

CALIFORNIA'S NEW ELECTORAL REFORMS: THE FALL ELECTION

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Results as of 10 a.m., 11/8/12

► **New electoral reforms have now played out over a full election cycle.**

California used two electoral innovations for the first time this year: new districts drawn by an independent redistricting commission (instead of by the legislature), and a "top two" primary system that let voters choose any candidate, regardless of party, with the two candidates receiving the most votes advancing to the fall election. The top-two system has produced the most unusual change: 28 races in the fall election pitted two candidates of the same party against each other. But the new districts also altered the electoral landscape, leading many incumbents to pass on reelection, forcing others to introduce themselves to unfamiliar voters, and increasing the number of competitive races overall.

► **Democrats achieved crucial gains.**

After years of failed attempts to gain dominance, the Democrats appear to have gained three seats in the state Senate and two in the Assembly. In both chambers these gains push them over the two-thirds threshold needed to pass tax increases without Republican support. Democrats also picked up four U.S. House seats, a strong showing in a redistricting plan that already favored them. In contrast, the new state legislative districts were not especially favorable for Democrats compared to the old ones, but the party appears to have enjoyed good turnout among its core constituencies. Moreover, the 20 Senate districts contested this year forced Republicans to defend more of their seats in this cycle than in the next one.

► **Races were more competitive than in recent years, especially for Congress.**

The new redistricting plans created more districts that were potentially competitive between the two major parties. Among races between candidates of opposing parties, 18% had a margin of victory of less than 10 points, up sharply from the 7% average of the last 10 years. The top-two primary also created more competition. All but one of the 28 same-party races occurred in districts that were unlikely to have hosted competitive races in the past. Roughly one-third of those races were decided by less than 10 points. This increased competition led to some increase in fundraising compared to the average over the last five election cycles: up \$136,518 per candidate for the state Senate and \$134,954 for the U.S. House, though down somewhat (-\$103,780) for the Assembly. By comparison, the average House race received less money in the nation as a whole this year (\$428,842 in 2012 vs. \$459,085 from 2002 through 2010).

► **Compared to the primary, the fall vote was far more Democratic.**

The fall electorate was considerably more favorable to Democrats than the one in the primary. In close contests between a Democrat and a Republican, the Democratic candidate gained an average of 5 percentage points from the party's primary showing. This helped push several Democrats in cross-party races over the top: 30% of second-place Democratic candidates from the primary won, compared to just 3% of second-place Republicans.

► **Some outsider candidates were successful, but the status quo mostly prevailed.**

The average margin of victory for incumbents (33%) was about the same as in the last 10 years (31%), and all but a handful of incumbents won reelection. Likewise, in the same-party races in which one candidate had been endorsed by the party in the primary and the other had not, the endorsed candidate won 12 out of 16 times. Nonetheless, there was more turnover in the state's political class than in recent memory. The state now has 38 new assemblymembers, 9 new state senators, and 14 new members of Congress, compared to an average of 30, 10, and 3 over the last decade. Out of 10 losing incumbents, 7 were in districts that had been significantly redrawn.



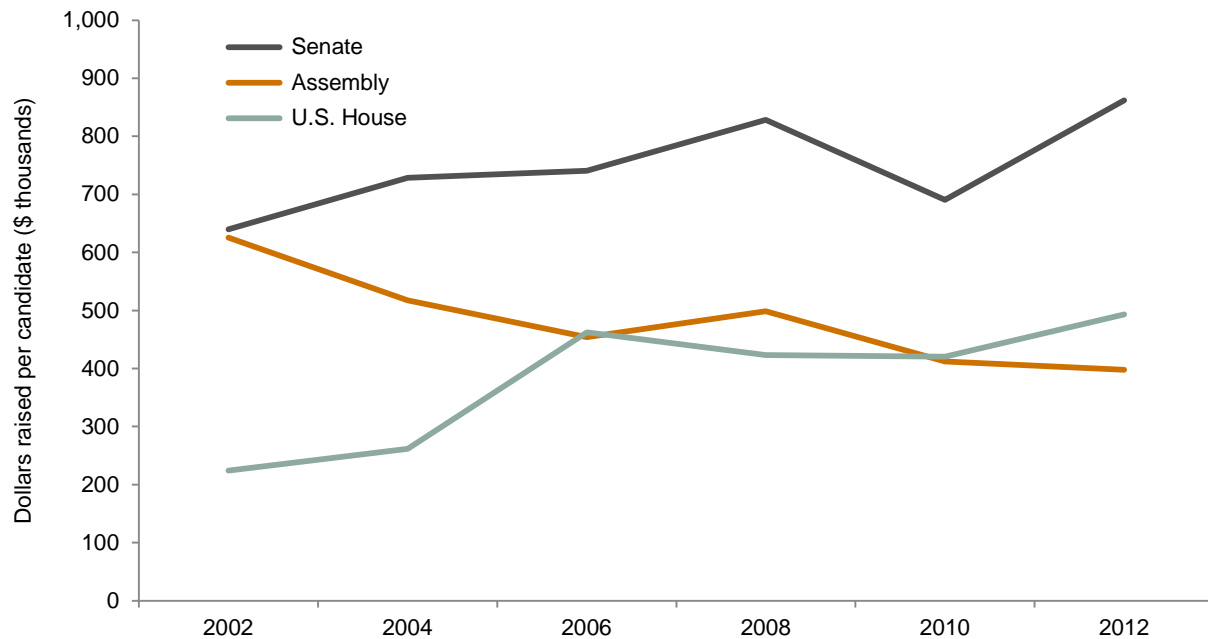
The reforms altered the status quo in small but potentially important ways

	Assembly (80 seats)	Senate (20 seats per election; 40 total)	U.S. House (53 seats)
Democratic seat gain	+2	+3	+4
Close outcomes	16	4	11
Newly elected members	38	9	14
Defeated incumbents	3	0	7

Source: California Secretary of State.

Notes: "Democratic seat gain" = net number of new seats the party won. "Close outcomes" = races won by less than 10 percentage points. "Newly elected members" = races in which either no incumbent ran or the incumbent lost. "Defeated incumbents" = incumbents who lost reelection.

More money in politics this election, but not a lot more



Sources: National Institute on Money in State Politics, www.followthemoney.org/ (2002–2010 California Assembly and Senate direct donations); California Secretary of State, www.sos.ca.gov (2012 California Assembly and Senate direct donations; 2002–2012 California independent expenditures); Federal Election Commission (2002–2012 U.S. House direct donations and independent expenditures).

Notes: Numbers include all direct donations to candidates as well as any independent expenditures, either for or against. House numbers are preliminary and do not include all the money raised in the last three weeks of the campaign.

Sources: California Secretary of State; California Republican Party (endorsements); California Democratic Party (endorsements); National Institute on Money in State Politics, www.followthemoney.org/ (2002–2010 California Assembly and Senate direct donations); California Secretary of State, www.sos.ca.gov (2012 California Assembly and Senate direct donations; 2002–2012 California independent expenditures); Federal Election Commission (2002–2012 U.S. House direct donations and independent expenditures).

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Supported with funding from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

