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Sour Grapes? Party Donors and Canadian Leadership Primaries

Scott Pruyzers* 

Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada

*Corresponding author. Email: scott.pruyzers@dal.ca

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Abstract

Political parties around the world are adopting primaries to select leaders and legislative candidates. While a large, though inconclusive, literature has emerged in the American context to explore the consequences of primaries, little attention has been devoted to other national contexts. Exploring patterns of financial donation, this study examines whether individuals who supported a losing leadership candidate are less likely to exhibit subsequent financial commitment to the party compared to those donors whose preferred candidate won the internal election. Drawing upon a novel dataset that includes tens of thousands of donors to recent leadership elections in Canada, we demonstrate that intra-party winners (i.e. those who supported the winning leadership candidate) are more likely to be financially committed to the party in the year after the election than those who supported losers. Results suggest that open and inclusive elections, while participatory in nature, may come at a cost for political parties as losers withdraw from the party in the wake of their loss.

Keywords: divisive primaries; intra-party democracy; sore losers; sour grapes; political parties

Intra-party elections, especially ones for positions such as party leadership, often result in prolonged and highly visible battles between leading candidates as they mobilize and recruit new supporters into the party, travel the country with their message and publicly criticize one another in their debates, advertising and other campaign messaging (Lengle et al. 1995). In doing so, internal party elections have the ability to create considerable discord within the party, challenging party cohesion and establishing clear divisions (Key 1964; Perlin 1980). Such division often falls along the lines of winners and losers. As R.K. Carty (1989: 116) writes, leadership elections ‘choose winners’ and at the same time ‘they publicly label a large number of candidates as losers and indicate just how much or little support such individuals command in their party’. Given that the creation of winners and losers is an inevitable outcome of elections, and given that parties around the world are adopting more and more inclusive and participatory selection methods (Cross

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et al. 2016; Kenig et al. 2015a), an important question is, what happens to intra-party losers? Do they remain committed and loyal or do they, reeling from their loss, withdraw from the party?

Evidence, primarily from the United States, where primaries are most common, is somewhat mixed. A sore-losers or sour-grapes effect has been identified by some and refuted by others (Henderson et al. 2010; Johnson and Gibson 1974; Perlin 1980; Southwell 1986; Wichowsky and Niebler 2010). Michael Henderson et al. (2010: 500), for instance, write that the dynamics of a primary only have a 'modest effect on eventual support for the party nominee'. They go on to suggest that more 'fundamental political considerations' such as policy attitudes matter more. While limited, evidence suggests that the sore-losers hypothesis may have support beyond the American context (Cross and Pruyers 2019; Venturino and Seddone 2022). Here the evidence suggests that intra-party losers have a tendency to withdraw from party activism and remain less loyal during the general election. Though here too some of the evidence has been mixed.

This article adds to this debate by providing a novel test of the sour-grapes hypothesis. Exploring rates of financial donation, this study examines whether individuals who supported a losing leadership candidate are less likely to exhibit subsequent financial commitment to the party compared to those donors whose preferred candidate won the internal election. To do so, the article draws upon an original dataset that includes tens of thousands of donors to recent leadership elections in Canada. Building on the divisive-primaries literature, we demonstrate that intra-party winners (i.e. those who supported the winning leadership candidate) are more likely to be financially committed to the party than are those who supported losers. Although the gap is not as large as some of the literature might suggest, an identifiable difference between winners and losers is indeed evident. Results suggest that open and inclusive elections, while participatory in nature, may come at a cost for political parties as losers withdraw from the party in the wake of their loss.

Divisive primaries and sore losers

Once an American phenomenon, political parties around the world are increasingly adopting primaries (Kenig et al. 2015a) as a means of selecting party leaders and general election candidates (Cross and Blais 2012a; Cross et al. 2016; Sandri et al. 2015). According to Jean-Benoit Pilet and William Cross (2014), primaries have been among the fastest-growing methods of selection over the last 50 years. While these intra-party elections are rarely as inclusive as traditional American primaries (Ware 2002),¹ they do come close in so far as they typically invite eligible party members, and in some cases registered supporters, to cast a ballot for their preferred candidate. What's more, a variety of parties have already begun experimenting with expanding the pool of eligible voters beyond party members. In 2013, for example, the Canadian Liberals adopted a method in which both traditional dues-paying party members and registered supporters could participate in the selection of the party's leader (Cross 2014).

