

**Hanging Together: Overcoming Divisions  
in the  
Tea Party Movement**

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## **Introduction: Unity and Division in the Tea Party**

*“We must indeed all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”*  
– Benjamin Franklin

The room was packed. More than twenty Tea Party groups and dozens of Tea Partiers from all over North Carolina had arrived at the Wilmington Hilton for the 2011 North Carolina Republican State Convention. Dozens of gray-haired Tea Partiers who had navigated arcane rules to become state GOP delegates were flitting from conversation to conversation around the brightly lit hall. The energy in the room did not fade until well past 1 a.m., even though they all planned on waking up in time for a 7 a.m. “Morning Tea” breakfast at which they were going to be addressed by both Jenny Beth Martin, the head of the Tea Party Patriots, and Republican Presidential candidate and Tea Party darling Michele Bachmann. After that they would head over to the Convention, where an establishment North Carolina Republican would attempt to appease them in the hopes of preventing the Tea Party from repeating the previous year’s success in electing a more conservative Republican, Timothy Johnson, as Vice Chair of the North Carolina GOP.

It would turn out differently from how the North Carolina Tea Partiers hoped that night. Foreshadowing the 2012 national GOP primary struggles, North Carolina Tea Partiers would splinter the next day, allowing an establishment favorite, Wayne King, to displace the more conservative Johnson. In the aftermath of victories in the 2010 election cycle – including switching the state legislature from Democratic to Republican control, and electing two new conservative congressmen – the North Carolina Tea Party should have been at the peak of its

power in 2011. Yet these Tea Partiers barely made a dent on the Convention agenda, and much of their inability to coalesce around specific candidates stemmed from disagreements among North Carolina Tea Partiers on various social issues. The philosophical divisions that proved troublesome existed long before the 2011 North Carolina GOP convention, but during the heady days of 2010 the differences had been downplayed and smoothed over only to surface just a year later and cripple the Tea Partiers' hopes for leverage in 2011. But they did not know all of that yet. Tonight they had reason to celebrate, and the beer flowed freely among the jubilant crowd.

Among Tea Partiers across the United States, ideological divisions similar to those that undercut North Carolina Tea Party clout in 2011 had existed since the birth of the movement in 2009, yet these remained dormant for a long time – certainly long enough to let the Tea Party boost the Republican Party enough to gain 63 seats and take back the U.S. House of Representatives from Democrats in the largest electoral swing since 1948. In the 2010 midterm elections Tea Party voters, roughly 20% of the population, made up 41% of the electorate.<sup>1</sup>

Republicans also took six seats in the Senate, added six new governorships and, perhaps most impressively, 700 more seats in state legislatures nationwide. In many of these local elections the Republican Party was represented by first-time Tea Party candidates and spurred on by Tea Party volunteers and energy. This was remarkable. In the first election after its eruption as a national movement, the Tea Party successfully moved the Republican Party to the right.<sup>2</sup> Not only did the Tea Party revitalize the Republican Party after a demoralizing

2008 election which saw Democrats take or keep control of the White House and Congress, but it also dashed the 2008 Democratic Party's dream of building a longstanding national majority.

### *The Puzzle*

Recent scholarship has shown that Tea Partiers are fiscally conservative and overwhelmingly vote Republican, but they do not all view controversial social issues like the role government should play in enforcing traditional moral norms related to family life, sexuality and abortion in the same light. Surprising as it may be to some, as many as 40% of avowed Tea Party supporters hold libertarian views on social issues: they favor personal choice positions often identified only with liberals and prefer to keep government out of matters of family life and sexual behavior. At the same time, as many as 60% of Tea Party supporters nationally – and of course in higher proportions in many southern and midwestern states – hold positions that overlap with well-known religious conservative opposition to abortion rights, legal acceptance of gay marriage, and government acceptance of family norms outside the traditional ideal of male-female marriages.

If such sharp divisions really exist among Americans who identify with the Tea Party, how has the movement managed to attract and coalesce into such a diverse group? Under what circumstances do potential divisions on social issues become apparent or lie dormant? So far, this pressing question about internal heterogeneity in the Tea Party ranks has been largely overlooked. Scholarly and

popular understanding of the Tea Party has improved and there are no longer widespread misconceptions of the movement as a third party or centrist populist revolt; observers have come to understand that Tea Partiers are almost never Democrats or moderate Independents but are all fiscal conservatives operating at the rightward edge of the Republican Party and voting for GOP candidates versus Democrats. Yet when it comes to understanding internal differences within the Tea Party, large holes still exist in scholarly understandings of the organization and demographics of the movement.

As this thesis explores and clarifies the heterogeneity of the Tea Party, and the consequences of internal differences for movement dynamics, it will also seek to help fill a gap in studies of social movements. Although the social movement literature is very established in the social sciences, much of the focus remains on how movements emerge and how they directly impact policy. Scholarship lags in appreciating how modern collective action movements use technology to mobilize and sustain popular support. The existing literature has little to say about how organizations keep members engaged while overcoming cleavages within the movement. Prior studies have suggested that movement mobilization and unity largely rest on pre-existing social networks. But available evidence suggests that pre-existing social ties have played little role in launching and sustaining the Tea Party movement. The sources of common goals despite central differences in outlook evidently lie elsewhere, and this thesis aims to describe and explain these distinctive Tea Party dynamics.

### *The Argument*

Scholars and casual observers alike presume that groups should be held together by internal factors, whether social ties among members, strong leaders, or a sense of unified purpose.<sup>3</sup> External conditions are typically viewed as epiphenomenal and play a small role at best. This thesis challenges such conventional assumptions about the sources of movement unity and looks to other variables that make better sense of unified action by the Tea Party and, possibly, within other present-day social movements. In the Tea Party's case, the hodgepodge of groups and participants operating under the catch-all banner of the Tea Party movement is held together by an immense fear of the political Left. This fear of the Left was initially stoked and is continually refined and maintained by a powerful conservative media sector led by *Fox News* and supported by a wide variety of conservative talk radio and blogs. The right wing media "echo chamber," as Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph Cappella describe it, helps to mobilize conservatives and also serves to insulate their community of values and meaning from mainstream counter-pressures.<sup>4</sup> Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin have gone so far as to suggest that during the launch of the Tea Party in 2009, *Fox News* served as a "national advocacy organization actively fostering a social protest identity."<sup>5</sup> Looking at that claim in greater detail, this thesis shows that the conservative media sector plays a major role in unifying and motivating diverse Tea Partiers toward a common goal by highlighting external, threatening enemies that all Tea Partiers, regardless of differences on social issues, feel the need to defeat. Understanding the sources of unity, despite diversity among Tea Partiers,

sheds new light on the roots and limits of the movement's cohesiveness and offers theoretically intriguing ideas about dynamics at work in other movements as well.

### *Sources of Evidence*

To document and test hypotheses about amalgamation in the Tea Party at both the individual and organizational levels, I utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Throughout the thesis I rely, when appropriate, on several large national polls, but whenever possible I supplement national-level data with in-depth observations from my experiences traveling around the country to North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Arizona. My observations and things I learned when talking with local Tea Partiers add flavor and color to occasionally dry statistics and allow deeper understandings of the movement than any I could have arrived at from survey evidence alone. In addition to these sources, I use a national website dataset constructed with Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson that looks at the different topics that over 900 Tea Party groups across the country talk about and link to on their group web pages. This dataset, assembled in the spring of 2011, allows me to show where Tea Party groups are located and estimate how large they are in terms of their membership claims. More importantly, this data reveal what local Tea Party groups say publicly about their issue priorities. Lastly, I am able to examine and note the characteristics of a random sample of over 3,300 Tea Party emails gathered over the last year from groups across the country. This last dataset allows me to look at how Tea Partiers talk with each other and quantify what they say in such exchanges.

Synthesizing this plethora of data – national surveys, interviews and observations from three states, the national website database, and tallies of email exchanges among Tea Party participants – enabled me to develop the rich descriptions offered in this thesis and test various hypotheses about the sources and dynamics of unity and diversity in the Tea Party. In the remainder of this section, I offer more details on each source of data and explain why I believe the evidence I use is the best available.

When the Tea Party first emerged, reporters and academics were surprised and overwhelmed by the magnitude of these unexpected protests. As one journalist lamented while covering the 2010 Florida midterms, “There seem to be more [T]ea [P]arties in Florida than in other places, although there is no way of knowing this.”<sup>6</sup> *The Washington Post* set out to try and know this. Using the Tea Party Patriots website as a starting point they emailed and called around 1,400 Tea Party groups – all the groups they could find – and received 647 responses.<sup>7</sup> While the *Post*’s findings are very interesting, there are some potential flaws with the study’s methodology – most important being the fact that many members of the Tea Party despise and distrust the mainstream media. *Lauren Tilney*,<sup>1</sup> a Tea Partier from New Hampshire, sent out an email simply saying: “The ABC poll has Obama over Romney 51-43. ABC is corrupt.” This is not one isolated email: in an internal poll by The Greater Phoenix Tea Party an overwhelming 48% of Tea Partiers answered the question, “Will Romney win due to a split conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Out of respect to the individuals who sent these emails I quote them directly but do not name them or their particular group. When names are needed, I use an italicized pseudonym (e.g. *John Doe*) the first time their name is used and regular print if I use their name subsequently.

vote?” with the unrelated answer, “The media is orchestrating this.”<sup>8</sup> This bias against the media may have skewed results. For example, the *Post* reported 38 different groups claiming over 100,000 members, suggesting that roughly 5% of all Tea Party groups had that many members – a simply unrealistic number.<sup>9</sup>

Improving on phone surveys, the objective national website data I use here, developed last spring by the Harvard team, accomplishes several important things by tallying web content. First, it ensures that most groups are accounted for and makes the study easily replicable. In order to determine if that webpage was a Tea Party site or not, we simply looked to see if it proclaimed itself a Tea Party group in its title or somewhere on its front page. We ultimately recorded data on 39 different variables for 962 individual Tea Party groups. Rather than directly asking specific Tea Partiers which issues were most salient to their group as the *Post* did, we instead examined their website to determine whether they discussed an issue. Likewise, instead of asking Tea Partiers which national groups they supported (such as FreedomWorks or the Heritage Foundation), we examined their website to see which links were present.

