Polarization & Three Reforms
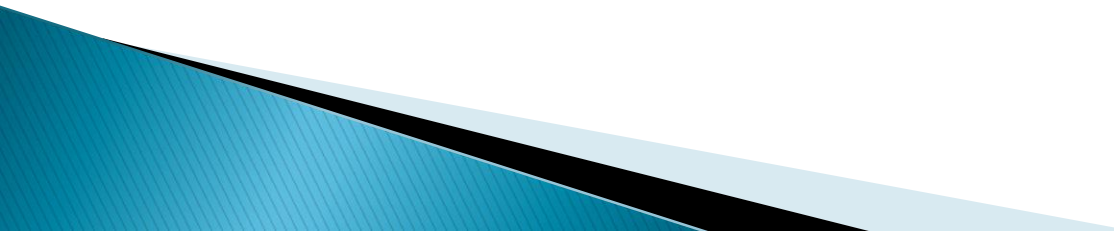
Michael McDonald
University of Florida
www.electproject.org

Three Reforms

- Closed vs. Open (Semi-closed) Primaries
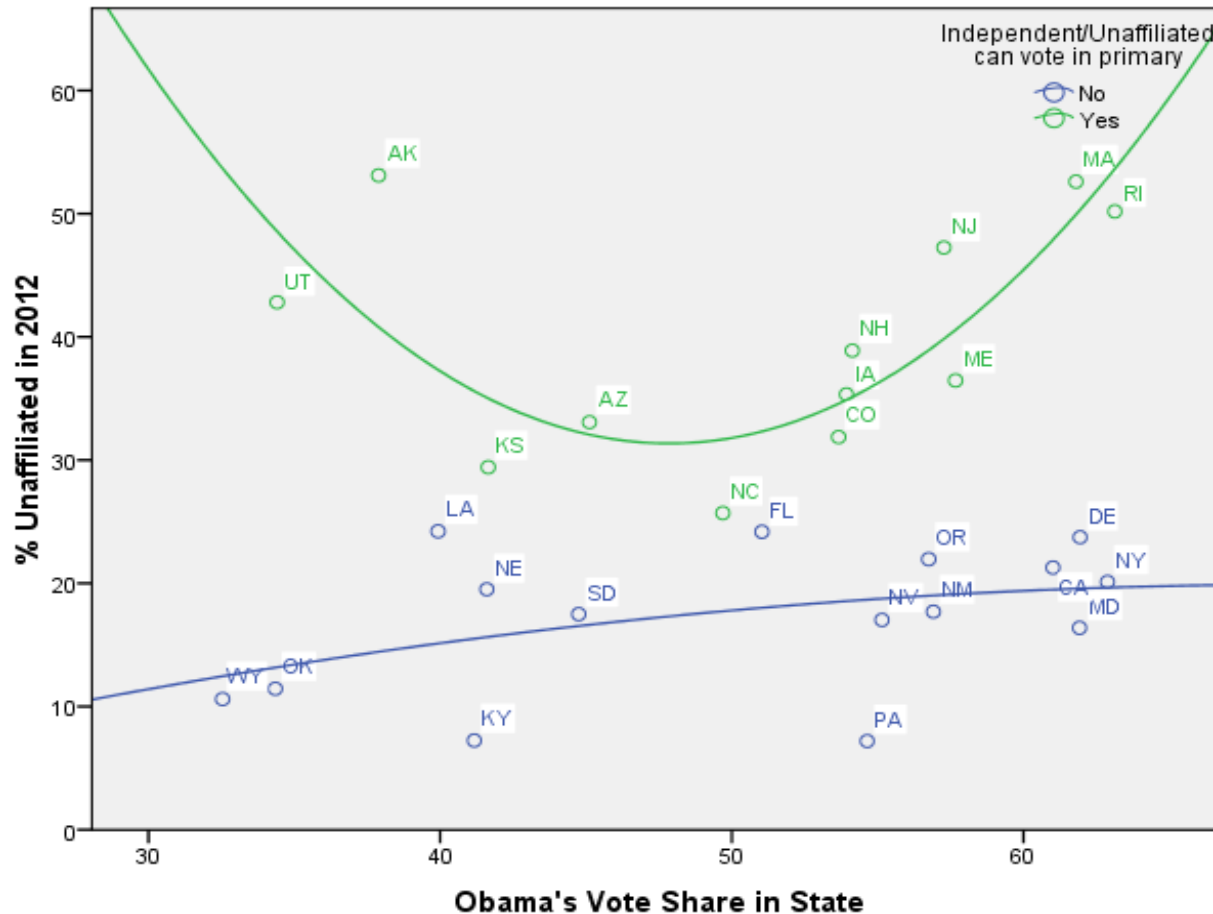- Redistricting
- Small donors

