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Differences in Vote Margin of Candidates in the Florida Legislature

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DIFFERENCES IN VOTE MARGIN OF CANDIDATES IN THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program
in Political Science
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at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

What explains differences in the margin of victory in Florida legislative races? Data is collected for all 160 legislative races from 2016 (120 house contests and 40 senate elections) and two sets of analyses are conducted: all races and just competitive races. When looking at all races, five variables are statistically significant in the multivariate model. District party registration difference has a positive effect on margin of victory and the greatest relative impact. Races involving two major party candidates have a much smaller margin of victory, a contest with a major party versus a minor party (or No Party Affiliation candidate) has a somewhat smaller margin of victory, and a race involving only a write-in candidate as an opponent has a wider margin of victory. House races had somewhat smaller margins of victory compared to senate races. When examining just competitive races (contests that had at least two candidate names listed for an office) only two variables were statistically significant in the multivariate model. District party registration difference had a positive relationship with margin of victory and races involving a minor party candidate as the main challenger had higher margins than contests between two major party candidates.

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INTRODUCTION

What explains the difference in vote margin of candidates in the Florida Legislature?

This is an important question because without competitive elections Florida voters would have little meaningful choice in picking legislators and directing public policy. Florida has been called a microcosm of the United States due to its diverse population almost matching the racial and ethnic percentages of the country as a whole. This diversity has led to Florida being a powerful swing state. In recent years Florida has been under the control of the Republican Party, but each election there is a chance of a shift in that balance of power. The way the constituents vote for members of the Florida House and Florida Senate has an effect on how the state has an impact on a national scale. People speak about many factors that they think have an influence on why some candidates win and why some candidates do not. Common ones are differences in party registration in a district or if there is an incumbent present on the ballot. Redistricting has been a hot topic in recent years and the Florida Senate went through a redistricting in 2016 before the election cycle that is being studied. The characteristics of the constituents, the contest, and of the candidate are also going to come into play. The following theories and literature review will give important background knowledge on redistricting, the state legislature and other information on variables that can affect the margin of victory in an election.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully understand the differences in vote margin of candidates in the Florida Legislature it is essential to know background knowledge on the subject and aspects that may influence state politics in Florida. Florida is known as one of the nation's preeminent battleground states. When it comes to nationwide elections, Florida is a barometer in the sense that Florida has the ability to change the outcome of an election. Florida has been the largest swing state since the 1990s and this is attributed to the state being a microcosm of America (MacManus, Dye, Jewett, and Bonanza, 147). What that means is that the state is as diverse as the nation. It is made up of people from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. When it comes to state politics in Florida the political parties and elections have been as competitive as their national counterparts. For years, the Florida Legislature was dominated by Democrats and it was not till the 1960s when Republicans started gaining seats in each house (MacManus, Dye, Jewett, and Bonanza, 146). This shift to a true two-party system was the catalyst for the competitive nature that is now associated with the state legislature races. The Republicans took their first majority in both the Senate and the House in 1996 and this was no surprise due to the Republicans slowly catching up to the Democrats each election cycle (MacManus, Dye, Jewett, and Bonanza, 146).

As of now the Republicans still hold the majority in both houses. Going in to the 2018 elections there are 76 members of the Republican Party and 41 members of the Democratic Party in the Florida House of Representatives (Florida House of Representatives). There are 23 members of the Republican Party and 15 of the Democratic Party in the Florida State Senate (The Florida Senate). In 2016 there were 24 competitive state Senate elections and 78 competitive state House of Representative elections (Florida Department of State). Those 24

competitive Senate races and 78 competitive House races will be the focus of this investigation. Focusing on competitive races only in hopes that will highlight the main determining factors of each election. What is meant by competitive is that there is more than one person running for the seat. “It is only in competitive races where the normal campaign related activities, money, message, mechanics, make a difference and where variations in these resources can affect the outcome (Crew and Bayliss, 145).” If a candidate is running unopposed then the difference in vote margin would be explained by the fact that there was not another campaign occurring that would take away votes from the candidate instead of other factors, such as money, candidate traits, or effects of redistricting that are influential in competitive races.

In Florida, there are 120 representatives in the state House and they all have two-year term limits and can serve up to four consecutive terms or eight years in total. There are 40 state Senators and they have four-year term limits and can serve up to eight years or two terms. There are exceptions in the state Senate where a Senator can be in office for a total of ten years depending on how close they are initially elected to a reapportionment year.

Legislative reapportionment or otherwise known as redistricting is an important factor when it comes to the state legislature. “Every ten years, the United States Census Bureau is charged with tracking changes in the nation’s population, as required by article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution (Lewis, Jordan).” The changes in population result in a change of the number of U.S. Representatives and state legislators. This is done by redrawing the district lines. In 2012 the population of Florida has grown to almost 19 million people, with heavy growth in the Central and Southwest Florida areas (Jewett and McKee, 41). There is a one-person one-vote standard that the states are supposed to take into consideration when adjusting the districts after the census (Engstrom, Erik). The districts are geographical areas that are represented by the

candidate who wins the district. The redrawing of district lines are drawn by the legislatures themselves in most states (Levitt, Justin). The responsibility of election administration is primarily on the states due to the U.S. Constitution (Engstrom, Erik). The same Constitution that gave the states this administrative power did not outline how the districts were to be drawn. This opened the door for state politicians to have more control over their political agendas. The district lines can change the outcome of elections and in turn who controls the legislature.

Most research done on redistricting and its affects, focus on electoral outcomes and how those outcomes affect the partisan make-up of the state (Hayes and McKee). Historically, there have been attempts by legislatures to draw new districts that will benefit their party or the districts that they represent. This is done by making new districts that will primarily contain voters who are in support of them and their agenda. The partisan attempt of redistricting is known as gerrymandering. Redistricting in this way has created uncompetitive elections and partisanship (Lewis, Jordan). Some critics have even said that gerrymandering can erode away electoral competitiveness to the point of violating equal protections standards in the Constitution (Forgette, Garner, and Winkle). Malapportionment was an issue in the twentieth century, specifically in rural areas. The population was growing fast, and redistricting was not able to keep up with that growth. To fix the consequences of the malapportionment there were radical redrawing's taking place in the 1960s to the congressional and state legislative districts (Engstrom, Erik). This sweeping change to the districts brought the judiciary into the redistricting process. The role of the courts was and is to make sure that the districts are fair and not an attempt to gain partisan control. There have been studies on the historical competitiveness of state legislative general elections. As years have passed the percent of uncontested seats has increased from 20 percent in 1968 to 39 percent in 2002 (Forgette, Garner, and Winkle, 156). This has resulted in a decline in the competitiveness of state legislative elections because a high

percent of candidates do not have competition to begin with. The margin of victory over this time period has remained stable. There was a slight increase in margin of victory in the 1990s, but the absolute value of the margin of victory has remained high with candidates winning by almost 25 percentage points (Forgette, Garner, and Winkle, 156). The high percentage of races that are unopposed coupled with the high margin of victory has led to this idea that state legislative general elections are not competitive. This was a catalyst for why people were looking for reform to the redistricting process to work towards making these elections more competitive and more inclusive.