Many parties, it is argued, adopted primaries as part of a broader bundle of reforms that were designed to enhance intra-party democracy. Such reforms were

meant to arrest, or even reverse, party decline (Cross and Blais 2012b; Katz 2013).² Commenting on the decline of parties, Fulvio Venturino and Antonella Seddone (2022: 233) explain that political parties have been faced with ‘an unrelenting crisis, heralded by declining membership and waning levels of trust among citizens’. The adoption of primaries offered a potential solution to many of the challenges that parties were facing. First, primaries afford parties and their candidates with opportunities to mobilize and recruit thousands of new supporters into the party. In this sense primaries can help grow the party and combat declining memberships. Second, primaries enhance the legitimacy of parties by providing ordinary grassroots members with a meaningful opportunity to participate in important internal party decisions. Finally, primaries can generate an excitement and buzz around the party as they garner the attention of both media and the general public. In this regard, primaries offered political parties a great amount of ‘promise’ (Cross et al. 2016). This promise, however, has not always fully materialized. Indeed, numerous scholars contend that many of the theorized benefits (i.e. enhanced legitimacy and public support) of greater intra-party democracy have often been short-lived or overstated (Pedersen and Schumacher 2015; Wauters and Kern 2021). Although primaries were meant, at least in part, to address decline, a growing body of literature has now explored some of their negative consequences. Such consequences include the strengthening of party leadership at the expense of the grassroots (Katz and Mair 1995), the gendered dynamics of selection and removal (Astudillo and Paneque 2022; O’Neill et al. 2021) and the manipulation of intra-party rules (Cross et al. 2016).

One potential consequence of primaries that has received little attention outside of the United States is their propensity to create internal divisions and therefore create a divide between winners and losers within the same party. In the American case this literature has often fallen under the umbrella of the ‘divisive’-primaries hypothesis. Here the argument is that primary elections, particularly competitive/divisive ones, can have negative implications for party cohesion as well as the success of the party/nominee in the subsequent general election. Much of this stems from the fact that primaries pit individuals of the same party against one another. James Lengle et al. (1995: 372) capture this sentiment when they write,

By their very nature, primaries invite internal party dissension if not civil war ... Negative and deceptive advertising blankets the airwaves and reinforces voter loyalty and antipathy toward candidates. In a primary, the price of victory for the winner is a tarnished image and a split party, and there is no consolation prize for losers.

In the wake of an intra-party battle, supporters of the losing candidates, according to the divisive-primaries hypothesis, are expected to exhibit less loyalty to their party in the general election than their winning counterparts. This is expected to take the form of individuals withdrawing from the electoral process (i.e. abstaining from voting) or defecting (i.e. voting for an alternative party).

Patrick Kenney (1988) describes two mechanisms through which this might work. First, there is a psychological perspective. In this view primaries encourage individuals to establish a positive affect towards a specific candidate. Over the

course of an intra-party election, the psychological bond creates a sense of loyalty among members of the ingroup (i.e. supporters of a particular candidate) and fosters a sense of hostility towards members of the outgroup (i.e. supporters of the other candidates). Here it is argued that the bond between candidate and supporter is such that if an individual's preferred candidate loses the nomination, they may withdraw from the party as their attachment to other candidates is weak or non-existent. This may be especially likely if the individual was mobilized into the party apparatus as a result of the leadership contest – as many donors and members are – and had no pre-existing relationship (financial or otherwise) with the party. The second perspective is the 'sore losers' or 'sour grapes' explanation. Here the emphasis is on more general discontent or disgruntlement as opposed to deep psychological attachments and loyalties. As Kenney (1988: 765) explains, 'Individuals may simply become angry at the winning candidate and find it impossible to support the nominees in the general election, even though they may not be psychologically attached to another candidate. The source of that displeasure may be as sophisticated as policy differences or as simple as concerns over style and personality.' Dissatisfied with the outcome, these individuals turn away from the successful candidate, either abstaining or finding a home in an alternative party.