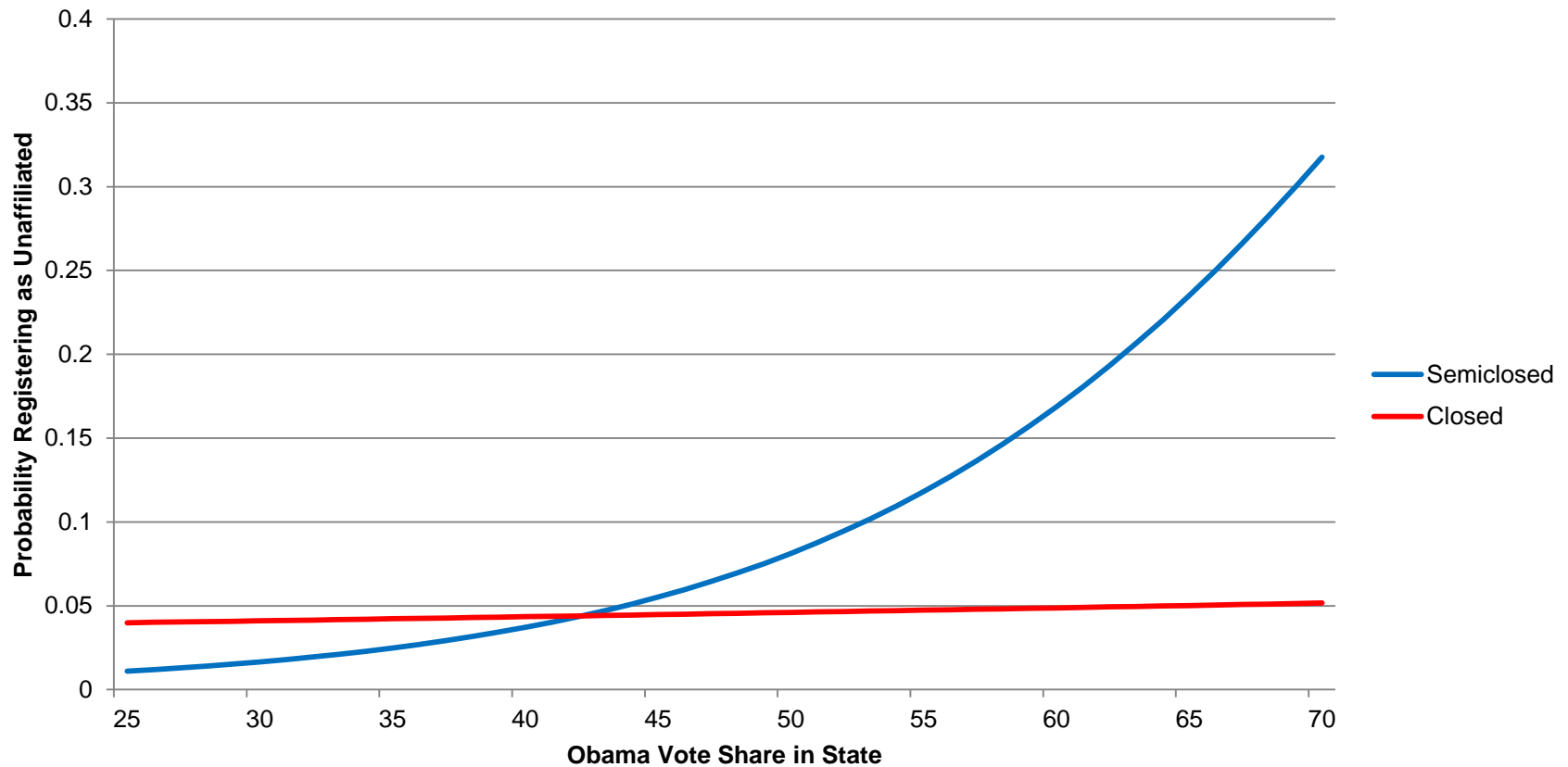# Primary Elections

With Matthew Thornburg

Primary Types

- Approach the issue from voters' perspective, comparing party registration in closed and semi-closed states:
  - Main theoretical insight: partisans in states dominated by opposing party have greatest incentive to register as an Independent in semi-closed states

