

Murphy vs. Domino in Florida's 18th Congressional District: A Case Study in Localizing Congressional Elections to Survive a Political Wave

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The 2014 Midterm Elections saw Republicans sweep the House of Representatives and retake the United States Senate. This paper examines how select Democrats survived this wave election by analyzing the case of Florida's 18th Congressional District, Patrick Murphy (D-Incumbent) vs Carl Domino (R). The analysis uses descriptive statistics of the district as well as precinct and county election results from 2012 and 2014 in order to show change in the political success of the Democrat Murphy. It then uses advertisement data and campaign finances, as well as personal interviews to find a reason for the change. The author concludes that a focus on the localization of district issues created a variety of effects that both aided Murphy and harmed the challenger Domino in 2014. This chain reaction, including the interaction between local and national politics and parties, would come to define the success of Democrats in the 2014 Midterms.

On election night in 2014, Republicans rebounded from their losses in 2012 to retake the Senate and gain 12 seats in the House of Representatives, giving the GOP control of both houses for the first time since the middle of George W. Bush's second term and their largest House majority since 1946¹. Those gross numbers alone show 2014 to be a "wave" election. While not as physically staggering as Newt Gingrich's 1994 Revolution or the 2010 Tea Party wave, the 2014 midterms place the GOP at a legislative advantage during a critical stage of Barack Obama's presidency. Looking at the national congressional map, one may notice the majority of Democratic representatives have seen themselves become marginalized, both figuratively – effectively losing their power to legislate – and literally – being pushed to the traditionally liberal districts on the coasts and into urban pockets throughout the country² like dots of sapphire amongst a sea of rubies.

Yet, on the southeastern tip of the country, in a district known for its tendency to swing each year, a freshman Democratic congressman who just barely won in 2012 gave his victory speech that night at a hotel in the city of Palm Beach Gardens.³ His 20% margin of victory over the Republican challenger

backed up his rhetoric⁴. The man's name is Patrick Murphy, and his story highlights what a representative needs to do to stay alive in an unfriendly year and in a less-than-friendly district. From his election in 2012, he handily entrenched himself to win by a larger margin in an unfavorable year than when he did in a favorable year, and his campaign style, legislation, and general political savvy all highlight a central theme for his election in 2014. In a year when Republicans campaigned to end a national Democratic stranglehold on the legislature, the words of Tip O'Neill rang true on Florida's Treasure Coast: For Floridians in District 18, the politics truly are local.

THE 2012 CAMPAIGN: A POLITICAL TITAN FALLS

This story begins three years ago on the night of November 6, 2012, election night, when pundits and pollsters began to call Congressional races across the country. President Barack Obama's victory over the Republican challenger Mitt Romney heralded a winning night for the left, as Democrats gained eight seats in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate⁵. In Port Saint Lucie, Florida, Lt. Col. Allen West (Ret.), a one-term incumbent Republican representative, had yet to determine his political fate.

West was a darling of the national conservative movement who cruised in to power on the 2010 Tea Party takeover of the House of Representatives,

1 Bremmer, Paul. "Schlafly: GOP Win 'Almost as Big' as Victory in 1946." *World Net Daily*. November 5th, 2014.

2 "2014 House Election Results." *Politico via Associated Press*. December 6th, 2014. While the claim made in the main text is not factually inaccurate, the map shows Democrat holds interspersed throughout the country, with their strongholds only remaining in the northeast, the southern tip of Texas, Minnesota, and on the west coast.

3 Mascareñas, Xavier. "Patrick Murphy Election Night Party." *TC Palm*. November 4th, 2014.

4 2014 General Election, November 4, 2014, Official Election Results. *Florida Election Watch*. Florida Department of State, Division of Elections.

5 Leamon, Eileen J. and Jason Bucelato for the Federal Election Commission. "Federal Elections 2012: Election Results for the U.S. president, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives." July, 2013

unseating the Democrat Ron Klein to take over the historically Republican 22nd Congressional District.⁶ His story is an interesting one. A veteran of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, he won a Bronze Star among other commendations and was highly decorated in the field, finishing his career as a Lieutenant Colonel.⁷ The circumstances of his departure, in which he fired his sidearm near the head of a captured Iraqi police officer in order to gain intelligence on a possible ambush situation, got him national attention and helped to polarize him before he ever entered politics. West survived official army investigations and retired with only a fine on his record.⁸ His statement at his hearing would become the basis for his national grassroots movement, give him early congressional support, get his name thrown into presidential discussions, and come to highlight his incredible fundraising skills: “If it’s about the lives of my soldiers at stake, I’d go through hell with a gasoline can.”⁹

In 2014, West needed only to go one hour up I-95, and the only gasoline he would need would presumably come from rest stations along the way. For his reelection campaign the former soldier raised almost \$20 million from donors nationwide and was first expected to cruise to victory. His total funds outmatched his opponent’s four to one.¹⁰ The Democratic challenger, a 29-year-old accountant from South Florida with no political experience named Patrick Murphy, ran with financial backing from his wealthy family.¹¹ Seeing West as vulnerable, the DNC pumped money into Murphy’s race.¹² The battleground, Florida’s 18th District, a three county vista of tropical beaches and marshes, found itself an open seat after Florida’s population growth saw redistricting across the state after the 2010 census. This redistricting saw West have to move to new territory to maintain any hope of keeping his office, and it gave Murphy an opening into congress. And, as Election Day loomed, West found himself fighting an ever-tighter campaign.

The race was bitter, with West running a highly

6 “Allen West.” *Notable Names Database*. <http://www.nndb.com/people/581/000262792/>

7 *Ibid*.

8 *Ibid*.

9 “U.S. officer fined for harsh interrogation tactics.” *CNN*. December 13, 2003. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/12/12/sprj.nirq.west.ruling/>

10 “2012 House and Senate Campaign Finance for Florida.” Federal Election Commission, Disclosure Portal. <http://www.fec.gov/disclosurehs/HSCandList.do>

11 Mattise, Jonathan. “Gift triples U.S. Rep. Patrick murphy’s personal wealth.” *TC Palm*. Decemver 30, 2014. <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/gift-triples-us-rep-patrick-murphys-personal>

12 Miller, Joshua. “Florida: DCCC to Launch First Ad against Allen West.” *Roll Call*. September 28, 2012. <http://atr.rollcall.com/florida-dccc-to-launch-first-ad-against-allen-west/>

negative campaign, basing his strategy on national issues and on taking down Barack Obama and the 78 to 81 Democrats who he claimed “are members of the Communist Party.”¹³ One advertisement, entitled “Decide,” contrasted the histories of the two candidates:

Narrator: February 16th, 2003, Fort Hood, Texas. Lt. Col Allen West had just received deployment orders and prepares his men to go to war. That night, South Beach, Miami, Patrick Murphy is thrown out of a club for fighting, covered in alcohol and unable to stand. Murphy then confronts and verbally assaults a police officer. Patrick Murphy was arrested and taken to jail. Two men, a country in crisis, you decide.

The imagery of an intoxicated Murphy’s police booking mug shot would become central to the campaign. Murphy, for his part, fired back hard, turning West’s own rhetoric against him and running as a moderate alternative to his polarizing adversary. In one televised debate, the challenger all but accused West of doing nothing for his district during his time in office¹⁴, a motif that would come to herald his campaign in 2014.

