COMPETITION AND THE TOP TWO PRIMARY IN WASHINGTON STATE

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ABSTRACT

Electoral rules guide who runs for office, how campaigns are conducted, who gets to vote, and ultimately who governs. Changes to electoral rules provide an opportunity to better understand these important dynamics of American elections. In this project, I examine the significance of a new development in an electoral institution: using a top two primary for state level elections in Washington State. Under this system, all candidates for office, regardless of party affiliation, appear on the same ballot, and the top two vote getters move on to the general election. Currently, there are two states using a top two primary system: Washington and California. Washington began using this system in 2008, and California began using it in 2012. In Washington, the impetus for this reform is premised on the idea that greater competition in elections provides a better means to hold elected officials accountable. Electoral competition is widely considered to be a key indicator of a healthy democracy. In this project, I seek to understand changing dynamics of electoral competition with the implementation of the top two primary. Are elections more competitive with the top two primary and in what ways? In order to test this question, I develop a new index of electoral competition. This index examines key components of competition, including the vote percentage of the winning candidate, and how many candidates appeared on the ballot. In addition to electoral competition, I also examine campaign spending and voter turnout under the top two primary. I analyze State House elections from 2006 to 2016) to show changing dynamics of electoral competition since the implementation of the top two primary. My findings suggest that elections are more competitive under the top two primary, but most elections remain uncompetitive or only marginally competitive.
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Chapter 1: Washington State and the Top Two Primary

Democracy requires that all voices are heard, tyranny is kept in check, and government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. The pursuit of these requirements necessitates periodically changing and reforming the functional mechanisms of democracy. The most important of these mechanisms is elections. Elections are the means through which the people create government, influence policy, and make their voices heard. While democracy cannot exist without elections, elections do not ensure democracy in and of themselves. Elections can be a means of amplifying some voices and muting others, which can contribute to tyranny of the majority and oppression. While electoral rules provide the means for elections to be conducted fairly, the rules may sometimes be abused to benefit a group, party, or individual. Electoral rules in a democracy ultimately determine who governs and who is represented.

Reforming electoral rules is an essential function of a healthy democratic society. As populations, demographics, and societal ideas change, so must governmental institutions and processes. Change and reform are features of the electoral system that respond to shifts in the American population. Elected officials enact public policies to address a particular problem or need in a particular moment, meaning that over time, policies must be changed to address the different needs of a different moment. Election laws are no different. Changes in electoral rules may be a reflection of national movements, or may be borrowed and adapted from other states. Over time, each of the 50 states has developed unique processes for conducting elections that best reflect the state’s specific political culture.

Electoral reforms tend to occur along three interconnected paths. First, some reforms change who is allowed to vote. For example, constitutional amendments allowing African Americans and women to vote, as well as the collection of laws that rescinded Jim Crow laws in
the South are examples of this type of reform. Second, some reforms change the content of the ballot. The direct primary gave voters the opportunity to directly decide candidates for office, and initiatives and referendums provided a means for voters to create or weigh in on different policies. Third, some reforms change how easy or difficult it is for citizens to vote. Voting by mail, for example, has made it easier for voters in some states to participate in elections. Conversely, strict voter identification laws have made it more difficult for voters in other states to participate.

In this dissertation, I examine a new electoral structure that intersects all three types of reforms: the top two primary. Under this system, all candidates for office appear on the same primary election ballot, and the top two finishers, regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election. The top two primary allows all registered voters, no matter their partisan affiliation (or lack thereof) to participate, thus expanding the pool of potential voters in primary elections. Placing all candidates on the same ballot allows for voters to select candidates from different parties for different seats, thus changing the relationship voters have with their ballots. When all voters have the same ballot, the top two primary makes it much easier for voters to participate in primary elections because they do not have to change their voter registration or request a specific ballot. As a result, the top two primary moves the first stage of the election process away from partisanship and party control. The top two primary also acts as a winnowing process wherein a potentially broad field of candidates is reduced to two candidates prior to election day.

Proponents of the top two primary argue that this reform produces more moderate representatives by increasing electoral competition, by encouraging moderate independent voters to participate, and by making representatives responsive to their constituents rather than to the
political parties. Opponents argue that the reform does not produce substantive changes because candidates can lie about their party affiliation, incumbents are further entrenched, and voter choice in the general election is reduced. Currently, the top two primary reform is active in two states, Washington and California. The bulk of scholarly attention evaluates the role of the top two primary in California, the largest state in the nation. Far less attention has been given to Washington, an important oversight this project aims to address.

Specifically, in this dissertation I examine electoral competition and the top two primary. Electoral competition is the foundation upon which many democratic ideals are built, such as voter engagement and turnout. Competition has been declining in American elections for decades, and the top two primary has been touted as a solution to this problem. This study provides a scientific assessment of whether the top two primary is living up to this promise. In the following chapter, I describe how the state of Washington adopted the top two primary. I then explain why studying Washington is essential for understanding the consequences of implementing the top two primary. I conclude the chapter by outlining my central argument and establishing the key questions I address in this project.
Washington State has a well-established independent streak. As this cartoon from 1934 illustrates, Washingtonians have long believed that people, not parties, better serve democracy. Early in Washington’s history, politicians took steps to limit the power of the political parties. Their goal was to decrease the corruption that ran rampant in Reconstruction era America. In 1889, when Washingtonian framers wrote the state Constitution, controversies about the sale of land to foreign developers led to the immediate creation of the Grange, an organization of Progressive era farmers determined to register their opinions about what was included in the state constitution (Washington State Grange, 2014). Their issues bridged the divide between liberals and conservatives: the government was too large, salaries for government officials were too high, and they were concerned about potential abuses generated by career politicians, machine politics, and secret legislative sessions. These aspects of the newly created state government allowed for corruption by political elites. Washingtonian pioneers sought to escape corrupt state politics.
While the Grange failed to block the adoption of the new state constitution, they did form a lasting organization that continues to impact politics in Washington today.

The Progressive movement swept up the western United States and Washington was no exception. In 1907, the state legislature established a direct primary. The direct primary meant that when a party received at least 10% of the statewide vote in the previous general election, the party could automatically put candidates into a primary election. Once eligible, each political party printed ballots and voters declared their party affiliation by selecting a party ballot. It is important to note that under this system, voters did not register their party affiliation until they selected a ballot. The state legislature changed this policy in 1921 by requiring voters to register with a party either when they registered to vote or when they voted in a primary election. This meant that voters were now formally and publically affiliated with a political party. This policy was unpopular with Washingtonians. In 1922, opponents collected sufficient signatures for a referendum repealing partisan voter registration. The referendum passed with nearly 75% of the vote. Washington never registered voters by party again, making the state an ideal place for nonpartisan reforms to be successful (Reed, 2012).

Washington has a deep and longstanding culture of rejecting partisan affiliation. In 1934, Washingtonians strengthened their commitment to the idea with the introduction of the blanket primary. The blanket primary placed all candidates for office on the same ballot, and the top finisher from each party would advance to the general election. The Washington State Grange and the AFL-CIO initiated the blanket primary reform for several reasons. The organizations had the idea that voters should not have to publically declare their party affiliation because voters should be allowed to vote for whichever candidate they prefer in primary elections. They thought voters should be able to vote for candidates including those affiliated with different parties for
different offices. Under the blanket primary system, the candidates that appear on the general election ballot had to be from different parties. This allowed voters in Washington to vote for candidates from different parties for different seats. For example, they could vote for a Republican for Governor and then a Democrat for Secretary of State. According to Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, “Washingtonians really want to be able to bounce around the ballot and vote for the best person…if you’re from Washington, you just expect that, and that is what a primary is to you” (Wyman, phone interview, June 22, 2018). This culture of aversion to formal and public partisan affiliation is an important underlying characteristic of Washington state. The blanket primary was the prevailing system for primary elections in Washington from 1935 until 2003. The blanket primary system survived two challenges in the State Supreme Court, and was well entrenched until 1996.

Between 1934 and 1996, when Washington adopted the blanket primary, Alaska and Louisiana adopted versions of this system.¹ Alaska adopted a blanket primary in 1947, 12 years before it became a state. Voters in Alaska, like in Washington, wanted to be able to vote for the best candidate, rather than a preferred party. Alaska used the blanket primary until 1960, when the first state legislature enacted a system similar to what is known as the pick-a-primary system. Under the pick-a-primary system, voters received a single ballot with all candidates, and then voted for all candidates from their preferred party, Democrats or Republicans. If voters crossed over and voted for candidates from different parties, their ballot was invalidated. This system proved unpopular, and the blanket primary was reinstated in 1967 by the Alaska state legislature. Similar to the story in Washington, the blanket primary in Alaska survived several State Supreme Court challenges. In the 1996 challenge, the Supreme Court found that the blanket

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¹ Nebraska also uses a version of the top two primary for their nonpartisan, unicameral state legislature.
primary did not violate the political party’s freedom of association. Alaska continued conducting blanket primaries until the United States Supreme Court invalidated the system in 2000 (see below) (“Alaska’s Primary Election History,” 2015).

Louisiana took a different path with their primary election system. In Washington and Alaska, the blanket primary was rooted in a cultural history of independence and resistance to partisanship. In Louisiana, however, intense Democratic partisanship led the state to adopt their variation of the top two primary, known colloquially as the jungle primary. Under the jungle primary system, all voters for an office appear on the same ballot. If any candidate receives a simple majority of votes, or more than 50 percent of votes, the candidate wins the seat. If no candidate receives the majority of votes, the top two candidates participate in a run-off election held a few weeks later. The jungle primary system is rooted in the historic dominance of the Democratic party in Louisiana. Democrats dominated Louisiana politics for over 100 years, from 1877 to 1980. Because Democrats were assured of victory in a general election, the competition for elected office occurred in the primary stage. Louisiana Democratic governor Edwin Edwards implemented the jungle primary in 1975 (Mooney, 2002). Edwards noted that he faced the fiercest competition during primary elections, and prevailing at the primary stage effectively guaranteed him the governorship. The general election was merely a formality. Edwards sought to further insulate himself from competition, and was successful in his endeavor, winning reelection easily in 1976. While in the short term this reform benefitted Edwards, in the long
term it has made the Republican party more viable\(^2\) and led to a more competitive two-party system.

In Washington and Alaska, the blanket primary was in place for decades, surviving a smattering of court challenges, but quietly working without much attention from voters in those states. Similarly, though implemented for very different reasons, the jungle primary in Louisiana was not the subject of much notice. Everything changed for these states in 1996. In 1996, California voters approved Proposition 198, which implemented a blanket primary for state-level elections. The primary was modeled after Washington’s system. Prior to 1996, California had a closed primary system in which only registered party members could vote in primary elections. Proponents of the blanket primary in California argued that the reform would give independent voters a voice in selecting candidates for office, and that it would result in more moderate candidates with a broader base of support.\(^3\)

California is the largest state in the country in terms of population, economy, and political power. As such, the stakes are high for political actors there. A closed primary system meant that parties had a much stronger infrastructure. The parties did not approve of this measure, because it represented a dramatic loss of control in their role in nominating candidates. As a result, parties in California used their political strength and resources to challenge the reform. California only used the blanket primary for a single election (1998) before the parties sued to have the reform repealed. In a blanket primary election, voters selected the Democratic and Republican nominee.

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\(^2\) Scandals defined Edwards’ political career as he perpetually used his office for monetary gain. Despite these controversies, he continued running for and winning elections. His presence on the ballot caused the Democratic vote to split on many occasions, allowing Republican candidates to make it to the run-off election. Because the run-off elections tended to be lower turnout elections, Republicans had more opportunities to mobilize their voters and more publicity and support. Thus, he is often credited as the “Father of the Louisiana Republican Party.” Edwards was convicted of racketeering charges in 2001, and served 10 years in prison for his crimes (Robertson, 2011).

\(^3\) Interestingly, these were essentially the same arguments made in support of the top two primary in California 14 years later.
for office, even if those voters were not members of the Democratic or Republican party. The Supreme Court case, *California Democratic Party v. Jones* (2000), found that the blanket primary allowed non-party members to vote in party elections, which the court determined was a violation of the party's right to freedom of association. Freedom of association allows for individuals to freely decide to join groups and for groups to decide who is allowed to be a member (Emerson, 1964). Therefore, when the state of California allowed non-party members to vote in partisan elections it was, according to the Supreme Court, a government intrusion upon the parties because the state of California dictated who could participate in these organizations.

In the majority opinion, Justice Scalia wrote that the blanket primary "…forces political parties to associate with, to have their nominees and hence their positions, determined by those who, at best, have refused to affiliate with the party, and, at worst, have expressly affiliated with a rival," (Scalia 2000, 57). Scalia also noted that allowing non-party members to vote has the potential to severely alter the party’s nominees, and to dilute party member votes (Scalia, 2000). The Supreme Court deemed the blanket primary unconstitutional, and California, Washington and Alaska were no longer allowed to conduct this type of primary election.

Despite rejecting the blanket primary systems, Scalia’s majority opinion in *California Democratic Party v. Jones* (2000) did not close the door on allowing this open primary idea entirely. The opinion notes that the problem with the blanket primary is that it maintains partisanship as a fundamental organizing principle of the election. However, if partisanship were removed from the equation, as is the case in Louisiana, the right to association is not violated.

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5 Schmidt (2017) argues that *Jones* was decided incorrectly, as parties are public, not private, entities that are not protected under the Constitution, partisan affiliation should not be a requirement for participation in a democratic society, and that ultimately the freedom of the people to shape their political system is a higher consideration than the freedom of parties to control ballot access.
This logic became the underlying foundation of the top two primary system. Candidates under this system choose whether or not to affiliate with a party. Under the system, the general election may contain two members of the same party. Party is present in top two primary elections, but the role of parties as a central organizing structure is significantly reduced.

The last blanket primary in Washington was conducted in 2002, and the state legislature was then under a strict deadline to come up with new primary system before the 2004 election. The legislature passed a top two primary reform, which included a failsafe mechanism stating that in the event of the invalidation of the top two primary by the courts, Washington would use a pick-a-primary system.\(^6\) In 2004, in a highly controversial move, the governor of Washington, Gary Locke, used a line item veto to void the top two primary language, leaving Washington with the pick-a-primary system (Kirby, phone interview, July 5, 2018). While this system allowed unaffiliated voters to participate in primary elections, it forced voters to only vote in a single primary. The consequence for voters meant that crossover voting was not possible in the primary election. Washington State voters did not support the pick-a-primary system. A report by the Washington Secretary of State in 2004 found that only 21% of voters supported the pick-a-primary system (Sam Reed, 2012).

In January 2004 the Grange, which had been active in Washington since the founding of the state, filed Initiative 872 calling for the implementation of a top two primary system for all elections in Washington except for presidential preference elections. Initiative 872 was overwhelming approved by voters, with 60% of the overall vote and a majority in every district (Reed, 2012). Despite widespread public support, challenges from the state political parties, prevented the top two primary from being implemented immediately. In 2005, the U.S. District

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\(^6\) This is also known as the Arizona or Montana system.
Court found that the top two primary violated the party’s freedom of association in *Washington State Republican Party v. Logan* (2005). This was reaffirmed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Washington State Republican Party v. Washington* (2006). The State and the Grange both appealed these decisions to the Supreme Court in the combined cases *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party et al.* (2007) and *Washington v. Washington State Republican Party et al.* (2007). The Supreme Court overturned the Ninth Circuit decision, finding that the top two primary did not impose a severe burden on the freedom of association of political parties. The parties had further argued that voters would be confused by the top two primary, as candidates can self-select party labels and make it difficult for voters to fully understand the party affiliation of candidates. The Supreme Court found that it would be impossible to evaluate this argument until elections had actually been conducted under the top two primary rules. The Supreme Court decision also cleared the way for Washington to implement the top two primary. After the first top two primary in August 2008, a survey by the Washington Secretary of State found that 76% of voters expressed support for this system (Reed, 2012). In 2012, the Ninth Circuit found that the top two primary was not causing widespread confusion for voters in *Washington State Republican Party v. Washington Grange* (2012). This case appears to be the final word on the constitutionality of the top two primary, and the major issues surrounding this reform seem to be settled. The top two primary is now a permanent feature of Washington State elections.

**Why Study Washington?**

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Since Washington began using the top two primary in 2008, ten other states have considered adopting the top two primary system. In some instances, such as Arizona, consideration was in the form of a ballot initiative. In other states, such as Oklahoma, a bill was considered by the state legislature but not passed. Support for top two primaries has come from many sources, including Senators (Schumer, 2014), philanthropists (Arnold, 2014) and even former rock stars (Novoselic, 2009). John Arnold, a millionaire from Texas, funded top two primary initiatives in several states, including Arizona and Oregon (Arnold, 2014). Despite these attempts at implementing the top two primary, few scholars have conducted systematic studies of the impact of the top two primary reform.

Scholarly Research on Top Two Primaries

The majority of the analysis of the impact of the top two primary comes from and focuses on California. California demonstrates one of the most polarized state legislatures in the nation (Gary C. Jacobson, 2004; Shor & McCarty, 2011). One goal of introducing the top two primary was to decrease polarization by increasing the number of competitive elections, by encouraging moderate candidates to run, and by forcing candidates to reach across partisan lines to secure votes. Alvarez and Sinclair (2015) found that in 2012, the first year California conducted a top two primary, elections were more competitive than in previous years. Alvarez and Sinclair (2010) offer the only available analysis about competition in the California top two primary.

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10 Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Oklahoma, Mississippi, New York, and Maine have all had legislation introduced to implement a top two primary. Source: www.openprimaries.org/movement_by_state
11 In 2012, Arizona’s top two Primary Initiative failed by a two-to-one margin (67% against, 33% in favor).
12 Arnold donated $1 million to the Arizona Open and Honest Elections coalition in 2016. This organization attempted to get the top two primary and a ban on dark money onto the 2016 ballot. Arnold withdrew his support, as he did not favor the dark money ban, causing the coalition to collapse and neither initiative appeared on the 2016 ballot.
available at this time. Scholars studying the California top two primary have focused more on questions of legislator ideology.

In 2009, Republican state representative Abel Maldonado initiated the top two primary in California. Maldonado claimed the reform would "produce more moderate or pragmatic legislators," (Sinclair 2015, 1). Increased moderation would be achieved through opening the primaries to independent voters who are more likely to be centrist, and by giving minority party members a stronger voice in the elections. However, in order for this moderating effect to occur, first, moderate candidates must run for office, and second, voters must be able to identify the ideologically moderate candidates. The first assumption may build from the second: if moderate candidates win some elections, more moderate candidates may be motivated to run. Therefore it seems that the burden of moderating the state legislature is, rightly, in the hands of California voters. However, so far, there has been a limited moderating impact from this reform (Sinclair, 2015; Ahler, Citrin, & Lenz, 2016).

Preliminary evidence suggests that moderate candidates do not perform better under the top two primary system because voters are not knowledgeable about who the moderate candidates are (Ahler, Citrin, & Lenz, 2015; Ahler et al., 2016). Another explanation for why moderate candidates do not perform better is because partisan loyalties are still favored over voting for moderate candidates. Crossover voting remains rare (Nagler, 2015). McGhee and Shor (2017) find a slight moderating effect among Democrats in California, but conclude that overall the moderating impact of top two primary reform is ambiguous. Voter turnout has in fact

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14 Hughes, Levitt, Hill and Kousser (2017) find that voters in competitive districts are more receptive to GOTV messages, but do not comment on the relationship between the top two primary and electoral competition.

15 This is due in part to the difficulty in differentiating the effects of several major reforms that were all implemented in 2012, including the top two primary, an independent redistricting commission and changes to term limits in the state legislature.
decreased as compared to the prior, closed primary system (S. Hill & Kousser, 2016), and independent voters are not turning out at high rates (Kousser, 2015).

One of the key features of the top two primary is the potential for two candidates from the same party to appear on the general election ballot. However, in California same party general elections have been rare.\textsuperscript{\ref{footnote16}} When same party general elections do occur, they are most likely to occur for elections of open seats in districts with minimal intraparty competition (Sinclair, O’Grady, McIntosh, & Nordlund, 2018). Minor parties seem to perform poorly under the top two primary, with no third party candidates appearing on a California general election ballot in 2014 (Kousser, 2015).

This data is valuable, and provides a basis for understanding California elections into the future. However, these findings may not reflect how the top two primary functions in other states, such as Washington. Further, these findings do not provide enough long-term data to allow researchers to see patterns over time. With so much scholarly attention on California, Washington seems to have been forgotten as the first state to begin using a top two primary system. To date, scholars have not conducted comprehensive studies of the top two primary in Washington. Studies on Washington are few, but have focused on voter confusion about candidate party affiliation (Manweller, 2011), constitutional controversies (Birkenstock, 2007), and the number of candidates running in an election (J. H. Beck & Henrickson, 2013). The lack of studies on the top two primary in Washington is a disappointing oversight in the developing literature on electoral reform.

\textsuperscript{\ref{footnote16}} With the exception of statewide races, where it is more common to find two Democrats on the ballot. Notable examples of this include the 2016 and 2018 Senate races.
Washington is an ideal place to study multiple effects of the top two primary for several reasons. First, each State House district in Washington elects two representatives, creating a large number of primary elections to analyze every two years. Multi-member districts (MMD) allow for strategic decision making by candidates regarding which seat they will run for, and doubles the number of elections held, creating a large data set to analyze. States with MMD’s conduct elections in a variety of ways. According to Gierzynski et al. (2011), Washington uses a seat or post method, which means that each legislative seat is established and elections are conducted separately for each seat. During elections, voters select one candidate for each seat. This system is differentiated from plurality-at-large voting, where voters can vote for multiple candidates at the same time; cumulative voting, where voters can cast multiple votes for candidates; or staggered MMD elections, where legislators represent the same region but are elected at different times. MMD’s are an important feature of Washington State politics, but because each election is a separate event, the lessons learned in Washington will have applications to single member districts, as well as to multi-member districts in other states.

The second reason to study Washington is because of the significant geographic differences within the state. The western part of the state is, broadly speaking, populous, urban, and liberal, while the eastern part of the state is more sparsely populated, rural, and conservative. The demographic diversity creates a natural experiment to observe how population differences, population concentration, and partisanship impact top two primary elections. In Washington, Democrats have held the governorship since the 1980’s and the state House of Representatives since the early 2000’s. At the same time, a Republican-dominant coalition held the state Senate from 2012 to 2018. Though Democrats have often held a slim majority in the state legislature,

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17 Idaho, Maryland, and South Dakota also use this method.
both major parties are competitive in Washington. This is an important difference between Washington and California, where Democrats have held large majorities since the 1970s.\footnote{Republicans held a two seat advantage in the State Assembly during the 1995-1996 legislative session. Republicans have had more luck in holding the governorship, with Republican governors from 1982-1998, and 2005 to 2010. Republicans have not had a majority in the California State Senate since 1971.}

The third reason to study Washington is that it has consistently higher voter turnout than California.\footnote{In the 2016 elections, 65\% of Washington voters participated, compared to 55\% of California voters. Data from www.electproject.org} In addition, Washington boasts a more comprehensive system for reporting campaign contributions and spending than California. Relying on voter data from California alone does not tell the whole story of the top two primary. Findings such as low turnout among independents may be descriptive of independent voters in California, but not necessarily other states. Finally, Washington implemented the top two primary two election cycles earlier than California, so there is more data from additional election years.

**Central Questions**

This project addresses three key questions related to the top two primary in Washington state:

1. Is the top two primary living up to its promise of a more competitive electoral environment in Washington state?

2. How has implementation of the top two primary impacted electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout?

3. How do electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout impact each other in Washington state primary elections?

