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Voter Behavior in California's Top Two Primary

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Abstract

California's Top Two Primary in 2012 gave voters the chance to cross party lines to vote for the candidate of their choice in what was the equivalent of a two-stage election with run-off. The top two vote getters in each race, independent of party, proceeded to the general election. Using a panel survey design I examine the behavior of voters under this system at both the primary (first) stage and general election (second) stage. I estimate how many voters chose to cross party lines, and how many did so for strategic reasons. I then examine how voters behaved when faced with different scenarios in the general election regarding the availability of their preferred candidate, or *any* candidate representing their party. I find that surprisingly few voters crossed party lines, and relatively few who did so did so for strategic reasons. *If* such low levels of crossover continue, the impact of the top two primary on candidate ideology will likely be small. At the general election stage, voters who were faced with two candidates of the opposing party often chose to simply abstain from such races at a high rate.

Voter Behavior in California's Top Two Primary

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Introduction

In 2012 California implemented a Top Two primary system that was intended to produce more moderate (i.e., centrist) candidates. The basic logic was that by opening the primaries of both parties to voters from the opposing party, candidates would have an incentive to campaign closer to the middle of the ideological spectrum. The belief was that candidates that did so could reap the benefits of cross-over voters: members of the opposing party who chose to cross-over and vote for an ideologically 'tolerable' candidate from outside their own party. Thus any understanding of the consequences of the adoption of the Top Two rests on beliefs about what candidate behavior will be, and ultimately about what voter behavior will be. If partisan voters are unwilling to cross-over and vote for moderate candidates of the opposing party (or if no such candidates run), then the Top Two will not have any impact on who serves in the legislature, and no impact on policy outcomes.

Empirical evidence on whether or not either a Top Two primary or a version of an open primary leads to more moderate election winners has been mixed. Gerber (2002) found that moderates were more likely to win under the blanket primary in California in 1998 than under its predecessor closed primary in 1996. And Alvarez and Sinclair (2012) found that legislators elected under the blanket primary in either of the two elections it was used in were more likely to be central to the legislature (having better connected networks) than legislators elected under a closed primary. However, Bullock, et-al (2011) point out that it is only in competitive districts that the blanket primary had a moderating effect – leading to the election of more moderate legislators than their predecessors in competitive districts. Given how few competitive districts there are in California, this suggests a dampening of expectations of the moderating impact of changes in primary rules.² Kaufmann, et-al (2003) look at a much broader set of primaries across the United States from 1988 thru 2000, and study the impact of alternative primary configuration not on the ideology of legislators, but on the ideological composition of the voters who choose them. They compare the ideological position of primary voters in each party with supporters of each party's candidate in the

¹ I thank Woo Chang Kang for valuable research assistance. Comments from the editor and reviewers for this journal, and from participants at a panel at the 2013 Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, have made this a better paper. Funding for this research was provided by a gift from Charles T. Munger, Jr. to New York University. All views expressed, and inferences made, are attributed solely to the author. Contact: jonathan.nagler@nyu.edu.

² But see Sinclair (forthcoming) for a specific example of a race where the Top Two may have helped a moderate candidate.

general election. They find that open primaries did lead to more moderate voters in Republican primaries, but did not have any such effect in Democratic primaries. McGhee, et-al (2014) also consider a comprehensive set of elections, examining data from most states from 1992 thru 2010. They classify the electoral rules of the state, and examine whether or not states that changed their rules to more open primaries elected more moderate legislators. They found a small effect for Democrats, but no statistically significant effect for Republicans.

Ultimately the impact of the Top Two will depend on candidate behavior and voter behavior, but in this paper I focus on voter behavior in the 2012 elections: both the primary election and then the general election that followed. I utilize a two-wave panel of 2500 registered voters conducted immediately after the primary, and immediately following the general election.³ I consider two basic questions of voter behavior in the primary. First, how many voters voted for a candidate in the primary that was not from their own party? Second, of these cross-over voters: how many were behaving strategically. That is, how many were *not* voting for their most preferred candidate in the primary? And I also consider voter behavior in the general election. Since many general election races were between candidates of the same party, many primary voters were orphaned when they were voting in the general election: no candidate from their party was available to them. I examine the behavior of these voters to see if they were more likely to abstain in such races than were voters who did have at least one candidate from their own party on the ballot.