Congressman West would never see a victory in 2012, as one of the hardest fought and caustic races of the campaign cycle came to a head with one of the closest results in the country. At the end of the night, a 2000 vote lead for West quickly shifted to a 2400 vote deficit as Palm Beach County electors recounted some early ballots. This number would remain relatively stable days after the election. Nevertheless, the Associated Press refused to call the race for the young challenger. While Florida election law requires a full recount for any victory of 0.5 percentage points or fewer, the conditions of Murphy’s 0.8 percentage point lead were cause for concern, as the West campaign began to level claims of Democratic agents rigging the election, arguing that electors in Palm Beach county had engaged in “nefarious actions” and “numerous other disturbing irregularities.”¹⁵ Indeed, the *Palm Beach*

13 Sherman, Amy. “Allen West says about 80 House Democrats are members of the Communist Party.” *Tampa Bay Times – Miami Herald Politifact Florida*. April 11, 2012. <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2012/apr/11/allen-west/allen-west-says-about-80-house-democrats-are-membe/>

14 Bendery, Jennifer. “Allen West, Patrick Murphy Debate: No Apologies for a Nasty Campaign.” *Huffington Post*. October 20, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/20/allen-west-patrick-murphy-debate_n_1990481.html

15 Robillard, Kevin. “Rep. Allen West Demands Recount.” *Politico*. November 7, 2012. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83476.html>

Post's George Bennett observed that St. Lucie county seemed to have trouble “just running a basic election,” with boxes of ballots still uncounted weeks after the election, and that Palm Beach “has had its controversies in the past.”¹⁶ These claims eventually pressured a partial recount in the district, consisting of all Saint Lucie County early votes. The move, which West’s campaign manager Tim Edson referred to as a “sham,”¹⁷ saw Murphy’s lead level off with only about a 2000 vote margin of victory, only 0.65 percent but well above the margin for a full recount.

On November 20, Allen West conceded to Patrick Murphy, who accepted the victory with an “appreciat[ion of]” of the retired lieutenant colonel’s “gracious concession.”¹⁸ West, for his part, proceeded to go on a radio show hosted by Mark Levin, a nationally syndicated host and former Reagan administration official, to undercut the loss, claiming:

“I’m a warrior and I’m a statesman and I’m a servant of this republic. I’m not going away because of a congressional race where he seems to have to cheat to beat me.”¹⁹

Clearly, the deposed Tea Party darling did not share Murphy’s sentiment. Nevertheless, Patrick Murphy, after months of campaigning, fundraising, and debating, after recounts and national spotlight, after allegations spanning from voter fraud to outright fixing, and after a final lead consisting of just over one percent of his home town of Fort Lauderdale’s population, emerged from the flames as one of those eight Democratic House seats, defeating a political titan on the scale of Prometheus. The heat of the campaign inferno and of the South Florida sun both behind him, Murphy packed some sweaters and trekked up to Washington as a member of the 113th United States Congress.

16 References to George Bennett throughout this paper all refer to a personal interview conducted with him in October of 2014. Bennett, the chief political correspondent for the *Palm Beach Post* and author of the *Post on Politics* blog, is intimately familiar with the politics of the region and discussed many aspects of the 2014 election in detail.

17 Shawn, Eric. “Results still pending in Florida partial recount for Rep. West’s House race.” *Fox News*. November 11, 2012. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/11/11/florida-officials-order-partial-recount-in-tight-congressional-race-between-rep/>

18 Parkinson, John. “Tea Party Stalwart Allen West Concedes, Patrick Murphy Wins.” *ABC News, The Note*. November 20, 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/11/tea-party-stalwart-allen-west-concedes-patrick-murphy-wins/>

19 Keyes, Scott. “Sore Loser Allen West: My Opponent Only Won Because He Cheated.” *Think Progress*. December 10, 2012. <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2012/12/10/1308921/allen-west-cheating/>

FLORIDA'S 18TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

The 18th District comprises three counties in the South-Central area of Florida known as the “Treasure Coast,” named for the sunken Spanish fleet and associated treasure that supposedly lies just a few miles into the Atlantic. The district’s demographics fail to represent this admittedly exciting Spanish influence. 81.3% of the voting age population is white,²⁰ and in total they comprise 485,355 registered voters.²¹ It is an area of change, transitioning into “Central Florida” at its northernmost border and just reaching into the South Florida metropolitan area at its southernmost border. Its three constituent counties – St. Lucie in the north, Martin in the middle, and the northeast corner of Palm Beach in the south – are as different as they are similar. St. Lucie is home to the cities of Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie, a city sprung up from a planned community for retirees from New England and New York. Martin County, the most rural and least populated of the three, extends into the center of the state and hosts cattle ranches and orange farms in its western half. Palm Beach, the only one of the three counties officially part of South Florida, has much in common with neighboring Broward County, and hosts part of a sprawling metropolis, the Miami - Fort Lauderdale - West Palm Beach metropolitan area, on its east coast. The northern part of this megalopolis bleeds into District 18 in the cities of Jupiter, North Palm Beach, and Palm Beach Gardens.

FL-18: THE TOSS-UP DISTRICT

District 18 has not always been a toss-up. Before its redistricting in 2012, it comprised portions of the Miami suburbs and the Florida Keys. Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen held it with commanding authority, posting double-digit leads almost every election cycle from 1988 to 2012. Indeed, in 2008, even when the district voted for Barack Obama in a slight Margin, Ros-Lehtinen easily defeated her opponent.²² The District as it exists today has only witnessed one presidential election, no senate elections, a single governor’s race, and one – now two –

20 “Florida’s 18th Congressional District.” *Ballotpedia*. http://ballotpedia.org/Florida%27s_18th_Congressional_District#External_links Although the district does boast a 14.1% Hispanic population, this number is average or low compared with districts throughout the southeast corner of Florida, and in this authors estimation is still not large enough to live up to the historical name.

21 Florida Department of State, Division of General Elections. “2014 General Election Active Registered Voters By Congressional District.” October 6, 2014. http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2014/GEN2014_CountyPartyCongDist.pdf

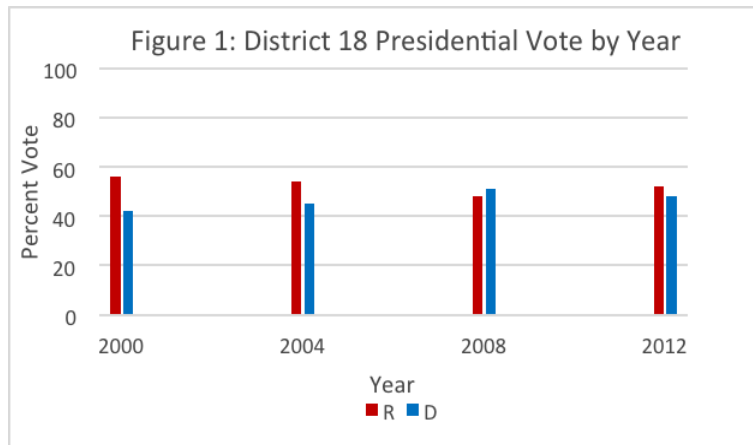
22 Congressional Biographical Directory of the United States 1774-Present, via Wikipedia. These numbers were difficult to verify, but seem correct based on analysis of various news articles from each election year listed.

