# The Impact of the Tea Party Movement on Congressional Behavior and

# Elections

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#### Abstract

As the Tea Party Movement (TPM) continues to grow, questions arise surrounding the relationship between the movement and legislative elections. As a result, this study focuses on two facets of this issue: one, does the TPM behave more as a political party, rather than a social movement? Additionally, have the movement's actions in this capacity altered the outcomes of Congressional House elections, influencing House behavior overall? To explore these ideas, this paper looks at how House members of the Tea Party Caucus vote, as compared with the Republican Party. Research also focuses on how the support from important TPM figures/groups impacted which TPM candidates ran successful campaigns in 2010, showcasing the influence that the movement has within the electoral realm. Findings suggest that while the movement does not emulate a political party overall, endorsements and donations from prominent TPM figures/groups may influence electoral outcomes. This has a significant bearing on the how TPM candidates and elected officials impact Congressional outcomes in the future, creating more of a third-party influence than seen in 2010.

#### **Introduction and Hypotheses**

As the Tea Party Movement (TPM) continues to grow within U.S. politics, the controversial grass-roots organization is no longer centered around an occasional protest. Rather, both local and national TPM groups have become widespread forces throughout the nation; with members of Congress, Presidential candidates, and citizens pledging allegiance to the once fledgling network. Largely emerging in 2009, local Tea Party chapters began to come to the forefront of U.S. politics, as their protests became national media events. This quickly catapulted into more membership across the country, and more prominent political influence – as many Congressional candidates in the 2010 midterm began to identify themselves as members of the TPM. Thus, literature suggests that the organization has created a third party influence ((Rasmussen & Schoen, 2010; Madestam, et. al, 2011; Karpowitz, et. al, 2011), implying that the TPM overall is more representative of a political party. Though local and national chapters have not specifically identified themselves as a party, their presence shows a powerful electoral influence, particularly in the House. In actuality, the groups that make up the TPM ensures that they are not seen as a political party or as an organization with a central leadership structure. However, the TPM's electoral actions reveal behaviors that are more like a political party, accumulating the leadership, resources, political clout, and media attention necessary to ensure a distinct impact within U.S. politics.

Though the TPM may act as a political party, and not as a social movement, what do these two terms really mean? According to scholar Alan Ware, "[a] political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government and...to some degree attempts to 'aggregate interests.'" (1996: 5); whereas a social movement "underscore[s] symbolic action in civil society or the cultural sphere as a major arena for collective action" (Buechler 1995: 442). Though it is arguable that the TPM had its roots in collective action to gain power, the midterm election of 2010 shows how the organization used national endorsements and contributions from TPM groups and figures to elect TPM freshman into the House. Additionally, through the establishment of the Tea Party Caucus and labeled TPM political figures, it is evident that Ware's description of a political party is suited to the TPM's actions. Due to TPM popularity and resources the overall organization has given to candidates, "various politicians…jumped on board the Tea Party bandwagon as strategic means for electoral success," particularly in 2010 (Rasmussen & Schoen 2010: 188). This not only shows the facets of mobilization and resource support critical to the establishment of a powerful political party (Ware 1996, Smith 2007), but gives additional credence to the electoral presence of the TPM as well.

Yet, even with these assertions, two questions remain: First, while one may argue that the TPM is acting like a third-party, is it possible to find evidence supporting this idea? Additionally, how is this influence seen on a purely electoral level? In an attempt to answer these questions, this paper will suggest two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Due to the Congressional behavior of Tea Party members, through the Tea Party Caucus' voting record, the movement has in actuality demonstrated a third-party presence; suggesting that the TPM behaves more like a political party than a social movement.

**Hypothesis 2:** In terms of electioneering, the TPM has ensured that candidates receive important endorsements from national TPM figures and groups, and significant campaign

contributions – replicating the way both Republican and Democrat parties create extensive partisan influence.

### **Research Design**

To test the first hypothesis, this study examined selected votes of the Tea Party Caucus' House members from January 2011 to January 2012; choosing 20 bills at random to see the variation between how TPM House members voted, as compared to their Republican counterparts. Two additional measures of evaluation are also used to test the second hypothesis. First, there is an examination of five of the most important "endorsers," for the TPM (Good 2011, Holloman and Killeen 2011): Americans for Prosperity, Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Express, FreedomWorks, and Sarah Palin to see if there is a correlation between those who won or lost, and if they were endorsed by Palin or these groups. Next, the top five top political action committee (PAC) contributors to TPM members within the Tea Party caucus are explored: Honeywell International, American Bankers Association, Lockheed Martin, Koch Industries, and the National Association of Realtors (Mehta 2012). Though these were not the top contributors to TPM candidates in 2010, they are the PACs that currently give the most to House freshman within the Tea Party Caucus. This paper used such contributors because of their influence in the House today, and sought to see if their donations are as relevant in 2010 as they are in 2012.

