Extremism Grows in the Dark:

Political Non-Profits, Disclosure and Ideological Interest Group Spending.

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Abstract:

Following the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, independent expenditures have grown dramatically both in terms of raw dollars and as a percentage of spending in elections. A large and growing portion comes from political nonprofits—so called "dark money" groups—named because the terms of their incorporation allow them to partially obscure the sources of their income. I posit that the pathways for anonymous giving that emerged from the *Citizens United* decision allowed ideologically motivated interest groups to aggressively challenge more established factions of political parties in way previously unfeasible. Testing this theory, I find strong support that dark money groups back more extremist candidates—especially during primary elections—than either formal party organizations or access-oriented interest groups. These results indicate that the anonymous pathway to giving offered by dark money has created a new font for ideologically motivated interest groups to spend in American elections.

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Introduction

"We've played too much to the cadence of Washington and the congressional calendar and whichever leader or whichever party held the majority and their agenda...Then we played marginally around ... either pushing them to success or fighting them to defeat. ... We haven't done enough to set the agenda."

–James Davis, Vice-President. Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, on plans by the Koch brothers network to spend between $300 and $400 million in the 2018 midterm elections (Hohmann 2018).

On June 7, 2016, Rep. Renee Ellmers of North Carolina went down as yet another casualty in the simmering civil war within the Republican Party. For the first time in its existence, the Koch network, a powerhouse of independent expenditure groups who have steered tens of millions of dollars into each of the last three election cycles, backed a primary challenge to a sitting member of Congress (Swan 2016). Ellmers, a Trump ally elected during the Tea Party wave in 2010, faced incumbent challenger Rep. George Holding after a court ruling placed large parts of his district into hers (Bonner 2016; Schneider 2016). In a statement following Ellmers' primary defeat, Americans for Prosperity–the flagship nonprofit organization of the Koch network–declared that "Renee Ellmers lost her job because she abandoned the limited-government principles she originally espoused" (Americans for Prosperity 2016). Touting the group's efforts in "knocking [sic] over 16,000 doors and making over 180,000 phone calls," the statement went on to warn the contest's winner that "we'll also urge him to continue to focus on cutting wasteful spending and ending special interest handouts. Americans for Prosperity will continue to hold politicians from both parties accountable to these basic principles of a free economy."

The internecine battle between the Koch network and Rep. Ellmers is illustrative of a growing tension within the Republican Party. At times, such as in the case of Ellmers, the goals of the institutional party and the goals of political donors were at odds–setting up a clash between the party's formal establishment and the interest groups that operate within its orbit. For instance, during the efforts to repeal the Affordable

Care Act, (ACA) in the first months of the Trump administration, the Koch network pledged access to a "new pool of money for advertisements, field programs and mailings" for those voting against a Republican overhaul of the ACA that the Koch's believed didn't go far enough (Schleifer 2017).

Many have blamed the rise of "dark money" organizations–political nonprofits who are able to employ loopholes in election and tax law to shield the identities of their donors–for the dysfunction in Congress and at the very least fueling the perception that these undisclosed contributions are biasing legislation in the favor of the wealthy (i.e. Gilens 2012; Bartels 2018). Several prominent politicians at all levels of government have decried dark money for its pernicious effects on the legislative process. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, (D-RI), called dark money "a rot in our American democracy" and the enabler of "special-interest influence" (Crabtree 2019). Sen. Elizabeth Warren, (D-MA), said in a speech on the Senate floor that "dark money has helped shape the anti-teacher, anti-worker agenda that undermines our democracy" (Warren 2018). In New Jersey, where $41 million of the $71 million spent by the top 25 highest-spending independent expenditure groups in the 2017 gubernatorial race came from dark money groups, one state legislator pushing a bill to regulate dark money called referred to these groups as "groups with benign sounding names have been operating in the shadows, spending large sums of money from undisclosed sources to influence the legislative, regulatory and election processes" (Corasaniti 2019).

The overhaul of election law following the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* not only drastically increased the amount of money spent in federal elections, but radically reshaped the way it was deployed. Following the 2010 election cycle, so-called "outside spending" or advertising purchased and produced by organizations not officially affiliated with a candidate, exploded (Jacobson and Carson 2015; Hasen 2016). While the majority of this spending came from so-called "super PACs," or PACs unencumbered by traditional spending and fundraising limits as they are, in theory, independent from a candidate's campaign (see Dowling and Miller 2014), a sizable portion of outside spending came from so-called "dark money" organizations, (see Figure 1.) These organizations are so named because their method of incorporation–as IRS designated 501(c) nonprofits–carries no legal requirement to disclose their donors.