Table 1: Partisan Vote Breakdown for District 18 by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Other</i>
Palm Beach (D-18)	68,139 (34.4%)	71,722 (36.3%)	57,992 (29.3%)
Martin	27,186 (25.8%)	52,060 (49.4%)	26,042 (24.7%)
St. Lucie	76,368 (41.9%)	56,211 (30.8%)	49,675 (27.3%)
Total	179,993 (37.1%)	171,613 (35.4%)	133,709 (27.5%)

Source: Florida Department of State, Division of Elections

congressional cycles. It thus becomes difficult to analyze voting trends over time. Nevertheless, even comparing the figures we do have for the new District 18 with those from the old District 18 creates a telling contrast. Figure 1, below, highlights the change the district witnessed over the last four presidential elections, with only the final cluster of bars referencing the new District 18. Removing the first election of Barack Obama as an anomaly, we see a dramatic shift in the closeness of the presidential election after the redistricting compared with beforehand.²³

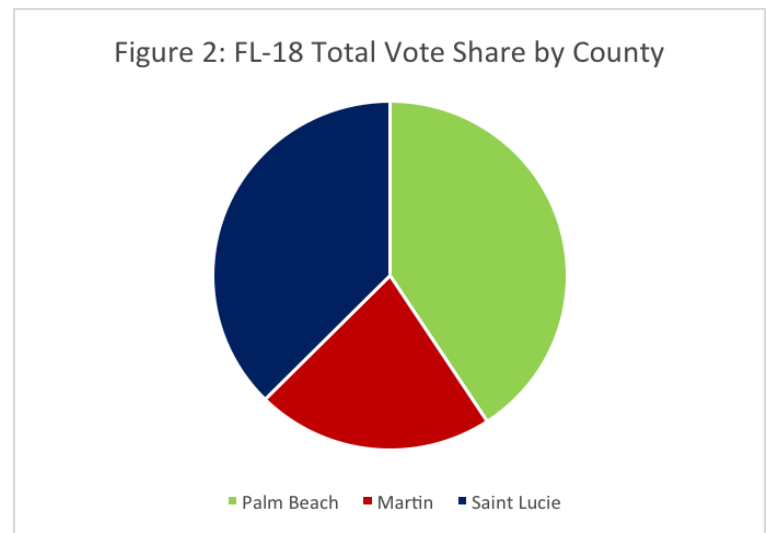


As discussed before, District 18 as it exists today can be aptly described in terms of its three constituent counties, which each have distinct personalities and unique qualities which, when combined, make the district a true toss-up. Table 1 gives the reader an idea of what the nature of each county’s vote breakdown is. One can see that Martin County, the rural and least populous middle county, leans heavily Republican, with almost 50% of the district registering with the GOP. The remaining half of the county is divided roughly evenly between Democrats and other voters, with Democrats registering just over 25% of the vote totals and other voters/Independents just

²³ All of these references were acquired from *Ballotpedia*.

under 25%.²⁴ The portion of Palm Beach County within the boundaries of the 18th District is split almost completely evenly between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. While the county as a whole often votes democrat, the northeast corner which contributes to FL-18 seems more moderate in its approach to elections – highlighted by Allen West’s slim victory over Murphy in Palm Beach in 2012. St. Lucie County, the most northern of the three, holds a slight D-lean. One would expect a republican candidate to pick up Martin County, Palm Beach to be a toss-up, and the Democrat to win St. Lucie. These descriptive statistics echo the results of the 2012 election between West and Murphy.

Figure 2 is a pie chart showing in rough terms the total vote share each county holds. This graphic highlights what one can see in the “Total” row of Table 1: That Martin County’s heavy Republican lean becomes diluted once one takes the population and total registered voters of each county into account.



²⁴ Florida Department of State, Division of General Elections. “2014 General Election Active Registered Voters By Congressional District.” October 6, 2014. http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2014/GEN2014_CountyPartyCongDist.pdf

So, the numbers show a district that together has only a less than two-point GOP lean, a district that voted for Romney by a slim margin in its only presidential election, and a district that elected the Democrat Patrick Murphy over the Republican Allen West in 2012 by the slimmest of margins, as discussed above. While the Florida state legislature might come under fire for gerrymandering districts²⁵, the legitimacy of District 18 seems unquestionable from what little election data we have available. Surely, this does not seem to be the land of blowout elections seen throughout much of the Sunshine State.

FL-18: THE ENVIRONMENTAL DISTRICT

Like the majority of Florida's southeast, District 18 finds itself sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean on its right and the Everglades on its left. This geographic location and the use of water as a natural resource affects commerce, agricultural production, and daily life in the region. Together, Martin and Palm Beach Counties lay claim to 325 square miles of water, or about 23% of their total area²⁶, with rivers and estuaries crisscrossing the entire region. Highlights include Lake Okeechobee, a massive 730 square mile eye in the center of southern Florida divided between five counties, one of them being Martin. Cycles of droughts and rains in recent years, and leading up to the 2014 election, have turned the lake into an environmental concern, as the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2013 "release[d] billions of gallons of polluted water into delicate estuaries in the east and west."²⁷ The water not only forced gallons of toxic agricultural runoff into neighboring waterways but also displaced salt water in those waterways which allowed wildlife to thrive. Florida Governor Rick Scott in August of 2014 pledged a billion dollars to make sure water went "south through the Everglades, rather than east and west,"²⁸ and indeed, all of District 18 is also contained within the South Florida Water Management District. A major outflow of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie River, begins in its namesake county and runs

straight through the middle of Martin County, terminating at the Indian River Lagoon off the coast. The lagoon, itself a major environmental threat, would become a campaign focal point for Patrick Murphy in 2014, as during his first term the region wrestled with "an algal 'superbloom' ... in spring 2011" and "a reduction of about 60 percent of the lagoon's total seagrass coverage." The bloom would eventually lead to loss of wildlife including "manatees and pelicans...and bottlenose dolphins," all in the midst of Murphy's first term.²⁹

Florida not only values its water, with 81% of full-time residents believing that storm water runoff treatment is a "very important" issue and 84% believing the same of preserving wetlands³⁰, but District 18 also depends on the environment financially. The Martin County Chamber of Commerce lists the marine industry and tourism as important contributors to the economy of the region, as well as massive amounts of agriculture including "40,000 acres of citrus" as well as "sugar cane, ornamentals, and cattle production," and "10 million dozen eggs per year."³¹ St. Lucie county's Chamber is much the same, listing "7000 acres of environmentally protected lands," "20 miles of unspoiled endless beaches," and an international destination for "offshore angling."³² Urban Palm Beach has some differences with the other two, but still contains the Jupiter Inlet, a major waterway connecting anglers and mariners to the Atlantic.

In short, it seems that District 18 is as united economically and environmentally as it is divided politically, and that its constituents both know and understand the importance the environment has on their daily lives. The contrast between national and local issues would become a main locus of interest in the 2014 congressional campaign.

25 Milhiser, Ian. "Republicans Score Big Victory in Their Battle to Keep Florida Gerrymandered." *Think Progress*. August 23, 2014. <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2014/08/23/3475056/republicans-score-big-victory-in-their-battle-to-keep-florida-gerrymandered/>

26 United States Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12/12085.html>

27 Alvarex, Lizette. "In South Florida, a Polluted Bubble Ready to Burst." *The New York Times*. September 8, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/us/lake-okeechobee-in-florida-a-polluted-bubble-ready-to-burst.html?_r=1&

28 Turner, Jim. "Gov. Rick Scott pitches his \$1B environmental plan." *The Tallahassee Democrat*. August 4, 2014. While critics on the left attack Scott for his environmental strategy, it still seems extremely pro-environment when compared to Republicans in other parts of the country.

29 Garland, Ed. "The Indian River Lagoon: AN Estuary of National Significance." St. Johns River Water Management District. October 4, 2013. <http://floridaswater.com/itsyourlagoon/>

It would be difficult to explain the total significance of water to Florida's biosphere without turning this passage into an ecology lesson. This reference however would point an interested reader in the right direction to learn more.

30 Borisova, Tatiana, John Brett and Cassel Gardner. "Public Opinion about Actions to Protect Water Resources." EDIS. University of Florida IFAS Extension. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fe842> This study contains relevant survey data for many more questions of significance, with demographic breakdowns along age, gender, and urban vs. rural location.

31 "Business and Industry." Stuart/Martin County Chamber of Commerce. http://www.stuartmartinchamber.org/business_and_industry.asp Additional sectors include construction, government, retail, and medical.