One of the proposed benefits of the top two primary is increasing the number of competitive elections (Zhang, 2012; Sinclair, 2015). The top two primary has the potential for increasing electoral competition in two ways. First, the top two primary can create competitive elections in single-party dominant districts by enabling co-partisan general elections. In
traditional primary elections, the most competition in these areas would occur during the primary, where the prevailing candidate would almost be assured of winning the election. Under the top two primary, competition does not necessarily end with the primary. For example, if a district is composed of 75% Republican voters, chances are good the general election will be between two Republican candidates. In such a scenario, Republican voters who perhaps did not support the candidate with the most votes still have a Republican candidate to support. Democratic voters in the district are able to vote for the lesser of two evils candidate, as opposed to voting for a token Democrat who has no chance of winning. Second, primary elections in the top two primary system increase competition because more candidates can participate. This gives voters more options in the primary election, allowing votes to be dispersed across a wider slate of candidates, and making it less likely that the primary election will end in a landslide. The increase in competition also means that the top two finishing candidates may have to seek support from voters who may not traditionally be in their party. I conducted a pilot study in 2015 that drew from a random sample of Washington districts. The results of the study suggest that competition increased with the implementation of the top two primary (Schnurr, 2016). This dissertation project will expand my analysis to draw more comprehensive and nuanced conclusions about competition in the top two primary.

Next, I am interested in how the top two primary impacts campaign spending. Elections are increasingly more expensive across the United States, and candidates must now raise large amounts of money to be viable in primary elections. Campaign spending is closely related to electoral competition, as candidates in competitive races must spend more to disseminate their message and get out the vote. However, the relationship between these dynamics is not necessarily linear, as elections in general are getting more expensive and less competitive (see
Chapter 2). The relationship between campaign spending and electoral competition is an important relationship to consider in the context of the top two primary.

Finally, I am interested in voter turnout. The literature suggests that competitive elections have higher turnout, though primary elections have traditionally low turnout (see Chapter 2). Evidence from California suggests a minimal impact on voter turnout with implementation of the top two primary. At the end of the day, judgments about the success of this reform rest, at least in part, on whether or not voters are more engaged as a result of this reform. This question has particular relevance for reformers in other states seeking to implement a top two primary system as a way to increase voter participation and voter turnout.

The Organization of this Project

In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I analyze the impact of the top two primary in Washington state. In chapter two, I develop a theoretical orientation based upon free market economics and public choice theory as the foundation for electoral competition. I present literature on electoral competition, electoral reform, campaign spending, and voter turnout to situate my project into this broader body of research.

In the third chapter, I discuss my methodology, including development of an original competition index based on three factors: the number of candidates in the race, the winning candidate’s percentage of the vote, and the difference between the second and third place finishers. I explain the composition of my data set, including how data was collected for each of the focal points of this project. Finally, I include a discussion of the process through which I conducted elite interviews with elected officials in Washington.
In chapter four, I present descriptive analysis of my original index of electoral competition. I examine each of the index indicators individually, and further explain and demonstrate the scoring of the index.

In chapter five, I present analysis of electoral competition in Washington utilizing my competition index and multiple statistical techniques. I show that competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary, but I add nuance to this argument through a careful analysis of where, how, and in what ways competition has increased.

In the sixth chapter, I present analysis of campaign spending and voter turnout with implementation of the top two primary. I show that campaign spending has risen over the past decade, and that there is a clear link between competition and campaign spending. I show that voter turnout initially increased with the first top two primary election, but has remained largely consistent subsequently. While the relationship between electoral competition and campaign finance is clear, the relationship between electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout is less clear.

In the final chapter, I present conclusions from this project, as well as suggest ideas for future research. I find that on the whole, electoral competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary, though most elections still feature low levels of competition. In all, this analysis suggests that the top two primary is working to improve democracy in Washington, though the specific political culture of this state makes it difficult to generalize about how well this reform would work in other states.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Democracy and democratic elections are key features of American politics and have been the philosophical cornerstone of American society since the founding of the nation. Liberty, rights, equality, and justice are ideals found in the United States Constitution, although these ideals have proven difficult to live up to in practice. At different points in the nation’s history, whole populations of people have been restricted from participating in democratic government. For example, restrictions on voting have limited African Americans and women from casting their ballots. Other restrictions have prevented individuals and groups from running for office. Today, the voting franchise has been expanded to include nearly all citizens in the United States, which might suggest more competitive elections. Yet elections are often uncompetitive because they are driven by huge amounts of undisclosed money and feature low voter turnout. Taken together, these issues have led politicians to call for reforming our electoral system.

In this chapter, I examine the literature on the latter three interconnected concepts. First, I examine electoral competition. While competitive elections are essential for a functioning democracy, in the United States, competition has been declining. Today most elections are not competitive, as evidenced by the high numbers of incumbents who are reelected each cycle. In this chapter, I present a theoretical understanding of why electoral competition is important, discuss the benefits of electoral competition, and analyze how electoral rules impact levels of electoral competition. Next, I turn to campaign finance. I trace the history of campaign finance regulations, demonstrate the impact of money in politics, and discuss the link between campaign finance and electoral competition. Finally, I evaluate and analyze voter turnout in the United States, presenting information on why people vote, and why turnout is comparatively low. I conclude this section by weaving these ideas together and revealing the connections among
electoral competition, campaign finance, and voter turnout. I elaborate on how these dynamics work together to shape the American electoral environment. I argue that electoral rules impact competition, campaign finance, and voter turnout. I also argue that reforms such as the top two primary can be an effective tool for addressing these issues in American politics.

**Democracy and Electoral Competition**

Democracy is broadly defined by the famous words of Abraham Lincoln as "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln, 1863). Perhaps it is better to think of this definition as an ideal rather than an actual practice of governance. Political scientists debate what democracy actually means. Early American scholars broadly equated democracy with voting rights (Downs, 1957a; Dahl, 2005). Later scholars added nuance to their definitions, adding discussions of different models of democracy (Lijphart, 1999), rules and institutions (Schmitter & Karl, 1991), and representation (Rosenthal, 1998).

While scholars now recognize democracy to be a complicated and complex governing system, voting and elections remain a core component of this form of government. Voting is the means through which citizens express policy preferences by selecting representatives who share similar ideas and beliefs (Downs, 1957a). Regular elections enable citizens to hold representatives accountable for their actions in office (Schmitter & Karl, 1991; Dahl, 2005). Accountability makes representation meaningful because accountability requires representatives to stay in touch with their constituents. Competitive elections foster accountability (Squire, 1989; Niemi & Weisberg, 1993; Dahl, 2005). According to Maisel (1990), "A minimal criterion for an effectively functioning election system is that officeholders are held accountable for their actions in frequent elections" (p. 119).
Transparency in elections is an aspect of healthy democratic elections. Voters must have a clear choice among candidates with different policy positions, and those candidates should be of a high caliber (Banks & Kiewiet, 1989; Squire, 1989). Scholars decry the increasingly uncompetitive nature of American elections, with incumbents now winning 90 percent of the time and many races featuring only a single candidate (Mayhew, 1974; Banks & Kiewiet, 1989; Squire, 1989; Abramowitz, 1991; Abramowitz, Alexander, & Gunning, 2006).

Competition is a frequently cited measure of the health of American democracy, and there are important theoretical considerations in examining why competition is important. In the first part of the chapter, I lay the theoretical groundwork for the project with a discussion of perspectives on electoral competition, impacts of competitive elections, election rules, primary elections, and representation. The second half of the chapter applies these theories and concepts from American politics to campaign finance laws, as I illustrate how campaign finance laws have changed over time. The conclusion of the chapter will connect the literature review and theoretical perspectives and the history of campaign finance law to the state of Washington.

**Perspectives on Electoral Competition**

There are two guiding theories in American politics, pluralism and elitism, and competitive elections are a cornerstone of both perspectives. In the classic pluralist understanding of American politics, policy results from groups competing for influence (Dahl, 2005). Each group has a particular set of resources which allow them to win their policy objectives sometimes, but because no group possesses all of the resources, no single groups wins all the time. Pluralism posits a bottom up model of governance. Conversely, democracy also exists as a conflict between competing elites (Schattschneider, 1960). Elite theory posits a top down approach to governance, wherein popular elections are a symbolic means to generate
public consent for decisions over which the mass electorate actually has little control. While both theories, pluralism and elitism, conceptualize governance differently, they overlap in featuring competition as a key characteristic of how American elections, and therefore governmental outcomes, operate.

There are two conflicting views about why competition is important. In the first school of thought, competition is essential for producing quality representation. For scholars arguing this view, electoral competition exists at a nexus between democratic theory and free-market capitalist theory (Issacharoff & Pildes, 1998; Ferejohn, 1999; Karlan, 1999; Levinson, 1999). Under capitalism, rational actors enter a marketplace seeking the product to best suit their needs at the lowest price, and producers contend with each other for customers and profits. In democracy, rational actors enter the voting booth, seeking a representative who will act in their best interest, and candidates compete with each other for votes. Of course, this is an idealized example because neither customers in a marketplace nor voters in the voting booth behave in totally rational ways. Viewing democracy through the lens of free market theory explains why electoral competition is considered important for effective democracy. When connecting competition to quality representation, Issacharoff and Pildes (1998b) summarize, “Only through an appropriately competitive partisan environment can one of the central goals of democratic politics be realized: that the policy outcomes of the political process be responsive to the interests and views of citizens.” In other words, when elections are competitive, policy makers create policies which are more responsive to the needs of their constituents, thus increasing the quality of representation.

A similar neoliberal/capitalist market logic can be applied to many areas of politics. One clear example is with campaign finance, where politicians promote deregulation of political
spending and instead rely on the concept of the marketplace of ideas (Karlan, 1999). Interestingly, though, Americans oppose extending the same concept to allow politicians or interest groups to pay voters to vote for particular candidates (Karlan, 1999; Levinson, 1999). Gerrymandering is another example of market logic applied to American politics. Some scholars see gerrymandering as a means of creating a monopoly for a party or individual in an electoral district. Still another example is how scholars see institutions such as the Electoral College as a means to equalize disparities between large and small states in the political marketplace. Overall, capitalism and democracy share core values including the importance of the free market and competition. Capitalism and democracy have been intimately linked throughout history (Almond, 1991; Schumpeter, 2012).

This approach to thinking about competition presents single party dominance of a district as a monopoly and thus a market failure. Just as singular control of a product can result in price gouging, single party control of an electoral district can result in politicians who engage in tyranny of the majority. This is particularly problematic for people of color, who because of gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and other types of discrimination are already at an electoral disadvantage (Issacharoff & Pildes, 1998). Because incumbent politicians make the rules, they create a system which secures their seats while creating structural barriers for challengers. According to this theory, when parties take actions to limit competition, the courts should apply an anti-trust rationale, and find such laws unconstitutional. It would be the same outcome if a for-profit firm took similar actions to limit competition in the marketplace. While parties work to perpetuate their dominance, success is in fact a natural monopoly which requires a different regulatory scheme (Schleicher, 2006). In fact, Ferejohn (1999) argues that the market analogy is

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20 Natural monopolies occur when, in large economies, it is most efficient for a single firm to control all production. Public utilities are a classic example of natural monopolies.
most useful in constructing regulatory schemes as opposed to understanding political and electoral processes.

Another way to think about competition is through the legitimacy it provides for elected officials and the stability it provides for the political system. Schumpeter (2012) argues that democratic systems with competitive elections differentiates democracy from other forms of government. While competitive elections define democracy, the electorate in democracies does not have an incentive to develop clear and detailed policy positions. This would require devoting time, energy and resources to studying the intricacies of public policy, which would have minimal net effect on the policies the government actually implements. Instead, it is more rational for voters to develop a general idea in different policy areas and leave it to the elected officials to sort out the details. Competition, then, gives the government the authority and legitimacy to act through the consent of the majority. Voters then assess the policies of the governing party in power based on individual perceptions of how those policies are impacting them. Elected representatives are granted a monopoly, which the electorate accepts because it is limited by time. Under Schumpeter’s (2012) theory, this period of monopoly produces innovation, both in economics and governance, because those who invested in the winner will receive large returns, incentivizing future victories.

Competition is also important because under winner-take-all electoral rules a likely sizable population of the electorate must accept rule by a party with whom they disagree (Przeworski, 1999). The potential for future victories keeps the population in the minority from uprising and revolution. However, democracy is most likely to endure when “…it offers an opportunity for conflicting forces to advance their interests within the institutional framework,” (Przeworski 1999, p. 50). Competition in elections allows for the peaceful transition of
governmental control, and helps a society avoid violence by providing an institutional mechanism for the electoral losers to peacefully concede power (Przeworski, 2015).

Each of these perspectives on competition is flawed. Issacharoff and Pildes (1998) link elections to quality of representation, which assumes that voters are informed enough to understand the intricacies of public policy, and that they know what is in their best interest (Schleicher, 2006). The market metaphor, however, fails to take into account how voters can be persuaded by interactions rather than purely rational assessment of candidates (Karlan, 1999). If Issacharoff and Pildes (1998) give voters too much credit, Schumpeter’s (2012) does not give voters enough credit. Though it is likely true that voters do not possess perfectly rational policy knowledge, they almost certainly do have some idea about how public policy decisions will impact their lives (Schleicher, 2006). These theories therefore conflict over the rationale for competition. This conflict can be problematic if one seeks to challenge electoral rules that reduce competition. For example, a law requiring a large number of signatures for a candidate to get on the ballot would contradict a model seeking to increase representation but would synchronize with a model seeking to provide legitimacy and stability. Conversely, a law requiring parties to allow non-members to vote in their primaries (as was the case with the blanket primary21) would be illegal under the legitimacy and stability model, but not under the representation model.22 Despite these theoretical tensions, scholars agree that the rules of electoral engagement guide competition in elections and these scholars also agree that competition is a desirable and necessary function of democratic politics.

Impacts of Competitive Elections

21 See Chapter 1
22 Perhaps the top two primary addresses both of these concerns by allowing for inter- and intra- party competition on the ballot, which allows voters to hold their representatives accountable thereby making the representatives more representative, and increasing legitimacy by allowing all voters to vote in the primary.
Electoral competition is essential for democracy and distinguishes democracies from other types of governmental arrangements. In the United States, it is well documented that competition has declined over time (Mayhew, 1974; Ferejohn, 1977; Abramowitz, 1991; Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993; Van Dunk & Weber, 1997; Issacharoff & Pildes, 1998b; Abramowitz et al., 2006; Ansolabehere, Hansen, Hirano, & Snyder, Jr., 2007; Huckfeldt, Carmines, Mondak, & Zeemering, 2007; McGrath, 2011). However, the reasons for the decline in competition are less understood. The chance of elections being competitive is related to perceptions of chamber control because minority parties are more likely to field quality candidates when the minority party think they can gain a majority in government (Van Dunk & Weber, 1997). Majority parties therefore have an incentive to lock up seats to further disincentivize competition. The diminishing competition in American elections is most often viewed through the lens of high incumbent reelection rates, though this is not the whole story, as discussed in the next chapter. There is a large, consistent body of literature criticizing the increasing insulation of incumbents and lack of meaningful choice for voters. Studies have addressed a multitude of effects from this competition deficit. State level elections are more likely to be contested following income tax increases (Van Dunk & Weber, 1997). McGrath (2011) finds that states with high numbers of uncontested elections are more likely to have higher numbers of initiatives on the ballot. This suggests that voters and interest groups recognize their impact on public policy is limited when electoral competition is low, and will rely more heavily on direct democracy to achieve their policy goals. Professional legislatures are more likely to have contested elections (Hogan, 2003), but legislatures with higher pay feature less competitive elections (Van Dunk & Weber, 1997). States with multi-member districts saw a somewhat slower decline in competition (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995) and a slight increase in
marginal, or close, elections (Weber, Tucker, & Brace, 1991). Perhaps most importantly, representatives in competitive districts are more responsive to their constituents (Griffin, 2006). Electoral competition creates meaningful effects, and is important for a healthy democracy. However, political actors in power have an incentive to reduce competition in order to preserve their position in government. Often, competition is promoted or diminished through electoral rules, discussed below.

**Electoral Rules**

If elections are essential for democracy, then election rules are essential for elections. “It is a paradox of democratic decision making that for the people to decide, there must be accepted rules of decision,” (Issacharoff, 2005). Rules determine who can vote, who can run, and the manner in which elections take place. Most importantly, the rules of the game directly impact the outcome (Przeworski, 2010). Rules regarding the conduct of both voting and elections ensure elections are conducted fairly, and confer legitimacy onto the winning representatives (Dahl, 2005). In order to achieve this, the rules must be agreed upon in advance of the election, and all parties must accept the results (Issacharoff, 2005). From the perspectives of Dahl and Downs, the rules should provide a level playing field, a fair and agreed upon set of regulations to which all people agree. Yet electoral rules are often a means to prevent certain groups of people from voting and prevent certain types of candidates from running for office (Rogers, 1990). Whether or not electoral rules are intentionally nefarious, they do structure who wins and who loses by determining who votes.

Suffrage in America has a rather troubled history, and issues surrounding who is allowed to participate in elections have been under discussion since the founding of the country (Rogers, 1990). It took almost 100 years for African American men to gain suffrage, and 150 years for
women. During the 19th century, the poor were often excluded from voting (Steinfeld, 1989). During the first half of the 20th century, African Americans in the South were often prevented from voting though restrictive literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses. In short, changing suffrage rules determine who gets represented and who gets to participate in our government.

When the rules governing participation are unfair or prevent people from participating, citizens sometimes call for reforms. Some examples of reforms have focused on making it easier to vote, such as voting early by mail or allowing people to register to vote the day of the election. In general, these types of reforms have not produced significant increases in voter turnout (Southwell & Burchett, 2000; Citrin, Schickler, & Sides, 2003; Tolbert, Donovan, King, & Bowler, 2008). One explanation is because making voting easier does not necessarily make voting more interesting or meaningful for voters. Most elections are non-competitive, especially at the state level (Ansolabehere et al., 2007; Niemi, Powell, Berry, Carsey, & Snyder, 2007), which means less information and engagement for voters. Competitive elections are more engaging to voters, give voters more information, allow voters an opportunity to hold elected officials accountable and increase voter interest in politics and government (Caroline J. Tolbert, Donovan, King, et al., 2008). Competition also ensures that public policy reflects the will of the people, rather than the self-interest of the politicians (McGrath, 2011). Competition is the foundation upon which other electoral benefits, such as presence of quality candidates and increased voter turnout, can be built. Therefore, lawmakers should focus electoral reforms first and foremost on creating competition in elections (Caroline J. Tolbert, Donovan, & Cain, 2008).

23 An important exception to this is the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which allows people to register to vote when they receive a driver’s license. This was initially shown to increase both registration and turnout (Knack, 1995; Franklin & Grier, 1997), though more recently the findings about voter turnout have come into question (Brown & Wedeking, 2006).
Electoral rules have a reciprocal relationship with political parties because electoral rules determine how parties operate in the electoral system, but the party in power gets to make the rules. Duverger’s law holds that election systems that feature plurality rule and single member districts will most often result in a two party system (Duverger, 1954). Further, in a first past the post (FPTP) system, two parties is the ideal outcome, and it ensures that the winning candidate received a majority rather than a plurality of votes (Duverger, 1954; Schleicher, 2006).

According to Mayhew (1974), members of Congress are focused only on reelection. When that is the case, then individual candidates have an incentive to tailor their policies to the median voter in a given district (Downs, 1957b). However, political parties consistently have differing stances on issues, which is important for voter choice (Owen & Grofman, 2006). The positions that individual legislators take relative to their constituents often depend on the ideological composition of the district (Gerber & Lewis, 2004). The nature of governance is such that politicians will only learn relevant information after taking office, which means that some ambiguity on the campaign trail is inevitable and beneficial in giving elected officials discretion (Kartik, Van Weelden, & Wolton, 2017). This allows for competition between the parties by allowing for the parties to develop differing policy positions, giving voters a meaningful choice. Party competition then occurs at two levels: interparty competition to win the nomination, and intraparty competition to win the seat. The relationship between intraparty competition and representation is also linked to how inclusive parties are in allowing members to decide their nominees (Rahat, Hazan, & Katz, 2008).

In America, the rules are shaped by the governing interests in power. Political factions, similar to electoral rules, have been a historical source of controversy (Madison, 1787; Washington, 1796). Yet political factions are now an institutionalized and deeply entrenched
Historically, parties were powerful organizations, particularly in terms of selecting which candidates were allowed to run for office (Ware, 2002; Aldrich, 2011). Over time, the power of parties diminished (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Wattenberg, 2009; Whiteley, 2011; Aldrich, 2011). The leading explanation for this decline is that it is a response to movements for more opportunities for democratic participation among citizens, including allowing more people to vote and opening up the candidate selection process (Aldrich, 2011). One prominent place where the candidate selection process has opened is through primary elections, discussed below.

Primary Elections

The direct primary has been one of the most significant contributors of greater participation. Direct primaries allow party members to select the party nominee for a given office (Ware, 2002). Before the direct primary, candidates were chosen by party leaders in proverbial "smoke filled rooms". Allowing party members, rather than party leaders, to choose candidates meant creating a new system of electoral rules to be developed and implemented by states. Subsequently, states have developed unique systems for selecting party candidates (Gerber & Morton, 1998).

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of primaries for state elections today: open and closed.24 States with closed primaries only allow party members to participate in primary elections. This means that in order to vote in the Democratic primary, for example, a potential voter must be registered with the Democratic Party, or that one must be a registered Republican to vote in the Republican primary. This is the most restrictive type of primary and requires voters to register to vote with their chosen party, sometimes far in advance of the primary election.

24 These designations also apply to presidential primaries, though the rules governing the presidential selection process are in many cases different from the rules for state primaries.
Open primaries are systems in which voters not registered with a given party are able to vote in primary elections. Generally, voters are given access to both party ballots, and can choose which ballot to submit. In some states, ballot selection is made public, in other states it is kept secret. Finally, hybrid primaries, a term that encompasses a range of different rules and policies, including registering to vote at the polling location or allowing registered independents to choose which party’s primary they prefer. Hybrid primaries are a catch-all category for those primary systems that are not explicitly closed or open.

Primary elections function differently from general elections. Because primaries are explicitly party affairs, primary voters are more likely to be the most dedicated members of the party. Primary voters are those party members most active in party politics and the strongest adherents to party ideology (Gerber & Morton, 1998). This results in candidates who are more likely to be ideologically at the wings of the party, leading to greater polarization in both state and national legislatures (Gerber & Morton, 1998; Brady, Han, & Pope, 2007). Further, primary elections are usually characterized by lower voter turnout and levels of competition (Beck & Sorauf, 1992), particularly for less prestigious offices, such as state representatives and senators, and even in some instances the national House of Representatives (Squire, 1989). The promise of the direct primary to increase effective democracy has failed because most primaries serve only as a formality. In response to the decline of competition in primary elections, Ansolabehere et al. (2007) argue that, "…Americans have lost an important instrument of electoral accountability," (p. 23). The lack of competition in primaries is troubling in light of two important factors. First, incumbents in America are reelected at extraordinarily high rates (Mayhew, 1974; Banks & Kiewiet, 1989; Abramowitz, 1991; Friedman & Holden, 2009). Second, non-competitive

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25 For more detail about state primaries, see appendix 1
primary elections are generally marked by lower voter interest and participation (Key, 1949; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Patterson & Caldeira, 1983; Powell, 1986). I examine each of these factors of primary elections in turn.

First, incumbents in America are elected at very high rates, resulting in a generally uncompetitive electoral environment. Scholars developed several theories to explain this phenomenon. Some argue that gerrymandering in the redistricting process has led to an abundance of districts in which a single party dominates (Ferejohn, 1977; Abramowitz et al., 2006). Partisan redistricting practices sometimes force incumbents out or weaken the position of the incumbent in a district (Yoshinaka & Murphy, 2011). Yet partisan redistricting practices can also create safe districts for incumbents or parties. Gerrymandering occurs when certain types of people are packed into a single district, or broken up into several districts, to give electoral advantages to certain groups over others. Often gerrymandering practices occur along racial lines or to specifically protect incumbent candidates. Packing, a type of gerrymandering, has the effect of concentrating minority party voters into a single district, allowing the district to have a single representative, but preventing them from impacting the overall representation of the state. Cracking, another type of gerrymandering practice, has the effect of diluting a group of minority party voters, potentially preventing them from gaining any representation at all. While explicitly race based gerrymandering is illegal, because race and partisanship track so closely, it can be difficult to tease these concepts out. Gerrymandering is problematic when districts are manipulated to favor a particular party or group. Partisan gerrymandering often decreases general election competition, but increases competition in the primary elections (Ansolabehere et al., 2007). Districts drawn by courts or commissions tend to be the most competitive, while
districts drawn by a unified state government tend to be the least competitive (Carson & Crespin, 2004).

