

Test-driving California's Election Reforms

Eric McGhee



This election featured new reforms

- Top two vote getter (“Top two”)
- Districts drawn by independent redistricting commission
- Goals
 - More choices
 - Competitive elections
 - Shake-up status quo
 - Moderate legislators



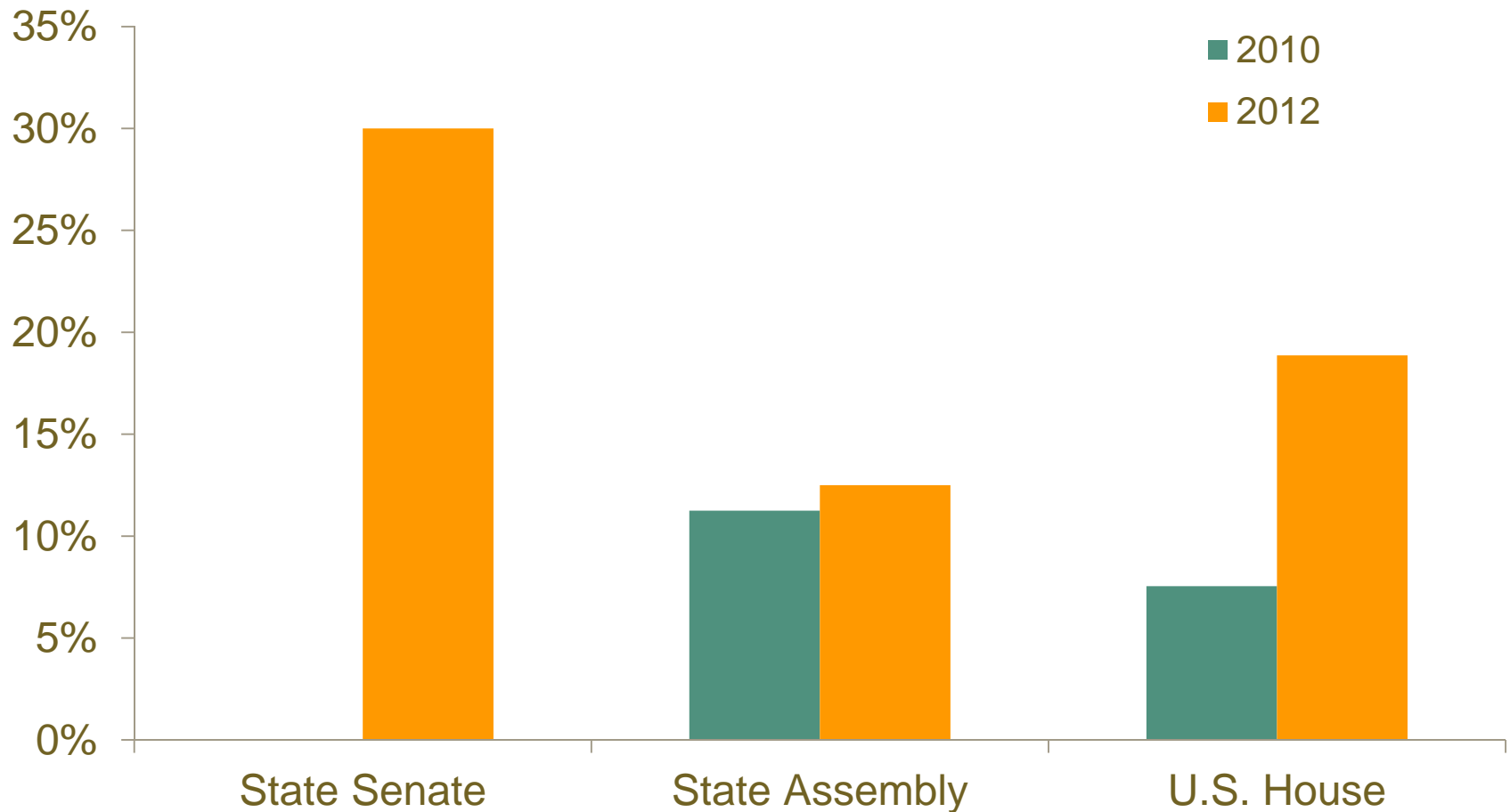
Primary election results

- Redistricting