I. Institutional Design

Most elections in the United States for representatives at the Federal or State level are conducted in two parts. A primary election chooses candidates from each party, major and minor, to be represented on the ballot. Then voters choose between a single candidate from each party in a general election that is decided by plurality rule. The rules for eligibility to vote in the primary vary across states. Many states have closed primaries that require a voter to be a registered member of the party to vote in the primary. Other states have open primaries allowing any eligible voter to participate in the primary. And many states have semi-open (also referred to as semi-closed) primaries which allow only registered party members and independents (i.e., voters who are registered, but do not belong to any party) to participate. Finally, Louisiana has what is commonly referred to as a “Jungle Primary” in which voters may choose from candidates of any primary, and the top two vote-getters (irrespective of party) advance to the general election.⁴

In the modern era California had used a closed primary until 1998. In 1998 and 2000 it experimented with a blanket primary that was passed by the voters but undone by a Supreme Court decision. The blanket primary was a “super-open” primary where voters chose which party’s primary to vote in for each race. Thus a voter could vote in a Democratic primary for state assembly, while simultaneously participating in the Republican primary for state senate. California again used a closed primary for 2002 thru 2010. In 2012 California ran its election for state and federal offices using a Top Two Primary system that the voters passed in June of 2010, as Proposition 14. This system is not really actually a primary system, as the elections

³ The survey was conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix

⁴ If any candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, they are declared the winner and there is no run-off.

are non-partisan.⁵ The structure is that voters choose a single candidate for each office in the first round (the “primary”), and the two candidates with the highest vote totals advance to the second round. The candidates may declare a party, but they are not required to do so.⁶ Thus legally the primary is non-partisan, though in practice in 2012 almost every candidate on the ballot declared a party. This means that in the Top Two, the voters do not have a legally meaningful partisanship – but the candidates have so far had a *stated* partisanship, a stated partisanship that has no legal implication for how the primary winners are determined.⁷ And note that “primary winners” is something of an oxymoron in that neither candidate “wins” the first round, but simply ranks high enough (top two) among the vote-getters to advance to the general election.

II. Strategic Voting in Primaries

Voters in a traditional open primary are faced with a strategic decision. They not only choose between candidates, but they choose between elections. They can vote in either the Democratic Primary or Republican Primary.⁸ Their strategic incentives depend upon both the nature of the individual intra-party contests and the likely nature of the inter-party contest at the next stage of the electoral process. If the district is dominated by one party, then partisans of the lesser party have strong incentive to vote in the primary of the dominant party as the expectation is that the winner of the dominant party’s primary will win the general election. If the general election is expected to be competitive, voters may still have incentive to cross-over if they believe that their own party’s primary’s outcome is not in doubt – but they believe the primary election of the other party to be a closer race. Note that such behavior rests on the voter believing he is *more likely* to be pivotal in the race he crosses into; it does not require the voter to have a belief that he will be pivotal. We just need to assume that voters would rather vote in elections where they are more likely to be pivotal. After all, voters vote in many elections over their lifetime, they might as well maximize the chances of being pivotal in one of them.

The incentives to cross over in such races have been studied before, and I rely on the categorization of the strategic incentives for them as described by Alvarez and Nagler (2002). *Sincere Crossover* voting is simply when a person votes for a candidate from the opposing party because they prefer that candidate to all alternatives. *Hedging* refers to crossover voting designed to hedge one’s bet. It presumes that the voter is in a district with inter-party competition, so that at the primary stage of voting it is not known which party will win the general election. If that is the case, *and* the voter’s own party’s primary is not competitive, then he has incentive to crossover and vote in the other party’s primary to try to influence the winner there as the winner of the opposing primary may end up winning the general election and serving in office. *Impact Voting* is another form of trying to maximize the impact of one’s vote. But this refers to crossover voting in districts *without* inter-party competition, where a voter chooses to cast a vote in the primary of the dominant party because they realize that this primary is actually determining the winner of the general election. Finally, Alvarez and Nagler discussed the most controversial form of strategic crossover voting: *Raiding*. This occurs when a voter crosses over to attempt to nominate a weak

⁵ The elections were designed to be non-partisan to avoid the type of court challenge that stopped California’s earlier experiment with a voter-mandated more open primary: the Blanket Primary.

⁶ In practice, almost all candidates on the ballot in 2012 did declare a party.

⁷ Note that the Presidential primary was an exception, it continued to exist as a closed primary. Thus when I refer to federal offices I am only referring to the United States House and United States Senate.

