

Motivation

The analysis detailed herein was not written for the explicit purpose of contemplating the influence of radicalism, the far right, or partisan realignments. However, I think it suits the purpose of the conference and the panel by highlighting the unique context of the United States political system. Hetherington and Keefe (2007) outline the benefits of the Tea Party housing itself within the Republican Party proper, highlighting the adversities which exist for a minor party attempting to break in to the two-party system. The United States' first-past-the-post, single member district system makes it difficult for minor parties to thrive as finishing second or third offers no advantages. Moreover, the endogenous nature of election law (written by Democrats and Republicans), makes it extremely difficult for a third-party candidate to even secure itself a spot on the ballot.

The fact of the matter is that the Tea Party is not, in fact a party. Hershey (2013) makes clear that political parties differ from other political groups in that they are important in the structure of elections, are engaged in political activity full-time, mobilize large numbers of supporters, are enduring and stand as political symbols. While the Tea Party movement did manage to mobilize a significant number of individual citizens and certainly served as a political symbol, by trying to become a third party, it would have struggled against the institutionalized organizational capacity of the Republican Party, risked splitting the conservative voting base, and lost the easy ballot access provided by running as Republicans.

My motivation for analyzing the effect of the Tea Party label was and is driven by the curiosity that is the popular commentary surrounding the "power" of the Tea Party in electoral politics contrasted with the absolute dearth of research on either social movements or the associated labels that candidates touted in the 2010 electoral contest and beyond. Given there is no extant literature that would provide us with an understanding of Tea Party success, I wondered if there might be some underlying characteristic of these Tea Party challengers that would explain their relative success. As such I take advantage of the long-standing literature on quality candidates to craft a theory that would explain the outcome observed.

This paper is but a first foray into the unexplored realm of social movement participation in electoral politics. I very much look forward to the feedback of the esteemed scholars participating in this conference and welcome the opportunity to improve my understanding of radical challengers and far right politics.

Power of the Party?

The Influence of the Tea Party Label in the 2010 House Elections

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The results of the 2010 midterm elections transformed the legislative landscape for the House of Representatives; 63 seats shifted hands from the Democrat to Republican party. In a time where the public was displeased with the state of the nation, the grassroots Tea Party movement caught fire. The Tea Party supported a conservative social agenda and economic policies focused on cutting programs. As a result of highly visible protests, extant political organizations seized on the ebullience of the Tea Party movement, soliciting donations from the grassroots and organizing to aid candidates reflective of their political preferences. As the movement gained national attention, many political hopefuls began to associate themselves with the Tea Party. Despite the splash made by the Tea Party, I argue that Tea Party affiliation provided challengers no greater probability of defeating the incumbent in general or Republican primary elections, and instead seek to demonstrate that prior political experience is the trait critical to electoral success. In examining the general election, I find support for my expectations. In the primary, however, I find mixed results for my expectations. I find that the quality challenger and Tea Party effects are only statistically significant in reducing incumbent vote share, not in affecting the overall probability of reelection.

Introduction

In 2006, the Democratic Party capitalized on the failings of the Republican Party, — an unpopular continued presence in Iraq, an ineffectual response to Hurricane Katrina, and multiple ethics and personal scandals — reclaiming majorities in Congress after an extended period of Republican control (Hershey 2013). Strategically running moderate candidates in swing districts, the 2008 elections gave Democrats not only the presidency but stronger control of both chambers of Congress (Dodd and Oppenheimer 2013, Karpowitz et al 2011). The early months of the 111th Congress were consumed with responding to the financial instability that America was facing after the failure of several large banks and the crash of the housing and stock markets in late 2008. Democrats worked to secure the votes needed to pass President Obama's \$787 billion stimulus bill and the campaigned-upon middle class tax cuts (Dodd and Oppenheimer 2013). Despite the Democrats' better efforts, the economy remained mostly stagnant through 2010.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a landmark piece of legislation granting universal healthcare to citizens, was signed into law by President Obama in March 2010. However, public opinion toward the bill was ambivalent at best in a nation plagued by economic anxieties and fear of unemployment; evidence suggests that Democrats representing swing districts received lower vote shares in the midterm as a result of casting their vote for the ACA

