

A CUP OF TEA:  
A STUDY OF THE TEA PARTY CAUCUS  
IN THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the course of the last few years, a new movement has taken the American political system by storm, the Tea Party. The movement has not only captivated our media but also the minds of ordinary Americans and political elites. According to popular consensus and academic opinion, the Tea Party is comprised of a group of conservative-leaning Republicans who want a smaller government and a lesser tax burden. This is what we think of the Tea Party, but is it true? It is perceived that Tea Party members differ significantly from their Republican colleagues in the House of Representatives, but do they? Do they truly represent the Tea Party philosophy and agenda?

By creating an original data set on the Republican members of the United States House of Representatives, and examining variables such as the political lean, economic and employment make-up of a member's district, their endorsements and incumbency, as well as high priority legislative votes from the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, I will be able to investigate the characteristics and tendencies of Tea Party Caucus members. Once one looks at the 242 member House Republican Caucus and further examines the sixty members of the Tea Party Caucus, the data shows that Tea Party Caucus members largely originate from safe Republican districts and have served in previous congressional terms. Analysis shows that Tea Party Caucus members do vary significantly from their House Republican colleagues when examining their districts, but do not vary as considerably when examining their voting patterns.

## **DEDICATION**

For my parents and family, for the warmth, love and inspiration they have given me,  
For my professors, instructors and teachers, for all their generosity, guidance and wisdom,  
For my friends, for all the good times, great memories and encouragement.

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“I did it my way.” – Frank Sinatra

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## INTRODUCTION

Insurgency or caricature? A new brand of conservatism has taken the main stage of American politics in the past few years, the Tea Party. While some trace the roots of the Tea Party back to the big-government conservatism of President George W. Bush, the Tea Party that many people came to know emerged with a thunderous roar during the debate over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as health care reform (Berzon, Blackmon, Etter & Levitz, 2010). It was then that a group comprising of Members of Congress, political talking heads and elites as well as concerned citizens, voiced their opposition to Obama's signature piece of legislation. This group espoused conservative philosophies, like small government, personal choice and lower taxation. This group quickly grew national attention and even faster became a political force.

Following the “Great Recession” that swallowed the nation in 2008, the federal government undertook a wide array of actions to help stabilize and revitalize the country’s economy. Among these were a small stimulus package, the Toxic Asset Relief Program (TARP), and bailouts of the financial and automotive industries that amounted to trillions of dollars in government spending. This spending continued into the Obama administration, most notably with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and eventually culminated with the bitter debate over health care reform that took place in late 2009 and early 2010. Even though the debate over health care may have been a turning point in the movement, garnering it global attention and curiosity, high stakes political fights have continued over such issues as the loans extended to the American automakers, home foreclosure and refinancing programs, extended unemployment benefits and the federal deficit and debt among many others.



Whether one sees the Tea Party traced back to the spending and government actions taken place under Bush or not, the movement clearly gained steam after an upset CNBC correspondent, Rick Santelli, took to the airwaves live from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on February 19, 2009, just two days after the ARRA was signed into law. To the cheering of traders around him, Santelli who was clearly upset with the stimulus package and the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan – a roadmap to help families avoid foreclosure – suggested a Tea Party be held on the Chicago River in July. Overnight the video became a viral sensation and within days Santelli became a national figure and the moniker “Tea Party” had taken hold (Rae, 2011, p. 11).

“Hell no you can't,” “You lie!” and “Job killing,” are perhaps the most notorious and well-known expressions of the Tea Party. These phrases help to steer the image of the Tea Party in the public mind as an anti-incumbent grassroots movement that gained power because its tenets are universally acceptable, i.e., a smaller and more responsible government, lesser taxes, a more accountable Congress, and a strong and robust foreign policy. Others see the movement as an anti-Obama faction, possibly furthered by not only those who vehemently oppose his policies, but those who also dislike him because of his background and history (Parker, 2010).

Though the Tea Party movement drew much attention, garnering the support of politicians such as Congressman Ron Paul, Former Governor Sarah Palin and Former Congressman Dick Armey, it would not be until 2010 that self-professed Tea Partiers would campaign and be elected to Congress. However, the group’s first election is often seen as that of then-Massachusetts State Senator Scott Brown to fill the seat held for almost 47 years by the late Senator Ted Kennedy (Rae, 2011, p. 15). Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann

founded the Tea Party Caucus (TPC) in the House of Representatives – the group which serves as the main focusing point of this paper – six months after Brown's election in July 2010 (Herszenhorn, 2010). Following the Republican resurgence in the 2010 midterm elections in which the GOP gained 87 seats and took control of the House, the now 242 member strong House Republican Caucus gave birth to a freshly minted 60 member Tea Party Caucus headed by Bachmann.

Some give the Tea Party credit for their election victory. Yet others believe that it is not so simple to assign success. As stated by Jacobson (2011), the Tea Party may not have solely won the 2010 congressional elections for the Republicans; yet, its major influence was that it helped to “energize people who opposed [President] Barack Obama.” Previous research has been focused mainly at the causes of the Tea Party movement, how it affected the 2010 elections and the Republican Party, as well as the general make-up of the movement.

In their paper that dealt with the relationship between the Tea Party and the 2010 Congressional election, Bond, Fleisher and Ilderton (2011) came to the conclusion that there was no systematic evidence that the Tea Party was responsible for the Republican success, and that there was “no evidence that a Tea Party endorsement significantly increased the probability of a Republican winning victory” (p. 11-2). Jacobson (2011) also looks at the role that the Tea Party played in the 2010 midterm elections stating that the Tea Party “brought an intense, angry energy to the Republican cause” “that contributed disproportionately to nationalizing the election and swinging it to the Republicans” (p. 1-2). He also looked at the motivations of those who supported the Tea Party and found that “Tea Party sympathizers were nearly unanimous in disapproving of Obama's job performance,” and that the “Opinions of the Tea Party are also

strongly related to beliefs about Obama's birth place, religion, and ideology as well as opinions of his performance as president” (Jacobson, 2011, p. 8). This research raises the contentious question that if the Tea Party did evolve from the big government conservatism of President Bush, than why is it that the Tea Party shows such distaste toward President Obama. Did Obama inspire the movement or did he merely add fuel to the fire? Moreover, if Obama did not motivate the movement, are elements of the group motivated by the president’s background?

Abramowitz (2011) analyzes the rise of the Tea Party Movement by stating that the movement emerged from the “natural outgrowth of the growing size and conservatism of the activist base of the Republican Party during the preceding decades,” only gaining widespread notoriety during the Obama presidency (p. 14-5). Putnam and Campbell (2011) echo Abramowitz’s assertion “Tea Party’s supporters today were highly partisan Republicans long before the Tea Party was born” and that “In fact, past Republican affiliation is the single strongest predictor of Tea Party support today.”

At this time, researchers are just beginning their research about what the elected Tea Party members have done since assuming office and what propelled them to office. Specifically, are their voting habits and ideological tendencies different from their colleagues and did the underlying characteristics of their districts – unemployment, income and political lean (Cook Partisan Voting Index) – have a greater effect on their election than previously thought. These questions have at best been addressed in bits and pieces, and thus, deserve more attention. In their recent paper Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2011) write that “activists mattered both electorally and for roll call voting on issues of importance to the movement. Constituent opinion had virtually no impact on either political outcome.” They continue to say that while the

movement has had an impact, it is more representative of elites and activists than “the will of the people” (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, 2011, p. 37). Bailey, et al. conclude that “[Tea Party] Members of Congress are not responding to changes in the preferences of constituents so much as they are responding to an organized interest, and one that put electoral and legislative politics at the top of its agenda” (p. 37).