The Fair Districts Amendment was made to require legislators to draw districts that make geographic sense and not districts that would help them politically. It prohibited the drawing of new district lines with the intent of favoring political parties or incumbents with the intent or result of diminishing minority presentation and require districts to be compact and follow existing geographic and political boundaries where possible (Jewett and McKee, 42). The Amendment was put on the ballot in 2010 and passed with nearly 63 percent of the vote (Lewis, Jordan). With the implementation of the Fair Districts Amendment and the population changes in the census of 2010 those running in 2012 were campaigning in districts that were different than they would have been in 2010. This change resulted in several incumbents retiring and others having new competition in their party primaries or general elections (Crew and Anderson). The Republican Party had the supermajority in the House and the Senate after the 2012 elections in Florida, so they controlled the redistricting process for the next cycle (Jewett and McKee, 53). The new districts that were made in 2012 were approved by the Justice Department and the Florida Courts, but the Florida Supreme Court required some changes to the original senate map (Jewett and McKee, 43). All state legislators are elected by districts and the state legislature affects the daily lives of people, whether it be in the taxes that are in place or the regulations in

place that determine air quality. The affect these representatives have on their districts and on the state of Florida are the reasons why redistricting is an important topic. Illegitimate attempts of redistricting are impacting the democratic sense of the state government and impacting the citizens of the state. Redistricting does not always get attention. In most cases, the average citizen does not realize that it has occurred. There are some cases that disobey that trend. In Texas, in 2003, there was an attempt to redraw the district lines for Congress after the court had already redrawn the lines a few years prior (Levitt, Justin).

Redistricting can be a factor in who wins an election, but it is not the only reason a candidate wins. Even in the 2012 elections for the state legislature the new districts were affecting all of the candidates and there were other factors that determined the outcomes of that election cycles. The factors were the elements of legislative behavior, like incumbency success, the competitiveness, and party control (Crew and Anderson). Redistricting can have a varying degree of impact on an election cycle. When the result of redistricting is districts that are primarily representative of one party over the other then that will lead to a larger impact than a fair reapportionment cycle where each candidate is affected by the changing of the lines and the new areas do not reflect on party or race more than the others.

Redistricting can also change the relationship between representatives and individual campaign contributors. As discussed, districts grow and change depending on population size after each census. It is not uncommon for a district to move geographically and thus move away from past donors. The effect that this change has on the campaign contributions varies. It has been shown that as a district moves geographically the members of that district receives larger shares from donors outside of their new area (Crespin and Edwards, 220). When it comes to individual donors who are no longer a part of their past district are less likely to support their

previous representative, but contributors who are now in a district because of the geographical changes are more likely to donate (Crespin and Edwards, 220). It has been observed that geography is the most important factor influencing contribution decisions, with the three types of contributors being investors, ideologs, and intimates (Francia, Green, Herrnson, Powell, and Wilcox). The contributor breakdown of a district coupled with the partisan breakdown of a district can impact the vote margin of an election.

For redistricting to have an effect on a candidate they have to become a candidate first. Aside from the three constitutional qualifications that are required in order to be hold a congressional office, there is also a recruitment process. It is said that there are formal and informal elements to this recruitment process. The formal being the Constitution and state and federal laws governing nominations and elections. The informal being ambitions, skills, resources and then the popular mood and attitudes at the time (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 41). These elements coupled together result in the quality of representation that is had in the House and the Senate. The candidate process is more than those elements however. The decision to run for a political office deals with personal and emotional matters and considerations have to take place in order to realize if a one is committed to the process and committed to the outcome if they were to win a seat.

There is a recruiting season where the leaders and campaign staff of the Republican and Democrat parties reach out across the country in search of political talent (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 57). Amateurs and professionals are the two categories that potential candidates can be placed. An amateur would have a lack of political experience and professionals are career politicians, people whose career is in politics (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 57-58). Professionals have more to weigh when thinking about running and

amateurs are more likely to run for a long shot than are professionals. Many amateurs run for Congress, but the most successful congressional candidates are professionals before they run. “Candidate quality and campaign strength are critical factors in many battles for congressional seats (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 59).” A candidate who can present him or herself as skilled makes them compelling to voters. Name recognition as seen in the 2016 Presidential election with high profile candidates such as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and credibility are also major factors.

There are also campaign laws that have an impact on whether or not a candidate ends up running for office. Focusing more on campaign finance law because studies have shown that the task of fund-raising is a deterrent when it comes to running for office (Hamm, and Hogan, 458). When an incumbent is running one view suggests that a challenger is less likely to run if the states contribution limits are low (Hamm, and Hogan, 459). It is known that incumbents have a high seat retention rate and part of the reason for that success is that it is easier for them to restart their campaigns and reach out to donors and contributors they already have on their side than it is for challengers who have to essentially start from scratch. Campaign finance laws vary state to state. Some may have greater limits on sources of funding than others and some may even prohibit direct contributions from corporations (Hamm, and Hogan, 459). A study of races involving an incumbent in contested primary and general elections from 1994 to 1998 was done of the lower house elections for twenty-five states. It showed that of the 303 elections examined in Florida during that time only 25 incumbents faced a challenger in their primary election and 39 faced a challenger in their general election. When it came to an independent or minority party challenging an incumbent that happened in 1 percent of elections during the time period specified (Hamm, and Hogan, 462). This data supports the idea that an incumbent is more likely

to run in an uncontested election than they are to run in a contested election and that campaign finance laws may be an influencing factor.