32 "St. Lucie County." St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce. http://www.stluciechamber.org/slc_info.asp

THE INCUMBENT – PATRICK E. MURPHY

Born in Miami in 1983 and graduating from the University of Miami with degrees in finance and accounting, Patrick Murphy has roots in the Florida Keys in construction labor and environmental management.³³ While an accountant by trade, Murphy created a company called Coastal Environmental Services, an offshoot of his family's construction company, through which he engaged in environmental cleanup in the wake of the 2010 Deep-water Horizon oil spill.³⁴ That company, and that family, gave him the financial backing he needed to first run for Congress. At 31 years old (just 29 when first elected), he currently serves as the youngest member of the United States Congress. His age highlights his inexperience, as he had never run for office before taking down Allen West in 2012. That same inexperience, at least in 2012, shielded him somewhat from attacks from the right, as he would often claim that the district would need to actually send him to Washington before they could compare him with Barack Obama.³⁵

Politically, Murphy is not the ideal party line Democrat and registered Republican before 2011, according to the *Tampa Bay Times*. He claims he switched parties in response to the Tea Party movement and that his moderate stance is just him being "himself."³⁶ In terms of his voting record, the *National Journal* claims that he has one of the 5% most independent ones in all of Congress, although George Bennett of the *Palm Beach Posts* describes the times he has crossed the aisle as "mostly meaningless votes." Isadora Rangel of *TC Palm* elaborates, saying "the Democrats know that this is a tough district so they are allowing him to take more votes across the aisle."³⁷ Interestingly enough, one highlight of this independent streak, and one that possibly conflicts with his persona of environmental savior, is a vote for the Keystone XL oil

pipeline³⁸. On budgetary issues as well, the congressman has an independent streak. In one ad, entitled "Numbers Again," Murphy lays out his conservative economic tendencies:

I'm Patrick Murphy. I'm one of only ten CPAs in Congress. We do numbers. Like three: the number of times I voted against congressional pay raises. Or 56 billion: that's how much government spending I've cut working across the aisle. And the amount congress should get paid if they don't pass a budget? Zero. I'm Patrick Murphy and I approve this message. I'll keep working across party lines to get things done. You can count on it.

In this case, reality seems to back up rhetoric, as Murphy boasts endorsements from both the Business-Industry Political Action Committee and the United States Chamber of Commerce, a feat which, as his campaign website eagerly points out, was only achieved by six democrats in 2014.³⁹

In Congress, Murphy has kept up that independence. In addition to the Keystone vote, he also voted most recently for the Executive Amnesty Prevention Act of 2014⁴⁰, a vote which, it should be noted, came after Election Day. He also keeps up with the issues his constituents deem most important. Of his committee assignments and caucuses, he serves as ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy, and Trade, and as Co-Chair of the Congressional Citrus Caucus, Disaster Relief Caucus, and the United Solutions Congress, (he co-founded the latter in 2013). Select memberships of importance also include the Boating Caucus, Everglades Caucus, Travel and Tourism, Veterans Jobs, Florida Ports, the Seniors Task Force, and the Task Force on Climate Change.⁴¹ In short, it seems as if the Congressman read the earlier section of this essay and afterward proceeded to join every related congressional group. Highlights of the

33 "Biography." Patrick Murphy Official House of Representatives website. <http://patrickmurphy.house.gov/biography/>

34 Ibid.

35 Bendery, Jennifer. "Allen West, Patrick Murphy Debate: No Apologies for a Nasty Campaign." *Huffington Post*. October 20, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/20/allen-west-patrick-murphy-debate_n_1990481.html

36 Leary, Alex. "In Swing District, Rep. Patrick Murphy Has to Tread Carefully." *Tampa Bay Times*. July 4, 2013. <http://www.tampabay.com/news/politics/national/in-swing-district-rep-patrick-murphy-has-to-tread-carefully/2130016>

37 Similarly to George Bennett, References to Isadora Rangel refer to an independent personal interview with the source conducted in October of 2014. Rangel is the Local Politics Staff Writer for *TC Palm*, a newspaper which covers the treasure coast region of Florida.

38 Regarding Keystone XL, Murphy voted for it multiple times, including an Aye vote on passage and a yea vote on a motion to recommit on H.R. 5682, as well as voting yea to provide for consideration of that bill with H.Res. 748, all in November of 2013. <http://patrickmurphy.house.gov/voterecord/>

39 One other notable endorsee is Congressman Scott Peters (D-San Diego), who also won reelection in 2014. "PRESS: Patrick Murphy Endorsed by U.S. Chamber of Commerce," Patrick Murphy for Congress, Friends of Patrick Murphy. <http://www.patrickmurphyforcongress.com/press-murphy-endorsed-u-s-chamber-commerce/#.VIXqMTHF-So>

40 Patrick Murphy Voting Record <http://patrickmurphy.house.gov/>

41 "Committees and Caucuses." Patrick Murphy Official House of Representatives website. <http://patrickmurphy.house.gov/biography/committees.htm>

31 bills he sponsored during his first term include “Small Business Investment Act of 2014,” the “Indian River Lagoon Nutrient Removal Assistance Act of 2014,” “To authorize the Central Everglades Planning Project,” and an amendment to increase funding for the US Army Corps of Engineers.⁴² Clearly, Patrick Murphy does not forget where he came from. These subjects – agriculture, the environment, and retirees – would remain the focus of his legislative agenda. They highlight his continued focus on the issues that seem most important to the district based on demographic and geographic analysis.

THE CHALLENGER – CARL J. DOMINO

Born in Quantico, Virginia in 1944, the Republican candidate for District 18 is old enough to be Patrick Murphy’s grandfather. His connection to the district is well established. As he pointed out on many local TV appearances, “I have lived in this district for more years than my opponent has months.”⁴³ Carl Domino’s Floridian roots extend from his early childhood in South Florida to his bachelor’s degree from Florida State University. Domino went on to earn his MBA from Harvard and works to this day in the financial sector, managing the private assets of South Florida’s millionaires and billionaires through his Jupiter-based business enterprise Carl Domino Associates. In 2014, at the age of 70, he graduated with a JD from Nova Southeastern University, a move he claimed would help to make him “a better legislator.”⁴⁴ That being said, the man has quite a bit of legislative experience and is a worthy candidate for Congress. Domino ran a successful bid for the Florida State House of Representatives in 2002, serving in the 83rd District (Port St. Lucie-Ocean Breeze Park-Sewall’s Point) until 2010, when term limits forced him out. While in the House, he additionally served in party leadership as Majority Whip from 2004 to 2006 and as the Chairman of the Palm Beach County Delegation in 2005.⁴⁵ While serving in the Florida House, accord-

ing again to George Bennett, “his voting record in Tallahassee was pretty Republican. But he went against the party on things like abortion votes. He wasn’t like a 100 percent partisan Republican.”

A military veteran, Domino served in active duty in Vietnam as part of the United States Navy. He went on to advance to the rank of Commander in the United States Naval Reserve and eventually retire. This military service allowed him to channel a connection with Allen West, the district’s previous representative.⁴⁶ A Domino mail piece geared toward conservative Republicans highlights this attempt at a connection:

No man or woman left behind. That was our creed in the United States Navy where, for over 20 years, I served as a decorated naval commander of men and women in uniform. In Vietnam, I learned firsthand that “no man or woman left behind” is more than just a military slogan. It’s a matter of principle. Lt. Col. Allen West also understands this code. After a slim loss to Pelosi’s “favorite” politician in 2012, West has now moved on to other battlefields. West held the line against Nancy Pelosi during some of the darkest days of Obama’s reign of destruction when he served in Congress. But the Democratic Machine lined up its entire liberal resources and propped up Patrick Murphy to defeat West. Allen West was left behind, and now I am ready to defeat Murphy in the same seat he took from West and return it to its rightful Republican hands.