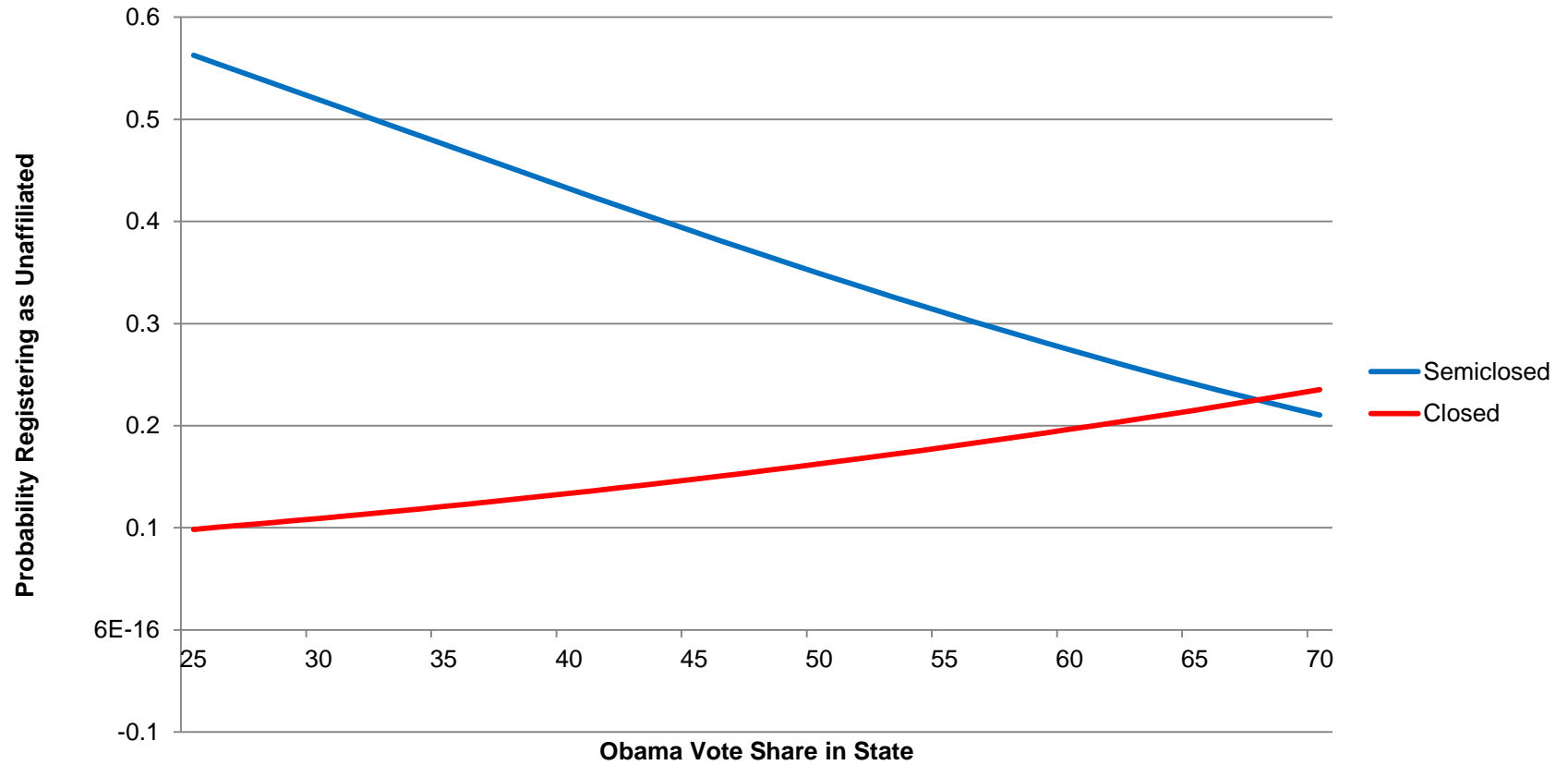# Party Registration
(Aggregate Administrative Statistics)

Individual Analysis (2010 CCES)