The strength of a campaign can come down to stamina. If an incumbent is running that changes campaigns all together. Races that do not have an incumbent running are more likely to be competitive and to shift party control (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 60). Party strategists concentrate on these races and this thesis will focus on these competitive races as well. The procedures that are involved in party customs helps shape who ends up on the ballot. There are laws in each state that determine who is permitted to vote in a party's primary election. Closed primaries aid party loyalty and discourage outsider candidates from running (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 62). Florida has a closed primary, meaning that one can only vote in the primary for the party that they are registered to have an affiliation with. The incumbency factor is evident in primaries where an incumbent is running. When there is an incumbent in the primary the incumbent has only been defeated 1 percent of the time since the postwar period (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, 62). Open-seat races result in competitive primaries. Overall, there is a large pool of people who could run for a seat, but due to the recruitment process and nominating process as one gets farther into the pursuit of candidacy the path becomes narrower and the pool becomes smaller.

There are many candidate characteristics that can influence voters. These characteristics can include campaign skills, name recognition, integrity, competence, and dedication to public service (Adams, Merrill, Simas, and Stone). The personality of a candidate comes out in news coverage and other forms of communication. The way the media views a candidate can influence what the people think of the them in a positive and negative way. Voters rely heavily on these candidate traits when deciding who to cast their vote for and this is even when there is a control

for ideology and issue preference (Fridkin, and Kenney). It is expected that voters will vote for the party that they are registered as affiliated with, but every election cycle there are some voters who do not conform to that norm. The way that a candidate interacts with the media and citizens drives the election and determines the outcome (Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell). A candidate can come out on top in some cases due to partisans who defect from their usual voting patterns and vote for the opposing party (Herrnson, and Curry). There is debate over whether or not issues matter in elections. Policy issues are considered short term forces and campaigns fall into this short-term category as well. Research has shown that partisan attachment is the basis for vote choice and because there is low-visibility in many state level elections the long-term forces are what most believe have the strongest pull on the outcomes (Herrnson, and Curry). Even when people are not particularly fond of the candidate that is representing their party typically, they will still vote for them. Studies have shown that members of Congress hold more extreme views than their constituents which supports the idea that there are differences that the voter puts to the side (Bafumi, and Herron, 519). This was also seen in the 2016 Presidential Election. People sticking to their party nominee further supports the idea that party affiliation is the best predictor of vote choice (Nelson and Mellow, 89). If we can see who someone is likely to vote for by their party, then that will have an impact on the vote margin in a given district. If there is strong support for one party in a district, then the vote margin should be higher than if it was a divided district when it comes to party affiliation. Analyzing the partisan breakdown in districts will help show the strength of the relationship between vote margin and party affiliation. This will help show if what happens at the national level trickles down to the state level elections.

THEORIES EXPLAINING DIFFERENCE IN VOTE MARGIN OF CANDIDATES IN THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE

Political Districting:

This theory suggests that the partisan breakdown of a district has an effect on the vote margin between the winning candidate and the runner up. Specifically, the percent of a district affiliated with the Republican, Democrat and other parties will have an impact on whether a legislative race is close or a blowout. Districts with high percentage of voters identifying with one major party are more likely to elect a candidate from their preferred party by a wide margin. Districts with an even number of voters from each major party are more likely to have competitive elections.

Constituent Characteristics:

This theory suggests that the characteristics of the constituents that make-up a district have an effect on the vote margin. These characteristics can include the percent of each race and sex that are in a district. The median household income and level of education in a district can also have an effect. Variations on the percentages can have an impact on why one candidate beats another and by how much.

Candidate Centered Characteristics:

This theory suggests that characteristics of the candidates who are running will have an effect on the vote margin of the election. These characteristics can include race and sex of the candidates.

This will test the effect that a female or minority candidate can have on an election.

Contest Characteristics:

This theory suggests that there are certain contest specific characteristics that effect the vote margin of the election. The money raised, and the money spent by the candidates have shown to have an impact on elections. In addition, whether there is minor party or major party competition can have an effect: elections that include one major party candidate against only a minor party candidate are likely to have wide margins of victory. Finally, whether the race is for a house or senate seat may also make a difference in the margin of victory. House districts are geographically smaller and have fewer constituents and may be more homogenous and thus less contested, while senate districts are larger, have more constituents and tend to be more heterogeneous and thus more competitive.

HYPOTHESES

Political Districting Variables

H1 – There is a positive relationship between party registration differences and the vote margin.

The higher the difference between registration for one party versus another, the higher the vote margin. This will include information on the percent of people registered as Republicans, Democrats, and those not registered as one of the two major political parties. The party registration data will show the partisan breakdowns of each district. If a district is primarily made up of registered Republicans versus registered Democrats then the vote margin will be higher.

Constituent Characteristics

H2 – There is a positive relationship between racial homogenization and the vote margin. The district breakdown of the percent of each race represented will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between more homogeneous districts or diverse districts when it comes to vote margin. The more racially homogenous a district is the higher the vote margin. If a racial group makes up the majority of the district, then the vote margin will be higher than if there was not a majority racial group.

H3 – The closer the percent of each sex the lower the vote margin. The percent female and male for each will be collected and analyzed to have a better understanding of the district breakdown and to see if there is a relationship between majority male districts versus majority female districts. If a district is split evenly between women and men, then the vote margin is likely to be lower due to the differences in opinion. Women are also more likely to be registered as Democrats than men, so that may also have an impact on this variable.

H4 – There is a positive relationship between the average age of a district and the vote margin. The age breakdown of each district will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between districts with an older population versus districts with a younger population when it comes to the vote margin. Older populations tend to vote more and follow elections closer than their younger counterparts. The older the population the higher the vote margin. Younger or more diverse age populations tend to also be more diverse on the political spectrum leading to closer races and in turn lower vote margins.

Candidate Centered Characteristics

H5 – If both candidates are from the majority race of the district, then the vote margin will be lower than if one candidate was not from the majority race. The race or races of the candidates running will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between racial homogenous races and races where there are candidates of different races. Essentially if there is a minority candidate running or if there is not a minority candidate running. A district that is majority Hispanic and has a Hispanic candidate running against a non-Hispanic candidate will have a higher vote margin than if two Hispanics were running against each other in that district.

