

**Don't Tread on Me: Analyzing the Effects of the Tea Party on  
Voting Patterns of House Democrats**

Nicole DeMont

Department of Communication

Stanford University

Advisor: Shanto Iyengar

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**Abstract:** *The Tea Party reached its peak during the 2010 midterm elections and helped propel Republicans into the House of Representatives. While commentary has focused on the Republican Party's shift to the right in response to the Tea Party movement, this paper examines the Tea Party's influence on the Democratic Party. Using Washington Post data on party voting, I find that Democrats who beat Tea Party candidates in competitive races are 6.5 percent more likely to vote with the Democratic Party in the congressional session following the 2010 midterm election. This brings the likelihood of voting with the Party up to 89.4 percent on any given vote, compared to the baseline of 82.9 percent. Possible explanations for this Tea Party effect are presented.*

Amid the mounting concern over the national debt and the size of the federal government, the Tea Party movement emerged in early 2009. On Tax Day, April 15, 2009, in what would be one of the largest rallies the movement would see, Tea Party protests took place in over 750 cities across the country. President Obama's proposed healthcare bill only fueled the growth and frustrations of the Tea Party movement. Although the Democratic leadership, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, had originally dismissed the movement, by August 2009 the Democrats were forced to pay attention. The Tea Party had ignited a wave of opposition to government spending and the healthcare bill, giving Republicans a point of focus for state and federal campaigns around the country.

Early on, Tea Party supporters actively resisted political parties, choosing to remain independent and not associate with either the Republican Party or Democratic Party. (Courser, 2010) When surveyed, though, more than three-quarters of those who identify with the Tea Party claim to be Republican or lean Republican (Williamson, Skocpol, & Coggin, 2011). The Tea Party eventually assimilated into the Republican Party, and in the 2010 election, every House candidate that associated with the Tea Party ran as a Republican (Courser, 2010). Once assimilated, the Tea Party sought to rebrand the Republican Party by pulling it back to its conservative roots.

Even as it rose in prominence, the Tea Party remained, and has continued to remain, decentralized and disorganized. There has never been a single individual or organization to lead the movement and provide direction and purpose. Consequently, the Tea Party's messaging was very uncoordinated, and candidates could easily use the Tea Party label without adopting a specific platform or certain beliefs. Tea Party supporters could associate with others who self-identified as Tea Partiers and could come together for protests, marches, and rallies, but the lack of formal structure inhibited increased cooperation among various Tea Party groups (Courser, 2010). On the other hand, Williamson, et al. note that the absence of a leader or national organization allowed the Tea Party to prosper because the movement could not be undercut when a particular candidate was defeated or a particular organization was discredited (2011). Instead, the decentralized groups were able to carry on with their grassroots meetings and events. Although this may be true, the lack of central leadership and organization suggests that the fervor of the Tea Party cannot survive for very long in its current form.

Tea Party organizations like FreedomWorks and the Tea Party Express seemed to act as a unifying force for the grassroots movement, as they worked to raise awareness and support for the Tea Party throughout the country. At the same time, they too remained committed to decentralized local chapters and independence. The Tea Party Patriots website emerged as a place for Tea Partiers all around the country to interact, but the site's creators did not have the experience or aspiration to move the Tea Party beyond its disorganized, grassroots nature (Courser, 2010). Tea Party activists also used the website MeetUp to network with other supporters. Williamson et al. note that "on a typical day, MeetUp lists about twenty Tea Party events nationwide—including rallies, seminars, candidate fundraisers, and casual events such as barbeques or book club meetings" (2011).

Conservative media, including television, talk radio, and the blogosphere, helped put the Tea Party movement on a national stage and helped maintain its relevance. *Fox News*, in particular, consistently discussed the Tea Party from its very early stages and the Tax Day protest, through the 2010 midterm elections, and beyond. Williamson et al. write, “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that *Fox News* provides much of what the loosely interconnected Tea Party organizations otherwise lack in terms of a unified membership and communications infrastructure” (2011).

Interestingly, most Tea Party supporters were not focused on electoral politics. A *CBS News/New York Times* 2010 survey found that only 7 percent of Tea Partiers responded that the “main goal of the Tea Party is to [elect] their own candidate.” For the vast majority of supporters, joining the Tea Party was about voicing protest. Accordingly, when Republican candidates were campaigning in 2010 as Tea Partiers, independent Tea Party organizations did not provide much support.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Republicans would use the label but continue to rely on the traditional candidate-centered campaign (Courser, 2010).

When it comes to policy, surveys show that Tea Party supporters share only a “nebulous set of principles.” Tea Partiers cite reducing the size of the federal government, decreasing government spending, and lowering the deficit among their top priorities. They also express a lack of confidence in government, and they evoke a libertarian viewpoint by emphasizing constitutionally limited government (Courser, 2010). Moreover, the *CBS News/New York Times* poll found that over 90 percent of Tea Party supporters said they think the country is headed in the wrong direction, compared to about 60 percent of the general public. Tea Partiers are also

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<sup>1</sup> The one exception may be the Tea Party Express, which is a counterpart to a Republican-run political action committee that gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to support Tea Party candidates and sponsored bus tours around the country to promote their campaigns (Williamson et al., 2011).

more likely to say they are “angry with Washington,” whereas traditional, non-Tea Party Republicans are more likely to say they are “dissatisfied.” Despite these strong sentiments, the Tea Party remained vague on solutions and did not endorse specific policy proposals to tackle these challenges.

Overall, the Tea Party’s numbers and strength are somewhat contestable. An exit poll found that 41 percent of all 2010 midterm voters said they supported the Tea Party movement (Courser, 2010). However, Williamson et al. estimate that there were only a few hundred Tea Party groups across the country at its peak, and only a small portion of those claimed more than five hundred members. Another poll found that only one in five of those who claimed to be Tea Party supporters had actually attended an event or donated money (Williamson et al., 2011).