his article seeks to answer just how different dark money really is from the forms of election spending
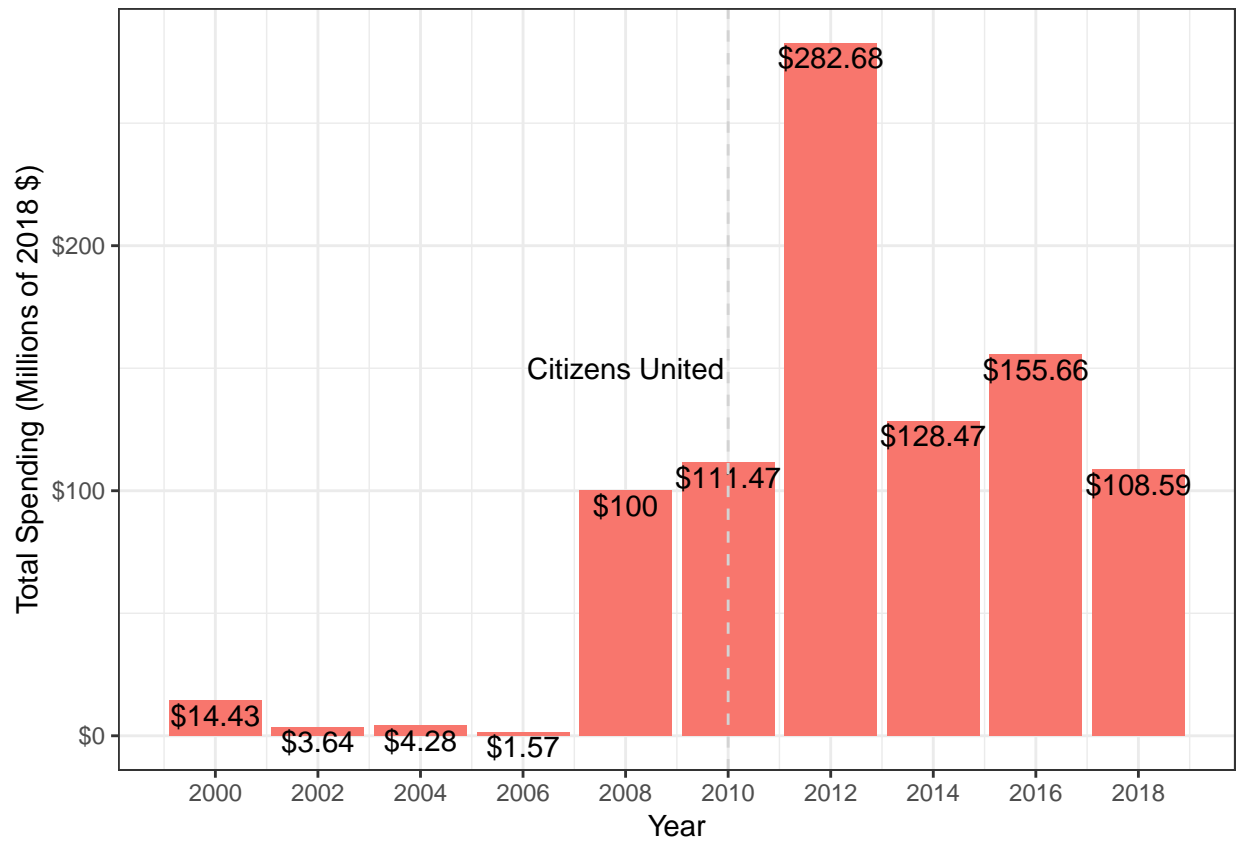
Figure 1: Estimated Dark Money Spending by Election Cycle. Source: Center for Responsive Politics.

that predated it. Are dark money groups changing American politics or are they, as some scholars have posited, mere creatures of the extended party network (Bawn et al. 2012), carrying different identities but fulfilling the same functions as formal party organizations did prior to *Citizens United* in 2010 (see Mann and Corrado 2014; Drutman 2015)? These groups are of particular interest as the opacity of their finances precludes researchers from tying them to larger networks (e.g. Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; R. M. Blum 2016; Skinner, Masket, and Dulio 2012; Masket 2016) and thus making them difficult to place in the traditional interest-group typology used by the literature.

I find that dark money organizations throw their support behind a vastly divergent set of candidates, backing more extreme candidates than do party organizations or access-seeking interest groups. For Republicans, this phenomenon of supporting extremists is pronounced during the party's primary. Dark money organizations also prefer differing candidates in open-seat primaries compared to those organizations as well–throwing financial support to aid extremists. Taken as a whole, these findings show that dark money groups have preferences that are distinct from more moderate actors in the extended party network and appear to closely mimic ideological interest groups whose political giving is tied to a particular policy or ideological agenda (Barber 2016).

This new pathway for political money into American elections should cause scholars to re-examine the cohesion of the extended party network and the ability of party organizations at the center of this network to wield influence. Whereas once these formal party organizations were the sole conduit between ideologically motivated donors and candidates for higher office, the ability of donors to give anonymously via dark money organizations has turned the former "company store" into a series of small boutiques, each catered to the specific preferences and policy goals of these political financiers. In short, dark money functions as a new freeway to carry ideological interest group money into American elections.

Theory

Group Goals

There exists a long-running literature detailing the differing types of interest groups and the motivations that fuel each's foray into politics. Welch (1981) and Gopoian, Smith, and Smith (1984) first advanced this typology to the world of PACs, arguing that they either focus on access to members of Congress or represent ideological issue concerns which themselves might be broad or narrow. R. L. Hall and Wayman (1990) posited the theory of PAC giving as buying access to legislators such that they might influence the policies they choose to pursue, rather than merely influence their vote. Notably, Francia et al. (2003) separated donors to Congressional elections into "investors, ideologues and intimates." While analyzing individual donors and organizations collectively, these authors distinguished between those seeking access to lawmakers, those seeking to place like-minded individuals into office and those supporting friends, respectively. Brunell (2005) adds nuance to this theory showing that while interest groups may give to both parties in order to ensure access in the event of a partisan swing in Congress, differing types of groups still have their preferred parties and will not donate to key races which may affect their preferred party's hold on power. More recently, Barber (2016) identified "ideological groups" as a unique typology that occupy "an intermediate position between purely access-oriented PACs and individuals," the latter of whom are more motivated by ideological alignment than the ability to gain an audience with a member of Congress shaping legislation.

Broadly speaking, the existing literature classifies politically active organizations into one of three camps and ascribes the following motivations to each:

1. *Party Organizations:* These groups are focused primarily on growing the size of their coalition as a party gains strength from representation within either an executive office or within a legislative body. As such, party organizations concern themselves first and foremost with a candidate's chances for winning an election. The main criteria that a party organization uses to evaluate a candidate is *electability.*

2. *Access Groups:* These groups are focused primarily on being able to contact incumbent lawmakers and

Table 1: Group Incentives and Predicted Behaviors

Type	Main Incentive	Main Constraint	Support Extremists in Generals?	Primary Involvement?	Back Extremists in Primaries?
Party	Grow Coalition	Can't Overtly Support Favorites	No	No	No
Access	Gain Access to Lawmakers	Cannot Challenge Incumbents	No	No	No
Ideological	Elect Fellow Travelers	Cannot Gain Access to Spurned Incumbents	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dark Money	Elect Fellow Travelers	None, (Anonymity Protects from Backlash)	Yes	Yes	Yes

influence their votes on pending legislation. These types of interest groups are most concerned with preserving relationships with members of a legislative body such that they will be able to help guide that member's vote or insert themselves into any pending legislation that member is crafting. The main criteria that an access group uses to evaluate a candidate is that candidate's *position of power*, or ability to influence legislation pertinent to the group.

3. *Ideological Groups:* These groups focus primarily on enacting specific policy goals or ideological agendas into law. While these groups prize electability, they are more focused on some policy or ideological position. These groups seek less to influence incumbent members of a legislative body, but rather replace them with fellow adherents to the goal or cause. The main criteria than an ideological group uses to evaluate a candidate is a candidate's *conformity* towards a policy goal or cause.

