nomination (74).

two-tiered party primary is still in effect in seven of the 11 states of the region, with only Florida eliminating it in 2002.[2] Outside the South, primary runoffs are found only in Oklahoma, a contiguous, previously one-party state that is southern on many dimensions.[3] The runoff provision, then, still distinguishes southern elections from those held elsewhere, and, as I argue in this article, still has some bearing on the nomination process in the now politically competitive South. As in decades past, the runoff encourages more candidates to run. As before, it heightens intra-party competition. And the iterative voting that it mandates still can keep a plurality faction with significant electoral power from winning a nomination. Much has changed in the politics of the region, but strikingly this remnant of the political past continues to shape the politics of the present and to contribute to the region's political distinctiveness.

1. Data

To investigate the ways that the primary runoff continues to affect contemporary southern electoral politics, I have collected data on every open seat congressional race in the country—Senate and House—between 1980 and 2002. I study congressional elections, rather than state-government elections, as they have the advantage of being more plentiful, thus offering a critical mass of cases from one political era, 986 in the 12 election cycles of this study. Congressional elections also offer easy comparability across regions, with every candidate studied here vying for the same job (in the House or Senate) and the same destination. The unit of analysis in these studies is the primary election, thus each open seat yields two cases. Only contests held during the regular cycle are included in the study as special elections in many places operate via different rules and have unique dynamics. Elections in Louisiana, Washington (between 1988 and 2000), and California (in 1998 and 2000) are excluded because of their open or blanket format. Likewise, Virginia elections are almost all excluded from this analysis as that state uses the convention to nominate candidates (there are a few districts in Virginia that hold primaries and these are included in the study).

The choice to look at elections between 1980 and 2002 is purposeful as well. The 1980 election represented a new high point for the Republican Party in the South. While Republican presidential candidates had been winning electoral votes in the South going back to 1952, Republican candidates had difficulty breaking through at the congressional level. Prior to the 1980 elections, Republicans held only about one-quarter of all southern congressional seats, House or Senate. With the 1980 election, Republicans experienced a new plateau, reaching about one-third of southern House seats and one-half of Senate seats (Glaser, 1996). Even when they were not winning, they were fielding viable candidates and running spirited campaigns. Between 1970 and 1978, southern Republican candidates averaged 37% of the two-party vote in open seat congressional and Senate elections; in the 1980s, that jumped dramatically to 46%.[4] The period under study here thus represents an era of partisan competitiveness in the South, an important point given my argument that a leftover from the old political system—the runoff primary—has continued to influence political behavior even as its

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[2] For reasons of cost and efficiency, Florida eliminated the runoff for federal and state-wide elections, on a pilot basis in 2002 and 2004, and permanently in April 2005.

[3] For these reasons, and for simplicity in describing results, I classify Oklahoma as part of the South in the remainder of this article.

[4] If one removes the uncontested elections (eight of 69 in the 1970s, two of 42 in the 1980s), Republicans averaged 42% in the 1970s and 48% in the 1980s. These numbers do not include elections in Louisiana.

purpose has became obsolete. This is also important as the literature on runoffs is largely built on studies utilizing data from before the competitive era. As I will discuss further on, this undermines some of the conclusions drawn about the effect of the runoff and makes replication of these studies especially valuable.

Finally, I restrict the analysis to primaries in open seat elections. This makes sense given that primaries are so rarely competitive when an incumbent is running. Very few candidates challenge from within an incumbent's party. The prospects for victory against all but a few incumbents are so dismal as to discourage entry into the challenger's race. To include elections involving incumbents would increase the number of cases, but also introduce a variable into the analysis that would swamp all others while not illuminating the issues studied here. This, I argue, is a flaw of the previous studies of this phenomenon.

I have collected data on the number of candidates involved in each contest, the electoral performance of each candidate, and miscellaneous other features of the district and the election in order to test hypotheses about the continuing impact of the runoff election. These data come from the *America Votes* series (Scammon and McGillivray, 1981–1995, Scammon et al., 1997–2001), from various issues of *Congressional Quarterly*, and from on-line Federal Election Commission data (http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2002/tcontents.htm). The dataset is available from the author by request.