Since the emergence of the Tea Party, there has been plenty of dialogue about how the movement pulled the Republican Party to the right and caused much tension between the extreme right-wing Tea Partiers and the traditional, non-Tea Party Republicans. But there has been a noticeable lack of discussion about the Tea Party’s influence on the Democratic Party. Generally, the discussion starts and ends with the Tea Party’s victory over the Democratic Party in 2010. Republicans, of course, have much to evaluate, as the Tea Party has been blamed for several high-profile election losses and is the source of ongoing intraparty fighting. This paper is a first step in understanding how the Tea Party movement may have also affected the Democratic Party.

### ***Who are the Tea Party Candidates?***

Because the Tea Party does not have a single umbrella organization that endorses candidates, any Republican can adopt the label. In fact, in 2010 at the height of the Tea Party’s popularity, almost every Republican did claim to have Tea Party support (Moe, 2010). The lack

of a clear definition for Tea Party candidates, coupled with the Republicans' willingness to use the Tea Party brand in 2010, makes compiling a list of Tea Party candidates very difficult and very subjective. I wanted to ensure that the candidates included in my data did not just use the Tea Party label because of the electoral advantage it conferred; I wanted to include only the candidates who strongly identified with the values of the Tea Party and were determined to carry those values into office if elected.

There are a variety of possible ways to define Tea Party candidates, including endorsements from Tea Party groups. The Tea Party Express, FreedomWorks, the Independence Caucus, the Boston Tea Party, Americans for Prosperity, the Tea Party Patriots, and Club for Growth are the main groups that explicitly describe themselves as Tea Party organizations or are widely known to be affiliated with the movement. Many of these organizations endorsed various candidates prior to the 2010 election, but their endorsements did not consistently overlap. Complicating matters more, some of these groups actively endorsed candidates, some made only a few endorsements, and some did not endorse any candidates. They also took different strategies when making their endorsements. For example, FreedomWorks endorsed Tea Party candidates in targeted swing districts where Republicans were likely to win. Endorsements from Sarah Palin or Jim DeMint—two of the well-known leaders of the movement—could also be used as a proxy for defining Tea Party candidates. In contrast to FreedomWorks, Sarah Palin was not shy about endorsing candidates in strong Democratic districts, and she endorsed a large number of candidates (Karpowitz, Monson, Patterson, & Pope, 2011). Overall, endorsements did not provide a clear picture of which candidates could be defined as faithful Tea Partiers.

Many sources I consulted utilized different criteria altogether. For example, Tea Party candidates could be defined as those who did not have previous political experience, or those

who upset the Republican Party's chosen nominee (Weigel, 2010). *NBC* defined Tea Party candidates as "anyone who has either been backed by a Tea Party group or has identified themselves as a member of the Tea Party movement" but added, "toward the end of this cycle...seemingly every Republican was trying to associate themselves this way," indicating their criteria was too broad (2010). *Fox News* also released an overly broad list that included any candidate "claiming Tea Party support in the midterm election" (2010). The *New York Times* created its own list with the following explanation: "For the purposes of this list, Tea Party candidates were those who had entered politics through the movement, or are candidates receiving significant support from local Tea Party groups and who share the ideology of the movement. Many have been endorsed by national groups like FreedomWorks or the Tea Party Express, but those endorsements alone were not enough to put them on the list" (Zernicke et al., 2010).

In an effort to create a comprehensive but selective list, I collected over twenty-five news articles from 2010 about the Tea Party and created a list of every Tea Party candidate mentioned in these articles. This process resulted in over 500 names. I then narrowed this down to only the candidates who appeared three times or more. For my final list, I was able to combine the many different methodologies the news organizations used to define Tea Party candidates and ensure the candidates fit multiple criteria. After selecting only the candidates who appeared on three or more Tea Party lists, I determined there were 71 Tea Partiers who ran for House seats in 2010.

I then used the *New York Times* 2010 Election Results to gather basic electoral information, including the district, state, Democratic opponent, other opponents, and general election outcome. Next, I extracted the Democrats who beat their Tea Party opponents (see Table 1). In 2010 Democrats won 26 of the 71 races with Tea Party opponents, or 36.6 percent. Among

them, margin of victory ranged from 1.1 to 45.2 percent, with an average of 13.3 percent and a median of 10.95 percent. 23 of the 26 Democrats were incumbents, suggesting that Democrats who were able to fend off a Tea Party challenge had established their name and records in the districts. Democratic newcomers had a more difficult time overcoming the Tea Party's momentum. 18 of the 26 Democrats are still currently serving in the House, making the results of this research relevant still today.

Table 1  
Democrats who beat their Tea Party opponents, by margin of victory

<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Tea Party Candidate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Margin of Victory</b>
Jerry McNerney	David Harmer	California	11	1.1
Gabrielle Giffords	Jesse Kelly	Arizona	8	1.5
Jason Altmire	Keith Rothfus	Pennsylvania	4	1.6
Rick Larsen	John Koster	Washington	2	2.2
Gary Peters	Rocky Raczkowski	Michigan	9	2.6
Martin Heinrich	Jonathan Barela	New Mexico	1	3.6
Jim Matheson	Morgan Philpot	Utah	2	4.4
Bill Keating	Jeff Perry	Massachusetts	10	4.5
Raul M. Grijalva	Ruth McClung	Arizona	7	6
Colleen Hanabusa	Charles K. Djou	Hawaii	1	6.4
Barney Frank	Sean Bielat	Massachusetts	4	10.5
John Yarmuth	Todd Lally	Kentucky	3	10.7
Peter DeFazio	Art Robinson	Oregon	4	10.9
Frank Pallone	Anna Little	New Jersey	6	11
Loretta Sanchez	Van Tran	California	47	13.7
Ben R. Lujan	Tom Mullins	New Mexico	3	14
Jay Inslee	James Watkins	Washington	1	15.4
John Carney	Glen Urquhart	Delaware	1	15.8
Dennis Cardoza	Michael Berryhill	California	18	17
Jim McGovern	Marty Lamb	Massachusetts	3	17.3
Mike Ross	Beth Anne Rankin	Arkansas	4	17.3
Lois Capps	Thomas C. Watson	California	23	20.2
Brian Higgins	Leonard Roberto	New York	27	21.8
Adam B. Schiff	John Colbert	California	29	32.8
Ed Pastor	Janet L. Contreras	Arizona	4	39.4
Laura Richardson	Star Parker	California	37	45.2

