Abstract:

The constitutional reform of 1997 placed Uruguay as the only country in the world in which parties are required to carry out primary elections –open and simultaneous- in order to select their presidential candidates. This rule replaced the former double simultaneous vote system (DSV) that allowed parties to run more than one presidential candidate in general elections. The aim of this study is to compare both systems and observe the effects that the open and simultaneous primary system produces. The effects of employing primaries on the election results are determined by the particular characteristics of the electorate who voluntarily participate in them, unlike the former DSV system with compulsory voting. From survey data, we analyze the factors affecting participation in such instances and their effects on the type of presidential candidates tend to be elected. The results show that in primary elections vote citizens more educated, more interested in politics, identified with political parties and with more extreme ideological positions. As a result we observe that through primaries, candidates away from the median voter are more likely to be winners than with DSV system.
Introduction

Uruguay is the only country in the world in which all parties must hold open simultaneous primary elections to select their respective presidential candidates. The actual effect of this formal rule depends on the characteristics of the citizens who decide to attend to cast their ballot. This paper analyzes the factors affecting turnout in primary elections and its impact on the type of presidential candidates that tend to be elected.

Turnout in Uruguay has not been a widely studied phenomenon. High levels of electoral participation (around 90%) have been associated with compulsory voting in national and local elections, and with a developed civic culture where parties are the main agents of political mobilization. Turnout seems to have not been a political problem for Uruguay. Therefore, also has not become a matter of academic concern.

Political science pays attention at the problem of electoral participation concerned about its impact on the quality of democracy. Low rates of turnout and involvement in politics may indicate low levels of competition and, therefore, little control over political actors by the voters. As Adserà et al. (2003) note, without accountability there is no incentive, produced by the "electoral connection", to a desirable political behavior. On the other hand, biases in political and social characteristics between those who attend to polls and those who do not, can produce that political actors feel responsible to an electorate that ends up having political preferences quite different from those of all voters.

The decision about who is the presidential candidate of the party is taken neither by the leaders, nor by its rank and files, or by its voters, but by those who, for whatever reason, attend to polls in the Uruguayan primary elections. The extent in which it could be argued that this is a more democratic, open and representative type of candidate selection depends on who votes in the primary election. In other words, how similar are the preferences of primary voters to the party voters or its members (if one thinks that one or the others are those who should select the candidate). What seems clear is that voters that end up deciding the nominee are many more than party members, and much less than its potential voters.

This paper first briefly reviews the theoretical discussion about the factors that influence voter turnout, and in especial those that apply to primary elections. Then it presents the characteristics of primary process in Uruguay. Third, it analyzes the
likelihood of different kind of voters to participate in the primaries based on survey data, and finally it discusses the possible consequences that this selection system produces.

Why people vote?

Blais (2006) argues that, although political science has devoted much effort to understand what induces and what discourages turnout, little is known because the findings are not conclusive. However, Geys (2006) says that Blais perception is not entirely correct. In his "meta-research" he reviews a set of variables that have the same effect on turnout. Both papers stress the importance of advancing in a combined analysis of variables that affect macro and micro level.

The Geys study shows that there are not pervasive variables at turnout researches. For him, this responds to the lack of a theoretical work on which to base the selection of variables. In this respect, Downs (1957) propositions, based in the logic of rational choice, seems to be the most accepted. Downs argues that since the vote has a cost, people will pay that price if his/her behavior can produce a profit. In other words, a person votes if that vote can affect the election outcome. Therefore, turnout increases in close elections, and / or when institutions raise the cost of abstention.

