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Polarization: The Tea Party Movement's Effect on Congressional Roll Call Voting

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The Tea Party movement is the most recent example of a faction rising from within an American political party. It rose unexpectedly, and it is hard to predict where it will end. It is important to get inside the heads of incumbent Congressmen to see how they deal with events like the rise of a faction within a two party system. This study analyzes roll call voting ideology scores of both Democrat and Republican incumbents to see just how the presence of the Tea Party caused a change from the 111th Congress to the 112th Congress. I find that the presence of the Tea Party seems to have a positive influence on roll call voting ideology, effectively pushing the parties further apart on the traditional liberal-conservative spectrum of ideology. Due to low sample sizes, this unfortunately cannot be said with statistical certainty. It is clear by the end that the Tea Party, as a faction attempting to change the status quo, further separated the two parties. This was due to the Republican Party’s need to assume the movement to ensure they remained Republicans. In a sort of reactionary force, the Democratic Party has been able to become more liberal in the face of extreme opponents and still retain the median voter all Representatives seek.
In 2010, one of the most popular subjects for people in the political realm was the exact classification of the Tea Party. This grassroots movement, focusing on primarily economic concerns, seemingly rose out of nothingness with no central leadership and no strict platform of. Political entities like Michelle Bachmann, who formed the Tea Party Caucus, have helped direct this new movement, yet the Tea Party has maintained little autonomy since its inception and has become increasingly intertwined with the Republican Party. This recent evolution of the Tea Party within the Republican Party has caused many political scientists to question the effect it has had on the ideological base, measured by roll call voting patterns, of Representatives in Congress. The work on this thesis aims toward proposing solutions to a few of these questions with regards to the effects of facing more extreme factional candidates on incumbents. These questions are important to ask because they provide a basis for what may be occurring in the U.S. Congress with an increasingly partisan divide and little room in the middle for moderate members of Congress, along with clear anti-compromise sentiments. By providing possible solutions to the proposed questions, the Tea Party's influence, and inner-party factions influences on the party as a whole, may become clearer.

My opinion, which other scholarly research in the past has supported, is that in order to maintain elected office, one must access the “median voter." In general elections this voter can be seen closer to the ideological middle, that is, somewhere between the Democratic and the Republican parties. The median voter changes in primaries, however, when an incumbent faces opposition from within his own party. The “median voter” for primary elections, therefore, is typically more extreme on the ideological spectrum than that of the general election. After these primary elections, I believe that incumbents who
are victorious will become more ideologically extreme to ensure their success in future primary elections within their own party through the idea of “uptake”, the consuming of their opponents ideas and standpoints. This is especially prevalent in the case of the Tea Party movement because the rise of the faction within the Republican Party lends itself to a certain set of beliefs and ideas that allow Republican incumbents an easy way to identify ways to obtain those votes that did not go their way in the previous election cycle. In line with the idea of the “median voter”, Democrats may be seen undertaking a similar, yet opposite, form of “uptake.” I call this term “reverse uptake” because their opponents shift to one end of the ideological spectrum, meaning that they may be able to do the same and take up issues that previously would have labeled them too liberal to attain the median voter. Previous studies have shown that there is not likely a link between the Tea Party and overall ideology in Congress, but this study aims to analyze specific contests and testing the ideology of specific Congressional incumbents.

This study asks, “How does the presence of Tea Party endorsed candidates affect incumbent members of Congress?” I test three hypotheses:

1. Democrat members of Congress who face Tea Party opposition in the general election will shift to a more liberal voting pattern in roll call voting ideology.

2. Republican members of Congress who are not contested by Tea Party candidates but represent a state with a strong Tea Party base will become more conservative with regards to roll call voting ideology.

3. Senators up for reelection in 2012, following the rise of the Tea Party in 2010, will preemptively change their voting ideology in anticipation. Democrat Senators will become more liberal and Republican Senators more conservative.
To test my hypotheses, I will take a look at primary elections that took place for the 112th Congress, in 2010. Using Keith Poole’s measurement system called "DW-NOMINATE," which gauges incumbent’s ideological stance by their voting record to take a look at the ideological stance following 111th Congress for incumbents, I will then compare that with their ideological stances following the 112th Congress to see if a shift occurred following either party's primary experience. To ensure that specific incumbents were affected by their primary contests in 2010, I control various variables such as seniority and the amount of money raised during the election cycle, along with the closeness of the election to determine how that affects change in ideology as well. I may find that shifts exist in non-competitive general election districts rather than competitive ones because the acquisition of the median voter for the general election is much easier and less important than the median voter of the primary election.