Some may assert that this method will systematically undercount the number of Tea Party groups by only looking at ones that have an online presence. To check for this possible shortfall, assembly of the web database was accompanied by a comprehensive study of three states: Arizona, North Carolina, and New Hampshire. In each state I spoke for an hour with more than half of the leaders of all identifiable Tea Party groups and used those connections to develop a more exhaustive list of all local Tea Party groups, including those without

websites. In North Carolina, for example, I found only four additional Tea Party groups without a web presence. North Carolina may be an outlier, but the Tea Party was born online and it seems safe to say that at this point nearly all groups do have an online presence.

The various methods of data collection and analysis I use present a powerful picture of the scope and attributes of the Tea Party movement, but there are still some shortcomings. For example, the website survey does not capture the trends of the movement, but rather takes a snapshot at a moment in time. Since the Tea Party is constantly evolving, some of the website database's findings may already be outdated. I do my best to indicate where there are discrepancies between the 2011 snapshot and more recent findings. In addition, the website data cannot attach intensity scores to any of the issues presented. So while 33% of Tea Party Groups mention gun rights and 66% mention healthcare, this does not mean that the Tea Party feels twice as strongly about healthcare as they do about gun rights. That relationship cannot be derived from website mentions alone.

In order to help examine the fervor of different issues, I also looked at a wide variety of Tea Party emails. The Tea Partiers' second most-popular website server, after Ning, is an online social networking platform called Meetup. Meetup helps people find local groups for a variety of causes; an individual, for a nominal monthly fee, can set up her own Meetup page which will then be publicly listed. Users sort through a variety of compiled "tags," a one or two word description, to find a local group. Indicative of the ambiguity as to what constitutes a Tea Party group, only 79 out of the 680 "Tea Party" tags actually were Tea Party groups.

For example, “Glenn Beck Singles – Conservatives/Libertarians/Republicans” of Fort Lauderdale is not considered a Tea Party group; neither is the “Central New Mexico John Birch Society Chapter,” although both were tagged as such.

Meetup groups are worth studying because they present their members with a variety of ways to communicate: members can contact each other through message boards (which 60/79 groups have) or email (which 47/79 groups have). I chose to look at Tea Party emails instead of message boards for several reasons:

1) looking at a message board requires members to log onto the Meetup site, whereas emails appear in members’ personal inboxes, giving the email a slightly

<b>Table 1: Attributes of Meetup Groups</b>	
<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Number of Groups</b>
Locked	24
Email	47
<i>Has email with replies</i>	21
<i>Has email without replies</i>	26
Message Board	60
Total Groups	79

more personal feel – an impression confirmed by perusing both emails and message board postings; 2) emails tend to contain links and direct messages to members while message boards tend to resemble short didactic essays or blog posts, making it difficult to capture different kinds of communication between members; and 3) more

emails had consistent replies than did message board postings, as the latter tend not to elicit replies.

Of these 79 Meetup groups, many did not have publicly accessible emails, and not all email lists show communication between groups. Some Meetup groups are “locked” to the public, and in these cases I chose not to request access for four reasons: 1) because locked groups are not publicly accessible it dampens the replicability of the study;<sup>10</sup> 2) at best, only three additional groups would have

been added;<sup>11</sup> 3) there is little reason to believe that locked groups, several to which I have been granted access, communicate differently from non-locked groups; and 4) locked Meetup groups are generally locked because members choose this added level of privacy, which I believe should be respected.

Of groups that have publicly accessible emails, approximately half reply to each other while the other half are generally group leaders sending out reminders of meetings or updates regarding other local events. I discarded groups from the sample if over two thirds of their emails were from one or two group leaders. If most emails did not respond directly to other members of the group, then I discarded that group from the sample as well. While these groups are interesting and emails from leaders should and do merit examining, they do not reflect how members of the group communicate with each other.

Meetup websites by their nature create slightly different group interactions and may attract different demographics. For one, all Meetup groups are essentially the same, which could subtly alter the preferences or actions of various members. Second, different types of Tea Party groups might be attracted to Meetup groups – perhaps older groups that are less technologically savvy. Younger, more technologically conversant groups that want to avoid paying the \$12 monthly fee might use Facebook or Twitter to communicate with each other. Still, the database is comprised of a large cross-section of the Tea Party. Meetup groups are, as a whole, not statistically significantly different from other Tea Party websites (Appendix 1). The findings from this novel study of Tea Party emails are invaluable in accurately painting a better picture of the movement.

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to talk to Tea Partiers all over the country. In order to build better networks within states and sample the local Tea Party flavor, I specifically targeted New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Arizona because they represent the regional diversity of the Tea Party and have bustling Tea Party movements. All three states are large but manageable: they are sizeable enough to be reflective of their general regions but unlike, say, Texas or California, small enough for me to gain an understanding of their own brand of Tea Party dynamics in a short amount of time.

I studied the groups I did by looking at all the Tea Party groups in a given state, contacting someone from the website, and then asking them if they would be willing to talk with me about their involvement in the Tea Party. I always asked leaders I spoke with if they knew anybody else I should talk to, and they often recommended me to other group leaders. Using this methodology I was able to talk at length with 43 Tea Party group leaders, including representatives of roughly half of the Tea Parties in North Carolina and New Hampshire, as well as a sizeable number of group leaders in Arizona. In addition to telephone interviews, I also spent at least one week in each of the three states meeting with Tea Partiers in their homes or at restaurants and attending local meetings. Along the way, I spoke or interacted with countless other Tea Partiers “off the record,” trying to understand the *geist* of the movement. Almost all of the Tea Partiers I spoke with were gracious and welcoming although many, if not most, were initially skeptical of my background, especially coming from a “liberal bastion” like Harvard.<sup>12</sup>

### *Roadmap to the Chapters Ahead*

The task of Chapter One is to set the table for the rest of the thesis. It will first use the kinds of data just summarized to provide an overview of who Tea Partiers are, what they think, where they get their news, and what they hope to achieve. The second part of the chapter will familiarize the reader with prior scholarly research on social movements, focusing on what holds movements together. It will address what we can learn from prior social movement research about unity and diversity within an upsurge like the Tea Party and what lacunae in the literature remain to be filled.

Chapter Two fleshes out the puzzles about unity and diversity introduced earlier. I show that the Tea Party managed to unify people with disparate ideologies under one fiscally conservative umbrella. Serious internal differences, primarily between religious social conservatives and libertarians, did not simply disappear, however, and have continued to play a role within the movement. Specifically, Chapter Two answers three questions about the divisions within the movement: does a divide between social conservatives and libertarians hold even when we apply a rigorous definition of “Tea Partier?” Is this divide largely within local Tea Party groups, or between groups? In what ways do differences in member perspectives on important social issues cause problems for the Tea Party? I find that substantive philosophical divisions are quite real and strong enough that they might be considered politically debilitating. But this chapter concludes with evidence drawn from Tea Party emails that shows philosophical divisions are often not as harmful to Tea Party efforts as might be expected.

Chapter Three attempts to understand why divisions between social conservatives and libertarians are often held in check. First, it looks at past explanations for unity within social movements, specifically at some work done by Doug McAdams on the importance of pre-existing networks. However, as I document, the Tea Party was not built upon previous networks. Instead, people jumped in to Tea Party efforts to fight common enemies, namely a fear of the Left, and this serves to unify the movement. This chapter concludes by tracing their shared anxieties to Tea Partiers' very uniform consumption of information from *Fox News* and other conservative media, all of which combine to instill overriding fears and perceptions of the need to fight together against overwhelming threats from Democrats and the Left.

I conclude by looking at where the movement is going by briefly contrasting the unified 2010 midterms to what has happened thus far in the 2012 primary. Chapter Four argues that while the Tea Party was largely unified in 2010, they have failed to act as cohesively in 2012, in no small part because of an absence of a strong external threat and because of disunity within the echo chamber.

## Chapter 1: We the People

*Trying to describe the ideas of the Tea Party movement is a bit like a blind man trying to describe the elephant. The movement, like the elephant, exists. But no one, not even the Tea Partiers themselves, can seem to get hands around the whole of it. -- Alan Brinkley<sup>13</sup>*

The “Tea Party” moniker is a wonderful metaphor. It calls into mind revolt against a tyrannical government, patriotism, and a sense of standing together at the water’s edge to push back the British. But who and what, exactly, is the Tea Party? This chapter aims to answer that question by examining the Tea Party movement at large and looking at the two major components of the Tea Party: the members that comprise the movement and the organizations that support it. Second, it attempts specifically to answer several questions about prior scholarship and the Tea Party, namely: Which field of scholarly literature should be applied to the Tea Party – research on social movements or research on political parties? What can that literature teach us about movements more generally, and about the Tea Party specifically? How has success been defined in social movements and what variables affect how they succeed? Lastly, what factors have previous scholars found that are more or less likely to hold movements together?