2. Candidate emergence

The runoff was conceived originally to manufacture a majority candidate and to generate intra-party competition. One can see how a second round of voting might entice more candidates into a contest. With two spots rather than one at stake, and a lower threshold required to secure a place in the second round than a victory in the first round, candidates, especially those from outside a plurality faction in the party, have more reason to be optimistic about their chances. Not only does the perceived chance of winning increase, but the runoff theoretically should lead candidates to believe that they can own a significant enough piece of the political spectrum to win one of the two spots (Greenberg and Shepsle, 1987). The runoff also makes it possible for many different factions to be represented in the first round without fear of splitting the vote and electing an unpalatable plurality candidate. As Key argues, without the runoff, "the forces that unite behind a single man for [the runoff] would join in the first or only primary" (Key, 1949, 422).

Several studies of the past 20 years have shown that the runoff has, in fact, traditionally lured more candidates into elections. Looking at gubernatorial primaries since the initiation of the runoff, Canon (1978), Wright and Riker (1989) and Berry and Canon (1993) all find that the runoff provision had an effect on candidate emergence. In these studies, southern Democratic primaries were more crowded than primaries outside the region, the runoff provision being the prime reason for the difference. Berry and Canon, however, suggest that this relationship may have more to do with the fact that there are other factors associated with primaries in the South. Notably, they argue that the effect of the runoff is partly contingent upon the strength of the opposition party. Where there is real inter-party competition, and candidates are not crowded into one party apparatus, the effect of the runoff is greatly reduced. Thus, it may not have been runoff primaries at work in the previous era. Instead, because previous studies of the relationship all utilize pre-1980s data, they may be conflating the effect of a runoff with the effect of a primary being held in an environment of one-party dominance. Berry and Cannon's study

uses data up to 1988 to make this point, and they do so effectively, but the post-1980 elections represent only a small percentage of those they use in their study.

So I ask the question again, at a time enough data can be collected to disentangle the effect of the runoff from the effect of one-party dominance. Do elections with runoff provisions continue to lure more candidates into them? If this is the case, the relationship should hold in this politically competitive era. And it should appear in both Democratic and Republican primaries (Rice, 1985; Berry and Canon, 1993).

To test the hypothesis that the runoff stimulates more candidacies, I regress (using OLS) the number of meaningful candidates in the primary on whether or not the election has a runoff provision.[5] Meaningful candidates are those who win at least 5% of the vote in the primary. This is a low place to set the bar, but even candidates with a small percentage of the vote have the potential to influence a very close multi-candidate race.[6] Of course, I also include a number of additional controls in the equation, variables that might capture alternative explanations for large or small candidate fields. These controls are linked to the following questions:

- What does it take to get on the ballot? Potential candidates are likely influenced by state rules governing access to the ballot. States that require candidates to pay a fee or gather signatures (or both) are likely to see fewer candidates on their ballots. Party rules that require candidates to line up some minimum number of delegates to a state party convention to run in the primary also are likely to discourage or eliminate candidacies.[7] All three of these factors are controlled for in the equation.[8]
- Is the contest for a Senate or House seat? The expectation here is that the larger task of running state-wide and raising more money in order to be a viable candidate will be a discouraging factor and that fewer candidates will thus emerge.
- Is the race well-timed? National political factors are likely to determine the answer, and these factors are idiosyncratic year-to-year, even district-to-district. However, there is one systematic point about national factors that potential candidates are likely to know and pay heed to. With the out-party picking up seats in almost every midterm election (1998 and 2002 being the very rare exceptions), off-year elections are likely to be more enticing for members of the out-party and more discouraging for members of the in-party. Somewhat less reliably, incumbent presidents are known to bring fellow partisans into office with them, leading to a relatively predictable ebb and flow of party fortunes. This is one of the fundamental points that Jacobson and Kernell (1983) make in laying out their "strategic politicians theory." I control for this

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[5] Obviously, this analysis only includes first-round elections in runoff states. It also should be noted that elections in Florida and North Carolina in 2002 are not runoff elections. As noted, Florida eliminated runoffs starting in 2002 (see note 2). North Carolina, facing a shortened primary season due to redistricting litigation, did not have runoffs in 2002, but returned to them in 2004.