#### Data

After randomly generating 20 bills to see the variation between the TPM caucus members and the rest of the Republican party, this research focuses on how members of the Tea Party Caucus joined the majority of the Republican Party (over 50% of the vote

share) solely on final passage of bills; meaning that votes on amendments, procedural motions and votes under suspension of the rules were excluded, in order to provide a more concrete and more transparent approach to measuring TPM activity against the overall Republican party [Congressional Votes Database, 2012].

House Votes	All Yea Tea Party Votes (62 members)	All Yea Republican Votes (242 members)
House Vote 38	62	239
House Vote 18	62	239
House Vote 81	62	236
House Vote 71	62	216
House Vote 74	62	234
House Vote 92	62	235
House Vote 46	55	197
House Vote 4	62	233
House Vote 18	62	239
House Vote 51	62	232
House Vote 100	62	237
House Vote 72	24	197
House Vote 51	62	232
House Vote 12	62	233
House Vote 81	62	236
House Vote 39	62	235
House Vote 79	62	234
House Vote 147	61	229
House Vote 42	62	238
House Vote 130	62	238

Table 1:

From this data, there is little differentiation between TPM members and fellow Republican counterparts. In fact, a direct connection appears between the number of "yeas" a bill receives from both the Republicans and Tea Party Caucus members. This is especially seen in House Vote 72, as 197/242 Republicans voted for the bill, and 24/62 Tea Party members did as well; showing that the Tea Party is voting in tandem with the Republican Party. Though there was an expectation that both the Tea Party and Republicans would vote cohesively within each respective group, there was also an assumption that there would a large difference between the two; with Tea Partiers distinguishing themselves continuously from their conservative counterparts.

Aside from Congressional behavior, TPM candidates in the 2010 election are also examined in this paper. Though the second hypothesis encompasses both endorsements as well as PAC contributions, there is a readily apparent distinction between the two. Endorsements represent TPM figures and groups that publicly support a candidate, while contributors are PACs that aid campaigns in a purely monetary sense. With this in mind, it is clear that three of the "top endorsers" dominated the field in 2010: FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Express, and Sarah Palin. Though Americans for Prosperity is widely seen as an influential Tea Party group, it now refuses to endorse candidates. Additionally, little information can be found on endorsements from the Tea Party Patriots, as this organization seems to simply organize meetings on behalf of all TPM candidates and popular conservative figures. As a result, this portion of the paper focuses on FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Express, and Sarah Palin. A multiple regression analysis (Table 2) is used in order to test the statistical significance of these two organizations and Palin.

Regression	n Statistics							
Multiple F	R .		0.592					
R Square			0.351					
Adjusted l	R Square		0.337					
Standard I	Error		0.398					
Observatio	ons		143					
	Coefficients	Standard	t Stat	<i>P</i> -	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 99%	Upper 99%
		Error		value				
Intercept	-0.014091588	0.057291302	-0.245963833	0.806	-0.127366673	0.099183497	-0.163717103	0.135533926
Freedom	0.166872511	0.074439383	2.24172345	0.027	0.019692623	0.314052398	-0.027537994	0.361283015
Works								
Теа	0.498559613	0.075548172	6.59922804	0.000	0.349187453	0.647931773	0.301253327	0.695865899
Party								
Express								
Sarah	0.062739446	0.074840483	0.838308942	0.403	-0.085233488	0.210712381	-0.132718597	0.258197489
Palin								

# Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

y = -0.014 +0.167\*Freedom Works +0.499\*Tea Party Express +0.063\*Sarah Palin

With an R-Square of .351, Table 2 shows that the combinations of endorsements may explain 35.1% of the variation in winning versus losing candidates. This means that 35% of the reason candidates run successful campaigns could be due to endorsements; which may give insight into why some candidates fare better than others. If specific endorsements mean that candidates even have a better chance of being elected, Palin, Tea Party Express, and FreedomWorks may be very important factors to the future of the TPM. The other significant aspect to this set of data lies in the p-values. To disprove the null hypothesis (that endorsements had no impact on the 2010 midterm outcome), the pvalue must be lower than .05 for these three endorsers. Though the p-value (.403) for Sarah Palin is statistically insignificant, both Tea Party Express (.000) and FreedomWorks (.027) are both within range to reject the null hypothesis. Though this does not prove that FreedomWorks and Tea Party Express endorsements ensured the election of certain TPM candidates over others, the support from these organizations may have influenced the final outcome of the 2010 election.