At the same time, Domino portrayed himself in 2014 as a no-nonsense “problem solver,” resting heavily on his financial laurels to go toe-to-toe with the accountant Murphy on budget and monetary policy. His strength at appealing to broad swaths of the electorate, his willingness to break with the party in his legislation, and his long-standing connection to the area seem to make him an ideal challenger to take out Murphy in a good year for Republicans. His journey, however, was not ideal.

DOMINO’S REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

To some extent, Domino’s independence in the state legislature disenchanted the RNC, at least according to George Bennett, who claimed “he’d been in the state

42 “Library of Congress Bill Summary & Status Search, FLD003: #1 (Rep Murphy Patrick)

43 “Carl Domino Republican Congressman Candidate.” *Newsmax TV MidPoint*. October 13, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0CSGCxToPE>

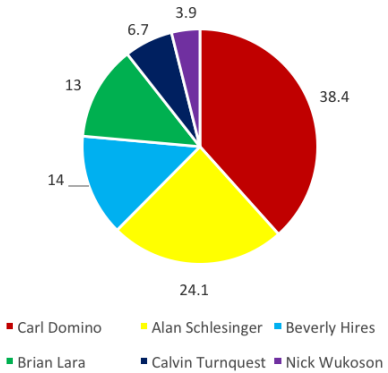
44 Bennett, George. “Today: Carl Domino, 70, interrupts congressional campaign to receive law degree.” *Palm Beach Post’s Post on Politics*. May 10, 2014. <http://postonpolitics.blog.palmbeachpost.com/2014/05/10/today-carl-domino-70-interrupts-congressional-campaign-to-receive-law-degree/>

45 “Representative Carl J. Domino.” Florida House of Representatives Official Biography. This page will also lead any interested readers to a full list of his sponsored bills and votes in the Florida House, in order to verify George Bennett’s claims regarding Domino’s independence on social issues. <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4289>

46 Derby, Kevin. “Carl Domino Claim’s Allen West’s Legacy against Patrick Murphy.” *Sunshine State News*. September 18, 2014. <http://www.sunshinestateneeds.com/blog/carl-domino-claims-allen-west-legacy-against-patrick-murphy>. The article references and quotes a mailer put out by the Domino campaign.

house, but it's not like the Republican establishment really anointed him as the guy. He had to run the primary and do it." Without the blessings of the national party, Domino fought a contested primary in which he always lead in cash on hand and in the polls, but which highlighted a lack of consensus that he was the best candidate for the job of taking back the district⁴⁷. Figure 3 shows the results of that Republican primary, with Domino winning just less than 40% of the total votes, a strong plurality to be sure, but far less than a mandate from the party base.⁴⁸

Figure 3: FL-18 Republican Primary Results



The runner up and only true threat, with 24.1% of the vote, was Alan Schlesinger, a legitimate candidate in his own right. Schlesinger certainly pressed Domino throughout the primary campaign, with each of the candidates exchanging phone and mail attacks calling the other one a “RINO” (which stands for “Republican In Name Only”) or a “liberal Republican,”⁴⁹ especially concerning issues important to the party base like immigration and health insurance. Schlesinger, a carpetbagger if there ever was one, moved to Florida after three failed House campaigns and a failed Senate campaign in Connecticut. In that state, he served as Mayor of the City of Derby for four years and as a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives for 12 years.⁵⁰

In third place with 14% of the vote was Beverly Hires, the Tea Party candidate, who only bears mentioning because of her work on the 2012 recounts and her unofficial endorsement by Allen West himself, who clearly

47 George Bennett personal interview, October 2014.

48 Florida Department of State, Division of Elections. Federal Office Results. <http://enight.elections.myflorida.com/FederalOffices/>

49 Bennett, George. “Domino, Schlesinger slam each other on immigration as GOP congressional primary heats up.” *Palm Beach Post’s Post on Politics*. August 6, 2014. <http://postonpolitics.blog.palmbeachpost.com/2014/08/06/domino-schlesinger-slam-each-other-on-immigration-as-gop-congressional-primary-heats-up/>

50 Williams, Michael. “Rep. Congressional candidate Alan Schlesinger.” *To the Point*. WPTV NBC Channel 5. May 18, 2014. <http://www.wptv.com/news/political/elections-local/to-the-point-sunday-may-18-2014-reps-congressional-candidate-alan-schlesinger>

did not agree with Domino’s characterization of them as brothers in arms in a war against the left. In general, the ability for each of these candidates to draw support away from Domino forced him to spend in his primary campaign, exposed his lack of unified support, and caused what was otherwise a solid political foundation to crumble. As a result, the Cook Political Report moved District 18 from a true toss-up to a Democrat Lean shortly after the primary election.⁵¹

THE ELEPHANTS OUTSIDE THE ROOM

The NRCC and the RNC did not want Domino as the Republican candidate, and they were willing to back other candidates who they thought had a better chance of winning. Those candidates, for one reason or another, decided not to run, and they will be discussed here.

The NRCC’s top choice was State Senator Joe Negron of the 32nd District, which runs along the coast of Florida from northern Palm Beach County and through the entire eastern half of District 18, up into Indian River County at its northernmost point. While the party offered the district to Negron, who shares Murphy’s constituency and who would have made the election far closer than it turned out to be, Negron refused to run. The consensus among journalists covering the election is that Negron had a certain future in State Senate Leadership, including the possibility of becoming Senate President, and he did not want to jeopardize this future with an uncertain bid for the U.S. Congress.⁵² In other words, Murphy had made it too hard for Negron to win his own constituency at the national level.

To the south, Adam Hasner seemed poised to move to District 18 and take on Murphy. Hasner, who served in the Florida House of Representatives alongside Domino for eight years as the representative from the 87th District (Lake Worth-West Palm Beach-Palm Springs), also served as Majority Leader from 2007 to 2010. In 2012, Hasner ran for the House in FL-22 in Broward County, and had endorsements from prominent Florida Republicans including Allen West, Jeb Bush, and Marco Rubio, but lost in a year favorable to Democrats. Many believed that in a midterm election year, he might have a shot of unseating the one-term Congressman Murphy, and his actions in the preliminary stages of the campaign seemed to verify this intention. Nevertheless, he failed to put his house on the

51 “2014 House Election Results by Race Rating.” *Cook Political Report*. Updated November 14, 2014. <http://cookpolitical.com/house/charts/race-ratings>

52 Personal Interviews with George Bennett of *Palm Beach post* and Isadora Rangel of *TC Palm*, both conducted October of 2014.

market, most likely because he “perceived it would be a big undertaking.”⁵³ Again, we see a legitimate candidate failing to engage in the campaign because the risk was too great for them. It seems Murphy scared away two of his strongest competitors. As for Allen West, his representative declined to comment regarding any elections, and journalists from local news organizations found similar results.

One explanation for the cold feet of the party’s favorite sons was Murphy’s ability to entrench himself in the district as discussed above, in his legislation, in his committee assignments, and in his rhetoric. As Isadora Rangel of *TC Palm* described him, Patrick Murphy had become in essence “the mayor of District 18,”⁵⁴ and it would take a lot of money and campaigning to dig him out – money that the NRCC was not willing to commit without an A-level candidate, but money that Carl Domino had in droves. All of these themes would play out to completion in the general election campaign.

THE CAMPAIGN

As September turned into October and autumn progressed, the heat of the campaign did not diminish, and Domino had just weeks to divert his attention from the primary to his new opponent: Patrick Murphy. Though far less exciting and far more cordial than the 2012 race, Domino began attacking the incumbent congressman almost immediately, and attempted to capitalize on a pro-GOP trend nationwide to compensate for his lack of support. The only polls released throughout the race came a year out and on the eve of Domino’s nomination⁵⁵ from Frederick Polls, a group that worked for Murphy’s campaign. While certainly skewed towards Murphy, the results are telling, and underscore the mountain Domino would need to summit in order to defeat the Democrat incumbent. Table 2 shows the poll results below:

Table 2: Poll Results in District 18

<i>Poll</i>	<i>Murphy</i>	<i>Domino</i>	<i>Undecided</i>
October, 2013 (n=300)	52%	25%	23%
August, 2014 (n=400)	54%	33%	13%

Source: Frederick Polls

⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵ “2014 Florida 18th District Polls.” *Election Projection*. The author of this passage has both correspondences between Frederick Polls and the Murphy campaign regarding the two polls taken during the election cycle. At further request, these can be provided.