Next, I researched Democrats representing districts with a similar Cook PVI and who won by the same margin of victory but faced a traditional, non-Tea Party Republican. The Cook Partisan Voter Index (PVI) is a measure of how liberal or conservative a congressional district is compared to the country as a whole. The calculations are based on the district's average Democratic and Republican vote share in the two previous presidential elections compared to the country's average vote share. For example, R+15 indicates that the district is strongly Republican, whereas D+8 indicates a safe Democratic district. A district under 5 is considered a swing district, so D+3 leans Democratic, while R+3 leans Republican.<sup>2</sup> Using Cook PVI and margin of victory, I was able to identify very close matches to use for comparisons with the Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers (see Table 2). By identifying Democrats in similar districts with similar election outcomes, I was able to isolate the effect of the Tea Party.

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<sup>2</sup> In the graphs, Republican districts are converted to negative numbers. For example, R+15 is represented as -15.

Table 2

Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates matched by margin of victory and Cook PVI to Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans

<b>Democratic Candidate Facing Tea Partier</b>	<b>Margin of Victory</b>	<b>Cook PVI</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate Facing Traditional Republican</b>	<b>Margin of Victory</b>	<b>Cook PVI</b>
Jerry McNerney	1.1	R+1	Bill Owens	1.1	R+1
Gabrielle Giffords	1.5	R+4	Mark Critz	1.6	R+1
Jason Altmire	1.6	R+6	Ben Chandler	0.2	R+9
Rick Larsen	2.2	D+3	Bruce Braley	2	D+5
Gary Peters	2.6	D+2	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.	2.8	D+1
Martin Heinrich	3.6	D+5	Jim Costa	3.4	D+5
Jim Matheson	4.4	R+15	Mike McIntyre	7.4	R+5
Bill Keating	4.5	D+5	Ron Kind	3.8	D+4
Raul M. Grijalva	6	D+6	Jim Himes	6.2	D+5
Colleen Hanabusa	6.4	D+11	Dale Kildee	8.7	D+11
Barney Frank	10.5	D+14	Emanuel Cleaver	9.1	D+10
John Yarmuth	10.7	D+2	Chris S. Murphy	8.2	D+2
Peter DeFazio	10.9	D+2	Mike Michaud	10.2	D+3
Frank Pallone	11	D+8	Niki Tsongas	12.6	D+8
Loretta Sanchez	13.7	D+4	Steve Israel	13.4	D+4
Ben R. Lujan	14	D+7	John Tierney	13.8	D+7
Jay Inslee	15.4	D+9	Chellie Pingree	13.6	D+8
John Carney	15.8	D+7	Allyson Schwartz	12.6	D+7
Dennis Cardoza	17	D+4	Ruben Hinojosa	14.1	D+3
Jim McGovern	17.3	D+9	Bob Filner	20.2	D+8
Mike Ross	17.3	R+7	Collin Peterson	17.6	R+5
Lois Capps	20.2	D+12	Kathy Castor	19.8	D+11
Brian Higgins	21.8	D+4	Jerry F. Costello	23.3	D+3
Adam B. Schiff	32.8	D+14	Susan A. Davis	28.3	D+14
Ed Pastor	39.4	D+13	Peter Welch	32.5	D+13
Laura Richardson	45.2	D+26	Hank Johnson	49.4	D+26

## *Analytic Methods*

To get a broad picture of the Democrats in the House after the 2010 election, I began the analysis by looking at all of the Democrats. The *Washington Post* maintains a database on every vote taken during the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress—from January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 to January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013—and calculates how frequently each member votes with his or her own party. Using this data, I compared the Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates (the 26 previously introduced) to the Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans (the remaining 174). Democratic House members who beat Tea Party candidates voted with the Party, on average, 87.3 percent of the time. Democratic House members who beat traditional Republicans voted with the Democratic Party, on average, 91.0 percent of the time ( $p < .056$ ). Although imperfect because of the large difference in sample size, this initial finding suggests that there may be a difference between Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates and Democrats who did not. However, this difference might be explained by how conservative the districts are. Perhaps Tea Party candidates were more likely to run in conservative districts, so the Democrats who now represent those districts vote less often with the Democratic Party to maintain a moderate voting record. Further analysis was required to test this explanation.

My data suggests that Democrats were more likely to face Tea Party opponents in safe Republican districts or swing districts. After the 2012 election, there were 200 Democratic members of the House, and 43 of those represented a swing district or conservative district (21.4 percent).<sup>3</sup> As Table 3 shows, 12 of the 26 races in which the Democrat beat the Tea Party challenger were in swing or conservative districts (46.2 percent). Because Tea Party candidates

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<sup>3</sup> Data for the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress was not available, but the 2012 election did not change the make up of the House very much at all. There were 193 Democratic members of the House after the 2010 election and 200 after the 2012 election, so the data would be similar.

were challenging Democrats in swing and conservative districts, the median voter theorem would predict that these Democrats would vote with the Party less often to reflect the ideology of their constituents.

Moreover, when Cook PVI and percentage voting with Party are plotted, there is a very strong correlation between the two ( $r = .70$ ) for both races against a Tea Partier and races against a traditional Republican, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. As the district becomes more liberal, the Democratic members are more likely to vote with the Democratic Party. Clearly, there is a strong relationship between Cook PVI and voting with Party, and this relationship should not be ignored. Therefore, the averages I previously calculated with all the Democrats in the House cannot sufficiently explain the differences in voting with Party, so I extended my analysis to control for Cook PVI.

