

Love wins by getting more GOP votes the second time around

Republican Mia Love made history Tuesday night in her victory over Democrat Doug Owens. Love became the first African American female Republican elected to Congress. How was Love able to win in 2014 when she was not able to unseat incumbent Democrat Jim Matheson in 2012? The answer is due at least in part to her picking up more Republican support.

In Utah elections, Democrats need to court not only independents, but also Republicans in order to be competitive. In the fourth district race, Owens won 97 percent of the Democratic vote and 57 percent of the Independent vote. He also performed admirably among Republicans, pulling in about 17 percent of that group's vote.

However, according to Geoff Cannon, a senior majoring in political science at Brigham Young University, "all Mia Love had to do to win this race was keep enough Republican voters from defecting to Owens, and it appears that she did that."

In contrast, in the 2012 race between Jim Matheson and Mia Love, Matheson was able to pull 22 percent from Republicans to win the race. The difference between 22 percent for Matheson in 2012 and 17 for Owens in 2014 may seem small at first glance. However, in a district where nearly three-fifths of the voters are Republican, a 5 percent difference can be the deciding factor in a race. Indeed, Love receiving 5 percent more of the Republican vote in this election compared to her race in 2012 may have been that deciding factor in such a close race.

Another part of the explanation is demographics. In 2014, Love performed much better among various demographic groups than she did in 2012. She received more of both the female (49 to 47 percent) and male vote (51 to 45 percent) than Owens did in 2014. In contrast, in 2012, she was outperformed by Matheson among males (49 to 47 percent) and females (53 to 44 percent). A majority (52 percent) of white voters, who make up 92 percent of the fourth district

voters, also voted for Love; again, she lost this demographic to Matheson in 2012 (49 for Matheson, 47 for Love). One additional key demographic group in Utah is religion. The vast majority of active Mormons voted for Love in both elections. However, Love performed significantly better among less active Mormons in 2014 (47 percent) than she did in 2012 (40 percent), adding to the votes that she needed in order to win against Owens.

Finally, the Utah Colleges Exit Poll also asked a hypothetical question about who the respondents would have voted for in the fourth district race had it been between Love and Matheson for a second time. The results were clear: fourth district voters would have sent Matheson back for a seventh term. While about 50 percent of Utah voters preferred Love in the race against Owens, only 42 percent indicated they would have voted for her had she been running against Matheson again. About 48 percent of the electorate would have voted for Matheson. Such a hypothetical matchup is unrealistic in the sense that Matheson did not campaign in 2014 and it is impossible to know how issues, campaign spending and other factors might have impacted such a race. But the strong showing of Matheson in 2014 suggests that he continues to have a strong following in Utah.