(Aldrich et al 2013). This marked the beginning of the end of any bipartisan efforts in the 111th Congress (Dodd and Oppenheimer 2013). Republicans consistently attempted to block Democratic legislative efforts for the rest of 2010. Bills regarding finance-industry regulation, environmental protections, immigration, and taxes were all met with resistance from the Republican block. Despite being one of the most active lame duck Congresses in history, public approval of both President Obama and the Democrats plummeted (Gallup 2010, Aldrich et al 2013); this created favorable conditions for the Republican party heading into the 2010 midterms (Kernell 1977, Healy & Malhotra 2013). Republicans, aided by conservative lobbying groups, used the economy and the policy achievements of the 111th to foment discontent among the public and build anti-Democrat sentiment for the 2010 midterm elections (Dodd and Oppenheimer 2013, Aldrich et al 2013, Jacobson 2011).

The Tea Party was thus born of the sharp economic downturn that occurred in late 2008. Despite the average Tea Party supporter being less affected by these events than the average American (Skocpol and Williamson 2012), Tea Party ideologues came out in droves in early 2009 to protest Obama's and the Democratic 111th Congress's response to the crisis. Another major spark that lit the Tea Party torches was the on-air outburst of CNBC commentator Rick Santelli, who called for rebellious action reminiscent of the Boston Tea Party of Revolutionary days gone by.

The Democratic Party, by virtue of their strong hold on both chambers going into the 2010 midterm elections, had more seats to defend than conservatives, particularly in swing districts where more moderate Democrats had run previously (Dodd and Oppenheimer 2013). This coupled with low approval ratings made challenging a Democratic incumbent for office more enticing to quality candidates (Hetherington and Keefe 2007). Moreover, midterm voter turnout is low, typically below forty percent (Hetherington and Keefe 2007); those that do turnout are more likely to be white, older, and wealthier than voters that turn out in presidential election years (Hershey 2013). These demographics tend to favor the Republican Party as well as the Tea Party movement (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, Jacobson 2011).

Background

Incumbency Advantages

Since the 1960's, incumbents in the House have experienced average reelection rates of 93%, fluctuating as high as 98% and as "low" as 87% (Hershey 2013, Hetherington and Keefe 2007). This fact unsurprisingly discourages quality candidates from challenging incumbents who appear to be rather safe in their districts. Adding to the notion of "safe districts" is the fact that ideological self-sorting on the part of the electorate (caused by the increasing mobility of voters) truly has created a large number of safe-Republican and safe-Democratic districts (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009), leaving fewer contested districts in which quality candidates might

challenge an incumbent. Expectations are that quality challengers should emerge against Democrats in the general election and target weak Republican incumbents or open seats in the primary election.

Incumbents hold a variety of distinct advantages, but these can be ameliorated by the challenge of a quality candidate. Incumbents garner extra votes in the voting booth by a phenomenon as simple as name recognition. Greater amounts of media coverage serve to further the name recognition advantage and moreover increase opportunities to remind voters about the services and “pork” or funding that they have already brought back to the district (Hershey 2013, Hetherington and Keefe 2007, Pew 2010). Ease of fundraising, already having a staff, previous experience with running a campaign, and access to voters through franking privileges (the ability to send communications to constituents with government rather than personal funds) are among the other benefits incumbents enjoy (Hershey 2013, Hetherington and Keefe 2007).

Quality Candidate Characteristics

According to Canon (1990), less experienced candidates emerge in periods of electoral opportunity. This offers a plausible explanation the high number of non-quality Tea Party candidates who emerged in the 2010 midterm elections but performed poorly. Prior political experience distinguishes individuals as competent candidates in high stakes elections. It also provides resources in campaigning that non-quality candidates do not possess (Mackenzie 2015). The resources of quality candidates are similar to those of incumbents – some degree of name recognition, media attention, experience with running a campaign, access to donors and other fundraising resources, previous office accomplishments, etc. (Jacobson 1989).

H_{1a}: Facing a quality challenger will have a significant negative effect on the probability of incumbent reelection in the general election.

H_{1b}: Facing a quality challenger will have a significant negative effect on the probability of incumbents reelection in the primary election stage.