After testing my hypotheses, I expect to find that Republican incumbents who ran for reelection in states with a strong Tea Party presence will show a more conservative voting record following their electoral contest. The reasoning behind this idea is the notion that politicians constantly strive for reelection. This goal, combined with the pressure that the Tea Party candidate puts on the incumbent in the primary, means that the incumbent will absorb, or “uptake,” some of the Tea Party candidates' ideas to shift their ideological stance more towards the Republican “median voter,” and thus more conservative in general, to ensure future electoral success, especially in primary elections. The same basic reasoning lies behind the second hypothesis regarding Democratic incumbents against Tea Party members. The Tea Party is traditionally more conservative than many Republicans, thus Democratic candidates can become more liberal themselves,
creating a balancing effort that allows them to use “reverse uptake” to still maintain the median voter, but better represent their possible “true” ideological position. It is important to consider the idea of competitiveness, and it may be the case that incumbents who barely win reelection will only slightly change their voting ideology, if at all. Moving toward one of the ideological extremes would only alienate a candidate who barely won the last election from his median voter.

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the effect of factions within parties, in this case, Tea Party challengers during the 2010 midterm election. When trying to understand the intricate nature of political ideology with regards to roll call voting in the United States Congress, it is important to look at past research to gain a strong foothold on the subject.

**The Median Voter**

Not every election is created equal. It is important to consider the electoral context of each election rather than simply assuming that each is similar in a variety of aspects. If a Democrat is running for office in a strictly liberal district, then the general election is secondary to the primary election in importance. The same is true for Republican candidates in strictly conservative districts. In more moderate, or slightly learning districts, primary elections maintain their importance, while at the same time the general election becomes an issue. It is the duty of a candidate to weigh his options and find a happy ideological medium with which he can attempt to win his party's primary,
and still be contentious in the general election. This creates concerns in which it may be in the best interest of a candidate to absorb more ideologically extreme ideas to maintain position in their own party. However, doing so may harm his prospects of winning the general election.

It is the overarching goal of elected officials to maintain that elected status, whether for selfish reasons like prestige and wealth, or for more altruistic ones like the promotion of a particular social policy that they believe in. To obtain this end goal, they must constantly strive for an increase in the vote share of their electorate. This results in the idea of obtaining a “median voter” (Downs 1957), the exact point in the ideological spectrum present where one party, if all actors are rational, can expect to obtain 50 percent of the vote plus one. In general elections this “median voter” lies somewhere in the ideological middle, maintaining a more moderate position when using the traditional liberal-conservative spectrum. One can think of this as a sort of centripetal force that pulls candidates inward towards positions that best promote their re-election chances. The “median voter” phenomenon is also present in primary elections where candidates vie from within their own party for the nomination to the general election. This creates a problem for candidates, as primary voters are typically more ideologically extreme, and catering to them would pull their position further from the median voter in the general election. Thus, though a centripetal force is exuded on candidates in the general election, this may be balanced by a centrifugal force that is put in place by party primaries (Burden 2004).

These party primaries are dominated by the politically active, who tend to be more ideologically extreme than the average member of the party (Burden 2004). The rise of
the Tea Party movement for the 2010 midterm elections placed pressure on incumbents and other primary candidates, as candidates identifying with the Tea Party were in general much more conservative than their Republican peers (Abramowitz 2011). Studies have concluded that the Tea Party was a polarizing movement during the 2010 midterm elections (Aldrich, Bishop, Hatch, Hillygus, and Rohde 2012). These two concepts go hand in hand with one another, politically active primary voters combined with extreme candidates. For example, in the 2010 midterm Senatorial election in Utah, incumbent Robert F. Bennett was seeking his fourth term, yet the state convention became strongly aligned with the Tea Party, with 86% of the convention members saying they viewed the movement “favorably”. Senator Bennett, who did not align himself with the Tea Party, did not make it past the second round of the state convention voting, and only got a majority vote with the small proportion of the convention population who viewed the Tea Party “unfavorably” (Karpowitz, Monson, Patterson, and Pope 2011). The rise in support of these more extreme conservative candidates from the Tea Party suggest that pressure will be placed on Republican candidates to accept positions further to the right of the median voter to maintain their positions (Abramowitz 2011). Furthermore, this seems to be a continuation of previous work by Alan Abramowitz. His studies found that ideological moderation by candidates can be a risky undertaking, as any move toward the center will risk alienating segments of their electoral base, which with the rise of the Tea Party is increasingly more conservative for the Republican side (Abramowitz 2008).
Roll Call Ideology

A roll call vote is basically any vote taken in Congress where the list of Congressmen, or “roll”, is read to determine attendance and vote status. When talking about roll call voting in Congress, it is convenient to consider each member of Congress on the traditional ideological spectrum, liberal to conservative, in relation to other members of Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Poole and Rosenthal 2007). This allows one to gauge a specific Congressman’s voting stance and to compare changes in voting pattern.

The Tea Party is not a unique phenomenon in the history of the U.S., but it is the first factionalized movement in recent years and deserves some study as to its effects on ideology in Congress. During the first half of the 112th Congress, research shows that there is little effect on the totality of Republican ideology scores, identified by Poole and Rosenthal’s NOMINATE scoring system (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012). Poole and Rosenthal’s system will be explained more fully later in this paper, as it is the primary analysis tool used to test the hypotheses. That being said, little research has occurred on specific Congressman who faced a viable Tea Party candidate in either the primary election or the general election. Bailey et. al. focused on possible nationwide ideological shifts, rather than focusing only on incumbents who faced Tea Party opposition or possible ideological shifts occurring due to the Tea Party’s strength in individual states. For this reason, more research must be done on the individual level to assess possible Tea Party influence.