Republicans – 2010 CCES

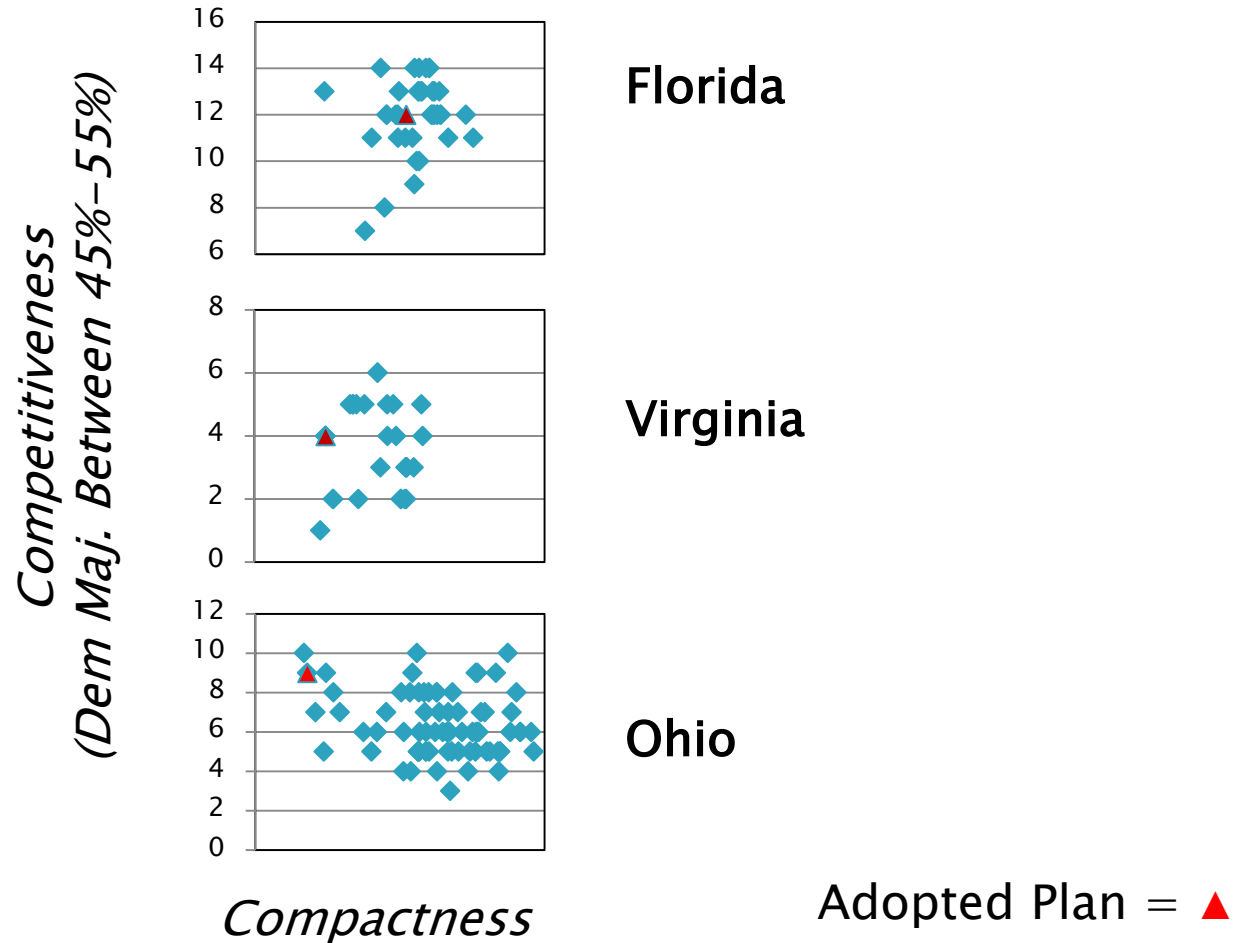# Individual Analysis (2010 CCES)