Under this logic, gerrymandering leads to polarization in governing bodies because, as discussed previously, primary voters tend to be from the ideological wings of the party. This results in candidates who appeal to those voters getting elected in primaries. When voters from a single party are concentrated into one district, they may choose more ideologically extreme candidates than if districts were more ideologically balanced. However, the link in academic research between polarization and gerrymandering appears to be weak or nonexistent (Masket, Winburn, & Wright, 2012; McCarty, 2011; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2009).

Other scholars find increasing polarization has led to stronger partisan election winners in highly partisan districts. Both major parties have become more ideologically extreme, muting moderate voices. This makes members of both parties less willing, or politically able, to compromise with each other on public policy. In this situation, voters are more likely to favor partisan loyalties over moderate candidates. Partisan polarization may be a result of polarization of elites, who donate to the parties and have greater access to candidates and policies than average Americans (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005). These factors compound to allow extreme candidates to win, leading to greater polarization, which creates a cycle of partisan gridlock. In conjunction with polarization, districts that were formerly marginal are becoming less so due to "…powerful forces at work in American society, including internal migration, immigration, and ideological realignment within the electorate" (Abramowitz et al., 2006, p. 77). As the American population shifts and changes, becoming less white and more concentrated near the coasts, areas

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26 Brunell and Clark (2012) argue that high levels of two party competition in House districts have the net effect of leaving half of the district unhappy with the result of an election. They argue for ideologically homogenous districts in order to ensure that citizens are effectively represented. This is the single exception in the literature on electoral competition which suggests that interparty competition is not an electoral benefit.
are becoming more ideologically homogenous. This means that there are fewer and fewer competitive elections during each election cycle.

A competing school of thought argues that other factors explain declining competition. For example, some scholars examine the increasing benefits that go along with being an incumbent, including advantages in fundraising and name recognition, and other scholars consider franking privileges and an accessible record from holding office as reasons for the incumbency advantage (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995; Abramowitz et al., 2006; Friedman & Holden, 2009). Further, incumbents have the means and incentives to manipulate electoral rules for their own benefit (Przeworski, 2010). The literature shows little support for the hypothesis that gerrymandering is decreasing competition, but great support for the compounding influences of polarization and incumbency advantages (Ferejohn, 1977; Jacobson, 1987; Abramowitz, 1991; Abramowitz et al., 2006). Further, because of the established relationship between incumbency and reelection, it is rare for incumbents to face quality challengers in primaries or general elections (Banks & Kiewiet, 1989; Beck & Sorauf, 1992; Van Dunk, 1997). When behaving rationally, strong challengers will wait until the incumbent appears especially weak, or decides to retire from office before running (Van Dunk, 1997). The incumbency advantage calls into question the ability of citizens to hold their representatives accountable. If incumbents can use their advantages to scare off quality challengers, then voters are not being given a meaningful choice between candidates and are being denied the means to hold their elected representatives responsible for their actions in office. Electoral competition in primary elections decreases as a result of the incumbency advantage.

Second, non-competitive elections reduce voter participation in elections. The costs of voting in America are high (Powell, 1986; Franklin, 2004; Hill, 2006). Scholars generally
conclude that voting is an irrational behavior, as an individual vote is unlikely to make a difference in an election. Also, citizens reap the same benefits whether they actually vote or not (Downs, 1957a; Niemi & Weisberg, 1993). Overall, the United States has low voter turnout, especially when compared to voter turnout in other industrialized democracies (Powell, 1986; Franklin, 2004; Hill, 2006; DeSilver, 2015). Low voter turnout raises concerns about the legitimacy of democracy in the United States. Voting, while not the only form of political participation, is the most common way for people to engage with the political system (Miller & Stokes, 1996), and therefore, the system should be focused on increasing voter participation in elections. One way to achieve this is to increase voter interest through focusing on electoral reforms that make elections more competitive.

Politicians in support of electoral reform have many goals, most often to change the representatives in a governing body and the type of representation those agents provide. Two leading arguments for the benefits of electoral reform call for responsiveness by representatives (Issacharoff & Pildes, 1998a) and alignment between representatives and their constituents at all levels of government (Stephanopoulos, McGhee, & Rogers, 2015). Other authors focus on increasing participation and responsiveness as key goals for electoral reforms (Tolbert, Donovan, & Cain, 2008). These studies provide useful guidelines for what politicians who see electoral reforms should accomplish. Scholars have developed many ideas about how to increase responsiveness and alignment in government. Some authors suggest making it easier to register to vote (Wolfinger, Highton, & Mullin, 2005), providing public funding for campaigns (Melinda Gann Hall, 2007; Saad, 2013), or imposing term limits on all elected officials (Hall, 2007).

Others have called for changing the type of candidate who seeks office by changing how primary elections are conducted (Gerber & Morton, 1998; McCarty, 2011). Sometimes, primary
Election reforms have the consequence of weakening party control over their candidates for office (Beck & Sorauf, 1992; Ware, 2002; McCarty, 2011; Snyder & Ting, 2011). Some see this as a positive development because freedom from party control allows representatives to act out of conviction rather than loyalty to their party (Edwards, 2012). Others have noted that where parties lack control, voters may choose candidates who have popular appeal rather than candidates who will be best at governing (Snyder & Ting, 2011). Parties maintain some control by determining the requirements for getting on the primary ballot, and party support remains critical to most candidates' success, especially in terms of financing a campaign (Hassell, 2015).

McGhee, et al. (2014) find that decreased party control over a primary results in more extreme candidates, while increased party control results in candidates more likely to toe the party line. However, if party elites are increasingly polarized as some have suggested (Fiorina et al., 2005), then perhaps candidates toeing the party line could still reduce polarization in legislatures.

Unfortunately, while introduction of the direct primary was intended to expand democracy, scholarship has shown that the direct primary did not have the desired impacts. For example, the costs of running in primaries are high, which makes running in a primary election less equitable for candidates. Candidates must appeal to broad, yet specific, constituencies. Further, in many states it is difficult to get on the primary ballot. Further, the sheer number of primary elections and confusion surrounding the rules for voting in them often drives down voter turnout (Beck & Sorauf, 1992). Therefore, primary elections have not expanded democracy. Nonetheless, calls for primary election reforms persist.

Representation

In a healthy democracy, elected officials represent the policy interests of their constituents. Representation changes according to the population and the policy interests of the
general population. Changing dynamics surrounding suffrage, including who votes and the types of elections they are voting in, produce changes in types of representatives who are elected. When the voting franchise is expanded to different groups, such as African Americans or women, members of those groups are more likely to be elected. Different representatives have different ideas regarding how to effectively represent their constituencies, meaning that changing who votes and how they vote can change the representatives that hold office in government.

In an ideal democratic society, when problems arise, all members of that society come together and discuss those problems. All voices would be heard and a consensus about the best course of action would be reached by all citizens. In reality, direct democracy is impractical due to the large population of the United States and the multitude of issues that would require a vote from the mass public. Representative democracy presents a reasonable substitute for the ideal (Brennan & Hamlin, 1999). Representation has been discussed by many scholars, all concerned with the normative aspects of what representation means. The following section discusses perspectives scholars have about what it means to represent others and what it means to be represented.

For Weber (1947), representation occurs when one group (the representatives) has legitimate authority to act, and their actions are binding upon another group who accepts the actions of the representative group. Elections provide that legitimacy by allowing citizens to consent to be governed. Pitkin (1967), takes a broader view that representation is “…making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact,” (p. 9). She further distinguishes between descriptive representation and symbolic representation. Descriptive representation occurs when the representative body matches the represented body ideologically and physically. Symbolic representation occurs when representatives stand up for
the ideas of the represented. For Pitkin, representation is “...a continuing tension between ideal and achievement” (p. 240) and we must constantly work to reform institutions to move government towards a more perfect pursuit of the public interest.

One of the important theoretical considerations of representation theory is how representatives ought to behave. Should representatives act as a delegate, or as a trustee?27 (Pitkin, 1967; Rehfeld, 2009). In other words, should a representative act as their constituents want them to act or should they act in what they perceive to be the best interests of their constituents? Each of these models has advantages and disadvantages. Delegates are more responsive to their constituents but are incentivized to only listen to the loudest voices (as they are more inclined towards seeking reelection). Trustees are more inclined to think about what is best for the whole group, but rely largely on their own judgment, with little concern towards pleasing voters (Rehfeld, 2009). Kartik, Van Weelden, and Wolton (2017) find that voters want a representative who is a combination of these ideals when they stated, “Voters would like politicians to have some discretion to adapt policies to changing circumstances, but also to constrain how much they can do so to mitigate policy bias,” (p. 969). In other words, elected officials must balance the tasks of representing their constituents as both a delegate and a trustee.

Scholars have challenged the dichotomy between delegates and trustees because it is too simplistic. For example, Mansbridge (2003) identifies three models of representation, including anticipatory representation, gyroscope representation, and surrogate representation. Anticipatory representation occurs when representatives act in a manner they think their constituents will approve of in the next election, rather than in a manner they said they would in the previous election. Gyroscope representation occurs when representatives are selected based on their

27 Sometimes referred to as the “Independent-Mandate Dichotomy” (Pitkin, 1967).
internal sense of right and wrong rather than relying on “external incentives” (p. 520). Finally, surrogate representation occurs when representatives act on behalf of constituents they do not directly represent, such as a representative from a majority white district supporting civil rights for people of color. While Mansbridge’s model presents a more nuanced understanding of representation, Rehfeld (2009) argues for introducing more ideal types to explain representation. He conceptualizes representation as a series of at least three choices a representative must make.

Rehfeld (2009) offers three questions to conceptualize representation types:

- Should the representative pursue the good of the whole or of the part?
- Should the representative act based on their own judgment or the judgment of someone else?
- Will the representative be more or less responsive to sanctions incurred as a result of their work? (p. 211)

The questions create eight possible ideal types of representatives. In reality, most representatives adapt their behavior to the given issue or political mood of the time, making it difficult to pin down a broad understanding of individual behavior. This complication of what representation means also presents challenges for reformers seeking to change laws to increase representation. A clear understanding of what representation ought to be impacts the types of rules that should be implemented. And, a fundamental underpinning of all theoretical forms of representation is that representatives compete for their right to represent.

Electoral competition is an essential component of democratic politics. Competitive elections provide voters the means to hold their elected officials accountable, and changes the types of candidates who seek election, and the behavior of those who are elected. However,
competition is declining in American elections. Incumbents are insulated and reelected at high rates, which deprives voters of a meaningful choice regarding who will represent them. Some of the ways incumbents have been successful at retaining their seats are through well-established donor networks and creating favorable campaign finance regulations. These themes are explored below.

**Campaign Finance**

Campaign finance is an ever-evolving system of rules and regulations governing how money is received and spent in elections. This system involves changing dynamics in partisan politics, incursions and excursions by the Supreme Court, and a seemingly endless network of loopholes which are exploited and redrawn by individuals and organizations seeking to influence both voters and elected officials. “Political money, like water, has to go somewhere,” (Issacharoff & Karlan, 1999, p. 1705). Campaign finance rules are virtually always constructed with the goal of combating government corruption in mind (Ansolabehere, 2007). The idea seems to be that limiting money makes representatives more attuned to the policy desires of constituents. While combating corruption may be the overarching goal, campaign finance regulations have important implications for electoral competition. As with any policy there are winners and losers, and in most instances, incumbents win and electoral challengers lose.

Since the first campaign finance law, the Tillman Act, was passed in 1907, America has undergone expansions and contractions of campaign finance regulations. I divide the history of campaign finance regulations into three broad eras: First, the pre-Watergate Era was characterized by disorganization and lack of enforcement. Legislation in this era was largely symbolic. Second, the post-Watergate Era was characterized by an expansion of campaign finance regulations, which included public financing for campaigns, harsh restrictions on
corporate and union spending, and the development of enforcement mechanisms for the laws. Finally, the Post-Citizens United Era is characterized by a contraction of campaign finance laws. I thoroughly define and review each of these eras to provide an historical context for the current state of campaign finance regulations. I end the section by then developing connections between campaign finance and electoral competition.

**Pre-Watergate Era (the First Regime)**

In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Act, creating a non-partisan merit-based hiring system for civil service employees. This was the first step towards a divorce between monetary support for campaigns and tangible benefits for the donor. This law came as a result of President James Garfield’s assassination by a jilted office-seeker (Corrado, Mann, Ortiz, & Potter, 2005). Civil service reform, and the consequent changes to campaign finance, were continued with the Hatch Act in 1939, which prohibited public employees from campaigning for a candidate, banned candidates from soliciting donations from public employees, and outlawed intimidating or bribing voters (Mutch, 2014). Separating elected officials from civil service employees was an important step in creating a continuing civil service class that had the opportunity to remain in their positions through multiple regime changes. One consequence of separating elected official from civil service employees was allowing the bureaucracy to function with less pressure from outside forces.

As a result of rapid industrialization and rampant political corruption after the Civil War and Reconstruction, Americans sought governmental and labor reforms in the Progressive Era. Theodore Roosevelt, a major driver of the Progressive movement, became president in 1901 after William McKinley was assassinated. When he sought reelection in 1904, Roosevelt feared defeat, and solicited large donations from Wall Street to better fund his campaign (Mutch, 2014).
Progressive voters and Congress members saw this as antithetical to the Progressive movement, leading to passage of the Tillman Act in 1907. The Tillman Act was the first law specifically governing campaign finance. Under this law, corporations were banned from giving money directly to candidates, a sentiment still in effect today. The Tillman Act was extended to primary elections in 1911 but faced many problems with enforcement. While there were punishments for violators, there were no requirements for candidates to disclose their donors, and no agency was tasked with enforcing the law. Although the Tillman Act was largely symbolic, it provided the basis for governing corporate donations. The effects of the Tillman Act are still foundational for how candidates handle corporate donations to this day.

In 1911, the Federal Corrupt Practices Act, more commonly known as the Publicity Act, passed, and provided campaign finance guidelines until the 1970’s. Under the Publicity Act, political parties were capped in how much they could spend in general elections for seats in the House of Representatives, and disclosure requirements were established for political parties (Corrado et al., 2005). Subsequent amendments to this law placed caps on candidate spending, but similar to the Tillman Act, the Publicity Act lacked mechanisms for enforcement. The Publicity Act was amended in 1925 following the Teapot Dome Scandal to require both House and Senate candidates to file quarterly reports listing all donations of more than $100 they received. The Publicity Act still lacked a meaningful enforcement mechanism, but the requirement for quarterly reporting moved campaign finance law closer to achieving an end to corruption.

Over the next few decades, a smattering of other laws sought to address campaign finance issues. The Hatch Act in 1939 banned politicians from soliciting donations from government employees. Amendments to the Hatch Act in 1940 limited the amount that an
individual could donate to candidates and national parties, as well as limiting the total amount that parties could raise and spend (Corrado et al., 2005). A broad interpretation about the boundaries of those limitations meant that parties and candidates regularly exceeded those limits. In 1943, the Congress of Industry Organizations (CIO) formed the first official political action committee (PAC). Soon other labor organizations followed, raising large sums of money to support pro labor candidates (Corrado et al., 2005). Other interests slowly followed suit. The American Medical Political Action Committee (AMPAC) and the Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) were both spending large amounts of money on federal elections by 1964 (Corrado et al., 2005).

The 1968 election was a particularly tough loss for Democrats, who subsequently led the charge to address campaign finance rules. The Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA) sought to “revise and recodify” existing campaign finance law (Mutch, 2014). The FECA created new disclosure requirements, relaxed donation caps, and created limits on broadcast advertisements (Mutch, 2014). Further, Presidential committees were required to submit spending reports to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the first real attempt at addressing the lack of enforcement that had plagued previous legislation. President Richard Nixon signed the FECA into law in 1971. In 1972, Nixon engaged in campaign finance fraud, leading to perhaps the biggest political scandal in American history: Watergate.

Post-Watergate Era (the Second Regime)

On June 17, 1972, four burglars were caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. Over the next year it came to light that the burglars had been hired by members of Nixon’s staff, and paid in cashier’s checks from his Committee to Reelect the President (CRP) (Bernstein & Woodward, 1974). The
scandal led to Nixon’s resignation. The Watergate scandal also led to the first meaningful and enforceable campaign finance laws in America.

In 1974, Congress amended the FECA to create much tighter restrictions on how campaigns, parties, and outside groups raise and spend money. These amendments tackled both hard (direct donations to candidates) and soft (spending on behalf of candidates) money spending. Individuals were limited in how much they could donate to candidates, as well as how much they could spend on independent expenditures. Candidates were limited in how much money their campaigns could raise and how much money their campaigns could spend. Candidates and their campaigns were also subject to strict disclosure requirements for all raising and spending activities. In addition, a system for public financing of elections was introduced, and a new government agency, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) was created to monitor and enforce these new regulations. In effect, the FECA amendments established a new campaign finance system that imposed strict regulations on campaigns in the hopes of leveling the playing field between big donors and average citizens. Most importantly, this legislation sought to avoid another Watergate-esque scandal through reducing opportunities for corruption through campaign finance (Corrado et al., 2005; Mutch, 2014).

Several key provisions of the FECA amendments were struck down in the seminal 1976 Supreme Court decision *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). The Court found that the FECA’s new restrictions on spending reform (both by individuals and by campaigns) violated people’s ability to express themselves, bringing campaign spending under the purview of the first amendment.

A restriction on the amount of money a person or group can spend on political communication during a campaign necessarily reduces the quantity of expression by

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restricting the number of issues discussed...this is because virtually every means of communicating ideas in today’s mass society requires the expenditure of money. (Buckley v. Valeo, 1976)

In effect, Buckley v. Valeo decided that money is a form of speech, thus removing the caps on expenditures by campaigns and independent expenditures by individuals. Further, this decision upheld limits on donations to campaigns, disclosure requirements, and the public financing system. Corporations and unions were still banned from donating money directly to campaigns, and if they wanted to engage in political spending, they were required to form a PAC with its own treasurer and management. The Supreme Court sought to balance free speech with guarding against corruption, and the FECA largely remained intact\(^{29}\) until 2002. During this time period, corruption was not growing at the aggregate level (Ansolabehere, 2007). In addition, campaign spending was low relative to GDP (Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, & Snyder Jr., 2003).

From 1976 to 2002, the nature of American elections changed dramatically, particularly because of how Americans consumed news and media. The rise of cable television and the advent of the 24 hours news cycle meant that Americans were watching more TV than ever. As a result, candidates needed more money than ever to purchase increasingly expensive advertisements on cable channels. Candidates and parties were becoming ever more reliant on outside spending to supplement their campaign budgets, especially since the public financing system that most major presidential candidates used imposed spending limits in exchange for federal matching funds. This system provided funding to presidential primary candidates who reached a certain threshold of support, and then equal amounts to the general election candidates to provide a more even playing field. To address the increasing role of outside money, Congress

\(^{29}\) In general, from 1976 to 2002, the FECA upheld the hard money restrictions. At the same time SUBJECT weakened the soft money restrictions and organizations were given more leeway in their spending. For a full accounting of relevant cases, see Mutch 2014.
passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002. This bill sought to limit the role of soft money entering elections by banning the national parties from raising or spending money outside of the campaign finance regulation system and banning independent expenditures naming a specific candidate from being broadcast within 30 days of a primary or caucus, or 60 days of a general election (McCain & Feingold, 2002). Further, the BCRA banned corporations and unions from spending money from their general treasury on electioneering communications. Electioneering communications are defined in the BCRA as:

…Any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication which: refers to a clearly identified candidate for federal office and is made within 60 days before a general, special, or runoff election sought by the candidate or 30 days before a primary or preference election, or a convention or caucus of a political party that has authority to nominate a candidate for the office sought by the candidate and in the case of a communication which refers to a candidate for an office other than President or Vice President, is targeted to the relevant electorate. (BCRA, 2002)

The BCRA also contained an exception for newspaper stories, commentaries, and editorials, which meant that newspapers are still able to endorse and support a particular candidate, even 60 days before a general election.

Major portions of the BCRA were upheld in the 2003 case McConnell v. FEC (2003). This new campaign finance regime seemed largely stable. In 2004, advertisements for Michael Moore’s film Fahrenheit 9/11, a documentary criticizing President George W. Bush’s handling of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, aired on broadcast television during the presidential campaign. A conservative non-profit group called Citizens United brought suit against Michael Moore with the FEC claiming these ads violated the BCRA’s ban on electioneering communications 60 days before a general election. The FEC ruled against Citizens United, finding that the film was a commercial activity rather than a

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political advertisement. In 2007, Citizens United produced a film, *Hillary: The Movie*, which was highly critical of Hillary Clinton. In 2008, the group sought to advertise their film, which would be available through DIRECTV’s video on demand service. The FEC found that advertisements for this film did violate the BCRA’s ban on electioneering communications, which prompted Citizens United to sue the FEC. The 2010 Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010)\(^{31}\) represented the most profound change to campaign finance regulations since the 1974 FECA amendments. The case itself decided a relatively narrow area of campaign finance law and ushered in a new era of increased political advertising by outside groups. In the next section, I discuss the *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) decision, and the dramatic impact the Supreme Court case has had on American elections.

**Post Citizens United Era (the Third Regime)**

Today’s campaign finance regime is generally characterized by deregulation. In 2010, the landmark Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) held that corporations and unions can spend unlimited amounts of money from their general treasury on independent expenditures. These expenditures cannot be coordinated with the campaign and are therefore not subject to the same spending and disclosure rules as expenditures made by campaigns. Subsequently, *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* (2010)\(^{32}\) held that groups seeking to only engage in independent expenditures do not have to disclose their donors (Sentelle, 2010). Together, these cases have resulted in a significant increase in the amount of money entering the political system, largely through independent expenditure committees, colloquially known as Super PACs. These organizations only engage in independent expenditures and at times take advantage of legal loopholes in order to avoid disclosing their donors. In 2012, outside groups spent nearly $600

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\(^{32}\) *SpeechNow.org et al. v. Federal Election Commission*, 599, F. 3d, 674 (2010)
million on the presidential election, and nearly half of that amount, $239 million came from Super PACs (Center for Responsive Politics, 2012). In 2016, the amount of Super PAC spending more than doubled, with $618 million spent (Center for Responsive Politics, 2016).

Among the more problematic aspects of deregulation has been the increase in undisclosed money, or dark money, that enters the political system without known origin. In addition to the decision in *SpeechNow.org v FEC* (2010), a loophole in the tax code governing social welfare organizations means that millions of dark money dollars are now entering our political system. Also, though foreign nationals are explicitly banned from spending money on American elections, the loopholes surrounding Super PACs are almost certainly allowing foreign money into our elections (Sparks, 2014). Every new policy requires a period of learning by candidates, voters, and outside groups. Under this logic, the amount of money being spent by outside groups and the types of advertisements that money is purchasing will increase. As a result, the argument is that candidates, voters, and outside groups will become more innovative over time as spenders become savvier at exploiting legal loopholes.

Changes in election rules may produce a similar dynamic. New electoral rules require a period of learning by candidates, voters, and outside groups. Candidates must adjust to new forms of campaigning and new populations of voters. Voters, on the other hand, must grapple with new forms of strategic voting to ensure their preferred candidates win (or their least preferred candidates lose, as the case may be). And, outside groups must determine the most effective ways to mobilize their resources. Competition is embedded in this learning process: the candidate, voter, or outside group who figures out the most effective strategy first will be

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33 Groups organizing under a 501 (c)(4), otherwise known as a social welfare group, do not have to disclose their donors so long as less than 50% of their spending goes towards political expenditures.
successful, while those who are not able to capitalize on changes will not be successful. Perhaps the most important component of this learning process for candidates and outside groups is to determine how to efficiently use their limited monetary resources to maximize votes.

**Campaign Finance in Washington**

Campaign finance laws in Washington follow the general guideline outlined at the federal level, with more strict disclosure requirements in some areas, and less strict requirements in other areas. Interestingly, campaign finance regulations are an area where the political parties have retained a great deal of freedom, in terms of both raising and spending money. In this section, I examine some specific rules governing how much candidates, parties, and outside groups are able to contribute and receive.