Continuing with the idea of local Tea Party strength, research shows that on votes seemingly in line with Tea Party ideals, Republican members of Congress from districts with much Tea Party activity were more likely to vote in favor of what the Tea Party
favored (Bailey Mummolo, and Noel 2012). This adds weight to my hypothesis that non-Tea Party Republicans may be affected by the strength of the movement in their own state. Gallagher and Rock find that there is little difference in terms of roll call voting in the House between Republicans and self-identified Tea Party members, and propose as one of their answers to this conundrum that this is effectively because the Tea Party has “dragged the entire party to the right in a push for purity”(Gallagher and Rock 2012). They also concede, however, that this may be because there is little differentiation between Republicans and Tea Party Republicans.

When assessing the impact that the Tea Party has on individual Congressman, it is important again to realize the ultimate goal of incumbents. If we assume that re-election is indeed the end goal of all elected officials, then we must look at how the voting public perceives issues important to themselves and how they relate those issues to a vote during election season. Ignorance and imperfect information are both fundamental to human life and thus voting citizens do not always know which candidate will support the values that they believe to be important (Downs 1957).

Research has shown that voters rely on party cues to decide whom to vote for in general elections. Due to high information costs, they use these cues along with other candidate qualities to make more informed decisions in a world based on imperfect information (Conover and Feldman 1989; Kam 2005). For the primary election, however, party cues are non-existent because each candidate is from the same party. This is important because with the rise of the Tea Party movement, a new label was created for the average voter to engage with and learn about what policies were supported by individual candidates adhering to the Tea Party identifier. This identifier may have acted
as a party cue for the 2010 primary elections, even though it was a more informal identifier than political party affiliation.

More evidence for this idea of the Tea Party as an identifier to allow for easy voter cues comes from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. This study measures voting consistency with regards to presidential approval and House voting. The 2010 study showed that 95% of those who identified with the Tea Party offered consistent responses based on their approval of President Obama, compared to 90% of Tea Party opponents and 79% of people who were neither supporters or opponents of the Tea Party (Jacobson 2011). This goes to show that the Tea Party clearly aligns itself with a set political stance and rarely wavers, allowing for voters who align themselves with those specific ideals to know whom to vote for with ease.

The rise of the Tea Party label is an important indicator of “conservativeness,” and no alternative exists for the Democratic Party. Many have written that the longevity of the Tea Party faction itself is going to be relatively short lived, largely due to the lack of organization and elected Tea Party official’s failure to stay true to the agenda that got them elected, specifically with the concept of earmarks in legislation. The Tea Party Caucus, established by Representative Bachmann, had 38 of its 52 elected members request earmarks for their districts, a policy that the Tea Party Caucus strived to end when in office (Courser 2010). This lack of unity within the movement brings a bleak outlook for the Tea Party, but may offer an opening for other Republicans in future elections.
Political Factions

The Tea Party movement is clearly a political faction and not an attempt to create an entirely new political party. Duverger’s Law, one of the few ideas in the realm of political science that can be classified as a law due to just how basic and descriptive it is, explains that in an electoral system run by single member districts and first past the post voting, only two major parties will develop and last (Duverger 1955). Because of this, the Tea Party would likely not be as influential had it attempted to organize collectively under a formal banner as it was in 2010 when under the guise of the Republican Party. By remaining within the established party, the Tea Party could partake in primary elections and directly influence their results through the use of motivated ideologically extreme supporters. Factions within parties rely on this established party structure to further their goals, but present a problem for the party on the whole. Because these polarized factions are not wholly encompassed by the platform of the greater party, they may be consumed by other organizations. To maintain their status as a dominant political force, traditional parties must realign to be in line with the polarized faction to ensure their support (Sundquist 1983).

It is important to consider the impact of factions on Congress in general. The rise of the Tea Party did not only change the face of the Republican Party, but impacted the entire Congressional system. There were approximately nine intraparty factions in Congress throughout the 20th Century, each one striving to reach different goals (DiSalvo 2009). These factions can be categorized by whether or not they seek to preserve the status quo, or to change it. Regardless of their categorization, ultimately when it comes to factions, the “…locus of power within the institution of Congress” is at stake (DiSalvo
2009). This means shifting the focus of government to a strong centralized one, or a more decentralized one. The Tea Party movement can be considered a faction striving to change the status quo simply through its platform encouraging lack of cooperation, and attempts to do so by establishing ties amongst its members and connecting them to outside organizations and groups. It can be seen as trying to decentralize government through the promotion of fewer taxes and more economic freedom, utilizing policies devoid of compromise to achieve its goals. The Tea Party faction within the Republican Party is much like previous factions like the Republican “Old Guard” in that it ideologically shifts the entirety of Congress around, affecting more than just their own party.