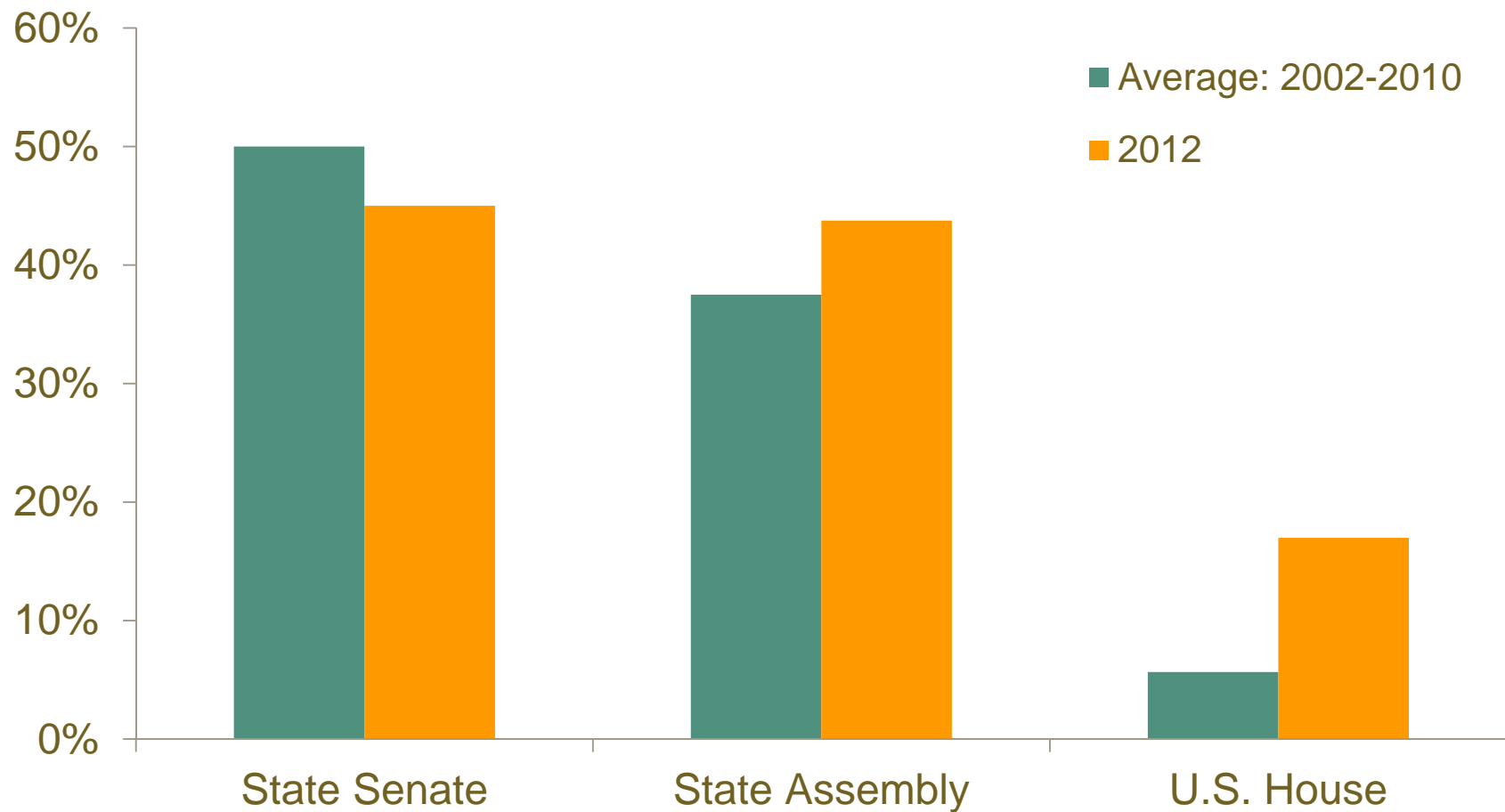
Redistricting created a few more competitive seats...

Competitive seats by registration, as share of total



...prompted more open seats in most cases...

Open seats as share of total



...and forced the remaining incumbents to run in new territory

- Average incumbent: 45% of constituents are new
- 41% of incumbents running to represent more new constituents