⁸ For simplicity of exposition I restrict the discussion here to the two party case, though in many cases voters may have the option of voting in a third party’s primary.

candidate in the other party's primary, thus increasing their own party's candidate of winning the general election.

However, the incentives for crossover voting in the Top Two primary are very different than the incentives in a blanket primary or open primary. The structure is very different. In a partisan primary, a voter knows that one candidate from each party's primary will advance to the general election. There is no such guarantee in the Top Two. Thus consider the case of *Hedging* described above. This presumes a district with inter-party competition, but an uncompetitive primary in the voter's own party. There is no such analog in the Top Two. For a voter to engage in similar behavior in the Top Two, he must believe that his party's candidate is sure to be the leading vote-getter in the primary and thus move on to the general election, and believe that second place in the primary is uncertain. But the voter faces the conundrum that if he leaves his party's candidate, and sufficient other voters leave the candidate, then the assumption that this candidate was assured of winning the primary and moving on to the general election is no longer valid. Thus the open competition between candidates of the Top Two, as opposed to the distinct within-party competitions of an open primary, effectively tethers the voter to the candidate from his own party in such a scenario.⁹ However, consider the case of a district that is *not* competitive across the parties, but a district where the voter can have a very strong prior belief about which party's candidate will win the general election (a case quite common in California districts). In these cases, a voter from the disadvantaged party in the district has the exact same incentive as a voter in an open primary to crossover and try to have an impact as the *Impact Voter* in the open primary. Below I examine the behavior of the many voters who live in uncompetitive districts in California.

III. Individual Level Survey Data

The data in this paper was collected in an original survey of a panel of 2500 registered voters in California. The survey was conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix in two waves. The first wave followed the primary and asked voters about their behavior in the first round of the election. And the second wave immediately followed the general election, and asked respondents about their behavior in the second round of the electoral process: the general election.

To determine crossover voting is relatively straightforward: we only need to know a respondent's partisanship, and the party of the candidate they voted for. But to determine strategic crossover voting requires knowing the preference ordering of the voters over candidates. To elicit these preferences voters were asked to rate each candidate for state assembly on a scale from 0-11, where 0 was "very unfavorable" and 11 was "very favorable." They were also given the option to say they had not heard of the candidate, or that they "just (do) not know where (you) would rank them." This allows us to determine a preference ranking over the candidates for the voters, and we can then determine whether or not a voter voted for a candidate who was *not* their most preferred candidate.

⁹ The voter may have some beliefs about the unwillingness of others to engage in strategic behavior, and choose to cross over. But it is hard to know where the voter could get such beliefs, or to have any reason that such beliefs would be widely shared.

Table 1: Crossover Voting in State Assembly Races - 2012 Total Crossover and Crossover by Voter Ideology

	D to R^a	R to D^b	Either^c
All Respondents	5.5 (709)	7.6 (586)	6.4 (1295)
Respondent Ideology			
Liberal	1.7 (335)	47.2 (5)	4.8 (340)
Moderate	7.8 (282)	16.4 (135)	10.1 (417)
Conservative	2.3 (23)	2.2 (386)	3.8 (409)

^aCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Republican candidate for State Assembly.

^bCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Republicans having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Democratic candidate for State Assembly.

^cCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats or Republicans reporting voting for a Democratic or Republican candidate, respectively, for State Assembly. Number of respondents in each category given in parenthesis. Percentages are based on weighted data.

The first row of Table 1 shows the percentage of voters who crossed over in state assembly races. Of Democratic voters, only 5.5% chose to cast a vote for a Republican candidate in a state assembly race; while 7.6% of Republican voters who cast a vote in a state assembly race did so for a Democratic candidate. Overall, the crossover rate was 6.4% of major-party partisans.¹⁰ This overall crossover rate is substantially lower than that reported in analyses of voting when California experimented with the Blanket Primary (Alvarez & Nagler 2002, Sides, Cohen & Citrin 2002), a point I return to later.

If voters are crossing over to vote for candidates they prefer, we would expect to see this revealed by looking at the voters' ideology. Presumably it would be liberal and moderate Republican voters who cross over to vote for Democratic candidates, and it would be conservative and moderate Democrats who cross over to vote for Republican candidates. Rows 2 thru 4 of Table 1 show the rate of crossover voting for liberal, moderate, and conservative Democrats and Republicans. There are so few conservative Democrats (23) and liberal Republicans (5) in the sample that they can be ignored to understand what happened. If we compare the behavior of liberal Democrats to Moderate Democrats we see that as predicted moderate Democrats were substantially

¹⁰ Note that this is self-identified partisanship.