H6 – If both of the candidates are of the same sex, then the vote margin will be lower than if the candidates running were of different sexes. The sex or sexes of the candidates running will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between vote margin when a race only has candidates from one sex or when a race has a candidate of each sex. The thought is that in races of candidates of different sexes one might be seen as more of an underdog candidate than the other based off of that factor.

H7 – If there is an incumbent running, then the vote margin will be higher than if it was an open seat election. The incumbency advantage is well known and will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between there being an incumbent running versus when an incumbent is not running and the vote margin. Incumbents have a high reelection rate and will run unopposed more often than first time candidates. Incumbents do not have to start their campaigns from scratch and it is usually easy for them to reclaim financial donors. An incumbent running also scares off potential opposition since the chance of winning against an incumbent is lower than the chance of winning in an open seat election.

Contest Characteristics

H8 – There is a positive relationship between the difference in amount of money spent and the vote margin. The amount of money spent by each candidate will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between the difference and the vote margin. The higher the difference of total money spent between candidates the higher the vote margin. If one candidate spends a large amount more than the other candidate, then the vote margin will be higher. Spending more results in more exposure which leads to more votes.

H9 – If both candidates are from one of the major parties, then the vote margin will be lower than other types of races (for instance if a minority party, NPA, or write in faces a Republican or Democrat). Minority parties do not have as strong party organization or the same funding opportunities. The party of each candidate will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between races between majority parties and races with a minority party present. Major party candidates will likely have a large number of supporters from their respective party bases turning out to vote which should tend to keep races more competitive.

H10 – If one candidate is from one of the two major parties and the other candidate is from a minor party or non-party affiliated, then the vote margin will be higher than if two major party candidates were present but lower than if there was no named competition on the ballot (a write in or an uncontested race). The major party candidate will probably have a large base of party support that turns out while the non-major party opponent will likely lack such a group of supporters. Conversely a minor party or no party affiliated candidate will still be likely to garner more votes than a person whose name does not appear on the ballot at all since many voters may not even know the name of an official write in candidate and people who don't like major party or the major party candidate will be able to register their disapproval with a vote for the minor party or the NPA candidate.

H11 – If there is a write-in candidate as the only opponent, then the vote margin will be higher than if there was another named opposition candidate on the ballot. Write-in candidates do not appear on the ballot, so they typically receive less than one percent of the votes. If a candidate's only competition is a write-in candidate, then that is virtually like no competition at all since voters see only one name on the ballot and thus that named candidate will likely win a very large share of the votes.

H12 – If only one person files for a legislative seat, then the vote margin will be higher than for any other type of race. When someone is running uncontested in Florida their race does not actually appear on the ballot and they automatically win and theoretically receive 100% of the vote.

H13– If it is a House race, then the vote margin will be higher than if it is a Senate race. The State Legislature is made up of the House and of the Senate. These races differ in size and in the competitive nature. The Senate districts are three times the size of the House districts, meaning

that they are larger and more diverse than the House. Both races will be analyzed to see if there is a relationship between the type of State Legislative race and the vote margin.

METHODOLOGY AND MEASUREMENT

To conduct my analysis, I will do a regression analysis to show the relationship between different variables and the effect that they have on the vote margin of candidates in the 2016 races for the Florida Legislature – both the Florida House and the Florida Senate. I will collect the information of the races from the Florida Division of Elections. Two sets of analyses will be run: one for all races and one for competitive races where more than one person has filed for a seat. This means that the analysis for all races will include 160 races since there are 120 house seats and 40 senate seats. Normally, senate races are staggered so that only 20 would be up for grabs in any election cycle. However, a court mandated senate redistricting for 2016 resulted in elections for all 40 seats. This will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of which variables effect vote margin and to what extent.

Variables

The dependent variable is the difference in vote margin of candidates running for the same seat in the Florida Legislature. Vote Margin is determined by taking the absolute value of the difference between the first-place candidate and the runner up candidate. The value will not take into consideration the other candidates who may have ran and received votes. My analysis will use information from the Florida Division of Elections for the 2016 State Legislature cycle. There will be an inverse relationship between the vote margin value and the competitiveness of the race, meaning that the lower the value the more competitive the race and the higher the value the less competitive the race.

Independent variables are divided into four categories; political districting, constituent characteristics, candidate centered characteristics, and contest characteristics.

Political Districting:

Party Registration Difference – the absolute value of the difference between the percent of registered Republicans and Democrats in the district. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections Book Closing Reports from the 2016 General Elections.

Constituent Characteristics:

Racial Homogenization – the absolute value of the difference between the percent of the largest racial/ethnic group and the 2nd largest racial/ethnic group in the district. Thus, it will be the absolute value of the difference between white and black, white and Hispanic, or black and Hispanic. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections 2016 Bookclosing Reports.

Sex – the absolute value of the difference between the percent of males and females in the district. This information will come from the United States Census Bureau and from the Florida House and Senate Redistricting Statistics.

Age – the percent of people over the age of 65. This information will come from Florida House and Senate Redistricting Statistics.

Candidate Centered Characteristics:

Race/Ethnicity – a dummy variable recorded as 0 if both candidates are the same race or ethnic group or 1 if candidates are of different races. This information will come from the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate websites, along with the Florida Division of Elections and additional background research when necessary.

Sex – a dummy variable where if both the candidates running are of the same sex, then it will be recorded as 0 and if they are not the same sex then it will be recorded as 1. This information will be gathered from the Florida Division of Elections.

Incumbency – a dummy variable where if there is an incumbent it will be recorded as 1 and if there is not an incumbent it will be recorded as 0. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections.

Contest Characteristics:

Money Spent Difference – the absolute value of money spent by candidate R minus money spent by candidate D. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections Campaign Finance Database.

Major Party Competition – a race between a Republican and a Democrat would constitute a race between majority parties. Any other type of race (for instance a Libertarian running against a Democrat) that would constitute a different type of contest. Races between the majority parties will be coded as 1 and any other type of race as 0. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections.

Minor Party Competition – if there is a race between a candidate from one of the two major parties and a candidate from a minor party or non-party affiliated then that would be considered minor party competition. Races with a minor party present will be coded as 1 and races without a minor party will be coded as 0. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections.

Write-In Competition – if there is an official write-in candidate registered for a contest then that would constitute a race with write-in competition. If there is a write-in candidate, then that will be recorded as 1 and if there is not a write-in candidate that will be recorded as 0. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections.