In another attempt to show the relationship between important endorsements and TPM elected officials, this paper also utilized a correlation analysis (Table 3). This analysis shows much of the same relationship between endorsers and TPM candidates as the data from Table 2; as both Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks show a greater connection to winning candidates, 56.773% and 36.264% respectively, while Sarah Palin's endorsement seems to mean less overall (18.450%).

Table 3:	Correlation	Analysis
	0 011 01001011	

Pearson Correlation Coefficients, N = 143		
	W/L	
Sarah Palin	0.18450	
	0.0274	
Tea Party Express	0.56773	
	0.0000	
Freedom Works	0.36264	
	0.0000	

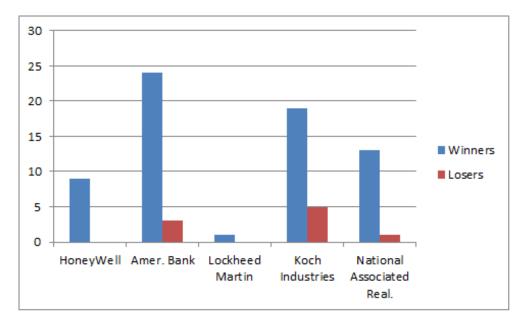
Lastly, Table 4 is a more basic approach to understanding the data; examining how many winners had support from these three endorsers (Table 4).

## **Table 4: Endorsements**

	Winners (55)	Losers (88)
FreedomWorks	33	21
Tea Party Express	54	37
Sarah Palin	22	20

Though the results in Table 4 are similar to the results of Table 2 and 3, there is a clear distinction between Tea Party Express' endorsements, and the backing from FreedomWorks and Sarah Palin. Out of 55 winners, 54 were endorsed by Tea Party Express; and out of the 88 losers, only 37 found support from the group. Additionally, though the numbers are less profound, FreedomWorks endorsed 33 out of the 55 winners, and only 21 of the 88 losers. Yet, there is little difference between Sarah Palin's endorsement of candidates, as seen throughout the previous data as well. Though there could be several explanations for Palin's lack of influence, rumors surrounding a possible Presidential run could be the basis for her endorsements – as opposed to how FreedomWorks and Tea Party Express choose whom to support. Particularly in this case, whom endorsers choose to support gives insight into the endorser, rather than into the candidate pool overall: "Robert Schlesiger, editor at U.S. News and World Report, said... "[The]...importance [of endorsements] lies in what they tell us about the endorser, not the endorsee." And recent rumors about Palin's presidential run could be a clue" (Shahid 2010: 2). From this, it seems as though Palin may have focused on the candidates to push her ahead for Presidency, rather than a focus on successful candidacies.

In addition, monetary backing clearly plays a role in electoral success as well. Even as national endorsements demonstrate support for certain candidates over others, money is critical to propelling all campaigns. Yet, does the presence of a certain PAC make a difference for Tea Partiers? Just as some endorsements are more influential than others, can the same be said of specific PAC contributions? The graph below (Graph 1) compares selected PAC contributions to the numbers of winners. Though it is impossible to state that certain contributors ensured that specific candidates would gain office, Graph 1 shows a clear relationship between donations and successful campaigns. However, this data also show that no one PAC made the difference between a TPM member winning or losing. Rather, there is a strong connection between the amount of donations a candidate received, and the likelihood that she/he would win; showing that the top PACs currently supporting Tea Party interests wielded significant influence before these candidates gained elected office.