Group Constraints

Not just motivated by differing goals, each type of organization is also subject to differing constraints. As indicated in Table 1, each group encounters a unique roadblock in pursuing their electoral and policy goals. For instance, the primary process was designed to cut party insiders out of the nominating process. As such, party organizations are generally reticent to expend precious resources in an election in which, by definition in most states, a copartisan will emerge. Parties are also able to influence the nomination process through means more efficacious than independent expenditures in a party primary (e.g. M. Cohen et al. 2009; Masket 2011; Hassell 2016).

Access groups are equally constrained by the prospect of losing access to a particular member of a legislative body. Unless one is a safe incumbent, access groups will shy away from primary elections precisely due to the fact that a misplaced show of support could see them locked out of the legislative process by either a spurned member or one of their allies. Generally, access groups reserve their independent expenditures for general elections and will often give to both candidates just to ensure an audience with whomever happens to prevail (Lowery and Brasher 2004; E. N. Powell and Grimmer 2016).

Similarly, ideological groups may often prefer an incumbent's challenger in a given race. However, these groups also pursue policy change by behaving like access groups and seeking to influence sitting members of a legislative body. Thus, these groups often encounter the same constraints of access groups, though on a much less pronounced scale as their strategies are less transactional.

Where Does Dark Money Fall?

The relevant question for this paper is where dark money organizations fit into the typology of interest groups and how their own unique constraints and motivations should allow us to predict their behaviors. This is especially important as these organizations often emerge concurrent to an election and offer voters very little information on which to evaluate them other than a name and a minimalist webpage. I theorize that the decision making process leading a donor to select either to contribute a traditional, disclosing political

organization or a non-disclosing dark money organization revolves around the "expressive" vs. "instrumental" motivations debate that underlies other political behaviors (see Brennan and Buchanan 1984; Copeland and Laband 2002; Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Shieh and Pan 2010; Ellis and Stimson 2012; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). As with voting, political donors can also be motivated by appeals to one's "expressive" social identities or by appealing to their "instrumental" concerns as they relate to a specific policy area. Ansolabehere, De Figueiredo, and Snyder Jr (2003) find political donations satisfy a "consumption good" motivation for givers in allowing them to fulfill an expressive need to participate in the political process. However, Francia et al. (2003) find via surveys of political donors that substantial numbers of donors are motivated to give for more "instrumental" concerns such as pending policy or the belief that their own material interests might benefit more from the election of one candidate over another.

Dark money, I posit, allows a single donor to satisfy both motivations by simply routing the money to differing organizations. As depicted in Figure 2, a donor can satisfy the expressive aspects that motivate political giving–the "consumption good" theory–through traditional transparent channels. That these donations are part of a public record is immaterial given that expressive motivations hinge around one's group identity and public persona. At the same time, instrumental motivations can be addressed via non-disclosing entities. This point becomes especially salient when expressive and instrumental concerns come into conflict. Research has shown that disclosure rules subject donors to social pressures that affect their giving (see La Raja 2014; Wood and Spencer 2016; Oklobdzija 2019). Therefore, contributing to a dark money organization in order to help defeat a particular policy or promote some ideological agenda, for instance, allows one to satisfy these issue and ideological concerns even if they come into conflict with a donors outward-facing social identity.

Given this dichotomy, one should expect differing behaviors from party organizations that fund-raise primarily via expressive giving and dark money groups. The ability to obscure financial information and donor identities make will make dark money organizations behave more akin to ideological interest groups who fund-raise primarily via an instrumentally motivated agenda. Further, ideological organizations differ from formal party organizations in that parties are motivated by increasing the size of their coalition within
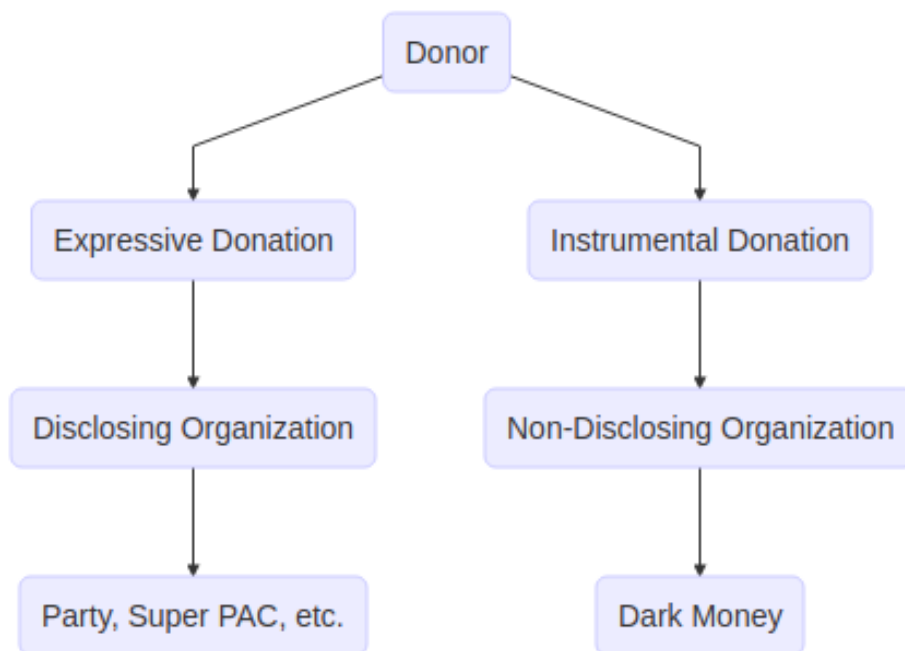
Figure 2: Flowchart of donor decision making process when giving to a traditional political organization or a dark money organization.

a legislative body. Ideological interest groups, on the other hand, seek not copartisans, but ideological fellow travelers. Their concern is not the partisan affiliation of a legislator, but rather a shared ideology or shared position on a particular policy topic. As such, dark money is best thought of as an evolution of ideological interest groups. Because ideological interest groups often are at odds with established party orthodoxy on a particular issue or policy area, the offer of anonymity for their financial backers lessens the social pressures that might constrain political giving–making dark money an ideal vehicle.