[6] In eliminating the most marginal candidates, I follow Berry and Cannon's (1993) study of candidate emergence. Party primaries where no candidate declares (a rare occurrence) are excluded from the analysis. A structural enticement like the runoff is unlikely to work in a district where no candidates emerge even when a seat is open, the most optimistic of moments.

[7] Colorado, Connecticut, and Utah all have such rules. A few other state parties hold conventions that endorse candidates, but do not limit access to the ballot with the endorsement vote. The "Convention Delegates" variable only separates out primaries held in the three states that require candidates to line up a minimum number of delegates.

[8] I acquired data regarding ballot access from Richard Winger, the editor of the newsletter *Ballot Access News*, and from phone calls to Secretary of State offices.

ebb and flow to test for the behavior of "strategic politicians" as they make candidacy decisions in anticipation of a good or bad year for their party.[9]

- What kind of advantage does one party have over the other in the district? To measure this potential factor, I have added presidential performance in the district in the *previous* general election to the equation. I use previous presidential performance as this would be the information available to prospective candidates as they make decisions about whether or not to run. The measure is district performance of the party's candidate minus national performance of the party's candidate. A positive number thus represents an above average presidential candidate performance in the district, a negative number, a below average performance. This is done to make different presidential elections comparable. A district that went 50% for Walter Mondale in 1984 is probably more Democratic than a district that went 50% for Bill Clinton in 1996, and this measure accounts for this. Obviously more candidates should elect to run in a dominant party, the ease of winning the general election and holding the seat being the incentive. Additionally, I include a variable tapping whether the primary takes place in the party of the outgoing officeholder. The hypothesis here is that more candidates should emerge when this cue suggests they have a better shot at winning.

As shown in Table 1, several of these variables have a significant effect on candidate emergence. Where a party's presidential candidate has run well in the previous election, more candidates do, in fact, run in that primary. More crowded fields also emerge in the party of the departing representative or senator. As expected, Senate races do draw fewer candidates than House races, the greater cost of running state-wide and greater likelihood of a high intensity contest against quality candidates (Krasno, 1994) likely scaring off some potential candidates. State rules requiring the payment of a fee to get on the ballot do not appear to discourage primary candidates, but signature requirements do and convention delegate requirements most certainly do, some evidence that effort is a greater barrier to entry than money.[10] Finally, the effect of the "strategic politicians" variable, the advantage of running with or against the president, is small and insignificant.

Most important for this study, the coefficient associated with the runoff does attain statistical significance in the multivariate equation. Primary elections that hold the possibility of a second round draw more candidates than those that do not—in both parties, in congressional elections, in contemporary times. Translating the coefficient into practical terms, the runoff provision leads to candidate fields that are 14% larger than non-runoff primaries, all else the same. Put another way, with a coefficient of 0.40, runoff fields are four-tenths of a candidate larger. Though no election has ever been won by four-tenths of a candidate, the effect nonetheless comfortably confirms the hypothesis, and replicates a finding from previous work, an important finding but one derived from data from the pre-competitive South.[11]

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[9] This is a dummy variable which takes a value of "1" if the election is held in the incumbent president's party in a presidential year. It also takes a value of "1" if the primary takes place in the out-of-power party in an off-year.

[10] States with fee requirements generally do not have signature requirements, and vice versa. There is a negative correlation of 0.30 for these two variables, significant but small enough to alleviate concerns that multicollinearity might be influencing these coefficients.

[11] The Adjusted R^2 statistics associated with these equations are modest compared to previous studies of this topic. This is a function of my decision to limit this analysis to meaningful—that is, open-seat—elections. Incumbency is a huge factor in the size of candidacy fields. Even weak incumbents rarely face internal opposition. Inclusion of this variable in the analysis is certain to inflate the Adjusted R^2 statistic, but at the cost of a much larger data collection that holds out little promise of new insights.