No Competition – if there is only one name on the ballot, then that would be considered a race with no competition. Races that have a write-in candidate are considered no competition since there is still only one name on the ballot. Races with no competitor will be coded as 1 and races with more than one name in the ballot will be coded as 0.

House or Senate – a dummy variable where a House race will be recorded as 1 and a Senate race will be recorded as 0. This information will come from the Florida Division of Elections.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

EXPLAINING DIFFERENCE IN VOTE MARGIN OF CANDIDATES IN THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE – ALL RACES

UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 1: Explaining Vote Margin in All Races - Univariate Analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Margin Difference	58.405	41.044	160
Registration Difference	16.901	14.970	160
Race/Ethnicity Difference District	47.760	22.518	160
Sex Difference District	3.079	1.785	160
% 65 and Older	17.336	7.039	160
Money Spent Difference	233408.226	229130.346	160
Major Party	N/A	N/A	75
Minor Party	N/A	N/A	14
Write-In	N/A	N/A	14
Race/Ethnicity Difference Candidate	N/A	N/A	29
Sex Difference Candidate	N/A	N/A	38
Incumbent	N/A	N/A	72
House	N/A	N/A	120

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables examined in all 120 state house districts and 40 senate districts, meaning that it includes the 76 uncontested races, so the races where there was only one candidate filed and won the race. Out of the 160 districts there were 75 that contained races between a Republican and a Democrat. There were only 14 races that included a candidate from a minor party and then another 14 that contained a write-in candidate. There were 29 races where the candidates were of different races or ethnicities and 38 races where the candidates identified as different sexes. There were 72 incumbents running for reelection during the election cycle being studied. The mean for margin of victory was 58.4, meaning that the average difference between the first and second place candidate was 58.4 percent. The standard deviation is large being 41, so there is a lot of spread in the difference in margin of victory. The difference between registered republicans and registered democrats averages out to 16.9, with the standard deviation being 14.97. For the race or ethnicity differences of the constituents the mean was 47.76 and the standard deviation was 22.5, so most districts had a race that made up almost half the population. The sex difference between constituents was small with the average being only 3 percent and the standard deviation was 1.78, meaning that most districts had small differences between the amount of male and female constituents. The difference between the 65 percent of older population was 17.33, with a standard deviation of 7. The money spent differences between candidates as expected resulted in a large mean of 233408.22 and a standard deviation of 229130.34. There was a large amount of variance when it came to the amount spent by candidates, since minor party candidates would spend significantly less money than their major party counterparts. Even between two major party candidates the spent difference was often high depending on the partisan breakdown of the district.

BIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 2: Explaining Vote Margins in All Races - Bivariate Regression Results

Independent Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta	Significance	Constant B
Registration Difference	1.478	.184	.539	.000***	33.422
Write-In	45.278	10.942	.313	.000***	54.443
Minor Party	-23.011	11.373	-.159	.045**	60.418
Major Party	-75.868	2.473	-.925	.000***	93.968
No Competition	79.131	1.690	.966	.000***	20.818
Race/Ethnicity Difference District	-.279	.143	-.153	.053*	71.721
Race/Ethnicity Difference Candidate	-31.484	8.070	-.296	.000***	64.111
Sex Difference Candidate	-29.591	7.278	-.308	.000***	65.433
Money Spent Difference	-2.761E-5	.000	-.154	.052*	64.850
65 or older	.267	.463	.046	.565	53.777
Sex Difference District	1.308	1.825	.057	.475	54.377
Incumbent	-1.077	6.542	-.013	.869	58.890
House Race	-4.560	7.509	-.048	.545	61.825

Significance Levels = ***.01, **.05, *.10

All constants were significant at the .000 level

Table 2 shows the bivariate regression results for all independent variables hypothesized to have an impact on the vote margin in all 160 state legislative races. The results showed that these variables were significant; registration difference, write in candidate, minor party candidate, major party candidate, no competition, racial difference in the district, race difference of candidates, sex difference of candidates, and money spent difference.

When there is no difference in party registration in a district the vote margin is 33.4 percent. For each one percent increase in difference in party registration there was a 1.48 percent increase in the margin of victory. Party registration difference alone explains 29 percent of the

variance in vote margin. This supports our initial hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between party registration and vote margin.

When there was a race that included a write-in candidate as the only opposition, the margin of victory increased by 45.3 percent and when there was no write-in candidate the vote margin was 54.4 percent. This variable only explains 10 percent of the difference in margin. This is in line with our initial hypothesis that the margin of victory would increase when there was only a write-in candidate present.

Races that have a minority party or no party affiliated candidate on the ballot showed a 23 percent decrease in the margin of victory. When no minor party or no party affiliated candidate was on the ballot the margin was 60.4 percent. A minor party candidate only explained 2.5 percent of the change in vote margin. This is on par with the initial hypothesis since the decrease in vote margin when a minor party is present is smaller than the decrease when two major party candidates are present.

If a race contained a candidate from both major parties, as in there was a candidate from the Republican Party and a candidate from the Democrat Party then the margin of victory decreases by 75.9 percent. When the race does not include a candidate from both major parties then the vote margin is 94 percent. Major party candidate explains 86 percent of the difference. This supports our initial hypothesis about two major party candidates causing a lower margin of victory.

When only one candidate's name appears on the ballot (or when a candidate won by default because there were no challengers at all) the margin of victory increases by 79 percent. When there is more than one name on the ballot the margin is 21 percent. The no competition variable explains 93 percent of the variance in the margin of victory. This supports our initial hypothesis since having no competition caused the margin of victory to increase and to increase

a significant percentage. One would expect this result since when there is no competition at all the winner theoretically takes 100% of the vote and if there is only one name on the ballot for the voters to choose from then it is likely only a miniscule number of voters actually even know the name of the person who has registered as a write-in candidate.

For each one percent increase in racial and ethnic difference among constituents there is a .28 percent decrease in the margin. The larger the racial and ethnic difference is of the constituents in a district the smaller the margin of victory becomes. When there is not a difference the vote margin is 72 percent. This variable alone only explains 2.3 percent of the change in margin. This is the opposite of what our initial hypothesis since the increase in racial differences led to a decrease in margin, instead of an increase in margin.

