

The Role of Party in Nominating Gubernatorial Candidates

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There are seven states in which preprimary endorsements are provided by law, mostly ones that have used them for twenty years or more, and five other states where the rules of one or both parties provide for endorsements. States with legal endorsements continue to have relatively few contested primaries. But there has been a substantial decline, from over three-fourths to less than half, in the proportion of gubernatorial endorsees who win contested primaries (in states with either legal or informal endorsements). Endorsements are less successful if the convention represents too narrow a political or ideological base and the primary winner can appeal to a broader constituency.

The nomination of candidates is one of the most important functions performed by political parties in most democratic systems, and it was a major function of political parties in the United States until the development of the direct primary at the turn of the century. Direct primary elections have been mandated for the nomination of statewide partisan officials, including the governor, in all but a very few states. The exceptions are southern states where parties may choose to nominate by convention. A few other states (seven at the present time) give the parties a formal role in nominations through the endorsement process.

Theoretical Perspectives on Party Endorsements

Political parties have an obvious interest in nominating the strongest possible candidate, the one who has the best chance of winning in the general election. Political leaders and activists may believe that their judgment about the viability of candidates is better than that of the voters. The fact that a candidate can win a primary is not necessarily a sign that he or she is best able to win in November.

Political activists may believe it is important to choose a candidate whose ideology and views on issues are in the mainstream of the political party. It is possible, of course, that delegates to an endorsing convention will not be in the mainstream, partly because party organizations are quite permeable and may be dominated by relatively narrow interests.

The party has an interest in fostering unity and avoiding the bitter divisions that sometimes result from divisive primaries. It is arguable, but

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far from certain, that an endorsing convention can promote unity either by endorsing a candidate with broad appeal or by preventing a divisive primary.

One of the party's responsibilities is recruitment of candidates, particularly if the party is in the minority. Recruitment becomes more difficult if the party organization has no influence over nominations, and if carefully recruited candidates are defeated in primary elections.

A political party that plays a role in nominations may be a stronger, more vital institution. V.O. Key (1956, 168) asked "whether the direct primary mode of nomination may not set in motion forces that tend to lead to the atrophy of party organizations." If party activists and local organizations have an opportunity to participate in preprimary endorsements, their interest in the party organization and its activities may be enhanced.

Sarah Morehouse (1992) has concluded from her research on governors that those who have been selected through an endorsement process are likely to have greater political strength and be more effective in dealing with state legislatures.

For these and other reasons, a good case can be made that an important criterion for measuring the strength and effectiveness of a state party is the existence of a process to endorse candidates for nomination—particularly if the endorsement is usually successful in influencing the choice of a nominee. Because the governor is most important to the state political party, gubernatorial endorsements are particularly significant.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of preprimary endorsements in states where they are carried out formally under state law, or informally under party rules. More specifically, the purpose is to update previous research (Jewell 1984) that has been done on state party endorsements of gubernatorial candidates.

Has the use of endorsements increased or declined in the last dozen years? Have the endorsements become more effective—that is, have the endorsed candidates been more or less successful in gaining nomination than in the past? In the nonendorsing states, what is the trend in nominations: have office-holders and others who have worked within the party system been more or less successful when confronted by outsiders?

The Development of Preprimary Endorsements

The direct primary movement, which began in southern states in the late nineteenth century and in the North in the early twentieth century, spread very rapidly to most of the states. But in a few states, party organizations were strong enough to resist direct primaries for many years and to

continue nominating by convention. The practice of state parties making preprimary endorsements in an effort to influence the outcome of primary elections developed in several ways. In some of the states that adopted primaries relatively early (such as Colorado and Wisconsin), the parties adopted procedures to permit preprimary endorsement. In some of the states that held out longest against primaries (such as New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island), the parties insisted on maintaining some influence over nominations through endorsements. In other states, endorsements were not employed until long after the direct primary had been adopted.

Preprimary endorsements have taken two forms. The first is formal, legal endorsing conventions or committees, provided for by law. Very often the law has either mandated that primary candidates demonstrate significant support in the convention to get on the primary ballot or given the endorsee (or endorsees) some advantage, such as easier access to, or a better position on, the ballot.

The second form is informal endorsing procedures that are not mentioned in statutes, but are the product of party rules. These endorsements may be done in a public convention, or by the state central committee (meeting publicly or privately), or by party leaders meeting behind the scenes—perhaps with little publicity about the endorsement.