Working as a cohesive whole, these dark money groups work towards large-scale overhauls of policy rather than just piecemeal changes to existing legislation. Thus, they concern themselves far less with access than with the election of ideological fellow travelers. Differing from formal party organizations, dark money organizations are far less concerned with the partisan balance of a legislative body. As such, dark money organizations are far more likely to support extremist candidates in primary elections in spite of the negative consequences this could have farther down the road (see A. B. Hall 2015). Additionally, dark money groups

prize ideological conformity over electability, meaning that their utility calculus entices them to support ideologically proximate candidates with less chance of winning over co-partisans in closer elections–unlike a formal party organization whose calculus is the exact opposite. These groups are concerned with broad issue areas and, most importantly, see the election of like-minded legislators are more efficacious to achieving these policy goals than simply gaining access to those already in Congress. Furthermore, anonymous dark money organizations will be utilized far more often by ideological interest groups than access oriented interest groups since the entire idea of access is predicated on being able to demonstrate past support in order to ingratiate one's organization with a politician (see Kalla and Broockman 2016).

Turning specifically to primary elections, the rift between party-preferred candidates and others in primary elections has been explored in book-length treatments by both Hassell (2017) and Boatright (2013). Hassell (2017) finds that party supported nominees in primary elections are more moderate than their challengers, but that this effect is entirely driven by the Republican Party. When disaggregating, Hassell found no party preference for moderate candidates on the Democratic side, but a strong and statistically significant effect on the Republican side. Boatright (2013) contends that a small but growing number of primary contests have become nationalized and that these challengers are being funded by a "small but influential coterie of interest groups" (p. 213). Placing extremist lawmakers within a legislative body is theoretically much easier to accomplish during a primary election than during a general. Indeed, many scholars have posited that primary elections actually favor extremists candidates in that they feature lower turnouts than generals and a more ideologically motivated voter-base (see Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Brady, Han, and Pope 2007). Therefore, if dark money is fueling the rise of extremists in the U.S. Congress, the likely pathway is also via primary elections.

Empiricial Predictions

I posit that one can place dark money organizations within the standard interest-group typology by analyzing two aspects of behavior–their willingness to spend in primaries and their willingness to support ideological extremists. Political parties will avoid expressly favoring one candidate or another in a primary

(but see Hassell 2017) and will shy away from supporting extremists as they seek to deploy their scant resources to support the most electable members of their coalition. Access seeking groups will prefer incumbents within a legislative body over extremists who may hold sympathetic views but are in a diminished position to enact any policy. Further, the risk of alienating a future member of a legislative body means that access seeking groups will avoid primary races almost entirely. Ideological groups, on the other hand, seek conformity above all, and worry less about the presence of a lawmaker from a specific party than about a lawmaker who is reliable on certain issues, for instance. Ideological groups will spend for more extremist candidates in primaries precisely because primaries are the best time to install such a reliable lawmaker into a legislative body. Dark money organizations, however, operate with anonymity as their main feature. As such, they will support extremists just like ideological groups because their objectives and motivations are largely aligned. Similarly, dark money organizations will be more heavily involved in primaries than both party and access groups because, as with ideological groups, they prefer ideological conformity to either access or electability. This leads to my first hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Dark money organizations will support more extreme candidates than formal party organizations during general elections.*

Hypothesis 2: *Dark money organizations will be spend more in primaries, relative to general elections, than formal party organizations.*

Hypothesis 2a: *Dark money organizations will support more extreme candidates in primaries than either access-oriented interest groups or formal party organizations.*

Next I posit that most of the "action" in primary elections will come in open-seat contests. Both parties and access groups will avoid challenging incumbents during primary elections for similar reasons to those mentioned above. Ideological groups will also rarely venture into a primary where an incumbent is present because attacking an incumbent rarely ever results in an incumbent's ouster from office (Boatright 2013) and is thus a poor use of precious financial resources. Instead, the divergence in these groups will come during open seat elections in primaries. These elections present the best available opportunity to put an ideologically

proximate candidate into office, especially given the partisan tilt of most Senate seats and districts which effectively makes the primary the decisive nominating contest (Jacobson and Carson 2015). In these types of races, I expect that both dark money organizations and ideological interest groups will support more extreme candidates than access group or parties. Thus, my final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: *Dark money organizations will be more likely to support extreme candidates in open-seat primaries than will formal party organizations.*

Methods

To test these hypotheses, I assembled data on the three Congressional elections between 2012, (the first election following enactment of the *Citizens United* decision), and 2016 for both House and Senate candidates. Fundraising data came from the Federal Elections Commission. Measuring an organization's "support" for a given candidate requires a few assumptions in the post *Citizens United* world where support is primarily given in the form of independent expenditures. In cases where these independent expenditures advocated the election of a candidate, calculating support is entirely straight-forward. However, this is rarely the case as the majority of independent expenditures come in the form of attack ads. Thus, it becomes somewhat debatable who these ads are "supporting." In the case of a general election, in which there are generally just two viable candidates representing the Republican and Democratic parties, an attack on one candidate can be reasonably classified as support for their opponent (an approach used by Desmarais 2015).