One can see that by the dawn of the election cycle in District 18, Domino would not have enough undecided voters to overtake Murphy. Attack advertisements highlight this knowledge.

ISSUES AND AIRWAVES

For Murphy, the campaign centered largely on massive and aggressive television advertisement purchases, a blitz that helped to define him as a candidate based largely on the issues important to the district. While it might be difficult to say what the focus of each campaign was in quantitative terms, one approximation is what each candidate decided to say with his money. Thus, Figure 4 is a bar chart detailing the amount of times Murphy referenced specific issues in his advertisements.⁵⁶ Each advertisement was transcribed and marked for specific terms relating to issues or subjects the candidates discussed on the campaign trail. For Murphy, the data is clear. His highest scores translate to local issues, with him referencing terms such as “local jobs” and “our community” a total of fourteen times. The Indian River Lagoon and other references to “Florida’s water” by themselves are referenced nine times, and the ads reference Murphy’s independence thirteen times. He references his opponent one time in all of his ads. He calls his opponent by name zero times.

The vast majority of his ads have him standing in front of lakes or rivers throughout the district, talking with local residents, interspersed with palm trees and swimming fish. One ad, entitled “Jogging,” sees Murphy running through a park wearing an Indian River High School t-shirt. One of his early advertisements, entitled “Way of Life,” sums up the importance of these issues clearly:

Murphy: The Indian River Lagoon. More life exists here than any other estuary in the country, and it’s key to our economy too. Tourism, fishing. Our water is who we are, the heart and even the soul of Florida.

The campaign ads were high quality and positive, portraying the good Murphy had done for the community. Murphy’s focus was clear: to win the district, he had to sell himself as a delegate, not as a party politician.

⁵⁶ All of the transcribed advertisements come from Patrick Murphy’s campaign website. <http://www.patrickmurphyforcongress.com/>

Figure 5: Carl Domino Ad References

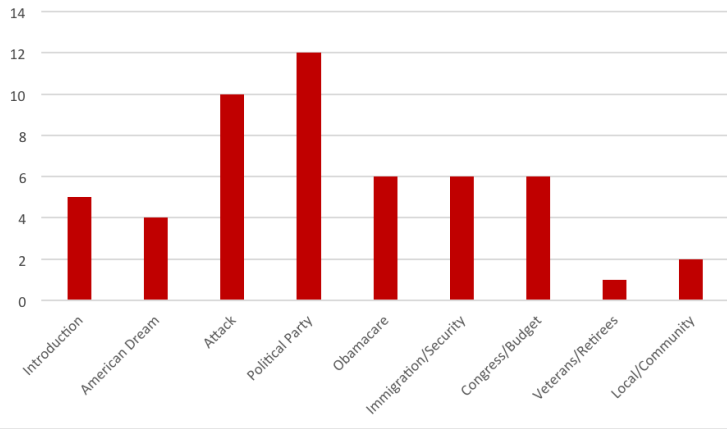
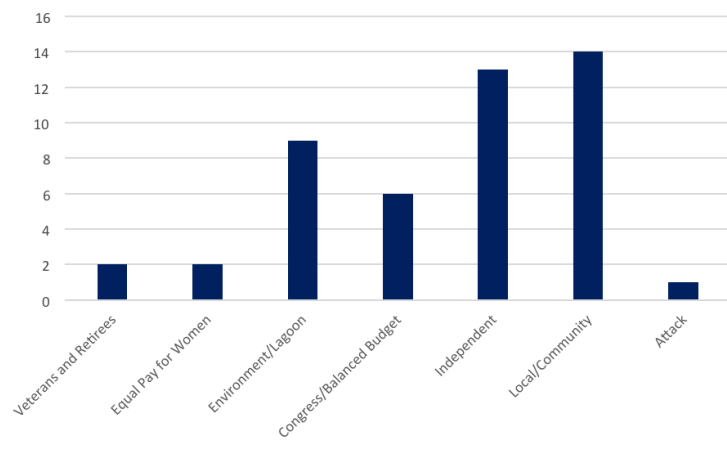


Figure 4: Patrick Murphy Ad References



Domino’s ad campaign tells a far different story, one that again betrays his general campaign stratagem.⁵⁷ Figure 6 shows his highest scores coming from references to political party, either identifying himself as the Republican or connecting Murphy to national Democrats. He directly attacks Murphy by name ten times. His third highest is a three-way tie between three national issues: Obamacare, immigration/national security, and the budget. He references community issues only twice, just behind references to “the American Dream.” One ad, entitled “Still Ready to Serve,” hits all of Domino’s favorite issues:

Narrator: Like his father before him Carl Domino served in our armed forces to protect our freedom and our security. Now Washington liberals are threatening both, and Carl Domino is still ready to serve as our voice in Congress. Secure America’s borders. Save our tax dollars from reckless Washington spending, and stop the government takeover

⁵⁷ All of Domino’s transcribed advertisements come from his campaign website, which has since been taken down. The videos can still be found on Carl Domino’s YouTube account.

of our healthcare. Our security, our future, and our freedom. Republican Carl Domino for Congress.

His most famous attack ad took Murphy’s jogging ad and added in a picture of Barack Obama, claiming Murphy was “running from the truth.” Indeed, Domino ran a campaign centered on milking anti-Obama sentiment from the very beginning, establishing himself as the conservative alternative to Murphy and even going so far as to link himself to Allen West. But, Murphy ran as the moderate alternative to West in 2012, and he doubled down on this approach for his second election season.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FINANCE AND BACKING

One less direct way Murphy used his “mayoral” bona fides was to portray himself as a strong candidate that required a strong opponent. His ability to scare off major contenders in the race with the strong possibility of defeat has been discussed above. Thus, Domino’s relative weakness, along with his aforementioned independence in the state legislature, would both frighten and rebuff the National Republican Congressional Committee. Just as Domino never received an official NRCC endorsement, the “NRCC never stepped up” to offer him funding, and “it showed that he wasn’t able to gather support.”⁵⁸ Only one PAC of note contributed to the campaign, one spearheaded by John Bolton, a Bush-era neoconservative ambassador.⁵⁹ In 2012, it was Murphy who out-raised Domino many times over, with the state representative raising very little money relative to Murphy or relative to the amount he pumped in from his personal coffers. Indeed, with a net worth of over “25 million dollars,” Carl Domino did not need national backing, and would periodically pump money into his own campaign to keep it afloat.⁶⁰ This money came in the form of loans rather than contributions, and so technically the Domino for Congress Campaign owes Carl the candidate \$1,185,000. Seeing as how he did not win, one can assume Mr. Domino will write those loans off as losses. Table 3 shows his total contribution break down, as well as Murphy’s. In contrast to Domino, the majority of Murphy’s contributions come from individual donors (many of whom lived outside the district thanks to national efforts) and over a million from

⁵⁸ Personal interview with Isadora Rangel of *TC Palm*, conducted October 2014.
⁵⁹ Federal Election Commission. 2014 House and Senate Campaign Finance, “Other Committees Contributions.” <http://www.fec.gov/disclosurehs/HSContTran.do>
⁶⁰ Personal Interview with Isadora Rangel of *TC Palm*, conducted October of 2014.

PACs, with some direct money pumped in from the DCCC to cover some operating expenses. Murphy contributed none of his own money to his 2014 campaign.