Parties in Washington are unrestricted in the amount of money they can receive. In general, donors are not restricted in the amount of money they can give to political parties. Parties can receive unlimited donations from individual donors, PACs, and from candidate surplus funds to accounts that are used for providing general election information to voters, efforts to mobilize voters, or internal expenses that do not have a direct association with an individual candidate. Parties are only restricted in receiving money from PACs when that money is put into a non-exempt account, which can be used to directly aid a specific candidate. Parties are, in turn, allowed to contribute unlimited funds to PACs. They can donate one dollar per registered voter per cycle to all state executive, legislative, and local candidates, as well as $2,000 per election cycle to judicial candidates. Because parties have so much latitude in how they are able to raise and spend money, they are able to maintain some semblance of party

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34 All information regarding specific regulations in this section from [www.pdc.wa.gov/learn/contribution-limits](http://www.pdc.wa.gov/learn/contribution-limits)
discipline. This is in stark contrast to the general anti-partisan control seen in the state’s electoral rules, including not registering voters by party and using a top two primary election system.

Individual donors are able to contribute $2,000 per election to state executive and judicial candidates, and $1,000 per election to legislative candidates. Individuals can make unlimited donations to parties and PAC’s. PAC’s have essentially the same contribution limitations as individuals, which includes being able to make unlimited donations to other PAC’s. This can create a nesting doll phenomenon, in which money is filtered through many PAC’s and becomes difficult, if not impossible to track the original source of the money. As a final law of interest in terms of campaign contributions, corporations that are not directly doing business in the state of Washington are barred from donating to candidates, though corporations that are based in Washington have the same contribution limitations as individuals.

While contribution laws in Washington are comparable to other states, Washington features strict disclosure laws for campaign contributions and expenditures. During the campaign season, which lasts from June until December, candidates and parties must file weekly disclosure reports, listing all donations over $25 the campaign received, and all expenditures over $50. For donations over $100, campaigns must list more personal information about the donor, including their place of employment. Expenditures over $50 must include receipts listing specifically how the money was spent to ensure that campaign funds are not being spent for the candidate’s personal expenses. Finally, campaigns are not allowed to receive more than $300 in truly anonymous contributions during an election cycle.

Currently, the Washington legislature is considering legislation that would require PAC’s to list specific donors in issue ads in order to combat the power of outside money, specifically in
ballot initiatives. It is unclear what the outcome of that legislation might be, especially in light of the post- *Citizens United* and *SpeechNow.org* deregulation environment. However, this does illustrate Washington’s efforts to regulate the impact of outside money. This also illustrates an important relationship between political money and electoral competition: big spending brings more attention to a candidate or initiative. Once candidates or initiative have more attention, they can significantly impact how voters perceive issues. The relationship between campaign finance and electoral competition is discussed further below.

**Campaign Finance and Electoral Competition**

Electoral competition is a foundational component of a healthy democracy and is embodied in our government through ideas such as separation of powers and popular elections. Campaign finance is an indicator of electoral competition, and also reflects free market economic theory (Kuhner, 2014). Prior to competing for votes, candidates must compete for money and donors. Money allows candidates to purchase advertising which assists them in more effectively competing for votes. Donors make investments in candidates who they feel will best represent their interests, and the closer a race, the more donors and candidates will spend to ensure their victory.

One of the important lenses through which to assess electoral competition is campaign finance. The relationship between campaign spending and competition is well established, even as the type of relationship is contested among scholars. Increased spending is associated with more competitive elections in some studies (Glantz, Abramowitz, & Burkart, 1976; Jacobson, 1978; Jacobson, 1985; Stratmann & Aparicio-Castillo, 2006). However, other studies have demonstrated that campaign spending goes up while electoral competition goes down (Abramowitz, 1991; Ansolabehere et al., 2003; Bonneau, 2004; Abramowitz et al., 2006). When
thinking about what all of these scholars have in common, changes in campaign finance regulations impact elections.

Jacobson (1978) demonstrates that high levels of campaign spending by challenging candidates greatly aids electoral victory. Spending buys exposure for challengers, while incumbents, who are likely to win by default, are advantaged when less attention is paid to a race. Therefore, limits on campaign fundraising or spending benefit incumbents at challengers' expense, while raising campaign contributions benefit challengers’ ability to fundraise while harming incumbents. Because challengers have to spend money to get noticed, any limitation on their spending reduces their ability to compete with incumbents. Scholars have shown that campaign finance regulations further entrench incumbents (Samples, 2006), that spending limits negatively impact levels of electoral competition (Gross, Goidel, & Shields, 2002), and that races with high challenger spending lead to a closer race with higher overall spending (Glantz et al., 1976).

Competition in U.S. House races has decreased over time. Ninety percent of incumbents are reelected (Mahtesian, 2012), and they are raising more money than ever. "Over the last three decades, the median spending of winners in House elections has grown at more than double the rate of inflation, going from $41,885 in 1974 to $657,359 in 2002," (Abramowitz et al., 2006). In 2012, the average cost for a federal House seat had grown to $1.6 million (Wheaton, 2013) and remained at nearly that level in 2016 (Kim, 2016). This means that candidates challenging an incumbent have a large financial burden to overcome to have any chance of winning a seat. A similar pattern is visible in Washington state Supreme Court elections, which have gotten more expensive and less competitive. However judicial elections have become more contested,
meaning that challengers are not necessarily deterred from running because of the costs associated with running for election (Bonneau, 2004).

Elections with high spending can be indicative of greater competition (Moncrief, 1998; Ansolabehere et al., 2003), particularly when that spending is driven by a challenger. Higher spending by challengers forces incumbents to also spend more, though the relative benefits of that spending aids the challenger more than the incumbent (Jacobson, 1978). We should expect that the most competitive elections will also be the most expensive. The reason competitive elections and expensive elections may be correlated is because high spending may indicate that the incumbent is weak and a challenger has perceived an opportunity for victory. High spending may also indicate that there is an open seat and two challengers are running in the election. An analysis of electoral spending in top two primary elections is therefore important to our understanding of the dynamics of competition under this reform.

Campaign spending also has important connections with voter turnout. Some scholars have argued that increased money in politics is bad for democracy and will cause voters to stop participating.\footnote{See Justice Kennedy's dissent in \textit{Citizens United v. FEC}} The literature generally suggests that high spending by campaigns increases voter turnout by increasing voter interest in and knowledge about the election (Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004; Tolbert, Donovan, King, et al., 2008). Further, high levels of spending do not change voters' perceptions of their ability to influence policy (Coleman & Manna, 2000). Further, support for campaign finance reform is not related to congressional approval (Primo, 2002). The logic is that more competitive elections have higher levels of spending, and greater levels of advertising supported by high spending likely result in higher turnout. The top two primary election in Washington provides an ideal arena to test these assumptions.
Campaign finance regulations structure aspects of the American electoral system. Campaign finance laws and state and federal regulations determine who can donate, how much they can donate, and how donors spend their money. Most recently, outside spending has become a controversial issue, and the Supreme Court has largely favored deregulation under the banner of free speech. How money is spent in the political system largely determines election winners and losers. Spending is a key indicator of the competitiveness of elections, though again the relationship between spending, competition and voter turnout is not entirely clear.

**Voter Turnout**

In addition to campaign spending, electoral competition can also be viewed through the lens of voter turnout. Healthy democracy functions best when an informed active citizenry engage with the electoral system by voting. Understanding why people do or do not vote has been one of the fundamental challenges of American politics. Broadly speaking, scholarship has focused on questions about why people vote and conversely, questions about why voter turnout is so low in the United States compared to other industrialized nations. I examine each of these questions in the following section about voter turnout.

The first question is about why people vote. One theory of voter participation, known as the baseline or resource model, focuses on understanding voting as a function of specific characteristics possessed by individual voters (Verba & Nie, 1972; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995). According to the resource model, the resources were socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and occupation. The logic is that as each of those factors increase (i.e. more income, better job, more education), people are more likely to vote. Analysis of voter mobilization by both parties and interest groups was added to the resource model to further explain voting behavior (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Franklin, 2004).
Participation is not always voluntary\textsuperscript{36}, but even when people have the option to vote, their choices are constrained by electoral rules and culture (Przeworski, 2009).

Why is turnout in America so low, particularly when compared to other industrialized nations? "Americans seem to be more politically aware and involved than citizens in any other democracy, yet the levels of voter turnout in the United States are consistently far below the democratic average," (Powell 1986, p. 17). Some have suggested that a major factor in our low participation levels is institutional barriers in voting and registering to vote. (Erikson, 1981; Powell, 1986; Franklin, 2004; Hill, 2006). In many states, voters wishing to register must travel a long distance, and possess specific types of identification to register to vote. The burden of registration is also solely on citizens, and some may not have the institutional or bureaucratic knowledge to overcome these barriers. The top two primary may serve to eliminate some of these barriers. In states that conduct closed primaries, voters must be registered with the party in whose primary they wish to vote. In top two primaries, this problem is eliminated because there are not partisan primary elections and all voters receive the same ballot.

Downs (1957a) argues that people are most likely to vote when the individual rewards of voting outweigh the costs of voting. However, this is almost never the case. All citizens reap the benefits of voting (i.e. a representative government) whether they actually vote or not. Therefore, voting is often considered an irrational behavior (Ferejohn, 1977; Harder & Krosnick, 2008). Voters are more likely to cast a ballot when costs of engaging in the action of voting are decreased and motivation to vote is increased (Harder & Krosnick, 2008). Citizens are most likely to vote when they are political engaged, and engagement most often occurs as a result of campaign spending and voter mobilization efforts of parties and groups (Huckfeldt et al., 2007).

\textsuperscript{36} Many nations enforce compulsory voting laws, including Australia, Belgium, and Brazil.
Another dynamic of voter turnout is that in some cases people want to vote but are not allowed to vote. This has historically taken the form of restricting the vote to white men, either by law, as was the case prior to the 15th and 19th Amendments, or by practice, as was the case during the Jim Crow era in the South. Today, attempts to prevent certain groups from voting take the form of identification requirements (Horwitz, 2016), closing polling locations in certain neighborhoods (The Editorial Board, 2014), and banning people convicted of certain crimes from voting (Nelson, 2016). In these examples, the costs of voting are increased to the extent where voting becomes all but impossible. In the latter example, citizens convicted of a felony are, in some states, legally barred from voting, and many states have either outright banned felons from ever voting again or created a complex system of requirements for restoring civil rights that are all but impossible to navigate. In 2016, felon disenfranchisement impacted over six million voters, or two and a half percent of the total eligible voter population (Uggen, Larson, & Shannon, 2016). While cultural and structural elements do certainly contribute to low voter turnout levels in the United States, it is also important to consider the legal barriers to voting.

**Voter Turnout and Competition**

There is a clear link between competitive elections and higher levels of voter turnout (Jackman, 1987; Hanks & Grofman, 1998; McDonald & Samples, 2007; Tolbert, Donovan, King, et al., 2008). Voters are more aware of campaigns and elections when their districts are competitive, though voters tend to overestimate how competitive. Voters perceive races as more competitive when they see more election advertisements, meaning perceptions of competition are largely as a result of increased campaign spending. However, increased turnout might be more related to mobilization efforts by the candidates rather than voters caring more about the election (Huckfeldt et al., 2007; Bowler & Donovan, 2011). Scholars have further shown that partisan
competition is an important factor in voter mobilization (Caldeira, Patterson, & Markko, 1985). Further, when elections are competitive, voters are more likely to cast their ballots based on a candidate’s position on issues (Lachat, 2011). However, the population at large may be more unsatisfied with increased campaign activity, perhaps because they do not like being exposed to politics, which can lead to greater dissatisfaction with the candidates (Bowler & Donovan, 2011).

This is an important interplay and suggests that voter turnout can be a reflection of competition in elections. In this respect, it is important to understand how voters respond to top two primary elections. Competition is by no means the only indicator that drives voter turnout, but previous research suggests a correlation. This project will further develop the relationship between the concepts of competition in elections and voter turnout in the context of top two primary elections.

Electoral competition, campaign finance, and voter turnout work together to structure the American political environment. While each of these factors operates somewhat independently, together they paint a clear picture of incumbent behavior and voter responses. In the end, electoral competition is the basis of a healthy democracy. When elections are competitive, voters are more likely to engage with and vote in elections. Yet competition is declining over time, and this deprives voters of an important tool for holding their representatives accountable. While it is unlikely that a single reform will totally rectify declining competition, increased spending, and low voter turnout in American politics, top two primary elections might be a good place to start. In the next chapter, I develop my methodology for studying the impact of the top two primary reform on electoral competition.
Chapter 3: Methods and Data

Electoral competition is a foundational component of American democracy. Electoral competition gives voters a meaningful choice when deciding who will represent them in government, and produces representatives who are more responsive to constituents. The top two primary reform is premised in part on the idea that it will create more electoral competition. This project seeks to test whether or not the top two primary is living up to this promise. To best study this question, I look at elections for the Washington state House of Representatives from 2006 to 2016, and I utilize a mixed methods approach, comprised of quantitative analysis and elite interviews. In total, I have collected data on 686 primary elections from 2006 to 2016. I have collected spending data for 1,347 candidates during that same time period. This is a large data set that allows me to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the top two primary.

Mixed-Methods Approach

In order to understand the full picture of the top two primary in Washington, I employ a mixed methods approach. “Mixed Method” refers to a methodology featuring aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Mixed methods improves upon a singular methodological approach because the weakness of one approach can be compensated by the strengths of another approach (Jick, 1979). Quantitative research allows for analysis of large amounts of data and generalization, but does not give voice to individuals, nor provide opportunities for nuance and fine distinctions. Conversely, qualitative research does allow for individuals to have a voice in the research process, and allows for a more nuanced and distinctive understanding of political phenomena.

37 There are 49 state electoral districts in Washington. Because each district elects two representatives, in top two primary years 98 total primary elections occur. In 2006, each party conducted their own primary, doubling the number of total primary elections to 196 for that year.
However, qualitative research utilizes small data sets and is often not generalizable. These approaches, therefore, complement each other, and can be utilized together to create an effective and comprehensive study.

This project combines statistical analysis with elite interviews of stakeholders in Washington state who have been impacted by the top two primary. Employing a mixed methods approach provides the most comprehensive picture of how the top two primary is working in Washington. Interviews were conducted by phone, and recorded and transcribed by the author. Interviewees include Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, and Representative Steve Kirby, both of whom were elected to office before and after the implementation of the top two primary and have provided an invaluable perspective on this reform. Information gleaned from these interviews is woven throughout this project. In the next section, I present the quantitative component of this project.

I began this portion of the project by developing an initial list of candidates for interviews. I first sought incumbent elected officials who had been elected under all three systems discussed in this project: the blanket primary, pick-a-primary, and top two primary. I specifically looked for representatives who were still in office, as I anticipated they would provide the most up to date information about the top two primary reform. After compiling this list, I expanded my potential pool of interviewees to include members of the Washington State Grange, the organization responsible for the initiative that implemented the top two primary, and Open Primaries, a national non-profit organization attempting to get more states to adopt top two primaries. Finally, I sought to interview members of the Washington state Libertarian party.

For sample interview questions and a sample interview invitation, see Appendix 2
which has been active in running candidates in top two primaries, though they infrequently make it to the general election.

After compiling this list, I began sending out invitation letters. Secretary Wyman and Representative Kirby were quick to respond, and I was able to conduct interviews with them. Secretary Wyman and I discussed why the top two primary was working for the citizens of Washington, as well as the impact of this reform on her campaigns, and some broader questions about electoral competition and campaign finance. Representative Kirby was an outspoken critic of the Governor’s veto of the congressionally approved top two primary bill in 2004, and was able to speak to the story of how Washington actually ended up with the top two primary through the initiative process. Across both interviews, the broad theme seemed to be that the top two primary was working in Washington because of the state’s deep roots with less partisan control over the primary election process. Both interviewees also suggested that the political parties are actively against this electoral system, though the parties do now seem resigned that the top two primary is here to stay. I was able to utilize this information in the introductory chapter of this project to better understand Washington’s journey to the top two primary, and return to some of these ideas in the conclusion chapter.

After completing these interviews, I reached a dead end in terms of soliciting responses to my invitation letters. I then sent email follow-up invitations to my initial pool of potential interviewees, and after receiving no responses, I went back to the drawing board and looked for more potential officials to interview, this time including people who had been recently elected. I continued sending invitations, about 50 total, and unfortunately received no further responses. As a latch-ditch effort to reach the Washington State Grange, I cold called them on two separate occasions, and received no reply. Further, the Washington State Libertarian party website was
down for repairs for several months, and I was unable to find contact information for this organization. Finally, multiple attempts to reach out to members of Open Primaries similarly resulted in no responses.

This process may have been improved through using a snowball sample and seeking further interviewees through Secretary Wyman and Representative Kirby. I did not employ this approach initially in order to cast a wide net of potential interviewees, but may have had more luck with recruitment had I employed a different sampling technique. It is also likely that I might have had better luck soliciting interviews had I been able to travel to Washington and conduct the interviews in person rather than over the phone.

That said, both interviews I was able to conduct were consistent in citing Washington’s political culture as the central component for the success of this reform. Further, though the overall number of interviews I conducted was small, the insights I gained about the history of this reform provided a strong basis for my understanding of the specifics of the top two primary, as well as a broader understanding of why and how a reform might work in one state and not another.

**Quantitative Methods**

This research addresses seven hypotheses:

*H1: Competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary in Washington.*

*H2: The majority of primary elections in Washington remain uncompetitive.*

*H3: Electoral spending has increased with implementation of the top two primary.*

*H4: In elections where competition is high, spending will also be high.*

*H5: Races with higher levels of competition will feature higher levels of voter turnout.*
**H6:** Races with higher spending also have higher levels of voter turnout.

**H7:** Races with both high competition and high spending have the highest levels of voter turnout.

These hypotheses address three interconnected concepts: electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout. In the previous chapter, I analyzed debates in the field surrounding these concepts, including the importance of these concepts for democracy and how they impact each other. Overall, the relationship between these concepts is complicated, and this project further advances our understandings of each concept individually as well as understanding relationships between concepts.

In this chapter, I outline my methodology for studying electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout under the top two primary in Washington. First, I explain my mixed methods approach and describe my process for soliciting and conducting interviews. Next, I analyze other competition indices and explain how my index of electoral competition improves upon other indices for measuring competition. An index provides a composite score based on multiple indicators, which allows us to observe changes within the data over time, as well as to rank individual races based on their index scores. This makes an index the ideal way to study electoral competition and the top two primary. I then present my index of electoral competition, including a full description of how races are scored. In the final section, I describe how I collected both campaign spending and voter turnout data.

**Previous Competition Indices**

Historically, electoral competition has been analyzed in a variety of ways. Perhaps the original measure of competition is the Ranney Index (Ranney, 1976), which was built upon three indicators: vote share of gubernatorial candidates, the percentage of seats held by each of the parties in the state legislature, and the length of time and percentage of time that each of the
parties held the governorship and a majority in the state legislature. The Ranney index ranged from .5 (no competition) to 1 (perfect competition) (Ranney, 1976). This approach to studying competition has been criticized for not including actual election results and for ranking states in order of competitiveness without bringing attention to individual state dynamics. Despite its limitations, it was an important building block for later competition indexes. An important contribution from the Ranney index is an understanding that competition can, and should, be assessed from several angles rather than just a single indicator.

Holbrook and Van Dunk (1993) suggest using district level data to add nuance and actual electoral results into their analysis of competition. An important take away from this index is that close races receive higher scores on the index. If all races were unopposed and all candidates received 100% of the vote, the competition score would be 0. If all races were opposed and each candidate (assuming a two party election) received 50% of the vote, the score would be 100. While the Ranney and Holbrook and Van Dunk indices are often used in conjunction with one another, they are actually measuring separate concepts. Ranney is measuring competition between parties, while Holbrook and Van Dunk are measuring competition between candidates. This means that comparing these measures is effectively comparing apples and oranges (Shufeldt & Flavin, 2012). Grofman and Selb (2009) include voter incentives and voting blocs, as well as party specific measures in their index. They also focus on aggregate data rather than voter preferences for individual districts. This index is also more applicable to multi-party, proportional representation elections. Each of these indices focuses on ranking states against each other to show the most competitive areas of the country by state. None of these indices focus on competition within a state, and none provide a means to show how different electoral systems impact competition within a state.
My index of electoral competition improves upon all of these factors. Rather than comparing competition across states, I look at competition for each seat at the district level. Looking at competition for each individual seat in the Washington state House of Representatives provides the best means for understanding how the top two primary reform has impacted electoral competition in Washington. I describe my index of electoral competition in detail below.

**Index of Electoral Competition**

In this section, I explain the index of electoral competition I utilize in my analysis. The index is comprised of three components: contestation, the winning candidate’s percentage of the vote, and the difference in vote percentage between the second and third place candidates in contested elections. Each of the components, and the possible scores for each component, will be explained in turn. After describing the application of the index for top two primary races, I include a separate section discussing differences between scores for top two primaries and other types of primaries. I use the index to address the following hypotheses:

**H1:** *Competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary in Washington.*

**H2:** *The majority of primary elections in Washington remain uncompetitive.*

**Contestation**

First, I look to whether or not a seat is contested. Contested elections are the most basic form of electoral competition, meaning there is more than just one candidate running for the seat (Squire, 1989; Beck & Sorauf, 1992; T. M. Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993; Wrighton & Squire, 1997; Squire, 2000; Hall, 2007; McGrath, 2011). Under traditional primary election rules, a contested election would be defined as more than one party member running in the party primary. Only one candidate can win the party nomination and go on to the general election. In a
top two primary, having two candidates on the ballot does not necessarily denote competition because both candidates are guaranteed a place on the general election ballot. Therefore, in top two primaries, a contested election is defined as more than two candidates running in the primary, because not all candidates will advance to the general election.

On this component, seats are scored based on the number of candidates in a race, with scores ranging from zero to two. If only two candidates appear on the ballot, the seat receives zero points. If three candidates appear on the ballot, the seat receives one point. If four or more candidates appear on the ballot, the seat receives two points. More candidates on the ballot means more choice for voters, and therefore more competition. However, though contestation is the most basic form of competition, it is also the least descriptive. Having multiple candidates on the ballot does give voters a more meaningful choice, but if the third (or fourth, or fifth) place candidates are not quality challengers, then their presence on the ballot is unlikely to have a significant impact on the election. The vote percentage of the candidates is more indicative of overall competition levels, which is why the contestation component has the lowest overall weight on the index.

**Winning Candidate’s Percentage of the Vote**

The second competition indicator is the share of the vote controlled by the top two finishing candidates. It is common for scholars to use this as a measure of competition (Carson, Crespin, & Williamson, 2014; Holbrook & Dunk, 1993; Mayhew, 1974; Moncrief, 1998; Niemi et al., 2007). There are two important dimensions to consider here. First, the overall percentage of the vote earned by the winning candidate. In the studies cited above, it is a commonly held belief that a winning candidate receiving 60 percent or more of the vote is considered a landslide victory. I use this threshold as the benchmark for a non-competitive race on this component.
Races in which the winning candidate received less than 50 percent of the vote are considered the most competitive (with some exception, explained below). Races in which the winning candidate received 60 percent or more of the vote are considered non-competitive on this measure.

Second, it is important to consider the difference in vote percentage between first and second place. Consider the following example from the 2016 Washington primary election for LD 18, seat 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liz Pike (R)</td>
<td>42.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Gillespie (D)</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane Bowman (R)</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilana Brown (D)</td>
<td>13.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, though the winning candidate received less than 50 percent of the vote, she still finished more than 13 percent ahead of the second place candidate. This scenario tends to only occur in crowded races (though, not all crowded races feature this dynamic) where the vote is divided among the many candidates. It is possible, in such a scenario, that voters preferring the third or fourth place candidates could consolidate around the second place candidate, but in the vast majority of races, the candidate who wins the primary will go on to win the general election. In this race, Liz Pike went on to win the general election with 56 percent of the vote.