Table 1
Runoff elections attract more candidates (OLS regression coefficients)

	All primaries		Republican primaries only	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
Runoff	0.40***	(0.11)	0.36**	(0.15)
Presidential ebb and flow	0.05	(0.09)	0.24*	(0.13)
Presidential party strength	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
Outgoing Rep/Sen	0.33***	(0.09)	0.30**	(0.14)
Fee required	−0.02	(0.05)	−0.02	(0.07)
Signatures required	−0.43***	(0.09)	−0.37***	(0.12)
Convention delegates required	−0.89***	(0.19)	−0.97***	(0.26)
Senate race	−0.33***	(0.13)	−0.51***	(0.18)
Intercept	2.91***	(0.10)	2.83***	(0.14)
Adjusted R^2	0.15		0.16	
n	986		493	

The data in these analyses represent all open seat primary elections for Congress held between 1980 and 2002. Special elections and primaries without candidates are not included. The dependent variable in this analysis is the number of legitimate candidates in the contest. Legitimate candidates are all those who receive at least 5% of the primary vote. ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$.

In finding that the relationship still holds beyond 1980, I bolster confidence in the idea that it really was the primary runoff that was at work in encouraging candidacies in the one-party South, not some other feature of politics in the region such as an uncompetitive party system pushing all candidates into one contest. This finding also indicates that the South's old political rules still have bearing on contemporary elections, even within the Republican Party. Indeed, it is striking that the runoff coefficient continues to achieve statistical significance when the analysis is confined to Republican primaries (column 2, Table 1). How ironic that the runoff, a device once intended to stifle competition from the Republican Party, now serves to enhance competition within it.

3. Electoral competitiveness

Candidate emergence is but one measure of the competitiveness of a political system, albeit an important one. Many candidates may run, but not be able to generate a meaningful challenge. If it simply pulls more quixotic candidates into the field who might not otherwise be there, what difference does the runoff make? The next step here is thus to bring electoral performance into the analysis and to look at the difference in the actual competitiveness of primary elections held under runoff rules and those held under simple plurality rules.

At the most basic level, the difference is impressive. In this study of open-seat congressional elections, in districts without a runoff provision, the lead candidate wins a majority 66% of the time ($n = 737$). In districts with runoff provisions, the first round yields a majority winner only 54% of the time ($n = 260$). By this simple standard, southern primaries are quite a bit more competitive. Strikingly, in that runoffs happen almost as often as they are avoided in the South,[12] things have not changed since 1948. Key (1949, 417) found that the ''odds were about

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[12] Because of the rules in North Carolina, where a 40% plurality is all that is required to avoid a runoff, the percentage of southern primaries actually yielding an outright winner in the first round is slightly larger.

even that no candidates will receive a majority in the first primary'' in his analysis of Democratic gubernatorial nominations.

A second multivariate test confirms this initial finding that primaries in the runoff states of the South are more competitive than those held elsewhere. Here, I utilize the exact same equation as in the previous analysis, but change the dependent variable. Instead of using a measure of the number of viable candidates in the primary as the dependent variable, I use a measure of competitiveness that accounts for both the number of candidates in the contest and their electoral strength. This measure comes from previous studies of the topic, Berry and Canon's (1993) study of the runoff primary and Canon's initial work on the topic (Canon, 1978). Canon's Index of Factionalism, as it is called, is based on the formula

$$\text{Faction} = 1 - \sum c^2$$

where c represents the decimal share of the total vote each viable candidate receives (again, very marginal candidates—those receiving less than 5% of the vote—are not counted). With only one candidate in the race, the value of the measure is zero. As the number of candidates increases and as more of these candidates receive larger shares of the vote—as the election becomes more competitive—the summation becomes smaller and the value of the measure approaches one (Berry and Canon, 1993, 463−464).