Bianco (1984) writes on quality candidates as well. He states that the probability of a quality candidate running increases as support for the candidate’s party in his/her district increases. When the incumbent is being challenged by a quality candidate from the opposite party, the probability that the quality candidate runs is inversely proportional to the level of electoral support for the incumbent. Quality candidates are thus more like to emerge and challenge incumbents during periods when conditions are in their favor. This can be when the incumbent did poorly (achieved less than sixty percent of the vote) in the previous general election or in swing districts where the president received lower vote shares or when he (who represents the opposing party of the quality candidate) is experiencing low approval ratings (Hetherington and Keefe 2007). Thus, we can expect quality candidates to emerge in open seat

general elections and in open primaries (either those where the Republican incumbent retired or the seat is held by a marginal Democrat).

H_{2a}: Being a quality challenger in general election open seat races will provide a significant positive effect on probability of winning the seat.

H_{2b}: Being a quality challenger in primary election open seat races will provide a significant positive effect on the probability of winning the seat.

Primaries

Per Boatright (2014), ideological challengers have become more common since the 2000's, especially in the Republican Party. However, "there is no evidence that primary challenges are successful either in replacing incumbents or in bringing about change in incumbents' behavior." Similarly, the Brookings Institute Primaries Project finds that, overwhelmingly, incumbents continue to win their primary challenges; however, they do add that Republicans are winning by slightly smaller margins than a decade ago. If incumbents are continuing to win consistently, it follows that Tea Party challengers are not winning at higher than expected rates.

H_{3a}: Facing a Tea Party challenger will not have a statistically significant effect on the probability of incumbent reelection in the general election.

H_{3b}: Facing a Tea Party challenger will not have a statistically significant effect on the probability of incumbent reelection in the primary election stage.

Moreover, due to the nature of first-past-the-post single member districts in the US, Tea Party affiliated candidates strategically couched themselves within the most ideologically similar establishment party (Riker 1982), the Republican Party. To the extent that establishment party leadership embraced these social movement candidates, some challengers may have been able to obtain resources through the party. However, a challengers' Tea Party affiliation was not listed on the primary ballot, thus obscuring the signal by which the Tea Party candidates' sought to distinguish themselves from the establishment, particularly for low-information voters.

H_{4a}: Being a Tea Party affiliated candidate in open seat races will not have a statistically significant effect on the probability of winning a seat in the general election.

H_{4b}: Being a Tea Party affiliated candidate in open seat races will not have a statistically significant effect on the probability of winning in the primary election stage.

Data Collection

I define prior political experience as having previously held elected office at any level of government. As such, individuals who have served as political aides or in appointed positions are

not coded as having prior political experience. Incumbents listed in the dataset are those who held office at the start of the 111th Congress. Individuals who won special elections to replace Representatives that were appointed to offices in the Obama administration are not included in the dataset. Tea Party affiliation, another binary variable, is based on a broad internet search of candidate websites, newspaper articles, and conservative blogs.

General election candidate data was gathered from the *Almanac of American Politics 2012* (Barone and McCutcheon 2011) via a web script using the program R Studio. Additionally, half of the dataset was coded by hand to verify the accuracy of the scraped data. Data was collected on the following categories: candidate name, party, Tea Party affiliation, prior political experience, percentage of vote won in general election, and whether the candidate is running for an open seat or against an incumbent. Using *Politics in America 2012* (Bicknell, Meyers, and Layman-Wood 2011), I collected data on a proxy variable for district ideology, vote percentage received by Obama in 2008. Using the 2010 edition of *Politics*, I collected information on each districts' current incumbent, incumbent's party, and incumbent's vote percentage in 2008, and using the roll call database recorded how incumbents voted on several divisive pieces of legislation including the stimulus and healthcare bills.