Party Endorsements as of 1982

At the time of the 1982 election, there were seven states in which the laws provided that parties should hold preprimary conventions: Colorado, Connecticut, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Utah. Such laws had been repealed in three other states (Delaware, Massachusetts, and Idaho) that had used them during some elections in the 1960s and 1970s.

There were five other states in which one or both parties had rules providing for endorsements, and actually endorsed in most or all gubernatorial elections. After legal endorsements were repealed in Massachusetts, the Republicans began informal endorsements in 1974, while the Democrats started in 1982. After Delaware repealed legal endorsements, only the Republicans used informal endorsements, starting in 1980. Both parties in Minnesota and the Republicans in Wisconsin had used informal endorsements for many years. In Illinois, the central committees of both parties generally made endorsements, though the pattern appears to have been less consistent in the Republican party.

Trends since 1982 in the Use of Endorsements

There have been a few changes in the use of endorsements since 1982. After the 1982 election, the New Mexico legislature repealed the legal endorsement system that had been used intermittently in that state (1952-1954, 1964-1966, and 1978-1982). In 1993, the state legislature restored party endorsements, effective as of 1994. Unlike most states that have used legal or informal endorsements, New Mexico is not, by most criteria, a strong party state.

In Delaware, the legal endorsement system had been abolished after the 1976 election, but the Republican party has continued the practice through informal endorsements.

In Colorado, the state legislature strengthened the endorsement system by increasing—from 20 to 30 percent—the vote that candidates must win in the convention to get on the primary ballot without using petitions. In contrast, the Connecticut legislature recently has reduced—from 20 to 15 percent—the percentage of the convention vote required to get on the primary ballot.

In Massachusetts, both parties continue to use informal endorsements. The Democratic party did not start the practice until 1982, but it appears to be generally accepted. The Republican party recently has followed the Democratic example by adopting a rule requiring candidates to get at least 15 percent of the vote at the convention to qualify for the primary.

Both Minnesota parties continue to make informal endorsements, but in the Democratic party there has been increasing controversy over their use. Some party activists favor either repealing them or limiting the number of ballots that can be taken to reach the 60 percent required for endorsement.

In Illinois, the Democratic state central committee continues to endorse, but the Republican party has made only intermittent use of the process for gubernatorial elections. The Wisconsin Republican party, with a long record of informal endorsements, has failed to endorse in recent years.

For many years, California had a unique legal ban on preprimary endorsements by political parties—a ban that was challenged by political scientists and some party leaders and was eventually overturned by the courts. (For a long time informal organizations of party activists have made statewide and local endorsements, but the parties themselves had been unable to.) The California Democratic party, for the first time, made endorsements in the 1990 governor's race. The Republican party chose not to use endorsements in 1990. The Democrats avoided making endorsements in 1992 but followed the practice in 1994 (though not for the governor's race).

It is too early to tell whether endorsements will become an established practice in either or both parties.

The Effectiveness of Endorsements

Trends over Time

There is evidence that those gubernatorial candidates who have been endorsed, either formally or informally, have won a high proportion of the time, either because nonendorsed candidates dropped out, or the endorsees beat their opponents. In evaluating the effectiveness of endorsements, we should look separately at legal and informal methods, to determine whether the former is likely to have a greater impact on the nomination than the latter. The historical evidence is based on parties in thirteen states that made either legal or informal endorsements for some of the years from 1950 through 1982 and for which data are available (unfortunately, some data are missing).

In gubernatorial nominations from 1950 through 1982 there were contested primaries in only 42 percent of the cases in which legal endorsements were used, and in 66 percent of the cases of informal endorsements, compared to 78 percent of the remaining primaries in northern states. Moreover, the endorsed candidate was nominated in 77 percent of primaries that were contested, with no important difference between legal and informal endorsing systems (Jewell 1984, 66-67).

Table 1 provides more recent information on the effectiveness of primary endorsements in those states that still use legal or informal endorsements and for which data are available. The first time period for each state runs from 1960 or 1962 (or a later date when endorsements began) through 1978 or 1980 (1982 in New Mexico). The second period runs from 1982 or 1984 to 1990 or 1992. (For states that changed from formal to informal endorsements, as Massachusetts did, data are included only for the current system. A few state parties had the current system only in the second period.)

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were contested primaries in 44 percent of the nominations with legal endorsements and 71 percent of those with informal ones. In the 1980s and early 1990s, contested primaries occurred in 37 percent of legal and 81 percent of informal systems—relatively small changes over time.