### **Describing the Tea Party: Individuals**

As Alan Brinkley pointed out in this chapter’s epigraph, defining the Tea Party movement is no easy task. Tea Partiers regularly claim that their movement is diverse, and in some ways it is. Although it is very much a national movement with at least one group in every state, there is no national umbrella organization or defining characteristic of membership. Consequently, there is much partisan

bickering about who the Tea Partiers really are. *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board believes they are “ordinary folks who are using the power of the Internet to organize,” while others, like former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, derides the movement as “astroturf.”<sup>14</sup> While activists accurately assert that much of the movement is grassroots, Pelosi’s pun is not out of line because the movement is also supported by many “fake grassroots” organizations. This section will focus on the grassroots while the next section will focus briefly on the astroturf.

Unlike organizations such as Greenpeace or the Republican Party, there is no obvious defining characteristic of Tea Party membership. For example, in order to become a member of Greenpeace, one has to make a donation; to be a Republican, one must register as one. With the Tea Party no such qualification presents itself, and even leaders of groups find it difficult to articulate what constitutes membership in the movement. Sociologists such as Bert Klandermans have long differentiated between individuals who are actively involved in a movement and those who “are sympathetic to a given collective action frame”<sup>1</sup> while “shar[ing] certain values and beliefs.”<sup>15</sup> While individuals who are actively involved in the movement should be thought of as a category unto themselves, if an individual is a “Tea Party supporter” they are more accurately thought of as “mobilization potential:” part of the group of citizens that could be mobilized to support a given cause rather than merely be a movement member.<sup>16</sup> Based on the same website data I use in much of this thesis, Skocpol and Williamson generously estimate that there are 160,000 very active grassroots Tea Partiers

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<sup>1</sup> Gamson defines a collective action frame as “a set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns.” (Gamson, *The Social Psychology of Collective Action* 1992, 7)

across the United States and while this is certainly impressive, this is a much smaller share (.05%) than the percentage of Americans who claim to support the Tea Party (close to 25%).<sup>17</sup>

Distinguishing between these two groups matters. Asking an individual if they are a “Tea Party supporter” proves to be a bit of a Rorschach test because individuals project their own definitions onto a broad and diverse movement (Appendix 2 goes into greater detail). Many who agree with some of the movement’s aims are scared off by accusations of racism or disheartened by the inaccurate portrayals of the movement, from both the Right and the Left, in the media. Similarly, others who may be driven away by some of the specifics of the movement’s positions on a variety of issues agree with its general platitudes such as “lower taxes, less government, and more freedom.” Looking only at Tea Party supporters grossly overstates the movement’s impact and dilutes the Tea Party’s overall message by including individuals who are often much less conservative than those who attend meetings or donate to Tea Party groups. Because of this, a clearer definition for “Tea Partier” is needed. For the sake of this thesis, “Tea Party supporters” are those who support the movement and nothing more, whereas “true Tea Partiers” are those who actively attend meetings and have donated directly to the movement.<sup>1</sup>

So who are true Tea Partiers? While there are some flaws with widely held stereotypes about Tea Partiers, the general demographic stereotypes hold up fairly

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, most sources still use “Tea Party Supporter” as a measure of support for the movement. Even in cases where it is possible to filter the data only to include true Tea Partiers, this would result in a miniscule N. Because of this, much of the data in this paper, sadly, rely on the less precise definition of Tea Party supporter.

well. True Tea Partiers are indeed more likely to be older, whiter, and Republican – as are Tea Party supporters.<sup>18</sup> I regularly asked Tea Party group leaders if I could speak to any of the Democrats in their group but all demurred until, at last, one leader in North Carolina obliged. I asked the group member if she was a Democrat and indeed, she had continuously been a registered Democrat since the Kennedy administration. Shocked, I probed a little deeper and asked whom the last Democrat she voted for in a presidential contest was. She sat back in her chair to consider. “Oh my,” she said finally. “It would have to be, well, I think Johnson.” This was the only registered Democrat I found.<sup>1</sup>

Not all the stereotypes fit general descriptions of the movement. Early accusations of “stupidity” for Tea Party members ring hollow because, compared to the public at large, Tea Party members are better educated (+17% likely to have some college than the average American) and many of the Tea Partiers I talked to were quite articulate and well-read. Several of them proudly showed me stacks of books by conservative authors ranging from Glenn Beck to Ann Coulter; they also read more mainstream historians such as David McCullough or Jonathan Alter. This intelligence is likely not unrelated to the fact that Tea Partiers tend to be wealthier (+12% made more than \$50,000 a year) and more likely to vote (97% of Tea Partiers are registered to vote). Tea Partiers were not hit harder than most

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say all Tea Partiers are loyal Republicans: 43% of Tea Partiers have an unfavorable opinion of the GOP and many are independents in the sense that they are disgusted with both parties. However, Tea Partiers are substantially more likely to be closely involved with the local GOP and much more likely to “lean” Republican than other voters. They almost never vote for a Democrat. This story also reflects an interesting fact about Republicans who, historically, are much more likely than Democrats to vote for their party’s presidential candidate in any given year yet are less likely to claim that they always vote for the same party. (Keith, et al. 1992, 105)

Americans by the 2008 recession, with the exact same percentage saying that the recession had “not much effect” on their family as other Americans (30%). Furthermore, the amount of economic hardship suffered in the “Great Recession” did not make anyone more likely to favor the Tea Party.<sup>19</sup> Nor are Tea Partiers political neophytes: they have a strong record of past political activity.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, Tea Partiers are substantially more likely to attend religious services weekly (+15% more likely to attend weekly or almost every week) and much more likely to be married (+18%).

There are two ways to measure the salience of any issue in the Tea Party: first, look at that issue’s national prevalence best measured by how many groups nationwide reference it on their website. Second, look at the intensity of an issue, a slightly more complicated variable to measure. Intensity can be captured in several ways: look at which issues Tea Partiers say are most pressing in polls; do what one academic did and code the language of the signs at Tea Party rallies;<sup>21</sup> or, employing the method I have used, code Tea Party emails to find the most relevant issues in their everyday conversations (see Figure 1).

Regardless of the method, common wisdom suggests that the Tea Party cares most about curbing federal spending. Indeed, curbing spending is explicitly listed in the mission statement of the Tea Party Patriots, the largest and most representative national Tea Party group. Out of control government spending is mentioned on 78% of Tea Party websites, with 14% mentioning the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (“ObamaCare”), with the two issues thought of as interrelated. Survey data show that 22% of Tea Partiers considered the



healthcare bill. Indeed, “healthcare,” “health,” and “ObamaCare” are among the most frequent words used in the subject lines of Tea Party emails. This is mirrored in our website analysis, where 64% of Tea Party websites reference the healthcare bill. In fact, ObamaCare is one of the most unifying elements of the Tea Party: the 2010 *New York Times*/CBS poll found that only 2.1% of Tea Partiers supported it, and it is impossible to overstate Tea Partiers’ passionate loathing of that bill. *Connor Heard*, a Tea Partier in North Carolina, explained to me that “Hitler killed the Jews through their national healthcare,” a belief actively promoted by Glenn Beck.<sup>25</sup> Nationalized healthcare, as Tea Partiers see it, is the most visible step yet toward socialism taken by the Obama administration. “I see a society where the government is providing food and healthcare, and then the government becomes God,” Connor concluded. Others, like *Jonathan Rossi*, an openly gay Tea Party leader in New Hampshire, are more tempered in their beliefs. Jonathan simply believes that ObamaCare is going to end up costing too much money. When I mentioned that the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office scored ObamaCare as saving money, Jonathan retorted, “The CBO is lying about lowering the costs of ObamaCare, they’ve revised that estimate up so many times.” Later, he followed up by emailing me some articles from conservative blogs asserting that ObamaCare will cost more money than previously expected.

While it is true that most of what Tea Partiers talk about is ObamaCare and Federal spending, they also talk a lot about non-fiscal issues like immigration and Islam. As we would expect, groups in border-states are deeply passionate about immigration. In Arizona, especially after the polarizing passage of SB 1070

that called national attention to the immigration policy of the state, many Tea Party groups added “stopping illegal immigration” to their group mission statement. For example, the Yavapai Tea Party of Arizona added “protection of our U.S. Borders” to the usual “constitutionally limited government, fiscal responsibility, and free markets.”<sup>26</sup> Amazingly, Tea Party groups in the North and Midwest, where immigration is decidedly a less salient local issue, are just as likely as Southern border-states to mention immigration on their website.<sup>27</sup> As Chapter Three will argue, this likely suggests the important role a unifying national informational network plays.