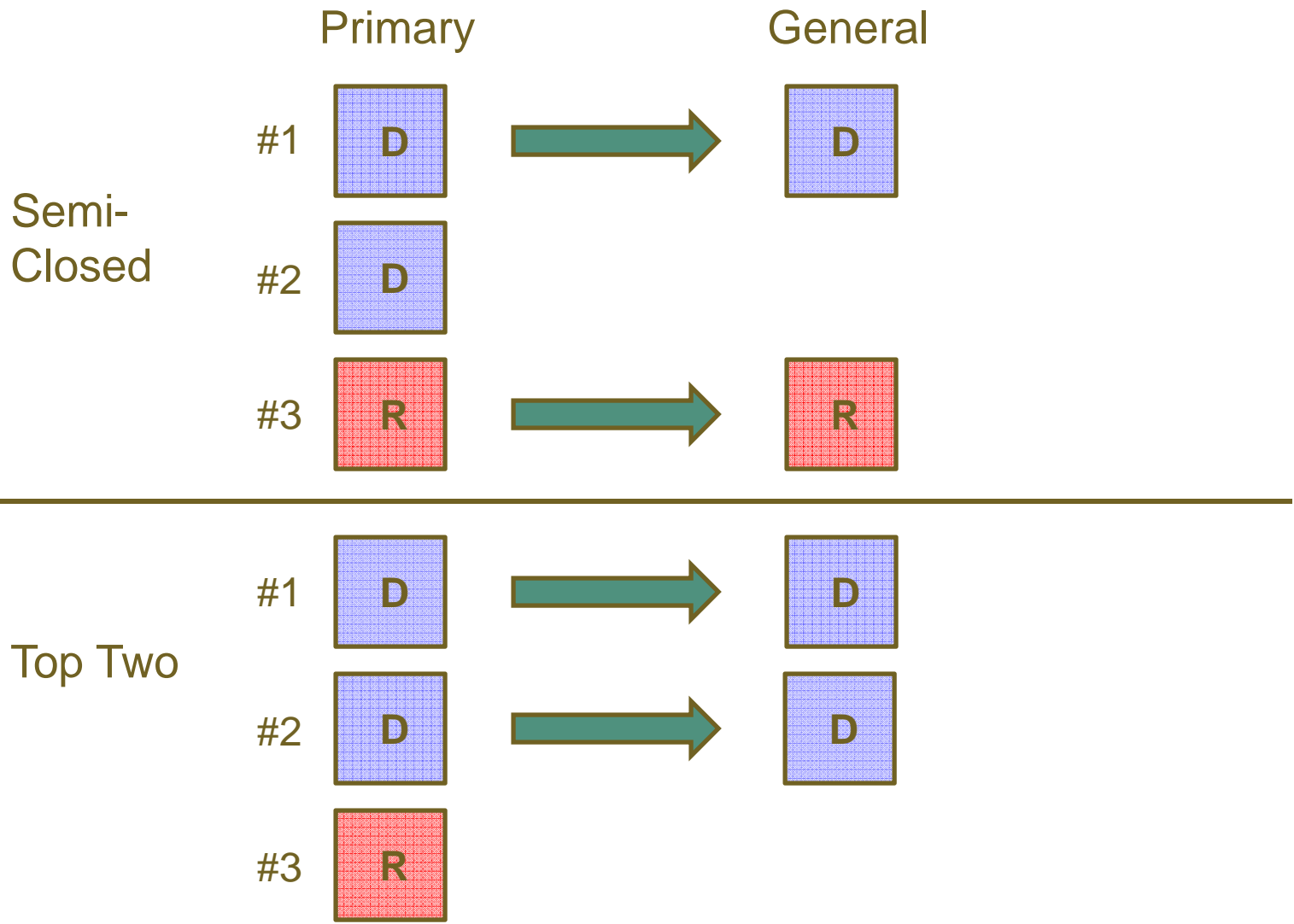


Primary election results

- Redistricting
 - More competitive seats
 - More open seats
 - Incumbents in unfamiliar territory
- Top two primary



Top Two altered the strategic logic...