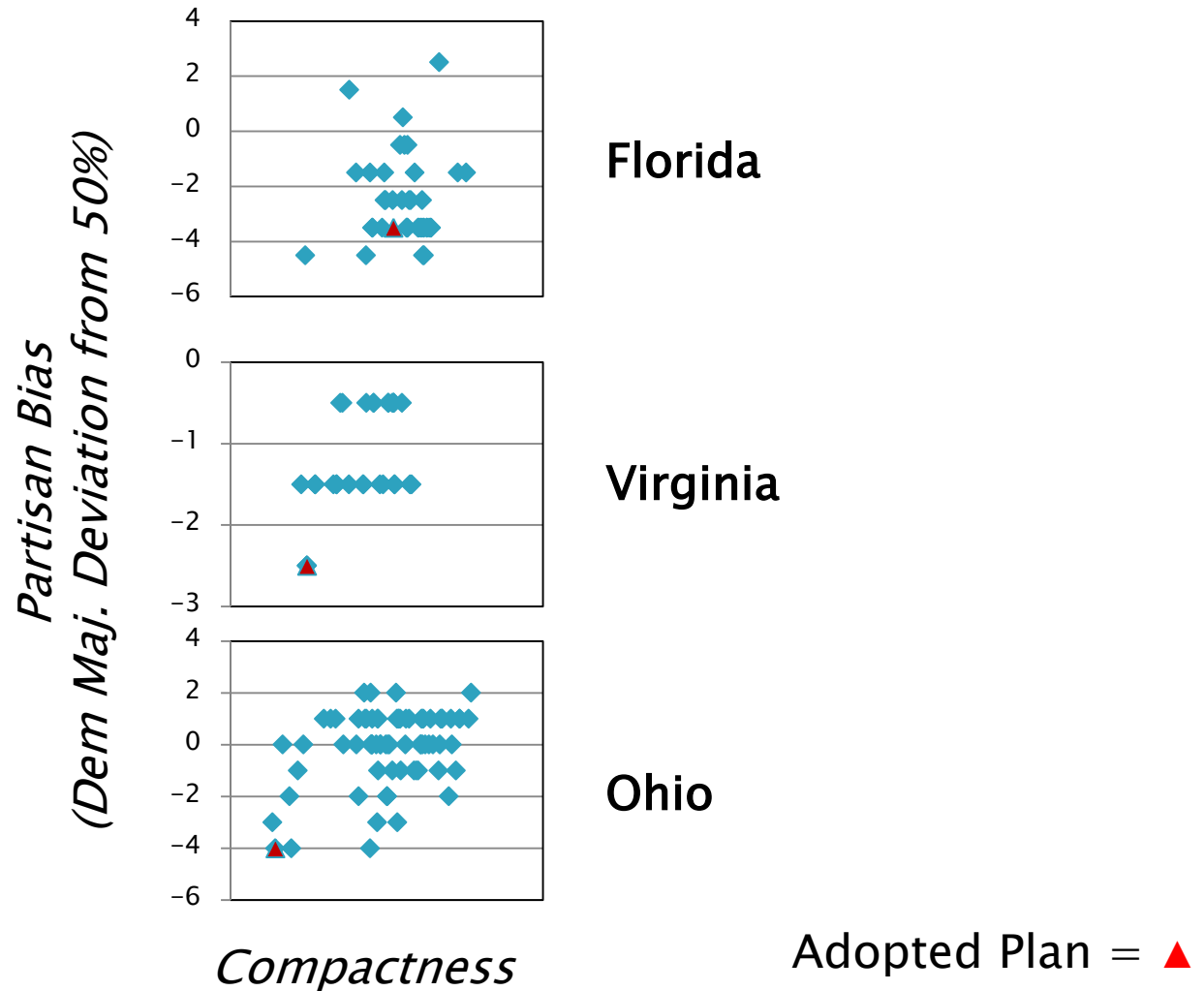
Democrats – 2010 CCES

Redisticting

With Micah Altman

Public Mapping Project

▸ Created award-winning open-source, web-accessible redistricting software (www.DistrictBuilder.org) and deployed in support of advocacy efforts and official governmental redistricting.

  ◦ Thousands of users created hundreds of redistricting plans.
  ◦ Evaluate these plans on compactness, competitiveness, partisan fairness, locality splits, voting-rights, etc.

Compactness and Competitive Districts

Compactness and Partisan Balance

Partisan Bias
(Dem Maj. Deviation from 50%)

Compactness

Florida

Virginia

Ohio

Adopted Plan = ▲

Small Donors

With Tyler Culberson and Suzanne Robbins

Small Donors to Congressional Candidates (give less than $200 aggregate)

- Analyze internal FEC data to examine patterns of aggregate small donor giving to incumbents, challengers, and candidates in open seats.

Ideological Extremism a factor for Incumbents (only)

▸ Using Bonica's Candidate Ideology CFScores:
  ◦ On average, ideologically more extreme incumbents raise $103,183 more than moderate incumbents.
  ◦ Challengers did not raise more money from their own extremism or the extremism of their incumbent opponent

Three Reforms

- Primaries
  - May diminish polarization
- Redistricting
  - May diminish polarization
- Small donors
  - May increase polarization

Polarization & Three Reforms

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