For analysis of the Republican primary elections*, challenger data for candidates finishing in the top three was collected on the following categories: candidate name, percentage of vote and vote count won in primary election, Tea Party affiliation, prior political experience, and whether the candidate is running for an open seat or against an incumbent. Candidate name, vote measures, and seat status were collected from *CQ Almanac*; the remaining measures were collected from a broad web search of candidate websites, newspaper articles, and conservative blogs. Using *Politics in America 2012* (Bicknell, Meyers, and Layman-Wood 2011), I collected data on a proxy variable for district ideology, vote percentage received by Obama in 2008. Using the 2010 edition of *Politics*, I collected information on each districts' current incumbent, incumbent's party, and incumbent's vote percentage in 2008. Finally, I collected the primary type used in each district: open, semi-closed, closed, top-two.

Limitations

There were a handful of abnormalities and limitations in compiling an original dataset. There is a lack of data available on the representative for Oregon's 1st district, so it is not included in my analysis as there would be no incumbent data to quantify and compare to the

*I include districts where a Democratic incumbent currently holds the seat as open seat Republican primaries given there is no incumbent for Republican primary candidates to challenge.

challenger data. The Florida 21st is also excluded as the lead Republican competitor for the open seat is a sitting incumbent from the Florida 25th; characterizing this individual as a quality challenger seemed inappropriate. Finally, I exclude the Alabama 5th from the incumbent analyses as the incumbent, Parker Griffith, switches his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat. Complete information on losing candidates was not wholly available in the scheme of my available resources; where it was not possible to determine prior political experience for a candidate, analysis designated that candidate as not having prior political experience (0). Given no independent candidate won a general election contest and given the lack of available personal information on independent candidates in the 2010 House elections, independent candidates running in the general election are not included in the dataset either.

General Election - Incumbent Present

Quality Challengers	Tea Party Challengers		Total
	0	1	
0	247	87	334
1	62	36	98
	309	123	432

General Election Open Seats

Quality Challengers	Tea Party Challengers		Total
	0	1	
0	35	12	47
1	35	13	48
	70	25	95

Republican Primary - Incumbent Present

Quality Challengers	Tea Party Challengers		Total
	0	1	
0	105	47	152
1	1	2	3
	106	49	155

Republican Primary Open Seats

Quality Challengers	Tea Party Challengers		Total
	0	1	
0	241	212	453
1	83	46	129
	324	258	582

Analysis

To examine the effect of Tea Party and quality challengers in the 2010 general election, I use a Heckman selection model. Selection is based on whether the incumbent chooses to run for reelection, and I consider that self-selection decision to be a function of the incumbent's age, his previous performance, and whether the incumbent is affiliated with the Democratic party. The effect of age is statistically significant and in the expected direction (Table 1). The coefficients for previous performance and being a Democrat are statistically significant, but both are in the opposite direction of the expected relationship.

The second stage of the Heckman model regresses the binary outcome variable, whether the incumbent wins, against the incumbent's previous performance, the district vote share received by Obama, Democratic status, whether the incumbent faces a quality challenger and/or a Tea Party challenger, and how the incumbent voted on the Affordable Care Act. All

independent variables yield statistically significant results. In support of **H1a**, facing a quality challenger has a significant, negative effect on incumbents' chance of reelection. Though the coefficient is small, facing a Tea Party challenger actually *helps* incumbents' chances of reelection. This statistical significance of the finding contradicts the stated expectations of **H3a**, but the overall effect supports my contention that facing Tea Party affiliated candidates are no more successful than non-affiliated candidates. Additionally, the greater the vote share the incumbent received in 2008, the greater the likelihood of reelection in 2010. Status as a Democrat also decreases the likelihood of reelection as expected given the low approval ratings for Obama.

Table 1: General Election Incumbent Reelection Races

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Heckman selection model          Number of obs   =       432
(regression model with sample selection)   Selected       =       383
                                           Nonselected   =        49

