The Costs of Reform

Seth Masket
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Presented at “American Gridlock: Causes, Characteristics, and Consequences of Polarization,” American University, May 9, 2014
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or

Stop Trying to Fix Things; You’re Only Making Them Worse

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Nebraska: Most rapid polarization in nation

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Minnesota: Achieved "partisanship" even before parties appeared on ballot

1969 State House
California “nonpartisan” recall: 134 candidates enter, 3 candidates split 94% of vote

Vote Shares in 2003 California Gubernatorial Recall

- Schwarzenegger, 49%
- Bustamante, 32%
- McClintock, 13%
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- Reactions to campaign finance reform, primary rules are evidence that broader parties can still be very active.
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  • Policy demanders in Colorado got around limitations by building 527s, independent expenditure committees.

• Money now nearly impossible to follow.
Source: Denver Post analysis of Colorado secretary of state data

Karen Crummy and Thomas McKay, The Denver Post
The Dark Money Rises

Source: Open Secrets
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• Evidence from Minnesota: Under nonpartisanship, there was greater voter confusion, lower turnout, greater incumbency advantage.
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  • Evidence from Minnesota: Under nonpartisanship, there was greater voter confusion, lower turnout, greater incumbency advantage.

  • Evidence from California under cross-filing: Less organized legislative voting, greater lobbyist power, greater corruption.
Why undermine parties?

• Deeply unpopular

• Best tool we've developed for improving voter knowledge, promoting turnout, organizing elections and giving them meaning, organization legislatures, etc.