Immigration is not the only issue that seems to come up surprisingly often given Tea Partiers’ strong predilection to focus on budgeting and spending issues. Tea Partiers are also very concerned about the rise of radical Islam, which is mentioned in 1.94% of Tea Party emails, making it slightly more talked about than the national debt (1.69%). Islam does not come up only in emails: 30% of Tea Party groups also mention it, usually in a negative light, somewhere on their website. Several groups have even brought in individuals as part of their regular lecture series to talk about the rise of radical Islam and, as the next chapter will show, it has proven to be a fairly divisive topic within groups. *Austin Harms*, the leader of a Tea Party group in North Carolina, told me that his group brought in a local speaker on radical Islam who, after 9/11, started teaching himself Muslim history by “reading the Koran” and learning a lot about the “Muslim Brotherhood.” While nobody would explain to me exactly what the speaker said during the presentation, Austin said that “four or five people” who had been

former “missionaries” to Muslim countries “walked out and they haven’t come back.”<sup>28</sup> He added, “I apologized and explained that we thought this was the kind of thing that would open your eyes.” Since then, Austin’s group has not talked about Islam because “it’s such a controversial issue.” Austin did try to do this in good faith; he knows and likes “some Arabs from the truck driving business” and acknowledged that not all Muslims are bad but “there are some bad apples in every bunch.”

There are some bad apples in the Tea Party too, but for the most part they are very kind, welcoming individuals who are genuinely concerned about the direction of the country. Rupert Murdoch was right when he said of the Tea Party that “they’re not extremist, they’re moderate centrists,” in the sense that they are not trying violently to overthrow the government but rather seeking change through electoral means.<sup>29</sup> However, politically, the Tea Party *is* extremist: their collective views on nearly every political issue are well outside mainstream America and quite different from even those of the median Republican’s.

To conclude, it is important to realize that Tea Partiers are most interested in “fiscal issues” but that they feel passionately about social issues as well. It is not unusual for the lines to be blurred between these issues – for example, the debate over funding Planned Parenthood is neither purely a fiscal nor social issue. Surprisingly, the Tea Party is not nearly as unified on social issues as they are on fiscal issues. As the next chapter will assert in more depth, a substantial portion of the Tea Party, nearly 40%, is closer to Democrats than to Republicans on social

issues. The next section, meanwhile, will focus on the more professional NGO side of the Tea Party.

### **Describing the Tea Party: National Organizations**

At the Wilson NC Tea Party meeting in North Carolina, the speaker and youthful leader of the group was asking for donations. “In case any of y’all haven’t heard, we still haven’t received any of the Koch money the liberal media promised us, so if y’all wouldn’t mind pitching in a couple of bucks to support the website it would be much appreciated.” The audience laughed knowingly. The person allegedly funding the whole movement, David Koch, had told *The New Yorker* in 2010, “I’ve never been to a Tea Party event. No one representing the Tea Party has ever even approached me.”<sup>30</sup> However, the real link between the local Tea Party groups on the ground and the national organizations that have funding by billionaire Republican donors like David Koch is more complicated.

Part of the reason that no one representing the Tea Party has approached Koch is because the Tea Party is not one national movement but rather a jumble of different groups loosely aggregated into an over-arching movement. This type of professional movement alongside a grassroots effort is not new.<sup>31</sup> Since 1977, sociologists like McCarthy and Zald have been aggregating movements into a “social movement industry,” (SMI) a collection of movement organizations that share similar goals.<sup>32</sup> While the vast number of local Tea Party groups, the focus of the prior section, can be thought of as an SMI, these grassroots groups are helped by a wide array of professional organizations.

Nearly all of the external non-local meeting groups that support the Tea Party can be placed into one of three distinct buckets, the first being “facilitators,” organizations that provide logistical and legal support, training, and, occasionally, funding. The exemplar groups that do this are AFP and FreedomWorks. The website banner for the Wilson NC Tea Party, the same group that has never approached Koch or directly received money from him, proclaims that it is “affiliated with the Americans for Prosperity Foundation [AFP]” which is, in turn, funded by Koch.<sup>33</sup> The Wilson NC Tea Party group runs its bank account through AFP; any check written to the group is addressed to AFP, which then adds another 25% of the donation to the check and places the new combined balance in the group’s account. A board member of the Eastern North Carolina (ENC) Tea Party said that AFP also provides legal work, resources, information, and buses all free of charge, or for a nominal cost, to member groups as needed. Even though the ENC is not affiliated with AFP, they told me that AFP is invariably happy to help Tea Party groups that are not technically member groups. Since Koch founded AFP he does donate to the Tea Party, even though he may not actively have any direct contact with any groups.

The second bucket is “thinkers,” groups that provide intellectual backing to the movement. These groups provide specific policy ideas and actions, and range from the nationally acclaimed Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute to local groups such as North Carolina’s John Locke Foundation. At a May, 2011 forum at the Harvard Institute of Politics, Jenny Beth Martin, a leader of the Tea Party Patriots, was asked by an elderly gentleman: “What action does the Tea

Party propose to deal with the inadequate financing for Medicare and Social Security?” She responded: “We don’t have the specific answer for how to address social security, but we understand that it has to be addressed.”<sup>34</sup> The groups that do have the specific answers are the thinkers. This bucket does not shape the ideology of the Tea Party movement at large, but rather provides expert ideas for actions on pieces of legislation or issues.

The last bucket is “champions,” groups that promote and guide the movement while shaping its ideals. This is a broader range of groups and is largely comprised of individuals such as Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Senators Jim DeMint and Rand Paul, and Representatives Ron Paul and Michele Bachmann. This group serves three main roles: to promote the group while proselytizing the Tea Party ideals; to shape the focus of the movement; and to serve as the public face of the movement primarily by defending the movement from public attack. The relationship between Tea Partiers and their champions is clearly symbiotic: 63% of Tea Party supporters say they most frequently watch *Fox News* compared to 33% of non-Tea Party Republicans; Glenn Beck receives the excellent ratings he does because of Tea Party support; Sarah Palin’s and Michele Bachmann’s political bases come from the Tea Party; and in conservative states where the Republican primary determines the outcome more so than the general election, the support of the Tea Party’s frequent voters is an invaluable constituency to have.<sup>35</sup> However, the relationship between Tea Partiers and their champions can be quite fickle at times.

The Tea Party Patriots (TPP) are in a category unto themselves. They are the largest Tea Party group in the nation, claiming over 3,000 local affiliates and 15 million members.<sup>36</sup> However, these numbers are unquestionably inflated: for example, the Lincoln County Tea Party in Troy, Missouri, has no members or events. Their message board is a collection of politically charged spam messages and one prospective member's note which reads, "I tried to join the group, however, the button does not work."<sup>37</sup> Yet despite these exaggerations, the TPP is the single most influential group in the nation. 53% of Tea Party websites across the nation directly link to the TPP website, a significantly higher rate than similar minded groups such as Tea Party Express (18%) and Tea Party Nation (8%), or facilitators like AFP (22%) and FreedomWorks (29%). While their influence varies across the country, ranging from 0% of groups in North Dakota to 98% of groups in California, there is little doubt that the TPP is the single best place to look for the national values of the Tea Party.

### **Prior Scholarship**

Any study of the Tea Party would be remiss if it ignored prior scholarly work on social movements. In that vein of thinking, the aims of this section are threefold. First, to define what a social movement is by briefly reviewing how the role of the individual versus the collective has been interpreted in academia over time. Second, to look at success in movements, arguing that one of the foundations for success is group cohesiveness. Third, to examine the past mechanisms that hold movements together and give them the potential to succeed.

What is the Tea Party? Despite all the talk of “Tea Party candidates” and the very name itself, the Tea Party is not a political party.<sup>1</sup> Political parties, in an academic sense, are clearly circumscribed groups that seek to maximize votes and win elections.<sup>38</sup> The Tea Party, inasmuch as it interacts with candidates, actively seeks to galvanize them, and the national political discourse, away from the political middle and further to the right. This, at least according to the median voter theorem, is a recipe guaranteed to lose elections.<sup>39</sup> But the Tea Party is not designed to help any individual party win elections; rather, it seeks to convey dissatisfaction with a set of issues to the government – which is Lipset’s definition of a social movement.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the term “social movement” is imprecise. For example, groups as diverse in nature and intent as public interest lobbies (e.g. Sierra Club, NRA), full-scale revolutions (e.g. China, Iran), and religious movements (e.g., People’s Temple, Nichiren Shoshu) have all been considered social movements.<sup>41</sup> Some political scientists argue that social movements do little more than bear a “family resemblance” to one another in that each movement shares some features with others but no one feature is both sufficiently inclusive and sufficiently exclusive to warrant a rigorous definition.<sup>42</sup>

In 1920, in one of the earliest academic attempts at understanding social movements, Martin claimed that social movements were “people going crazy together.”<sup>43</sup> Based primarily on the social conflicts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, early analysis of social movements assumed that when collective action occurred, individual actors came together to form a unitary character spurred on by

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<sup>1</sup> Some Tea Partiers claim that the name “Tea Party” is a link to the colonial Boston Tea Party tax protests while others claim that “TEA” is really an acronym for **T**axed **E**nough **A**lready.

frustration or deprivation.<sup>44</sup> This would suggest that perhaps the Tea Party came out of the decline in income associated with the 2008 Great Recession. However, Tea Partiers report being no harder hit than any other demographic suggesting that this theory, while interesting conceptually, fails to explain why some individuals choose to participate in social movements whereas other people, apparently in the same situation, do not. Others argued that collective action was a form of irrational and pathological behavior.<sup>45</sup> These theories were focused largely on the interaction between movements and authorities, as would be expected of scholars writing during the time when many of the international protest movements of the 1940s and '50s actively fought against totalitarian governments for new rights or regime change.