Consider another example from the 2016 primary, for LD 30, seat 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kristine Reeves (D)</td>
<td>50.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teri Hickel (R)</td>
<td>49.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, though there were only two candidates in the race, the vote is closely divided and both candidates have a realistic chance at winning the seat. In this race, Kristine

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39 See vote splitting, below
40 See chapter 4
Reeves did go on to win the seat, but by a very slim margin (51.1 percent of the vote). Both of these races are quite competitive, though in different ways. In the first example, the primary election is highly competitive: there are many candidates, and the winning candidate received less than 50 percent of the vote. In the second example, though the primary race was not contested, both the primary and general elections were competitive. Therefore, on this component, an extra point is awarded to races where the second place candidate finishes within five percent of the first place candidates. Such races are awarded a score of four on my index of electoral competition. Seats where the winning candidate receives less than 50 percent of the vote are scored with three points. Seats where the first place candidate receives between 50.1 and 54.9 percent receive two points. And seats where the winning candidate receives between 55 and 59.9 percent receive one point.

**Difference Between Second and Third Place Candidates**

In contested top two primary races, the difference between the second and third place candidates determines which candidate makes it to the general election, and which does not. This measure is somewhat unique to top two primaries, as in traditional partisan primary elections the winning candidate’s margin of victory would encompass this component. This is an important measure of competition which gives further nuance to the argument that competitive elections should give voters a meaningful choice between quality candidates. On the other hand, if the third place candidate finished far behind the second place finisher, they had minimal impact on the race.

On this component, I use a 10 percent difference between second and third place as the threshold for competition. Seats in which the third place candidate finished more than 10 percentage points behind the second place candidate receive zero points on this component. The
more narrow the difference, the greater the competition. Seats in which the third place candidate finished between seven and nine percent behind the second place candidate receive one point. Seats in which the third place candidate finished between five and seven points behind the second place candidate receive two points. And, seats in which the third place candidate finished less than five percentage points behind the second place candidate receive three points.

**Total Index Score**

The index ranges from zero (no competition) to nine points (high competition). A seat receiving a score of zero on the index would have only one or two candidates, and the winning candidate would have received more than 60 percent of the vote. An election scoring nine would have four or more candidates, a difference of less than five percent between the first and second place candidates, and a difference of less than five percent between the second and third place candidates.

**Traditional Primary Scoring**

In traditional, partisan primary elections, application of the index of electoral competition is applied differently. On the contestation component, seats are counted as contested if more than one candidate runs in the primary. This is because only a single candidate from each party can advance to the general election. Races with two candidates receive one point, and races with more than two candidates receive two points on this component.

The winning candidate’s percentage of the vote component is scored the same as in top two primary seats, with the exception of races with less than five percent difference between first and second place. This point is eliminated from the second component, as it is redundant with the third component. As with top two primaries, races in which the first place candidate receives less than 50 percent of the vote receive three points. Races in which the winning candidate receives
between 50.1 and 54.9 receive two points. Races in which the winning candidate receives between 55 and 59.9 percent receive one point. Races in which the winning candidate receives 60 percent or more of the vote receive zero points.

On the difference between second and third place component, scores are assigned based on the vote percentage difference between second and third place candidates. As with top two primaries, races in which the second place candidate finishes within five percent of the first place candidate receive three points. Races in which the second place candidate finishes between five and seven percent behind the first place candidate receive two points. Race in which the second place candidate finishes between seven and nine percentage points behind the first place candidate receive one point. And races with a difference of 10 percent or more between the first and second place candidates receive zero points on this measure. All together, traditional, partisan primaries can score between zero (no competition) and eight (high competition) on the index.

Though the index score is slightly different for traditional and top two primaries, comparisons between these types of primaries can still be made. I categorize competition into low, medium, and high levels, which can be compared with the different scores. Further, so few seats in 2006 featured any competition at all that the overall numbers are not significantly impacted by the differential scoring.

**Campaign Spending**

To add to my analysis of competition and the top two primary, I examine levels of campaign spending. This data is used to study the following hypotheses:

*H3: Electoral spending has increased with implementation of the top two primary.*
*H4: In elections where competition is high, spending will also be high.*

Understanding the interplay of campaign spending and competition has been the subject of many academic studies, with largely inconsistent results across time. In some studies, increased spending is associated with increased competition (Jacobson, 1978, 1985; Stratmann et al., 2006), while other studies have demonstrated that competition has decreased while spending has increased (Abramowitz, 1991; Abramowitz et al., 2006; Bonneau, 2004). The relationship between campaign spending and competition seems largely to depend on who is driving the spending (i.e. the incumbent or the challenger). This study will contribute to this debate by adding state politics and primary elections into the discussion.

The Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) collects information about campaign donations and spending by candidates. The PDC was created by a ballot initiative in 1973 after the state legislature failed to enact campaign finance regulations. The PDC is comprised of five individuals appointed by the governor of Washington for a five year term. They are tasked with tracking campaign donations and expenditures, as well as independent expenditures, and creating public reports. The organization is also able to hear cases dealing with campaign finance violations, and can levy fines if appropriate (Washington Public Disclosure Commission, 2016).

The PDC maintains a publically available website with reports on donations and spending for each candidate seeking election each year. For this project, I look specifically at expenditures. Expenditures are listed by date, meaning I am able to differentiate expenditures made before and after the primary election. Comprehensive spending data allows me to see patterns and draw conclusions more clearly. All expenditures are included in my data set, with
two important caveats. I excluded three types of expenditures from this analysis: candidate donations to the state political parties, candidate donations to their future campaigns, and repayment of personal loans using campaign funds. These expenditures were excluded because they were not spent in pursuit of gaining votes in the election under consideration. All other expenditures were included for each candidate running in the primary election. I use this data to analyze statistical linkages between electoral competition and campaign spending.

Voter Turnout

The final concept in my analysis is voter turnout. I use this data to statistically test the following hypotheses:

**H5:** Races with higher levels of competition will have higher levels of voter turnout.

**H6:** Races with higher spending also have higher levels of voter turnout.

**H7:** Races with both high competition and high spending have the highest levels of voter turnout.

While competition and spending are important for their own sakes, ultimately what matters is how those concepts impact voters. There are important linkages between competition, spending, and voter turnout. Competition in elections makes voters more interested and therefore more likely to vote (Franklin, 2004). Campaign spending also increases voter interest, as well as knowledge about the election, which increases voter turnout (Freedman et al., 2004). Therefore including voter turnout in this analysis is a natural extension of my other concepts.

Voter turnout data is readily available on the Washington Secretary of State's website (Washington Secretary of State, 2018). Data is available both as a raw total number of voters, and also as a percentage of total registered voters. Using this data, I analyze how the top two primary is impacting voting behavior in Washington. Ordinarily, a complicating factor would be
differences in voting levels in presidential and midterm year elections. This is less of a problem in Washington because the statewide primary is conducted independently from the presidential preference primary. In order to provide the most nuance about voter turnout, I primarily use raw voting totals for this analysis.

**Other Variables Considered**

While the core of this project focuses on electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout, several other variables are factored into the analysis. First, I am interested in better understanding vote splitting. This dynamic is important to note because of the increased potential for vote splitting in top two primaries. In races with, for example, many Republicans and one Democrat, the Republicans may split the vote in a way that allows the Democrat to make it to the general election. The Republican vote would likely reconvene to make the general election a victory for the prevailing Republican. This would be an instance where a competitive primary resulted in a non-competitive general election. Consider the following example from for LD 6, seat 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynette Vehrs (D)</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Volz (R)</td>
<td>29.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Field (R)</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Canty (R)</td>
<td>4.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Pfundt (NPP)</td>
<td>4.08%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, Lynette Vehrs was the lone Democrat amid a group of Republicans (and one candidate with no party preference). Vehrs was able to make it to the general election because the Republican vote divided among the other candidates. However, Mike Volz went on to win the seat with 53 percent of the vote, making for a less competitive general election. LD 6 is a solidly Republican district, and Vehrs stood little chance of winning the seat.
This scenario is of interest to this study because it can only occur in top two primary elections. In traditional primaries, many candidates from a single party could run and the vote could divide among those candidates, but that would not impact a member of the opposing party. Further, this scenario is an example of why some reformers sought to implement the top two primary in the first place. Single party dominant districts, like LD 6, could have more competitive elections if two Republicans (in this case) made it to the general election. However the presence of the singular Democrat complicates matters. The frequency of vote splitting is therefore an important component in telling the story of the top two primary.

Next, I consider the frequency and impact of same party general elections. As with vote splitting, this is a scenario unique to top two primary elections, and, at least potentially, allows for greater interparty competition. In single party dominant districts in states with traditional partisan primaries, the main competition occurs at the primary stage of the election: whichever candidate from the dominant party prevails is all but assured to win the seat. Top two primaries allow for same party general elections, which can create more competition at the general election stage of the process. As with vote splitting, studying the frequency and competitiveness of elections that result in same party general elections is essential for fully understanding this reform.

Other variables of interest to this study include the presence and electoral fortunes of incumbent candidates and third party candidates. Incumbents in America are elected at high rates, and I am interested as to whether this dynamic is changed with the implementation of the top two primary. Further, third parties often struggle with ballot access, and have been vocal opponents of the top two primary, as it is seen as a means for further marginalizing their
candidates. Finally, I briefly address candidate gender. Altogether, these additional variables allow me to present the first comprehensive analysis of the top two primary in Washington state.

This project studies the impact of the top two primary on electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout. I utilize a mixed methods approach and an innovative index of electoral competition to address seven key hypotheses, and further address other unique and important aspects of the top two primary reform. In the subsequent chapters, I present the application of my index of electoral competition, analysis of campaign spending and voter turnout, and some conclusions about how these dynamics are linked, and an overall assessment about the top two primary in Washington state.
Chapter 4: Competition Index

Competition is an important cornerstone of democracy and democratic elections. This project seeks to better understand how implementation of the top two primary in Washington has impacted electoral competition over time. In order to study this impact, I have developed an original index of electoral competition. In this chapter, I present analysis of the individual components of the index. This analysis demonstrates the composition of the index, which is then applied as a whole in the next chapter.

Index Indicators

My original index of electoral competition is comprised of three indicators: the number of candidates in the race, the vote percentage of the first place candidate, and the vote percentage difference between the second and third place candidates. Each of these indicators reflects different aspects of electoral competition, and together they provide a clear measure of competition.

Table 1: Index Indicators and Scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of candidates in the race</td>
<td>0-2 Candidates: 0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Candidates: 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Candidates: 2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First place candidate’s percentage of the vote</td>
<td>First place candidate receives 60% or more of the vote: 0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First place candidate receives between 56% and 59%: 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First place candidate receives between 51% and 55% of the vote: 2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First place candidate receives less than 50% of the vote: 3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;5% difference between first and second place: 4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference of 10% or more: 0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference between 7% and 9%: 1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following sections, I closely examine results from the application the individual indicators. First, I consider the number of candidates running in each primary election. Second, I inspect the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote. Here, I give special attention to races where the first and second place finishers were within five percentage points of one another, indicating a very close race. Third, I assess the difference in vote count between the second and third place finishers. Each of these indicators is explored in turn below.

**Number of Candidates**

The first factor in the index is the number of candidates running in the primary election. Contested elections are the most fundamental indicator of competition: elections cannot be competitive without multiple candidates running for office. If competition provides the means for voters to hold their elected official accountable, then having a choice among candidates is key. In traditional primary elections, more than one candidate competing for a party’s nomination is considered a contested election. In traditional primary elections, only one candidate in the election means that the race is totally non-competitive. This is because the singular candidate will automatically advance to the general election, and because there was only one candidate in the primary, there is no potential for competition.

In top two primaries, more than two candidates running in the primary is considered a contested election. In these scenarios, voters have a choice between candidates, and some candidate(s) will not make it to the general election. In top two primaries, an uncontested election may still be competitive on other factors. If there are only two candidates on the ballot,
both will automatically advance, signifying that the election is uncontested. However, the division of votes could still be close, meaning there is still potential for the election to be competitive. For example, most races with a less than five percent difference between the first and second place candidates featured only two candidates in the race (see Table 4). Such races are still competitive, even though both candidates automatically advanced to the general election. This is a key distinction between traditional and top two primaries.

**Table 2: Number of Candidates by Year in Primary Elections in Washington State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2006, when each party conducted their own primary elections, there were no primary candidates in just over 16% of primary elections (see Table 2). In other words, effectively, the primary election did not occur. This scenario likely developed as a result of either a strong incumbent candidate from the district’s majority party seeking reelection, or from a degree of single party dominance in the district that made it inadvisable for the minority party to invest.
resources in the election. This resulted in the opposing party running no candidates for that seat. Because parties had more control over their party members in the pick-a-primary system\textsuperscript{41}, they could better decide where and how to distribute their resources. The party would have the ability to determine which races were lost causes, and which were worth investing in. Having no candidates in the primary is the ultimate in uncontested elections, as voters have no one to vote for at all in the primary. Further, in 2006, 77\% of primary elections featured only one candidate, meaning that while voters did have someone to vote for and a primary election did take place, they had no choice between candidates. In fact, only 6.6\% of primary elections in 2006 were contested, meaning that voters only had a choice between candidates in about 13 primary elections. Uncontested elections seem to be the biggest barrier to competition in 2006, because if the election was uncontested, it is impossible for that election to score any points on the index. Other index indicators measure the relationship between candidates, and without multiple candidates in a race, competition is not possible.

In traditional primary elections, if only one candidate runs, that candidate automatically advances to the general elections. In top two primaries, because all candidates run together, if two candidates appear on the ballot, both automatically advance to the general election. Top two primary elections with only one or two candidates mean that those candidates automatically advance to the general election. Since implementation of the top two primary in 2008, the number of elections with only one candidate on the ballot has been largely consistent. Between 18 and 20 elections each year have only one candidate on the primary ballot, which means, effectively, that person will automatically win the seat (as they will have no competition in the general election). These elections feature no competition at either the primary or general

\textsuperscript{41} See chapter 1
elections stage, similar to elections featuring a single candidate in the pre-top two primary years. If democracy is a marketplace, then single candidate elections are a monopoly. Voters have no choice, and representatives have less incentive to provide quality representation. This is a market failure, and a true problem for the integrity of American elections and representative government. The top two primary appears to go a long way in addressing this problem, as single candidate elections dropped from 77% in 2006 to 20% or less in every top two primary year since 2006. This is a big advantage of the top two primary election system.

That said, many top two primary elections remain uncontested as the majority of these primary elections feature only two candidates, and both candidates automatically advance to the general election. In 2008, 2012, and 2014 about 75% of primary elections were uncontested (including races with only one or two candidates). In top two primary elections with only two candidates, voters can choose which candidate to support, but because both candidates automatically advance to the general election, their vote does not hold as much weight as it would in a contested elections. In other words, voters have a choice, but in the primary election that choice is not meaningful. Choice among candidates is the foundation of electoral competition. The top two primary seems to be moving Washington in the right direction in terms of encouraging more candidates to run in primary elections. However, the top two primary has not resulted in every voter, or even most voters, having a meaningful choice at the primary stage of the election process.

Interestingly, 2010 and 2016 feature more contestation in primary elections. In these years, 35% and 40% of races, respectively, feature three or more candidates. It is unclear at this time why more candidates were running in these two years, especially because 2010 was a midterm election, while 2016 was a presidential election. This could have been a result of
national factors, as 2010 is often considered a wave election for the Republican party. In Washington State, while Democrats maintained control of the State House, Republicans did pick up seven seats in 2010. However, this explanation does not apply for 2014 and 2016. 2014 had the lowest overall amount of contestation in top two primary years, but Republicans picked up four seats in the State House. In 2016, the overall partisan balance of the State House did not change, but this year featured the most contestation of any top two primary year. This suggests that a wave election alone does not explain contestation. National factors might partially explain high contestation in 2010, but this does not seem to be the case for 2016. Another possible explanation could be related to changes in the district boundaries as a result of the 2010 Census. Perhaps more candidates were running in an attempt to establish themselves in the old district boundaries, but again this does not explain the high contestation in 2016.

A more likely explanation is that high contestation years are followed by lower contestation years as a sort of cycle. 2006 and 2008 were low contestation years, so by 2010 the pool of quality candidates had built up, and many chose to run. The candidate pool was therefore smaller in 2012 and 2014, and built up again by 2016. This six year cycle would also address the presidential/non-presidential election year phenomenon because Washington State House elections appear to be operating at least somewhat independently from national election factors (i.e. the presence of a presidential candidate on the ballot). This “political cycles” dynamic will be further explored later in this chapter.

2008, 2012, and 2014 featured about 25 contested elections (see Table 1). 2008 and 2012 contained a slightly wider distribution of candidates, each having one race with a high number of candidates (seven). The most number of candidates in a race in 2014 was five. 2016 had the most races with four and five candidates, with 19 such races, and the second highest number of
candidates in a single race, with eight. 2010 had one race with the most candidates in a single primary election with nine.

Table 3: Index Scoring for Number of Candidates in the Race in Primary Elections in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 points</th>
<th>1 point</th>
<th>2 points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 demonstrates the index score for contested elections for each year in this analysis. Over the past decade, 76% of all elections in Washington have been uncontested, scoring zero points on the index. Only about 24% of elections were contested, with about 14% scoring one point on the index, and about 10% scoring 2 points on this indicator. The top two primary has significantly increased contestation, and this is likely the most important contribution of the top two primary: more candidates are running. However, most elections remain uncontested, meaning there is more work to be done in incentivizing candidates, especially quality candidates, to participate in electoral politics.

In 2006, voters had very little choice in determining who would represent them in their state government. 16% of primary elections had no candidates running, and 77% of primary
elections featured only a single candidate (see Table 2). This was a sad state of affairs for the people of Washington, and raised serious questions about the quality of representation they were receiving. Implementation of the top two primary in 2008 had an overall positive impact on voter choice in Washington. While only about 7% of elections were contested in 2006, approximately 30% of elections overall were contested in top two primary years. This is a solid improvement, and many more voters have had a meaningful choice in primary elections as a result of this reform. Still, the majority of elections feature only two candidates, indicating that for most voters, the primary election is a formality, not a substantive contest.

**First Place Candidate’s Percentage of the Vote**

One widely used measure of competition is the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote. This is perhaps the most important measure of competition, as it can be an indication of the quality of candidates, their ability to campaign, and voters’ perception of their performance. This indicator is also a place where top two primary elections can still be considered competitive, even if there are only two candidates on the ballot. In many studies, if the first place candidate receives 60% or more of the vote, it is considered a landslide, or non-competitive election (Carson, Crespin, & Williamson, 2014; Holbrook & Dunk, 1993; Mayhew, 1974; Moncrief, 1998; Niemi, Powell, Berry, Carsey, & Snyder, 2007). In top two primaries, the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote may be somewhat a function of how many candidates are in the race, or how the vote disperses. I account for this dynamic in my model of competition including a separate indicator for races where the first and second place finishers were within five percentage points of each other. In this way, this index component encompasses both the first place candidate’s raw vote total and the vote margin between first and second place. First, I analyze the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote.
Table 4: First Place Candidate’s Percentage of the Primary Election Vote in Washington State by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 25%</th>
<th>25.1% to 40%</th>
<th>40.1% to 50%</th>
<th>50.1% to 55.4%</th>
<th>55.5% to 60%</th>
<th>Greater than 60%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1 .6%</td>
<td>2 1.2%</td>
<td>1 .6%</td>
<td>3 1.8%</td>
<td>1 .6%</td>
<td>155 94.5%</td>
<td>163 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>4 4.1%</td>
<td>7 7.1%</td>
<td>13 13.3%</td>
<td>21 21.4%</td>
<td>53 54.1%</td>
<td>98 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>10 10.2%</td>
<td>11 11.2%</td>
<td>18 18.4%</td>
<td>13 13.3%</td>
<td>46 46.9%</td>
<td>98 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>7 7.1%</td>
<td>8 8.2%</td>
<td>10 10.2%</td>
<td>23 22.4%</td>
<td>50 51%</td>
<td>98 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>4 4.1%</td>
<td>7 7.1%</td>
<td>15 15.3%</td>
<td>18 18.4%</td>
<td>54 55.1%</td>
<td>98 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>10 10.2%</td>
<td>7 7.1%</td>
<td>16 16.3%</td>
<td>13 13.3%</td>
<td>52 53.1%</td>
<td>98 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1 .3%</td>
<td>37 5.7%</td>
<td>41 5.7%</td>
<td>75 10.9%</td>
<td>89 13%</td>
<td>410 59.6%</td>
<td>653 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In every year except for 2010, the majority of primary elections featured the first place candidate receiving 60% or more of the vote (see Table 4). This is most acute in the traditional primary election in 2006, where 95% of primary elections were won in a landslide. Only eight primary elections in 2006 featured any level of competition on this indicator, and only four of those races featured high levels of competition (meaning, the first place candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote). This is significant because in the very few races where voters had a choice between candidates (meaning an election was contested), an even smaller number of races featured candidates close to each other in terms of percentage of the vote. This indicates that the pick-a-primary system acted not only as a barrier for challenging candidates to run (see Table 2),

---

42 Data on this indicator was condensed based on natural cleavages in the voter percentages, resulting in columns that are not equivalent.

43 In 2006, 33 races with no candidate were excluded from this analysis, resulting in the reduction from 196 to 163 total elections.
but that the challenging candidates who did run were not of sufficiently quality to attract voters.

In the majority of top two primary years, with the exception of 2010, the first place candidate still gained 60% or more of the vote (see Table 4). However, this is a considerably smaller majority than in 2006, suggesting that the top two primary has had a positive impact on reducing the number of landslide primary victories. 2008 and 2014 had the highest number of landslide victories, with 53 and 54 elections respectively, while 2012 and 2016 were slightly better, with 50 and 52 landslide elections, respectively. 2010 was the only year when a majority of primary elections were not landslides, with only about 47% of races ending in a landslide victory. 2010 also had more elections on the other end of the spectrum, with 21 races featuring the first place candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote. This may partially be a function of 2010 having 34 races with three or more candidates. However, that does not totally explain this dynamic, as 2016 had 39 races with three or more candidates, but 52 races that ended in a landslide (see Tables 3 and 4). 2016 had 17 races where the first place candidate received less than 50% of the vote. 2008 and 2014 featured only 11 races with the first place candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote, and 2012 featured 15 such races.

Table 5: Number of Candidates and First Place Candidate’s Percentage of the Vote in Primary Elections in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 25%</th>
<th>25.1% to 40%</th>
<th>40.1% to 50%</th>
<th>50.1% to 55.4%</th>
<th>55.5% to 60%</th>
<th>Greater than 60%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44 As with the previous Table 4, 33 races in 2006 were excluded from this analysis because no candidate ran in the primary election.
Dispersion of the vote percentage is closely, but not entirely, related to the number of candidates running. By this I mean that when many candidates run in elections, voters are more prone to spread their votes out among the many candidates, making a landslide in the primary less likely. Generally speaking, the more candidates in a race, the less likely it is that the first place candidate will receive 60% or more of the vote. Five candidates in a race seems to be the tipping point for this phenomenon: in races with five or more candidates, the first place candidate has never received more than 55% of the vote, meaning no primary race with five or more candidates resulted in a landslide during the primary (see Table 5). Only about five percent of total primary elections featured five or more candidates, meaning this is a relatively rare occurrence. On the other end of the spectrum, in races with only two candidates, well over half featured a landslide victory for the first place candidate. When there are three candidates in a race, the dispersion of the vote is more evenly spread, but the majority of these races featured the first place candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote.
Figure 1: Winning Candidate’s Percentage of the Vote and Number of Candidates in Primary Elections in Washington State

Viewed a different way, it is clear that as the number of candidates increases, the average vote share of the first place candidate decreases. This is a consistent pattern, though the relationship is statistically moderate.\(^4\) This is likely due to the high number of races featuring a single candidate (who therefore received 100% of the votes), and a singular race with eight candidates in which the winning candidate received 52% of the vote. That said, visually there is a clear trend towards more candidates in the races resulting in a greater dispersal of the vote, and therefore a lower vote total by the winning candidate.