                                           Wald chi2(6)   =       78.85
Log likelihood = -177.4818        Prob > chi2    =       0.0000

```

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
incumbentWins						
previousVote08	.0002467	.0001046	2.36	0.018	.0000416	.0004517
obamaVote08	.0060665	.0014541	4.17	0.000	.0032166	.0089164
democratIncumbent	-.3532046	.0416324	-8.48	0.000	-.4348026	-.2716066
qualityChallenger	-.0578529	.0138667	-4.17	0.000	-.0850312	-.0306746
TeaPartyChallenger	.0056936	.0013647	4.17	0.000	.0030188	.0083683
nobamacare	-.0009878	.0002371	-4.17	0.000	-.0014524	-.0005231
_cons	.7579986	.0685616	11.06	0.000	.6236203	.8923769
runs						
age	-.0019896	.0004323	-4.60	0.000	-.002837	-.0011422
previousVote08	-.0008717	.000308	-2.83	0.005	-.0014753	-.0002681
democratIncumbent	.8802923	.1078381	8.16	0.000	.6689335	1.091651
_cons	.4182656	.1304202	3.21	0.001	.1626466	.6738845
/athrho	-17.35122	106.2269	-0.16	0.870	-225.5521	190.8496
/lnsigma	-1.075975	.043799	-24.57	0.000	-1.161819	-.9901305
rho	-1	3.77e-13			-1	1
sigma	.3409652	.0149339			.3129163	.3715282
lambda	-.3409652	.0149339			-.3702352	-.3116952

LR test of indep. eqns. (rho = 0): chi2(1) = 84.25 Prob > chi2 = 0.0000

In estimating the marginal effects, all else equal, status as a Democrat decreases an incumbent's probability of reelection by 0.21. Facing a quality challenger also decreases an incumbent's probability of reelection, by 0.06; however, facing a Tea Party challenger increases

the incumbent's probability of reelection by 0.006. Previous vote share (from 2008) and voting against the Affordable Care Act has a minute effect, increasing the probability of reelection by 0.0001 and decreasing it by 0.0010, respectively.

Table 2: Marginal Effects of Incumbent Reelection

Marginal effects after heckman

$$y = E(\text{incumbentWins} | Zg > 0) \quad (\text{predict}, \text{ycond})$$

$$= .7539732$$

variable	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% C.I.]	X
previ~08	.0001136	.00006	1.97	0.049	7.3e-07	.000227		96.9275
obama~08	.0060665	.00145	4.17	0.000	.003217	.008916		53.7639
democr~t*	-.2128389	.03158	-6.74	0.000	-.274739	-.150939		.587963
qualit~r*	-.0578529	.01387	-4.17	0.000	-.085031	-.030675		.226852
TeaPar~r*	.0056936	.00136	4.17	0.000	.003019	.008368		.284722
nobama~e	-.0009878	.00024	-4.17	0.000	-.001452	-.000523		.073107
age	-.0003036	.00006	-5.38	0.000	-.000414	-.000193		57.8248

(*) dy/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1

In examining open seat races in the general election, the only statistically significant factors in the probability that a challenger wins is that the challenger is a quality challenger and that a challenger is facing a quality challenger, providing evidence in favor of **H2a**. In support of **H4a**, neither being a Tea Party challenger nor facing one has any statistically significant effect of the probability of challenger victory. Holding all other values at their median, the predicted probability of a non-Tea Party quality challenger winning the open seat in the general election against a non-Tea Party, non-quality challenger is 54.1% whereas non-quality challengers have a 28.7% probability of winning the same seat under identical conditions. For a Tea Party quality challenger facing a non-Tea Party quality challenger, their predicted probability of winning is 71.1% while a Tea Party non-quality challenger has only a 45.8% probability of winning the general election open seat.