Uptake

When relating the presence of a Tea Party challenger to the roll call voting of a reelected incumbent, it is important to conceptualize just how this ideological shift would take place. The concept of “issue uptake,” thoroughly discussed by Tracy Sulkin, is the idea that a victorious elected official will often subsume some of the policies and goals of their most competent adversary in the election (Sulkin 2005). The reasoning behind this idea is simple and relates back to the Downsian principle that it is the goal of every politician to seek reelection. If an elected official faces tough competition, it only makes sense that after obtaining victory, he attempts to increase his vote share in the district to avoid such a close contest in the next election cycle. One of the ways that he can obtain voters who did not previously vote for him is to take up positions that his previous opponents, opponents who these voters supported, had as part of their platforms. As Sulkin describes it: “Because challengers focus their campaigns on the incumbent’s
weaknesses, their choice of campaign themes provide signals to winning legislators about important issues they may have previously neglected” (Sulkin 2005, 2). Because the Tea Party label was so prominent around the time of the 2010 midterm elections, and that label represented a certain sect of ideas, it is conceivable that other Republican candidates were more easily able to identify issue areas, like obsessive fiscal responsibility and reduction of the overall size of government, that they had previously neglected.

In the same vein, it is interesting to consider the possible “issue uptake” of Senatorial candidates. Because of the six-year term length of a Senator, it is unlikely that those elected in 2010 that faced Tea Party opposition have adjusted their voting behavior as a direct result of the contest. Instead it may be that, because incumbents do not simply wait for a challenger to come to light, but rather anticipate them in the future, that the class of incumbents up for reelection in 2012 may have adjusted its voting ideology in anticipation of meeting a Tea Party candidate in the party primary or general election. Senators going up for reelection in 2012 may have taken up some of the Tea Party ideologies preemptively in order to avoid a contentious party primary before the 2012 election, much like the one that Senator Bennett from Utah experienced.

Because data are now available for the 112th Congress, it is possible to analyze if any uptake of ideas took place following the 2010 midterm elections, which would conceivably result in a larger proportion of the votes for the incumbent in the 2012 than 2010. This would lead to the end goal of all Representatives: getting reelected. The Tea Party label will show to accelerate this idea of “issue uptake” because it allows voters to
easily identify candidates with specific ideas. A shift in roll call voting ideology would be indicative of “uptake” particularly on the Republican side of things.

Prior research done on the subject of the Tea Party effects on the ideology of other members of Congress have their various shortcomings that I build upon. Past research has identified that there was no significant shift overall in the first half of the 112th Congress, but now that the data for the 2nd half is now available, it must be retested (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012). Past research has also failed to conduct individual examinations of any ideological shift in Democratic or Republican members of Congress who faced a competitive Tea Party candidate. My research will detail these specific cases to see if an encounter with a competitive candidate who identified with the Tea Party in the 2010 midterm elections resulted in an ideological shift towards a more liberal stance in Democrat incumbents. I look at Republicans to see if the Tea Party strength in their state affected their voting ideology mainly due to the small sample size of Republicans who faced, and beat, a Tea Party candidate in the primary election. This idea of the importance of statewide Tea Party strength on ideology is derived from possible future aspirations of an incumbent. If an incumbent has aspirations for statewide office like the Senate, he will focus on attaining voters in districts that may be more strongly associated with the Tea Party movement than his own is currently.

This paper generally focuses on how factions affect incumbent officials. By testing the effect of the Tea Party movement and the subsequent Tea Party identifying label, I am able to detect possible ideological shifts that have occurred in specific Congressmen following their interactions with Tea Party candidates. I believe that, due to the extreme ideological nature and insistence on a policy of no compromise, the Tea Party in the 2010
midterm elections resulted in the shifting to the right of Republican candidates and to the left of Democrat incumbents. While competing uptake concerns may be an issue for the general election, for candidates who must focus on the primary election this is almost always true, because any attempts to seek the moderate middle will alienate a large segment of their electorate. Additionally, preemptive uptake may have occurred for the Senate class going up for reelection in 2012 to avoid a difficult struggle to even be on the November ballot.