The Tea Party without a doubt has become a powerful political force across America but are our assumptions about it true? Where do its members derive from? Are they an insurgent force? Do Tea Party members vote more conservative? By creating an original data set – one that includes 32 independent variables and almost 8,000 entries – I will be able to see the 242 member House Republican Caucus and further examine the sixty members of the Tea Party Caucus. I will investigate the characteristics of Tea Party Caucus members, see if there are significant differences between them and their House Republican colleagues, and determine if there are significant differences between freshman and incumbent members of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. By interpreting the statistics in the data set and looking at analysis from academics and researchers, this thesis contributes towards the ongoing scholarly study and interest in understanding the Tea Party and its members.

## VARIABLES AND METHODOLOGY

In order to determine if Tea Party members differ significantly from their Republican colleagues we must focus on the members of the Tea Party Caucus. I do this because these members are self-identified, and this demonstrates an overt and manifested sign that they have endorsed the Tea Party movement. By compiling a data set on the 242 members of the House Republican caucus and looking at the sixty members of the Tea Party Caucus, I will measure their ideology, internal party cohesion between the caucus members and their Republican colleagues, and their voting habits. In addition, I will look at the district characteristics of the Tea Partiers vs. the non-Tea Partiers. I must also investigate how these members view themselves, and how freshman members differ from their incumbent colleagues.

The purpose of this study is to document differences in characteristics between members of the Tea Party and their Republican colleagues in the House. Specifically, this study will attempt to provide sufficient evidence to be used in answering three distinct questions.

1. What are the characteristics of Tea Party Caucus members? Who are they? What issues are important to them? What is their ideological persuasion? What regions do they come from? What are the economic conditions in their districts?
2. Do Tea Party Caucus members vary significantly from their House Republican colleagues, in terms of ideological persuasion, voting patterns and district characteristics?
3. Are there significant differences between freshman members of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and their incumbent colleagues who served in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress?

In order to answer the above questions, an original data set was compiled as previously mentioned. Within the set are a number of high priority legislative votes from the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress (beginning in January 2011). These include, but are not limited to, votes to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and to pass “Cut, Cap and Balance.” To better understand the voting habits and tendencies of the members, I will also be looking at the rule votes for those pieces of legislation, due to research by Patty (2005) and Theriault (2008) that rule votes have a tendency to show more partisan tendencies than the final passage votes on the respective pieces of legislation. A rules vote is “a simple resolution, which must be passed by the House, that sets out the particulars of debate for a specific bill – how much time will be allowed for debate, whether amendments can be offered, and other matters” (“The Legislative Process”). Rules votes simply allow and provide the process for the consideration of legislation on the House floor. Final passage votes on the other hand are what most are familiar with, and are an up or down vote that determines whether a piece of legislation – such as healthcare reform – passes the House.

To understand the member’s districts, their histories and political lean, compare Tea Party Caucus members and non-members, a number of independent variables are used:

**Endorsements.** Was the Representative endorsed by the Tea Party Express, FreedomWorks, or Governor Sarah Palin? The endorsements were sourced from the official website of the Tea Party Express and the Washington Post for the backing of FreedomWorks and Palin. The variable is coded 1 if the Representative received an endorsement, a 0 if they did not and a 2 if they were not a candidate in the 2010 elections.

**Legislative Votes.** Did the Representative vote for the motion to consider and the final passage of the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act;” the April 2011 federal budget compromise; the “Cut, Cap and Balance” plan; the August 2011 debt ceiling compromise; the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act;” the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” (patent reform); the “PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011;” and the Paul Ryan budget (2011)? The votes were gathered from the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. All of the legislative votes examined in this thesis occurred during the First Session of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. The variable is coded 1 if the Representative voted in the affirmative, a 0 if negative, a 2 if they did not vote, a 3 if they were not a Member of Congress at the time of the vote, and a 4 if they voted present.

**District Lean.** What is the political lean of the Representative’s district according to the Cook Partisan Voting Index? The information was collected from the Cook Political Report, and was coded on a 1 to 5 scale; 1 – strong Republican, 2 – weak Republican, 3 – swing, 4 – weak Democratic, 5 – strong Democratic.

**Elections.** Did the Representative’s district vote for Senator John Kerry and then-Senator Barack Obama in 2004 and 2008, respectively? The variable is coded 1 if the Representative’s district voted for the Democratic candidate for president in either race and a 0 if otherwise. The information was collected from the Cook Political Report.

**Incumbency.** Was the member a Representative in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009–2011), the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (2007–2009) or the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005–2007)? A Member’s previous service was sourced from lists gathered from The Washington Post and the Office of Clerk of the U.S.

House of Representatives. The variable is coded 1 if the Representative served during one of the aforementioned congressional terms and a 0 if otherwise.

**Geography.** Is the Representative's district urban or rural? The information was collected from Proximity, a company that uses information solutions software and databases to analyze U.S. Census data. The variable is coded 1 – urban, 2 – rural, 3 – even mix.

**Region.** In what Census region is the Representative's district located? The variable is coded 1 – Northeast, 2 – Midwest, 3 – South, 4 – West.

**Economics.** What was the average per capita income in the Representative's District in 2010? The statistics were gathered from Proximity from an estimation based upon data from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey.

**Unemployment.** What was the unemployment rate in the Representative's district in 2010? The numbers were collected from Proximity from an estimation based upon U.S. Census data and estimations from the American Community Survey.

The lists of current members of the House of Representatives and members of the Tea Party Caucus were gathered from their respective congressional websites in September 2011.

As seen, the statistics and information used to comprise each of the variables was gathered from a collection of reputable sources such as the United States Census Bureau, major newspapers, official organization websites (endorsements) and congressional sites as seen. Using the above independent variables, as well as whether or not the member is a part of the Tea Party Caucus (dependent variable), helps to paint the most comprehensive picture possible of as many factors as is feasible, and provides the greatest breadth of information that will aid in definitively



answering the research questions. A full list of the variables used in the data set and their sources are provided in Appendix A.

## THE TEA PARTY CAUCUS

The statistical analysis for this project was conducted with IBM’s SPSS software. For this section, the variables as stated in the previous section have been grouped into five categories: endorsements, rules votes, final passage votes, incumbency and district characteristics. Grouping like variables together is the best way to analyze their effects, as well as to understand how the variables are intertwined.

### Endorsements

According to Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2011) over “201 GOP candidates were endorsed” during the 2010 election cycle by one the major Tea Party groups (p. 7). Three major endorsers were studied due to their activities during the 2010 election, the Tea Party Express, FreedomWorks and former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, who has become an icon of the Tea Party movement. The Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks are both conservative organizations that campaign and endorse national and local candidates. FreedomWorks can be traced back to billionaire mogul David Koch and is currently headed by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey (Rich, 2010). The Tea Party Express originated from a California based Republican consulting firm in 2009 and is led by Amy Kramer (Elliott, 2010).

**Table 1: Tea Party Express Endorsements**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Endorsed</b>	15 25.0%	69 37.9%	84 34.7%
<b>Not Endorsed</b>	45 75.0%	111 61.0%	156 64.5%
<b>Did not run in 2010 election</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Table 2: FreedomWorks Endorsements**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Endorsed</b>	13 21.7%	57 31.3%	70 28.9%
<b>Not Endorsed</b>	47 78.3%	123 67.6%	170 70.2%
<b>Did not run in 2010 election</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

There were 173 total endorsements made by the three organizations to Representatives who are currently serving in the House, 84 by the Tea Party Express, 70 by FreedomWorks and 19 from Sarah Palin. Only 34 of those endorsements were made to candidates who are now members of the Tea Party Caucus, only 19.7% of the total. Two current members of the House Republican Caucus were elected in special elections on September 13, 2011, Mark Amodei from Nevada's 2<sup>nd</sup> District (replacing Dean Heller who was appointed to the Senate) and Robert Turner from New York's 9<sup>th</sup> District who succeeded Anthony Weiner. The Tea Party Express had endorsed Heller.