The economic theory often conceived the behavior of voting as an investment. Another way to understand this behavior, which is also economic, is to take the voter as a consumer. Under this view the decision to vote is not a function of expected profit, as in the case of an investment. The voter utility maximization function can be associated with the pleasure of winning, the pleasure of seeing that his political choice wins, and so forth. While considering the vote as a consumer’s good, this theory is similar to the expressive voting theory, but has other implications behind and maintains some of the properties of the downisian theory (especially those associated with the cost). For example, casting the ballot would keep some kind of relationship with income, since low-income people prefer to consume other goods most needed than the vote. But more importantly, situations of alienation or indifference are also available in this theory. When the party’s ideological position is too far from the voter, or parties’ ideological positions are indistinguishable for the voter, it can be expected that he/she will decide not vote.
Cox and Munger (1989) propose an alternative to the analysis of turnout associated with vote cost. For them, participation in tight elections is higher because elites develop greater efforts to mobilize voters to ensure the results. Aldrich (1993) basically agrees and claims that politicians invest more in close competitions, and this investment is reflected in higher levels of turnout. Therefore, turnout increases in competitive scenarios even though individual voters do not perceive that their vote could be decisive. Analyzing voter turnout in Latin America Perez-Liñán (2001:288) sustains that: “…we may have been looking at the wrong level of the game. It is the state, parties, and other agents — rather than formal rules and procedures — who provide selective incentives for voters to turn out”. Consequently, we would expect that parties that present closer competitions will have greater participation depending on the incentives that the expected result produce to the voter (or to party elites).

Hajnal and Lewis (2003) study voter turnout in municipal elections in California. They find that participation increases in concurrent elections, when at the same time a referendum is held, and when the disputed offices have more power to develop politics. Therefore, primary elections in parties that can win the national election, will tend to have higher turnout.

Scholars who study primaries in United States think that people with extreme ideological positions are more prone to attend to polls in this kind of elections. Hence, the median voter in primary elections is skewed to the right or to the left (depending on the party's position) than the total electorate's median voter. As a result, parties engaged in open primaries run the risk of selecting less competitive candidates, far from the center, than those selected by party committees’ decisions. The assumption behind is that party committees have a strong incentive to take electoral strategic decisions to win elections.

Although the use of primaries to select presidential candidates is still exceptional in Latin America, there is an increasing trend to adopt this kind of mechanisms (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006, Alcantara 2002). Research on this subject in the region, though limited, has led to an interesting debate on the effects of these presidential selection processes on election outcomes. On the one hand, there are those who tend to endorse the theoretical tenets from American Politics, and try to adapt it to Latin American cases. On the other hand Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006) have questioned the negative effects of primaries in Latin America.
Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006) argue that, contrary to what American Politics scholars say about US primaries, it use in Latin America gives an advantage in the general election. His argument is that voters in Latin America (region in which parties are evaluated negatively by the citizens) think that parties that use primaries are more democratic and transparent. Additionally, they say that voters do not necessarily select worse candidates than party leaders, since they might favor those with high popular support and without enough power within the party structure. Finally, as Kemahlioglu et al. (2009) show, Carey and Polga-Hecimovich think that primaries can be efficient mechanisms for solving conflicts over nominations, particularly in the case of coalitions or electoral alliances. Contrary to their expectations, their findings are not conclusive about the existence of an electoral "bonus" for parties that hold primaries to select presidential candidates. Either way, it does seem to rule out possible negative effects.

Last, there are other variables that are mentioned in the literature that tries to explain turnout, particularly in primary elections. Kenney and Rice (1985) show that the level of education, in interaction with low legal register barriers, and historically competitive elections tend to boost turnout in United States's primaries. Additionally, social pressure and the habit of voting increases. In this regard, Gerber et al. (2003) illustrate how the propensity to vote increases with participation in previous elections.

Based on theoretical explanations about the turnout, particularly in primary elections, we would expect that voters in primary elections in Uruguay be more educated, with more extreme ideological positions, and closer to parties with uncertain primary outcome and greater chances to gain access to the national government.