Table 3

Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates, by Cook PVI

<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Tea Party Candidate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Cook PVI</b>	<b>Safe Republican/ Swing/ Safe Democrat District</b>
Jim Matheson	Morgan Philpot	Utah	2	R+15	Safe Republican
Mike Ross	Beth Anne Rankin	Arkansas	4	R+7	Safe Republican
Jason Altmire	Keith Rothfus	Pennsylvania	4	R+6	Safe Republican
Gabrielle Giffords	Jesse Kelly	Arizona	8	R+4	Swing
Jerry McNerney	David Harmer	California	11	R+1	Swing
Gary Peters	Rocky Raczowski	Michigan	9	D+2	Swing
John Yarmuth	Todd Lally	Kentucky	3	D+2	Swing
Peter DeFazio	Art Robinson	Oregon	4	D+2	Swing
Rick Larsen	John Koster	Washington	2	D+3	Swing
Loretta Sanchez	Van Tran	California	47	D+4	Swing
Dennis Cardoza	Michael Berryhill	California	18	D+4	Swing
Brian Higgins	Leonard Roberto	New York	27	D+4	Swing
Bill Keating	Jeff Perry	Massachusetts	10	D+5	Safe Democrat
Martin Heinrich	Jonathan Barela	New Mexico	1	D+5	Safe Democrat
Raul M. Grijalva	Ruth McClung	Arizona	7	D+6	Safe Democrat
John Carney	Glen Urquhart	Delaware	1	D+7	Safe Democrat
Ben R. Lujan	Tom Mullins	New Mexico	3	D+7	Safe Democrat
Frank Pallone	Anna Little	New Jersey	6	D+8	Safe Democrat
Jay Inslee	James Watkins	Washington	1	D+9	Safe Democrat
Jim McGovern	Marty Lamb	Massachusetts	3	D+9	Safe Democrat
Colleen Hanabusa	Charles K. Djou	Hawaii	1	D+11	Safe Democrat
Lois Capps	Thomas C. Watson	California	23	D+12	Safe Democrat
Ed Pastor	Janet L. Contreras	Arizona	4	D+13	Safe Democrat
Barney Frank	Sean Bielat	Massachusetts	4	D+14	Safe Democrat
Adam B. Schiff	John Colbert	California	29	D+14	Safe Democrat
Laura Richardson	Star Parker	California	37	D+26	Safe Democrat

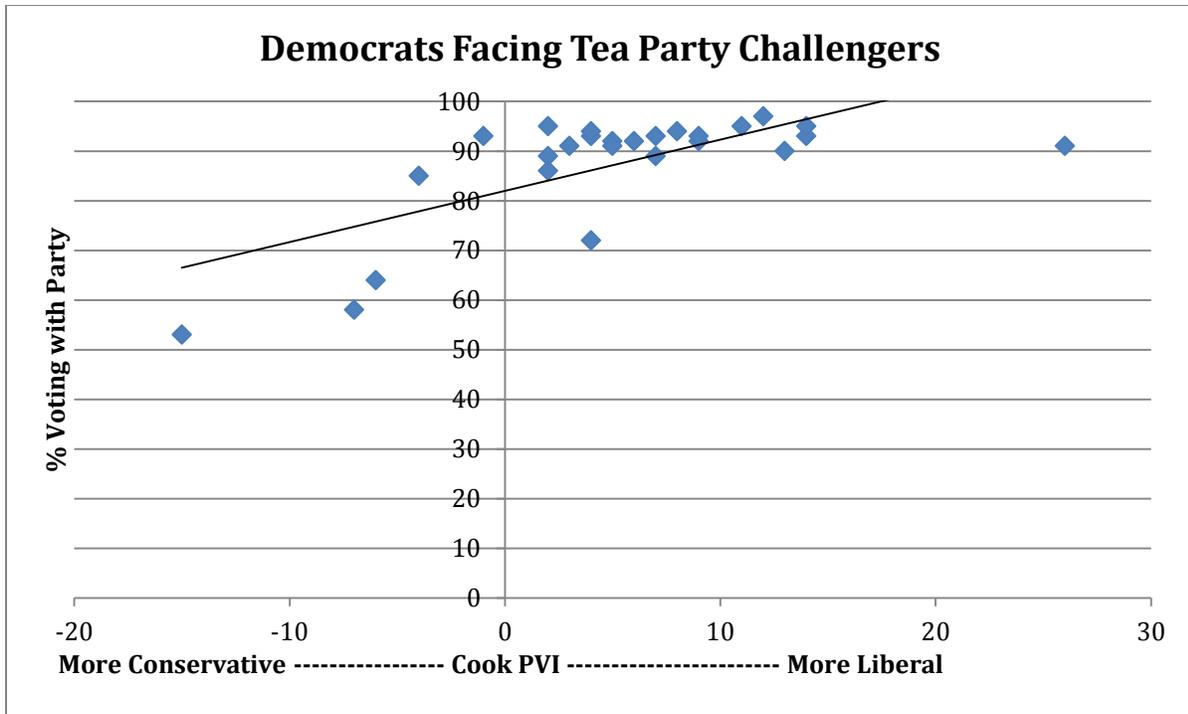


Figure 1: Cook PVI and party voting for Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers ( $r = .70$ )