This approach fell out of favor for the same reason that it fails to explain the Tea Party: it does not explain why some individuals partake in social protest while others, similarly deprived, do not. The theoretical focus then shifted from the aggregate level to the individual level. Economist Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action* argued that individuals should be thought of as rational actors who view collective action as a means to achieve a goal.<sup>46</sup> From this premise, McCarthy and Zald founded Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT). RMT argues that social movements emerge not so much because grievances increase but rather because available resources increase within an aggrieved population – such as the wealthy, politically experienced, and oftentimes retired Tea Partiers – giving them resources to protest.<sup>47</sup>

RMT quickly swept through the field. In the 1970s, more than half (56%) of the social movement and collective action articles in the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and the *American Political Science Review* were based on the theoretical approach of resource mobilization; by the early 1980s, it was almost three quarters.<sup>48</sup> However, resource mobilization has its flaws. Critics point to the absence of a plausible account of values, grievances, ideology, and collective identity in the resource mobilization paradigm.<sup>49</sup> Critics such as Myra Marx Fereee argue against this “radical individualism,” since it “presupposes a pseudo-universal human actor” for whom “race, class, gender, and historical circumstances do not determine perceptions in any significant or socially significant way.”<sup>50</sup> Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci, in a nice turn of phrase, adds that movements should be understood as being composed of individuals, not as “unitary empirical datum.”<sup>51</sup>

Emerging from this was New Social Movement theory. Proponents asserted that this theory brought the field back to its social psychological roots, having “jettisoned the old baggage of irrationality and social pathology” that defined the first wave of social movement analysis.<sup>52</sup> Melucci, the exemplar author of this theory, suggested that the construction of a collective identity is the most central task of “new” social movements.<sup>53</sup> New social movement theorists emphasize that movements are not solid blocks but instead heterogeneous, fragile, complex groups of individuals who are acting for a variety of wide-ranging reasons.

With this emphasis on the differences in individuals, new social movement theory implies that movements must naturally have divisions, as it is almost impossible for a group of diverse individuals of a given size who are unified by only a few variables to act as a single body. Therefore, solidarity in movements cannot be taken as a given state of affairs but rather is actively changing. As Melucci writes:

...this on-going process of construction of a sense of 'we' can succeed for various reasons: for instance, because of effective leadership, workable organizational forms, or strong reserves of expressive action. But it can also fail, in which case collective action disintegrates. The task of sociological analysis is to understand how and why the game of solidarity succeeds or fails.<sup>54</sup>

Accordingly, his definition of a social movement hinges around the collective. He argues that a social movement contains three dimensions: 1) it involves "solidarity," mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit; 2) it engages in conflict with an opposition; and 3) it must "break the limits of compatibility of a system" by "push[ing] the system beyond the range of variations that it can tolerate without altering its structure."<sup>55</sup>

Most scholars are less overt about the importance of establishing and maintaining a collective identity and it is instead implicit in their definition. For example, according to Sydney Tarrow, social movements are "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities."<sup>56</sup> Tarrow emphasizes that: 1) movements mount disruptive action against elites, cultural codes, other groups, and authorities; 2) they do so in the name of common claims against opponents, authorities, and elites; 3) they are rooted in feelings of solidarity or collective

identity; and 4) it is only by sustaining their resulting collective action that contention turns into a social movement.<sup>57</sup>

With definitions of social movements established, it then becomes necessary to know how and why they succeed. Defining success is nearly impossible for a social movement because success evolves with the group. For example, how do we measure the success of a group like the NAACP? Undoubtedly it has made great strides, but has it fully achieved a world without discrimination? Most of the time success falls under Potter Stewart's "I know it when I see it" clause, although some scholars have tried to develop a discrete definition of success. Most notably William Gamson, who argues in his seminal work *The Strategy of Social Protest* that success for social movements could be broken down into two basic clusters, one concerned with "the fate of the challenging group as an organization" and one with "the distribution of new advantages to the group's beneficiary."<sup>58</sup>

Gamson also argues, somewhat arbitrarily, that a movement can be considered effective (although that is not his term) if it accomplishes at least half of its objectives. This has resulted, predictably, in few successful movements when it comes to displacing established governments. This definition not only favors groups with more modest aims but also ignores the indirect outcomes that are the result of "failed" social movements, such as groups that change public perceptions of an issue, create cohorts committed to activist careers, and form countermovements.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the difficulties in definition, social movements employ a variety of approaches to attempt to achieve this “success.” Tarrow, building on the work of Gamson, argues that there are three major ways through which social movements engage the status quo: violent encounters, organized public demonstrations, and creative disruptions.<sup>60</sup> These are all examples, he argues, of “public performances.”<sup>61</sup> This echoes claims made by Gamson who asserted that “virtually every aspect of a challenger’s experience – recruitment efforts, organization, strategy, and tactics – is affected by a potential or actual media presence.”<sup>62</sup> As Chapter Three argues the Tea Party has, symbiotically, cleverly taken advantage of this strategy by attracting heavy doses of media attention.

All social scientists agree, however, that a critical underpinning of any successful social movement is cohesion within the movement. A variety of psychological studies has shown that when group cohesion is strong, the group will be motivated to perform well and be better able to coordinate activities instrumental in reaching their disparate goals.<sup>63</sup> However, in the social sciences this foundation is often overlooked. Most scholars focus on predicting how and when movements will arise, what causes them to succeed, or on relationships with their aggressors.<sup>64</sup> Still as Klandermans asserts:

Very few students of social movements seem to appreciate that movements must not only attract participants but also retain and even, at times, lose them. As great as the abundance of research on the first of these processes, however, is the dearth of studies on the latter two.<sup>65</sup>

Klandermans believes that it is the type of commitment (affective, continuance, and normative) that broadly explains why an individual leaves the group.<sup>66</sup>

Another way of approaching the same question is to examine what characteristics or situations promote solidarity within a movement? Recent social scholars argue that acceptance of group think, pre-existing social relationships, organizational forms that support and sustain the personal needs of participants and embody the movement's collective identity, and group success are all important factors for a group to exhibit high levels of cohesion.<sup>67</sup>

Sociologists have pointed to Fantasia who argues that union solidarity arises only if two conditions are met: individuals come to accept newly unfolding group logic and think in terms of what the group as a whole can accomplish, and potential members become convinced that movement strategies can actually succeed. The most important component in this group logic is the belief that unless large numbers join the group effort, nobody will benefit.<sup>68</sup>

Others have focused more on the role of pre-existing social relationships, which have played a huge role in creating a wide variety of new movements.<sup>69</sup> Friedman and McAdam point out that "movements as diverse as a Texas anti-pornography effort, the Populist party, the Berkeley free speech movement, and the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s found their impetus in existing organizations."<sup>70</sup> Strong, pre-existing relationships result in a better sense of solidarity and attachment to the movement, especially in situations with high levels of risk for the volunteers. McAdam, for example, has looked at risky activism for participants in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project, comparing those who signed up and dropped out with those who made it all the way to Mississippi. Those who had strong ties to others had half the dropout rate

compared to the group as a whole.<sup>71</sup> Chapter Three, however, argues that within the Tea Party strong pre-existing networks do not seem to be the norm.

Organizational characteristics are, as expected, more diverse and complicated. Some groups use an internal division of labor, identifying members who would risk arrest and jail or who might act as partners to help the families of the detained meet their everyday demands. Others work to create “open spaces” or safe havens for members within the movement.<sup>72</sup> These divisions of labor help high-risk groups find safe spaces and increase group cohesiveness. Many Tea Party groups, which rarely risk arrest, employ a variety of internal structures such as electing officers, recruiting members, or researching specific issues. From my experience, groups that have a division of labor tend to perform better. However, it is not clear whether this is because a division of labor leads to better performance or because better performance results in more work, which necessitates assigning tasks.

Alongside group cohesiveness, an extensive literature suggests that protest takes place only if members believe they can successfully enact change and eliminate, or at least mitigate, grievances.<sup>73</sup> Value-expectancy theory and collective action theory both hold that an individual’s behavior is a function of the value of the expected outcomes of behavior.<sup>74</sup> Klandermans, looking at the Dutch peace movement, has shown that decline of a movement is highly correlated with commitment: commitment goes down as activity levels decrease.<sup>75</sup> Success breeds success, so more successful movements are likely to encourage more group involvement, perhaps as a result of the accompanying morale boosts. It is difficult

to disaggregate, however, the role that success plays in holding a movement together; an unsuccessful movement may be unsuccessful for a variety of reasons (e.g. poor leadership) which, although correlated with movement commitment, might actually be due to a spurious variable.