The results from the OLS regression can be found in Table 2. Having a runoff procedure in place leads to an increase in the competitiveness index of about 0.07, not only a substantively sizable 15% jump, but a statistically significant one ($p < 0.01$). The controls all operate as they did in the previous candidate emergence regression. These coefficients run in the same direction and meet the same significance levels as they do in the first equation. Given that the number of candidates in the field (the dependent variable in the emergence regression) is a component of Canon's index, it is not terribly surprising that the coefficients in the two equations are similar. But the index does incorporate other important information about the competitiveness of the

Table 2
Runoff elections are more competitive (OLS regression coefficients)

	All primaries		Republican primaries only	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
Runoff	0.07***	(0.02)	0.05**	(0.03)
Presidential ebb and flow	0.01	(0.02)	0.03	(0.02)
Presidential party strength	0.007***	(0.001)	0.007***	(0.001)
Outgoing Rep/Sen	0.05***	(0.02)	0.04	(0.03)
Fee required	−0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Signatures required	−0.07***	(0.02)	−0.06**	(0.02)
Convention delegates required	−0.12***	(0.04)	−0.10**	(0.05)
Senate race	−0.06***	(0.02)	−0.09***	(0.03)
Intercept	0.47***	(0.02)	0.46***	(0.03)
Adjusted R^2	0.14		0.12	
n	986		493	

The data in these analyses represent all open seat primary elections for Congress held between 1980 and 2002. Special elections and primaries without candidates are not included. The dependent variable in this analysis is Canon's Index of Factionalism (Faction $= 1 - \sum c^2$) where summation is over all candidates receiving more than 5% of the vote and c equals a given candidate's decimal share of the total vote (Berry and Canon, 1993). ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$.

race. It tests the proposition that the runoff not only inspires more candidates to run, presumably by influencing their perceptions of viability, but brings in better candidates who stand better chances.

As above, the analysis yields nearly the same outcome when restricted to Republican primary elections. Republican primaries in runoff—southern—states are more competitive affairs than Republican primaries elsewhere because of an old rule grafted onto new circumstances. The runoff provision creates the same incentives for stronger candidates to join Republican contests now that the Republican ticket is a vehicle for general election in the South.

4. A second chance to evaluate choices

The runoff has yet one more effect on the way in which contemporary southern congressional nominations progress, an effect that again reflects the intent of its original advocates. The second election continues to offer a party's voters an opportunity to take another look at their choices, to reassess their preferences, or to respond to a less-than-desired outcome in the first contest. Voters do seize these opportunities, at least on occasion, and the runoff thus provides a check against fluky candidates or plurality candidates who are objectionable to a majority from representing the party in the general election. Some indication of this is that second place candidates can come from behind to win runoffs. While this is not the usual outcome—first-place candidates from the first round win much more than they lose in the runoff—it is not unusual either. In this study, 28% of the 117 southern congressional primaries that went to runoffs between 1980 and 2002 were won by the candidate who placed second in the first contest. Yet again, this result is only slightly different from Key's day. Thirty-six percent of the runoff contests in his analysis went to the second place candidate. My result also matches that found in the 1970s and early 1980s by Bullock and Johnson (1992). In their analysis of southern nominations between 1970 and 1986, 30% of first primary runners-up won the runoff (Bullock and Johnson, 1992, 37). It is striking how consistent this has been over time, in the two studies of the pre-competitive South and here, in the competitive South.

Key's explanation for the non-trivial number of "come from behind" runoff victories is that the runoff provides an opportunity for the losing factions from the first round to coalesce behind the surviving alternative to a dominant and sometimes unpopular candidate or faction in the party. Certainly, this dynamic can still operate in contemporary runoff situations, as illustrated in a *Republican* primary held in South Carolina's 4th District in 1998. Here, in a very conservative part of a very conservative state, a dogmatic Christian conservative, high profile state senator, Mike Fair, placed first in the first primary with a sizable chunk of the vote, but not enough to avoid a runoff. Four other candidates vied for the second spot in what was a very close election. The candidate who emerged from that crowded election was Jim DeMint, another conservative, but one with a softer touch. In the runoff, DeMint appealed to many Republicans who were worried about Christian conservatives dominating their party, and this led him to a runoff victory (and, ultimately, to a congressional seat). This, at least, was the interpretation of party players and political observers. This cleavage runs through the Republican electorate in many southern districts now and it is a cleavage that the party will have to bridge, though the primary runoff offers a means by which a majority can at least counter a "mischievous" faction—as it long has done. This has been overlooked in discussions of how the Christian Right might threaten the growth and dominance of the party as a whole by turning off more centrist general election voters.