Such expectations are corroborated by the broader political behaviour literature. Here a large body of research, focused on general elections, has demonstrated a consistent 'winner–loser' gap in terms of satisfaction with democracy, general support for the political system and subsequent voter turnout (Anderson et al. 2005; Blais and Gélinau 2007; Dahlberg and Linde 2017; Howell and Justwan 2013). As André Blais and François Gélinau (2007: 426) explain,

citizens who cast their vote for the winning party are more inclined to display faith in the way democracy works, because they like and/or trust the party/individual who has been elected. Inversely, citizens who cast their vote for any of the losing parties are more prone to display lower levels of support for the political system, because they dislike and/or distrust those who have been chosen to govern.

In short, losers of general elections tend to express less satisfaction and less support for the political system than winners.

Whether it is the psychological and emotional mechanisms outlined by Kenney (1988) or the utility-maximizing and cognitive-consistency mechanisms outlined by Christopher Anderson et al. (2005), the divisive-primaries hypothesis suggests that there may be a cost for parties when holding a primary. Discontent, disgruntlement and even disloyalty may all befall the party in the general election as the intra-party contest creates a divide between winners and losers. While the logic and theory are simple enough, empirical validation of the hypothesis has been somewhat mixed. On the one hand, a number of studies have argued that the dynamics of primary elections do indeed impact the fortunes of political parties during the subsequent general election (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014; Kenney and Rice 1987; Lengle et al. 1995; Makse and Sokhey 2010; Southwell 1986). However, many who have found support for the thesis nonetheless suggest that the magnitude of the effect has been overstated (Henderson et al. 2010; Kenney

1988). While much of the sore-losers work considers voters, Donald Johnson and James Gibson (1974) extend this to include party activists. The authors provide compelling evidence that supporters of a winning candidate remained more committed than did supporters of the losing candidate. What's more, a sizeable minority of intra-party losers (21%) reported that they intended to volunteer for an opposing party. On the other hand, there are many who are less convinced by the sore-losers hypothesis (Lazarus 2005; Wichowsky and Niebler 2010). Piereson and Smith (1975: 562), for instance, write that 'a candidate's primary election experience bears little relationship to his success in the general election'. While much has been written on the subject, no clear consensus has emerged.

Despite the growing adoption of primaries, the sore-losers literature has been largely limited to the United States. There are, however, at least two notable exceptions. First, William Cross and Scott Pruyzers (2019) provide an analysis of the general election campaign activities and satisfaction of party members following participation in a candidate nomination. Using survey data of Canadian party members, the authors find that individuals who supported a losing nomination candidate were significantly less likely to engage in high-intensity activism during the subsequent general election (i.e. go door-to-door canvassing); were more likely to report that they were unsatisfied with their party membership; and were considerably less likely to report that they would renew their membership moving forward. While levels of high-intensity election activism and membership satisfaction differed significantly between winners and losers, the analysis found no support for the idea that intra-party losers were disloyal during the general election (both cohorts supported their party at equally high rates). Their analysis, therefore, finds support for the sore-losers hypothesis outside of the United States, with the caveat that the significant results revolved around activism and satisfaction and not voting behaviour.³

The second exception is recent research by Venturino and Seddone (2022), who explore similar questions in the Italian context. Here the authors rely on a series of surveys (exit polls) administered after four leadership selection primaries within the Italian Partito Democratico (PD): 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2019. In doing so the authors consider the (anticipated) general election loyalty of individuals who participated in the primary election. Consistent with the American literature, their analysis provides rather mixed results: in two instances intra-party winners were more likely to vote for the party in the general election whereas the reverse was also true in two instances. As Venturino and Seddone (2022: 243) explain,

in 2009 and 2017, supporting the winning candidate predictably implied a higher likelihood of a loyalist vote in the following parliamentary election. However, coefficients for 2013 and 2019 tell precisely the opposite story. In these cases, selectors supporting the winner were less likely to support the party in a general election when their candidate failed in the primaries.

While important to the advancement of our understanding of the consequences of primaries beyond the American context, both studies referenced in the previous section (Cross and Pruyzers 2019; Venturino and Seddone 2022) rely on self-report data, which carries with it concerns of reliability (i.e. memory recall) and generalizability (i.e. how representative was the sample?).⁴ The study presented here, by

contrast, provides a new test of the sore-losers hypothesis using observational data. To do so, we turn our attention away from party members and voters to a different cohort of party actors: financial donors. Doing so allows us to draw upon actual donation patterns that are publicly disclosed by political parties and their candidates.