Still relatively unacknowledged in recent academic debates is the role of fear. Since the late 1940s, psychologists have long held that external conflict promotes internal cohesion.<sup>76</sup> In 1947 Sociologist Robin M. Williams Jr. looked closely at the role external threats play in bringing a group together. Williams hypothesized that external conflict increases group cohesion only if two conditions are met: a consensus among the group that its preservation is worthwhile, and whether the threat is perceived to be against the group as a whole.<sup>77</sup> More recent studies, and anecdotal evidence, suggest that these findings are still relevant today.<sup>78</sup> For example, as I write this the front page of the *Christian Science Monitor* reads: “Tornado’s aftermath: Illinois town is stunned... and roused to action.”<sup>79</sup> The town came together in response to an external threat, the tornado, because it threatened the entire village and the citizens had a desire to save their town. Similarly, as Chapter Three will argue, Tea Partiers believe their ideals and way of life are under attack from a hostile Left. However, although Tea Partiers believe that preservation of the movement’s ideals are important, the threat is often not perceived to be against the group as a whole, which causes them to splinter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided some basic background information on the Tea Party movement. First, I investigated the important but rarely made distinction between those who support the Tea Party and those who attend Tea Party events. With that in mind, I surveyed the issues that true Tea Partiers care about as well as their demographics. From this it is clear that Tea Partiers are passionate about a wide array of issues beyond just fiscal ones. This passion raises a question answered in the next chapter, namely, are Tea Partiers unified on social issues? If not, what is the effect of this on the movement?

The second section looked at the broader social movement industry in which the Tea Party finds itself. Tea Party groups work alongside three other groups – facilitators, thinkers, and champions – who all play an important role in keeping the movement operational, funded, and unified. The last section then provided a brief history of scholarly work on social movements. Importantly, prior scholars have emphasized that divisions within groups are often mended through internal group methods while psychological insights suggest that external factors may play an equally important role. This scholarly background enhances our understanding of the rise of the Tea Party movement.

## Chapter 2: Dynamics of the Tea Party

*If we had two forums through which this website accommodated the interests of those who look at problems within a religious perspective, and another which deals with the issues from a secular/civic approach for dealing with the problems our government creates for us, we could both move forward supporting each other and collaborating in our common aim. This is not to suggest two separate groups, but rather a simultaneous conversation where hang ups about language do not create interference.<sup>1</sup>*

--Email sent on a Texas Tea Party website

*Although Tea Party activists come from a variety of backgrounds, they are united in a core set of beliefs. That is the inherent strength of the movement. When you have principle to guide your activism, you do not need an organizational hierarchy. -- Dick Arney and Matt Kibbe<sup>80</sup>*

One of the most surprising academic findings on the Tea Party was uncovered by Emily Ekins, a graduate student at UCLA.<sup>ii</sup> Looking closely at three polls, including *The New York Times*/CBS 2010 survey, the same one used in much of this thesis, Emily noticed that there was an interesting division in the Tea Party:

The Tea Party seems unified on the role of government questions regarding economics and business; however, they are roughly split in half about the government promoting a particular set of values. The 46%<sup>iii</sup> who believe government should promote traditional family values in our society could be called the Tea Party conservative half of the Tea Party. The 51% who believe government should not promote any particular set of values could be called the Tea Party leaning-libertarian half of the Tea Party...<sup>81</sup>

With this in mind, there are three questions about this divide that need answering: first, Ekins looked only at Tea Party supporters, not true Tea Partiers. So does this divide persist statistically even when we apply a more rigorous definition of Tea Partier? Second, is this divide within groups or between groups?

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<sup>i</sup> Instead of identifying the errors in hastily written emails with a “[sic],” I chose to transcribe the email as written.

<sup>ii</sup> An earlier draft of this chapter was presented at the Northeastern Political Science Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia, PA, on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> Differences between Ekin’s numbers and my numbers are due to the use of different polls: in this case, Ekins referred to the Politico/Target Point 2010 Poll.

That is, does the evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, suggest that there are distinct libertarian groups and social conservative groups? Or do most groups contain both social conservatives and libertarians? Third, how often does this divide appear to cause problems?

### **A True Divide**

In order to define “libertarian” and “social conservative,” Ekins used survey respondents’ answers to different questions on the role of government. For *The New York Times*/CBS poll, a respondent was categorized a Tea Party libertarian, one who favors small government and is socially liberal, if they met all of the following conditions: 1) they were a Tea Party supporter; 2) they favored gay marriage or civil unions; and 3) they favored abortion being available or available within limits. Social conservatives comprised the rest. This is not to say that Tea Party libertarians define themselves as textbook philosophical libertarians. Some of the Tea Partiers who did self-identify as libertarians would not be categorized as a Tea Party libertarian and vice versa.

Although these labels are slightly imprecise, they do apply to large swaths of individuals within the Tea Party; however, it is difficult to pin down exactly how large these factions are. Surveys are snapshots in time, meaning that numbers will vary because of the wording of the questions, timing of the data, or innumerable other things. For example, Ekins found that the breakdown of social conservatives in the Tea Party ranged anywhere from 52% to 58% (with libertarians making up the rest). Other researchers, like Robert Putnam, have

found by using a different survey with slightly different wording that the number may be closer to 31%. Regardless of the precise number, the important thing is that at least a third, and quite possibly more, appear to be Tea Party libertarians in that they favor small government and are socially liberal.

The differences between these two groups are statistically significant<sup>I</sup> in many regards.<sup>II</sup> Libertarians are much more likely to come from the West (30% to 20%) and Northeast (19% to 11%) than social conservatives, who are much more likely to be from the South (31% to 45%). Libertarians are less likely to vote the GOP party line (15% to 20%) and have a much lower favorability to George Bush (50% to 62%), Sarah Palin (58% to 73%) and Glenn Beck (49% to 67%).

Libertarians are much more likely to believe that Obama was born in this country (54% to 31%) and are much more likely to be concerned solely with economic issues (90% to 69%). Tea Party libertarians are also less likely to watch hosted news shows (42% vs. 62%).

Yet the groups are overwhelmingly similar in some respects. Both agree that Obama is “moving the country toward socialism.” Some slight but nonetheless statistically significant differences exist with regard to how they feel about economic issues, but for the most part the groups are remarkably similar when asked about federal spending, perceptions of the economy, and perceptions

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<sup>I</sup> Unless noted otherwise, all differences in this section are significant at the .01 level.

<sup>II</sup> This section uses data from the 2010 *New York Times*/CBS poll. This poll looked at 881 Tea Party supporters making it the largest poll, to date, of the Tea Party. Its large size has enabled scholars to get more accurate breakdowns of individuals in each of these groups, looks that are not possible in the typical smaller study. The movement has undoubtedly changed since 2010, when it was fairly new, but the size of this survey still makes it the best picture of the movement to date. Accordingly, many academics refer to it in their studies of the Tea Party: Skocpol and Williamson, 2012; Campbell and Putnam 2010; E. M. Ekins 2011; Abramowitz, 2011.

of government. Both groups widely believe the 2009 bailouts were unnecessary and that the economic stimulus package was ineffective or made things worse. Both groups were affected by the recession similarly and both report similar family financial situations. In short, almost all of the substantial differences between these two groups are contained within their disagreements over social issues and there is mostly, but not complete, agreement on economic issues.<sup>82</sup>

<b>Table 2: Tea Partiers and Supporters as Social Conservatives and Libertarians</b>				
		Ideological Breakdown		Total
		Social Conservative	Libertarian (Social Liberal)	
Tea Party Supporter	Count	369	303	672
	%	54.9%	45.1%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	112	82	194
	%	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	492	389	881
	%	55.8%	44.2%	100.0%

It is important that Ekin's divide exists within the movement and not just among those who support the movement from afar. If, for example, the roughly 40% of Tea Party supporters who identified as libertarians never attended meetings or donated but instead supported the movement from the comfort of their homes, that would present a very different picture of a divide than if social conservatives and libertarians sat next to each other within group meetings. As Table 2 shows, it appears that this divide does exist between both Tea Party Supporters and true Tea Partiers. Although libertarians are slightly more likely to be "supporters" and not "Tea Partiers," the difference is relatively minor and not

statistically significant.<sup>83</sup> Even when applying a more rigorous definition of Tea Partier, the division outlined by Ekins certainly seems to exist.

### **Herein Lies the Divide**

The polling is clear: when looking at individuals who report going to meetings and donating to the Tea Party there is a divide within the nationwide composition of the Tea Party movement. But is this divide inside or between groups? One group leader in Arizona, *Brian Butler*, told me that he conducted an informal poll of his group and found that 95% of the hands in the air were pro-life. Despite this overwhelming social conservative tendency, Brian told me that this group had decided to focus on “fiscal values and our economic values” in an effort to attract more voters. They do have occasional, usually spontaneous, debates over social issues, however. One time, Brian said, they spent 45 minutes on “the abortion issue.”

A few weeks later I conducted an informal online opt-in poll with a vibrant and active Tea Party group in New Hampshire which revealed that about 75% of the members of the group claimed to be pro-life and about 36% claimed to be “libertarian” instead of “conservative.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps not unrelatedly, this group is much more bellicose than most groups, often sending a hundred emails a day arguing, often very heatedly, about who is the best Republican presidential candidate or what to do about a bill in the New Hampshire State Legislature. What these anecdotes indicate is that there is often something of a divide within

groups; however, which of these two groups presents a more accurate national picture of the severity of the divide?

The best way to test this would be to poll every Tea Party group, or at least a representative sample, in the country to measure their internal composition. Given limited time and resources, not to mention the infeasibility of obtaining a good sample due to many groups' skepticism toward members of the media or the academy, the next best approach is to use proxy variables. In our national Tea Party website database we look at the specific issues that groups talk about. For instance, we always check to see if a Tea Party group links to the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, a popular think tank that about 12% of Tea Party groups link to. Additionally, about 16% of all Tea Party groups link to the Campaign for Liberty, the group that spun out of nationally popular libertarian Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign. While obviously there are non-libertarian individuals who are Paul supporters, and non-libertarians who read the Cato Institute's website, this proxy seems to be as good an indicator as any for gauging a libertarian presence within the group.