When the candidates are of different races or ethnicities the margin decreased by 31.5 percent. When the candidates were of the same race or ethnicity the margin was 64 percent. The race or ethnicity of the candidates explain 9 percent of the variance in vote margin. Again, this is the opposite of our initial hypotheses. The initial thought was that the vote margin would be higher if the candidates were of different races not lower.

When the candidates are of different sexes then there was a 29.6 decrease in the margin. When the candidates were of the same sex then the margin of victory was 65 percent. The sex of the candidates explained 10 percent of the difference in vote margin. Our initial hypothesis thought that candidates of the same sex would result in a decrease in vote margin, not the other way around.

The larger the dollar difference between the candidates spending the smaller the margin of victory. When there is no difference in amount spent the margin is 65 percent. Money spent only explains 2.4 percent of the variance. Initially the thought was that money spent difference was going to result in a positive relationship, meaning that the larger the difference in

spending the larger the vote margin. The data surprisingly showed otherwise since it seems that a larger dollar difference resulted in a smaller vote margin. There were a few races where one candidate spent more by a half a million dollars and then the vote margin was only a couple points. These instances of extreme out spending in a few close races might help account for the result.

A series of bivariate regressions showed that these variables were not significant; 65 percent or older, sex difference, incumbent, and house race.

The percent of each district that was 65 years old or older did not have a statistically significant effect on vote margin. Districts that had larger percentages of 65 and older did not have significantly different vote margins than districts with smaller 65 and older populations. This does not support our initial hypothesis; the positive relationship is not at the strength that was expected.

The percent difference between males and females in a district did not have an effect on the margin of victory. A larger percent of males or females did not cause a significant change in the margin. This also did not support our initial hypothesis due to the difference in sex of a district not having an impact on the margin of victory.

The presence or absence of an incumbent candidate did not have a statistically significant effect on the vote margin. When there was no an incumbent on the ballot the vote margin was 59 percent. This surprisingly did not support our initial hypothesis. The redistricting of the Senate in 2016 might explain this result since there were a number of previous Senators running, but they were running in different districts than their prior election.

There was no difference in competitiveness between House races and Senate Races. The difference between the two types of races was not statistically significant enough to have an

effect on the margin. This did not support our initial hypothesis since the Senate districts are larger the thought was that they would be more competitive than the House races.

FULL MODEL – MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION

Table 3: Explaining Vote Margin in All Races - Multivariate Regression Results

Model	B	Standard	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	90.794	4.346		20.891	.000***
Registration Difference	.261	.073	.095	3.564	.000***
Major Party	-71.511	2.278	-.872	-31.388	.000***
Minor Party	-36.273	3.087	-.251	-11.751	.000***
Write-In	9.771	3.263	.067	2.995	.003***
House Race	-5.196	2.552	-.055	-2.036	.044**
Race Difference Candidate	-2.167	2.351	-.020	-.922	.358
Sex Difference Candidate	-3.030	2.127	-.032	-1.424	.156
Race Difference District	-.017	.051	-.009	-.329	.742
Sex Difference District	.153	.483	.007	.317	.752
% 65 and Older	.191	.150	.033	1.274	.205
Money Spent Difference	1.816E-6	.000	.010	.402	.688
Incumbent	1.412	1.987	.017	.711	.479

Significance Levels = ***.01, **.05, *.10

R Square = .939

F Change = 189.261

Durbin-Watson = 1.944

Table 3 contains the results for the multivariate regression analysis seeking to explain the variance in vote margin in all 160 contests. When regression is run on the full model, the full model explains almost 94 percent of the variance in margin of victory. The F Change Statistic was 189 which shows that the full model was statistically significant. The Durbin-Watson was 1.94 which indicates that serial correlation was not a problem for the model. All of the variance inflation factors were less than two, indicating that multicollinearity was also not a problem in this model. The constant for this model indicates that the margin of victory for a race where all other variables are set to 0 is 90.79 percent.

There were five variables that were statistically significant; registration difference, major party, minor party, write in and house race. Each one percent increase in the difference between registered Republicans and Democrats leads to a 2.61 increase in margin of victory. When there was major party competition margin of victory was 71.5 percent smaller. When there was only minor party (or NPA) competition on the ballot the margin of victory was also smaller, but only by 36 percentage points, about half of what it was for major party. Conversely, when there was only a write in candidate the margin of candidate was larger by almost 9.7 percent. House races have a 5.19 percent lower margin of victory than Senate races, so the House races are on average somewhat more competitive than Senate races. These five variables had roughly the same impact in the bivariate regression and they were statistically significant and had the same direction in both bivariate and multivariate regression. According to the standardized coefficient the statistically significant variable with the largest impact was major party whose beta was -.873. Minor party had the second largest impact at -.250. Presence of a write in candidate had an impact of .067 and house race had the smallest beta of -.055. Party registration difference as expected supported our initial hypothesis. Major and minor party both also as expected supported our initial hypothesis about how each would decrease the vote margin. The presence of a write-in

also supported our initial thoughts since the vote margin ended up being larger when a write-in candidate was present. House races being slightly more competitive did not support our initial hypothesis. Since Senate districts are larger the initial thought was that they would be more competitive than House races.

There were seven variables that were not statistically significant; race or ethnicity difference among candidates, race or ethnicity difference in the district, sex difference between candidates, sex difference in the district, percent of the district 65 or older, money spent difference and if there was an incumbent. In a bivariate analysis four of these variables were statistically significant; race or ethnicity difference among candidates, race or ethnicity difference in the district, sex difference between candidates, and money spent difference.