Table 3: Campaign Contributions

Type	Domino	Murphy
Individual	\$295,479	\$3,559,585
Party	-	\$4,972
PAC/Other	\$10,500	\$1,488,989
Candidate	\$1,189,527	-
Total	\$1,495,506	\$5,053,546

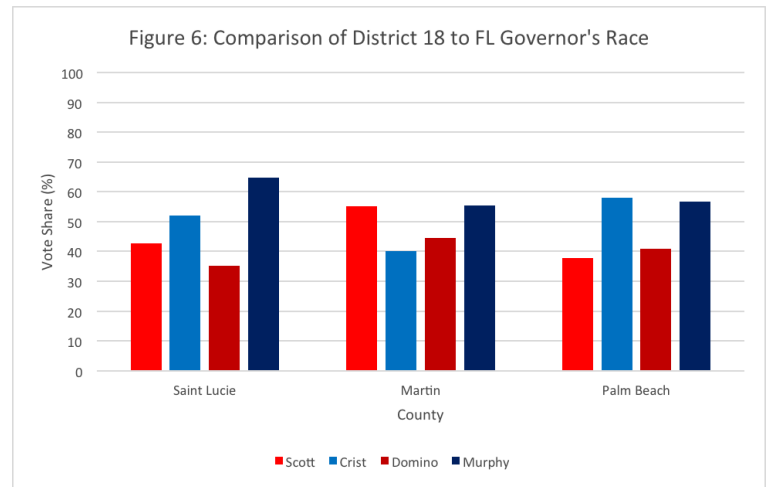
Source: Federal Election Commission, 2014 House and Senate Campaign Finance for Florida, House Candidates – FL District: 18. <http://www.fec.gov/disclosurehs/HSCandList.do>

The outside spending for Murphy compared to Domino is astounding, and it again highlights the failure of the Republican to receive national support, due in part to hesitance from the national party and in part from his personal qualities. A candidate who won't go along with the party line in critical ventures and who has the fourth best shot of beating the incumbent is not someone the party wants to waste their time with, especially in a year where Republicans had a chance of gaining seats in close races nationwide. Miami's FL-22 highlights this. John Boehner came to Boca Raton, on the fringes of District 18, to campaign not for Domino, but "to benefit Carlos Curbelo, the Republican challenging freshman Rep. Joe Garcia, D-Miami."⁶¹ The Republicans abandoned Domino. Murphy's ability to entrench himself won him the race before it even began. The fundraising contrasts between 2012 and 2014, are a good predictor of the results on Election Day. The important thing to remind oneself while examining the contrast is that Murphy beat West in 2012 while outspent 4:1.

61 Bennett, George. "Boehner raises money in Palm Beach County – but not for local congressional hopefuls." *Palm Beach Post's Post on Politics*. October 22, 2014. <http://postonpolitics.blog.palmbeachpost.com/2014/10/22/boehner-raises-money-in-palm-beach-county-but-not-for-local-congressional-hopefuls/>

WHAT HAPPENED ON ELECTION NIGHT?

The short answer to the above question – Patrick Murphy clobbered Carl Domino 59.8% to 40.2%, winning by about a 50,000-vote margin.⁶² The long answer is not much different. But delves into the results to show just how different Murphy's victory in 2014 was compared to 2012. Figure 6 is a comparison of the District 18 congressional results with the governor's race between Rick Scott and Charlie Crist in the same area, separated by county.⁶³



In the above clustered bar chart, lighter colors correspond to the governor's race while darker colors correspond to the congressional race. From this chart one can make several observations. First, in St. Lucie County, the most liberal of the three which make up District 18, Patrick Murphy outperformed the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, netting almost 65% of the vote compared with Charlie Crist's 52%. This 13 point variation points to many Republicans defecting in St. Lucie, moving from the Republican Rick Scott in the highly partisan and extremely close gubernatorial race to the Democrat Murphy for the congressional race. Martin County presents even starker results. Recalling that Martin has the most registered Republicans of the three counties at almost 50%, one would not be surprised to find Rick Scott posting a 55% vote share, but the congressional race shows far different results. In Martin County, Carl Domino loses again, gaining only 45% of the vote. Patrick Murphy not only beats the Republican in the most conservative region of the district, but also virtually matches the Republican gover-

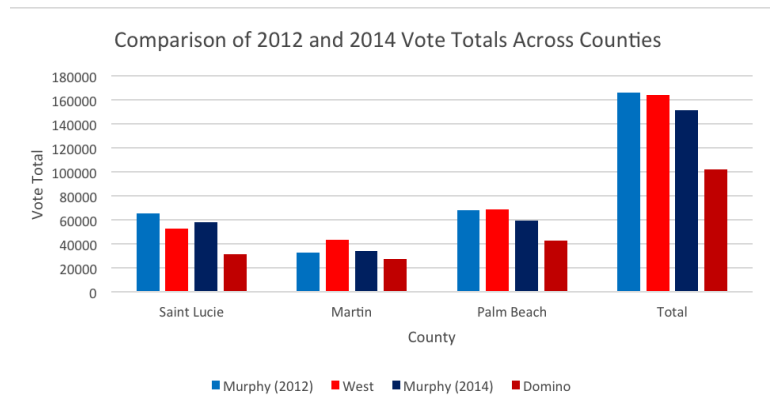
62 Florida Department of State, Division of Elections. Federal Office Results. <http://enight.elections.myflorida.com/FederalOffices/AdditionalCountyByCountyInformation> by county information was obtained with the use of precinct level data from each county's Supervisor of Elections website.

63 "2014 Florida Governor Election Results." *Politico Election Central*. <http://www.politico.com/2014-election/results/map/governor/florida/#.VIX4fTHF-So>

nor in vote share. Martin County’s results for Amendment 1 to the Florida Constitution might point to some answers. The “Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative” dedicates a third of excise tax revenue to improving wildlife conservation, ecological management, and wetlands preservation. This environmental bill passed with a high margin in the environmental county, with 78.7% of voters voting for the legislation, a number almost four points higher than the state average. In St. Lucie, their total support for the amendment was almost six points higher.⁶⁴

The results for Palm Beach County in Figure 6 are deceiving. Although the graph shows Domino with a slightly higher margin of votes than Rick Scott and Murphy with a slightly lower margin than Charlie Crist, this is because the gubernatorial vote comes from data taken county wide, while the District 18 data comes only from the county’s northeast – and most conservative – quadrant. If one were to control for this variation, they would find Murphy once again outperforming Crist and Scott outperforming Domino. It’s not for nothing that Palm Beach’s votes for Amendment 1 came at a rate almost 10 points higher than the state average.⁶⁵ To summarize, District 18’s voters defected when it mattered to them. While they might have voted along partisan lines for governor, they voted based on the candidate when it came to choosing their representative.

Figure 7 shows the same three county spread, this time comparing Murphy’s margins of victory in 2014 to his 2012 race against Allen West and with both margins in terms of total votes rather than percentages.⁶⁶ Here, lighter colors signify the 2012 race while darker colors correspond to the 2014 race.



Again, the results point to an incredible victory. The candidate who just barely edged out his opponent in 2012 extended his victory margin from 0.08% to just under 20% in 2014. Although Murphy received less total votes in 2014 than he did in 2012, this can be explained in two ways. Total votes might have dropped off due to a governor’s race anchoring the top of the ticket instead of a presidential race, which led to an overall decrease in voter turnout. Domino’s inability to effectively run a campaign and turn Republicans out to the polls might have also contributed to the decrease. Even the base, the voters who would never vote for a Democrat, viewed the election as a fruitless endeavor. While those arguments consist solely of speculation, one can draw more concrete conclusions from the county-by-county breakdown. In St. Lucie County (again, the most liberal of the three), the Tea Party titan and uber-conservative Allen West lost by a slimmer margin than the comparatively moderate Carl Domino. While Domino’s legislative action and record make him more likely to draw independents on paper than West, independents seemed to flock to Murphy in higher numbers in 2014 than they did in 2012. The incumbent had earned his seat in their eyes.