More than just the availability of observational data, donors are remarkably important to democratic politics. Indeed, money is often referred to as the ‘life-blood’ of elections, and such a statement is only becoming more true in an age of professionalized and increasingly costly campaigns (Norris 2000). There is no shortage of literature demonstrating the link between financial resources and electoral success (Carty and Eagles 2005; Currinder 2009; Johnston and Pattie 2014). Given the link, it is not surprising that political parties work tirelessly during the election and inter-election periods to solicit new donors and keep them engaged with party politics. This is especially true in the Canadian case, where other sources of funding have been removed and individual contributions have been capped (Tolley et al. 2022; Young and Jansen 2011).

Donors, however, should not be assumed to be identical to party members. Although the categories of party member and financial donor clearly overlap, they ‘are not synonymous’ (Garnett et al. 2022: 423). Cross et al. (2022), for example, report that just two-thirds of party members make a financial donation to their party (outside of membership fees). In other words, there are many donors who are not members, and many members who are not donors. Likewise, research suggests that party members may be more motivated by solidary incentives compared to financial donors who are more transactional/material in their motivations (Garnett et al. 2022). Despite this, donors remain the most understudied cohort of party actors in Canada. Given the importance of money to electoral outcomes, as well as the need to study donors separately from members, this study explores what happens to leadership election donors whose preferred candidate lost. In particular, it advances a single hypothesis. Namely that intra-party losers will be exhibit less commitment/loyalty than will winners.

Hypothesis 1: *Those donors who contributed financially to a losing leadership candidate will be less likely to donate to the political party in the following year compared to those who contributed to the winning leadership candidate.*

Data, methods and case

Are ‘losers’ less likely to display subsequent financial commitment to their party than are ‘winners’? To answer this question, we draw upon a unique dataset of tens of thousands of donors to recent Canadian federal leadership elections. This includes contributors to the following party’s internal leadership elections: Bloc Québécois (2011, 2014), Conservative (2017), Green (2006), Liberal (2013) and New Democrat (2012, 2017).⁵ Data are derived from the financial reports that political parties are required to file with Elections Canada.⁶ In all cases the data are from the ‘reviewed’ as opposed to ‘as submitted’ reports.⁷ These financial records include information such as the name and postal code of the individual donor, the amount donated, and the recipient of the donation (i.e. leadership contender,

registered party, electoral district association, etc.). Usage of this administrative financial data is not uncommon in scholarly work, and it has been used to examine questions of gendered donation patterns, racial affinity and personalization (see Besco and Tolley 2022; Cross et al. 2020; Tolley et al. 2022). In the case of this article, we use these data to explore whether a ‘sore losers’ pattern applies to party leadership donors in recent Canadian intra-party elections.

To construct our dependent variable of interest – whether a leadership donor also donated to their party in the year following the leadership election – we rely on two sources of Elections Canada data. First, we captured donations made to leadership contestants from the official start of the internal election up until the final day of voting.⁸ Next, we captured donations made to the registered political party in the year following the leadership election. Take, for example, the 2013 Liberal leadership election. The internal election officially began on 14 November 2012 and the final day of voting in the leadership election was 14 April 2013. In this case we begin by capturing all the donations to leadership contestants during the 14 November to 14 April period. Next, we capture donations to the Liberal Party for the period of 15 April 2013 to 15 April 2014 (the year following the internal leadership election). We are then able to use these two separate lists of financial donors (leadership and party donors) in order to establish a variable that identifies whether a leadership donor made a donation to the party in the year following the intra-party election. This variable is coded dichotomously (1 = leadership donor made a party donation in the year following; 0 = leadership donor did not make a party donation in the year following).⁹ We repeat this process for each of the seven elections for which we have data and merge the data into a single dataset for analysis.¹⁰

Our key independent variable of interest is whether the donor’s preferred leadership candidate won the internal party election. To create this variable, we look at the leadership contestant to which the donor contributed financially. We take this donation as a strong indication of their expressed preference for who should win the party’s leadership.¹¹ We then code whether the leadership contestant to whom the donation was made either won or lost the internal election. This too is a dichotomous variable (1 = donor supported winning candidate; 0 = donor supported losing candidate). Recall that our central hypothesis is that winners will remain committed and will donate to the party at higher rates than will losers.