EXPLAINING DIFFERENCE IN VOTE MARGIN OF CANDIDATES IN THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE – COMPETITIVE RACES

UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 4: Explaining Vote Margin in Competitive Races - Univariate Analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Margin Difference	20.817	14.731	84
Registration Difference	10.260	9.855	84
Race/Ethnicity Difference District	50.716	21.429	84
Sex Difference District	2.990	1.633	84
% 65 and Older	17.103	5.737	84
Money Spent Difference	261442.142	182539.308	84
Minor Party	N/A	N/A	14
Race/Ethnicity Difference Candidate	N/A	N/A	24
Sex Difference Candidate	N/A	N/A	31
Incumbent	N/A	N/A	39
House	N/A	N/A	65

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables examined in the competitive races, meaning the races that had at least two candidate names on the ballot. This set of analyses

excludes districts where only one candidate filed to run for an office or where the only competitive for a major party candidate was an official write-in candidate (because under Florida law write-in names do not appear on the ballot). Out of the 160 districts originally studied 84 of them were considered competitive. Minor party candidates were present in 14 of the races, which is the same number as in the analysis with all races. Candidates were of different races or ethnicities in 24 of the races and they identified as different sexes in 31 of the races. There were 39 incumbents present in this model and that is 33 less than in the All Races model. A decrease in that category is expected since incumbents are more likely to run without competition than those running for the first time. Of the 84 competitive races 65 of those were races for seats in the House of Representatives. That is surprising since one would think that Senate races would have more competition because Senate districts are much larger than House districts. The average difference in vote margin was 20.8 percent, with a standard deviation of 14.7. This is a lower average and tighter standard deviation than in the all races model. The registration difference had a mean of 10.26 and a standard deviation of 9.85, which again is lower than it was when all races were included. The mean for racial and ethnic differences of constituents was 50.7 and the standard deviation was 21.42. The sex difference of constituents was a lot smaller with the mean being 2.99 and the standard deviation being 1.63. This difference between sex and race is expected since more races are collected than sexes. The average for the percent of the population that was 65 or older was 17.1 and the standard deviation was 5.73. The difference in money spent between candidates had mean of 261442.14 and a standard deviation of 182539.30. This mean is higher than it was in the all races model, but the standard deviation is lower than it was in that model.

BIVARIATE REGRESSION

Table 5: Explaining Vote Margin in Competitive Races - Bivariate Regression Results

Independent Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta	Significance	Constant B
Registration Difference	1.056	.177	.706	.000***	9.987
Minor Party	32.081	3.519	.709	.000***	16.999
Money Spent Difference	-1.582E-2	.000	-.196	.074*	24.953
Race/Ethnicity Difference Candidate	-3.064	3.564	-.095	.392	21.693
Sex Difference Candidate	.933	3.350	.031	.781	20.474
Incumbent	2.470	3.231	.084	.447	19.671
Race/Ethnicity Difference District	-.073	.075	-.107	.333	24.545
Sex Difference District	.314	.996	.035	.753	19.879
% 65 and Older	.200	.283	.078	.480	17.389
House Race	1.424	3.862	.041	.713	19.716

Significance Levels = ***.01, **.05, *.10

All constants were significant at the .000 level, except % 65 or older was at the .001 level.

Table 5 shows the bivariate regression results for all independent variables hypothesized to have an impact on the vote margin in all 84 of the competitive state legislative races. The results showed that these variables were significant: registration difference, minor party, and money spent difference.

When there was no difference in party registration the vote margin was about 10 percent. For every percent increase in party registration difference there was a 1 percent increase in vote margin. This variable alone explains 49.9 percent of the variance in margin of victory.

When there is not a minor party candidate on the ballot the vote margin is about 17 percent. When there is a minor party candidate the margin of victory increases by 32 percent. This explains 50.3 percent of the change in vote margin.

When there was no difference in amount of money spent between the candidates the vote margin was 24.9 percent. The vote margin decreases slightly for each dollar increase in difference spent. Money spent difference only explains 3.8 percent of the difference in margin of victory. This result is opposite what was hypothesized since the expectation was that as the difference in money spent between the candidates increases so would the margin of victory.

A series of bivariate regressions showed that these variables were not significant; race or ethnicity difference of the candidates, sex difference of the candidates, incumbent, race or ethnicity difference in the district, sex difference in the district, percent 65 and older, and house race.

The difference in race or ethnicity of the candidates did not have a statistically significant effect on the vote margin. If both candidates were of the same race or if the candidates were different races did not have a significant impact on the margin of victory.

The sex difference of candidates did not have a statistically significant effect on the margin of victory. There was not a real difference between races that had two candidates who identified as the same sex or two candidates who identified as different sexes.

The presence or absence of an incumbent in a race did not have a significant effect on the vote margin. The margin of victory was not affected by having an incumbent in the race or not having an incumbent in the race. Since this analysis is from competitive races only that could

have had an effect on the significance of an incumbent. Incumbents tend to run uncontested more than other candidates, so many incumbents might not be accounted for in this dataset.

The difference in races or ethnicities of the constituents in a district did not have an effect on the margin of victory. Districts with large differences between races and districts with small differences between races had similar vote margins.

The difference in sex of constituents did not have a statistically significant effect on the margin of victory. Having a larger margin between men and women in a district does not cause a larger or smaller vote margin.

The percent of the constituents that are 65 or older did not have a significant impact on the margin. Districts that had larger percentages of 65 and older did not have significantly different vote margins than districts with smaller 65 and older populations.

The type of race did not have a statistically significant effect on the margin of victory. House and Senate races did not have differences in competitiveness. More of the competitive races were House races but looked at all together there was not a trend of House races having smaller margins of victories than Senate races.

FULL MODEL – MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION

Table 6: Explaining Vote Margin in Competitive Races - Multivariate Regression Results

Model	B	Standard	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	.766	4.935		.155	.877
Registration Difference	.854	.112	.571	7.655	.000***
Minor Party	22.361	3.092	.495	7.232	.000***
Race Difference Candidate	.059	2.036	.002	.029	.977
Sex Difference Candidate	-1.059	1.894	-.035	-.559	.578
Incumbent	2.355	2.066	.080	1.140	.258
Race Difference District	.041	.057	.059	.709	.481
Sex Difference District	.118	.569	.013	.208	.836
% 65 and Older	.099	.200	.039	.497	.620
Money Spent Difference	7.747E-6	.000	0.96	1.261	.211
House Race	2.279	2.818	.065	.809	.421

Significance Levels = ***.01, **.05, *.10

R Square = .741

F Change = 20.877

Durbin-Watson = 2.308

Table 6 contains the results for the multivariate regression analysis seeking to explain the variance in vote margin in all 84 competitive contests. When regression is run on the full model, the model explains 74 percent of the variance. The F Change statistic is 20.87, so the model is statistically significant. The Durbin-Watson was 2.308, meaning that serial correlation was not a problem for the model. All of the variance inflation factors were less than two, indicating that

multicollinearity was also not a problem in this model. The constant for this model indicates that the margin of victory for a race where all other variables are set to 0 is 76.6 percent.