There has been a much larger change in the outcome of contested primaries. In the 1960s and 1970s the endorsee won contested primaries 82 percent of the time, but in the more recent period this figure dropped to

Table 1. Primary Competition and Success of Party Endorsements

State	Number of Elec- tions	Years	Party	No Primary Contest			Primary Contest	
				No contest	Convention Contest	?	Endorsee Wins	Loses
States with Legal Endorsements								
Colorado	5	1962-78	D	3	1	—	1	—
	5	1962-78	R	2	—	—	3	—
	3	1982-90	D	2	—	1	—	—
	3	1982-90	R	—	2	—	—	—
Connecticut	5	1960-78	D	4	—	—	1	—
	5	1960-78	R	2	2	—	1	—
	3	1982-90	D	—	2	—	1	—
	3	1982-90	R	1	1	—	—	1
New York	3	1970-78	D	—	—	—	2	1
	3	1970-78	R	3	—	—	—	—
	3	1982-90	D	2	—	—	—	1
	3	1982-90	R	2	—	—	1	—
North Dakota	4	1968-80	D	3	—	—	1	—
	4	1968-80	R	—	—	—	3	1
	3	1984-92	D	1	1	—	—	1
	3	1984-92	R	1	2	—	—	—
Rhode Island	6	1970-80	D	1	—	4	1	—
	6	1970-80	R	1	—	4	1	—
	6	1982-92	D	2	—	—	2	2
	6	1982-92	R	4	—	—	1	1
Utah	6	1960-80	D	3	—	—	3	—
	6	1960-80	R	1	1	—	3	1
	3	1984-92	D	1	—	—	1	1
	3	1984-92	R	1	—	—	1	1
New Mexico	4	1964,66,	D	1	—	—	2	1
	4	78,82	R	—	1	—	2	1
States with Informal Endorsements								
Massachusetts	3	1982-90	D	1	—	—	1	1
	2	1974-78	R	—	—	—	1	1
	3	1982-90	R	—	—	—	—	3
Minnesota	6	1960-78	D	—	1	—	4	1
	6	1960-78	R	2	1	—	3	—
	3	1982-90	D	—	—	—	2	1
	3	1982-90	R	—	—	—	2*	1
California	1	1990	D	—	—	—	—	1
Delaware	3	1984-92	R	2	—	—	1	—

*The endorsee won the primary but was subsequently forced to resign as the Republican candidate. In a few state parties there is missing data, and the figures add up to less than the total number of elections.

only 46 percent, slightly over half the previous figure. In both periods the difference between legal and informal systems was negligible. The change in the fortunes of endorsees in contested primaries has been particularly dramatic in the Massachusetts Republican party, and in both parties in Rhode Island and Minnesota.

Examples of Successful Endorsements

Under what conditions are endorsements effective in either discouraging any primary opposition to the endorsee or helping the endorsee to win a primary? The endorsees who are most likely to win with little or no opposition are incumbent governors. But convention endorsement is probably not crucial in the renomination of most governors, although it may be helpful in some cases. We would expect that most governors are politically strong enough to win renomination without endorsement.

In the period from 1982 through 1992, there were 19 cases of governors seeking renominations in states that use endorsements, and 18 of them won both endorsement and nomination. Twelve of these 18 won endorsement without opposition in the convention and were unopposed in the primary.

Six other governors who won party endorsements were renominated with some opposition. In both 1982 and 1986, Democratic Governor O'Neill of Connecticut defeated his only opponent in the convention by over 80 percent, thus avoiding any challenge in the primary. In Rhode Island, Republican Governor DiPrete in 1990 and Democratic Governor Sundlin in 1992 beat challengers in the primary.

In Minnesota, Governor Rudy Perpich in 1986 was unopposed in the convention but had a primary opponent whom he defeated with 55 percent of the vote. Four years later Perpich needed four ballots to win the 60 percent required for convention endorsement and then defeated his closest convention opponent with 56 percent in the primary. It is possible that the controversial governor would have been defeated in the primary if he had lost his fight for endorsement in the convention.

The only governor defeated for nomination also failed to be endorsed. In 1982, former Governor Michael Dukakis was endorsed by the Massachusetts Democratic convention over Governor Edward King. King strongly opposed the newly instituted endorsement procedure and sought endorsement only because party rules required that candidates get at least 15 percent of the convention vote to gain a place on the primary ballot, a provision that King unsuccessfully tried to challenge in court. Dukakis then defeated King in the primary, gaining 54 percent of the vote.