Table 2: Crossover Voting in State Assembly Races - 2012 by Voter Education and Ethnicity

	D to R^a	R to D^b	Either^c
Respondent Education			
≤HS Grad	6.8 (72)	6.6 (106)	6.7 (178)
Some Coll	5.5 (230)	4.7 (246)	5.2 (476)
Coll Grad	4.5 (248)	16.0 (155)	8.9 (403)
Post Grad	5.4 (159)	4.2 (79)	5.0 (238)
Respondent Ethnicity			
White Non-Hispanic	5.3 (496)	6.1 (484)	5.7 (980)
All Others	6.0 (208)	10.7 (102)	7.5 (310)

^aCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Republican candidate for State Assembly.

^bCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Republicans having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Democratic candidate for State Assembly.

^cCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats or Republicans reporting voting for a Democratic or Republican candidate, respectively, for State Assembly. Number of respondents in each category given in parenthesis. Percentages are based on weighted data.

more likely than Liberal Democrats to cross over (7.8% versus only 1.7%). And we see an even larger discrepancy when comparing conservative Republicans to moderate Republicans: only 2.2% of conservative Republicans voted for a Democratic candidate for state assembly; while 16.4% of moderate Republicans voted for a Democratic candidate for state assembly. Thus the comparative static here suggests that voters were behaving as the standard spatial model would predict: voters were more likely to crossover when they were more ideologically in tune with the candidate of the other party. However, the number of voters crossing over is what matters for electoral outcomes. And what is more important than the fact that moderate Democrats were more likely to cross over than liberal democrats is the fact that *so few* Democrats crossed over.

Table 3: Crossover Voting in State Assembly Races - 2012 by Type of District: Incumbency Status

	D to R^a	R to D^b
Democratic Incumbent	6.3 (317)	15.8 (119)
Open Seat	5.4 (285)	7.6 (285)
Republican Incumbent	3.9 (107)	1.6 (182)

^aCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Republican candidate for State Assembly.

^bCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Republicans having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Democratic candidate for State Assembly.

All cell percentages are based on weighted data.

It may be the case that some level of sophistication or information was required to crossover. If that is the case, we would expect to see higher rates among voters with higher levels of education. Table 2 shows the different rates of crossover voting by voters with different levels of education. Among Democrats, there was not a substantial difference in crossover rates based on level of education. Among Republicans, the crossover rate was substantially larger among college graduates (16.0%) than among any other group. However, the crossover rate among Republicans with some post graduate education was the lowest for any group. Thus the data provide no evidence to support the theory that the low level of crossover voting is based on lack of sophistication or information.

The last two rows of Table 2 give the rates of crossover voting for Non-Hispanic Whites, and for all other respondents. Again among Democrats there does not seem to be a difference in the rate of crossover voting, while for Republicans it appears that Non-Hispanic Whites may have crossed over at lower rates than other voters, but given the small sample size it is impossible to draw a robust inference.¹¹

The level of crossover voting observed in Table 1 is surprisingly low. In an analysis of crossover voting in state assembly races in 1998 in California, Alvarez and Nagler (2002) found crossover rates to be on average slightly over 20% for both Democrats and Republicans. Yet we would expect crossover voting to have gone up given the imposition of term limits in state assembly races and the greater number of open-seat races. Open-seat races are prime candidates for crossover voting if we believe that voters want their vote to have an impact. An open-seat race in a district dominated by one party is a perfect scenario for seeing crossover voting from members of the minority party in the district into the primary of the dominant party. The first 3 rows of

¹¹ The size of the sample makes analysis of other ethnic groups individually impractical.

Table 4: Crossover Voting in State Assembly Races - 2012 by Type of District: Competitiveness of Parties

	D to R^a	R to D^b
Strong Democratic District	4.4 (488)	16.7 (228)
Contested District	8.6 (96)	0.6 (120)
Strong Republican District	7.2 (125)	1.9 (238)

^aCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Democrats having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Republican candidate for State Assembly.

^bCell entries are the percentage of self-identified Republicans having the row characteristic reporting voting for a Democratic candidate for State Assembly. Strong Democratic districts are the 50 districts with the highest Obama vote in 2012, and Strong Republican districts are the 10 districts with the lowest Obama vote in 2012.

