ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the rules which govern the direct primary in the states. Operating within the framework of responsible party nomination, I explore primary rules in the states across their 100-year history, and examine arguments regarding the adoption of the primary and correlates of its use.

First, this project introduces the traditional classification system of primaries, which is based on ballot choice. Drawing on state statute and other official sources, I examine rules in order to create a more comprehensive measure. Examining the motivations of progressive reformers in the west and party officials in the east, I examine how rules are shaped based on the motivation for their adoption, and show that these relationships continue to persist today.

Finally, I examine correlates of primary rules by investigating primary competition and candidate extremism. I show that there is little evidence for these relationships, and, using the example of the recent Tea Party movement, suggest that restrictiveness may inhibit the success of insurgent party factions.

To conclude, the final chapter discusses recent developments and their potential to impact the way we view the primary. Specifically, that recent political developments may prompt an increased interest in the direct primary, leading to change or innovation in the way primaries are structured.