**Presidential intra-party competition in Uruguay**

Uruguayan political parties are constitutionally forced to hold primary elections in order to select their presidential candidates, by the amendments made in 1996. Until that moment, the President and vice-president were elected on a list that contained both candidates (called “presidential formulas”) through a plurality system using “double simultaneous vote” (DSV), which essentially meant to hold a primary and a general election at the same time. Political parties were allowed to present as many "presidential formulas" as they wanted, and the winning “formula” resulted from the most voted in
the party which received the most votes. Traditional parties used to run several candidates, whereas the minor parties and the Frente Amplio (FA) generally unified under a single “presidential formula”.

After the 1996 constitutional reform, the DSV was eliminated for the presidential election and the plurality system was replaced with the majority run-off method (ballotage). The elimination of such a peculiar system implied the adoption of a method that is still rare in comparative terms. The political parties were forced to present single presidential candidates by establishing mandatory, open and concurrent primary elections. Since the new rules are in force, all parties that want to participate in the electoral process must have “internal” elections on the same date.2 Internal elections serve two purposes: i) to select the presidential candidate in each party and ii) to elect delegates to the national and 19 local party conventions.3 The national party conventions comprise 500 members (elected by proportional representation) and have two purposes: a) to select the presidential candidate if none of them receives more than 50% of the vote, or more than 40% with at least a 10 point margin over the second front runner; and b) to select the vice-presidential candidate.4

The reasons to eliminate the DSV were based in the distortions on the voters’ preferences that the system tended to produce. Since political parties are not forced to be ideologically coherent, voters under DSV are more uncertain on the consequences of their vote and the aggregation rules can produce inconsistent results.5 The way in which distortion works is exemplified in the Figure 1: candidate C, from the Rightist Party is the most voted (48%), yet the elected candidate is A (32%), from the Leftist Party, which received 52% of the vote due to the accumulation of the votes received by A and B (20%). If A was the only presidential candidate of the Leftist Party, the victory of C would be more likely, since B is ideologically closer to C and a minimum vote transfer from B to C is enough for C to defeat A.

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2 Citizens may vote in any party primary, but may only participate in one. Part of the reasoning behind holding the primaries on the same day for all parties was to prevent voters from intervening in the affairs of more than one party.

3 Thus, this kind of elections are simultaneously both, “internal” and “primaries”.

4 Party conventions could have any other functions that party rules assign to them.

5 While the voter decision with single party candidates is simple (must vote for A if \( U(A) > U(B) \) with two party competition), the decision with DSV could be rather complicated as represented by the following inequality: a voter must vote his/her preferred candidate of Party A if \( p_a[U(A_1)]+(1-p_a)[U(A_2)] > p_b[U(B_1)]+(1-p_b)[U(B_2)] \), where \( A_1 \) and \( A_2 \) are candidates of Party A, \( p_a \) is the winning probability of \( A_1 \) over \( A_2 \) and \( U \) is an utility function (Buquet 2003).
Figure 1. Electoral competition with DSV

Even though a whole comparison between both alternatives (DSV vs. Primaries) is more complex and show shortcomings on both methods (Buquet 2003), the primary system unarguably avoids the risk and distortion that DSV allows. But the use of primaries to select presidential candidates is not a neutral rule and produces outcomes that strongly depend on the characteristics of the electorate that voluntary participate on them.

The goal of this paper is to establish the consequences of the use of primaries in Uruguay, using survey data collected in 2009. But before that, we will briefly introduce over the primary electoral results from 1999 to 2009. Even though primaries were held only three times, some trends can be observed. In the first place it must be said that primaries promote it genuine use by political parties to select their presidential candidates. While primaries are mandatory, parties are not forced to stand more than one pre candidate to compete. Minor parties have always registered one candidate for the primary and the FA have done so once, but clearly for main parties, primaries became the arena where presidential nomination is decided. For traditional parties (Partido Colorado and Partido Nacional) it seems natural to compete in open primaries in order to select their presidential candidate, since they had a long tradition of open competition using the DSV. However, the FA has been criticizing the DSV system since its very beginning. Yet, the obligation to hold the primary and the internal competition process, eventually led the FA to use the primary as the legitimate arena where the presidential nomination has to be decided. Until 2004 the FA had a “natural” presidential candidate, Tabaré Vázquez (Buquet and Chasquetti 2008) and, even if he was formally challenged by Danilo Astori in 1999, he was virtually unbeatable. But
once Vázquez was elected as president with the prohibition of reelection, the dispute for the succession led unavoidably to the primary.