All percentages based on weighted data.

Table 3 show the different rates of crossover based on whether the district has a Democratic incumbent, Republican incumbent, or is an open seat race for State Assembly. Among Democratic voters we see very little variation in the rate of crossover based on the incumbency status of the district. However, we see that Republican voters are substantially more likely to crossover when they are in a district with a Democratic incumbent than when they are either in an open-seat district or a district with a Republican incumbent. This is consistent with Alvarez and Nagler’s finding that voters crossover for candidates they like and incumbents are candidates they like.

The first 3 rows of Table 4 perform a different test designed to gauge the intent of crossover voters. Recall that *Impact Voters* are voters who are members of the minority party in the district and who cross over because the majority party is expected to easily win the general election. In such cases a voter of the minority party in the district has no incentive to choose among the candidates of their own party in the primary, as whoever is nominated from the minority party is not going to win the general election. Thus in order to impact the winner of the general election, a voter from the minority party in the district must participate in the primary of the dominant party in the district. Of course in the Top Two primary that simply means voting for a candidate from the dominant other party in the primary. Thus if voters are choosing to behave as impact voters, we should see higher levels of crossover for a candidate of the dominant party in one-party districts. I broke districts into Strong Democratic Districts, Strong Republican Districts, and Contested Districts based on Obama’s share of the vote in the 2012 election. The 50 districts with the highest 2-party share of the Obama vote were coded as Strong Democratic Districts, the 20

Table 5: Logit Model of Primary Crossover Voting Dependent Variable: Probability of a Democratic Voter Choosing a Republican Candidate for State Assembly

Respondent	0.43* (0.08)
Education	0.24** (0.14)
Age	0.12 (0.02)
White Non-Hispanic	-0.16 (0.40)
Strong Republican District	-0.22 (0.48)
Strong Democratic District	-1.74* (0.46)
Constant	-5.04* (1.24)
Number of Observations	636

Cell entries are logit coefficients, standard errors in parenthesis.

* indicates significance at $p=.05$; ** indicates significance at $p=.10$

Because of the small number of Republican crossover voters and correlation between respondent ideology and type of district, this model could not be estimated for Republican crossover

districts with the lowest share of Obama vote were coded as Strong Republican Districts, and the remaining 10 districts were coded as Contested Districts. Again the small numbers of voters crossing over makes robust inferences impossible. But we see that Republicans who cross over appear likely to be behaving as impact voters – Republican crossover is much higher in Strong Democratic Districts (16.7%) than in any other type of district. For Democrats we see a much weaker relationship between type of district and crossover rate: the crossover rate is 7.2% in Strong Republican districts versus 4.4% in Strong Democratic Districts. So while Republicans are much more likely to crossover in districts where they can behave as impact voters, even in such districts their crossover rate is low at an absolute level. Over four out of five Republican voters in districts dominated by the Democratic party choose to vote for a Republican candidate who has almost no chance to win in the general election.

To try to determine the conditional impact of individual factors on the probability of crossing over, I specified a logit model with respondent’s ideology (measured as conservatism), education, and age as explanatory variables. Also included was a dum-

Table 6: Strategic Voting in State Assembly Races - 2012

	Party Loyalists	Crossover Voters
Strategic Vote	4.0	17.2
Sincere Vote	96.0	82.8
Column Totals	1181	60

Cell entries are column percentages, giving the percentage of respondents in each column who voted strategically and who voted sincerely. Calculations based on weighted data.

my to indicate whether the respondent was a white non-Hispanic. And to measure the nature of the district, I included dummy variables to indicate whether the district was a strong Republican district or strong Democratic district (the omitted category being the competitive districts). Unfortunately this model could not be estimated for Republican voters because of the small sample size and multicollinearity. However, the estimates for Democratic voters are reported in Table 5. Consistent with the bivariate results: more conservative Democrats are more likely to crossover, and Democrats residing in Strong Democratic districts are less likely to cross over than are other Democrats. However, given the small number of voters in the sample who crossed over, these results should be interpreted cautiously.

Finally, Table 6 gives the proportion of crossover voters who could be characterized as strategic voters. To be characterized as a strategic voter a respondent had to: 1) crossover to vote for a candidate from the other party; and 2) reveal that they preferred a candidate they did not vote for to the candidate they did vote for. As we can see in Table 6, only 17.2% of crossover voters could be characterized as behaving strategically.¹² The rest simply preferred the candidate they voted for to all other available choices. Considering the small fraction of voters who crossed over, there is very little overall strategic voting happening.