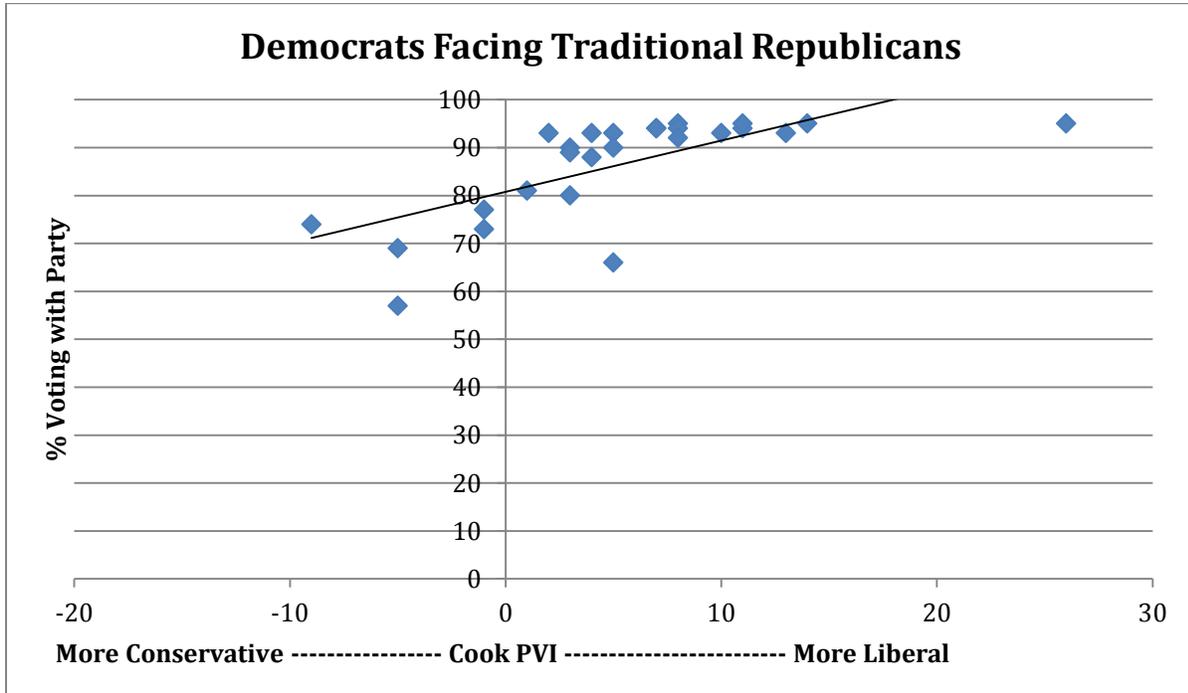


Figure 2: Cook PVI and party voting for Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans ( $r = .70$ )

Looking more closely at these races, I distinguished between those that were competitive (i.e. difficult for the Democrat to win) and those that were non-competitive (i.e. easy for the Democrat to win). The amount of money the Democratic Party spent on the campaign was used as a proxy to distinguish between non-competitive and competitive races.<sup>4</sup> In the data, there is a very clear separation between races the Democratic Party invested in and those it did not (see Table 4). In 8 of the races against Tea Party challengers, the Democratic Party spent from \$166,233 to \$1,471,789, with an average of \$832,249 and a median of \$873,226. In 18 of the races, they spent from \$0 to \$20,540, with an average of \$2,912 and a median of \$18. The clear gap between \$20,540 and \$166,233 provides a distinction between non-competitive and competitive races. Spending more than \$166,233 indicates that the Party believed it would be a challenging but winnable race, so they invested resources. When the Democratic Party spent less than \$20,540, the Party believed it was an easy race for the Democratic candidate to win, so very few or no resources were invested.

The same cut-offs were applicable in races against traditional Republican challengers. In 9 of the races, the Democratic Party spent from \$198,000 to \$2,334,769, with an average of \$803,659 and a median of \$537,691. In 17 of the races, they spent from \$0 to \$85,000, with an average of \$9,382 and a median of \$18. Again, there is a clear gap between \$85,000 and \$198,000 to distinguish between non-competitive and competitive races.

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<sup>4</sup> I purposely did not use margin of victory to distinguish between competitive and non-competitive races because Tea Party candidates sometimes sabotaged their own campaign with an outlandish statement or action, causing a larger than expected Democratic victory in the last weeks of the campaign. Therefore, a large margin of victory may not be indicative of a non-competitive race as a whole but may only reflect a flailing campaign.

Table 4

Democratic Party money spent on races against both Tea Party challengers and traditional Republican challengers

<b>Democratic Candidate Facing Tea Partier</b>	<b>Democratic Party Money Spent</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate Facing Traditional Republican</b>	<b>Democratic Party Money Spent</b>
Bill Keating	1,471,789	Mark Critz	2,334,769
Colleen Hanabusa	1,315,864	Bill Owens	1,641,308
Jerry McNerney	1,108,730	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.	866,328
Martin Heinrich	1,060,323	Jim Costa	652,884
Rick Larsen	686,129	Ben Chandler	537,691
Gary Peters	598,106	Chris S. Murphy	362,227
Raul M. Grijalva	250,818	Mike McIntyre	353,426
Gabrielle Giffords	166,233	Bruce Braley	286,297
John Carney	20,540	Ron Kind	198,000
Loretta Sanchez	15,514	Niki Tsongas	85,000
Ben R. Lujan	10,014	Chellie Pingree	50,646
Frank Pallone	2,914	Jim Himes	10,454
Lois Capps	2,000	Emanuel Cleaver	9,997
Ed Pastor	1,249	Peter Welch	2,595
Barney Frank	125	Hank Johnson	682
Adam B. Schiff	25	Allyson Schwartz	74
Laura Richardson	25	Ruben Hinojosa	18
Jim Matheson	10	Kathy Castor	18
John Yarmuth	5	John Tierney	3
Jason Altmire	0	Dale Kildee	0
Peter DeFazio	0	Mike Michaud	0
Jay Inslee	0	Steve Israel	0
Dennis Cardoza	0	Bob Filner	0
Jim McGovern	0	Collin Peterson	0
Mike Ross	0	Jerry F. Costello	0
Brian Higgins	0	Susan A. Davis	0

Four groups of Democrats emerged from the data: Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in competitive races, Democrats who ran against traditional Republican candidates in competitive races, Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in non-competitive races, and Democrats who ran against traditional Republican candidates in non-competitive races (see Table 5). The Democrats in non-competitive races would theoretically not need to move to the right to win, whereas those in competitive races may have to. Presumably, the Democrats in non-competitive races would not be affected by Tea Party candidates because they were guaranteed a victory by simply representing the alternative to the Tea Party. Therefore, Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers in non-competitive races should mirror Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in non-competitive races (*Hypothesis 1* below). If there is a Tea Party effect, Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers in competitive races should act differently than Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in competitive races. I would expect Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers in competitive races to vote less often with the Democratic Party because the campaign would have required them to move closer to the center, or even just right of center, given the extreme far-right opponent (*Hypothesis 2* below).