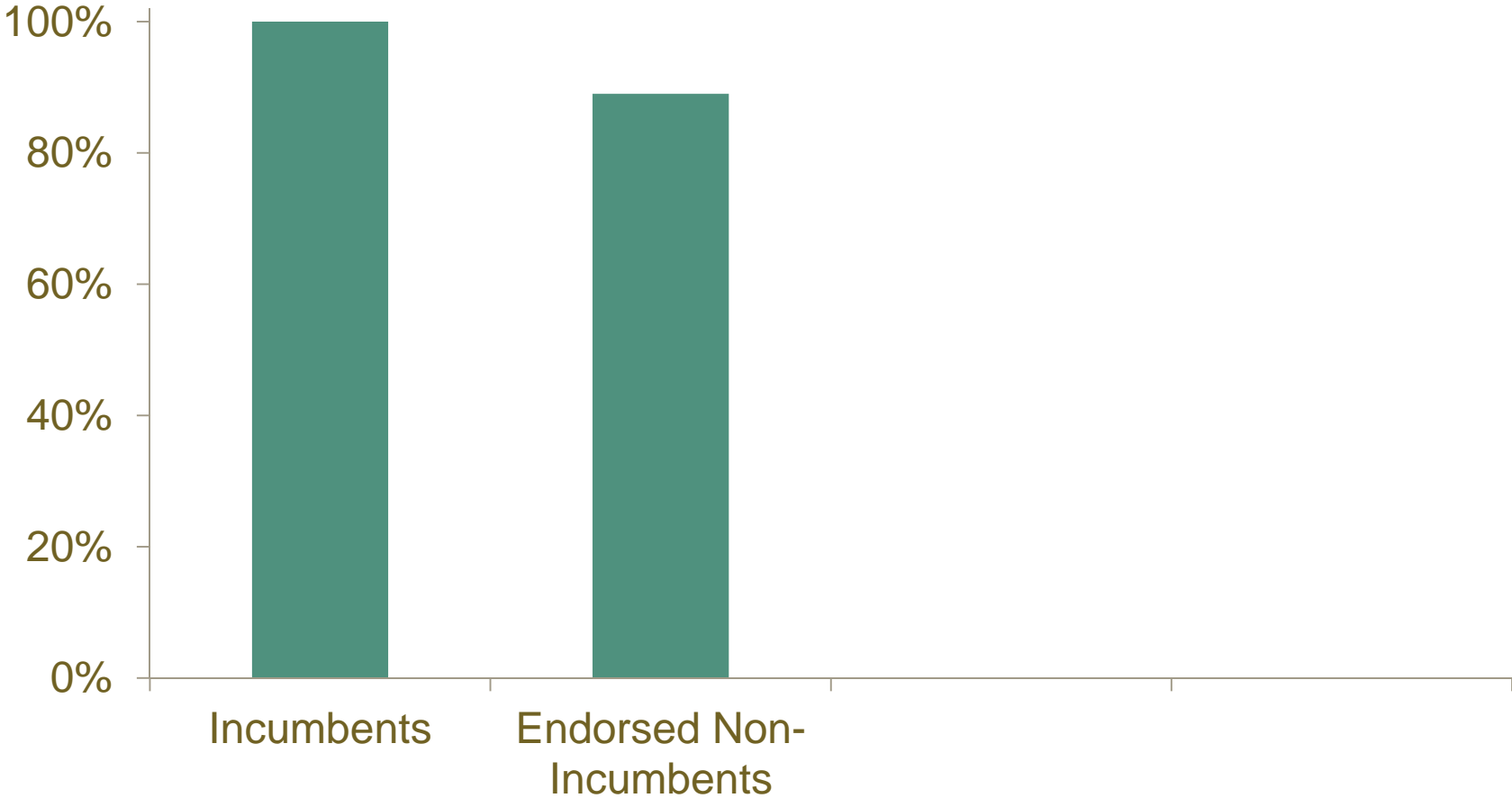
Primary election results

- Redistricting
 - More competitive seats
 - More open seats
 - Incumbents in unfamiliar territory
- Top two primary
 - More same-party challenges, especially in safe seats
 - Closer outcomes



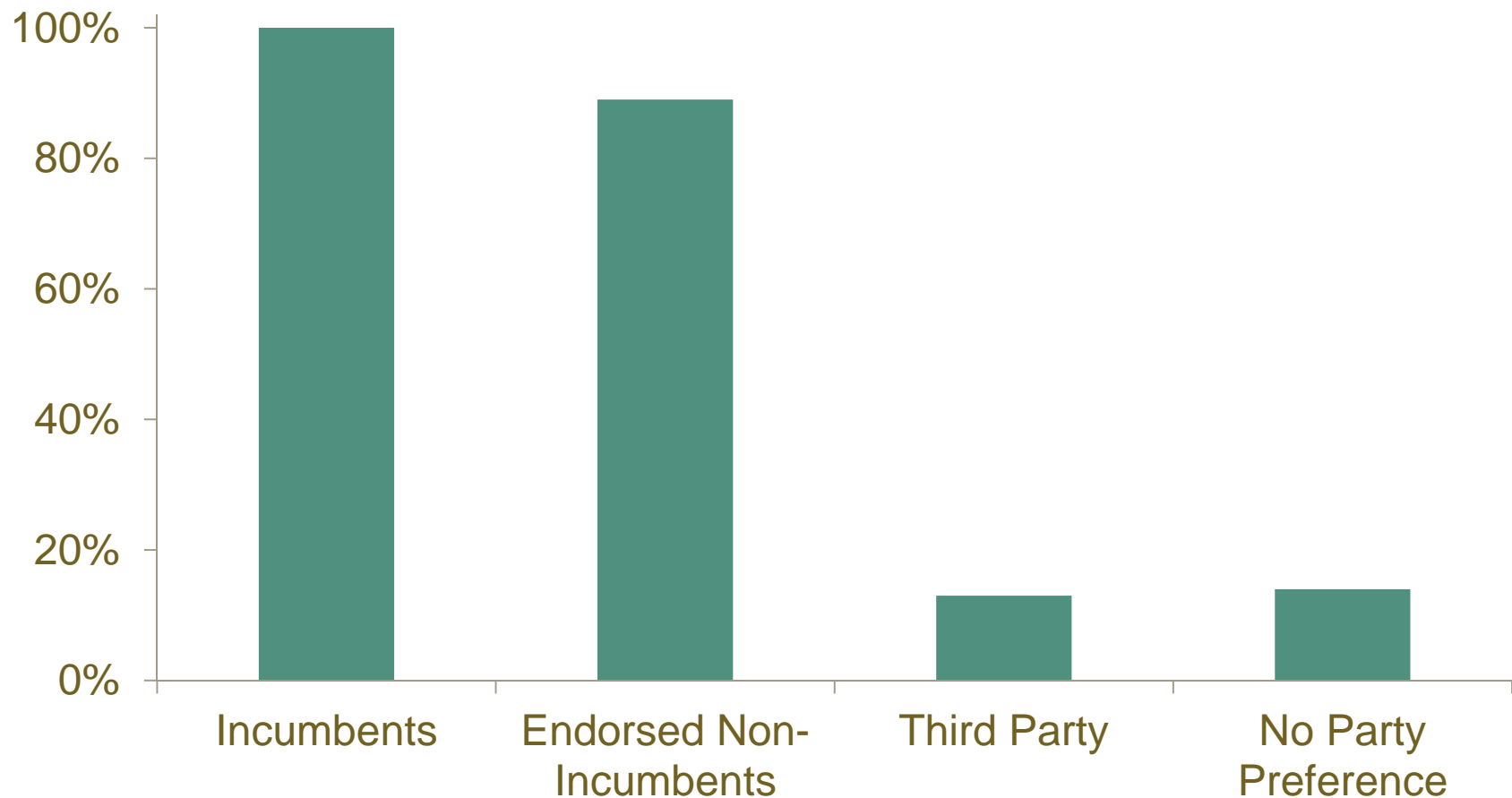
Establishment candidates did well...