As can be seen in Tables 1 through 3, the endorsements provided by the groups varied widely. Those endorsed included both incumbents and challengers, as well as rank and file three

**Table 3: Sarah Palin Endorsements**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Endorsed</b>	6 10.0%	13 7.1%	19 7.9%
<b>Not Endorsed</b>	54 90.0%	167 91.8%	221 91.3%
<b>Did not run in 2010 election</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Table 4: Freshmen v. Incumbents – Endorsements**

	<b>Tea Party Express</b>	<b>FreedomWorks</b>	<b>Gov. Sarah Palin</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Freshmen</b>	35 41.7%	69 98.6%	17 89.5%	121 69.9%
<b>Incumbents</b>	49 58.3%	1 1.4%	2 10.5%	52 30.1%
<b>Total</b>	84 100.0%	70 100.0%	19 100.0%	173 100.0%

establishment members. Table 4 shows that of the 173 total endorsements made by the organizations to current Members of Congress, 121 (70%) were given to freshmen, while 52 were given to incumbents. The Tea Party Express gave 49 endorsements to incumbents and only 35 to freshmen. FreedomWorks awarded all but one of its 70 endorsements to freshmen (Tom Graves from Georgia’s 9<sup>th</sup> District was the lone exception), and Governor Palin endorsed 17 freshmen and 2 incumbents. Tea Party Caucus freshmen received 22 total endorsements, 18% of total freshmen endorsements. The Tea Party Express endorsed 4 Tea Party Caucus freshmen, FreedomWorks endorsed 13 and Palin endorsed 5.

After analyzing the data it can be seen that Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks endorsements had little to no effect on members joining the Tea Party Caucus, raising the question of whether the candidate’s affiliation with the Tea Party was solely for electoral and political reasons. Endorsements made by Sarah Palin seem to have had a greater effect on Tea Party Caucus membership, as it is the only group where the percentage of Caucus members endorsed is greater than the number of non-Tea Party members who were, 10.0% to 7.1%, though she only had 19 successful endorsements. Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2011) note that not only do the three groups described in this section “correlate weakly with one another” but

that “group endorsements meant little for subsequent membership in the Tea Party Caucus” (p. 9).

### Rules Votes

Legislative voting is the next area that will be examined. The analysis of these votes has been broken into sections, one that deals exclusively with rules votes and one that discusses final passage votes. This has been done in order to assess the two areas separately, to show differences in voting tendencies, and to conclude whether there is evidence that rules votes are more partisan.

The analysis of rules votes was completed using the “Count Values within Cases” transform command in SPSS. This took the rules votes for seven pieces of legislation, and assigned a score of 1 for each if the Representative voted in the affirmative (members who did

**Table 5: Rules Votes**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0</b>	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	1 0.4%
<b>1</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>2</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>3</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>4</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>5</b>	0 0.0%	5 2.8%	5 2.1%
<b>6</b>	10 16.7%	20 11.1%	30 12.5%
<b>7</b>	50 83.3%	154 85.6%	204 85.0%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	180 100.0%	240 100.0%

not vote or voted present were included with those who voted in the negative). The maximum possible score was 7, which could be reached if the member voted in the affirmative for each vote. The seven pieces of legislation included were the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act;” the April 2011 federal budget compromise; the “Cut, Cap and Balance” plan; the August 2011 debt compromise; the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act;” the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act;” and the Paul Ryan budget (2011). The “PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011” was not included because it was “ordered without objection” by voice vote (“Library of Congress,” 2011). Of the 242 member House Republican Caucus, 240 were members at the time of voting. These two members – Mark Amodei and Robert Turner – were coded as missing variables and excluded from the analysis.

The data provided by the analysis detailed above can be seen in Table 5. Outside of the two members noted above and House Speaker John Boehner – who scored a zero – no other member voted in the affirmative for less than five rules votes. In fact, 85.0% voted for all seven votes, 12.5% for six and 2.1% for five. No significant difference was evident between members of the Tea Party Caucus and those who were not. 83.3% of caucus members voted in the affirmative for all seven votes, and 85.6% of non-Tea Party Caucus members voted for all seven. All sixty Tea Party members received a score of six or seven.

Examining how incumbency affected the rules votes is the next step. 86.2% of freshmen voted for all seven rules votes, compared to 83.2% of GOP incumbents. No freshmen voted for only five rules votes, 11.5% voted for six, while 3.2% of incumbents voted for five and 12.9% voted for six. Tea Party Caucus freshmen voted for the rules votes at a higher rate than their incumbent Tea Party Caucus colleagues. Sixteen of the seventeen Tea Party Caucus freshmen

voted for all seven rules votes. The remaining freshman member voted for six of the rules votes. 79.1% of incumbent Tea Party Caucus members voted for all seven rules votes, while the remaining 20.9% voted for six. A full listing of rules votes may be found in Appendix B.

### **Final Passage Votes**

The analysis of the final passage votes was completed using the “Count Values within Cases” transform command in SPSS. This took the final passage votes for eight pieces of legislation, and assigned a score of 1 for each if the Representative voted in the affirmative (members who did not vote or voted present were included with those who voted in the negative). The maximum possible score was 8, which could be reached if the member voted in the affirmative for each vote. The eight pieces of legislation included were the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act;” the April 2011 federal budget compromise; the “Cut, Cap and Balance” plan; the August 2011 debt compromise; the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act;” the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act;” the “PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011;” and the Paul Ryan budget (2011). Of the 242 member House Republican Caucus, 240 were members at the time of voting. The two members elected after these votes took place were coded as missing variables and excluded from this analysis.

Table 6 on the next page illustrates the data provided by the analysis detailed in this section. Outside of the two members noted above, no other member voted in the affirmative for less than two final passage votes. 43.3% voted for all eight votes, 26.7% for seven and 15.0% for six. Members of the Tea Party Caucus were less likely to vote for the bills than their colleagues, with only 31.7% voting for all eight compared to nearly half of non-Tea Party Caucus members. This compares to the 85.0% who voted for all seven rules votes, 12.5% for six and 2.1% for five

**Table 6: Final Passage Votes**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>1</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>2</b>	0 0.0%	1 0.6%	1 0.4%
<b>3</b>	2 3.3%	3 1.7%	5 2.1%
<b>4</b>	4 6.7%	5 2.8%	9 3.8%
<b>5</b>	10 16.7%	11 6.1%	21 8.8%
<b>6</b>	11 18.3%	25 13.9%	36 15.0%
<b>7</b>	14 23.3%	50 27.8%	64 26.7%
<b>8</b>	19 31.7%	85 47.2%	104 43.3%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	180 100.0%	240 100.0%

in the previous section. Where as in final passage votes there was a 15.5% difference between Tea Party Caucus members and their colleagues who scored an 8-out-of-8, there was only a 2.3% difference amongst the groups when measuring the rules votes for those who scored a 7-out-of-7 (Table 5).

Freshmen Members of Congress were more likely to vote for final passage votes than their incumbent Republican colleagues. 37.9% of freshmen voted for all eight final passage votes, 26.4% for seven and 20.7% for six. 45.8% of GOP incumbents voted for all eight, 26.5% for seven and 11.6% for six. Tea Party Caucus freshmen were also more likely to vote for final passage votes, with 35.3% voting for all eight, 11.8% for seven and 29.4% for six. 30.2% of



incumbent members of the Tea Party Caucus voted for all eight final passage votes, while 27.9% voted for seven and 14% voted for six.

