

## CALIFORNIA'S JUNE 3 PRIMARY ELECTION

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### ► California's reforms enter their second election cycle.

California's elections now operate under two recent reforms. First, new state legislative and congressional districts were drawn by an independent commission rather than by the legislature. Second, candidates are now nominated for the fall election under a "top-two" primary that allows voters to pick any candidate, regardless of party, with the two candidates receiving the most votes, also regardless of party, advancing to the fall election. Though the reforms were in place in 2012, this is the first election in which state constitutional offices such as governor or controller were covered by the top-two primary. Since only half of the state senate seats are up for election in each year, this is also the first time the state has relied on many newly drawn senate districts.

### ► Patterns of candidate competition have settled down somewhat.

In their 2012 debut, the reforms nudged more incumbents to leave office (sometimes to run for another one) and encouraged more same-party challengers to jump into the fray. This time around, the assembly and U.S. House districts are not the unknown quantities they were two years ago. Perhaps as a result, fewer incumbents for these races faced an intra-party challenge (28% today vs. 42% in 2012). In fact, there were many more races without any formal competition at all: 20 this time, compared to eight in 2012 and an average of about seven under the previous primary system. And the number of open seats (districts where no incumbent is running) is also down, from 53 in 2012 to 39 this year. These changes are mostly in assembly races, but the patterns are similar in U.S. House races.

### ► Statewide constitutional offices were covered by the top-two for the first time.

Most of the statewide races this cycle were considered quiet, perhaps because an unusually large number featured incumbents. As in the years before the top-two, the most competitive outcomes were in open seats: secretary of state, where no candidate received more than 30% of the vote, and controller, where the first- and fourth-place candidates were separated by only 3%.

### ► The top-two plays to the dominant political party in each district.

The system continues to discourage candidates whose party is not likely to finish in the top two: minor-party candidates, independent ("no party preference") candidates, and candidates from the smaller of the two major parties in any given district. The share of legislative or congressional races with no minor-party or independent candidate is up to 83% (from 72% in 2012), and the share with one major party absent is up to 24% (from 16% in 2012). (Every statewide office had at least one candidate of each kind.) Three of the 56 minor-party and independent candidates on the ballot finished in the top two. Votes for write-in candidates are still being counted.

### ► Races were more competitive than before the reform, though less competitive than in 2012.

The average vote margin was 27 points between first- and second-place finishers, and 11 points between second and third. Furthermore, 72% of the races gave one candidate more than 50% of the vote, making the fall race predictable in most of those cases. Every incumbent won a place in the fall election, and 104 of the 112 non-incumbent candidates endorsed by one of the major parties also advanced. At this time there are a total of 25 same-party runoffs, slightly fewer than the 28 in 2012. Almost all will be in a clearly safe seat, though Congressional District 25 could be competitive under the right circumstances and is currently advancing two Republicans to the fall campaign. It is also possible that the state controller's race could advance two Republicans, depending on the ballots that remain to be counted.



**Fewer incumbents have retired, and fewer were challenged**

District	Assembly (80 seats)		Senate (20 seats per election, 40 total)		U.S. House (53 seats)	
	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012
Open seats	29%	44%	50%	45%	11%	17%
Same-party competition	44	63	55	45	72	79
Same-party incumbent challenge	14	33	30	27	45	52
One major party absent	25	14	25	25	9	17

Source: California Secretary of State.

Notes: "Open seats" refers to districts where no incumbent is running. "Same-party competition" is the percentage of districts where at least one major party has at least two candidates. "Same-party incumbent challenge" is the percentage of incumbents running for reelection who face a challenge from within their own party. "One major party absent" is the percentage of districts where one major party has no candidate.

**Outcomes were less competitive than in 2012, with slightly fewer same-party runoffs**

District	Assembly (80 seats)		Senate (20 seats per election, 40 total)		U.S. House (53 seats)	
	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012
Same-party runoffs	15%	23%	30%	10%	13%	15%
Winner > 50%	70	50	70	80	77	66
Average gap between 1st- and 2nd-place finishers	23	19	26	21	33	28
Average gap between 2nd- and 3rd-place finishers	11	8	11	19	11	13

Source: California Secretary of State.

Notes: "Same-party runoffs" refers to the percentage of districts where two candidates of the same party will face each other in the fall. "Winner > 50%" is the percentage of top vote-getters who received more than half the vote. "Average gap" is the gap in vote share between the first- and second-place finishers, and second- and third-place finishers, respectively. The gap in vote share between the second- and third-place finishers shows the share of votes required to change the top two finishers. The 2012 numbers differ slightly from those reported in *California's Electoral Reforms: How Did They Work?* because the numbers in that fact sheet reflected preliminary election returns.

Source: California Secretary of State.

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