A 1992 case in Florida's 23rd District offers another instance of how the runoff can work to a different result from the first primary. This majority black district, created after the 1990 Census by combining heavily Jewish Miami Beach with black neighborhoods in Miami and several surrounding counties, drew a crowd of five candidates (three of them black) into the Democratic field. The leader after the first round was a white, Jewish state senator, Lois Frankel. Two black candidates, Alcee Hastings and Bill Clark, were in contention for the runoff spot, both with about 28% of the vote behind Frankel at 35%. Hastings emerged as the runoff candidate. The Frankel—Hastings contest immediately became racially divisive, with Hastings raising race in vivid ways to bring together black voters who had split among multiple black candidates during the first primary and to enhance black voter turnout (Dyckman, 1992). Hastings won a 58—42 runoff victory, despite coming in a relatively distant second place in the first round. Again, while the circumstances are different—districts with a black majority of voters did not exist in Key's day—his description of campaign dynamics in places with runoff rules still holds.

A second explanation for come-from-behind victories is that voters are reevaluating the first result and the electability of the frontrunner, whether the frontrunner is from a strong faction in the party or not. Electability was not an issue in the pre-competitive South. The winner of the Democratic runoff went on to certain general election victory, if he even had opposition. The ability to reconsider choices has always been there, however, and has long been seen as a desirable aspect of the runoff process (especially given the difficulty of assessing candidates in larger, multi-candidate fields in the first round). Now, in a competitive party system, reconsidering and reevaluating choices means that electability can come into play via the runoff. In non-runoff primaries, Abramowitz et al. (1981) find little evidence of strategic voting, which they define as ''voting that is based not on candidate preference, but rather on a calculation about the prospects of the primary candidates in the general election'' (902). Here, I provide a different test of strategic voting.

If voters are using the runoff to reevaluate choices and if electability becomes part of the calculus, then come-from-behind candidates should be better general election candidates and should win the general election with greater frequency than other candidates. That is, there should be a relationship between coming from behind in the primaries and winning the general. Such a relationship suggests but does not demonstrate strategic voting on the part of primary voters.[13] Of course, strategic voting could be taking place even if this relationship did not exist, but this would mean that voters were poor at voting strategically, unable to distinguish between more electable and less electable primary candidates. There is very little else but strategic voting that would explain the relationship if it does exist, however.

To test this hypothesis, I regress the candidates' general election success on their route to the general (obviously confining the analysis to elections in runoff states). The independent variables I use here separate come-from-behind candidates from those winning the nomination in the first round outright and those winning both the first round and the runoff, this last group serving as the base category from which comparisons will be made. I also enter controls for electoral forces into the equation, variables we know contribute to general election success. To capture national forces, I again include a presidential strength variable to measure partisan balance in the district.[14] I also

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[13] A full demonstration would require a study of voters, not elections, but the data for such a wide-ranging study simply do not exist.

[14] Though here the measure is slightly different. In the previous equations, I use presidential performance in the most recent presidential election, for this is the information that prospective candidates would have had when they were making decisions to run. Here, as my purpose is to study electoral success, I use presidential performance from the concurrent election. In off-year cases, the two variables will have the same values.

include the presidential ebb and flow variable which measures temporal advantages a candidate might have that would contribute to a general election victory. Local circumstances—the differential strength of candidates in any particular race—are also certain to influence the outcome. To control for local forces, I include in the equation a measure of comparative campaign expenditures. In creating this variable, I start with the amount of money spent in the campaign by the two major party candidates, and then calculate each candidate's share of those expenditures. It is not the sheer amount of money spent that matters to a result, after all, but the level of the playing field. This measure captures the playing field and has the added benefit of making expenditures in each year comparable, putting aside inflation.[15] Finally, I have included a House or Senate election variable in the equation. One might expect that multiple primaries would deplete resources more in a Senate than a House campaign, and thus dampen the general election chances of a Senate candidate. The dichotomous dependent variable—general election success—necessitates the use of logistic regression.