Creating a proxy for social conservatives is trickier: we cannot look at whether or not groups talk about social issues because we did not differentiate as to whether or not each group was pro-choice or pro-life.<sup>1 85</sup> However, one strong proxy for social conservatives is religion. As Table 3 illustrates, while both groups are religious there is, as expected, a large discrepancy in the church attendance of Tea Party social conservatives as compared to Tea Party

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<sup>1</sup> However, almost all groups were pro-life. The same correlation test as the one run below reveals that there is a moderate positive relationship (.250) significant at the 0.00 level. This holds when controlling for website quality.

libertarians.<sup>86</sup> Because of this, seeing whether groups mention “religion” seems like a good proxy variable for social conservatives. It is necessary to clarify what the religion variable stands for as it is slightly more opaque than the binary link/no link to the Cato Institute. In a country as religious as America we frequently see what Robert Bellah termed “civil religion” – that is, religious invocations that are accepted as part of the American vernacular, such as “God Bless America.”<sup>87</sup> Under my classification system, “religion” stands for explicitly Christian statements that go beyond civil religion. For example, the North Bay Patriots, a California Tea Party group, broadcast on their website that “America was born of the Judeo-Christian ethic, and our laws are governed by a morality, having an origin in God.”<sup>88</sup>

**Table 3: How Often Do Tea Party Social Conservatives and Libertarians attend Church?**

		Religious Attendance					Total
		Every week	Almost every week	Once or twice a month	A few times a year	Never	
Social Conservative	Count	263	56	42	69	57	492
	%	53.5%	11.4%	8.5%	14.0%	11.6%	100.0%
Libertarian (Social Liberal)	Count	83	50	48	110	98	389
	%	21.3%	12.9%	12.3%	28.3%	25.2%	100.0%

When running a correlation analysis between groups that link to the Cato Institute or the Campaign for Liberty and groups that mention religion, there is a weak positive (.131) statistically significant correlation (at the .01 level).<sup>89</sup> This relationship could be because of a spurious variable in the complexity of the

website; that is, more complicated websites are more likely going to have more links and posts, resulting in a greater likelihood for religious references in passing. However, even when controlling for website complexity using a 1-3 scale of how complicated and intricate the website appears, we find a similar level of statistical significance (again at the .01 level). It seems that the national division between Tea Party social conservatives and Tea Party libertarians is largely confined *within* groups, not *between* different groups.

This intuitively makes sense. If there were more Tea Party groups geographically close to each other, we would expect more members to shift into more ideologically compatible groups. But there simply are not enough Tea Party groups for this to be possible: 95% of Tea Party groups meet in different zip codes. Tea Partiers not in urban areas are effectively given the choice of not attending Tea Party meetings at all, starting their own, or continuing to go to the nearest local group. Given these options, it seems that few individuals choose to leave the group geographically close to them, although some do for ideological reasons.

It is quite possible that these divides do vary regionally or from town to town. Americans are increasingly being sorted into more politically homogenous neighborhoods.<sup>90</sup> The result of this is that there likely are some towns, perhaps deep in the Bible Belt, that simply do not have any libertarians, let alone any Tea Party libertarians. Still, it appears that many groups do suffer from this very real divide.

## **This Division Rarely Causes Problems**

In their book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, Skocpol and Williamson tell a fascinating story about a Tea Party group leader who faced so many tensions between libertarians and social conservatives that she felt the need to divide the group in two. The libertarian group got naming rights and is now meeting as “the regular Tea Party” while the other group is meeting as “the Christian Tea Party.”<sup>91</sup> This is certainly unusual but it is not completely uncommon. One group leader in North Carolina, *Steven Bombino*, did not completely split his group, but did spin off a separate group that was more focused on “moral and religious issues.” Steve, who then became the leader of the more religious splinter group, said, “My group speaks openly about Jesus Christ, we speak about spiritual things, we talk about good and evil. The Tea Party doesn’t want to do that.” He believed it was necessary to do this because “you could cut all the taxes, cut all the spending, but you haven’t solved the problem.” Steve believes that current economic woes grew out of the erosion of moral and religious values in the U.S. He is atypical of the group leaders I spoke with in his passion for increasing the role that religion should play in the Tea Party and the nation more broadly. While many Tea Partiers share similar feelings to Steve, or echo Steve’s sentiment that religion should play a larger role in the Tea Party, most of the time this divide is contained; groups rarely divide up and the data show that these issues do not often arise.<sup>92</sup>

Political disagreement is at the heart of many theoretical accounts of liberal democratic politics, from John Stuart Mill to Robert Dahl.<sup>93</sup> Debate leads

to more well-formed opinions<sup>94</sup> and encourages groups to be more tolerant of the views of others.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, individuals are increasingly located in politically homogeneous networks.<sup>96</sup> When people get sorted into similar units, basic group psychology shows that their attitudes will be further polarized in one direction, even when they are not presorted based on prior beliefs as they are in the case of the Tea Party, making political disagreement less likely to occur.<sup>97</sup> In the rare event that individuals do encounter conflicting beliefs, theories of political communication anchored in cognitive dissonance suggest that disagreement produces mental stress which leads to confusion, ambivalence, and political withdrawal.<sup>98</sup> Mental stress makes political debate unlikely to occur and unlikely to continue for very long when it does.<sup>99</sup> Because of this, conflict-averse individuals will, wherever possible, avoid confrontation either by acquiescence or silence.<sup>100</sup> As disagreements may break groups apart, this tendency toward going-along-to-get-along can help groups survive.<sup>101</sup>

Still, polling has suggested that nearly 80% of individuals report having frequent political disagreements in the last year.<sup>102</sup> So it would be expected that groups that contain distinct factions like the Tea Party would be expected to disagree over some issues. Some recent scholarship has demonstrated that while groups may move toward homogeneity in opinions, it is almost impossible to get to total group agreement without having some discord along the way.<sup>103</sup>

Table 4 shows the rates of disagreement within the Tea Party. I have read through thousands of randomly selected emails and noted certain attributes about them. First of all, a plurality (24% of all total emails and just over half of all

responses) corroborates the previous email. By corroborate I mean that an email agrees with the premise of an initial email and adds on a piece of supporting evidence or takes the argument slightly further. For example, an initial email

**Table 4: How Often do Tea Partiers Agree and Disagree in their Emails?**

	Number of Emails	Percent of Total
Corroborate	805	24.0%
Agree Strategy	78	2.3%
Agree Substance	91	2.7%
<i>Total Agree:</i>	974	29%
Disagree Strategy:	85	2.5%
Disagree Substance:	35	1.0%
<i>Total Disagree</i>	120	3.5%
<i>Total:</i>	2068	61.5%
<i>Total Emails:</i>	3354	100%

might say something like, “Ron Paul believes that we shouldn’t kill U.S. citizens like [Al Qaeda Terrorist] Al-Alwaki.” A corroborating email might add something like, “If Obama is killing U.S. citizens, who is to say that we won’t be next?” Or, “That’s right, it violates due process.” An email that “agrees” is one that explicitly agrees with the prior email but does not add any new information or opinions.

I break all agreements and disagreements into two broad categories: the first is strategic agreement/disagreement and the second is substantive agreement/disagreement. Strategic implies that it is an issue about group direction. For example, should our Tea Party form a third party? Which candidate is most electable? Is Main Street or Elm Street better for protesting? Substantive disagreement is issue based. For example, an email that responded to an initial

email stating “I think we should spend *more* money on welfare” by replying “No, I think we should spend *less* money on welfare” would be an obvious example of substantive disagreement.

When we look at the emails of the Tea Party we see that the Tea Party spends most of its time corroborating each other’s emails. This is not necessarily a surprise. Most Tea Party group leaders believe that one of the most important things that they can do is educate their members about what is going on today. For example, the Colorado River Tea Party’s “mission” is to “attract, *educate* and mobilize” fellow citizens. *Cory Lowe*, a regular attendee of the Wilson NC Tea Party group, told me that the “Tea Party is more of a learning group” and showed me an immense stack of books that he was working on. Since joining the Tea Party, Cory said that “he had read more than in the last ten years combined.” When Cory watches and listens to Glenn Beck he sees a lot of “opportunity to confirm what I already knew” but also sees a lot of information that he had not necessarily had his “eyes opened to” yet. The Tea Party emails confirm this shared learning mentality and they often take time to help out each other’s arguments or suggest a supporting piece of information to another’s argument.

Surprisingly, it is extremely rare to see a Tea Partier disagree with another Tea Partier, given the large philosophical divide outlined earlier between social conservatives and libertarians on social issues. Only 1% of emails disagreed with the substance of another email (Table 4). Even more surprising is what the arguments tend to be about (Appendix 5). There seems to be general lack of debate around immigration, healthcare, and the national debt. Rather, most of the

debates seem to occur around two major fault lines: Islam and spending.