Looking to incumbents' re-nomination in the primary stage, utilizing a Heckman selection model was inappropriate as the outcome variable was nearly collinear. All but one non-retiring incumbent won their re-nomination; this conflicts with the expectations of **H1b** but provides initial support for **H3b**. (It should be noted that only 3 quality challengers selected into Republican primaries where incumbents were present.) Moreover, logit analysis was perfectly predicted by previous vote share. To allow more variation in the dependent variable, I run a standard OLS regression of incumbent vote share against the previous election vote share, the Obama district vote share, primary type, and whether the incumbent faced a quality and/or Tea Party challenger. Previous performance, Obama vote share, and primary type all fail to achieve statistically significant results. For incumbents facing Tea Party challengers, their vote share is decreased by 8.6%, whereas incumbents facing quality challengers see their vote share decrease by 48.4%. Considering these vote share measures, we see mixed support for both **H1b** and **H3b**.

Table 4: Republican Primary Incumbent Re-Nomination Races

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	154
Model	10967.7654	7	1566.82363	F(7, 146)	=	8.46
Residual	27035.0208	146	185.171376	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.2886
				Adj R-squared	=	0.2545
Total	38002.7862	153	248.384224	Root MSE	=	13.608

voteShare	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
previousVote08	.0018395	.0087054	0.21	0.833	-.0153655	.0190445
obamaVote08	-.0413013	.1453703	-0.28	0.777	-.3286032	.2460005
primary_type						
2	-6.223122	3.167017	-1.96	0.051	-12.48224	.035998
3	-1.433023	2.645497	-0.54	0.589	-6.66144	3.795393
4	-7.713379	4.876608	-1.58	0.116	-17.35124	1.924484
qualityOpponent	-47.55149	8.017878	-5.93	0.000	-63.39759	-31.70539
TeaPartyOpponent	-8.107305	2.437621	-3.33	0.001	-12.92489	-3.289723
_cons	95.19518	6.534665	14.57	0.000	82.28042	108.1099

Finally, in the Republican primary open seats, I use a logit to regress whether the challenger wins against being a quality challenger, being a Tea Party challenger, facing a quality and/or Tea Party challenger, Obama's previous performance in the district, and primary type. I

find statistically significant effects for all variables. Being a quality and or Tea Party challenger both increase the likelihood of election as does running in closed primaries. Here I find support for **H2b**, but a contrast with the expectations of **H4b**. The Obama vote share variable is significant but is again in the opposite direction of expectations. Generated predicted probabilities suggest that a non-Tea Party quality challenger facing a non-quality opponent in a closed primary in a district with moderate Obama support experiences 47% probability of victory. A non-quality challenger under the same conditions can only expect a 26.3% probability of electoral success. A Tea Party quality challenger facing a non-quality opponent in a closed primary in a district with moderate Obama support experiences 65% probability of election whereas a Tea Party non-quality challenger has only a 43% probability of victory.

Table 5: Republican Primary Open Seat Races

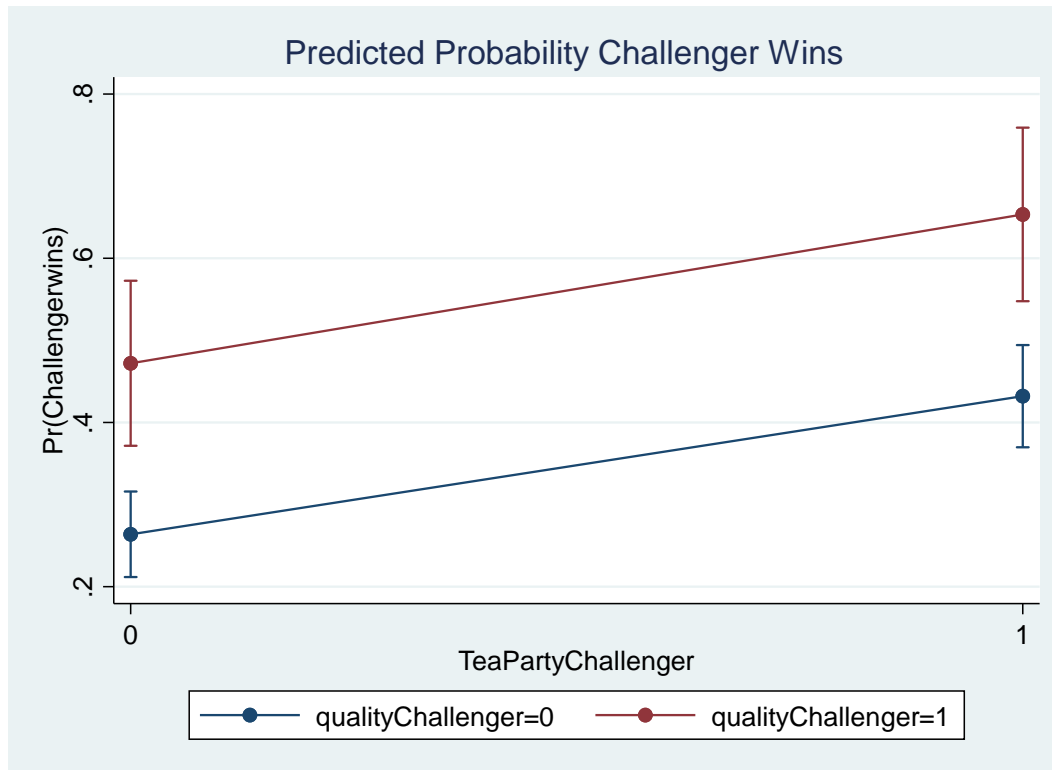
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Logistic regression          Number of obs   =      510
                             LR chi2(7)           =      67.87
                             Prob > chi2          =      0.0000
Log likelihood = -303.84119   Pseudo R2       =      0.1005
  