***H<sub>1</sub>*: Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in non-competitive races will be just as likely to vote with the Democratic Party once in office as Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in non-competitive races.**

***H<sub>2</sub>*: In an effort to establish a moderate voting record, Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in competitive races will be less likely to vote with the Democratic Party once in office than Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in competitive races.**

Table 5

Matrix illustrating the four groups of Democrats analyzed in the data set

		Type of Opponent	
		Tea Party	Traditional Republican
Difficulty of Race	Competitive	Group I.	Group II.
	Non-Competitive	Group III.	Group IV.

Figures 3 and 4 below illustrate the graphical results of splitting the Democrats by Tea Party challenger and traditional Republican challenger, as well as by competitive and non-competitive races. I performed a regression to determine if the difficulty of the race changes the likelihood of voting with the Democratic Party for each of these groups, while controlling for Cook PVI. The regression model is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \%Voting\ with\ Party \\
 & = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Cook\ PVI + \beta_2 * Close\ Race + \beta_3 * Cook\ PVI * Close\ Race + \beta_4 * TP + \beta_5 * TP \\
 & * Cook\ PVI + \beta_6 * TP * Close\ Race + \beta_7 * TP * Cook\ PVI * Close\ Race + \varepsilon
 \end{aligned}$$



## ***Results***

As a baseline, the regression showed that for Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in non-competitive races, increasing the Cook PVI by one unit increases the likelihood of voting with Party by 0.9 percent ( $p < .004$ ). Running in a competitive race against traditional Republicans did not affect this relationship between Cook PVI and voting with Party ( $p < .90$ ). The results also demonstrated that in non-competitive races, running against a Tea Party candidate does not change the relationship between Cook PVI and voting with Party ( $p < .51$ ). Similarly, running against a Tea Party candidate in a competitive race does not significantly affect the relationship between Cook PVI and voting with Party ( $p < .55$ ). The findings in regards to Cook PVI are clear: Democrats in more conservative districts votes less often with the Party, and Democrats in more liberal districts vote more often with the Party. Neither the difficulty of the race nor the challenger affects this relationship. In this case, Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates act just like Democrats who ran against traditional Republican candidates.

The regression demonstrated that Democrats who ran in non-competitive races against traditional Republicans in a perfectly neutral district (i.e. the intercept where Cook PVI equals 0) vote with the Democratic Party 82.9 percent of the time ( $p < .001$ ). The Democrats who ran in non-competitive races against Tea Party challengers in a perfectly neutral district are not more or less likely to vote with the Party compared to this baseline of 82.9 percent. The findings show that, in these races, likelihood of voting with Party decreases to 78.8 percent—a 4.1 percent decrease—but this result is not significant ( $p < .27$ ). These results indicate that Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in non-competitive races are not statistically different from Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans in non-competitive races, a finding which

supports my first hypothesis. Additionally, the difficulty of the race did not affect voting with Party for Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans. The likelihood of voting with the Party decreased to 78.6 percent—a decrease of 4.3 percent—when the race was competitive, but this result was not significant ( $p < .30$ ). However, running against Tea Party candidates in a close race increases the likelihood of voting with Party to 89.4 percent, indicating a 6.5 percent increase ( $p < .01$ ). My second hypothesis predicted the effect would be in the opposite direction (i.e. decrease the likelihood of voting with Party), but this finding indicates that a Tea Party effect does indeed exist in close races. An abbreviated version of the results is provided in Table 6, and the full results are provided in Table 7.

Table 6  
Matrix illustrating the four groups of Democrats with the results of the regression

		Type of Opponent	
		Tea Party	Traditional Republican
Difficulty of Race	Competitive	<b>Strong effect</b>	No effect
	Non-Competitive	No effect	No effect

Table 7  
Summary output

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.754869499
R Square	0.569827961
Adjusted R Square	0.5013915
Standard Error	7.885428139
Observations	52

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	7	3624.138707	517.734101	8.326379754	1.91634E-06
Residual	44	2735.918985			
Total	51	6360.057692			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	82.87127284	2.98017279	27.80753959	1.49029E-29	76.86512924	88.87741645	76.86512924	88.87741645
Cook PVI	0.923693492	0.299518635	3.08392662	0.003522929	0.320053347	1.527333636	0.320053347	1.527333636
Close Race	-4.306794079	4.087535239	-1.053640844	0.297799188	-12.54468006	3.9310919	-12.54468006	3.9310919
Cook PVI * Close Race	-0.085083453	0.68835661	-0.123603742	0.902191945	-1.472375044	1.302208138	-1.472375044	1.302208138
TP	-4.12141803	3.723854791	-1.106761209	0.274411479	-11.62635423	3.383518169	-11.62635423	3.383518169
TP * Cook PVI	0.239882334	0.364752087	0.657658566	0.51418359	-0.495227194	0.974991862	-0.495227194	0.974991862
TP * Close Race	14.86799325	5.858448532	2.537872129	0.01476971	3.061066042	26.67492046	3.061066042	26.67492046
TP * Cook PVI * Close Race	-0.578063924	0.971299486	-0.595144888	0.554795329	-2.535589413	1.379461566	-2.535589413	1.379461566

## *Discussion*

The findings reveal a Tea Party effect in competitive races but not in non-competitive races. The difficulty of the race alone does not affect Democrats' behavior once in Congress, nor does merely having a Tea Party challenger. Democrats who did not run against Tea Party candidates act similarly in Congress, regardless of having a competitive or non-competitive race. And Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in non-competitive races behave just like Democrats who did not run against Tea Party challengers at all. However, combining these variables has a very large and significant effect on voting behavior. Democrats who were in competitive races against Tea Partiers are 6.5 percent more likely to vote with the Democratic Party once in office. This is a fascinating but difficult result to explain.

A possible explanation could be found in the Democrats' personal ideologies. Perhaps Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in competitive races are inherently more liberal in their personal ideologies, and their votes reflect this. It could be that more liberal Democrats were willing to take on a tough Tea Party challenge, while more moderate Democrats were not. This theory could be tested with reelection data, but it does not seem very probable.