In addition to our primary independent variable, we include a small number of controls in our analysis. First, we include the amount that the donor contributed to the leadership candidate. This data is provided in the Elections Canada reports as parties are required to disclose all donations above \$100. When donors made multiple donations, these values were summed to create an overall donation amount.¹² Here we might have competing expectations. On the one hand, larger amounts donated may reflect a strong commitment to the party, a fact that would likely encourage future giving, irrespective of whether the donor’s preferred candidate won or lost the leadership. On the other hand, large donations may reflect a particularly strong commitment to a specific candidate, which may encourage a sore-losers effect in the event that another candidate won the election.¹³

Next, we include two variables that capture how competitive the internal leadership election was. Highly competitive internal elections may be considered more

divisive, and as a result, may have greater implications for party cohesion and future donation patterns. If an individual's preferred leadership candidate loses in a hotly contested and close race, it may signal that the party is internally divided. A landslide victory, by contrast, suggests more internal cohesion with a single candidate for party members (and supporters) to rally around. Patrick Howell and Florian Justwan (2013), however, reveal that general election winners express the highest satisfaction in 'nail-biter' elections (i.e. highly competitive ones). We operationalize competitiveness by including variables for the number of leadership contestants on the ballot as well as the margin between the top two candidates on the first ballot. For the former, the more candidates the more competitive the election. For the latter, the smaller the margin the more competitive the election.

We also include a variable for the gender of the leadership contestant. Many of the financial aspects of party politics have been found to be gendered, with donations to women candidates following an affinity pattern (Tolley et al. 2022) and with women donating less in general (McMahon et al. 2021).¹⁴ If donors are motivated by affinity more than a connection with the party, those who supported a woman leadership candidate may be less likely to continue donating to the party afterwards. This is especially the case given that the vast majority of women candidates in the data lost their election (Elizabeth May in the 2006 Green election being the sole exception). Finally, we also control for political party using a series of dummy variables with the Liberals as the reference category. The multivariate model, therefore, includes the following: supported winner, donation amount, number of candidates, margin between top two candidates on first ballot, candidate gender and political party.

We end this section with a brief discussion of the merits of studying the Canadian case. The Canadian case is a useful one to study intra-party politics for a number of reasons. First, Canadian parties have a long history of internally democratic elections (Courtney 1995; Cross and Blais 2012b; Cross et al. 2016; Pilet and Cross 2014; Pruyzers and Stewart 2018). While a number of parties around the world have recently moved towards more participatory selection methods (Pilet and Cross 2014; Sandri et al. 2015), Canadian parties generally have more experience and a longer history with inclusive selection methods (Cross et al. 2016; Pruyzers and Cross 2016a).

Second, Canadian leadership races are relatively competitive affairs. The average number of leadership candidates in our dataset is 5.5 per election. While five candidates may not seem particularly high, Ofer Kenig and colleagues (2015b) find that more than half of all leadership elections in their study of 14 parliamentary democracies resulted in acclamation (i.e. only one candidate). In fact, Canada has the lowest rate of 'coronations' of any of the 14 countries that Kenig and his colleagues studied. The competitive nature of Canadian leadership elections, therefore, provides a particularly useful case to study the intra-party dynamics of winners and losers.

Finally, as Christine Cheng and Margit Tavits (2011) suggest, the Canadian case is more generalizable to other Western democracies than is a country like the United States. Cross and Pruyzers (2019: 486) make a similar argument, noting that 'Canadian parties share many institutional features with political parties in Europe, Oceania, and Israel (i.e. parliamentary democracy, multi-party

competition, membership-based organizations, etc.)’ Thus, while phenomena like the divisive-primaries thesis may be most closely associated with the United States, Canada offers a more generalizable case, which is particularly important given the spread of democratic leadership selection methods worldwide.