There are also some recent nonincumbents who have been successfully endorsed by their party. In several cases, their endorsement led their opponents to drop out of the nomination race. This occurred in the 1990 Colorado Republican convention, when the loser failed to get the 30 percent required to get on the ballot without a petition. In 1982, after the Connecticut Republican convention endorsed Lewis Rome by a narrow margin, his major opponent decided not to challenge him in a primary.

In other cases the endorsed candidate has had to defeat one or more opponents in the primary. In 1990, Connecticut Democrats endorsed Bruce Morrison but gave William Cibes 31 percent of their votes, more than enough to permit a challenge in the primary. Morrison demonstrated similar success in the primary, winning with 65 percent. The 1986 Minnesota Republican convention conducted five ballots before Cal Ludeman won the 60 percent required for endorsement. Then his three opponents dropped out of the race and he easily won the primary against another candidate who had not sought endorsement. The 1982 New York Republican convention endorsed multimillionaire businessman Lew Lehrman over three experienced leaders. His large-scale campaign spending, which was mainly responsible for his endorsement, enabled him easily to defeat the only opponent who remained in the primary race.

The law in Utah provides that a party will endorse two candidates unless one person wins 70 percent at the convention. By definition, therefore, both winners and losers in the primary are endorsees. In the three elections from 1984 through 1992 there were five nominations not involving an incumbent governor. In 1988, the Democrats endorsed only one candidate, and thus there was no primary opposition. In both nominations in 1984 the endorsee with the larger number of convention votes won the primary. In both parties in 1992 the differences in convention votes between the two endorsees were very small (52-48 percent and 40-39 percent), and in both cases the candidate with the lower figure won the primary.

Examples of Unsuccessful Endorsements

In recent years there have been an increasing number of examples of endorsed candidates being defeated in the primary, some of them in state parties where in the past endorsees usually were not even challenged.

In Rhode Island, where challenges used to be rare, three endorsees were defeated in the 1982-1992 period. In 1990, the mayor of Providence won the Democratic endorsement, but got only 27 percent of the vote in the primary and came in third. The 1992 Republican endorsee was narrowly defeated in the primary by a political newcomer; and the 1984 Democratic

endorsee lost to a challenger who argued that the endorsee was supported by "party bosses."

The Connecticut Republican party, which had experienced only one gubernatorial primary challenge since the primary was adopted in 1958, had a closely contested race in 1986. The party convention endorsed Richard Bozzuto but gave each of two other candidates slightly more than the 20 percent required to enter the primary. The winner of the three-way primary, with 41 percent, was Julie Belaga, who had less statewide campaign experience than the other two.

In the years when Massachusetts law provided for endorsements (1954-1970), the Republican gubernatorial nominees were never challenged in a primary. However, since that time, with the endorsements being made under party rules, the endorsees have always been challenged and usually upset. In 1982, the party endorsed a free-spending businessman, John Lakian, over two experienced legislators. But another experienced politician, John Sears, who bypassed the convention entirely, won the primary by a large margin. In 1992, by contrast, the Republicans endorsed Steven Pierce, the House minority leader and a strong conservative. But the primary winner, by a 60-40 percent margin, was William Weld, a less experienced but less conservative candidate who benefitted from the state law permitting independents to register with a party just to vote in the primary. It was the primary voters, not the convention delegates, who nominated a Republican moderate enough to win the general election.

Massachusetts Democratic gubernatorial endorsees have always faced opposition, under the old legal system and the more recent informal system. The only endorsee to be defeated for nomination in recent years was Francis Bellotti, who won a bare 51 percent on the second ballot against two opponents in 1992. Evelyn Murphy, his closest opponent in the convention, dropped out of the primary at the last moment. The winner of the primary (54-44 percent) was John Silber, the outspoken, controversial president of Boston University. At the convention Silber barely won the 15 percent vote required to get on the primary ballot, a provision that he bitterly denounced. The deep divisions in the Democratic party, which were not overcome by the convention and were magnified by the primary, contributed to Silber's defeat in the general election.

Minnesota convention endorsees are often challenged but seldom defeated in the primary. Both recent defeats occurred in 1982. The Republican convention endorsed a conservative candidate, Lou Wangberg, on the seventh ballot; his victory depended heavily on support from fundamentalist delegates who initially had supported a "pro-family" candidate. Wangberg was beaten in the primary by a wealthy moderate Republican, Wheelock

Whitney, who bypassed the convention and ran an expensive television campaign. The Democratic endorsee, Attorney General Warren Spannaus, lost the primary to former Governor Rudy Perpich, who bypassed the convention because he believed he lacked support among delegates.