Instead, maybe running in a competitive race against a Tea Party candidate makes Democrats become more liberal. That is, before the election maybe these Democrats were just as moderate as their fellow Democrats who did not run against Tea Partiers, but something about running against an extreme candidate pushed their personal ideology to the left. Their votes, then, are reflecting a newfound personal ideology. Although difficult to test empirically, a psychological reason could be involved here. When these Democrats were campaigning, they were constantly inundated with Tea Party rhetoric and had to confront far-right supporters, groups, and even media. Perhaps this created a kind of out-group effect, whereby the Democrats

clung to their in-group more strongly in opposition to the out-group Tea Partiers. The huge gulf between Tea Party and Democratic ideology made the Democrats identify more strongly with the Democratic Party and its ideology, so when they arrived in Washington, they adhered to the Party's positions. The Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers but were in non-competitive races did not have to endure the same campaign events, media coverage, and supporters that constantly reinforced the Tea Party's far-right ideology. Therefore, they would not have felt the same in-group versus out-group effect.

Another explanation could be that Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates hold moderate views personally but outwardly voted more Democratically after a competitive race. Voting more often with the Democratic Party would not be expected to benefit them electorally, according to the median voter theorem, so perhaps another factor is at play here: money.

Democrats in competitive races against Tea Party candidates received substantial financial resources from the Democratic Party, whereas Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in non-competitive races did not. It could be that the financial resources they received influence their voting decisions more so than their personal ideology. But Democrats who were in tough races against traditional Republicans maintained a more moderate voting record, indicating that the financial resources they received did not greatly affect their voting decisions. So why would running against a Tea Party candidate in a competitive race increase the money effect?

The first explanation could involve the money outside groups spent on Tea Party races. Many far-right groups—some explicitly associated with the Tea Party and some not—put enormous amounts of money into electing these Tea Party candidates. Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates in competitive races may have become hypersensitive to the sources providing financial resources to each campaign. Democrats who ran against traditional

Republicans in competitive races did not see the same flood of money coming from Tea Party groups being used against them, so they were less aware of the source of their campaign money. The Democrats in competitive Tea Party races needed the money from their Party to combat the outside money their opponent was receiving and knew they would likely need it again in the next election, making them very aware of how much the Party spent to support their campaigns. These Democrats perhaps felt more indebted to the Party and therefore voted with the Party more often once in Congress.

The fear the Tea Party instilled in the Democrats in 2010 could provide a second explanation for why money more strongly influenced their voting decisions. These Democrats successfully won seats in Congress after a competitive race, but they saw 62 of their former colleagues defeated in the election, and many of these losses were the result of a Tea Party challenge. After the 2010 election, neither the Republican nor Democratic Party knew if this Tea Party wave would last into the next election, or if it would be short-lived. Although the Democrats in my data set won reelection, the 2010 election showed them that their districts were capable of producing Tea Party candidates and could do so again in the next election. Fearing another strong Tea Party challenge, these Democrats wanted to best set themselves up for another Tea Party race in 2012. Rather than building a moderate voting record, though, they saw the best path to victory as one the Democratic Party could help them achieve. They wanted to ensure that the Democratic Party would provide substantial financial resources again, but they also may have been seeking out perks such as chairmanships, pet projects, and influence over amendments and bills. Their constituents could very likely value these perks more than a moderate voting record, so successfully attaining these perks from the Democratic leadership would be more important to their reelection efforts. But attaining them would require the

Democrats to first curry favor with the Party, which means voting with the Party as much as possible. Additionally, these Democrats who had tough races against Tea Party candidates had already taken important votes, such as the stimulus bill and healthcare, that proved to be very toxic to their campaign in 2010 and would likely continue to hurt them politically. Unable to retract the votes, these Democrats were forced to turn to other methods, such as bringing a new construction project back to the district or convincing leadership to amend a bill that would be more favorable to their constituents, to keep their seats. Again, attaining these perks first required loyalty to the Party.

The third explanation is related but assumes that the Democrats were not fearful of a tough Tea Party challenge but rather were emboldened by it. These Democrats may attribute their 2010 victory to the Tea Party candidate's extreme views that their constituents could not support. After beating a Tea Partier once, the Democrats felt they could successfully do so again. The Democrats may have assumed that the Tea Party would be a strong force in the next election, so they expected to meet a Tea Party challenger again in 2012. Because 2010 proved to be a competitive race, the Democrats could logically expect a Tea Party candidate, rather than a traditional Republican, to emerge from the primary again. Knowing they could beat an extreme right-wing candidate, the Democrats felt they could safely move to the left. By moving to the left and voting with the Party, they could position themselves to be the recipients of certain perks from leadership. If they believed they could beat a Tea Party challenger the second time around, they would have no reason not to try to attain as much from leadership as possible. On the other hand, in districts where there were non-competitive races in 2010, a Tea Party candidate would be less likely to emerge from the primary in 2012, as this candidate could predict another losing battle. Consequently, Democrats in non-competitive races against Tea Partiers in 2010 may have

expected a challenge from a traditional Republican in 2012, encouraging them to build a moderate voting record because the next election would likely be a race to the middle. Although purely speculative, debating possible explanations for these findings could provide much insight into the Democratic Party's reaction to the Tea Party movement and their strategy for winning Tea Party races in the future.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

The findings here are robust and justify further research on the Tea Party's influence on the Democratic Party. Future research can take several new ideas into account. For this analysis, the Democrats were matched by Cook PVI and margin of victory. I did not take into account the state or region in which these races occurred, and geographical location could be a defining feature for many candidates. Comparing Democrats in similar regions or in the same state, rather than by Cook PVI and margin of victory, might also be a reasonable way to identify matches.

Additionally, the *Washington Post* data aggregates all votes taken in the House during the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. It could be beneficial to selectively analyze major votes rather than aggregating every single vote. Examining which votes the Democrats who ran against Tea Partiers did not follow the Party on could alter the findings and explanations.