```

challengerwins	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
1.qualityChalle~r	1.03682	.2733267	3.79	0.000	.50111	1.572531
1.TeaPartyChall~r	.8606495	.2075876	4.15	0.000	.4537852	1.267514
obamaVote08	.0555493	.0091861	6.05	0.000	.0375449	.0735537
primary_type						
2	-.1004543	.2660701	-0.38	0.706	-.6219422	.4210336
3	.5382811	.225952	2.38	0.017	.0954233	.9811389
4	.0015853	.6411716	0.00	0.998	-1.255088	1.258259
qualityOpponent	-.9582018	.3596266	-2.66	0.008	-1.663057	-.2533465
TeaPartyOpponent	0	(omitted)				
_cons	-4.647195	.633354	-7.34	0.000	-5.888546	-3.405844

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Challenger Winning

Varying Quality, holding all other values to median



Discussion

Though the efforts of the Tea Party movement, both at the grassroots and at the larger, corporate level, were noisy and effective in garnering media attention, evidence suggests that most Tea Party candidates were not able to turn the midterm elections in their favor any more than the mainstream Republican challengers. In view of the literature and findings above, most Tea Party victors won as a result of their political acumen, specifically their prior political experience, rather than the supposed momentum of the Tea Party label. However, in Republican open seat primaries, being affiliated with the Tea Party movement does offer a statistically significant advantage. These results find additional support in the articles written by Jacobson (2011), Karpowitz et al (2011), and Bond et al (2012). This paper contributes further evidence to support the incumbency advantage and quality candidate theories.

“No matter how resource poor they are, however, challengers can raise issues.” Such behavior resonates well with the type of “amateur” party activism practiced by the grassroots Tea Party constituency. Amateur activists, being issue-oriented, rather than loyal to the party could appreciate the anti-Washington, uncompromising rhetoric preached by Tea Party candidates.

(Hershey 2013). As such, this analysis meaningfully contributes to the literature on political movements, showing that even at the height of Tea Party fervor, campaigning as a Tea Party candidate offered no meaningful advantage. Further research should be directed toward examining the impact of the Tea Party and other electorally engaged social movements on candidate emergence, voter mobilization, and the long-term behavioral consequences of incumbents' facing ideologically extreme challengers.

Conclusion

The 2010 midterm elections resulted in a massive shift of power and control in the House of Representatives. The grassroots "Tea Party" movement mobilized in a way that brought opportunities for new candidates of both quality and non-quality backgrounds to emerge including new sources of funding, marketing, and manpower. The Tea Party constituency's support of an extremely conservative social agenda and reductionist economic policies resulted in the unseating of many incumbent Democrats, but almost none of the so-called Republicans In Name Only that the Tea Party movement railed against.

Candidates claiming the Tea Party label found little advantage in swaying outcomes, though some evidence in favor of a Tea Party advantage is found in open seat races. However, as expected, facing a quality challenger significantly diminishes the reelection probability of incumbents. I believe that I have demonstrated that, to the extent the Tea Party was successful, the Tea Party's success was overwhelmingly a function of prior political experience. Tea Party challengers who won, by and large chose races where they could target Democratic challengers who already faced an uphill battle with the negative sentiment directed at their party. Quality candidates had better organizational staff and overall were more skillful in running a campaign than their non-quality comrades. In compiling and analyzing an original dataset, I have found strong support for the effectiveness of quality candidates and minimal evidence of any Tea Party advantage.

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