Results

Do financial supporters of leadership losers suffer from the same kind of ‘sore losers’ effect that has been identified for other cohorts of party actors (Cross and Pruyers 2019)? Beginning with the simple bivariate results in Figure 1, we find some preliminary evidence to support our central hypothesis. In six of the seven leadership elections under analysis, donors who supported a winning candidate were more likely to donate to their party in the year that followed. In the 2017 Conservative leadership election, for example, those who supported the winning candidate (Andrew Scheer) were 72% more likely to donate to the Conservative Party in the following year. While not as pronounced, the same trend applies for elections in the Bloc (2011 and 2014), Greens (2006), Liberals (2013) and New Democratic Party (NDP – 2012). The exception is the 2017 NDP leadership election, where supporters of winner Jagmeet Singh were actually less likely to donate to the NDP in the following year than were supporters of losing candidates. While modest, an identifiable four-percentage-point gap separates winners and losers in their propensity to donate again after the conclusion of the leadership election in these other elections. At least at the bivariate level, then, we find support for our hypothesis that winners show more financial commitment to their party after an internal election than do losers.

In addition to these empirical findings regarding sore losers, the data in Figure 1 reveal another trend worth highlighting. The vast majority of individuals who are mobilized into party politics to support a leadership candidate do not appear to continue to support the party financially afterwards. Regardless of the leadership

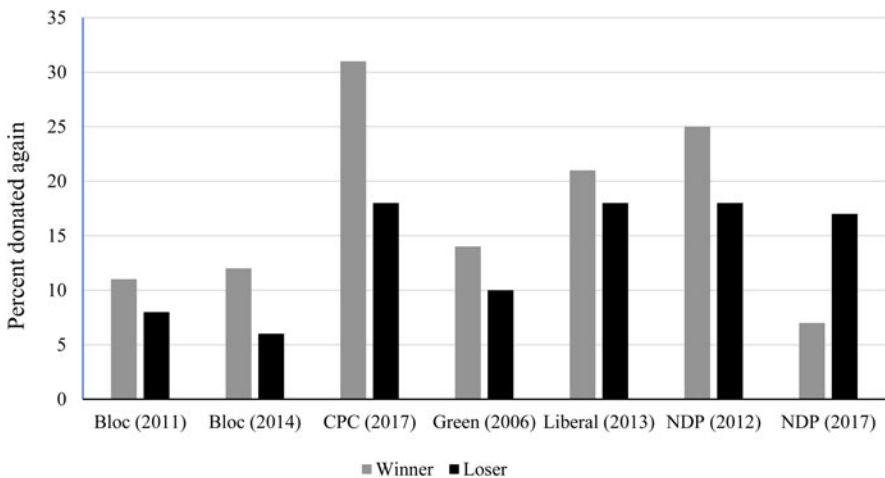


Figure 1. Party Donation by Intra-Party Result

outcome, fewer than one in five leadership donors made a party donation in the following year. Donors are mobilized into the party to support particular candidates but the majority of them exit quickly after. In this sense the data reveal a considerable amount of churn that occurs with party donors.

The bivariate results tell a straightforward story: winners appear to remain more financially committed. [Table 1](#) reports the results of our multivariate analysis where we further test the relationship between future party donation and the intra-party outcome while controlling for factors like the competitiveness of the election, political party, amount donated (\$) to the leadership candidate and the gender of the leadership candidate. Here the data are pooled for a single analysis. The multivariate results confirm those identified in the bivariate above: donors who supported a winning leadership candidate are significantly more likely to donate to the party following the election than are those who supported a losing candidate. Calculating the marginal effect reveals that while the effect is significant, it is modest. Supporting the winning candidate increases the probability of donating by approximately 3.3 percentage points.

[Table 1](#) also reveals that there is a relationship between future donations and the competitiveness of the internal election. The more candidates that contest an election, the less likely the party is to mobilize donations from this pool of donors in the future. In a similar fashion, the margin between the top two candidates is also significant and negative. In other words, as the gap between the top two candidates grows, indicating an uncompetitive outcome, the probability that donors will donate to the party afterwards decreases.

We find three more significant relationships in [Table 1](#). First, there is a relationship between the amount donated during a leadership election and the likelihood that the individual will donate to the party afterwards. Donors who contributed more during the leadership election are more likely to donate afterwards. Contrary to our expectation, we find that donors to women candidates are more likely to be active donors and contribute to the party. Finally, we see that Conservatives are less likely to be active party donors when compared to the

Table 1. Binary Logistic Regression Results (Pooled Data with Marginal Effects)

	Coefficient	Standard error
Supported winner	0.0325***	0.0042
Donation amount (\$)	0.0001***	0.0000
Number of candidates	-0.0026*	0.0163
Margin (top two candidates)	-0.0035*	0.0019
Candidate gender (male)	-0.0607***	0.0044
Bloc	-0.1569	0.0312
Green	-0.1362	0.0349
NDP	-0.1553	0.0706
Conservative	-0.1853***	0.0216

Notes: Reports marginal effects. Reference category for party is Liberal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Liberals. This likely speaks to the crowded and divisive nature of recent Conservative leadership elections (i.e. 14 candidates on the ballot in 2017).