To measure extremism, I utilize the DW-Dime measure of ideology calculated by Bonica (2018) and utilized by Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2017). Using a machine learning approach, the DW-Dime measure uses campaign finance data predict chamber votes in order to "generate the equivalent of roll call scores for actors who lack voting records" (Bonica 2018, 2–3). This metric is especially useful for my analysis as it imputes a common space for both members of Congress and their challengers who hadn't cast a vote in the body. Furthermore, this approach eliminates the tautological issue of using the Bonica ideological scores derived from campaign finance receipts as a dependent variable.
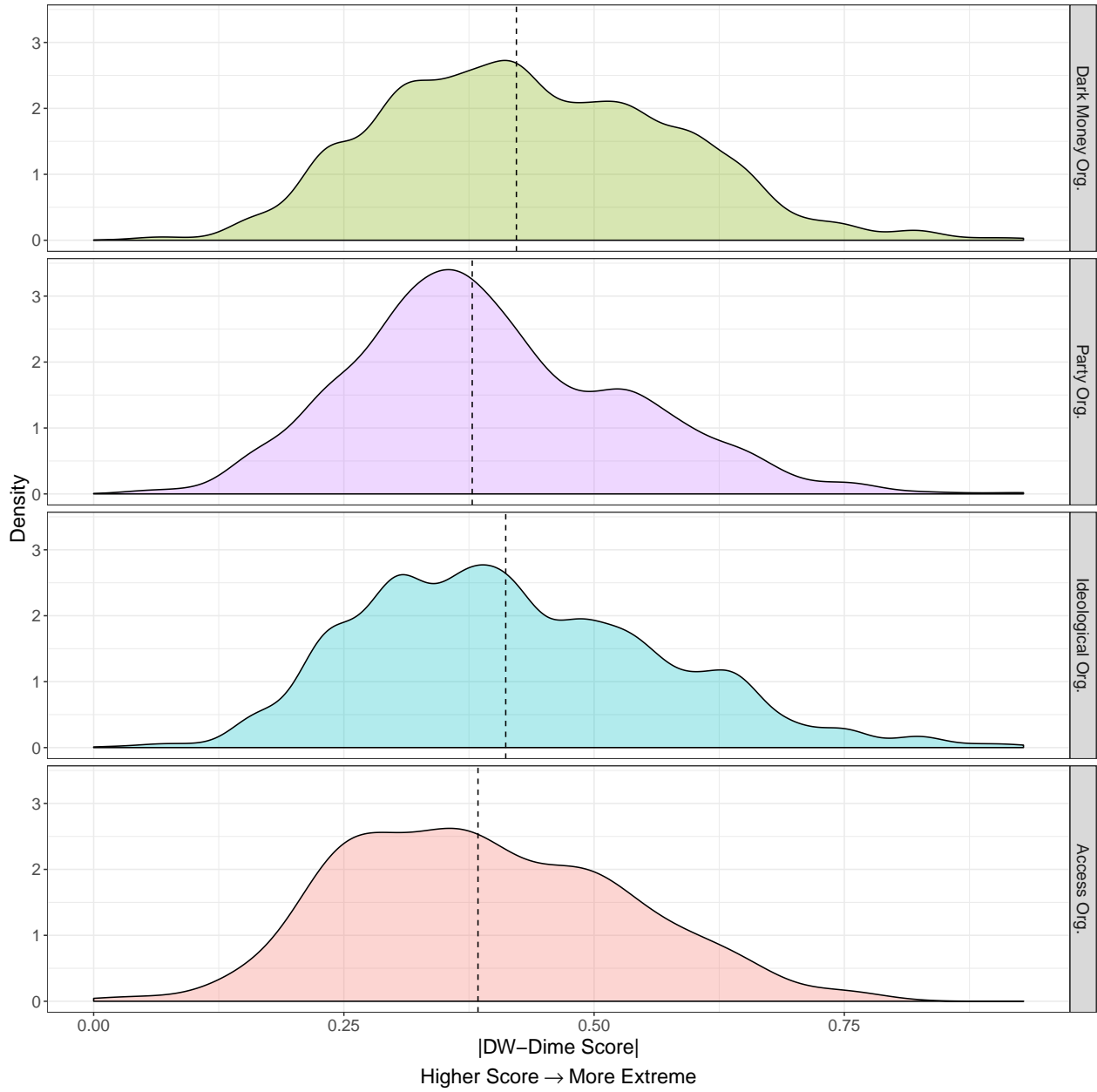
Figure 3: Distribution of DW-Dime Score for Candidates in General Elections Supported by Type of Independent Expenditure Group, (Vertical Line Indicates Median Ideology for Member of Congress Supported.)

To delineate between types of interest groups, I use the typology developed by the Center for Responsive Politics, (CRP.) In doing so, I mimic the strategy employed by Barber (2016). I categorize a group as "access-oriented," i.e. business groups under the CRP coding, "ideological" if they carried that title or were associated with organized labor or "party" if affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican parties[1]. To this categorization, I add my own distinction of dark money organizations for political nonprofits listed as active in the 2012 through 2016 election cycles by the Center for Responsive Politics. A cursory examination of the data as depicted in Figure 3 indicates that dark money organizations and ideological organizations tend to support more extremist candidates than do either party or access-oriented organizations in General Elections. Specifically, the mean ideological score for dark money groups, (0.44), is more extreme than both that of parties, (0.4), access-oriented groups, (0.4) and ideological interest groups, (0.43). This difference between dark money groups and the other types of independent-expenditure making groups is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

To test my hypothesis of dark money groups supporting more extreme candidates, I run an OLS regression using all general election independent expenditures from 2012 to 2016[2]. For the dependent variable, I use a binary indicator of whether or not a candidate running during a particular cycle was supported by each type of interest group. The main independent variable of interest is the interaction term between the type of interest group, (dark money, access or ideological with parties being the excluded baseline condition) and the extremism measure calculated as the absolute value of the candidate's DW-Dime score, (the absolute value is necessary as liberals take negative values under this measurement regime.) In addition, I control for a candidate's incumbency, a dummy variable indicating the election was for a seat in the U.S. Senate and a dummy variable indicating whether a challenger had ever held prior elective office as a proxy for candidate quality, (see Jacobson 2015). I estimate these regressions for all candidates, as well as for Republicans and Democrats separately. Additionally, I include fixed effects for each election cycle to account for unmodeled heterogeneity and I cluster standard errors on the electoral contest level, (i.e. the specific elected office the candidates are running for.)

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[1] I further added party-affiliated super PACs to this category (see Mann and Corrado 2014)

[2] A linear probability model was chosen for ease of interpretation and these results hold when estimated as a probit equation as shown in Table 7 of the Appendix