Similar arguments can be made for Martin and Palm Beach. West won Martin County convincingly, yet Domino lost the traditionally Republican stronghold. West and Murphy were in a dead heat in Palm Beach, while in 2014 Murphy blew Domino out of the water. In general, 2012 saw West and Murphy take results generally along the party lines delineated towards the beginning of this passage, with only a small amount of independent voters determining the final margin of victory. For Murphy’s margin to increase so much in 2014, not only independents but also Republicans must have voted for him. When looking at both of the figures above, “entrenched” does seem to be the operative word, and it seems as though Murphy managed to entrench himself fully with just two years in office.

64 Florida Department of State, Division of Elections. Amendment No. 1 Results by County. <http://enight.elections.myflorida.com/CompareByCounty/?ContestId=900100>

65 Ibid.

66 Again, precinct level data from the three counties was used to establish margins of victory in each respective county. Here, I ran into some trouble though. While Martin and Palm Beach counties readily provided past results through their respective Supervisors of Elections, St. Lucie County, the nexus of voter fraud allegations and mismanaged electoral processing in 2012, had no such results. This forced me to add the total number of Republican and Democrat votes in Martin and Palm Beach counties for District 18 in 2012, and then subtract those from the total number of Republican and Democrat votes in the entire district, obtained from *Politico*. This remainder was St. Lucie’s 2012 total. “2012 Florida House Results.” *Politico 2012 Election Central*. <http://www.politico.com/2012-election/results/house/florida/>

CONCLUSIONS

In 2012, Patrick Murphy rattled Republicans, especially Tea Party ideologues, by taking down and effectively ending the political aspirations of their star player Allen West. And in 2014, from the moment the Republican primary ended, many analysts could see the writing on the wall for Carl Domino. Cook Political Report continued to move FL-18 farther to the left, so that by the time election night came the seat was a Likely D rather than the true toss-up it began as. Even as Republicans looked optimistic on the national stage, politicians on the Treasure Coast seemed skeptical that Carl Domino could use the midterm wave to his advantage. The Mayor of District 18 had just made himself too powerful.

It seems as though in his two years in office, Patrick Murphy did everything right. In terms of legislation, committees, and caucuses, his entire first two years in congress seemed tailored to retailing himself towards his constituency. Even demographics not covered in depth here, such the large Jewish and retiree populations in the area, got covered by Murphy's inclusion of Israel defense, veterans benefits, and Silver Alert legislation as part of the package he sold to the district. As if reading a manual, Murphy addressed every concern in the district and brought those concerns to Washington where he turned them into legislation. The results? Billions of federal dollars to clean up the Indian River Lagoon and revitalize the region's small businesses.⁶⁷ Murphy constructed his campaign specifically to amplify these deeds and create a persona for himself that would both endear him to independent voters in the district and deter a strong competitor from running against him, a persona that would mark him as a maverick bent on helping his constituents before his party and the Treasure Coast before the District of Columbia. Financial backing from the national party surely helped, but the DCCC needed a palate to put their brush to in both 2012 and 2014. That palate, Patrick Murphy, had all the right pieces before the campaign even began.

For his part, Carl Domino had sparks of greatness on the campaign trail, but the facts that he fell by such a margin in a wave election and compared with other close races in the state both point to the inadequacies of his campaign. Whether he realized he could not go toe-to-toe with Murphy on local issues or whether he truly believed that he could infuse hackneyed national issues into the race, he failed by not addressing the topics on the minds

of the voters. Again, had a unified party structure existed behind him, the results would most certainly have been slimmer than they were; but in this case, the margins speak for themselves. Domino also, ironically enough, failed because of the national political environment that he tried so tenaciously to utilize. Surely 2014 was a wave election for Republicans, but compared to the Tea Party wave of 2010, this year saw more victories for moderates and establishment candidates. Republican senators throughout the country defeated strong Tea Party challengers, and without this national grassroots movement to energize the conservative base of the party, Domino had no way of dispatching the fairly moderate former Republican Patrick Murphy.

Yet, the District 18 election also had a certain uniqueness that gave Murphy the edge and allowed him to localize the race, in contrast with many other districts throughout the country that indeed fell victim to debates over Obamacare, immigration, and the like. That uniqueness comes from a place of tragedy and a place of demographics. Although District 18 lays claim to more Republicans than Democrats, the Republicans in the area have a history of moderation and environmentalism.⁶⁸ In fact, these two qualities of the electorate gave Murphy the opening he needed in 2012. The District's uncertain acceptance of West's right-wing rhetoric betrayed a certain reluctance with the trend of the national GOP. These qualities became all too concrete with the continued destruction of the waterways in the district and the effect that disaster had on so many sectors of the local economy. In this sense, Patrick Murphy, compared to other congressmen, had a unique opportunity to play the part of the savior. The localization aspect works here because the district has not been dealing with passive issues in the background of daily life. The issues are real. They were actively infringing on the livelihoods of the voters, and they had a much larger direct impact on their lives than national issues such as amnesty, ISIS, and Ebola, all of which seemed worlds away from the white sand and flowing grass of southeastern Florida. Patrick Murphy had a job and a mandate from the voters when he entered office in 2012, and by serving dutifully as a congressman, he earned their trust in 2014. It seems wholly within the realm of reason then, that the key to winning contested elections is finding the issues viewed as important by a district and going all-in on them, sacrificing party politics in an attempt to recast oneself in the mold of a true delegate of the people. Surely, pursu-

⁶⁷ "Funding for Toxic Waters Granted." Interview with Rep. Patrick Murphy on WPEC, CBS Channel 12. March 5, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_XEHQ6BNN0

⁶⁸ Personal interview with George Bennett of the *Palm Beach Post*, conducted October of 2014.

ing this strategy would help mitigate the often short-term polarizing effect party politics have in creating wave elections like those seen in both 2012 and 2014.

One other thought to keep in mind about Patrick Murphy and District 18 is this: throughout both campaigns, Republican operatives and the press both pointed out that Murphy's independent votes occurred on largely "meaningless" issues, that he votes with the party on large procedural issues and that he will become more liberal as he gains a stronger grasp on the district. His yea votes for Obamacare related legislation do in fact betray a willingness to cave to the left on important national issues, and many call into question the genuineness of the South Florida native when it comes to truly caring for District 18. Considering Murphy's history, these claims seem dubious at best. Throughout his admittedly short political career, Patrick Murphy has backed up rhetoric with action on multiple levels, and has, in the eyes of his constituents truly brought new life and hope to the Treasure Coast. Even if his heart does lie elsewhere and his persona has more image than substance, one has to ask if this really matters in the long run. The demographics and party identification of the district remain relatively stable, and this means that a threat to his control will always exist from the right. As long as that threat forces Patrick Murphy to keep that independent streak and bring aid and relief to his constituents, one could argue that the system is working, and that Patrick Murphy is an ideal model for representative government, a representative who, in the words of Allen West, must remain "steadfast and loyal" to his people if he ever hopes to keep winning. Speaking of West, the man who started Murphy's political career announced his plans to move out of the district, and out of Florida, shortly after the election in order to take over a think tank in Texas,⁶⁹ further solidifying Murphy's claim to District 18. Regardless, one thing remains certain. A political opportunist or a nature-loving independent, the results are the same: a continued symbiotic relationship between district and congressman that weathers both political and physical storms and that may well carry on into future election cycles.

⁶⁹ Man, Anthony. "It's Goodbye for Allen West, Who's Leaving Florida." *The Sun Sentinel*. November 10, 2014 <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/politics/fl-allen-west-leaves-florida-20141110-story.html>