Percent of candidates advancing to the general



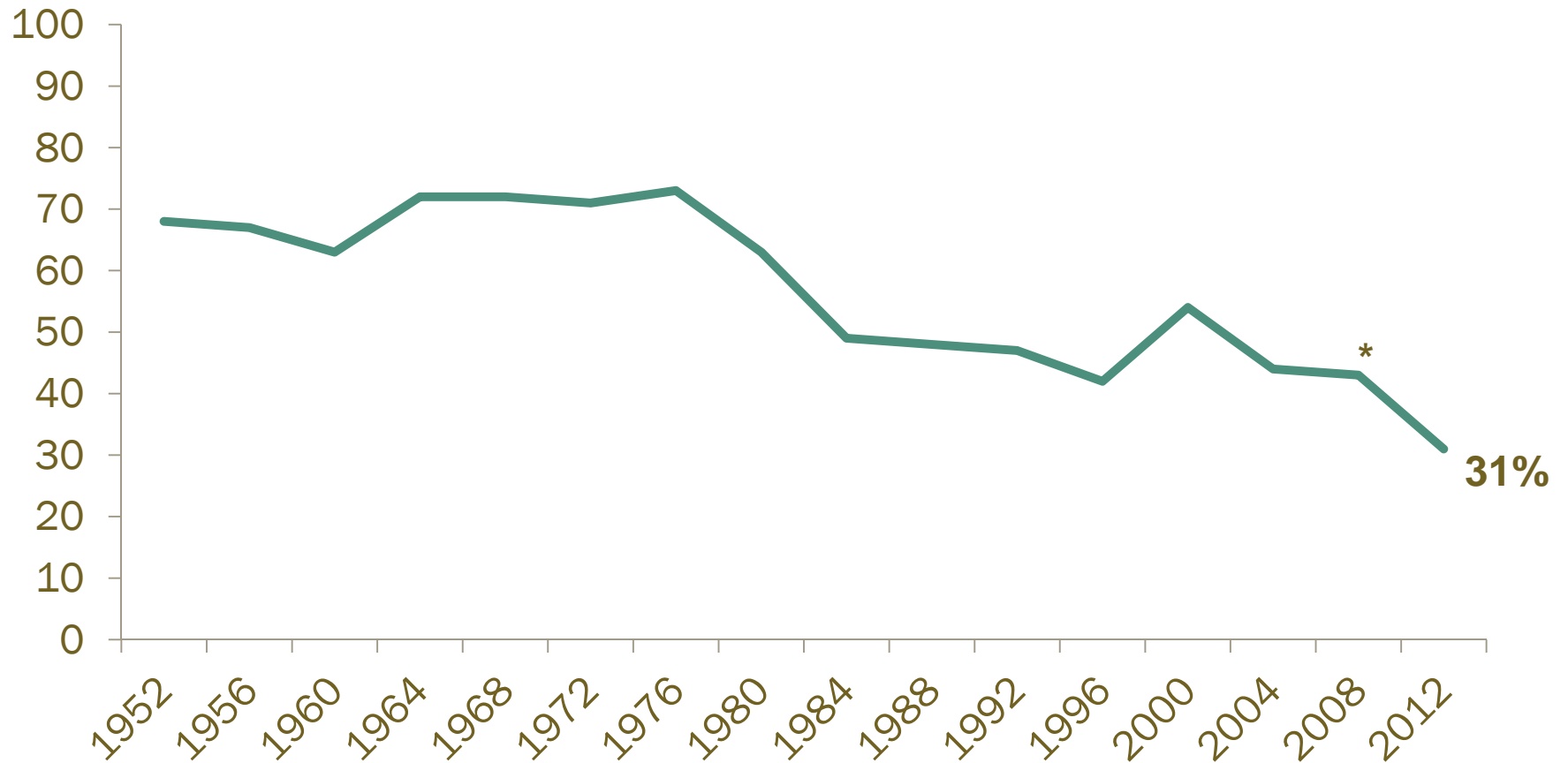
...and outsider candidates did not

Percent of candidates advancing to the general



Turnout was very low

Turnout as Share of Total Registered,
Presidential Years



* 2008 is average of February and June primaries