IV. Impact on General Election Behavior

One consequence of the Top Two Primary is that some voters will be “orphaned” in the general election: there may be no candidate from their party on the ballot. And this was not a rare outcome in 2012. Table 7 gives the distribution of partisanship pairs of candidates in the 2012 general election for races for the State Assembly, State Senate, and House. Of the 80 races for State Assembly, only 58 districts had the traditional Democratic vs. Republican pairing in the general election. Eleven of them had two Democrats facing each other, and seven of the districts had two Republicans facing each other in the general election. This means that in the 11 Democratic-Democratic districts, Republican voters who had supported a Republican candidate in the primary

¹² Note that 4% of voters who chose a candidate from their own party also appeared to be voting strategically.

Table 7: Partisan Configuration of General Election Races

Office	D	DD	DNPP	DPF	DR	RNPP	RR	Total
House	0	6	3	0	41	1	2	53
State Assembly	2	11	1	1	58	0	7	80
State Senate	0	2	0	2	16	0	0	20

Cell entries are the number of districts with the candidate-configuration indicated by the column headings: Democrat Unopposed (D); Democrat-vs-Democrat (DD); Democrat-vs-NoPartyPreference (DN); Democrat-vs-Peace and Freedom (DPF); Democrat-vs-Republican (DR); Republican-vs-NoPartyPreference (RNPP); Republican-vs-Republican (RR).

for State Assembly were now orphans. And in the seven Republican-Republican districts, Democratic voters who had supported a Republican candidate in the primary for State Assembly were now orphans.

So the behavioral question is what would these orphans do? And in particular, would they be less likely to vote in races where they were denied a chance to vote for a co-partisan? Zipp (1985) found that voters who were not given at least one desirable candidate to vote for were less likely to turn out, and examining elections from 1972 thru 2008 Leighley and Nagler (2014) find some evidence to support Zipp’s claim. Table 8 gives the abstention rate for orphaned voters *in the State Assembly Race* versus the abstention rate for non-orphans. Thus the question here is not whether or not these voters cast a ballot: the assumption is that the presidential election would motivate that. The question here is whether, contingent on deciding to cast a ballot, the voter would choose to abstain in this one race (State Assembly) where they had no partisan choice. As we can see, the orphaned voters were *much* more likely to abstain than voters who had a partisan choice available. Fully 47.9% of orphaned voters chose to abstain in the State Assembly race in the general Election.¹³ Of those voters who had a co-partisan choice available, only 3.9% chose to abstain. It is important to note that these voters who abstained were precisely the voters who could exert an ideologically moderating influence at the general election stage: these were voters who chose *not* to exercise a moderating influence by picking the more moderate candidate of the opposing party when given a chance to do so.

V. Conclusion

This paper provides a first look at voter behavior in the Top Two Primary. As is often the case, the best designed policy reform can have unintended results when voter behavior does not conform to predictions. The notion that the Top Two will lead to

¹³ Donovan (2012) analyzes turnout in Washington state after adoption of the top 2 primary there and found a slight increase in turnout. However, he was examining the decision to turnout to vote at all, not the decision whether to participate in an individual election conditional upon having decided to vote. The decision to turnout to vote in 2012 was presumably dominated by the presidential election.

Table 8: Abstention in General Election State Assembly Race

Vote Action	Co-Partisan Available	Orphan
Abstain in State Assembly Race Vote	3.9	47.9
in State Assembly Race	96.1	52.1
Totals	1159	120

Entries are column percentages, calculated based on weighted data.

more moderate election winners is based on a belief that voters will cross over into meaningful races, and thus lead to the emergence of election winners *not* chosen by a more partisan set of voters. But the low level of crossover voting in the first Top Two primary is striking. One could speculate about why this is. It could be that voters who say they are Democrats today are simply not willing to vote for Republicans: if they were, they would call themselves independents. Expectations of the impact of the Top Two also failed to consider closely abstention. If the voters who were expected to provide moderating influence instead choose to abstain, then the Top Two will fail to provide the expected result. Of course it is possible that voters simply need time to adapt. The Top Two was a radical change in the electoral rules, and it would be folly to draw inferences of where voter and party behavior will lead after just one election. Analysis of a new round of elections in 2014 – without a presidential race on the ballot – should offer more evidence on the likely longer-term effect of the Top Two.

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