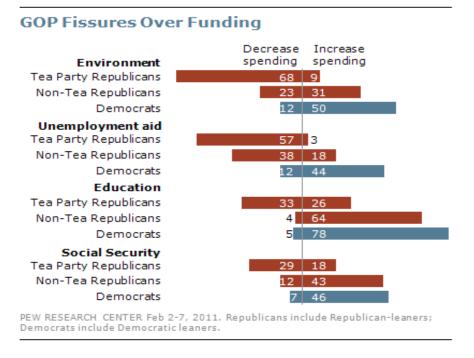


Graph 1 gives evidence that there is a strong relationship between the presence of these PACs and winning the election. Though Lockheed Martin and Honeywell International contributed to fewer candidates, their presence still connects with TPM winners over losers. Additionally, though the American Bankers Association, Koch Industries, and the National Association of Realtors spread out their campaign contributions more, the majority of the candidates they contributed to won their elections. Since many of these major companies donate large sums to candidates overall, the significance of this data rests in the connection between their presence in 2010, and their contributions in 2012. Though they donated similarly large sums in 2010 to candidates, their presence is now critical to the continuation of the House freshman within the Tea Party Caucus. As discussed in more detail below, the continuation of this PAC support is helping to ensure that these Tea Party candidates are always financially stable – which has some implications for the future. If TPM candidates lose backing from these companies, they may not only be jeopardizing their status within Congress, but for future elections as well. Though other factors clearly impact electoral success, the strong connection between these PACs and winning campaigns implies that these companies may impact future TPM candidacies as well.

### Discussion

Though Tea Partiers and elections may be strongly connected, the relationship between the TPM and Congressional behavior is less clear. The initial set of data (Table 1) failed to prove the first hypothesis, given that there is little difference between how members of the Tea Party Caucus vote, as compared with the rest of the Republican Party. However, due to the confines of solely looking at final passage, rather than amendments or possible changes before a bill is brought to the floor (in legislative committees or Rules Committee) there could be more to the Republican-Tea Party relationship than this data set shows.

Votes are one way to understand the connection between these two "groups," yet, there is a difference in objectives between TPM and Republicans that this research fails to examine. Some of these most fundamental differences between TPM and Republican ideology lie in the fiscal approach to U.S. government. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, TPM Congressional members are ensuring that there is little middle ground between Tea Party ideals and the standard Republican platform – all due to a fundamental disagreement on government spending: "...divisions among House Republicans over...federal spending reflect fundamental differences within the GOP base...in fact...spending preferences of Republicans....who do not agree with the Tea Party are...more in sync with Democrats than with Republican supporters of the Tea Party" (Pew Center 2011: 1). Though the authors of this study do not explicitly state that The TPM behaves as a political party due to differences in ideology, the article suggests that perhaps there is a greater difference between the GOP and TPM members than originally thought. Additionally, the fact that more Republicans can align with their Democratic counterparts on fiscal issues, rather than with TPM colleagues, may propel the TPM to publicly declare the organization as a new political party. In the data below, Graph 2 not only shows how far the TPM remains from the standard GOP base, but in the comparison between Democrats, TPM, and Republicans, gives additional credence the organization's tendency to look like a political party.



# Graph 2 [Pew Research Center, 2011]

Given Pew's data from Graph 2, the majority of Tea Partiers favor a decrease in spending overall, regardless of the issue; whereas Republicans seem more split. The Democrats also tend to agree on issues as a block as well, with most supporting an increase in spending on these issues. Not only does this research suggest that the TPM Congresswomen/men are likely to vote together, much like political parties in general, but also that the Republicans are seemingly more fragmented. This could lead to more fragmentation throughout the Republican party in the future, implying that Tea Partiers may be better equipped to take Tea Party leaning Republicans into the formation of a third party.

Even as speculation continues on the connection between the TPM and Congressional behavior, the data accompanying the candidacies of Tea Partiers may give better insight into their electoral impact. Tables 2-4 seem to suggest that both the endorsements of Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks play a significant role in the election of specific Freshman TPM members in the House; where Sarah Palin's support is less important. Research conducted at Brigham Young University finds similar results, though the research reaches a different conclusion than this paper, largely based on differing data sets. Brigham Young's 2011 study states that FreedomWorks has more of an impact than other TPM groups: "[o]f the Tea Party groups that backed candidates in the general election, only FreedomWorks endorsements were associated with a statistically significant increase in votes" (Karpowitz et. al 2011: 305), even though the increase was only by about 2%. Due to its small statistical significance, Karpowitz states that endorsements by popular TPM groups and/or Palin seems to have little impact on election outcome; yet, the study's research methods may have impacted this result.

Karpowitz and his colleagues used all districts where a Republican ran, instead of those in which a Republican TPM non-incumbent ran. As a result, the confounding factor of incumbency may have skewed the study's results. Though addressed within the authors' work, this has a direct impact on how endorsements are measured against other aspects of election results. Incumbency remains one of the most important features in election success, which could play a dramatic role in how endorsements are measured against winners and losers. Thus, perhaps endorsements play a more dramatic role in electoral outcomes – particularly in terms of freshman TPM candidates.