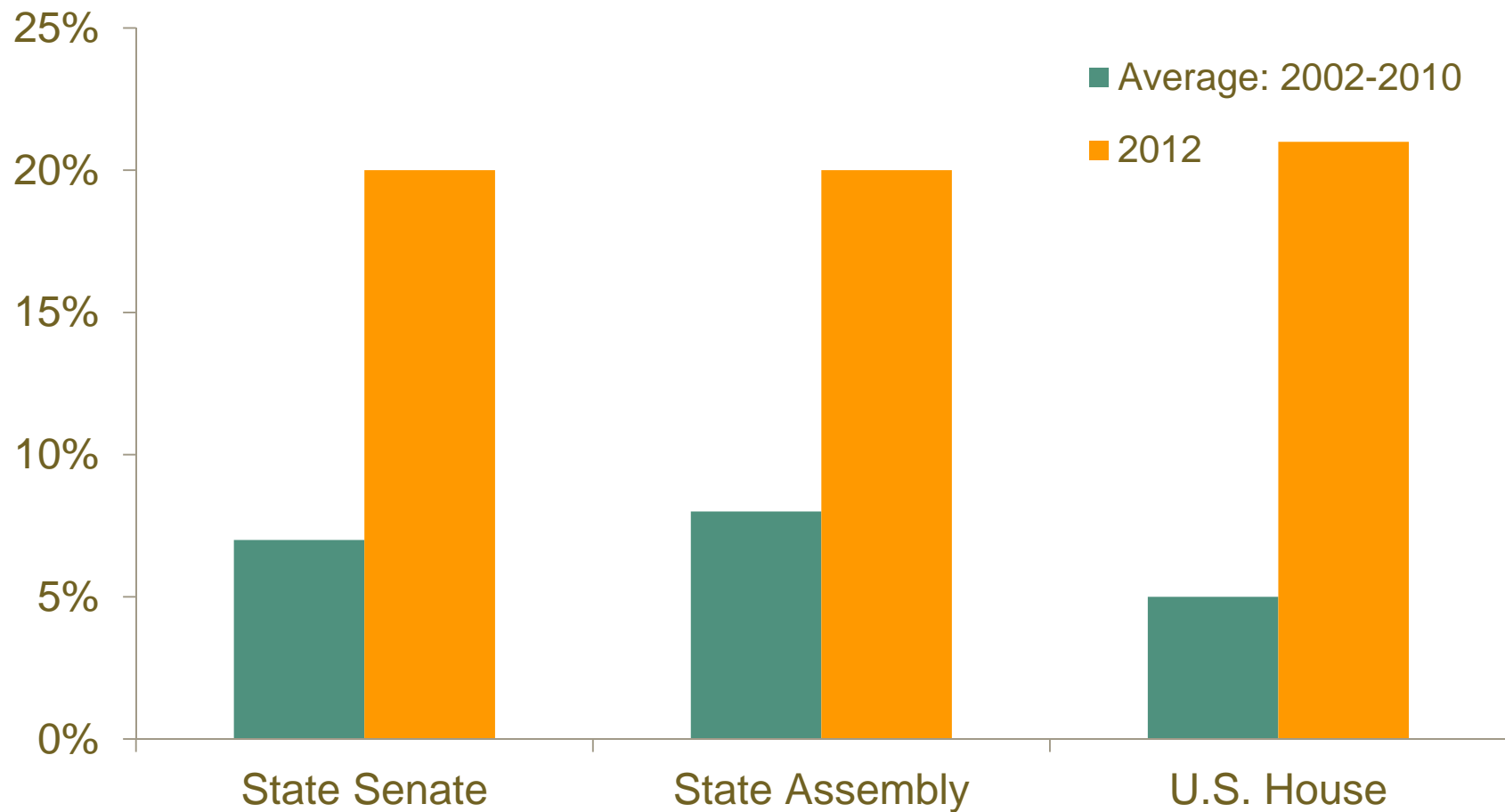
Fall election results

- More competitive outcomes



More races were close

Winners by less than 10 points, as share of total



Fall election results

- More competitive outcomes
- More new members
 - 38 Assembly, 9 Senate, 14 House
 - 10 losing incumbents, 7 in heavily redrawn districts