Because the number of candidates in the race and the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote are closely linked, I have included a separate indicator in my competition index to examine how close the election was, or the difference between first and second place (see Table

\(^4\) R: -.421 Sig. 000
1). A close election is an important indicator of competition: it signifies that both candidates have mounted a successful enough campaign to gain considerable support within their district. This analysis is important, because if the vote share difference between the first and second place candidates is less than five percent, the second place finisher is not far behind (in some districts, this could be less than a thousand votes), and could potentially make up that difference before the general election.

This indicator also accounts for races where there may be many candidates, causing the first place finisher to receive less than 50% of the vote, but where there is still a large gap between first and second place. In this instance, unless the vote was divided, it is unlikely that the second place finisher can overcome the difference and win the general election.

**Table 6: Percent Difference between the First and Second Place Finishers in Top Two Primary Elections in Washington State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Less than 5% Difference</th>
<th>More than 5% difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of primary elections do not feature a close race between the first and second place finishers. In 2008 and 2016, over 90% of elections resulted in more than a five
percent difference between first and second place. 2010 had the highest number of close races, with 16, and 2016 had the lowest number, with seven. 2012 and 2014 fall in the middle, with 11 close elections each (see Table 6). On the whole, top two primary election outcomes are not close, even if they are not in landslide territory.

Interestingly, a less than five percent difference is most likely to be found in races with only two candidates. Of the 50 races with less than five percent of votes separating first and second place, almost half, or 20 races, featured only two candidates. A vote that is more dispersed among several candidates may grant a distant second place finisher a better opportunity to close the gap in general elections, and in some instances a race with only two candidates may in fact become more competitive than races with many candidates.

While a difference of greater than five percent between first and second place is not ideal for the second place finisher, there are at least two scenarios where it would be possible for the second place candidate to recover. First, in a race with many candidates, voters who did not vote for the first place finisher may continue not supporting that candidate. This could allow the second place finisher to pick up voters from candidates who finished in third, fourth or fifth place, for example. However, that can be a tall order in races with only two or three candidates. Because races with five or more candidates occur infrequently, this scenario is unlikely to occur in a meaningful number of elections.

Second, the vote could split among many candidates from a single party. Vote splitting will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, but essentially if the vote splits among candidates from the district’s majority party, this can allow a member of the district’s minority party to advance to the general election. Voters from the majority party will then reunite in the
general election, allowing the majority party candidate to win the seat. In this situation, the minority party candidate may have received a higher percentage of votes in the primary election than the second place candidate, but will not win the general election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 Points</th>
<th>1 Point</th>
<th>2 Points</th>
<th>3 Points</th>
<th>4 Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-2⁴⁶</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The index scoring on this indicator again underscores the largely non-competitive nature of elections in Washington. A solid majority of elections, about 60%, scored zero points on this indicator (see Table 7) meaning that the first place candidate received more than 60% of the vote. 13% of races featured the winning candidate receiving between 55% and 59% of the vote. Nearly 11% of races featured the winning candidate receiving between 51% and 55% of the vote. 4.4% of races featured the winning candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote, but greater than 5% more votes than the second place candidate. And in 7.2% of races, the vote percent margin was less than 5% between the first and second place candidates, indicating the highest

⁴⁶ I removed this score for the 2006 elections to avoid double counting with the next indicator. In top two primary elections, the difference between second and third place determines which candidates made it to the general election, and which did not. Under traditional primary rules, this would be measured by the difference between first and second place. Therefore, for 2006, this indicator only measures the winning candidate’s raw percentage of the vote.
level of competition. Higher numbers of contested elections after implementation of the top two primary has had a largely positive effect on reducing landslide elections, but overall the candidate who finishes in first place is generally receiving the majority of votes.

This analysis yields important, if somewhat disappointing, conclusions about the top two primary. In most years, most primary elections feature the first place candidate winning in a landslide. This means that even when there is more than one candidate on the ballot, in most instances the second place finisher is facing an all but insurmountable barrier to winning the seat. While the winner’s percentage of the vote is linked to the number of the candidates in the race in top two primaries, these indicators also operate independently. Races with many candidates are more likely to feature the first place candidate receiving less than 50% of the vote, but this is not always the case. Finally, most primary elections feature a greater than five percent difference between first and second place, indicating that most races are not close. While the top two primary system is succeeding in giving voters more choice among candidates, those candidates are not necessarily mounting successful campaigns.

**Difference between Second and Third Place**

This measure is unique to top two primaries (see Chapter 3). The difference between second and third place determines which candidates advance to the general election, and which do not. This measure only applies to races with at least three candidates. A difference of less than five percent between the second and third place finishers is more competitive, while a difference of more than 10% is not competitive. In 2006, I use the difference between the first and second place finishers to determine who made it to the general election and who did not. It is important to note that only 161, or about 23%, of primary elections featured a sufficient number of candidates to be included in this analysis. The vast majority of races in 2006 featured only a
single candidate, and in the top two primary years, the majority of races featured only one or two candidates, meaning both candidates advanced automatically.

Table 8: Percent of the Vote Difference between Second and Third Place in Primary Elections in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Less than 5% Difference</th>
<th>5% to 10% Difference</th>
<th>Greater than 10% Difference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(first and second)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Percent</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2010 and 2016 featured the highest numbers of contested elections (see Table 2), and therefore had more elections included in this analysis. However, nearly 70% of contested elections in those years were non-competitive on this indicator (see Table 8). This demonstrates that while having multiple candidates is essential for competition, simply having multiple candidates on the ballot does not automatically result in a competitive election. In 2012, 32% of races featured less than five percent difference between second and third place, making it the year with the highest proportion of close races for the general election ballot. 2014 had the lowest proportion of close races, and also the highest proportion of races with a greater than 10% difference between second and third place. Less than 20% of the total number of races included in Table 8 were highly competitive on this measure. This suggests that even in races with
multiple candidates, there are generally two front runners, and the competition is between those candidates.

Table 9: Percentage of the Vote Difference between Second and Third Place Candidates and the Number of Candidates in Top Two Primary Elections in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 10%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote, the difference between the second and third place finishers is somewhat linked to the number of candidates in the race, though this link is less firm. Theoretically, more candidates on the ballot means greater dispersion of the vote, and potentially a greater likelihood of a close finish between second and third place. However, the data demonstrates this link is not constant. In races with three candidates, 75% result in the third place candidate finishing more than 10% behind the second place candidate. Of the 85 races with three candidates, only 21, or about 25%, featured any competition on this indicator (see Table 9). Among races with 5 or more candidates, the majority feature competition on this indicator. Notably, the single race with eight candidates did not result in a close finish between second and third place. The relationship between the number of candidates on the ballot and the difference between the second and third place finishers is, on the whole, less clear and consistent than the relationship between the number of candidates on the ballot and the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote. This is at least partially explained by
the low number of elections that are contested, and inconsistencies in the outlier races with 8 and 9 candidates (see Table 9). However, it does seem that in some instances, having more candidates does result in a tighter race.

**Figure 2: Difference between Second and Third Place Candidates and Number of Candidates in Top Two Primary Elections in Washington State**

The relationship between these variables is less consistent than the relationship between the first place finisher’s percentage of the vote and the number of candidates in the race. Broadly speaking, more candidates on the ballot results in a closer race between second and third place. However, races with six and eight candidates appear to be exceptions to this rule. The inconsistencies in this relationship are likely due to the lower number of races that qualified for inclusion in this analysis. While a larger number of candidates does seem to guarantee the first
place candidate a lower percentage of the vote, it does not guarantee a close race between the second and third place candidates.

A solid majority of races, 65%, featured a greater than 10% difference between the second and third place finishers (or first and second place finishers in 2006). Less than 20% of races are highly competitive on this indicator (see Figure 2). The explanatory power of this indicator is diminished by the low number of elections that can be included on this indicator. Overall, less than 25% of races have sufficient candidates for inclusion on this analysis. This means that, while the most competitive primary elections will have a close finish between second and third place, by itself this indicator does not hold much weight.

**Table 10: Index Scores for the Difference Between Second and Third Place in Primary Elections in Washington State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 Points (10% or more difference, or did not qualify)</th>
<th>1 Point (7-9% difference)</th>
<th>2 Points (5-7% difference)</th>
<th>3 Points (&lt;5% difference)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>190 (First and Second Place)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The index scores for this indicator further illustrate the low number of races that qualified for inclusion. Only 8.4% of elections were competitive on this measure (see Table 10). Interestingly, among races that were competitive on this indicator, high scores were the most common. Races in which the third place candidate received between 5% and 7% fewer voters than the second place competitor were the least numerous, with only five such races occurring. And in 3% of total races, the third place candidate received between 7% and 9% fewer votes than the second place finisher.

This chapter has presented analysis of my original index of electoral competition. Each component encompasses a different dimension of electoral competition. The biggest gains of the top two primary seem to be in encouraging more candidates to participate in elections. Contestation improved dramatically with implementation of the top two primary, giving voters more choice when they fill out their ballot. Great contestation has further worked to reduce the number of landslide elections. In 2006, 95% of primary elections resulted in the winning candidate receiving more that 60% of the vote. In top two primary years, this number is now closer to 50%, a significant improvement. However, even in top two primary years, most elections still feature the first place candidate receiving a majority of votes, and most elections are still not particularly close. Finally, a scant number of total elections feature a close race between the second and third place candidates. Overall, most elections feature two clear front runners, and those candidates receive a solid majority of votes.

In the next chapter, I look at competition in the top two primary comprehensively. While each index component measures an individual piece of the puzzle, together they provide a clear picture of electoral competition in Washington state.
Chapter 5: Analysis of the Top Two Primary in Washington

In the previous chapter, I presented analysis of the individual components of my original competition index. The index is comprised of the aforementioned indicators: number of candidates in the race, the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote, and the percentage difference between the second and third place finishers (or first and second place finishers in 2006) (see Table 1). Combining the scores from each of the components results in a single composite score. This score ranges from zero, indicating no competition, to nine, indicating high competition for top two primary years, and one to eight in 2006, the traditional primary year. 47

In this chapter, I present full analysis of my original index of electoral competition as applied to Washington State primary elections. I have two hypotheses for how competition has developed and changed with the implementation of the top two primary:

**H1:** The majority of primary elections in Washington remain uncompetitive under the top two primary.

**H2:** Competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary in Washington.

Each hypothesis will be addressed in turn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0 (none)</th>
<th>1 (low)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9 (high)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.4%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

47 In top two primary years, elections could score 4 points for a difference of less than five percent between first and second place. I did not include this in 2006, because it would result in races with less than five percent difference being double counted for the indicator measuring who got on the ballot. This results in one fewer point being available on the index for 2006.

See Chapter 3 for a complete explanation of the index and scoring procedures.
To begin, the index shows that competition has increased, rather significantly, with the introduction of the top two primary. In 2006, 93% of primary elections featured no competition at all (see Table 11). A further 2.6% of elections scored only a single point on the competition index, indicating a nearly non-competitive electoral environment. Overall in 2006, the mean index score was .23. The number of completely non-competitive elections drops by 43% with the implementation of the top two primary in 2008 (see Table 11). This is a significant increase in competition, and demonstrates that the introduction of the top two primary does have a positive impact on electoral competition. 2014 is the only top two primary year where a majority of primary elections, 53%, featured no competition. This is a considerably smaller majority than in 2006. 2008 and 2012 are evenly divided, with half of elections scoring zero on the index. 2010 and 2016 were the most competitive years, with only 44% and 47% of elections featuring no competition, respectively. Across all top two primary years, the mean index score was 1.69. This means that the top two primary has resulted in more competition over the more traditional primary system.

That said, races scoring zero on the index are the most common for each year. Top two primary races could only score zero in two scenarios. First, if only a single candidate ran, and second if only two candidates ran but the winner received more than 60% of the vote. Across all
top two primary years, 239 elections, or 48%, received a score of zero. This suggests that while the top two primary does have a positive impact on competition, it is not a magical elixir capable of creating a totally competitive electoral environment.

Among races featuring some competition, the overall highest frequency of races received a score of one on the index. A score of one was the most frequent (after zero) for all years except for 2010 and 2016. In 2010, the modal response was two, and in 2016 the modal score was 4. Almost 90% of races scored four or fewer points on the index, suggesting that while competition has increased, it has been marginal rather than dramatic. Interestingly, a score of four was the third most frequent overall. This is partially explained by the frequency of races with less than five percent difference between first and second place receiving a score of four. About 60% of races with a score of four were races with less than five percent difference between first and second place.

**Figure 3: Competition by Year in Top Two Primaries in Washington State**

![Graph showing competition by year in Washington State](image-url)
Graphically, the relationship between competition and the implementation of the top two primary is even starker. In figure 3, the low number of competitive elections in 2006 is prominent, as are the more consistent levels of competition in top two primary years. This graph further supports the general pattern of 2010 and 2016 being the most competitive top two primary years, while 2014 is the least competitive top two primary year.

In the following table, I divided competition into four categories: No Competition (score of zero), Low Competition (score of one to three), Moderate Competition (score of four to six) and High Competition (score of seven to nine). In this conception of my index, it is more apparent that the rise in competition has been rather uneven, marginal, and slow (see Table 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Competition (Score 0)</th>
<th>Low Competition (Score 1-3)</th>
<th>Moderate Competition (Score 4-6)</th>
<th>High Competition (Score 7-9)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In every year, the most frequent score for primary elections is zero, indicating no competition. In 2006, interestingly, there are an almost even number of low and moderate competition elections (though those numbers are small), and only two highly competitive
elections. 2008, 2012 and 2014 are similar across the low and moderate categories, though 2012 has more highly competitive elections. It is clearer here that 2010 and 2016 were more competitive overall, with fewer totally non-competitive elections, and more highly competitive elections. Looking at the index categorically demonstrates that the road to more competitive elections has not been smooth or consistent. Though, the trajectory towards greater competition is evident.

Table 13: Mean Competition Scores in Primary Elections in Washington State by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Competition Score</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the mean scores of each year confirms this trend. The average across all races each year is presented in Table 13. The high number of races scoring 0 in 2006 pulled the mean index score for that year down to only .23. 2010 had the highest mean index score at 2.3, and 2016 had the next highest average index score at 1.93. 2008, 2012, and 2014 all have lower average index scores, and are generally clustered around 1.5. The average index score among top two primary years is variable, ranging from 1.4 to 2.1, but overall scores are significantly higher than in 2006.

This presents an interesting puzzle. 2010 featured the most competitive elections: this year has the lowest number of races with a score of zero, the highest number of races with a high score, and the highest mean score. 2014 on the other hand appears to be the least competitive year: among top two primary years, it has the highest number of elections with a score of zero, the lowest number of elections falling into the moderate and high scoring categories, and the
lowest mean score among top two primary years. These are both non-presidential election years, so it is not immediately clear why there is such discrepancy in the levels of competition. It is possible that national factors were at play, as 2010 was a particularly contentious year, and 2014 was a particularly uncontentious year in national elections. More exploration to understand the exact dynamics at play in those years may be warranted.

Another explanation might be that electoral competition is cyclical. 2010 was highly competitive, many people ran for office and lost, which could have depleted the overall pool of candidates. Further, 2016 was also a significantly more competitive year, which could be explained by the lower levels of competition in 2012 and 2014. Perhaps the lower levels of competition in these years allowed the candidate pool to build back up, creating a more competitive year in 2016. More data will be required to see if this pattern holds, and this would explain the anomalous levels of competition in 2010 and 2014.

This data largely confirms both hypotheses with a few caveats. First, competition has increased with the implementation of the top two primary. In 2006, 93% of elections were totally non-competitive. In top two primary years, around 50% or fewer primary elections feature no competition. This allows me to conclude that top two primary elections are more competitive using this measure than traditional primary elections. That said, and to address my second hypothesis, in most years, close to a majority of elections remain uncompetitive. Across all top two primary years, 48% of primary elections received a score of zero on the index. This means that my second hypothesis is not confirmed across all top two primary years as a whole.

48 $H1$: The majority of primary elections in Washington remain uncompetitive under the top two primary.

$H2$: Competition has increased with implementation of the top two primary in Washington.
However, in 2014, the majority of elections were non-competitive, and in 2008 and 2012, the division is 50/50. This leaves only two top two primary years where the majority of elections feature some level of competition. Taken together, it is clear that the top two primary does increase competition, although most elections still feature no or very little competition.

**What is Driving the Increase in Competition?**

Thus far, this chapter has examined my original index of electoral competition as applied to top two primary elections in Washington state. This demonstrates that competition has increase, albeit rather marginally, with the implementation of the top two primary. In this section, I examine how each index indicator contributes to the overall index scores. Below, data from 2006 has been excluded, as here I am primarily interested in dynamics of top two primary elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14: Individual Indicator Contributions to the Index Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index Score</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* **p: < .01 (2-tailed)*

There is a strong, positive relationship between the number candidates running in the election and the index score. This is the strongest relationship, suggesting that competition is largely being drive by contestation. This makes sense, as competition is impossible if the election is not contested. Interestingly, the number of candidates in the race is the biggest factor driving
competition despite being the lowest weighted indicator on the index. Elections could receive a maximum score of two points on this indicator for races with four or more candidates. The other indicators have a higher potential score, with a maximum of four points available for the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote, and three points available for a close race between second and third place. This also helps to explain why the growth in competition has been at the lower end of the index. If index scores are largely driven by the number of candidates, and that indicator receives a lower score, it would make sense that index scores would increase, but by only one or two points. That said, a contested election is the most basic component of competition, and that is demonstrated here.

There is a strong, negative relationship between the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote and the index score. This is largely explained by the majority of elections featuring a first place candidate receive 60% or more of the vote. Races with the first place candidate receiving a higher percentage of the vote will result in a lower index score. There is a moderate positive relationship between the difference between the second and third place candidates and the total index score. The more muted relationship here is likely due in part to the smaller number of elections with multiple candidates, and the higher likelihood of a distant third place finisher, rather than a close third place finisher. As noted above, 65% of races on this measure featured the third place candidate finishing more than 10% behind the second place candidate. Therefore, the difference between second and third place is the lowest driver of the increase in competition.

Table 15: Index Score Regression in Primary Elections in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

49 See Chapter 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>0.198</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates</td>
<td>1.222**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.044)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Place Percent</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between Second and Third Place</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted R-Squared | 0.708 |

**p: < .01 (two-tailed)

Again, the number of candidates in the race is the most important predictor of the index score. Here, the impact of the difference between second and third place is negligible and insignificant. The impact of first place candidate’s percentage of the vote is significant, but minimal. Overall, competition in Washington state primary elections is largely being driven by the number of candidates in the race.

**Incumbents**

Another important facet of competition is the role of incumbents. Incumbent candidates have numerous advantages in the American political system, including established donor networks, name recognition, and a voting record to run on (Erikson, 1971; Mayhew, 1974; Maisel, 1990; Cox & Morgenstern, 1995). Many scholars point to the high reelection rates among incumbent candidates as a symptom of uncompetitive elections in America. In any given election year, between 90 and 99% of incumbent candidates win reelection in national elections. This could mean that incumbents are capitalizing on their advantages and working to stifle competition to retain their position, or it could mean that incumbents are representing their
constituents well, and are therefore reelected. This analysis of the top two primary can contribute to this debate by analyzing how incumbent candidates are performing under the top two primary.

**Table 16: Incumbent Victory in General Elections by Year in Washington State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Incumbent Wins</th>
<th>Incumbent does not Win</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To begin, I examine whether the top two primary is having an impact on incumbency rates in the general election. This table does not differentiate open seats from seats where the incumbent was defeated, which will be examined below. Because I am looking at the general election here, 2006 also has 98 total elections. The top two primary seems to be having a small but notable impact on incumbent reelection rates in Washington. In 2006, nearly 88% of incumbents were reelected to their seats. There is an almost 10% drop in incumbent reelection rates in 2008 and 2010. In both years, 75 out of 98 elections were won by incumbents. 2012 saw the lowest number of incumbents reelected, at 73, and 2014 had the highest number of incumbents reelected (among top two primary years) with 77. 2016 also had a higher number of incumbents winning, at almost 78%. Overall, in top two primary years, incumbent candidates are
reelected on average 76% of the time (see Table 16). The top two primary has resulted in fewer incumbents winning reelection, but again, this effect is small.

**Table 17: Incumbents Defeated versus Open Seats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Incumbent Wins</th>
<th>Incumbent Defeated</th>
<th>Incumbent Not Present (open seats)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I look to how many incumbents were defeated versus how many chose not to run, creating an open seat. Incumbents have been reelected in over 80% of total races in Washington over the past decade. Among races where the incumbent does not win, the overwhelming majority, 83%, are an open seat. While there are more open seats in top two primary years, the top two primary reform seems to have no real impact on challengers defeating incumbents. In fact, more incumbents were defeated in 2006 than in 2012 and 2016. Interestingly, 2014, which was the least competitive year on the index featured the highest proportion of incumbents being defeated. This demonstrates that the non-incumbents are performing better with the top two primary largely because fewer incumbents are seeking reelection each year.
Table 18: The Impact of Incumbents on Electoral Competition in Top Two Primary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Competition</th>
<th>Low Competition</th>
<th>Moderate Competition</th>
<th>High Competition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Present</td>
<td>222 (56.3%)</td>
<td>114 (28.9%)</td>
<td>55 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (.8%)</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Not Present</td>
<td>17 (17.7%)</td>
<td>20 (20.8%)</td>
<td>38 (39.6%)</td>
<td>21 (21.9%)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>239 (48.8%)</td>
<td>134 (27.3%)</td>
<td>93 (19%)</td>
<td>24 (4.9%)</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally I look at the effect of incumbents on electoral competition. Here, I include only top two primary elections. While I would expect that races with no incumbent would be the most competitive, that is not universally the case. Previously presented data, demonstrates that most races have either no or low competition, and in those categories, the majority of races featured an incumbent. While the majority of races with an incumbent are non-competitive, it is not an overwhelming majority. 44% of incumbents faced some competition for their seat, which is a positive development. That said, incumbents faced a serious challenge for their seat in less than 1% of elections. As expected, elections with high competition are much more likely to have no incumbent running. This makes sense, as quality candidates are generally aware that they have a better shot at winning when an incumbent is not on the ballot. Interestingly, most races with no incumbent have only moderate competition. Aside from the higher number of non-incumbent races featuring moderate competition, elections with no incumbent are almost evenly divided between no, low and high competition. While races with an incumbent are more likely to be uncompetitive, races without an incumbent are not necessarily more likely to be competitive.

Incumbents perform very well under the top two primary rules. They are reelected an average of 76% of the time in top two primary years. This is down from the nearly 88%
reelection rate of incumbents in 2006. While incumbents were less likely to be reelected in top two primary years, this was driven largely by fewer incumbents running, rather than incumbents being defeated. Perhaps the means are less important than the ends here for proponents of increasing electoral competition: there are fewer incumbents being reelected with the top two primary, and whether that is because they are not running or because they are being defeated, there are fewer of them serving in the legislature, which is an important development. Either way, incumbents are still winning the vast majority of the time. Finally, the relationship between incumbents and electoral competition is somewhat complicated. While having an incumbent in the race seems to be a good predictor of races being less competitive, not having an incumbent in the races is not necessarily a good predictor that the race will be more competitive.

**Other Facets of Top Two Primaries**

In this section I will examine three additional aspects of the top two primary. First, I look at how well the primary predicts the outcome of the general election. In other words, how frequently does the winner of the primary election go on to win the general election. Next, I look at the prevalence of same party general elections. Because the top two finishers of the primary can be from the same political party, this is an important and unique dynamic of top two primaries. Finally, I look at vote splitting, which occurs when multiple members of a district’s dominant party run, causing the vote to disperse in such a way as to allow a minority party candidate onto the general election ballot. Each of these aspects will be examined in turn, and I will then demonstrate the linkages between them. As a note on methodology, 2006 has been excluded from this section, as same party general election and vote splitting only applies to top two primaries, and I am only interested in how well the outcomes of the top two primary elections predict the winner of the general election.
The Primary Election as a Predictor of the General Election

To begin, I look at how well the primary election predicts the outcome of the general election. A general election is what differentiates a top two primary from the jungle primary used in Louisiana. In Washington, the primary election is held in August, and the general election is held on the national Election Day in November. After implementation of the top two primary, there have been 76 primary elections (over five election cycles) where the first place candidate has received less than 50% of the vote. Further, in the overwhelming majority of elections, the winner of the primary goes on to win the general election.