**Research Design**

It is my belief that the appearance of a Tea Party challenger in the 2010 midterm elections, whether in the primary or general elections, will push an incumbent more to one of the ideological extremes on the standard political ideology spectrum. To test my proposed hypothesis, I examined individual electoral competitions in individual districts to see whether a competitive Tea Party challenger was present against Democratic candidates in the general election. Additionally, I looked at the strength of the Tea Party movement in individual states and its effect on Republican incumbents' roll call ideology. After districts with competitive Tea Party candidates in the 2010 midterm elections became defined, I examined ideological spectrum scores based on the DW-NOMINATE analysis system created by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal.
DW-NOMINATE

DW-NOMINATE is a tool that ranks current and past members of Congress on an ideological liberal-conservative spectrum based on their performances in roll call voting. The system differentiates Congressmen based on party affiliation, assigning red and blue colors to the labels of each member. What is most helpful about this system is that not only does it separate Congressmen based on party affiliation, but can also be used to differentiate Representatives based on minute ideological differences. DW-NOMINATE analyzes each vote in Congress to determine positioning on the liberal-conservative spectrum, delineating differences between Congressmen with seemingly identical voting patterns. Because this system has records going back all the way to the 1st Congress, one is able to clearly identify an incumbent’s first dimension score. This dimension score is a measure of ideology from -1 (extremely liberal) to 1 (extremely conservative) used to examine any change that happened between the score for the 111th Congress and that of the 112th Congress, which occurred after the induction of the Tea Party movement. While this system is useful to identify changes in ideological positioning over time, it is impossible to determine the direct cause of this change.

Identification of Tea Party candidates

There are several important factors that come into play when discussing who exactly can be identified as a Tea Party candidate. Since the creation of the Tea Party Caucus, many other organizations such as the Boston Tea Party have sprouted up, including Contract From America, the Tea Party Express, and Freedom Works. All of these organizations endorse candidates that may allude to membership in the Tea Party
faction. Sarah Palin has become one of the more influential members of the Tea Party, and her endorsements also signal a membership to the Republican faction. Additionally, self-identification as a candidate supporting the ideals of the Tea Party can be an identifier as membership, but it may be the case that some candidates chose to be a member only by name and not by policy in order to ride the momentum of the movement. Because of this, more than self-identification as a Tea Party Republican is necessary for this study.

**Variables**

Two main variables are important to this study. The independent variable is simply the binary attribute of being confronted with Tea Party opposition or not. Accordingly, the dependent variable is the shifting in ideology based on the liberal-conservative ideological spectrum. This ideological positioning, as defined by the DW-DW-NOMINATE system, is based on roll call voting in Congress. thus, there are many conflicting factors that must be controlled to be able to look at the effect Tea Party opposition may have had on ideology. First of all, party affiliation traditionally assumes that a Congressman will reside in one general area of the ideological spectrum; Republicans will be typically more conservative, while Democrats will be more liberal. If a very conservative Republican incumbent represents a state that has a strong Tea Party presence, he may not shift to a more conservative stance, as he may have already been to the right of the general Tea Party. Congressional districts are subject to change at different time intervals based on the jurisdiction of each individual state, but shifting district boundaries may also shift the ideological mean of a district. If a district moves
toward a more conservative population, an incumbent may shift his roll call voting ideology toward the right as a result. This shift would be completely devoid of any influence from the contest with a member of the Tea Party. In this study, however, congressional district lines were not changed during the 111th or the 112th Congress, effectively making this concept moot.

It is important to look at the qualities of a Congressman that lead to a certain ideological stance, or a shift in his current one. While party affiliation is by far the most important aspect, contributing factors are numerous, including possibly seniority in Congress or the amount of funds that a candidate raised during a particular election cycle. Seniority may lead to more personal changes in voting pattern based on an individual Representative’s age. Additionally, a Representative’s seniority impacts his DW-NOMINATE score, with the longer he has served in Congress, the smaller the change between one Congress and the next should be. This may result in the under-reporting of the effect of the Tea Party on change in ideology, and thus must be controlled. In today’s election climate, money is key and if an incumbent is experiencing a shortage of it, he may change his voting patterns to match the audience that he wishes to target for financial donations. Because of this, campaign contributions during the 2010 election cycle are also controlled for each data analysis in this paper.

Data

The data for the testing of these hypotheses are derived from individual examinations of incumbents who faced competitive Tea Party opposition in either the primary or general election during the 2010 midterm election cycle. In addition to
looking at incumbents who faced Tea Party opposition and the change in ideology that occurred, I observed the ideological stances of Representatives who did not face Tea Party opposition directly, but who were elected from a state that experienced Tea Party pressures in other districts. By analyzing the change in ideological stance with regards to DW-NOMINATE and a metric created to measure Tea Party strength in individual states, I was able to investigate possible changes in ideology based on intrastate pressures. This metric looks at the number of competitive Tea Party candidates in primary elections across the state, and divides that by the total number of competitive candidates. If a Tea Party candidate beat the incumbent in the primary election, the score was be doubled to emphasize the obviously increased strength of the movement in that state. To be considered a competitive member of the Tea Party, a candidate must be endorsed by the Tea Party organizations, Contract For America, Tea Party Express, or Sarah Palin. In addition to these endorsements, a candidate must receive more than 10% of the vote in any given primary or general election.