The results in Table 3 show that, all else the same, come-from-behind candidates are well positioned to win general elections. Not surprisingly, the controls in the equation do have separate and distinct effects. The presidential ebb and flow variable, the party strength variable, and the financial balance variable all achieve statistical significance. While the coefficient gauging the effect of Senate elections is not statistically significant, it does run in the hypothesized direction. While these findings are of interest, the real value of the controls is the assurance they provide about the validity of the relationships under study.

To the principal hypotheses being tested here, even accounting for these factors, the come-from-behind coefficient carries some punch, though the significance level is borderline. This coefficient measures the difference in general election success between "come-from-behind" candidates and those who lead the first election and then win the runoff. Those who win the first contest outright are also more likely to win a general election than those candidates who run and win twice. Translating the logistic coefficients into "first differences" gives some sense of the size of these relationships.[16] Controlling for national and local forces, the probability of an "average" come-from-behind candidate winning the general election is 0.69; the probability of general election victory for the "average" candidate who wins the first primary election outright (which would include all candidates who run unopposed or run in two-candidate contests) is 0.55. For the average candidate who leads the first election and wins the runoff, the probability of general election victory is only 0.42.[17]

There is one other study of this relationship. Bullock and Johnson (1992) find a smaller effect, though the relationship does move in the same direction. In their study, come-from-behind Democratic candidates won the general election 80% of the time while first-round Democratic leaders won the general 75% of the time (Bullock and Johnson, 1992, 166). Given that they confine their analysis to Democrats and given the time frame of their study (1970—1986),

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[15] For ease of interpretation, I recode this variable, grouping the values into five categories. In the process, I also re-calibrate the variable, with rough parity categorized at zero (see Appendix A).

[16] The "first difference" is the difference in the probability of winning the general election for come-from-behind candidates and the comparison groups, while setting all of the control variables at their mean in the logistic regression equation (see Lupia, 1994).

[17] This last probability is notably low. One might argue that running twice depletes resources that could be used in the general though this does not seem to have hurt "come-from-behinders." Another possibility here is that winning the first election makes a candidate the clear frontrunner, and a more likely target for negative charges and coverage (Hagen, 1996), weakening the candidate for the general.

Table 3
Come-from-behind winners have a general election advantage (logistic regression coefficients)

	b	SE(b)
First round winners	0.56	(0.45)
Come-from-behind winners	1.17*	(0.66)
Presidential ebb and flow	1.04***	(0.41)
Presidential party strength	0.16***	(0.03)
Campaign expenditures	1.47***	(0.26)
Senate race	−0.16	(0.56)
Intercept	−0.862**	(0.42)
Cox and Snell R^2	0.51	
n	256	

The data in these analyses represent all open seat primary elections for Congress held in runoff states between 1980 and 2002. Special elections are not included. The dependent variable here is whether or not a candidate wins the general election. Winners of both the first primary and the runoff are set to zero and thus form the base category in this equation. ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$.

the smaller difference they find is not surprising. Almost all Democrats won their general elections in this period (thus the very high success rates of all candidates). Because there are so few general election losers in the study, the difference of interest is bound to be compressed. In this study, the "ceiling" is meaningfully removed and the relationship appears more vividly, suggesting that in contemporary southern elections, in newly competitive southern elections, primary voters are considering electability as they make their decisions. The old runoff rules certainly provide primary voters the opportunity to tap the electability consideration in a way other primary election processes do not, a point of importance as we consider the dynamics of elections, the strategies pursued, and the types of congressional candidates who run and win in the present-day South.

5. Final remarks

The literature on southern politics has rightly emphasized the dramatic and widespread changes that have occurred in recent decades. While the link to the past was once the major theme in this literature, this emphasis on continuity is long gone. I argue in this article, and on a grander scale elsewhere (Glaser, 2005), that we should not lose sight of the lines of continuity that run through the recent political history of the region. The runoff, and its lingering effect, represents just one piece of this argument, but it is a lovely example of continuity amidst change.