There were two variables that were statistically significant; party registration difference and minor party. For each one percent increase in the difference between registered Republicans and registered Democrats there is an 8.54 percent increase in vote margin. When there was a minor party candidate the margin of victory increased by 22.3 percent. These two variables were also statistically significant and had a similar impact, and direction in the bivariate regression as they did in the multivariate regression. According to the standardized coefficient party registration difference had a larger impact at .571 to the .495 of minor party. The results in both these instances are consistent with the hypothesized relationship.

There were eight variables that were not statistically significant; race difference of the candidates, sex difference of the candidates, incumbent, race difference in the district, sex difference in the district, percent 65 and older, money spent difference, and house race. In a bivariate analysis one of these eight variables were statistically significant; money spent difference. The other seven variables were also not statistically significant in the bivariate analysis.

CONCLUSION

The aim of my research was to explain the differences in vote margin of candidates in the Florida Legislature. Information was collected on all 120 house districts and all 40 senate districts from the 2016 general election. I intended to see which variables had a significant impact on the vote margin and which did not have a significant impact. Political districting, constituent characteristics, candidate centered characteristics, and contest characteristics were collected and inputted into a spreadsheet. Two spreadsheets were created; one contained all 160 districts and the other contained the districts that were considered to have competitive races. A competitive race was an election that had at least two names on the ballot. There were 84 competitive races by that definition. Using IBM SPSS software, a univariate analysis, a bivariate regression, and multivariate regression was done on both models, resulting in six sets of analysis total.

The all races model showed that nine of the variables were statistically significant in the bivariate regression; registration difference, write in candidate, minor party candidate, major party candidate, no competition, racial difference in the district, race difference of candidates, sex difference of candidates, and money spent difference. Five of the variables were statistically significant in the multivariate regression; registration difference, major party, minor party, write in and house race.

The competitive races model showed that three of the variables were statistically significant in the bivariate regression; registration difference, minor party, and money spent difference. There were only two variables that were statistically significant in the multivariate regression; party registration difference and minor party.

The all races model resulted in more statistically significant variables in both regressions than the competitive races model. This was expected since there were 76 less races being

analyzed in the competitive model. Party registration difference and minor party were the two variables that were statistically significant in all four regressions. This was not surprising, but what was surprising was that there were only two variables that were significant in each regression. It was thought that money spent difference and the presence or absence of an incumbent was going to explain more of the variance in vote margin.

The all races model showed that four variables were not statistically significant in the bivariate regression; percent 65 or older, sex difference in the district, incumbent, and house race. Seven of the variables were not statistically significant in the multivariate regression; race or ethnicity difference among candidates, race or ethnicity difference in the district, sex difference between candidates, sex difference in the district, percent of the district 65 or older, money spent difference and if there was an incumbent.

The competitive races model showed that seven of the variables were not statistically significant in the bivariate regression; race or ethnicity difference of the candidates, sex difference of the candidates, incumbent, race or ethnicity difference in the district, sex difference in the district, percent 65 and older, and house race. Eight variables were not statistically significant in the multivariate regression; race difference of the candidates, sex difference of the candidates, incumbent, race difference in the district, sex difference in the district, percent 65 and older, money spent difference, and house race.

All together these results show that party registration difference has the biggest impact on the margin of victory. The difference in registered Republicans and registered Democrats in a district largely determines how competitive the race is going to end up. The most competitive races were between districts that were evenly divided between the two major parties. The candidate characteristics and the constituent characteristics did not matter. The presence or absence of an incumbent ended up not mattering. Differences in money spent only had an effect

in the bivariate regressions and type of race only mattered in the all races multivariate model. One reason that money spent difference results did not turn out as initially hypothesized might be that the amount of money spent by the challengers is the most important variable rather than the gross difference between the candidates. Some research has shown that because incumbents have an advantage in name recognition and campaign contributions, challengers have to raise and spend a lot of money in order to raise awareness among voters. Successful challengers may still be outspent, but will have raised and spent a sufficient amount of money to get their name and message out to the public. It may also be that money and incumbency are factors that help decide who wins a race, but have little or no direct effect on the closeness of the race.

This research does cover all 160 districts in Florida, but that is also a shortcoming due to the data only covering the 2016 election cycle and only in the state of Florida. Additional research on more than one election year and more than one state could prove helpful in understanding what explains the differences in vote margin of candidates in state legislatures overall, not just in Florida. Since there was an unorthodox midyear redistricting in the Senate in 2016 that caused all of the seats to be up for elections instead of the usual half. The new districts also caused many incumbents to technically run in a different district than they had run in previously, which might explain the lower than expected impact of the presence or absence of an incumbent. This election cycle was also during a presidential election year, so it might be interesting to analyze data from a non-presidential election year and see if that has an impact on the results. In addition, given that Donald Trump was a maverick candidate who ran an unconventional campaign in 2016, it might be useful to analyze other presidential election years as well. Further research on competitiveness might also be conducted on the decision by major parties to contest a particular race with the dependent variable measures as a dummy variable:

“1” for races with two major party candidates and “0” for contests with only one major party candidate.

In the future, this research could be expanded to look at multiple election years in Florida and then look at multiple election years in other states as well. Starting with neighboring states such as Georgia and Alabama might open the door for seeing if there are regional differences in which variables have an effect on the margin of victory. Seeing how Florida compares to other preeminent swing states like Ohio could also prove to be an interesting analysis. Another possible factor that could be added in the future is replacing the current money spent difference variables with one that looks at the amount spent by the challenger. The thought there is to see if that measure would show different results than the current measure of the absolute value of the money spent differences between the candidates. Adding a third model that only contains the competitive races that include a Republican and a Democrat candidate could be interesting to see if some of the other variables become statistically significant in those types of races. Candidate centered, and contest characteristics did not have a direct impact on the vote margin according to the current models, so controlling for just races that contain the two major parties might help bring out those variables.

The takeaway from this research is that despite initial thoughts about the potential impact of candidate and constituent characteristics on vote margin, party registration differences and the presence or absence of major or minor party competition largely explain the differences in margin of victory of candidates in the Florida Legislature. Party registration differences are directly affected by redistricting and the presence or absence of major or minor party competition is indirectly impacted by redistricting decisions. This showcases the stakes of the upcoming redistricting after the 2020 census and highlights the importance of following the guidelines set

out in the Florida Fair District constitutional amendments to ensure that new districts are not drawn with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party.

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