Contrary to Karpowitz and his colleagues, this paper's research shows that the endorsements from specific TPM groups are significant to electoral success. The support of the Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks may not have proved the sole reason for electoral success, but the data here suggest that there is a strong relationship for Tea Party candidates in gaining certain endorsements and winning a House seat. Aside from the implications of endorsements, there is little evidence to show that the participation of certain PACs made a difference in campaigns, yet there is a clear link between these donations and winning candidates. All of the PACs supported a majority of successful campaigns, even while the 2010 midterm had more TPM losers than winners. As a result, their contributions may have given an extra edge to certain candidates overall – especially when looking at the parameters of a general election. Additional research could compare how many of these top contributors donated to non-TPM candidates, and then attempt to see if similar findings ensue, or if their presence is strictly more significant for TPM candidates.

## Funding of the TPM in Congress

Today, the trend of sizable TPM financial support continues. Though there are only 15 freshman members of Congress who have formally joined the Tea Party Caucus, championed by Republican Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (MN-6), PACs (particularly the ones discussed above gave almost \$3.5 million in the first nine months following the 2010 election (Mehta 2012). Though political giving to freshman House members is not surprising, the amount in this instance is impressive. Mary Boyle of Common Cause [stated] "The lobbyists and other traditional Washington powers that the newbies will learn fast that they need them...,"" it is still noted as "an impressive haul for...newly elected House members" (Mehta 2012: 2). This statement implies that TPM freshman are seemingly generating more financial power than their non-TPM counterparts, which could prove problematic for Republicans and Democrats alike. If Tea Party freshman have the ability to gain proportionally more money than other new House members in the House, this could translate into Tea Partiers raising more funds overall. While this may be far into the future, this ability could mean more power and political clout for the TPM both at election time and in Congress, which could in turn translate into a third party influence.

Koch Industries, led by the founding Koch brothers, is one of the companies that propels Tea Partiers forward, ensuring that funds are almost exclusively donated to different TPM organizations and candidates. While the other companies examined here contribute to a variety of mostly Republican candidates, the Koch brothers remain the most consistent supporters of the Tea Party cause. They are the founders of Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks; both of which are regarded as widespread TPM organizations. As noted above, the endorsement by FreedomWorks of TPM candidates may have played a part in helping their electoral success, which is in part due to the influence and monetary support of Koch. Yet, data suggest that they were not only helpful in the election of TPM officials, but in creating the start of the movement as well: "...Koch used Americans for Prosperity to "stimulate" [emphasis in original] the Tea Party movement that arose over the past two years...[it] was one of the organizations that helped plan dozens of the first national Tea Party rallies back in April 2009" (Carrk, 2011: 12-13). As such, Koch seems to not only fund candidates through its corporation, but to use a variety of avenues to further the entirety of the TPM as well.

Through the Koch Brothers are part of a wide network of TPM support, their financial power and organizational development seemingly make them critical to the continuation of the TPM. Further research is needed to determine how important their influence and monetary aid will be in the future, but as of now, Koch remains a formidable force within electoral politics.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Clearly, the Koch brothers and other important contributors play a role in the success of TPM candidates before and after their election the House. Endorsements from specific groups and/or figures may play a role in successful campaigns, especially in terms Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks; two of the most nationally known TPM organizations. Yet, while these relationships could suggest that the TPM acts more as a political party than as a movement, more research is needed to support this claim. Roll call voting data presented here show that the TPM does not vote significantly differently than their Republican colleagues, although research by the Pew Center cited above suggests that budgetary issues in particular divide Republicans and Tea Partiers. It is not clear what this finding speaks says about new party status for the TPM.

While this research has suggested significant insights, some limitations are apparent. For example, a variety of elements could influence the number of TPM members entering Congress; especially in terms of how a midterm election operates. Within a midterm, the President's party often loses a significant number of Congressional seats, putting the opposition at a distinct advantage (Bafumi, et al., 2009). Since almost all of the TPM members were designated as Republicans on the election ballot, this could have given them an advantage over their Democratic counterparts. In the 2010 midterms, another factor affecting data collection rests in district identification. Since many of these candidates were running in conservative districts, they were likely to win already; regardless of contributions or endorsements.

Future research is needed to broaden understanding as to how these confounding variables impact the TPM and legislative elections overall – in order to successfully

observe the movement's actions and role within Congress. In the future, it will become necessary to both see how Tea Partiers may distinguish themselves from fellow Republicans, and to further examine how both specific endorsers and donators influence the continuation of the movement. The data presented within this paper provides some clues into the relationship between the TPM and legislative elections, but this intricate relationship still needs more exploration. Through these additional investigations, scholars can gain more nuanced knowledge of how different groups affect public policy, while watching how the TPM maneuvers throughout the electoral process.

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