

California candidates set to battle in new political landscape

By Jean Merl, Los Angeles Times

Filing has closed, the candidate lists are final and the curtain has risen on California's reconstructed political stage, where the contests for 153 congressional and legislative seats will play out for the first time under new rules and in altered districts.

Look for intraparty fights that will last into the November runoffs, a likely lack of third-party candidates on the fall ballot and, possibly, a larger number of contested seats, compliments of a new primary system and a redrawing of political maps that did not seek to protect incumbents.

Voters authorized the two new wrinkles in this year's elections. In 2010 they approved Proposition 14, which requires that all candidates, regardless of party, appear on a single ballot received by all voters. Only the candidates who finish first and second in the June 5 primary will move on to the Nov. 6 general election, all but eliminating the chances of most third-party candidates, who used to be granted a spot on the runoff ballot no matter how poorly they fared in the primary.

In 2008, voters stripped the Legislature of the responsibility for redrawing political boundaries for state Senate, Assembly and Board of Equalization seats and gave the job to an independent citizens commission. Two years later, voters added California congressional districts to the commission's task.

The citizens group was charged with adjusting boundaries for population shifts since the previous census, and was

prohibited from taking into account a lawmaker's home and voter registration – rules aimed at eliminating the gerrymandering that the Legislature had done to protect incumbents.

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