Future research could also collect data on voting with Party before the 2010 election (23 of the 26 Democrats were incumbents) to determine if their voting patterns changed before and after the Tea Party challenge. Data can also be collected on these members after the 2012 election (18 are still in the House) to see how their voting patterns have evolved now that the threat of the Tea Party has diminished. It would also be interesting to find out if the same findings in this paper emerge from 2012 or 2014 data.

A more complete understanding of the Tea Party's influence on the Democratic Party would also include an analysis of the Democrats who lost against Tea Party candidates. There are a variety of ways in which the Democrats who lost could differ from the Democrats who won, and the differences will shed light on the broader question of how the Tea Party influenced the Democratic Party.

### *Conclusion*

Although the Tea Party is now known as the right wing of the Republican Party, any discussion of the Tea Party should also take the Democratic Party into account. Specifically, the Democrats who faced Tea Party candidates in elections provide an intriguing case study. This research suggests that the Tea Party acted as a unifying force among the Democrats who defeated them, which is somewhat ironic given that the Tea Party has had the opposite effect on the Republicans in Congress. And while the movement's main goal was to reduce the size of government, which largely meant opposing Democratic proposals, the Tea Party has inadvertently made the Democrats an even stronger voting block. Though the Tea Party provided the Democrats with multiple challenges, in certain cases it also provided them with members of Congress willing to toe the party line. The Tea Party may be a dying brand, but its legacy will undoubtedly be felt by both the Republican and Democratic Party.

Appendix A

Democrats who ran against Tea Party candidates, by voting with Party

<b>Tea Party Candidate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Margin of Victory</b>	<b>Cook PVI</b>	<b>% Voting with Party</b>
Morgan Philpot	Utah	2	Jim Matheson	4.4	R+15	53
Beth Anne Rankin	Arkansas	4	Mike Ross	17.3	R+7	58
Keith Rothfus	Pennsylvania	4	Jason Altmire	1.6	R+6	64
Michael Berryhill	California	18	Dennis Cardoza	17	D+4	72
Jesse Kelly	Arizona	8	Gabrielle Giffords	1.5	R+4	85
Art Robinson	Oregon	4	Peter DeFazio	10.9	D+2	86
Rocky Raczkowski	Michigan	9	Gary Peters	2.6	D+2	89
Glen Urquhart	Delaware	1	John Carney	15.8	D+7	89
Janet L. Contreras	Arizona	4	Ed Pastor	39.4	D+13	90
Jonathan Barela	New Mexico	1	Martin Heinrich	3.6	D+5	91
John Koster	Washington	2	Rick Larsen	2.2	D+3	91
Star Parker	California	37	Laura Richardson	45.2	D+26	91
Jeff Perry	Massachusetts	10	Bill Keating	4.5	D+5	92
Ruth McClung	Arizona	7	Raul M. Grijalva	6	D+6	92
James Watkins	Washington	1	Jay Inslee	15.4	D+9	92
David Harmer	California	11	Jerry McNerney	1.1	R+1	93
Van Tran	California	47	Loretta Sanchez	13.7	D+4	93
Tom Mullins	New Mexico	3	Ben R. Lujan	14	D+7	93
Sean Bielat	Massachusetts	4	Barney Frank	10.5	D+14	93
Marty Lamb	Massachusetts	3	Jim McGovern	17.3	D+9	93
Anna Little	New Jersey	6	Frank Pallone	11	D+8	94
Leonard Roberto	New York	27	Brian Higgins	21.8	D+4	94
Charles K. Djou	Hawaii	1	Colleen Hanabusa	6.4	D+11	95
John Colbert	California	29	Adam B. Schiff	32.8	D+14	95
Todd Lally	Kentucky	3	John Yarmuth	10.7	D+2	95
Thomas C. Watson	California	23	Lois Capps	20.2	D+12	97

Appendix B

Democrats who ran against traditional Republicans, by voting with Party

<b>Traditional Republican Candidate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Margin of Victory</b>	<b>Cook PVI</b>	<b>% Voting with Party</b>
Lee Byberg	Minnesota	7	Collin Peterson	17.6	R+5	57
Andy Vidak	California	20	Jim Costa	3.4	D+5	66
Ilario Pantano	North Carolina	7	Mike McIntyre	7.4	R+5	69
Matthew Doheny	New York	23	Bill Owens	1.1	R+1	73
Andy Barr	Kentucky	6	Ben Chandler	0.2	R+9	74
Tim Burns	Pennsylvania	12	Mark Critz	1.6	R+1	77
Teri Newman	Illinois	12	J. F. Costello	23.3	D+3	80
Mike Keown	Georgia	2	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.	2.8	D+1	81
Dan Kapanke	Wisconsin	3	Ron Kind	3.8	D+4	88
Jason Levesque	Maine	2	Mike Michaud	10.2	D+3	89
Dan Debicella	Connecticut	4	Jim Himes	6.2	D+5	90
Eddie Zamora	Texas	15	Ruben Hinojosa	14.1	D+3	90
Nick Popaditch	California	51	Bob Filner	20.2	D+8	92
Sam Caligiuri	Connecticut	5	Chris S. Murphy	8.2	D+2	93
Benjamin Lange	Iowa	1	Bruce Braley	2	D+5	93
Jacob Turk	Missouri	5	Emanuel Cleaver	9.1	D+10	93
Paul Beaudry	Vermont	1	Peter Welch	32.5	D+13	93
John Gomez	New York	2	Steve Israel	13.4	D+4	93
Dean Scontras	Maine	1	Chellie Pingree	13.6	D+8	94
Dee Adcock	Pennsylvania	13	Allyson Schwartz	12.6	D+7	94
Mike Prendergast	Florida	11	Kathy Castor	19.8	D+11	94
Bill Hudak	Massachusetts	6	John Tierney	13.8	D+7	94
Jon Golnik	Massachusetts	5	Niki Tsongas	12.6	D+8	95
Lisbeth Carter	Georgia	4	Hank Johnson	49.4	D+26	95
John Kupiec	Michigan	5	Dale Kildee	8.7	D+11	95
Michael Crimmins	California	53	Susan A. Davis	28.3	D+14	95

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