As can be seen with the information provided and Table 5 in the previous section, there is a much higher propensity for members to vote with the party on rules votes than final passage votes. This illustrates the conclusions of Patty (2005) and Theriault (2008) that rule votes show more partisan tendencies than final passage votes. As noted previously, two of the members who were not a Member of Congress at the time the votes took place were excluded from the analysis. The only member who scored a zero in Table 5 was Speaker John Boehner who did not vote or voted in the negative on all seven rules votes. Boehner voted for only three of the final passage votes; the April 2011 federal budget compromise, the August 2011 debt compromise and the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act.” According to a 2011 report from the Congressional Research Service, Speakers of the House “traditionally [refrain] from debating or voting in most circumstances” (Heitshusen, 2011). The report continues to include House Rule I, Clause 7, which “currently reads ‘The Speaker is not required to vote in ordinary legislative proceedings, except when his vote would be decisive or when the House is engaged in voting by ballot’” (Heitshusen, 2011). Appendix C contains a full listing of the final passage votes.

### **Incumbency**

Is the Tea Party an insurgent force? Of the 87 GOP freshmen who won election to Congress in 2010, is there a higher propensity amongst those who would join the Tea Party Caucus? This question must be examined because many writers and researchers have characterized the Tea Party as an insurgent force. Rae (2011) states that the “insurgent, spontaneous, and relatively unstructured Tea Party movement and the established Republican

**Table 7: 111th Congress Incumbency**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Incumbent</b>	43 71.7%	112 61.5%	155 64.0%
<b>Non-Incumbent</b>	17 28.3%	70 38.5%	87 36.0%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

Party campaign apparatus had combined to maximum effect in capitalizing on the increasing popular discontent with the Democrats and the Obama administration” (p. 19).

After analyzing the data set, and comparing members of the Tea Party Caucus with incumbency from the past three congressional terms – which date back to the 2004 presidential election – it can be determined that members of the Tea Party Caucus have a higher likelihood of being an incumbent than their colleagues in the House. As seen in Tables 7 through 9, which analyze whether a member of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress served as a Representative in the preceding three congressional terms, Tea Party Caucus members enjoy a near 10-percentage point advantage over non-caucus members in both the 111<sup>th</sup> (2009–2011) and 110<sup>th</sup> (2007–2009) Congresses. Caucus members enjoy a smaller 3% lead in the 109<sup>th</sup> (2005–2007) Congress.

The Tea Party Caucus not only is above the average for their non-caucus Republican colleagues – labeled Non-TPC members in Tables 7 through 9 – but also the overall average. As

**Table 8: 110th Congress Incumbency**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Incumbent</b>	38 63.3%	98 53.8%	136 56.2%
<b>Non-Incumbent</b>	22 36.7%	84 46.2%	106 43.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Table 9: 109th Congress Incumbency**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Incumbent</b>	32 53.3%	92 50.5%	124 51.2%
<b>Non-Incumbent</b>	28 46.7%	90 49.5%	118 48.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

evidenced by the tables, they enjoy a seven-percentage point benefit during 111<sup>th</sup> and 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses and a smaller 2-percentage lead during the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Tables 8 and 9 show that the high incumbency rate evidenced in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (Table 7) is not a fluke. A majority of the Tea Party Caucus was on the ballot during the 2004 general election, in which President Bush won reelection and the GOP gained three seats in the House and four in the Senate.

While the social movement may be “insurgent, spontaneous, and relatively unstructured,” these words do not accurately describe the Tea Party Caucus (Rae, 2011, pg. 19). These findings provide an interesting conundrum, how is the Tea Party an insurgent force when more than half of its members were serving in Congress in 2005? This question is best answered by understanding that “The incumbent members who joined the Tea Party Caucus were responding to the Tea Party; they were not spawned by it” (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, 2011, p. 8). They continue to write that, “Republicans [fare] substantially better when they are incumbents” (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, 2011, p. 13). Jacobson (2011) wrote “The Tea Party movement conferred a label and something of a self-conscious identity on a pre-existing Republican faction that already held strongly conservative views on both economic and social issues” (p. 28). To explain the higher propensity for incumbency amongst Tea Party Caucus members, it must be understood that incumbent Members of Congress perform markedly better

in reelection campaigns and that 2010 incumbents were likely to want to capitalize on the popular momentum of the Tea Party movement (Friedman & Holden, 2009). This information coupled with the data concerning district characteristics provided in the next section explains this higher rate of incumbency.

### **District Characteristics**

While examining endorsements, incumbency and legislative voting records paint a wide picture of any Representative, analyzing the characteristics of the district that they represent helps to illustrate not only their constituency but also the forces that helped send them to Congress and that continue to shape their voting records. The analysis for this section was mainly completed utilizing SPSS' crosstabs function.

After analyzing the data, many interesting conclusions may be drawn. Tea Party Caucus members are largely incumbents that hail from reliably safe Republican districts in the south. Forty-two of the members were incumbents in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009-2011), and only four reside from districts considered toss-ups or Democratic leaning according to the Cook Partisan Voting Index, as illustrated in Table 10. Fifty-five percent of the Tea Party Caucus represents

**Table 10: District's Partisan Lean**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Strong Republican</b>	33 55.0%	64 35.2%	97 40.1%
<b>Weak Republican</b>	23 38.3%	78 42.9%	101 41.7%
<b>Swing</b>	4 6.7%	29 15.9%	33 13.6%
<b>Weak Democratic</b>	0 0.0%	11 6.0%	11 4.5%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

strong Republican districts, compared to 35% of non-caucus members. While 22% of non-caucus Republicans hail from swing or weak Democratic districts, only 6.7% of Tea Party Caucus members represent swing districts (none represent weak Democratic districts). Caucus members are 20-percentage points more likely to represent strong Republican districts, and 15-percentage points less likely to represent swing or Democratic leaning districts.

Freshmen Members of Congress were more likely to represent Democratic and swing districts. Only 25.3% of freshmen represented strong Republican districts while 42.5% represented weak Republican districts. 21.8% hail from swing districts and 10.3% represent weak Democratic districts. On the other hand, 48.4% of GOP incumbents represent strong Republican districts, 41.3% hail from weak Republican districts and 10.3% come from swing or weak Democratic districts. The 17 Tea Party Caucus freshmen represent six strong Republican districts, seven weak Republican districts and four swing districts. Incumbent members of the Tea Party Caucus represent 27 strong Republican districts and 16 weak Republican districts. Incumbent members of the Tea Party Caucus are more than a third more likely to represent a strong Republican district.

**Table 11: Census Regions**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Northeast</b>	0 0.0%	28 15.4%	28 11.6%
<b>Midwest</b>	12 20.0%	52 28.6%	64 26.4%
<b>South</b>	38 63.3%	67 36.8%	105 43.4%
<b>West</b>	10 16.7%	35 19.2%	45 18.6%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

Tea Party Caucus members originate largely from the South, with none from the Northeast. 63% of Caucus members hail from the South, while only 37% of their colleague’s do. 15% of non-Caucus Republicans represent districts in the Northeast and 29% from the Midwest.

As seen in Table 11 on the previous page, Tea Party Caucus members hail overwhelmingly from the South, representing the other regions of the country at lower rates than their colleagues. 16.1% of freshmen Members of Congress represent districts in the Northeast, 29.9% from the Midwest, 39.1% in the South and 14.9% from the West. Nine percent of GOP incumbent members hail from Northeastern districts, 24.5% from the Midwest, 45.8% from the South and 20.6% from the West. 70.6% of Tea Party Caucus freshmen represent Southern districts, while 23.5% represent districts in the Midwest and only 5.9% hail from the West. Incumbent members of the Tea Party Caucus are less likely to represent Southern districts with only 60.5% doing so, while 18.6% represent districts in the Midwest and 20.9% are from the West. Jacobson (2011) wrote that “The media image of the Tea Partiers is generally on target: people who are... from the South, and more religious tend to have more favorable opinions of the Tea Party movement” (p. 15).