Comparison

Now that I have determined the data set of applicable Congressmen, a statistical comparison can be made between the 111th Congress first dimension ideology score in DW-NOMINATE and the 112th Congress first dimension ideology score. For my hypotheses to be confirmed, I expect the 111th Congress score to be lower than the 112th Congress score for Republican incumbents, which indicates a shift towards a more conservative voting pattern on roll call votes. I also expect Democrats who face Tea Party opposition to have a higher 111th Congress score when compared to the 112th Congress
due to fewer restrictions on voting moderation as a result of facing a more extreme candidate. I expect that Republican Senators up for reelection in 2012 from states with a higher Tea Party strength index will become more conservative as a precautionary measure, and that Democrat Senators in the same position will become more liberal due to the effects of extremist oppositional forces in their state.

Data Analysis

First I looked at the effects of going against a Tea Party challenger on Democrat incumbents. Without taking anything else into consideration, I wanted to see if a comparison of the means would show anything of value when comparing Democrat incumbents who did and did not face challengers endorsed by Tea Party organizations.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Against TP</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-0.0006471</td>
<td>0.0016634</td>
<td>0.0137165</td>
<td>-0.0039672 to 0.002673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against TP</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>-0.0030741</td>
<td>0.0013111</td>
<td>0.0118002</td>
<td>-0.0056833 to -0.0004648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>-0.0019664</td>
<td>0.0020904</td>
<td>0.0065581</td>
<td>-0.0017041 to 0.0065581</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The simple t-test in Table 1 indicates that, upon comparing the means of Democrat incumbents who faced Tea Party opposition and those who did not, facing a candidate associated with the movement may have a negative effect on voting ideology. Each of the boundaries of the 95% confidence interval for incumbents facing Tea Party candidates are less than 0, implying that this average mean is statistically significant when $\alpha = .05$. That
being said, correlation does not imply causation and thus other steps must be taken in
order to control for various other factors impacting incumbent Congressmen. Table 2 is a
regression that is taken with the ideological change in an incumbent’s roll call voting as
the dependent variable, with the binomial of facing a Tea Party candidate or not,
closeness of the election by percentage of votes, seniority, and amount of campaign
finances raised during the election cycle as the independent variables.

Table 2:

| Change in Ideology                  | Coefficient | Std. Error | t value | P > |t| | 95% Confidence                  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| Presence of Tea Party Challenger    | -0.0001772  | 0.0022077  | -0.08   | 0.936 | -0.0045408 to 0.0041864      |
| Closeness of Election               | 0.0001792   | 0.0000571  | 3.14    | 0.002**| 0.0000663 to 0.000292        |
| Seniority                          | 6.07e-6     | 8.82e-6    | 0.69    | 0.493 | -0.0000114 to 0.0000235      |
| Campaign Contributions             | 1.55e-9     | 1.48e-9    | 1.07    | 0.288 | -1.32e-9 to 4.43e-9          |
| Constant                            | -0.0106458  | 0.0042934  | -2.48   | 0.014*| -0.019132 to -0.0021596      |

* = Significance at the p < .05 level
** = Significance at the p < .005 level

Unfortunately, this regression seems to indicate that the presence of a Tea Party
challenger does not affect a Democrat member of Congress in a statistically significant
way. It leans to a negative effect, but that cannot be said with any statistical certainty.
Additionally, the concepts of seniority and campaign finances for the 2010 election cycle
do not seem to affect ideology in any significant way. What is interesting, however, is the
strength that the closeness of the general election has on an individual Representative’s
roll call voting ideology. The data shows a positive relationship between the closeness of
an election and the change in ideological roll call voting. This indicates that if an election was a landslide, a Democrat Representative may be more likely to make their roll call voting ideology significantly more liberal than their counterparts who experienced close elections. This study looks at 81 Democrat incumbents with Tea Party endorsed opposition and 68 without. A closer look at this data is clearly necessary to see how the presence of the Tea Party could have impacted voting records.

The group of 68 incumbents who did not face competition from Tea Party opponents had an average margin of victory of 38.94%. The remaining 81 only had an average margin of victory of 23.94%. Because these two groups are so different, it is prudent to separate them to examine them individually to see if the statistical significance of the closeness of the election persists.
Table 3: Positive for Tea Party Presence

| Change in Ideology         | Coefficient | Std. Error | t value | p > |t| | 95% Confidence               |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----|---|-----------------------------|
| Closeness of Election      | 0.0001901   | 0.0000859  | 2.21    | 0.030* | 0.000019 to 0.0003611       |
| Seniority                  | 0.0000189   | 0.0000103  | 1.84    | 0.069 | -1.51e-6 to .0000394        |
| Campaign Contributions     | 3.83e-9     | 1.74e-9    | 2.20    | 0.031* | 3.58e-10 to 7.30e-9         |
| Constant                   | -0.0168822  | 0.0049047  | -3.44   | 0.001**| -0.0266488 to -0.0071157    |