Discussion and conclusion

Building on the divisive-primaries literature, this study investigated the relationship between the outcome of intra-party elections and subsequent political activism. In particular, we hypothesized that intra-party winners (i.e. those who supported the successful candidate) would exhibit more financial commitment to the party whereas losers would display less commitment. To test this hypothesis, we examined the financial contribution patterns of tens of thousands of donors to recent Canadian party leadership elections. The bivariate results revealed a clear pattern. In six of the seven leadership elections under examination, winners displayed a greater likelihood of financial commitment to the party than losers. Here we were able to identify a four-percentage-point gap between winners and losers in their proclivity to donate to the party following a leadership election. Pooling the data and adding a number of controls for our multivariate analysis revealed a similar pattern: calculating marginal effects reveals that supporting a winning leadership candidate increases the probability of future party donation by approximately 3.3 percentage points. This modest effect size is largely consistent with limited Canadian literature on the subject. Cross and Pruyzers (2019), for example, find that party members who supported a losing nomination candidate withdrew from subsequent party activism at significantly higher rates than did winning members but that this was limited to 'high-intensity' activism (canvassing, distributing campaign materials etc.). As a relatively low-intensity form of party activism, a modest effect is to be expected.

The results and approach adopted here make a number of important advancements. First, the vast majority of literature surrounding divisive primaries and sore losers comes from the United States (Henderson et al. 2010; Kenney 1988; Makse and Sokhey 2010; Southwell 1986). This is despite the fact that primaries are being adopted by political parties around the world. By studying an alternative case, this study makes an important contribution to the intra-party democracy literature more broadly. Second, previous research on the subject has often been based on self-report survey data (Cross and Pruyzers 2019; Johnson and Gibson 1974; Venturino and Seddone 2022). This, of course, has potential limitations regarding memory recall or respondent bias. Our examination, by contrast, is based on observed behaviour: the financial donation patterns of intra-party winners and losers. Third, the analysis moves the focus away from members and voters to another cohort of party actors. While voters/members are undeniably important, so too are grass-roots party donors. By expanding the analysis to donors, this article raises important questions about the consequences of primaries on less-studied party actors.

The results presented here suggest that there may be a cost associated with conducting primaries. While these open selection methods were adopted by many parties as a means to combat party decline, they may have negative implications for party unity and cohesion. These intra-party conflicts may, in turn, have downstream consequences for how parties perform in the general election (i.e. votes secured, money raised, etc.). As we end, therefore, it is worth discussing some of

the challenges that parties face. The sore-losers effect uncovered in this article is consistent with an ever-growing literature on the personalization of political life (Bittner 2011; Cross et al. 2018; Rahat and Kenig 2018). The personalization literature has identified a trend whereby individual party actors are increasingly at the centre of political life, with parties taking more and more of a backseat (Karvonen 2010; Pruyzers and Cross 2016b). Gideon Rahat and Tamir Sheafer (2007: 65), for example, define personalization as a process in which the ‘political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e. political party) declines’. Donors, it would seem, are implicated in this trend as they show more attachment to a specific candidate than they have to the broader political party (evidenced by the fact that they are less likely to make a party donation when their preferred candidate loses). As Cross and Pruyzers (2019) suggest, this represents a challenge for parties as they would benefit from developing strategies of integrating losers into the party after their loss, fostering a connection to the party as opposed to the specific candidate who mobilized them into the party.

While it may be the case that primaries are able to mobilize more new members into the organization than they lose due to a sore-losers effect, it is undeniable that parties would benefit from finding ways to keep these disgruntled individuals engaged. Churning through members, supporters and donors is likely less sustainable than developing meaningful connections with these individuals. Relatedly, that fewer than one in five leadership donors continue to donate represents a real challenge for the health and stability of parties. Without overly generous direct public funding, Canadian parties rely on thousands of small contributions from ordinary individuals (Rocha 2019). While primaries clearly mobilize thousands of new members/supporters into the party (Pruyzers and Cross 2016a), the evidence presented here suggests that only a small minority are financially committed to the party as parties struggle to convert these individuals into recurring donors and committed party activists. The vast majority, including winners, simply do not contribute to the party after the internal election has concluded. Here too parties would benefit from finding ways to keep donors (even winners) engaged and connected to the party after the primary.