Also by studying district geography, I can look at whether a member’s district is urban,

**Table 12: Congressional District Urban or Rural**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Urban</b>	50 83.3%	146 80.2%	196 81.0%
<b>Rural</b>	5 8.3%	23 12.6%	28 11.6%
<b>Even Mix</b>	5 8.3%	13 7.1%	18 7.4%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

rural or an even mix of both. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 12. While there are not wide deviations amongst the two groups, Tea Party Caucus members are slightly more likely to represent urban areas and constituencies that are an even mix of rural and urban. They are a third less likely to hail from rural areas. 74.7% of freshmen represent urban districts, while 17.2% represent rural districts and 8% represent districts that are an even mix. 84.5% of incumbent GOP Members of Congress hail from urban districts, 8.4% from rural districts and 7.1% from districts that are an even mix. 76.5% of the freshmen members of the Tea Party Caucus represent urban districts, 17.6% represent rural districts and 5.9% represent districts that are an even mix. 86% of incumbent members of the Tea Party Caucus hail from urban districts, 4.7% from rural districts and 9.3% from districts that are an even mix.

When looking at how the districts of the 242 House Republicans voted in the last two presidential elections, Tea Party Caucus members – following the evidence above of being from safe Republican districts – did vote for the Democratic candidate at a lower rate than the districts of their House colleagues. Congressman Allen West, from Florida’s 22<sup>nd</sup> District, is the only Tea Party Caucus member who represents a district carried by both John Kerry and Barack Obama in 2004 and 2008, respectively. In both elections, there was marked difference between the two groups, 6% in 2004 and a larger 26% in 2008. Still in 2008, only three districts represented by a

**Table 13: 2008 Election by Congressional District**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Voted for Obama</b>	3 5.0%	57 31.3%	60 24.8%
<b>Did not vote for Obama</b>	57 95.0%	125 68.7%	182 75.2%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Table 14: 2004 Election by Congressional District**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Voted for Kerry</b>	1 1.7%	14 7.7%	15 6.2%
<b>Did not vote for Kerry</b>	59 98.3%	168 92.3%	227 93.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

member of the Tea Party Caucus voted for Obama. When the percentages of the two elections are averaged, 96.7% of districts represented by Caucus members did not vote for the Democratic candidate, compared to 80.5% of non-caucus Republican districts.

As seen in Table 15, in 2008, 64.4% of freshmen districts did not vote for Obama, compared to 81.3% of their GOP incumbent colleagues. In 2004, 87.4% of freshmen districts were not carried by Kerry compared to 97.4% of their incumbent colleagues as observed in Table 16. Districts represented by members of the Tea Party Caucus had even starker contrasts. 82.4% of districts represented by freshmen Tea Party Caucus members did not vote for Obama in 2008, while all 43 districts represented by incumbent Tea Party Caucus members voted against the Democratic candidate. In 2004, 16 of the 17 (94.1%) districts represented by freshmen members of the Tea Party Caucus voted against the Democratic candidate, compared again to all 43 districts represented by their incumbent colleagues. The above analysis shows neither Kerry nor

**Table 15: Freshmen v. Incumbents – 2008 Election**

	<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>Incumbents</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>District voted for Obama</b>	31 35.6%	29 18.7%	60 24.8%
<b>District did not vote for Obama</b>	56 64.4%	126 81.3%	182 75.2%
<b>Total</b>	87 100.0%	155 100.0%	242 100.0%



**Table 16: Freshmen v. Incumbents – 2004 Election**

	<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>Incumbents</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>District voted for Kerry</b>	11 12.6%	4 2.6%	15 6.2%
<b>District did not vote for Kerry</b>	76 87.4%	151 97.4%	227 93.8%
<b>Total</b>	87 100.0%	155 100.0%	242 100.0%

Obama carried a district that was represented by a member of the Tea Party Caucus who was also a member of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (meaning they were an incumbent). These numbers provide further evidence of the safe Republican nature of the districts of Tea Party Caucus members.

Another element to be examined while looking at congressional districts are financial and economic factors. In 2010, these issues were front and center as the United States continued to suffer from the effects of ‘The Great Recession.’ Rae (2011) compares the Tea Party Movement with other “populist movements in US political history [...] that [...] have been particularly prevalent during times of severe economic distress – the early 1890s, the 1930s, and the early 1990s” (p. 8). She also notes that “the issues that drive [the Tea Party’s] mobilization have been primarily economic in nature and of relatively recent origin – TARP, the stimulus package, the health care bill, and, most importantly, the escalating federal budget deficit” (Rae, 2011, p. 16).

If the movement was in fact driven largely by economic factors, as most experts believe it was, than it is important to study the economic characteristics of the districts represented by Tea Party Caucus members. Table 17 shows the mean per capita income and mean unemployment

**Table 17: Economic Factors in Congressional Districts**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Mean Per Capita Income</b>	\$25,137.97	\$25,952.03	\$25,570.19
<b>Mean Unemployment Rate</b>	10.120%	10.216%	10.193%

rate of congressional districts from 2010 as estimated based upon data gathered from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey by Proximity. While differences exist between the groups in both income and unemployment, the disparity is small. However, Tea Party Caucus members fall below the average mean in both per capita income and unemployment, by \$432.22 and .073% respectively. Freshmen districts had an estimated mean unemployment rate of 10.405% – compared to 10.074% for incumbents – and lower estimated per capita income at \$24,328.38, compared to \$26,548.25 for incumbents. The T-Test for Equality of Means – Sig. (2-tailed) – with equal variances assumed shows a .780 for unemployment and a .323 for per capita income when comparing Tea Party Caucus membership.

Interestingly, Tea Party Caucus members represent districts that had lower estimated unemployment figures in 2010 than their Republican colleagues yet also had lower per capita income. In addition, freshmen districts had weaker economic variables in 2010 when compared to their incumbent colleagues. If the Tea Party movement was in fact largely centered on economic factors, as were the 2010 midterm elections, than it's interesting that the movements self-identified members – those Representatives who joined the Tea Party Caucus – hail from districts that at least in the case of unemployment, were in better shape than their House Republican colleagues at large.

### **Analysis**

With the analysis of the variables complete, we must now find out if there were significant statistical differences amongst the variables. To complete this step, chi-square tests were completed on all the variables in SPSS to determine if significant differences were present between Tea Party Caucus members and their House Republican colleagues. A chi-square test

“determines whether the observed dispersal of cases departs significantly from what [one] would expect to see find if the null hypothesis were correct” (Pollock, 2012, p. 164). In a nutshell, chi-square measures the significance of relationships between variables. The full results of these tests may be seen in Table 18.

**Table 18: Chi-Square Tests**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>
<b>Tea Party Express Endorsements</b>	4.201
<b>FreedomWorks Endorsements</b>	2.855
<b>Governor Sarah Palin Endorsements</b>	1.144
<b>“No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” – Final Passage</b>	.894
<b>“No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” – Rules</b>	.805
<b>April 2011 Federal Budget Compromise – Final Passage</b>	9.751*
<b>April 2011 Federal Budget Compromise – Rules</b>	1.683
<b>“Cut, Cap and Balance” – Final Passage</b>	.894
<b>“Cut, Cap and Balance” – Rules</b>	1.386
<b>August 2011 Debt Compromise – Final Passage</b>	13.022*
<b>August 2011 Debt Compromise – Rules</b>	1.001
<b>“Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act” – Final Passage</b>	.665
<b>“Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act” – Rules</b>	2.058
<b>“Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” – Final Passage</b>	8.223*
<b>“Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” – Rules</b>	2.205
<b>“PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011” – Final Passage</b>	1.348
<b>Representative Paul Ryan Budget (2011) – Final Passage</b>	2.682
<b>Representative Paul Ryan Budget (2011) – Rules</b>	1.683
<b>Final Passage Votes (1–8 Scale)</b>	12.648*
<b>Rules Votes (1–7 Scale)</b>	3.820
<b>111<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency</b>	1.396
<b>110<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency</b>	1.650
<b>109<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency</b>	.140
<b>Political Lean of the Member’s district</b>	11.119*
<b>Congressional District 2008 Presidential Vote</b>	16.763*
<b>Congressional District 2004 Presidential Vote</b>	2.818
<b>Census Region of Congressional District</b>	17.958*
<b>Congressional District Urban or Rural</b>	.862

\*: Difference between Tea Party Caucus members and non-Tea Party Caucus members is significant.