Table 19: Does the Winner of the Primary Win the General Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary Winner Wins the Seat</th>
<th>Primary Winner Does Not Win the Seat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In over 90% of elections in each top two primary year, and nearly 95% of elections across all five cycles, the winner of the primary goes on to win the general election. 2010 and 2014 had the highest number of races where the second place candidate in the primary goes on to win the general election, with eight and seven such elections, respectively. 2008 had only 5

50 Under this system, the primary election is held on the national Election Day. All candidates appear on the same ballot, and if one candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, they are elected to the position. If no candidate reaches the 50% threshold, the top two candidates proceed to a run-off election a few weeks later.
51 See Figure 2
elections where the second place candidate won the general, and 2012 and 2016 each had 3 such elections. On the whole, presidential election years have similar rates of predictive primaries, as do non-presidential election years, with 2008 falling in the middle. This data suggests two things. First, the primary election in Washington is incredibly important for candidates. Ninety-five percent of the time, the primary determines who wins the seat. This is largely explained by the number of candidates running in each race. Seventy percent of top two primary elections featured only one or two candidates. In a single candidate race, that candidate will win the seat by default, as they will have no competition in the general election. In races with two candidates, the winner of the primary will most likely to win the general election, barring a scandal or other event, as voters are unlikely to change their vote. Therefore, candidates who do not perform well in the primary have a very small chance of recovering to win the seat. Second, when combining this with the data on the first place candidate’s percentage of the vote, in most instances the general election is wholly unnecessary, at least for State House elections. Perhaps Louisiana has the right idea, and Washington might be better off moving to a system more like the jungle primary. In any case, the primary election is a good predictor of general election outcomes, meaning candidates would do well to invest their time and resources into a solid performance at this stage of the election cycle.

Same Party General Elections

One unique aspect of the top two primary is the potential for same party general elections. Because all candidates appear on the same ballot, the top two finishers can be two

---

52 The cost of elections in Washington varies by county and is based on the number of registered voters. In Pierce County, the second most populous county in the state, the cost of normally scheduled primary and general elections is about $1.50 per voter. With about 33,000 voters, the cost of holding two elections is about $66,000 per year (Schmidtke & Rooney, 2015).
Democrats or two Republicans.\textsuperscript{53} This is one of the more controversial aspects of the top two primary. On the one hand, out party members in a district with a same party general election have no candidate from their party for whom to vote. On the other hand, same party general elections are most likely to occur in districts where a large majority of voters are from a single party, so a minority party candidate was unlikely to win anyway. Therefore, in a same party general election, minority party voters can still influence the candidates (and eventual representative) by voting for the lesser of two evils candidate.

\underline{Table 20: Frequency of Same Party General Elections in Washington State}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Same Party</th>
<th>Different Parties</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Same party general elections do not occur frequently in Washington. 2012 had the highest number of same party general elections with 12, while 2008 had the fewest with 5.

Overall, same party general elections occur a little over seven percent of the time (see Table 20). This suggests that same party general elections are infrequent, and do not appear to have a large impact on the overall electoral landscape in Washington. To further this analysis, I added a control for the presence of a third party candidate in the general election. Third party candidates

---

\textsuperscript{53} Or, theoretically, two members of a third party. This has not yet occurred.
appear in 9% of general elections. This means that 83.4% of general elections feature a Democrat versus a Republican. This suggests that, in Washington at least, the top two primary does not challenge the two party system. If anything, it seems to further entrench the two parties.

Finally, I examined the relationship between primaries that result in a same party general election and electoral competition. In short, primary elections that result in a same party general election do not seem to be any more or less competitive than primaries that result in general elections with candidates from different parties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 21: Same Party General Elections and Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same Party General Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Party General Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primaries that result in a same party general and those that result in a general with different parties have almost the same proportion of elections with no competition, and in the low, moderate, and high competition categories, are within 10% of each other. First and foremost, same party general elections are rare, occurring less than 10% of the time. While this is a potential outcome of top two primary elections, it occurs so infrequently as to have a minor impact on the overall politics of the state. Second, primaries that result in same party general elections are not categorically different from the majority of primary elections, suggesting that again, while the potential is there, it is largely a matter of indifference.
Vote Splitting

Another concern with top two primaries is the potential for vote splitting. This occurs when multiple candidates from a single party run in the primary, and voters divide in such a way as to allow a single member of the opposite party to move on to the general election. Theoretically, this could create a highly competitive primary election, but a non-competitive general election, as members of the majority party would most likely rejoin to vote for the prevailing candidate from their party. Though, as we have seen, the vast majority of time the primary election decides who will win the seat, elections with vote splitting are potentially an exception. To count as vote splitting, an election needed to include multiple candidates from one party and a single candidate from the other party. The candidate from the out party had to make it to the general election, and none of the candidates from the majority party could receive more than 50% of the vote. Further, the total votes for the majority party candidates combined had to equal more than the votes from the single member of the out party. If, despite these criteria, I was still unclear whether the vote had split, I would look to previous elections to see if the party with multiple candidates had held the seat in previous elections. In all instances, this clarified whether or not vote splitting had occurred.

Table 22: Vote Splitting in Top Two Primaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote Split</th>
<th>Vote Did Not Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like same party general elections and the second place primary finisher winning the general election, vote splitting does not occur frequently. However, after 2008, it does occur fairly consistently, with between six and eight elections featuring vote splitting. That said, in over 90% of elections, vote splitting does not occur. While opponents of the top two primary may cite this as a potential issue, it is occurring in so few elections it is likely not having much impact on the overall politics of the state.

That said, there are other important dynamics surrounding primary elections with vote splitting. While it occurs in very few elections, there is an important relationship between this phenomenon and primary predicting the general election result. Of the 26 elections where the winner of the primary did not win the general election, 20, or 77%, featured vote splitting. Generally, elections with vote splitting are also more competitive. Of the 31 elections with vote splitting, 20, or 65%, featured moderate competition, and 11, or 35%, featured high competition (see Table 22). Elections with vote splitting always feature some competition, and are more likely to feature high competition than races where the vote did not split. This suggests that while these types of elections are rare, they are the most competitive, particularly for the candidates from the majority party, and therefore are likely to be among the more interesting elections for voters. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the dynamics of competition in top two primaries. As compared to the pick-a-primary system used in 2006, more candidates are running in primary elections, and significantly fewer first place candidates are winning by a landslide (meaning
receiving greater than 60% of the vote). Primary elections have become significantly more competitive with implementation of the top two primary. In 2006, 93% of primary elections featured no competition at all. In top two primary years, only about 50% of primary elections featured no competition. This reform has proven successful at increasing voter choice in primary elections, which is an important accomplishment for proponents of this reform.

That said, the top two primary is not perfect. While it has increased competition, much of that increase has come at the lower end of the scale. Very few elections are highly competitive, and incumbents are still winning at very high rates. With this reform, the general election is most often a formality, as the winner of the primary goes on to win the general election 95% of the time. All told, while the top two primary does seem to have been a beneficial reform for the people of Washington, those benefits are likely not as consistent or dramatic as proponents may have hoped.
Electoral competition is a complex concept. To fully understand electoral competition, we must view it through multiple overlapping and intersecting lenses. In the previous chapters, I constructed, applied, and analyzed my original index of electoral competition. This index incorporates and synthesizes three indicators: the number of candidates in the race, the vote percentage received by the first place finisher, and the vote percentage difference between second and third place, which determines who advances to the general election in top two primary years. Each of these indicators describes a different aspect of electoral competition, and they work together to give a more complete picture of the competitiveness of a race.

There are two other crucial, yet distinct concepts related to electoral competition: campaign spending and voter turnout. The former measures how much candidates spend in the primary election to disseminate their message to voters. The latter measures how well voters respond to candidates, and the effectiveness of candidate and party voter mobilization efforts. I hypothesize that the most competitive races will have higher levels of spending, as candidates work to increase their vote share. They will also have higher voter turnout, as voters will be more engaged and interested in the race and parties will work to mobilize supporters. In this chapter, I begin by examining the evolution of electoral spending with the implementation of the top two primary, then demonstrate the linkages between spending and competition. Next, I examine voter turnout in Washington, specifically examining whether the top two primary has impacted overall turnout in the state. Finally, I bring competition, campaign spending and voter turnout together to specify the relationship between these variables and paint the clearest picture yet of the impact of the top two primary reform on electoral competition.
Candidate Level Campaign Spending and the Top Two Primary

In this section, I look at the relationship between political spending and the top two primary. Across the nation, elections are getting more expensive. The largest increase in spending has come at the presidential level, but all national level candidates have been impacted (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Candidate Spending in Federal Elections Over Time

Evidence about candidate spending at the state level is much more limited. This section provides important insights about how candidate spending has evolved over the past decade, as well as how competition and spending work together under the top two primary system. I proceed with two hypotheses:

H3: Electoral spending has increased with implementation of the top two primary.

H4: In elections where competition is high, spending is also high.

Table 23: Candidate Spending in Washington State Primary Elections by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $20,000</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $30,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $40,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $50,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $60,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 to $70,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000 to $80,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 to $90,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000 to $100,000</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55 Elections in 2006 with no candidates running were omitted from this analysis.
I begin this analysis by looking at candidate level spending categorically by year\textsuperscript{56}. Since 2006, 1,330 candidates have run for the Washington State House of Representatives (see Table 23). As discussed in the previous chapter, the top two primary has had a significant, positive effect on the number of candidates running in these elections. Theoretically, more candidates running would increase the amount of money being spent, but that does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, spending levels have, by and large, remained consistent with implementation of the top two primary.

Across all years, an average of 17.5\% of primary election candidates spent no money on their campaigns (see Table 23). Interestingly, 2010 and 2016 had about 20\% of candidates spending no money, despite being the most competitive years on the index. Conversely, 2008 and 2012, which were lower competition years, had about 15\% of candidates spending no money. 2014 was the least competitive top two primary year on the index, and had the highest proportion of candidates spending no money, at about 21\%. On the other end of the spectrum, 2006 had the smallest proportion of candidates spending no money, at only about 13\%. This is likely due to a higher number of uncontested races in 2006 (see Table 2).

This data suggests two things. First, getting on the ballot is much easier than running an effective campaign. While more candidates are running since the top two primary was implemented, fewer candidates are able to raise the funds necessary for electoral success. Second, the relationship between electoral competition and campaign spending is not straightforward. The most competitive years, 2010 and 2016, had a higher number of candidates spending no money, while 2006, the least competitive year included in this analysis, had the

\textsuperscript{56} Campaign finance data was collected from the Washington Public Disclosure Commission. See Chapter 3 for more details.
fewest number of candidates spending no money. However, 2014, the least competitive top two primary year, did feature a slightly higher proportion of candidates spending no money. It appears that competition is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for higher spending in elections.

The highest proportion of candidates in each year spent less than $10,000 on their campaigns (see Table 23). For every year except for 2010, around 30% of candidates fell into this category. In 2010, only around 25% of candidates spent less than $10,000. Across all years, 64% of candidates spent less than $20,000 on their campaigns, and only 10% of candidates spent more than $50,000. On the whole, spending levels have largely remained consistent across all years, even with implementation of the top two primary in 2008.

Table 24: Mean and Median Candidate Level Spending in Washington State Primary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$21,479.86</td>
<td>$19,075.46</td>
<td>$18,731.64</td>
<td>$21,332.71</td>
<td>$17,731.88</td>
<td>$17,850.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$11,394.77</td>
<td>$11,080.66</td>
<td>$13,149.50</td>
<td>$13,943.79</td>
<td>$10,837.80</td>
<td>$7,496.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Adjusted for Inflation$57</td>
<td>$26,289.28</td>
<td>$21,728.26</td>
<td>$21,412.27</td>
<td>$23,108.28</td>
<td>$18,604.26</td>
<td>$18,495.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Adjusted for Inflation</td>
<td>$13,946.10</td>
<td>$12,621.63</td>
<td>$15,031.29</td>
<td>$15,104.37</td>
<td>$11,371.01</td>
<td>$7,767.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I analyze overall candidate level spending. With the exception of 2012, overall candidate spending has decreased with implementation of the top two primary. Candidates on average spent more money before the top two primary in 2006 than they have under the top two primary rules. When mean spending is adjusted for inflation, this dynamic becomes clearer. In

2006, the average candidate spent over $3,000 more than the average candidate in 2012, the top two primary year with the highest spending. While 2012 had higher spending than other top two primary years, this appears to be an anomaly rather than the norm. 2014 and 2016 featured the lowest average candidate spending, with about $4,500 less per candidate.

Median spending tells a slightly different, but not entirely inconsistent story about candidate spending and the top two primary. Spending dropped by about $1,300 between 2006 and 2008, when the top two primary was implemented. 2010 and 2012 featured similar levels of median spending, at around $15,000. This drops significantly in 2014, before bottoming out in 2016. Higher spending in 2006 (see Table 24) may be partially explained by the overall lower proportion of candidates spending no money combined with overall fewer candidates running that year. However, 2008 and 2012 had identical proportions of candidates spending no money. Yet, 2012 had higher mean and median spending than 2008. Interestingly, top two primary years all featured the same number of candidates spending more than $100,000, meaning that changes in median spending across those years are not the result of some candidates spending a great deal of money.

This data suggests that while more candidates are running in top two primary elections, the amount of money available to them is not growing at a similar pace. It seems that in Washington, the pie of available donors is limited, forcing more candidates to split the pie amongst themselves, and leading them to spend less money overall. This is a system most likely to favor incumbent candidates, as they have already established donor networks from previous elections.
Table 25: Incumbent and Non-Incumbent Spending in Washington State Primary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Primary Elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>$24,818.99</td>
<td>$17,912.34</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Incumbent</td>
<td>$16,212.49</td>
<td>$5,445.73</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Two Primary Elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>$24,681.46</td>
<td>$18,333.86</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Incumbent</td>
<td>$15,936.30</td>
<td>$5,095.42</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, incumbents spent about $8,500 more than non-incumbent candidates in primary elections (see Table 25). It seems that a few non-incumbents spent higher amounts of money, pulling the mean for all non-incumbents up rather dramatically, and creating a large discrepancy between mean and median spending for non-incumbent candidates. High spending by some incumbents also pulled average spending up for all incumbents, but not as significantly as for non-incumbents. Looking at the median spending for incumbent and non-incumbent candidates further clarifies this relationship, and paints an even more difficult picture for non-incumbents. Median spending shows an over $12,000 advantage for incumbent candidates. Table 25 supports the conclusion that campaign spending is an incumbency advantage.

The top two primary does not appear to have done much to help non-incumbents raise money. Incumbents after 2008 spent about $8,700 more than non-incumbents on average. The median spending by incumbents in top two primary years had risen to over $13,000 more than non-incumbents. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that incumbent candidates are reelected 76% of the time in top two primary elections (see Table 16). The ability of incumbents to out raise and outspend non-incumbent candidates is a major contributing factor to the high incumbent reelection rates.
There is also a significant link between how much candidates spend, and their placement in the primary. I expect that the candidate spending the most money is most likely to place first in the primary. The data supports this hypothesis.

### Table 26: Candidate Finish Place and Spending in Washington State Primary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Mean Spending</th>
<th>Median Spending</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$25,532.68</td>
<td>$18,660.63</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$14,890.72</td>
<td>$5,087.41</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$10,939.23</td>
<td>$803.95</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$11,068.14</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$10,432.97</td>
<td>$3,287.74</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$9,905.98</td>
<td>$1,288.25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$5,663.18</td>
<td>$414.16</td>
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<td>$0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Candidates finishing in first place spent, on average, over $10,000 more than second place candidates (see Table 26). It is important to note the link between incumbency and first place finishers. Incumbents finished in first place 98% of the time across all primary years. Most likely, this creates a circular link between money, incumbency, and winning the primary election (which, over 90% of the time means they win the seat, see Table 19). Donors by and large want to support a winning candidate, incumbents win elections, and donors continue supporting them. When combining this with other incumbency advantages, for example name recognition, it is tremendously difficult for non-incumbent candidates to defeat incumbent candidates.

Predictably, as candidates move further from first place, they spend lower amounts of money. Races with many candidates appear to act as a filter for those who are unable to successfully mobilize donors. The most viable candidates will raise more money, will have a greater ability to disseminate their message to voters, and will be more likely to finish in a more
competitive position. Interestingly, there seems to be a shift in spending based on how many candidates are in the race. Elections with 5 or more candidates have higher median spending among lower placed candidates (see Table 26). Candidates finishing in fourth place have median spending of $0, but higher mean spending than candidates who finished in third place. This suggests that in races with at least four candidates, outliers are significantly impacting spending.

Finally in this section, I attempt to establish a correlation between factors that predict how much a candidate will spend in a primary election. In addition to the candidate’s finish place and incumbency status, I also included their party affiliation and gender in this analysis.58

**Table 27: Candidacy and Spending in Washington State Primary Elections**

| Primary Election Spending | Finish Place | -.218** | Incumbent | .164** | Female Candidate | .079** | Male Candidate | -.079** | Republican | -.70* | Democrat | .183** | Third Party | -.208** | N | 1330 |

**Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)**
*Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

While each of these variables is significant in predicting candidates’ primary election spending, none of these factors stand out as a particularly strong predictor of spending. The strongest predictor is a negative relationship between candidate finish place and spending, suggesting that candidates further away from first place will spend less money. In terms of party

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58 Categories for gender, party and incumbency were coded as dummy variables for this analysis.
affiliation, Democrats spend more money than Republicans and third party candidates, with third party candidates spending the least amount of money. Gender is the weakest predictor of candidate spending. Female candidates spent about $4,500 more than male candidates on average, but male candidates outnumbered female candidates by about a three-to-one margin. Interestingly, incumbency is also a very weak predictor of spending. Though incumbent candidates spent more than non-incumbents, there were about twice as many non-incumbents, thus complicating this analysis.

On the whole, we can say that the relationship between the top two primary and campaign spending is complicated at best. Most candidates spend less than $10,000, and only about 10% of candidates spend more than $50,000. Implementation of the top two primary, interestingly, has resulted in overall lower spending for both incumbent and non-incumbent candidates. 2010 and 2012 had higher spending among top two primary years, but even the highest top two primary year, 2012, had lower average spending than 2006. Finally, incumbency, finish place, gender and party affiliation are all weak to moderate predictors of candidate spending, though all are significant.

**Seat Level Campaign Spending and Electoral Competition**

In the previous section, I analyzed campaign spending at the candidate level. In this section, I move to the seat level to assess the relationship between campaign spending and overall competitiveness of an election. In Washington, each district elects two representatives to the state House of Representatives (described as seat 1 and seat 2). For this analysis, I combine the spending of all of the candidates for a seat together to show total spending for a seat. I can then compare this information to my original index of electoral competition to show how these dynamics work together.
Looking at the seat level paints a very different picture of campaign spending with implementation of the top two primary. At this level, adjusted spending nearly doubled from 2006 to 2008, when Washington implemented the top two primary system (see Table 28). While candidates may be spending less on average under the top two primary, seats appear to have gotten significantly more expensive (see Table 28). 2010 and 2012 featured the highest average spending among top two primary years, at just over $52,000 per seat. 2014 featured the lowest average spending, at just over $39,000, and 2008 and 2016 fall in between, at just over $48,000 and close to $50,000, respectively.

Interestingly, while 2012 had the highest median candidate spending (see Table 24), it has only the third highest spending at the seat level. 2010 had the highest median spending, at $4,000 more per seat than 2008. All top two primary years featured substantially higher median spending than 2006. This is likely explained, at least in part, by the higher numbers of candidates running in top two primary years, though the fact that average candidate spending is lower complicates this explanation. This suggests that the overall “pie” of money available to candidates has expanded with implementation of the top two primary, but that pie is not evenly distributed across all candidates and all races.
Next, I look at the relationship between spending and electoral competition. By and large, there is a clear trajectory towards higher spending with increased levels of competition. There is about a $25,000 jump between races that scored a zero on the index and races that scored a single point (see Table 29). Furthermore, there seem to be interesting cleavages in the spending data. For example, mean spending is very similar for races that scored one and three points, and for races that scored four and seven points. Races that scored three and seven points seem to be the exceptions to the rule here: races with those scores featured (rather substantially) less spending than the races that scored two and six points on the index. This may be partially due to the lower numbers of elections that scored seven and three points, especially compared to the number of races that scored two and six points.

**Table 29: Seat Level Mean Spending and Electoral Competition in Primary Elections in Washington State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Score</th>
<th>Mean Spending</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>$18,340.56</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$43,386.92</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$63,984.15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$43,947.51</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$73,015.96</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$83,487.40</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$84,086.10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$72,800.26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>$137,112.14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$142,261.88</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 30: Electoral Competition and Seat Level Spending Regression in Top Two Primary Elections in Washington State**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>23594.25</td>
<td>(2122.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Score</td>
<td>11875.11**</td>
<td>(741.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary election spending increases by nearly $12,000 for each point on the competition index (see Table 30). This is a significant increase, and it supports the idea that competition does increase spending at the seat level. However, the correlation between these variables in only moderate, and there are many outliers in the data. That said, the relationship is significant, meaning that competition is at least somewhat predictive of spending in primary elections.

**Figure 5: Seat Level Spending and Electoral Competition in Primary Elections in Washington State**
Figure 5 further demonstrates the relationship between competition and spending. While the pattern is not necessarily consistent, the relationship between electoral competition and spending is evident. Races with the lowest index scores have the lowest spending, while races with the highest scores have the highest spending (see Figure 5). Races that scored a nine on the index met the following criteria: at least 4 candidates ran, the first and second place finishers were within five percentage points, and there was a less than five percent difference between the second and third place finisher. This occurred rarely, but those highly competitive races featured over seven times more spending than races that scored a zero on the index. This supports the theory that higher electoral competition results in higher electoral spending.

My hypotheses concerning campaign spending in the top two primary are confirmed, with some caveats.

**H3: Electoral spending has increased with implementation of the top two primary.**

**H4: In elections where competition is high, spending is also high.**

Regarding H3, electoral spending has increased with implementation of the top two primary at the seat level. Spending more than doubled from 2006 to 2008. When seat level spending is adjusted for inflation, it increased from 2008 to 2012, then decreased in 2014 and 2016. Thus, spending increased with the top two primary, but not consistently. That said, the top two primary year with the lowest spending, 2014, still had significantly higher spending than 2006. As a further caveat, spending per candidate has lowered with implementation of the top two primary. This is likely due in part to the number candidates running in top two primaries increasing at a higher rate than the available pool of money for those candidates. Regarding H4, when competition is high, spending is also high, is confirmed. The most competitive races feature the
highest levels of spending. The top two primary has significantly impacted electoral spending in Washington state.

In the next section, I look at voter turnout after implementation of the top two primary.

**Voter Turnout and the Top Two Primary**

Voter turnout is a critical component of any analysis of electoral reform. Ultimately, the success of a reform is determined by how voters respond to the reform. As demonstrated, the top two primary has had a positive impact on electoral competition, and a somewhat complicated impact on electoral spending. The final piece of this analysis rests on the top two primary’s impact on voter turnout.

Here, I am concerned with two hypotheses:

*H5: Races with higher spending have higher levels of voter turnout.*

*H6: Races with higher levels of competition have higher levels of voter turnout.*

I begin by looking at how voter turnout has changed with implementation of the top two primary.

