WHY COMPETITION MATTERS

The United States is experiencing a 40-year decline in general election competitiveness. 42% of state legislators ran unopposed in 2016. In states with closed primaries, independents and members of the less-dominant party are systematically denied a say in who represents them. Incumbents who face no opposition are accountable to small groups of hyper-partisan primary voters. This lack of accountability contributes to legislative paralysis and voter dissatisfaction.

THE ILLUSION OF COMPETITION

Media coverage of high profile races creates an illusion that fierce electoral competition is the norm. But consider that 2018 saw the highest voter turnout for a midterm election since 1914 and yet:

• Over 60% of House elections were uncontested or won by landslide margins of 20% or more.
• 20% of 435 House races were competitive with a margin of victory of 10% or less.
• Only 4 House incumbents were defeated in a primary.

Competitiveness at the state level is just as limited. In 2016 statehouse races around the country:

• 42% of candidates faced no major party opposition in the general election.
• 15% of state legislative races were considered competitive.

THE CALIFORNIA MODEL RESTORES COMPETITION

79% of California elections were uncompetitive before the state eliminated partisan gerrymandering and enacted a top two open primary. Only 2 incumbents were defeated in the ten years before adoption (both were facing criminal investigations). Since the “California model” of reforms was enacted in 2010:

• Electoral competition has increased by 25%.
• Only 2% of November elections feature just one candidate on the ballot.
• 20 incumbents were defeated the first three post-reform election cycles.

75% of general elections feature a Republican and Democrat, 15% higher than the national average.

Democracy thrives when the marketplace of ideas is competitive. The California model of nonpartisan redistricting and top two open primaries demonstrates definitively that competition can be restored when partisan control of the electoral system is eliminated.

DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE

The collapse of the “Close Race” in state legislatures