There were not significant differences for most of the data, except for the April 2011 federal budget compromise, August 2011 debt ceiling compromise, and the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act.” Strong district differences were seen in the analysis of regionalism, political lean of the members district and when analyzing how the districts voted in the 2008 presidential election. Endorsements made by the Tea Party Express also showed strong differences. Without a doubt, the votes over the federal budget and debt ceiling were more visible and highly contentious. However, the debate over patent reform that was “Leahy-Smith” garnered nowhere near the media or popular attention of the other two votes. The votes over the budget and debt provided an opportunity for Tea Party Caucus members to vote for what the movement is popularly thought to stand for, a smaller more limited government, and many did just that. Still other members used each vote as a carefully planned political maneuver, appealing not only to members of the Tea Party movement but to the activists that helped to elect them and their constituents.

The differences seen in regionalism, political lean and the 2008 election further illustrate the differences present between the districts of Tea Party Caucus members and their House Republican colleagues. Differences seen in endorsements made by the Tea Party may be explained by three factors. First, they had the largest number of endorsements made to sitting members of congress (84), second, they had the highest rate of non-Tea Party Caucus members endorsed (37.9%), and third, they had the highest number of Tea Party Caucus members endorsed at 25%. In addition, final passage votes showed a greater disparity than rules votes, perhaps because the media, activists and the public are more attuned to final passage votes.

The above analysis shows that while stark differences appear when examining the districts of Tea Party Caucus members, differences in voting habits and ideological persuasion were not as significant. In only three of fifteen (20%) cases did the Chi-Square tests show significant differences between Tea Party Caucus members and their House colleagues on legislative votes. When comparing how Tea Party Caucus members and their House Republican colleagues voted, the two groups were within three-percentage points on all seven of the rules votes. Five of the eight final passage votes had differences within four-percentage points when comparing how Tea Party Caucus members and their Republican colleagues voted. The three other final passage votes on the April 2011 federal budget compromise, August 2011 debt ceiling compromise, and “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” had differences between the two groups of 18.6, 22.5 and 16.9 percentage-points, respectively. Two of these three votes dealt with the bread and butter issues of the Tea Party movement – economic and budgetary matters. Also observed was a significant difference between rules votes and final passage votes, as seen in Table 18. There was a greater amount of partisan cohesion amongst rules votes, but significant variation in three of eight final passage votes. These votes, along with the differences exhibited in district characteristics, illustrate the differences present between members of the Tea Party Caucus and their Republican colleagues. In addition, the fact that two of the final passage votes that exhibited such significant differences happened to be the most controversial and covered pieces of legislation considered during the First Session of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, shows the power of the Tea Party Caucus and its impact on Washington politics.

During the debate over the raising of the nation’s debt ceiling in 2011, both Obama and Boehner had reached a rough framework for a grand bargain compromise, not once but twice.

Both deals included deficit reduction measures that either matched or exceeded the amount required for a dollar-to-dollar match with the raising of the debt ceiling, which was considered by many to be the starting point for any deal. Boehner and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor scrubbed both of these plans after it became evident that many Tea Party Caucus members, freshmen and a large contingent of other Republican members would not agree to a deal that included revenue increases (Newton-Small, 2011). Matt Bai (2012) says that at one White House meeting, “Cantor, when asked for his opinion, directly contradict[ed] the speaker in front of the president. He insisted that the caucus would not accept the kind of sweeping deal that both leaders wanted.”

The final deal that resulted in the raising of the debt ceiling, the Budget Control Act of 2011, included no revenue increases and required a future vote on a Balanced Budget Amendment, yet only garnered 55% support amongst Tea Party Caucus members on final passage, compared to 77.5% of their Republican colleagues. The April 2011 federal budget compromise showed a similar split, with 60% of Tea Party Caucus members voting for the bill on final passage, compared to 78.6% of their Republican colleagues. In comparison, with both pieces of legislation, 100% of the Tea Party Caucus voted in the affirmative for the rules votes, a greater percentage than their fellow House Republican’s in both cases. Without a doubt, the Tea Party Caucus has a major say in the House, nearly bringing about not only a government shutdown but also a nearly impossible to conceive government default. The April 2011 federal budget compromise and the August 2011 debt ceiling compromise are the best examples of the Tea Party fighting the Republican establishment, and provide the most significant voting differences observed in this analysis at around twenty-percent each.

Now I must determine what these differences signify and use the results of the analysis conducted to answer the three distinct research questions asked in the introduction. Furthermore, do these findings change our understanding of the Tea Party movement and its members, and if so, how?

## THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

After understanding the preceding analysis, several important questions remain. One must ask what does it mean to be a Tea Party member, what does it mean to join the House Tea Party Caucus, are their differences in behavior depending on when they were elected, and is the affiliation solely for political reasons?

Is the Tea Party really a grassroots movement? Moreover, if so, are its representatives in Congress a product of the movement or of elite manipulation. Also, do they truly represent the Tea Party philosophy and agenda? As noted in the analysis, Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2011) concluded that the Tea Party movement is more representative of elites and activists than “the will of the people” and that “[Tea Party] Members of Congress are not responding to changes in the preferences of constituents so much as they are responding to an organized interest” (p. 37). George Monbiot (2010) of *The Guardian* echoes Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, believing that the Tea Party movement is not a grassroots movement but one largely driven by elites. He wrote, “An Astroturf campaign is a fake grassroots movement; it purports to be a spontaneous uprising of concerned citizens, but in reality it is founded and funded by elite interests.” *Washington Post* writer Dana Milbank (2011) penned that even though the Tea Party started as a grassroots, populist movement, “it has been hijacked by the plutocrats.”

Author Ron Suskind (2011) agrees with both Monriot and Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, writing,

“The Tea Party’s platform is populist, both conservative and libertarian, endorsing lower taxes, a reduction of national debt, and a reduction in government spending, along with individual rights and an ‘originalist’ interpretation of the Constitution. But [...] a lot of



Tea Party activists, didn't offer much in the way of an actual program or coherent policies. Tea Partiers are often against things that are themselves opposites, and against pretty much anything that Obama does" (p. 335).

In their paper, Bailey, et. al. (2011) conducted research in which they discovered that Tea Party Members of Congress did not necessarily vote for the small government legislation that you would expect. They write that "The Tea Party is also associated with a more general opposition to government, and with a more libertarian orientation" yet "many Tea Party supporters are very hawkish on national security and quite comfortable with a large or even expanded national security apparatus" such as the Patriot Act. (p. 29). 83.3% of Tea Party Caucus members voted for the "PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011" compared to 80.2% of their Republican House colleagues. Though a modest difference exists between the two groups, with over 80% of the Tea Party Caucus voting for the extension PATRIOT Act, clearly, the "libertarian and anti-statist element[s]" are "not universally held within the movement" (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel , 2011, p. 29).

In addition, there should be differences present in voting behavior based on when they were elected. One would expect to see marked differences between freshmen members who were elected as products of the movement (even if they did not join the Tea Party Caucus), and incumbents who may have merely jumped aboard the train. Differences in district characteristics may have also played a role in the election of such a large freshmen class of lawmakers. Of the 87 freshmen GOP members in the House, Obama carried only 31 of their districts in 2008. Eleven of the districts voted for Kerry in 2004. In addition, 75% of the freshmen class came from urban districts, 69% from the South and Midwest and 68% hail from Republican leaning

districts. 10% represent weak Democratic districts according to the Cook Partisan Index while 16% represent Northeastern districts. Furthermore, the 87 freshmen districts as a whole had weaker economic variables. Freshmen members were also less likely to vote in the affirmative for final passage votes than their incumbent colleagues. Only in two of the eight final passage votes did freshmen vote for passage at a higher rate than incumbents – the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” and the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act.”