Table 2: Independent Expenditures in General Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Supported Candidate?		
	All	Dem.	GOP
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	0.871***	1.910***	0.277**
	(0.095)	(0.189)	(0.122)
Extremism x Ideological Group	0.537***	1.032***	0.280**
	(0.095)	(0.188)	(0.128)
Extremism x Access Group	0.429***	0.864***	0.144
	(0.081)	(0.183)	(0.105)
Extremism	−0.556***	−1.364***	−0.297***
	(0.072)	(0.167)	(0.093)
Incumbent	0.159***	0.210***	0.100***
	(0.014)	(0.021)	(0.023)
Senate	0.219***	0.205***	0.190***
	(0.025)	(0.032)	(0.029)
Prior Elected Office?	0.205***	0.194***	0.210***
	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.031)
Dark Money	0.027	−0.404***	0.357***
	(0.044)	(0.073)	(0.062)
Ideological Group	0.080*	−0.120*	0.220***
	(0.043)	(0.070)	(0.065)
Access Group	−0.411***	−0.599***	−0.248***
	(0.039)	(0.073)	(0.056)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	7,876	3,876	4,000
R^2	0.306	0.307	0.326
Adjusted R^2	0.305	0.305	0.324
Residual Std. Error	0.413 (df = 7863)	0.410 (df = 3863)	0.410 (df = 3987)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
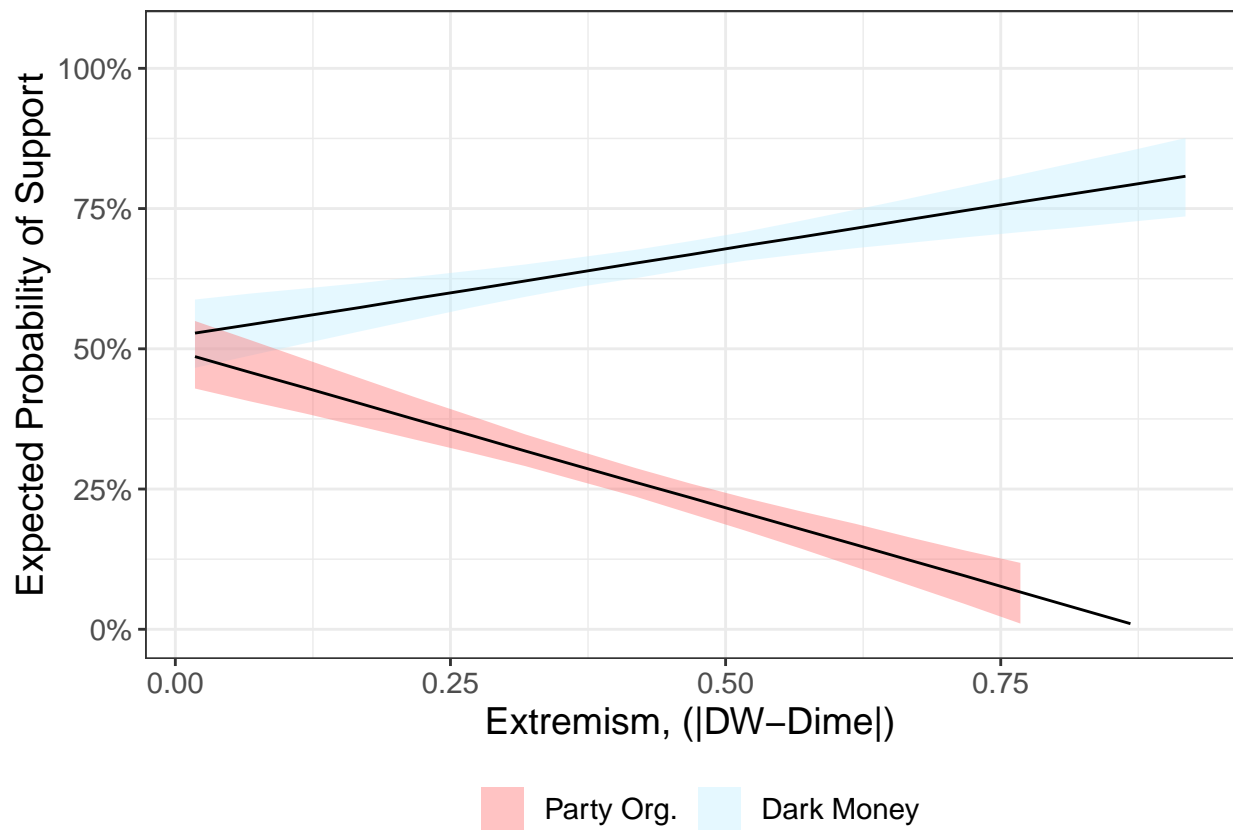Standard errors clustered by election contest.

Figure 4: Probability of Supportive Independent Expenditures in a General Election, Dark Money vs. Party Orgs.

The results presented in Table 2 show a statistically significant preference for more extreme candidates by ideological and dark money groups across both parties. This increased propensity to support a more extremist candidate also extends to ideological interest groups. Interestingly, access-oriented interest groups showed a milder preference for extremist candidates across Democratic races, whereas there was no statistically significant difference between them and party organizations in GOP races. As is clarified in greater detail in the expected value plot from the OLS regression depicted in Figure 4, the probability that a candidate in an general election will receive support from a party organization decreases dramatically the farther from the ideological center that person is. A candidate at the extremes of the ideological distribution, such as Texas Sen. Ted Cruz or former Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, could expect about a 50 percent drop in in the probability of receiving supportive independent expenditures from a formal party organization in a hypothetical race for a House seat in 2012 compared to a more moderate GOP Member of Congress such as Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. By contrast, those same candidates could expect an approximately 28 percent increase in the probability of support from a dark money organization.

Dark Money Primaries

Do dark money organizations spend more than parties and access-oriented interest groups, behaving more akin to ideological interest groups? To test this, I examine primary spending in the 2012 to 2016 elections. First, I use log-transformed spending in a given primary cycle. I utilize the same classification scheme as in the previous section and include controls for incumbency and Congressional chamber. Again, I include fixed-effects for each campaign cycle and cluster standard errors on the electoral contest.

Next, I utilize the log transformed ratio Primary to General election spending to investigate whether this difference is simply an artifact of some categories of interest group spending more as a whole. In this analysis, the unit of observation is each individual independent-expenditure making group, not the group-candidate dyad as in the previous and subsequent regressions. As such, the party division in Table 4 is calculated by the weighted average of candidate ideology by sum of total expenditures in general elections and supportive independent expenditures in primaries, (because conservative candidates have DW-Dime scores of more than

Table 3: Total Independent Expenditures in All Primary Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	log(Total Primary IE's)		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dark Money	0.259***	0.144***	0.350***
	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.043)
Ideological Group	0.772***	0.506***	0.962***
	(0.047)	(0.063)	(0.067)
Access Group	0.020	−0.012	0.041**
	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Incumbent	0.098**	−0.034	0.216***
	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Senate	6.664***	4.604***	7.599***
	(0.288)	(0.435)	(0.334)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	22,750	9,838	12,912
R^2	0.256	0.154	0.311
Adjusted R^2	0.256	0.154	0.311
Residual Std. Error	1.676 (df = 22742)	1.399 (df = 9830)	1.830 (df = 12904)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors clustered by candidate.

zero and vice versa.) There were 388 organizations out of 2,126, (18.2 percent), in my analysis that made only negative independent expenditures in primaries and thus a partisan affiliation could not be ascribed to them.