**Table 31: Voter Turnout in Washington State Primary Elections by Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less than 5,000 Voters</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5,000 to 10,000 Voters</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10,000 to 15,000 Voters</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15,000 to 20,000 Voters</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voter turnout has increased with the implementation of the top two primary. In 2006, over half of primary elections had less than 10,000 voters, and only one primary election had over 25,000 voters (see Table 31). In top two primary years, the majority of primary elections had between 20,000 and 30,000 voters. 2010 has the highest proportion of elections with over 30,000 voters, and the lowest proportion of elections with fewer than 20,000 voters. 2014, on the other hand, had the highest proportion of elections with less than 20,000 voters and the lowest proportion of elections with more than 30,000 voters in top two primary years. This dynamic falls in line with broader patterns concerning 2010 and 2014. 2012 also stands out among presidential election years as having the lowest proportion of elections with more than 30,000 voters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20,000 to 25,000 Voters</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>39</th>
<th>37</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>168</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 to 30,000 Voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 to 35,000 Voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35,000 to 40,000 Voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000 to 43,490 Voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examining mean voter turnout over time demonstrates an interesting pattern. First, voter turnout has increased in primary elections with implementation of the top two primary. This makes sense, as there were twice as many primary elections in 2006, with fewer voters in each individual primary election. On the other hand, the top two primary theoretically makes it easier to vote, as voters do not have to decide ahead of time in which primary they want to vote (as they did with the pick-a-primary system, see Chapter 1). It seems likely that the combination of these factors has led to increasing turnout. And, that increase has been substantial. In 2006, just over 10,000 voters participated in primary elections, on average. In 2008, nearly 26,000 voters participated in primary elections, on average. The number of voters participating in top two primary elections has more than doubled. There is a clear dip in turnout in 2012 and 2014, before returning to more normal levels in 2016 (see Figure 6).
Interestingly, after implementation of the top two primary, voter turnout has been remarkably consistent across years. 2010 had the highest average turnout with about 26,500 voters participating on average. 2014 had the lowest average turnout with just over 22,000 voters participating on average. This is consistent with other data in this analysis. 2010 was the most competitive year on the index, and had among the highest levels of spending at both the seat and candidate levels. On the other hand, 2014 was the least competitive year on the index and had among the lowest levels of spending among top two primary years.

Voter turnout further supports this pattern. With the exception of 2014, voter turnout has consistently averaged around 25,000 voters per primary election. This suggests that initially the top two primary increases voter turnout, but that this reform does not necessarily add new voters to the mix over time. Once the population of primary election voters has been established, it is unlikely to change dramatically from year to year. The top two primary does have a positive impact on voter turnout, but turnout overall remains low and this reform alone is unlikely to remedy America’s problem with low voter turnout.

**Voter Turnout Percentages**

From 2006 to 2016, the population of Washington grew by about 736,000 new residents. While voter turnout data has thus far been presented in raw numbers, in this section I examine voter turnout as a percentage of the overall population of registered voters.
Table 32: Registered Voters and Voter Turnout Percentages in Washington State Primary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Total Ballots Cast</th>
<th>Turnout Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3,182,209</td>
<td>1,243,992</td>
<td>39.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,417,355</td>
<td>1,455,756</td>
<td>42.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3,592,079</td>
<td>1,471,791</td>
<td>40.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3,731,657</td>
<td>1,435,928</td>
<td>38.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3,925,663</td>
<td>1,222,710</td>
<td>31.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4,102,624</td>
<td>1,431,058</td>
<td>34.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of registered voters in Washington has steadily increased since 2006 (see Table 32). However, the percentage of voters participating in primary elections has decreased over time, though not consistently. In 2006, about 39% of voters participated in primary elections, and implementation of the top two primary in 2008 produced about a 3% increase in voter turnout. This reflects previously presented data which demonstrates a significant increase in participation with the top two primary (see Figure 6). That said, 2008 featured the highest levels of participation in primary elections, and turnout percentages have steadily decreased over time. 2014 is a bit anomalous here in having such low turnout, both in terms of the total number of ballots cast and the percentage of voters participating. 2014 also featured the lowest levels of competition and spending, and taken together it seems this was an across the board off year when assessing general patterns regarding these dynamics.

Observing the raw number of ballots cast in primary elections in these years further supports the argument that the top two primary adds a significant pool of voters initially, and

those voters seem to generally participate each year. However, once the pool of voters is enhanced, it does not continue to increase over time. This means that other, complementary reforms are likely needed to continue to support voter turnout growth. In the next section, I turn to the relationship between voter turnout and campaign spending.

**Voter Turnout and Campaign Spending**

The relationship between campaign spending and voter turnout is complex. Campaigns spend money to disseminate their message and mobilize voters. Theoretically, as spending goes up, so should turnout as voters will be more likely to have encountered a given candidate’s message and mobilization efforts. Thus, when candidates spend more money, they can expect that more voters will show up on Election Day. However, looking at the nation as a whole we see that campaign spending has risen, rather dramatically in some instances, while voter turnout has remained largely consistent. In this sense, many non-voters are unaffected by higher campaign spending and voter mobilization efforts. On the whole, the literature examining the relationship between these variables is inconsistent and inconclusive (see Chapter 2). Examining these two variables under the context of the top two primary further illuminates the complexity of this relationship.
As Figure 6 demonstrates, there is a relationship between spending and turnout. Seats with no spending had, on average, about 10,000 voters participating in the election. There is a substantial increase in turnout when candidates for a seat spend some money, and the highest average turnout occurred when the seat featured $70,000 to $80,000 in spending. A similar number of voters participate when the seat featured more than $100,000 in spending (just over 28,000 average voters). However, the increase in turnout is minimal compared to the dramatic increase in spending: seats with less than $10,000 in spending featured about 22,500 voters, and seats with over $100,000 in spending featured about 28,000 voters. This suggests that spending does increase turnout, but that increase is not consistent across all spending levels. Further, high spending is likely to only result in a marginal increase in voter turnout.

My fifth hypothesis, that races with high spending will have high turnout, is supported. Seats that feature the highest levels of spending do have the highest turnout, but turnout levels are not dramatically impacted by spending. The biggest increase in voter turnout occurs between
elections that feature no spending and elections that feature some spending. High levels of 
spending produce only marginal increases in turnout. Therefore, while there is a relationship 
between these variables, the variables also appear to operate somewhat independently. In the 
next section, I explore the relationship between voter turnout and electoral competition further.

Voter Turnout and Electoral Competition

In theory, voter turnout and electoral competition should track closely together. A 
competitive election is exciting and engaging for voters, encouraging voters to participate. 
Competitive elections are also more likely to feature higher spending (see Figure 5), and races 
with higher spending are more likely to have higher voter turnout (see Figure 6). In this section, I 
examine the specific relationship between electoral competition and voter turnout.

Figure 8: Mean Voter Turnout and Index Scores in Washington State Top Two Primary 
Elections

R: .250   p: < .01
Because voter turnout has been largely flat in top two primary years, increases and decreases in voter turnout are marginal across the board. That said, competition does have an impact on how many people vote. Races that scored zero on the competition index had the lowest voter turnout, with just over 23,000 voters participating on average (see Figure 8). Interestingly, races that scored nine on the index also had comparatively low turnout, with just over 24,000 voters on average. Races that scored four, six, or eight on the index had the highest turnout rates, with around 28,000 voters on average. The evidence suggests that competition will increase campaign spending, but more competition does not necessarily lead to more voters. The correlation between these variables is low suggesting that, based on this data, greater competition is a weak predictor of higher voter turnout. While greater competition does increase turnout in the middle levels of the index, at the higher levels, the relationship is inconsistent and does not reflect my hypothesis. Therefore, my sixth hypothesis, that races with high competition will feature high turnout, is not confirmed.

**Competition, Voter Turnout, and Campaign Spending in Top Two Primaries**

As a concluding piece of analysis in this chapter, I combine my data on competition, campaign spending and voter turnout. Here, I examine my final hypothesis:

*H7: Races with high competition and high spending have the highest levels of voter turnout.*

**Figure 9: Competition, Campaign Spending, and Voter Turnout in Top Two Primaries in Washington State**
Putting these variables together paints a complete picture of the relationship between electoral competition, campaign spending and voter turnout in Washington state primary elections. Several conclusions can be drawn from this data. First, competition and campaign spending are rather closely linked. There is a general trajectory that as competition increases, so does spending (see Figure 9). There could be several explanations for this. Because the number of candidates in the race is closely linked to the race’s index score (see Tables 14 and 15), it makes sense that more candidates spending even a small amount of money drives up the average spending for the seat and also the index score. Further, in a crowded field, candidates hoping to win must find a way to stand out, and that requires spending more on advertisements and events. Taken together, it is clear that competition and spending will logically rise and fall together.

Second, voter turnout has a more complicated relationship with competition and spending. Turnout has been largely flat after the top two primary was implemented, and large scale changes in turnout are not apparent. On average, about 25,000 voters will participate in a
given primary election, and that number seems largely impervious to changes in spending and competition. Although the intent of high spending in competitive elections is to get voters to participate, in reality the effect is opposite. While the exact causative mechanism is unclear, what is clear is that both campaign spending and competition are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for voters to participate.

Table 33: Index Score, Campaign Spending and Turnout Correlations in Top Two Primaries in Washington State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Score</th>
<th>Spending</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Index Score</td>
<td>.587**</td>
<td>.250**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td>.587**</td>
<td>.274**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>.250**</td>
<td>.274**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

There is a statistically significant impact among these three variables (see Table 32). Spending and competition are the most closely related. Both spending and competition, however, have a low impact on overall voter turnout. This speaks to my final hypothesis, that races with the highest spending and highest competition also have the highest turnout. The data reveals that my hypothesis is not supported. While races with the highest competition did have the highest spending, those races had among the lowest voter turnout. Competition and campaign spending work closely together, but voter turnout appears to operate at least somewhat independently from these other factors.

Conclusion

The top two primary in Washington state has led to a reduction in the amount of spending by individual candidates, but an overall increase in spending at the seat level. Spending and
competition are closely related, and races with the highest competition index scores feature drastically more spending than races with low competition index scores. There is a clear linkage between campaign spending and electoral competition. Voter turnout, on the other hand, increased when the top two primary was implemented, but has been largely flat in subsequent elections. Higher spending does not appear to result in significantly more voters. Further, the races with the highest competition index score had similar turnout rates to races with the lowest index scores. On the whole, it seems that competition is a good predictor of spending, but that neither competition nor spending is a good predictor of voter turnout.

This project has presented findings and analysis related electoral competition, campaign spending, and voter turnout after implementation of the top two primary in Washington state. In the final chapter, I draw conclusions regarding the overall impact of this reform, and speak to the ultimate questions of whether this reform has been successful in increasing competition in Washington state, and its prospects for having a similar impact in other states.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

Electoral competition is the foundation for many benefits of democracy. Theoretically, competition produces better representation for constituents, similar to competing producers in a free market creating better products and prices for consumers. Competition also provides legitimacy and a mandate to govern for representatives. When elections are uncontested, or in other ways uncompetitive, a representative may govern by default rather than through the popular will of the people. Electoral competition increases voter engagement, knowledge and, most importantly, turnout on Election Day. However, electoral competition has decreased over time, and today incumbents win well over 90% of the time. Electoral rules determine who wins, who loses, and who governs, and while most reforms have focused on impacting the ability of voters to participate, greater improvements to our democracy are likely to come from reforms aimed at increasing the competition in the electoral environment (C. J. Tolbert, Donovan, & Cain, 2008).

Washington state implemented the top two primary in 2008 following the Supreme Court’s invalidation of the blanket primary in 2000. In the interim, Washington used a pick-a-primary system, which proved to be quite unpopular with voters, and resulted in a largely non-competitive electoral environment. The top two primary was promoted as a remedy for these issues, as well as a return to Washington’s anti-partisan roots. Proposition 872 was passed in 2004 with 60% of the vote, but court challenges prevented the top two primary from being implemented until 2008. This reform had high support among Washington voters, and led to significant improvements in electoral competition and voter turnout, as compared to the pick-a-primary system (see Chapter 1).
The scholarly work on the relationship between campaign spending and competition has been decidedly mixed, with some studies suggesting a close link between these variables and others finding that overall spending is increasing while competition is decreasing. The link between competition and voter turnout is more clear, with competitive elections featuring higher turnout than non-competitive elections. However, the exact ways that these three variables work together is less clear. The top two primary is an ideal environment to study this relationship (see Chapter 2).

In order to understand how the top two primary has impacted electoral competition, I developed an original index of electoral competition. The index is based on three factors: contestation, the winning candidate’s percentage of the vote, and the vote percentage difference between the second and third place candidates. I collected competition and turnout data on 686 primary elections and spending data for 1,347 candidates from 2006 to 2016. Further, I conducted interviews with elected officials in Washington state to employ a mixed methods approach and to provide a clearer picture of how elected officials have responded to this reform (see Chapter 3).

Application of the index of electoral competition demonstrates that the biggest impact of the top two primary has been to increase the number of candidates running in Washington state primary elections. In 2006, over 90% of primary elections were uncontested, and in top two primary years, between 60% and 75% of elections were uncontested. Though most elections remain uncontested, this is a significant improvement. The top two primary has also had a positive impact on reducing the number of landslide elections, defined as the winning candidate receiving 60% or more of the vote. In 2006, nearly 95% of primary elections were landslide victories, and in top two primary years, only between 47% and 55% of elections result in a
landslide victory. When more candidates are in a race, the vote tends to be more dispersed, meaning that contestation and the winning candidates percentage of the vote are closely linked. Finally, even when races are contested, most feature a large difference between second and third place. This indicator determines which candidates advance to the general election, and which do not. In top two primary years, between 2% and 8% of races were highly competitive according to this indicator, suggesting that in most races there are two clear front runners, and other candidates are not significant players in the election (see Chapter 4).

Looking across all Washington state primary elections shows that competition has increased, rather significantly, after implementation of the top two primary. In 2006, 93% of primary elections scored 0 points on the index of electoral competition, indicating a completely non-competitive election. After implementation of the top two primary, between 43% and 53% of elections scored 0 points, a dramatic improvement from the pick-a-primary system. That said, few elections in each year received a high score on the index, and most elections still feature low levels of competition. Further, incumbents are still performing very well under the top two primary, winning around 75% of the time. Interestingly, the first place candidate in the primary election can expect to win the general election around 90% of the time in top two primary years, and the most likely cause of the first place candidate not winning the general election is that the vote split in the primary. Finally, same party general elections, a unique feature of the top two primary system, are rare, occurring less than 10% of the time. The top two primary has improved the electoral environment in Washington state, but has not proven to be a magic pill capable of creating a completely competitive environment (see Chapter 5).

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60 With the exception of 2012, in which 12% of primary elections resulted in a co-partisan general election.
In terms of campaign spending, the top two primary has had different impacts at different levels. Spending per individual candidates has decreased on average under the top two primary, likely as a result of more candidates running in elections. However, spending at the seat level has increased. Incumbents far outspend challenging candidates, likely contributing to their continued dominance at the polls under the top two primary rules. There is a generally linear relationship between spending and competition: each point increase on the competition index results in almost $12,000 in additional spending at the seat level (see Chapter 6).

Voter turnout has followed a different pattern after implementation of the top two primary. In 2006, just over 10,000 voters participated in primary elections on average. Across all top two primary years, around 25,000 voters on average participated in primary elections. However, these numbers do not change dramatically from year to year. This suggests that the top two primary had an initially positive impact on incentivizing additional voters to participate, but that trend did not continue over time. Races with higher spending generally feature more voters, but this is rather marginal: races with less than $10,000 in spending featured about 23,000 voters, while races with more than $100,000 in spending featured about 28,000 voters. Interestingly, races that scored the highest on the competition index did not feature the highest levels of voter turnout. Voter turnout is highest at medium levels of competition, suggesting a curvilinear relationship, though again increases and decreases in turnout are relatively minor (see Chapter 6).

All together, there is an unequivocal relationship between spending and competition: competitive races feature higher spending. However neither competition nor spending has a large impact on voter turnout. The top two primary has been successful in increasing competition in primary elections in Washington state, but this increase occurred at the low end of the scale. The
top two primary can be a piece of the solution to some pressing problems with American democracy, namely increasing contestation in primary elections and reducing the number of landslide victories. However, this reform by itself will not create a perfectly competitive electoral environment, as most elections remain uncompetitive or marginally competitive, and only a small proportion of voters are participating in primary elections. More work must be done to fully address issues of low competition and low voter turnout in American elections.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the conclusions from this study. First, it is likely that the pick-a-primary system is not a particularly effective control for fully understanding the top two primary. Because Washington state had used the blanket primary for so long, and because it was apparent that the pick-a-primary would not be in place forever, it is likely that many quality candidates waited until the top two primary rules were implemented to run. Similarly, voter turnout and spending were also likely reduced during the pick-a-primary years because the system was so unpopular with voters who were unenthusiastic about participating, and with potential donors waiting for a better system with better candidates. That said this research does demonstrate that electoral rules do impact who participates in elections, and an unpopular system likely acts as a deterrent for both voters and potential candidates.

Second, a low response rate among potential interviewees makes any conclusions from the mixed methods portion of this project difficult to support. While the two interviews I was able to conduct illuminated some important aspects of the story of the top two primary and the political culture in Washington, these conclusions would hold more weight with more interviews.

Finally, this study does not address the role of political parties in shaping the electoral environment in Washington state. It is unclear what, if any, role the parties play in recruiting
candidates, or if they are able to prevent some potential candidates from running. Further, the top two primary has effectively worked to shut third party candidates out from the general election, almost entirely. This reform appears to further marginalize these parties, and the impact of their absence should be considered more thoroughly in future research. It is clear that parties in general are opposed to this reform as it constitutes a loss of power in the nominating process. However, exactly what role the parties still play in primary elections is unclear.

Index of Electoral Competition

An index is an ideal way to study electoral competition. An index can provide nuance through incorporating many indicators into a single measure, and can provide a common foundation to compare between different elections and across time. My index of electoral competition is an important methodological development for the field, and can contribute to better understanding American politics well into the future. My index incorporates three commonly used indicators of competition and district-level data, which is an improvement upon previous indices and gives the index broader applications for future research.

The index is easily adapted to non-top two primary elections through the scoring system developed for the pick-a-primary election year. Potentially, this index could form a basis for comparing how different primary election systems across the country impact electoral competition. Because the index encompasses multiple indicators of competition, it can provide a more nuanced understanding the ways rules promote or discourage candidates and voters to participate. It is my hope that this index can become a standard for measuring electoral competition in primary elections.

That said the index could potentially benefit from being recalibrated to give each indicator equal weight. My approach to the weighting of the scores was based on their
prevalence in the literature, but this may obscure some of the explanatory power particularly on the difference between second and third place candidates indicator. Because so few races qualified for inclusion in that analysis, it was appropriate for this project, and for studying top two primary elections. However, if the index were to be applied to other types of primary elections, it may be beneficial to reconsider the weighting of that element. Further, the differential scoring between top two primary elections and non-top two primary elections would need to be reconsidered for future projects. In this context, because pick-a-primary elections were so rarely contested, the extra point in top two primary years provided an important piece of nuance to the scores. However, in a more wide-scale project, the index would need to be reconfigured in favor of a common score. I will continue working to develop the index and to perfect the scoring system, as the index will feature in my future research projects.

**Future Research**

Future research on the top two primary and electoral competition should focus on better understanding how competitive elections impact legislator behavior. Competition is the theoretical foundation of quality representation, but it is not clear whether this actually plays out in terms of the legislation that an individual representative is likely to support in practice. The index of electoral competition developed in this project can be an important tool for assessing this relationship by providing a general and nuanced basis for measuring electoral competition. Further, some studies in California have begun to assess whether the top two primary is producing more moderate representatives, and this work should also be applied to Washington.

It is also important to continue to work to understand the relationship between voters in Washington and the top two primary. Public opinion data on support for the top two primary reform is from 2008, and should be updated to study how support for this reform has evolved
over time. Further, more research is required to better understand the relationship between electoral spending and voter turnout. The curvilinear nature of that relationship presents a compelling puzzle about the true impact of spending, and should be explored more thoroughly.

Another important question that I hope to address in future research is about the relationship between electoral rules and the types of candidates that run for office. Changing racial, gender, and generational demographics across America means that a more diverse array of candidates are seeking office than ever before. Therefore, it is important to assess whether and how electoral rules contribute to or hinder the increasing diversity in our political system. My index of electoral competition can form the foundation for understanding how rules impact competition, and then how competition impacts who runs for office. This is a critical question, and will be an important component of my research in the future.

A Final Assessment

To the ultimate question of whether or not the top two primary is working in Washington state, I believe the answer is yes. This reform has produced increases and electoral competition and voter turnout, and on the whole voters in Washington seem to appreciate the ability to vote without the constraints of party in primary elections. That said, this reform is working in Washington state largely because of the historic political culture there. Since 1934, Washingtonians have rejected partisan control of their electoral systems, and any infringements on their ability to vote for the candidate of their choosing have been met with fierce resistance. According to Representative Steve Kirby, “I’m a huge fan. If anyone ever tries to change it, I will do everything I can to put it down. And I have to tell you, if I don’t the voters will,” (Kirby, phone interview, July 5 2018).
Because of this dynamic, it is unclear how the top two primary would fare in other states. In California, the top two primary is the subject of much attention, and is controversial, though it remains popular with voters. The Jungle Primary system in Louisiana has been in place for decades, and though periodically controversial elections there may spur some discussion of changing the system, no real momentum for a new system is underway.\textsuperscript{61}

While much more data is needed on the continuing and changing dynamics of the top two primary over time, tentatively it seems that this reform may be most successful in states with either single party dominance, as is the case in California or Louisiana, or in states where parties have been more marginalized, as in Washington. As most states fall somewhere in between these extremes, it seems unlikely that many more states will adopt this reform, at least in the near future.

Beyond the more narrow scope of Washington state politics, this project speaks to the important role that electoral rules play in creating our electoral environment. Washington state provides an ideal environment to study this dynamic due to the number of dramatic changes that occurred in a short time in the early 2000’s. Those changes make it clear that some systems, such as the pick-a-primary, discourage participation, in this case quite dramatically. Participation is the lifeblood of democracy, and competition is essential for promoting participation and making participation meaningful. Electoral rules can work to increase competition, and therefore participation, or can work to isolate voters and potential candidates from the electoral system. In short, the rules matter tremendously. The lack of competition in most American elections is a crisis that must be addressed in order for our democracy to remain legitimate. While the top two

\textsuperscript{61} From 2008 to 2010, Louisiana used a closed primary for federal Congressional seats. They returned to the Jungle Primary system after the top two primary was found to be Constitutional.
primary may not be the best solution for most states, all states, and supporters of democracy should be concerned with promoting electoral competition, and should work to develop reforms to create a more competitive electoral environment across our nation.
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## Appendix 1: Types of Primary Election Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Primary</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Used In</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Voters can vote in any primary election regardless of official affiliation. Generally, voters are given access to each party's ballot and allowed to cast votes in one. In some states, voters must formally declare which ballot they are choosing, in others, their selection is kept secret.</td>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Only registered party members are permitted to vote.</td>
<td>Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Two</td>
<td>All candidates for office appear on the same ballot, and the top finishers regardless of party affiliation move on to the general election.</td>
<td>California, Washington, Louisiana, Nebraska (for state offices only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Encompasses a range of primary election systems that are neither totally open nor totally closed. In some states, only party members are allowed to vote, but voters may change their affiliation at the polling location; in others states, multiple parties may participate in the same primary; in still other, unaffiliated voters are allowed to participate, under varying qualifications.</td>
<td>Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Sample Interview Materials

Sample Interview Questions

1. How has the Top Two primary changed elections in Washington? What is the ‘story’ of this reform?

2. Are you/your organization satisfied with the Top Two Primary? Do the people of Washington in general seem to like this system?

3. Were there any specific challenges to implementing the Top Two primary?

4. Have elections in Washington become more competitive with the Top Two primary? More expensive?

5. Has the Top Two primary changed the nature of representation in Washington?

6. Overall, do you think the Top Two primary has been beneficial for Washington? Do you see any problems with this system that should be addressed?

Invitation Letter

Dear [Participant]:

I am currently a PhD student in the Department of Politics & International Affairs at Northern Arizona University. I am e-mailing to invite you to participate in a research study. My current research project is a component part of my dissertation project, required to obtain the degree.

The study, entitled “Competition and the Top Two Primary in Washington” focuses on understanding how the implementation of the top two primary in Washington has changed dynamics of electoral competition. In addition to conducting statistical analysis of how the top two primary is working, I will interview elected officials and activists in Washington to gain their perceptions of how this reform is working.

Your participation will only require a thirty-minute phone conversation. After obtaining your consent to participate in the interview, I will ask a series of open-ended questions. Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you may choose not to answer questions asked during the interview.
The interview questions are attached. Please take a moment to review the informed consent form. I will request your consent in response to the informed consent at the beginning of our interview.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Emily Schnurr
XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email@nau.edu

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Department of Politics & International Affairs