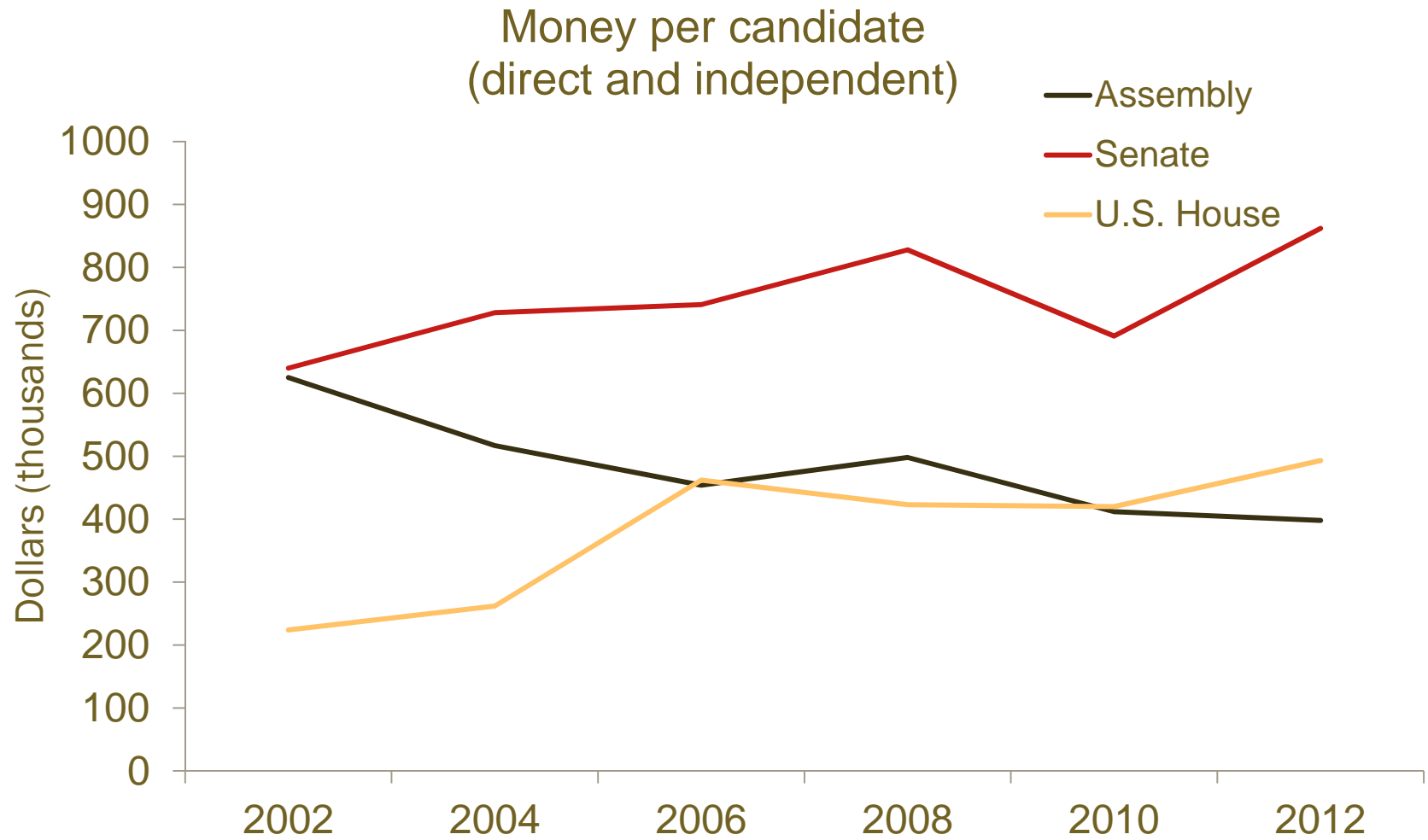


Fall election results

- More competitive outcomes
- More new members
 - 38 Assembly, 9 Senate, 14 House
 - 10 losing incumbents, 7 in heavily redrawn districts
- More money, but not a lot



Money concerns were overblown



Fall election results

- More competitive outcomes
 - More new members
 - 38 Assembly, 9 Senate, 14 House
 - 10 losing incumbents, 7 in heavily redrawn districts
 - More money, but not a lot
 - Big gains for Democrats
 - 3 Assembly seats
 - 4 Senate seats
 - 4 House seats
- } 2/3 Majority