As reported in Tables 3 and 4, I find a positive and statistically significant difference between dark money organization spending and party organization spending, again the baseline variable in both analyses. Like ideological interest groups, dark money groups spent more during primary elections than did party organizations. This distinction holds for both Democratic and Republican primary elections. Specifically, I find that dark money organizations spend, on average, spend about 42.6 percent more than party organizations in a primary election, all else equal. These results indicate that dark money organizations are more active than parties during primary elections, confirming Hypothesis 2. The results indicate that the constraints mentioned previously limit the involvement of both parties and access groups in primary contests–leaving those fields open for groups pursuing instrumental, ideological goals.

Table 4: Ratio of Primary/General Election Spending, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	log(Primary/General Spending)		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dark Money	1.453***	0.938**	2.069***
	(0.341)	(0.449)	(0.539)
Ideological	1.385***	0.893***	1.741***
	(0.282)	(0.345)	(0.477)
Access	0.323	0.498	0.634
	(0.515)	(0.694)	(0.746)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	2,126	811	1,121
R^2	0.028	0.023	0.021
Adjusted R^2	0.026	0.017	0.016
Residual Std. Error	4.451 (df = 2120)	3.705 (df = 805)	4.642 (df = 1115)
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Turning to Hypothesis 2a I now examine whether dark money organizations support more extreme candidates in primary elections. Calculating what type of candidates each type of outside spending group supports in a primary election is a bit more difficult of an exercise than during a general election. As in

general elections, the vast majority of independent-expenditures during a primary are attack ads opposing the election of a certain candidate. Unlike in a general, however, in a crowded primary in which there may be multiple candidates, determining exactly who an attack ads is designed to prop up becomes complex. To obviate this problem, I drop independent expenditures attacking a candidate during a primary from the analysis. While this removes a substantial amount of data, the remaining expenditures can unequivocally be attributed to a certain candidate. While the level of support may be underestimated, there is no doubt of the type of politician each dark money organization supports.

Table 5 shows the results of this analysis. As a dependent variable, I use log-transformed spending as was utilized in the previous two tables. As in Table 2, the key interaction is the dummy variable indicating whether the group making the independent expenditure was a dark money group with the extremism measure indicating how far from the center the particular candidate's DW-Dime score was. As before, I control for whether the race was for a House or Senate seat. I also include fixed effects for each campaign cycle and cluster standard errors at the electoral contest level.

Curiously, there was a statistically significant preference for extremist candidates compared to party organizations on both the Democrat and Republican sides individually, but none when the data was pooled. As shown in Table 8 of the Appendix, when modeled as a probit regression, there are no statistically significant differences between dark money groups and parties in any parsing of the data. Again, given that the negative independent expenditures which constituted the majority of data were discarded, this difference in behavior may be attributable to the data set being utilized. However, absent an extensive and labor intensive manual recoding of the data, I am unable to reject the null for Hypothesis 2a.

Finally, turning to the last hypothesis, I examine whether dark money has a higher propensity to support extremists in open seat primaries than do all other types of interest groups. To do so, I again subset the universe of primary spending to just independent expenditures made in support of a candidate. I further subset the data to include only party primary races in which an incumbent was not present.

I estimated the same OLS regression as shown in Table 5, this time subsetting the data to only races

Table 5: Supportive Independent Expenditures in Primary Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Log(Supportive Primary Independent Expenditures)		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	1.007**	0.477	−0.318
	(0.409)	(0.511)	(0.552)
Extremism x Ideological Group	3.310***	0.301	3.163***
	(0.546)	(1.054)	(0.683)
Extremism x Access Group	0.358*	−0.063	0.251
	(0.186)	(0.208)	(0.239)
Extremism	−0.061	0.291*	−0.142
	(0.086)	(0.161)	(0.127)
Incumbent	−0.187***	−0.140	−0.169*
	(0.061)	(0.086)	(0.087)
Senate	5.498***	3.573***	6.347***
	(0.314)	(0.528)	(0.353)
Dark Money	0.198	0.170	1.070***
	(0.181)	(0.202)	(0.291)
Ideological Group	−0.119	0.855**	0.044
	(0.244)	(0.398)	(0.339)
Access Group	−0.060	0.047	0.035
	(0.077)	(0.067)	(0.120)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	7,304	3,296	4,008
R^2	0.238	0.118	0.295
Adjusted R^2	0.237	0.115	0.293
Residual Std. Error	2.180 (df = 7292)	1.860 (df = 3284)	2.378 (df = 3996)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Standard Errors clustered by electoral contest.

Table 6: Independent Expenditures in Open Seat Primary Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Supportive Primary Independent Expenditure		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	0.141*	0.205**	0.049
	(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.170)
Ideological Group x Extremism	0.518***	0.382***	0.284*
	(0.092)	(0.115)	(0.162)
Access x Extremism	0.065**	0.070**	0.044
	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.050)
Extremism	−0.008	0.007	0.013
	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.034)
Senate	0.801***	0.761***	0.872***
	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.016)
Dark Money	0.064*	0.028	0.102
	(0.033)	(0.038)	(0.064)
Ideological	−0.028	0.080	0.011
	(0.038)	(0.056)	(0.056)
Access	−0.014	−0.016	−0.007
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.014)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	3,544	1,825	1,719
R^2	0.345	0.396	0.249
Adjusted R^2	0.343	0.393	0.244
Residual Std. Error	0.264 (df = 3533)	0.283 (df = 1814)	0.240 (df = 1708)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors clustered by electoral contest.

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without an incumbent. As before, I include fixed effects for the cycle to account for unmodeled heterogeneity and cluster standard errors on the candidate. The results in Table 6 show a positive and statistically significant relationship between increasing extremism and the increase propensity to support a primary candidate from both dark money and ideological interest groups as opposed to parties, who again were the baseline category in this regression. Tellingly, there is no statistically significant difference between party support for a candidate and access group support, confirming the intuitions laid out in Table 1 of the Theory section.