In the 1982 New York Democratic convention, Mayor Edward Koch, who had strong organizational support (particularly in New York City), defeated Mario Cuomo by a 61-39 percent margin. But Cuomo proved to have broader support outside the party organization and won the primary 52-48 percent.

In 1990, the California Democrats held their first endorsing convention since a judicial decision had made such endorsements possible. John Van de Kamp barely won the 60 percent needed for endorsement over Dianne Feinstein, whose strategy was to prevent any endorsement. The endorsement did not appear to have any effect on the nomination; Feinstein defeated Van de Kamp 52-41 percent in the primary election.

The strangest endorsement sequence occurred in the Massachusetts Republican nomination in 1986. The party convention rejected the front runner, who had been accused of rather bizarre personal behavior, and drafted a replacement, Royall Switzer. When it developed that Switzer had exaggerated his military record, both of these candidates dropped out of the race and a write-in candidate was nominated.

Conclusions on Effectiveness

We find that in recent years, although there has been little change in the proportion of contested primaries in endorsement states, there has been a sharp drop in the success of those endorsees who face opposition in the primaries. The reasons why 15 endorsees lost in the period from 1982 through 1992 are probably as numerous as the campaigns.

Probably the most common pattern, found to some degree in at least half of the races, was a convention endorsee who had more organizational support, while the primary winner was able to appeal to a broader constituency. A good example is Mario Cuomo's 1982 New York Democratic victory. Some of the winners explicitly attacked the endorsement procedure, or "boss control," including John Silber in the 1992 Massachusetts Democratic race, Anthony Solomon in the 1984 Rhode Island Democratic contest, and Nicholas Spaeth in the 1992 North Dakota primary. Two women candidates, Connecticut Republican Julie Belaga in 1986 and Rhode Island Republican Elizabeth Leonard in 1992, ran as "outsiders" with well organized grass-roots campaigns.

In several cases the winners appeared to be closer to the ideological mainstream of the primary voters than were the convention delegates. This was true of moderate Democrat Dianne Feinstein in the 1990 California primary, moderate Republican Wheelock Whitney in the 1982 Minnesota race, and moderate Republican William Weld in the 1990 Massachusetts primary (who had help from independent voters in the primary).

Several of the primary winners had more name recognition and state-wide campaign experience than the endorsees, including former Minnesota Governor Perpich in the 1982 Democratic race and Bruce Sundlin in 1990, who twice before had been the Democratic candidate for governor. In Utah, where two endorsements are usually made, the differences between the first- and second-place endorsees at both parties' 1992 conventions were so small that the defeat of the top endorsees requires no explanation.

The Virginia Convention

There is one state, Virginia, in which a party convention is used (particularly by the Republicans) to nominate candidates for office, and not merely to endorse them. This is possible because state law permits parties to use either conventions or primaries to make endorsements.

Until recently, the Virginia Republican party consistently has used a convention to choose its nominees for statewide office. Its goal has been to choose the strongest possible candidates and to prevent divisive primaries. In the past, the Democratic party has been plagued by deep divisions, often along ideological lines. This has led to divisive primaries that in some years have contributed to Republican victories.

In 1981, the Democratic party followed the Republican example and used a state convention to make nominations. They chose a strong slate, led by Charles Robb as candidate for governor, and won the election. They continued this practice in 1985, choosing without opposition a balanced slate that included Gerald Baines for governor, a black candidate (Douglas Wilder) for lieutenant governor, and a woman (Mary Sue Terry) for attorney general. That strategy worked and the Democrats elected all three. In 1989, the Democratic convention nominated Wilder as the gubernatorial candidate, without opposition; and Wilder was elected.

The 1985 Republican convention nominated a strongly conservative slate of candidates. Wyatt Durrette, the gubernatorial candidate, was unopposed, but four ballots were required for the conservative candidate for lieutenant governor to defeat a more moderate candidate.

In 1989, the Republican party broke with tradition and decided to hold a primary instead of a convention. The supporters of two gubernatorial

candidates joined forces to gain approval for a primary because they believed the third candidate, Marshall Coleman, would have greater strength in a convention. In fact, Coleman won the primary narrowly with 37 percent of the vote. The primary appeared to deepen the significant divisions within the Republican party and used up some \$3 million of Coleman's campaign funds. But it also generated large campaign contributions and considerable interest from Republican activists across the state.