* = Significance at the p < .05 level  
** = Significance at the p < .005 level

Table 4: Negative for Tea Party Presence

| Change in Ideology         | Coefficient | Std. Error | t value | p > |t| | 95% Confidence               |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----|---|-----------------------------|
| Closeness of Election      | 0.0001549   | 0.0000764  | 2.03    | 0.047* | 2.28e-6 to 0.0003076        |
| Seniority                  | -0.0000169  | 0.0000153  | -1.10   | 0.274 | -0.0000474 to 0.0000137     |
| Campaign Contributions     | -2.28e-9    | 2.45e-9    | -0.93   | 0.355 | -7.17e-9 to 2.61e-9         |
| Constant                   | -0.0007223  | 0.0063857  | -0.11   | 0.910 | -.00134792 to 0.0120345     |

* = Significance at the p < .05 level  
** = Significance at the p < .005 level

When the two groups of Democrats are separated, the regressions indicate that the positive relationship between closeness of election and change in ideology is greater for incumbents who faced Tea Party opposition. The reverse then is true for Democrats who faced non-Tea Party endorsed opponents. This supports my hypothesis that incumbents who face more extreme candidates may move further to one end of the spectrum themselves. The idea behind this resides in the idea of the median voter, which the incumbent could still target with more extreme ideological viewpoints.
Table 5 shows that when certain incumbents were eliminated (those who won their elections by more than 12%), a set of Democrats was established to more specifically test the effects of the presence of a Tea Party candidate and the closeness of an election. The presence of a Tea Party challenger still has a positive effect on changes in voting ideology, but with a p-value of 0.273. This value is much lower than the p-value when the entire group of Democrats was tested, but is far from significant. Additionally, when the set of Democrats who had a close election is examined, the effects of the closeness of elections do not affect change in voting ideology in the same way. This is most likely due to the fact that all of the incumbents at this point are bunched around the same data points and become hard to distinguish, unlike when there are elections that were landslides thrown in the mix.

I originally intended the purpose of this paper to be examining the effects of beating a Tea Party endorsed candidate on incumbent Republicans’ roll call voting ideology. The main difficulty I had with that goal was the incredibly small sample size that would make any finding statistically insignificant. Because of this, I was forced to
adapt my hypothesis to look at the effects of the Tea Party on Republicans who were not endorsed or affiliated with the Tea Party. Using my metric that gauges the strength of the Tea Party movement in individual states, I was able to see whether the presence of a stronger factional base in a state would influence Representatives who did not face a specific Tea Party challenger in their district. One major drawback with this method was that the metric I employed may overstate the strength of the movement in smaller states, where the total number of primary candidates is undoubtedly lower. That being said, the methodology is sufficient for the majority of the cases in this study.

Table 6:

| Change in Ideology          | Coefficient | Std. Error | t value | p > |t|  | 95% Confidence          |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----|---|-------------------------|
| Tea Party Strength          | 0.0216833   | 0.0241911  | 0.90    | 0.372 | 0.0262175 to 0.0695842 |
| Campaign Contributions      | 2.37e-10    | 2.22e-9    | 0.11    | 0.915 | -4.17e-9 to 4.64e-9    |
| Seniority                   | -0.0000506  | 0.0000216  | -2.34   | 0.021* | -0.0000933 to -7.82e-6 |
| Constant                    | 0.0159918   | 0.0076198  | 2.10    | 0.038* | 0.0009038 to 0.0310797 |

*= Significance at the p < .05 level
**= Significance at the p < .005 level

The data in Table 6 show that, while Tea Party strength may have a positive effect on voting ideology and consequentially makes Republicans more conservative, that trend cannot be stated with scientific certainty. This may be possible with a larger sample size, but due to the nature of the United States legislature, is difficult without more years of data. It is interesting to denote, however, that seniority appears to be a significant influence on roll call ideology, which was not evident in the datasets involving only Democrat Representatives. Because this relationship is a be negative one, the data set
implies that the less time a Republican member of Congress has been in office, the less conservative his change in ideology will be.

This paper mainly focuses on the effects of the Tea Party on the House of Representatives. The short, two-year terms that require each incumbent to be up for re-election each cycle allow for a glimpse at exactly how the rise of the faction within the Republican Party caused a shift in politics in such a short time. The United States Senate is a curious matter when talking about the Tea Party. Because Senators have six-year terms, they are quite probably less influenced by bursts of factional activity within parties. That being said, it is worthwhile to look at Senators who were up for reelection in 2012 to examine their changing ideology in order to take note if any preemptive shifts that may have occurred due to the rise of the Tea Party.