The runoff was instituted throughout most of the American South in the first half of the 20th century in response to the peculiar political structure that had been established in the Jim Crow era. At that time, it made good sense. From a loftier perspective, the runoff assured that the winner of an election had to win a majority vote at some point in the process, a seemingly important point for a region defensive about its political practices. From a more cynical perspective, it contributed to keeping electoral competition contained within the Democratic Party. As the one-party political system slowly crumbled in the years after the Civil Rights Movement, the rules—the electoral rules—have generally stayed the same. Here, I examine how those rules continue to shape electoral politics in the South. The findings show that southern primaries

attract more candidates, generate more competition, and offer voters an opportunity to block a dominant faction in the district and/or to reconsider choices.

These findings are meaningful from two additional perspectives. First, the relationship between electoral design and the political behavior of elites and citizens is of central concern to political scientists. In this piece, I replicate studies that show how different primary procedures and processes lead to different behaviors and decisions. And I do it using contemporary data that allow for a much more definitive conclusion on the point. Second, finding that the runoff continues to affect how politics are practiced in the South also allows me to make a more general point about *how* the past continues to inform the present, and presumably the future, in the region. Path dependency does not just mean that political culture, passed generation-to-generation, sets the parameters within which political activity can take place, or that common law requires that precedent be followed and revered. Sometimes it is just inertia, rules and procedures that have not adjusted to changed circumstances. People, places, and parties become so used to operating in a certain way that the rules and procedures become automatic. In this case, the outcomes associated with the runoff rules are generally positive, but it is likely that the runoff continues to exist because there has not been much incentive to reexamine the premises that underlie it. This is not to say that this never happens. Florida recently eliminated the two-tiered process as part of a general form of electoral procedures following the problematic 2000 election (the runoff and the punch card ballot were purged in the same piece of legislation, March, 2001). But the exception here really helps illustrate the point given the extraordinary nature of the impetus for change.

Appendix A. Variable definitions

A.1. Tables 1 and 2

Runoff: Dummy variable. 0, no runoff provision in election; 1, runoff provision.

Presidential ebb and flow: Dummy variable. 1, candidate running with incumbent president on ticket during presidential year or running on out-party ticket in off-year; 0, otherwise.

Presidential party strength: In Tables 1 and 2, this variable is the party's presidential candidate's performance in the previous presidential election in the district or state holding the primary election. Candidate performance is measured as the difference in the national performance of the party's candidate and his performance in the district or state. Positive values thus indicate a district whose support of a presidential candidate is higher than support in the nation as a whole; negative values indicate a lower level of support. In Table 3, presidential performance in the current election rather than the previous election is used (in off-years, the variable would be the same). See note 14 for explanation.

Outgoing Rep/Sen: Dummy variable. 1, departing representative or senator is of the party holding the primary election; 0, otherwise (includes primaries in districts newly created after reapportionment).

Fee required: 0, no fee required to enter primary election; 1, nominal fee required; 2, sizeable fee required.

Signatures required: Dummy variable. 1, signatures must be collected to enter primary election; 0, otherwise.

Convention delegates required: Dummy variable. 1, endorsement from party convention required to gain access to ballot; 0, otherwise.

Senate race: Dummy variable. 0, House election; 1, Senate election.

A.2. Table 3

First round winners: Dummy variable. 0, candidates leading after the first round primary and winning the second round primary; 1, candidates winning the first primary election outright (includes candidates who are unopposed).

Come-from-behind winners: Dummy variable. 0, candidates leading after the first round primary and winning the runoff; 1, candidates trailing after the first round, but winning the runoff.

Campaign expenditures: Party candidate's general election expenditures divided by expenditures of both general election candidates. This variable is then grouped into five categories: -2, outspent by opponent by more than 4-to-1; -1, outspent by opponent 4:1 to 1.5:1; 0, rough parity; 1, outspent opponent 1.5:1 to 4:1; 2, outspent opponent by more than 4:1.

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