In 1993 the Republican party returned to the convention format. The party nominated a gubernatorial candidate, George Allen, who was able to win the fall election. But the most controversial nomination was the choice of Michael Farris, closely identified with the Christian Right, as lieutenant governor. He won with the help of thousands of supporters—most of them newcomers to Republican politics—who gained seats at the convention (which had 13,100 delegates). This split within Republican ranks kept Farris from being elected in November.

Trends in Nominations in Non-Endorsing States

One of the purposes, and frequently one of the consequences, of party endorsements is to support an "inside" candidate—one who has held political office, is a proven campaigner, and has demonstrated some degree of loyalty to the party organization and to the party's principles. Often the candidate who challenges the endorsee is an "outsider," one with little political experience and few linkages to the political party, and sometimes a wealthy individual who relies heavily on television advertising in an effort to defeat the party's choice in a primary.

What is the pattern of nominations in the nonendorsing states? Are outsiders in such states any more likely to defeat insiders than in states where parties use endorsements? Are these nominations decided by factors similar to those found in endorsing states? Systematic evidence is not available on the characteristics of winning and losing gubernatorial candidates in recent years. But it is possible to learn something about the types of candidates winning and losing nominations by looking at primaries, particularly those involving nonincumbents, in the 1984-1992 period.

This overview of gubernatorial primary elections in nonendorsing states is based on descriptions of primary election outcomes in the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* for the years 1984 through 1992. The only races examined were those involving nonincumbents in which the winner got less than 90 percent of the vote, to rule out lopsided victories. The total number of such races was 77.

The backgrounds of the winner and of the top losing candidate were examined. Inside candidates were defined as present or former holders of statewide, congressional, or state legislative office; city mayors or county executives of major local governments; past or present state party chairs, and a few miscellaneous categories, such as U.S. attorneys and high-ranking federal appointees. All other candidates were considered outsiders.

During this period, inside candidates defeated other insiders in two-thirds of the elections. In another 15 percent, insiders defeated outsiders. In 9 percent, both candidates were outsiders. In only 8 percent were inside candidates defeated by outsiders, usually business-persons. Among the inside candidates losing to outsiders were a couple of members of the U.S. House, two state legislators (one in leadership), an attorney general, an auditor, and one ex-governor.

Party endorsements are usually given to insiders, and sometimes strengthen their chance of defeating outside candidates. But the recent evidence suggests that in nonendorsing states well-established political leaders are only rarely defeated by outsiders, and only occasionally are these wealthy candidates able to run expensive media campaigns.

Conclusions

Preprimary endorsements are alive and well, but in a limited number of states. Most of the states that were using legal endorsements twenty years ago are still using them, while New Mexico has revived them; the exception is Delaware. There is less continuity in the use of party endorsements in states where party rules control endorsements. The practice has been abandoned in the Wisconsin Republican party and used intermittently in the Illinois Republican party. But it continues in Massachusetts and Minnesota and in the Delaware Republican and Illinois Democratic parties. And, now that the legal obstacles have been cleared away, it has been adopted by the California Democratic party.

The procedures governing legal endorsements have strengthened their effectiveness in Colorado and weakened them in Connecticut. A change in the Massachusetts Republican party rules has increased the effectiveness of its endorsement process.

States with legal endorsement systems continue to have a relatively low rate of contested primaries, but the proportion of primary contests in states with informal endorsements is much higher and has grown slightly.

There has been a sharp decline, however, in the success rate of those endorsees who face opposition in the primary—from over 80 percent in the 1960s and 1970s to less than half in the 1980s and early 1990s, in both legal

and informal systems. There is no single explanation for this trend, but endorsees are more likely to be defeated by those candidates who can appeal successfully to a broader constituency than that represented by the convention. Endorsements are less successful if the convention represents too narrow a political or ideological base.

One argument for the endorsement system is that it increases the likelihood that the nominee will be an experienced political leader, with campaign skills and a sense of party loyalty. But a review of party primaries in non-endorsement state parties shows that the candidates receiving significant numbers of votes, and particularly the winners, are usually experienced officeholders.

Because there continues to be some variation in the use of endorsements and a decline in their effectiveness when primaries are contested, it is difficult to predict what the future holds for endorsement systems. There is little evidence that many of the political party leaders who are trying to revive and strengthen party organizations recognize the potential of endorsements as a vehicle for party-building.

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