Table 7: Senators Up for Election in 2012

| Change in Ideology     | Coefficient | Std. Error | t value | p > |t|   | 95% Confidence          |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----|-----|--------------------------|
| Tea Party Strength     | 0.0098277   | 0.0110262  | 0.89    | 0.387|     | -.00136741 to 0.0333295  |
| Campaign Contributions | 3.39e-10    | 2.93e-10   | 1.16    | 0.266|     | -2.86e-10 to 9.63e-10    |
| Seniority              | 0.0000242   | 0.0000872  | 0.28    | 0.786|     | -0.0001617 to 0.00021    |
| Constant               | -0.0068469  | 0.0053043  | -1.29   | 0.216|     | -0.0181527 to 0.004459   |

* = Significance at the p < .05 level
** = Significance at the p < .005 level

This examination of Senatorial data says little for my study. With only 19 observations of Senators who did not retire, were up for reelection, and won their reelection bids, the sample size is incredibly small. Additionally, there were only 4 Republican Senators who fit the criteria set forth in this data set, making any analysis
based on party lines in the Senate fruitless. Though it was insignificant at any important level, Tea Party strength in a state may have a positive relationship with change in voting ideology, pushing both Democrats and Republicans further to the two poles of the ideological spectrum. It would be interesting to look at more Senators to see how the movement would affect members of Congress with six-year terms as opposed to two-year terms if the Tea Party were to persist at a fervent level for a few more election cycles.

Conclusion

The Tea Party movement, leading up to the 2010 midterm elections, was the most recent example of a faction rising within an individual party. This concept of a different identifiable sect inside an already established political party creates numerous topics to study. Voters in this instance were allowed easy access to information based on the Tea Party label alone, where no label existed prior. The candidates who embraced this label immediately made their position on certain key issues, such as taxation and compromise within the legislature known to all based entirely off of label recognition to the generally uninformed public. The creation of this label worked as a cue to identify specific types of Republican Representatives, which in turn started an attempt to spin the locus of power in Congress. Because of this, members of Congress on each side of the aisle were forced to shift their voting ideologies to better target the median voter in their district, to secure the ultimate goal of a Representative: reelection. Understanding why Representatives vote the way that they do is one of the most important studies in political science purely because of how important many of their decisions are. By analyzing the effect that the
Tea Party has had on incumbent legislators, we can better see how extreme party factions influence Congress in its entirety.

Analyzing the effect that the Tea Party had on Senators up for reelection in 2012 was quite difficult. It is challenging to single out variables that could influence a change in ideology based on such a small sample size, especially with that sample size being so skewed in the direction of Democratic Senators. Despite this fact, the regressions ran on the data available show that the strength of the Tea Party movement in individual states might have had a positive effect on change in voting ideology. This is what would have been expected with the hypothesis I had originally put forth. Because of the extreme nature of the Tea Party movement, Senators up for reelection may have preemptively adjusted their voting behavior in a more extreme direction themselves. In the case of Republicans, to combat possible Tea Party opposition for their reelection bid, and in the case of Democrats to achieve an apparent reverse uptake due to the polarizing nature of the movement.

Relatively in the same vein as the data analyses involving Senators, I had difficulty pinning down any statistical significance with regards to the Tea Party movement’s effect on Republican ideological changes. The data indicated that there was a positive correlation between the strength of the movement in an individual state and change in Republican ideology, but again it was distant from any level of certainty. If the Tea Party remains in its current state for several more terms in Congress, a more thorough analysis could be done in the future with a larger sample size of Republican Representatives to look at. Interestingly enough, my analysis of 122 Republicans did show that seniority in the House of Representatives was a statistically significant factor in determining change
in ideological stance. This was not present in the datasets involving solely Democrat Congressmen. Whether this phenomenon is unique to the Republican Party based on something inherent in its structure or is just an anomaly from this specific set of regressions is an interesting topic to consider.

The most significant information that I was able to gather from this research came from the Democrat side. I looked at 81 Representatives who faced opposition from Tea Party endorsed candidates, and 69 who did not. When the entire sample was combined and analyzed, there was a clear and statistically significant relationship between the closeness of an election and a movement along the ideological scale. This alone did not tell much about the influence of the Tea Party, so I broke the group of Democrats down into groups based on the binomial variable of Tea Party presence. Both groups of Democrats displayed a statistically significant positive relationship between the closeness of an election and a change in ideology, but the group positive for Tea Party presence had a relatively larger one. This suggests that the closeness of an election resulted in a larger change in ideology for Democrats who went against Tea Party endorsed candidates than their peers who did not face movement endorsed challengers. Because of the extremist nature of the Tea Party, a successful reelection bid against one of its members may signal that a Democrat Representative is free to move more ideologically liberal while still feeling electorally secure.

Ultimately, the Tea Party movement is relatively banal. It is not the first intraparty faction to rise in the United States Congress, and in fact there were nine incidences of similar factions throughout the last century. The Tea Party will not be a prevalent group forever and neither will the effects it has had on Congress over the last couple of years.
What I found most interesting to study when dealing with the Tea Party is the idea of factions and how they affect various members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. From this study, it can be seen that the Tea Party has been steadily pushing both sides of the political spectrum to their respective poles. The Tea Party started this by forcing the Republican Party to adapt to its platform in order to keep them within the Republican banner. The Democratic Party simply followed the end goal of all politicians and maximized their median voter, which due to the extremist nature of the Tea Party, was increasingly easily attained with more liberal stances. Through simple analyses of the most recent factional movement within the U.S. Congress, the nature of politics can be seen in its current state.
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