On the other hand, the electoral formula to decide the nomination posed incentives to concentrate the primary contest between two main candidates inside each party. The effective number of candidates (ENC, Table 1), although reduced for all parties in 2004, was eventually placed around two in 2009. In spite of Duverger’s law, which predicts two candidate contests with plurality rule and more fragmented competition with majority rule (Duverger 1951), the Uruguayan primary system promotes essentially two candidate contests, in part because of the lowered threshold required to win (40+10) and in part because it seems difficult to imagine that a party convention could put aside a plurality winner. By means of a trial and error learning process, parties tend to run –or voters tend to concentrate around- two main candidates, and in every case in which there was competition, there was a first round winner. That is to say, none party convention has had to decide the presidential candidate because every presidential candidate since 1999 has been directly nominated by the electorate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batlle</td>
<td>54,92%</td>
<td>Stirling 91%</td>
<td>Bordaberry 72,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierro</td>
<td>44,14%</td>
<td>Iglesias 7%</td>
<td>Amorin 14,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>10,8%</td>
<td>DIF 84,2%</td>
<td>DIF 57,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>2,01</td>
<td>ENC 1,2</td>
<td>ENC 1,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacalle</td>
<td>48,3%</td>
<td>Lacalle 34%</td>
<td>Lacalle 57,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramirez</td>
<td>32,3%</td>
<td>Larrañaga 66%</td>
<td>Larrañaga 42,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>16,0%</td>
<td>DIF 33%</td>
<td>DIF 14,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>2,8</td>
<td>ENC 1,8</td>
<td>ENC 2,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vázquez</td>
<td>82,4%</td>
<td>Vázquez 100%</td>
<td>Mujica 52,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astori</td>
<td>17,6%</td>
<td>Astori 39,7%</td>
<td>Astori 39,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>64,8%</td>
<td>DIF 100%</td>
<td>DIF 12,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>ENC 1</td>
<td>ENC 2,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration with data from Área de Política y Relaciones Internacionales del Banco de Datos de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad de la República.

Finally, a strategic trend is observable, parties with competitive primary contests between two main candidates; tend to make up the presidential formula placing the primary looser as the vice presidential candidate (Batlle-Hierro in 1999, Lacalle-Larrañaga and Mujica-Astori in 2009). Such situation occurred in every case in which the difference between the first and second front runners was under 15 percentage
points and, in all cases in which such a formula was formed, one of them finally won. This kind of strategy is obviously conducted to compensate the damages in the general election performance that a divisive primary contest can produce on the party (Atkeson 1998). On the one hand, it avoids that critiques made by the looser during the primary campaign could be used by rival parties against the winner and, on the other hand, placing the looser as vice presidential candidate prevents the defection of his/her voters in the general election.

But the main consequence that primaries could have over the party competition process is its bias in candidate selection. Since in the primary do not vote the whole electorate, and the voluntary vote leads certain kind of voters to attend, the results of primaries could be far from those under DSV. The following section will analyze the effects that voluntary participation has over primary outcomes using survey data.

**Analyzing survey data**

The effects of primaries on the candidate nomination will be analyzed using data from the Panel Survey made by the ICP-FCS-UdelaR during the 2009 electoral process. At first sight, we can detect that extremist candidates, those closest to the ideological extremes of the spectrum, are benefited from the system. But if that conclusion could be evident, the mechanisms that lead to that outcome are not. Moreover, we can not reject the hypothesis that those candidates would be winners under DSV, as well. To know if that particular outcome is due to the bias produced by the system, we need to know which characteristics of voters induce some of them to participate in primaries and not others.