In the 2010 midterm elections, Republicans gained “63 seats in the House of Representatives, the largest gain of seats for a party since the 1938 [midterm] elections” (Bond, Fleisher and Ilderton, 2011, p. 1). The previous two elections, the 2006 midterm election and the 2008 presidential election, were both defined by a large gain of seats by the Democrats. At the beginning of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Democrats held 256 seats in the House and 57 in the Senate (accounting for vacancies and the two Independent senators that caucus with the Democrats). Bond, Fleisher and Ilderton (2011) write, “the Democrats were forced to defend a large number of seats they had gained in 2006 and 2008, many of them in districts with normal votes that leaned Republican. Thus, to some extent 2010 was a perfect storm with the Democrats caught in the middle of ferocious winds” (p. 1). In 2008, Democrats gained 21 House seats, a third of the number Republicans did in 2010. A logical question to be asked is, did the Republicans themselves overextend in 2010? More specifically, are members of the Tea Party Caucus that overextension?

Jacobson (2011) wrote that when looking at the role the Tea Party played in the 2010 midterm elections, the Tea Party “brought an intense, angry energy to the Republican cause” “that contributed disproportionately to nationalizing the election and swinging it to the Republicans” (p. 1-2). The main byproduct of the Tea Party movement in 2010 was its energy,

which contributed to the large Republican gains. Was this energy the Tea Party's main byproduct? In addition, can the movement create this energy again in 2012 and beyond?

To answer the previous questions, I must determine if this energy is likely to carry over to the 2012 presidential election. In 2012, the election of House members, in many cases, rides the coattails of whichever party's candidate wins the presidency. The data shows that most members of the Tea Party Caucus should remain in office for the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, because 56 of the 60 members hail from Republican-leaning districts. However, 2012 requires extra analysis due to redistricting taking place after the 2010 Census. Odds are that at least a few Tea Party Caucus members will be affected by redistricting, possibly moving into districts that are more Democratic leaning or placing them in direct competition with other Members of Congress. One example of this is Congressman Allen West, who has switched districts, from Florida's 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>, offering him a better chance at reelection. As a whole, members of the Tea Party Caucus should fare well because they originate largely from safe Republican districts that voted for neither Obama nor Kerry in the previous two presidential elections. In addition, due to these same district characteristics, it is safe to assume that many of these members could have been elected, and could be reelected, without the Tea Party banner. Democrats were overexposed in 2010 due to the two previous elections, and while Tea Party Caucus members seem safe in 2012, the Republican majority may not be due to GOP overexposure from 2010. The data shows that 21.8% of Republican freshmen hail from swing districts and 10.3% represent weak Democratic districts. Some of these members may be vulnerable in a large Democratic wave election, such as 2008, if Obama wins reelection.

It is also tough to decipher whether the Tea Party movement has dragged the Republican Party further to the right, or whether a party already becoming increasingly conservative spurred the Tea Party movement (was it a byproduct?). If the Tea Party movement is dragging the Republican Party further right, it has not fully succeeded yet. This is evidenced by the caucus's many public struggles with Boehner – including the previously described confrontation during the August 2011 debt ceiling debate.

Analyzing the differences between the freshmen Members of Congress and their incumbent colleagues is an important tool in understanding the Tea Party movement and its members. Studying Tea Party Caucus members takes on even greater importance because they have self-identified not only as members of the Tea Party movement but also as believers in its philosophy and agenda.

## CONCLUSION

After careful research and analysis, a discussion must ensue about what our findings are and what are their implications for our understanding of the Tea Party Movement and its members. Do members of the Tea Party Caucus espouse and represent conservative philosophies, like small government, personal choice and lower taxation? In the introduction, I asked whether their voting habits and ideological tendencies were different from their House colleagues and whether the underlying characteristics of their districts – location, economic factors and political lean – have a greater effect on their election than previously thought. Before, these questions were at best addressed in bits and pieces but now they have been the study of in-depth analysis and research.

The best way of studying and understanding the Tea Party's affect on Congress is to study the self-identified members of the Tea Party Caucus in the House. To do this, a large data set of legislative votes and district characteristics was compiled to provide a comprehensive look at the districts represented by the sixty members of the Tea Party Caucus. To provide context and for more in-depth analysis of the results, the variables have again been grouped into categories: incumbency and political distinctiveness, endorsements, legislative votes and district characteristics. As stated previously, grouping these variables together is the best way to analyze their effects, as well as to understand how the variables are intertwined and to determine myth vs. reality. With all the information and analysis presented in this paper, I can now answer the three distinct research questions that were first presented in the introduction.

Popular belief depicts the Tea Party as an insurgent movement that attained great electoral success by gaining House seats in Democratic and swing districts all around the country

due to the country's economic position. Reality is in fact contrary to this belief. Over half of the members of the Tea Party Caucus (32 of 60) were a Member's of Congress in 2005. Forty-three of sixty were members during the first two-years of Obama's first term (2009 – 2011). Tea Party Caucus members are overwhelmingly incumbents that hail from reliably safe southern Republican districts. For instance, Congressman Allen West, from Florida's 22<sup>nd</sup> District, is the only caucus member who represents a district carried by both John Kerry and Barack Obama in 2004 and 2008, respectively. Additionally, only four Tea Party Caucus members – including West – reside from districts considered toss-ups or Democratic leaning according to the Cook Partisan Voting Index, and none hail from districts in the northeast United States. Only three districts represented by Caucus members voted for then-Senator Obama in 2008 and only one voted for Senator Kerry in 2004. The notion that Tea Party members – at least its self-identified members – serve districts that represent a whole cross-section of society is false.

Understanding the pressures that helped elect Tea Party Caucus members is another important element of this paper. This encompasses not only the role that the political establishment played (endorsements) but also how district characteristics effected the 2010 elections and continue to shape the behavior of their representatives. Tea Party Caucus members are highly visible and self-identified members of the movement, making it important to understand the districts that they represent. After studying the 173 total endorsements made to Representatives who are currently serving in the House – 84 by the Tea Party Express, 70 by FreedomWorks and 19 from Governor Palin – only 34 of those endorsements were made to candidates who are now members of the Tea Party Caucus, less than one-fifth of the total. In addition, the data shows that endorsements had little to no affect on members joining the Tea

Party Caucus. This illustrates that the candidate's affiliation with the Tea Party was largely for political reasons and a channel through which to increase their chances of electoral victory. With such a small correlation existing between endorsements and Caucus membership, and such small variations present in the majority of legislative votes, the belief that endorsements had a statistically significant impact on the future political behavior of Tea Party Caucus members is not borne out by the analysis. In fact, as stated previously, it appears that many jumped aboard the Tea Party bandwagon for strictly electoral reasons, even though according to a report published immediately after the 2010-midterm elections, only "32% of all Tea Party candidates who ran for Congress won" (Moe, 2010).

To examine the legislative votes, I took the rules votes for seven pieces of legislation and the eight final passage votes, assigning a score of one for each if the Representative voted in the affirmative (members who did not vote or voted present were included with those who voted in the negative). The maximum possible score was seven for rules votes and eight for final passage votes, which could be reached if the member voted in the affirmative for each vote. No significant difference was evident on rules votes between members of the Tea Party Caucus and those who are not. However, members of the Tea Party Caucus were less likely to vote for bills on final passage than their colleagues, with only 31.7% voting for all eight compared to the 83.3% who voted for all seven rules votes. The analysis confirmed the conclusions of Patty (2005) and Theriault (2008) that rule votes show more partisan tendencies than final passage votes, as there was a higher propensity for members to vote with their party on rules votes than final passage votes. Tea Party Caucus members vary significantly from their House Republican colleagues in terms of district characteristics (economics, political lean, economics, geography,

etc.), yet do not differ at statistically significant levels in twelve of the fifteen instances in which voting patterns were analyzed. This echoes the assertion by Bailey, Mummolo and Noel that “On the high-profile votes and unlobbied votes [...] GOP candidates endorsed by Tea Party groups were remarkably conventional Republicans” (p. 35-6).