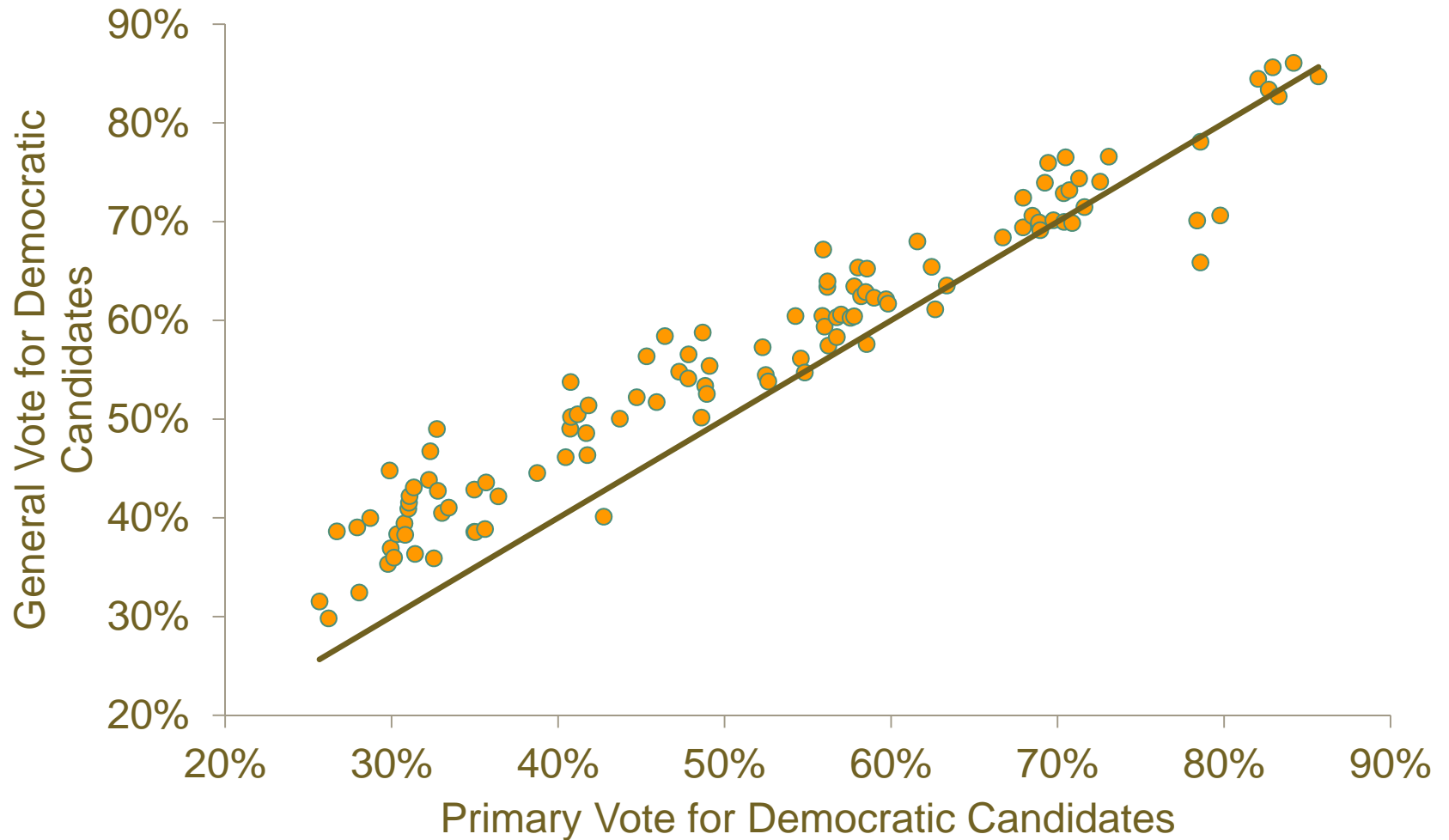


Did redistricting help Democrats?

- House: yes
 - But only because old plan so uncompetitive
- Senate: sort of
 - Seat numbers more than lines
- Assembly: not really
 - No clear sign that new lines favored one party
- So how did the Democrats do so well?



Fall electorate much more Democratic than primary



Change notable but not dramatic

- Competition higher, but not necessarily high
- Establishment candidates did well
- Money in politics up, but not a lot

- Biggest differences:
 - Competition in the House
 - Same-party races
 - Limited third-party presence



What's next?

- Monitoring top two elections
- Legislative behavior: more moderation?
- Term limits and electoral reform
- Turnout: where does California stand and how could it improve?



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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.