To determine the characteristics of voters that participate in primaries, we run a probit, logistic regression model. Such a model allow us to detect changes in the probability that a person has to vote in the primary taking into account other variables that are supposed to have impact on electoral behavior: ideological position, educational level, party identification, and age. The model also includes other control variables as place of residence and gender. The results of the model are shown in Figure 2, where we can observe that the probability to vote in the 2009 Uruguayan primary election depended on the voters’ age, educational level, ideological position and his/her identification with one of the three main parties.
To estimate the impact that those variables have in the probability of voting in primaries, we made the simulations presented in Table 2. In average, the probability to vote in primaries for a Montevideo resident male, with 20 years old, high school graduate, identified with the FA, and placed at the centre of the ideological spectrum (5) is 0.28. For an individual with the same characteristics but identified with the Partido Nacional (PN), the probability grows up to 0.35. If the individual were 60 years old instead of 20, the probability grows up to 0.5 for the identified with the FA, and to 0.58 for the identified with the PN. In terms of ideological positions, the simulation shows how, the closer an individual is to the extremes, the higher the probability to participate in the primary. For example, a 40 year old Montevideo resident, high school graduate and identified with the FA has a probability to attend of 0.39 when he is placed at the centre of the ideological spectrum. But that probability grows up to 0.55 if the individual places himself at the left extreme of the scale (1). By the same token, an

\[ \text{mvd} \] is a dummy variable which value is 1 when the individual lives in Montevideo and 0 otherwise; \[ \text{sexo} \] is a dummy variable which value is 1 for males and 0 for females; \[ \text{edad} \] is the individual age in years; \[ \text{educ} \] is an ordinal variable that ranges from 1 (for people with no education) to 9 (individuals with complete college studies); \[ \text{ideol} \] is the absolute value of the difference between the individual ideological self placement and the center; \[ \text{pn, pc and fa} \] are dummy variables with value 1 when the individual declares identification with the Partido Nacional, Partido Colorado or Frente Amplio respectivly, and 0 otherwise.
individual with the same characteristics, but identified with the PN, has a probability to vote at the primary of 0.46 when he/she is at the ideological centre and that probability grows up to 0.62 if he moves to the right extreme of the scale (9).

Finally the model allows establishing the effect of educational level over the probability to vote in the primary. For instance a 50 year old male Montevideo resident with elementary school identified with the FA and placed at the centre of the ideological scale (5) has a probability of 0.24 to vote in the primary. The likelihood increases to 0.54 for a voter with the same characteristics but with complete college studies.

In sum, the model and the simulation presented show that the ideological self placement, the educational level and age (when controlled by party ID) have a significant impact over the probability to vote in the primary election. Therefore, candidates preferred by older, more educated and ideologically extreme voters should be benefited by open primaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Ideological position</th>
<th>20 years</th>
<th>40 years</th>
<th>60 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frente Amplio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,43</td>
<td>0,55</td>
<td>0,66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0,39</td>
<td>0,51</td>
<td>0,62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0,35</td>
<td>0,47</td>
<td>0,59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,31</td>
<td>0,42</td>
<td>0,54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0,28</td>
<td>0,39</td>
<td>0,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partido Nacional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0,35</td>
<td>0,46</td>
<td>0,58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0,39</td>
<td>0,51</td>
<td>0,62</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0,43</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0,51</td>
<td>0,62</td>
<td>0,73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Elaborated from the probit model presented in Figure 2 using Zelig software (Imai, Kosuke, Gary King, y Olivia Lau 2007 y 2008) for R. The other variables were set as follows: mvd=1, sexo=1, and educ=7 (Montevideo resident, male and high school graduate).