In addition to the previously discussed district characteristics, economic factors play a pivotal role in politics. Even though, Tea Party Caucus members fell below the average mean in both per capita income and unemployment, and Tea Party Caucus members represent districts that had lower estimated unemployment figures in 2010 than their Republican colleagues, the disparity between Tea Party Caucus members and their Republican colleagues in both income and unemployment is small and statistically insignificant. The notion that Tea Party Caucus members were elected from districts that suffered from worse economic conditions than their House Republican colleagues, is shattered by the fact that Caucus members serve districts that at least in the case of unemployment, were in better shape than their House Republican colleagues at large.

The typical Tea Party Caucus member is one that represents a safe Southern Republican district that voted for neither Democratic candidate for president in 2004 or 2008. They also hail from districts that have weaker economic variables, specifically estimated unemployment in 2010. These districts vary heavily from that of their House Republican colleagues, especially when examining regionalism, political lean of the member’s district and when analyzing how the districts voted in the 2008 presidential election. The distinctions were not as stark when examining legislative votes, though there was a statistically significant difference found between rules and final passage votes as seen in Table 18 on page 27. In addition, I set out to determine if



there were significant differences between freshman members of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and their incumbent colleagues. Freshmen members were more likely to be endorsed by one of the three Tea Party organizations discussed, to vote for rules votes than their incumbent colleagues, and to represent a district that was carried by John Kerry or Barack Obama. Interestingly, freshman members also hail from more geographically and political diverse districts, had lower economic indicators in their districts (unemployment, per capita income), and they were less likely to vote for final passage votes than their incumbent colleagues in the House.

The self-identified members of the House Tea Party Caucus – those demonstrating an overt and manifested sign that they have endorsed the Tea Party movement and its philosophy – do vary significantly from their fellow Republican colleagues when examining their districts, but do not vary as considerably when examining their voting patterns. In only three of the fifteen legislative votes examined were significant differences present, all three of which were final passage votes. Considerable variations were present in the majority of the district characteristics analyzed. With all the information and analysis presented in this paper, it becomes clear that the Tea Party phenomenon is not what popular perception and the media would have you believe. It is clear that many of the notions and beliefs surrounding the group's self-identified members in the House of Representatives should be taken with a grain of salt, or dare I say, a cup of tea.

## **APPENDIX A: DATA SET**

**Member of Congress**

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/>

**House Tea Party Caucus**

<http://bachmann.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=226594>

**Tea Party Express Endorsements**

<http://www.teapartyexpress.org/endorse-2010/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/tea-party-endorsement-results/>

**FreedomWorks Endorsements**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/tea-party-endorsement-results/>

**Governor Sarah Palin Endorsements**

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/palin\\_tracker/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/palin_tracker/)

**“No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll292.xml>

**“No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll286.xml>

**April 2011 Federal Budget Compromise – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll268.xml>

**April 2011 Federal Budget Compromise – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll266.xml>

**“Cut, Cap and Balance” – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll606.xml>

**“Cut, Cap and Balance” – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll604.xml>

**August 2011 Debt Compromise – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll690.xml>

**August 2011 Debt Compromise – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll687.xml>

**“Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act” – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll014.xml>

**“Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act” – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll010.xml>

**“Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll491.xml>

**“Leahy-Smith America Invents Act” – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll465.xml>

**“PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011” – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll376.xml>

**“PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011” – Rules**

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d112:h.res.281:>

**Representative Paul Ryan Budget (2011) – Final Passage**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll277.xml>

**Representative Paul Ryan Budget (2011) – Rules**

<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2011/roll266.xml>

**111<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency**

<http://www.cookpolitical.com/sites/default/files/pvistate.pdf>

**110<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency**

<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/110/house/members/>

**109<sup>th</sup> Congress Incumbency**

<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/109/house/members/>

**Political Lean of the Member's district**

<http://www.cookpolitical.com/sites/default/files/pvistate.pdf>

**Congressional District 2004 Presidential Vote**

<http://www.cookpolitical.com/sites/default/files/pvistate.pdf>

**Congressional District 2008 Presidential Vote**

<http://www.cookpolitical.com/sites/default/files/pvistate.pdf>

**Census Region of Congressional District**

[http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)

**Congressional District Urban or Rural**

<http://proximityone.com/urban-rural.htm>

**Congressional District Unemployment Rate in 2010**

[http://proximityone.com/cd\\_employment0910.htm](http://proximityone.com/cd_employment0910.htm)

**Congressional District Average Per Capita Income in 2010**

[http://proximityone.com/cd\\_income0910.htm](http://proximityone.com/cd_income0910.htm)

## **APPENDIX B: RULES VOTES**

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	58 96.7%	172 94.5%	230 95.0%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	2 3.3%	8 4.4%	10 4.1%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the April 2011 federal budget compromise?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	60 100.0%	177 97.3%	237 97.9%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	3 1.6%	3 1.2%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the “Cut, Cap and Balance” plan?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	59 98.3%	175 96.2%	234 96.7%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	1 1.7%	5 2.7%	6 2.5%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the August 2011 debt ceiling compromise?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	60 100.0%	179 98.4%	239 98.8%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	1 0.4%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	56 93.3%	174 95.6%	230 95.0%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Present</b>	1 1.7%	1 0.5%	2 0.8%
<b>Did not vote</b>	3 5.0%	5 2.7%	8 3.3%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	57 95.0%	169 92.9%	226 93.4%
<b>Nay</b>	1 1.7%	8 4.4%	9 3.7%
<b>Did not vote</b>	2 3.3%	3 1.6%	5 2.1%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the rules to consider Representative Paul Ryan’s budget plan (2011)?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	60 100.0%	177 97.3%	237 97.9%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	3 1.6%	3 1.2%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%



## **APPENDIX C: FINAL PASSAGE VOTES**

**Did the Representative vote for the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	59 98.3%	175 96.2%	234 96.7%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	1 1.7%	5 2.7%	6 2.5%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the April 2011 federal budget compromise?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	36 60.0%	143 78.6%	179 74.0%
<b>Nay</b>	23 38.3%	35 19.2%	58 24.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	1 1.7%	2 1.1%	3 1.2%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the “Cut, Cap and Balance” plan?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	58 96.7%	171 94.0%	229 94.6%
<b>Nay</b>	2 3.3%	7 3.8%	9 3.7%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the August 2011 debt ceiling compromise?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	33 55.0%	141 77.5%	174 71.9%
<b>Nay</b>	27 45.0%	39 21.4%	66 27.3%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the “Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	60 100.0%	180 98.9%	0 99.2%
<b>Nay</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the “Leahy-Smith America Invents Act”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	34 56.7%	134 73.6%	168 69.4%
<b>Nay</b>	25 41.7%	42 23.1%	67 27.7%
<b>Did not vote</b>	1 1.7%	4 2.2%	5 2.1%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for the “PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011”?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	50 83.3%	146 80.2%	196 81.0%
<b>Nay</b>	8 13.3%	23 12.6%	31 12.8%
<b>Did not vote</b>	2 3.3%	11 6.0%	13 5.4%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

**Did the Representative vote for Representative Paul Ryan’s budget plan (2011)?**

	<b>TPC Member</b>	<b>Non-TPC Member</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yea</b>	58 96.7%	176 96.7%	234 96.7%
<b>Nay</b>	2 3.3%	2 1.1%	4 1.7%
<b>Did not vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Not a member at time of vote</b>	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	60 100.0%	182 100.0%	242 100.0%

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