In addition to raising a number of important questions regarding the consequences of intra-party democracy, the results presented here highlight a number of opportunities for future research. One such way for future research to push this analysis further would be to extend the temporal scope of the research to include financial donations made to the party *prior to* (not just after) the intra-party leadership election. Such an approach would be able to establish different groups of donors (individuals who donated to the party before and after the leadership election; individuals who donated to the party before but not after the leadership election; and those individuals who started donating to the party after the leadership election) and would therefore provide additional insight into the sour-grapes dynamic. Likewise, more data on donor behaviour, such as documenting the specific dollar amounts donated to the leadership candidate and party at different points in time, would allow for more fine-grained analysis regarding not just whether a donor stopped donating, but if they changed their patterns (i.e. lowered or raised the amount contributed).

Notes

- 1 There are, of course, a number of exceptions. The Italian PD, for instance, invites all Italian voters, including foreign citizens and those aged 16 and 17, to participate (Venturino and Seddone 2022: 241).
- 2 Party decline, however, is not the only reason to introduce greater intra-party democracy. As Katz and Mair (1995) note, changes to leadership selection were often a means of strengthening the power at the top while simultaneously circumventing middle-level party elites.
- 3 This, of course, is not to say that it had no impact on the election results. Campaign volunteers are essential to party success (Carty and Eagles 2005) and in this regard the disincentivizing effects of losing can have downstream consequences for the party during the general election (even if the members remain loyal in their voting behaviour).
- 4 Each study adopts a slightly different approach. Cross and Pruyzers (2019) utilize a survey approach whereas Venturino and Seddone (2022) make use of exit polls. In both cases respondents are providing self-report data.
- 5 We rely on this timeframe as it captures all major leadership elections that occurred after major changes to the election financing regime were introduced in 2004 (Carmichael and Howe 2014; Currie-Wood 2020; Young and Jansen 2011). This includes changes to who could donate (removal of corporate and union donations) as well as limits on the amounts that individuals could contribute (\$1,650 to leadership contests as of 2021). Unfortunately, data are not yet available for the Conservative and Green leadership elections of 2020.
- 6 Elections Canada is the country's non-partisan (i.e. arm's length) election management body. It is responsible for administering national-level elections and referendums.
- 7 'Reviewed' reports, as the name suggests, have been reviewed and verified by Elections Canada. These reports are inevitably different from the 'as submitted' versions as mistakes are corrected. Note, however, that even 'reviewed' reports change periodically as data are updated and revised by Elections Canada.
- 8 We classify the 'official start' of the election as the last day candidates had to register to compete in the election. The data then span the entire campaign period until the final day of voting. While this necessarily misses some contributions that came in before or after these dates, it is the best way to ensure consistency across the various internal party elections. Timelines for each internal election are as follows: Green 2006 (29 March–27 August), Bloc 2011 (17 September–11 December), NDP 2012 (15 September–24 March), Liberal 2013 (14 November–14 April), Bloc 2014 (8 April–16 December), NDP 2017 (2 July–1 October) and Conservative 2017 (2 November–27 May).
- 9 Donors were matched on the party and candidate donor lists by name and postal code.
- 10 Note that the approach adopted here does not account for the possibility that the leadership donor donated to another entity of the political party, namely the local constituency association.
- 11 Nearly all leadership donors in our data contributed to a single leadership candidate. The small number of individuals who donated to multiple candidates were removed from the analysis.
- 12 Donations were consolidated when identifying information of multiple donations matched with one another.
- 13 It is also possible that both of these effects are at play, which may result in a cancelling out.
- 14 Not just the financial aspects. Much research has pointed to gendered patterns of intra-party politics more generally (O'Neill et al. 2021; Thomas and Bodet 2013; Trimble 2007). Evidence regarding affinity effects for voting are somewhat mixed (see Goodyear-Grant 2010; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011; Pruyzers 2022).

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