**Ideological bias of primary voters**

If we deepen in the analysis and compare the ideological distribution of the whole electorate with that of the primary voters, we can see the magnitude of the effect of the ideological bias in the primary outcomes. Figure 3 shows the ideological
distributions of the whole electorate, PN primary voters, FA primary voters and voters for each of the main candidates of both parties. If we observe the distribution between Astori and Mujica (FA’s candidates), we can see that the latter has more voters than the former in every ideological position. Yet, the most significant differences in favour of Mujica are among the more radical leftists (positions 1 to 3). It is worth noting that two thirds of the electors from those positions vote in the primary, while just one third of FA electors from positions 4 and 5 do likewise. For the PN, the participation of ideologically extreme electors is even more decisive. Lacalle and Larrañaga are virtually tied among voters from positions 5 and 6, while the former clearly defeats the latter among the more rightist voters (positions 7 to 9). Similar to the FA voters, PN primary voters with centre ideological positions are a few more than 20% of the total, while voters with extreme ideological positions almost double that percentage.

The data just analyzed, together with the statistical model, show that primaries actually benefit ideologically extreme candidates. On the one hand, a higher percentage of voters placed far from the centre tend to participate in primaries (44% of those placed at the centre, against almost 58% of those placed at other positions). On the other hand it is worth noting that candidates of different parties compete among them for voters at the centre, while extreme candidates (particularly those on the left) are the sole options for extreme voters.

Even if we can not be sure that the electoral outcomes would be different without primaries, it seems clear that with a system where the whole electorate votes, the 2009 PN and FA internal contests would have been more competitive than they actual result. In sum, although in a different way from DSV, primaries also introduce distortions in the electoral preferences of citizens.

In Uruguay, the ideological self placement of voters that participate in primaries has a bias to the more extreme positions, thus supporting the theoretical arguments of those who say that primaries benefit radical candidates. Yet, according to Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006), we cannot expect any damage or benefit at the general election for any party, when all parties held competitive primaries to select their candidates. Nevertheless it could be possible that, even in systems with mandatory primaries, a party could avoid the internal competition running a single pre candidate selected by the party elite in order to have the best electoral result. If such a decision does not produce a conflict inside the party and do not contradicts the preferences of the party electorate, that party could be benefited in the general election if other parties hold
divisive primaries. If this reasoning could not be demonstrated, at least the performance of Tabaré Vázquez in the 2004 election –single pre candidate in primaries and the most voted presidential candidate in half a century- shows its plausibility. Therefore, if primaries produce a bonus, in Uruguay that bonus could go for the party with a leadership capable to select a good candidate for the general election and avoid the primary competition.

Figure 3. Ideological distributions

Source: Own elaboration with 2009 Panel Survey data from the ICP-FCS-UdelaR.

Conclusion

The 1996 electoral reform forced Uruguayan parties to select their presidential candidates by open and concurrent primary elections. That system, which appears to foster democratic competition, could create distortions since voluntary voters in
primaries have different characteristics from the whole electorate that attends the general election.

This paper tried to identify the factors that influence electoral turnout in primary elections in Uruguay and the effects that such biased electorate have in the presidential candidate selection. From survey data, the results of the statistical model presented seem to confirm most of the theoretical propositions about electoral participation in general and in primary elections in particular.

The ideological self placement, the educational level and age (when controlled by party ID) have significant impacts over the probability to vote in the primary election. Older, more educated and ideologically extreme voters are whom are more prone to attend open primaries. Even if evidence is not categorical, it also could be said that individuals identified with parties with more competitive primaries are more likely to vote.

Therefore, preferred candidates of that kind of voters -those more prone to vote in primaries- benefit from this selection system. This calls into question how representative primary elections can be. Even if it could be rash to assert that 2009 results would have been different using the old DSV method, it seems obvious that the Uruguayan primary system create incentives in favour of polarization, given that extreme candidates inside parties are better of with this system.

References