Discussion

As the previous analysis demonstrates, dark money has a distinct preference for extremist candidates in general elections and primaries. Dark money organizations, like their ideological interest-group counterparts, also are bigger spenders in primary elections than organizations affiliated with the Democratic or Republican parties. Interestingly, the preference for ideologically extreme candidates does not extend to primaries on the Democratic side. Further, in open seat primaries, there was no difference in the preferences for extremists between parties and dark money organizations for Republican races–a dissimilarity that was absent on the Democratic side.

The difference in behavior by dark money groups in Democratic vs. Republican primaries has many intriguing explanations. On the Republican side, dark money's preference for extremist candidates may be in part responsible for the asymmetric polarization noted by scholars such as Hacker and Pierson (2005), Theriault (2013) and Mann and Ornstein (2016). That dark money groups would target incumbents on the GOP side, such as in the case of Renee Ellmers discussed in the introduction, speaks to a more fractious coalition on the right than on the left. By contrast, dark money on the Democratic side moves to the extremes only in open seat primaries, indicating more deference to incumbency on that side of the aisle. This asymmetry in primary spending should prove fertile ground for further inquiry by both scholars of political parties and those interested in the polarization of American politics.

The rise in anonymous giving that followed *Citizens United* did more than reduce transparency in

American elections. The new pathways for money to enter politics created by the decision allowed for more efficient conduits for ideologically motivated money to extremist candidates. As the results presented here demonstrate, dark money behaves as an extension of ideological money. It's possible that the anonymity offered by dark money frees donors from the social pressures that might limit ideological giving. Future research should examine how anonymity affects donor behavior and its implications on how beneficiaries of that anonymous money eventually govern.

This new conduit for ideological money has large implications for that balance of power of factions within the extended party network and by extension, the types of policies political parties will select to champion following an election when their attention shifts to governing (see Blum 2016; Blum forthcoming). In addition, the emergence of a new pool of ideological money operating outside the control of formal party organizations may help explain the emergence of minoritarian extremist blocs within the Republican Party such as the House Freedom Caucus (Bloch Rubin n.d.). The diminishing of party leadership's financial cudgel may lead to the rising prominence of ideological interest groups who provide members of these blocs with ample campaign war chests as well as proving leaders of these blocs with a powerful incentive to attract new members. As a result, the emergence of dark money following *Citizens United* may have ramifications for democracy beyond just what information about political money voters are able to learn about before casting a ballot.

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Appendix:

Table 7: Logit Model of Independent Expenditures in General Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Supported Candidate?		
	All	Dem.	GOP
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	4.769***	9.548***	1.697**
	(0.588)	(1.214)	(0.760)
Extremism x Ideological Group	2.881***	5.091***	1.718**
	(0.559)	(1.188)	(0.709)
Extremism x Access Group	1.220	−1.927	−0.346
	(0.765)	(1.801)	(0.897)
Extremism	−3.190***	−6.639***	−1.836***
	(0.414)	(0.876)	(0.517)
Incumbent	−0.703***	−0.499***	−0.947***
	(0.081)	(0.120)	(0.114)
Senate	1.483***	1.381***	1.373***
	(0.116)	(0.183)	(0.152)
Pct. Behind Winner	−0.074***	−0.075***	−0.073***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Dark Money	−0.082	−2.026***	1.602***
	(0.258)	(0.458)	(0.382)
Ideological Group	0.255	−0.581	0.847**
	(0.248)	(0.455)	(0.355)
Access Group	−2.271***	−1.875***	−1.145***
	(0.330)	(0.608)	(0.435)
Constant	1.530***	2.721***	1.044***
	(0.194)	(0.342)	(0.278)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	7,844	3,860	3,984
Log Likelihood	−3,788.425	−1,797.963	−1,923.587
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,602.849	3,621.927	3,873.174
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 8: Logit Model of Supportive Independent Expenditures in Primary Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Supportive Primary Independent Expenditure		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	−0.283	−0.339	0.224
	(0.565)	(3.506)	(2.566)
Extremism x Ideological Group	2.154***	4.260	1.057
	(0.568)	(3.540)	(2.543)
Extremism x Access Group	1.379**	2.246	−0.013
	(0.685)	(4.670)	(2.861)
Extremism	−0.692	−3.668	1.219
	(0.549)	(3.386)	(2.499)
Incumbent	0.445***	0.945***	0.158
	(0.092)	(0.150)	(0.121)
Senate	19.534	19.916	19.356
	(241.972)	(425.183)	(292.046)
Dark Money	3.399***	3.527**	3.115**
	(0.251)	(1.482)	(1.400)
Ideological Group	3.058***	4.033***	3.560**
	(0.255)	(1.493)	(1.387)
Access Group	0.527*	0.919	1.220
	(0.317)	(1.942)	(1.560)
Pct. Behind Winner	−0.018***	−0.020***	−0.017***
	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	7,304	3,296	4,008
Log Likelihood	−2,033.317	−815.672	−1,155.186
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,092.634	1,657.344	2,336.371

Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 9: Logit Model for Independent Expenditures in Open Seat Primary Elections, 2012-2016.

	Dependent variable:		
	Supportive Primary Independent Expenditure		
	All	Democrats	Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extremism x Dark Money	3.137	6.184	−6.731
	(4.242)	(5.995)	(11.363)
Ideological Group x Extremism	5.602	6.548	−3.652
	(4.225)	(5.956)	(11.411)
Access x Extremism	5.414	7.822	−0.484
	(4.538)	(6.412)	(12.941)
Extremism	−1.983	−4.098	7.261
	(4.180)	(5.913)	(11.210)
Senate	19.656	21.108	18.446
	(319.274)	(569.181)	(426.972)
Vote-Share Diff.	−0.023***	−0.027***	−0.020**
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Dark Money	2.386	1.285	5.962
	(1.762)	(2.500)	(4.552)
Ideological	1.830	2.122	4.766
	(1.755)	(2.471)	(4.573)
Access	−0.772	−1.528	1.294
	(1.958)	(2.839)	(5.187)
Fixed effects?	Cycle	Cycle	Cycle
Observations	3,544	1,825	1,719
Log Likelihood	−820.859	−458.639	−351.438
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,665.718	941.279	726.875

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01