However, the debate over spending was almost entirely concentrated in one group in Alaska where one member who lived in the Alaskan “bush” was looking for infrastructure spending to lower the local price of milk which was high because it had to be flown to him, whereas someone else argued that this was “pork” spending. Debates about Islam came up in a variety of different groups, as mentioned earlier, often in response to a particularly Islamophobic comment, as in the following dialogue:

Social Conservative: The reason we suspect Muslims is because their religion teaches that infidels (non-Muslims) are to be treated like dogs. It is written into their religion that they can lie to us and kill us to promote Islam.

Libertarian: I think it’s extremely prejudiced to condemn a whole religion and race of people under any circumstance.

The libertarian in this example was eventually banished from the group for this exchange, which had quickly become quite heated.<sup>104</sup>

Social issue debates were fairly rare. Provocative social issue emails were not. Sometimes they were sent by libertarians: I saw one email promoting the legalization of marijuana. More often they were sent by social conservatives. I saw more than one that read something like this:

I just want it to be known that Gay/Lesbian and now Jihad are both moments which are absorbing our kids and those with weak minds. The more freedom they have the more our country will be suffering. The Muslim training camps, and all the propaganda should be stopped.

It is hard to imagine a gay member of the Tea Party, like Jonathan Rossi, or a socially liberal person tolerating emails like this for long.

A Tea Party leader in Arizona told me a story about a group member who stood up in a meeting and began talking about abortion. The leader told me that he

quickly shut this discussion down because, as he explained to the rogue member, “that’s not what the Tea Party is about.” But when I attended his group’s meeting, I saw social issues come up twice: once overtly and once more subtly under the guise of budget issues. Toward the end of the meeting a middle-aged man stood up and explained, at first calmly but gradually getting angrier, that “we need to talk to our young people about the destruction of the American family. The GLBT’s argument is lies... Y’all have to show them what liars they are, they’re going to tell you to trust their words and you have to call ‘em out on it.” Nobody disagreed and a few people added a point or two of corroboration, including a lengthy and humorous anecdote from the day’s leader about how girls were dressing much less conservatively than they did when he was growing up.

Earlier in the meeting, the group’s Education sub-committee reported on Kevin Jennings, the former Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools for the U.S. Department of Education. The group was outraged over Internet myths that Jennings abused young boys and encouraged a gay lifestyle. When I asked the leader of the Education sub-committee about this, she explained that the group was not irate that Jennings was gay but that their tax dollars were paying for his position. This situation is similar to the Tea Party outrage over federal tax dollars going to Planned Parenthood. While a fiscal argument about these issues can be made, it is hard to believe that these are not just social issues masquerading as fiscal issues.

Although they may not always be open about it Tea Partiers, especially social conservative Tea Partiers, do care about social issues and they do come up

in their group discussions. Given the large philosophical divide that appears to run through the Tea Party groups this should be a significant problem, but that does not seem to be the case. Within their emails, Tea Partiers seem broadly to agree with each other even on controversial issues. Far from being at the brink of internecine conflict, nearly all of the groups' meetings I attended were cordial. What explains how Tea Partiers have managed to overcome these potentially crippling divisions within the movement? After briefly addressing possible counterarguments, the next chapter will answer that question.

### **Counterarguments**

Many potentially controversial claims are laid out in this chapter. Challenges to these claims could be placed into two main categories. First are possible arguments as to why this division might not exist within the movement; within this category are concerns that libertarians have left the Tea Party en masse or that social conservatives from the Christian Right have co-opted the movement, so that now the Christian Right and the Tea Party are largely indistinguishable. Or, perhaps, libertarians may have gone to the first few meetings and even donated money but rarely go to meetings now and are not as active in the Tea Party as social conservatives. The second category of counterarguments that needs to be addressed is the notion that this division does cause problems. This is to say that the arguments are in fact occurring but they are difficult to measure or are happening beyond the view of reporters and academics.

*Does the Division Exist?*

The media and some academics have recently latched onto the notion that the Tea Party appears to have emerged from or is merging with the Christian Right. An October 2010 *Washington Post* headline read “Tea Party, Religious Right Often Overlap, Poll Shows.”<sup>105</sup> Putnam and Campbell went even further, writing: “The Tea Party’s generals may say their overriding concern is a smaller government, but not their rank and file, who are more concerned about putting God in government.”<sup>106</sup> They add that the only group that approaches the declining popularity of the Tea Party is the Christian Right.<sup>107</sup> Sarah Posner, who initially coined the phrase “Teavangelical,” wrote a July 2011 piece detailing how Christian Right leaders like James Robinson and Ralph Reed helped orchestrate the “theo-economic merger of a Christian Right and Tea Party wishlist.”<sup>108</sup> Ed Kilgore, a Democratic strategist examining the Republican Presidential candidates, claims: “After examining the beliefs of the contemporary Christian Right [and the Tea Party], candidates like Bachmann and Perry seem less like pols cleverly straddling factions and more like leaders of a single constituency.”<sup>109</sup> David Sessions of the *Daily Beast* straightforwardly states: “New research confirms that the Tea Party firmly unites right wing politics and evangelical Christianity.”<sup>110</sup> Last summer a group leader I talked to in North Carolina told me that she had begun to consider targeting churches as a venue for potential recruitment.

There are two parts to this counterargument: first, leaders of the Christian Right have begun to align themselves with the Tea Party both philosophically and

in membership. The second part is more complicated as it argues that grassroots members are all socially very conservative and that there is no substantial socially liberal, or libertarian, presence.

The alignment of Christian Right leaders with the Tea Party is hardly surprising. One reporter who was covering the Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C., asked, after observing a parade of Tea Party activists and leaders assuring Value Voters that their aims were not in conflict with Christian values, “Who can blame the Christian Right for needing a little reassurance that it isn’t obsolete?”<sup>111</sup> Every major Republican candidate has courted the Tea Party, and with the Christian Right’s ties to the Republican Party, it is logical for leaders of the Christian Right to ally with the Tea Party given the dynamic nature of the movement. With this in mind, elite alignment between the two groups is more likely a strategic move than a sign of an actual merger between the two groups.

It is also unlikely, although possible, that the Christian Right is “taking over the Tea Party” among the grassroots. While some, like NPR’s Barbara Hagerty, have pointed to the substantially higher portion of white Evangelical Protestants in the Tea Party (33% to 20%) this is based upon the faulty belief that the Tea Party is representative of mainstream America.<sup>112</sup> The Tea Party is *not* a subset of the American Public; it is a subset of the Republican Party.<sup>1</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the allegations of racism are rooted in this fundamental error in comparing Tea Partiers to the mainstream public when instead they should be viewed, demographically, as an extreme subset of the Republican Party. For example, compared to other Republicans, Tea Partiers are only slightly less ethnically diverse (8% of the Tea Party is non-white compared to 11% of Republicans; both numbers are smaller than the 21% of the general public that is non-white). (Newport 2009), (*New York Times*-CBS News 2010) There is also evidence from looking at the overlap in Twitter Networks between Republican, Democratic, and Tea Party candidates in 2010 that there is substantial

compared to the Republican Party, the Tea Party has fewer white evangelical Protestants than the Republicans (37% to 33%).<sup>113</sup> These are hardly the demographics of a movement co-opted. Furthermore, an August 2011 Pew poll shows that while 42% of Tea Partiers agree with the conservative Christian movement, 46% of them “have no opinion” or “haven’t heard of it.”<sup>114</sup>

Putnam and Campbell’s “Faith Matters” survey, from which they drew the aforementioned conclusions, was an unusually big survey which allowed them to look at around 650 Tea Partiers.<sup>115</sup> Their findings serve to reinforce the passion that many social conservative Tea Partiers have with regards to social issues. Indeed, many Tea Partiers, like Christine O’Donnell, were involved in the Christian Right before signing on with the Tea Party. However, the regressions that support Putnam and Campbell’s claim do not get at heterogeneity since these regressions do not account for significant minorities. To further test this theory, however, Putnam kindly volunteered to run a test for me on his 2011 data similar to the one run by Ekins in 2010. As expected, the number of libertarians<sup>1</sup> has declined slightly. Using a dataset collected for his book on religion in America, Putnam found that the Tea Party has about a 31% libertarian presence.<sup>116</sup> While these data suggest a decline in the libertarian presence in the movement, libertarians still comprise a significant portion of members in the movement.

Other surveys suggest that this may not be a marked decline as much as a stochastic over-estimation in the *NYT/CBS* study. A smaller 2010 survey,

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overlap in the topics and language between Tea Party and Republican candidates. (Livne, et al. 2011)

<sup>1</sup> As he asked slightly different questions, he used slightly different variables to construct the libertarian category. Putnam defined as libertarian all those who favor civil unions or gay marriages *and* who favor abortion in cases that are *not* just rape/incest.

conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, suggests that fewer Tea Partiers are socially liberal than indicated by the 2010 *NYT/CBS* Survey. In the Pew survey, 64% of Tea Partiers oppose same-sex marriage and 59% argue that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. Still, even though social liberals are a smaller percentage than the roughly 40% in the *NYT/CBS* survey and closer in line with the Putnam data, the 30% of social conservatives recorded in this poll still suggests a very real libertarian presence.

These polls mirror what is visible on the ground in Tea Party meetings all across the country. The New Hampshire Liberty Alliance (NHLA), the largest libertarian group in New Hampshire, predates the Tea Party movement. Several leaders of local New Hampshire Tea Party groups were in attendance at the annual NHLA fundraising dinner. Despite the small overlap in leadership, the meeting differed notably from most Tea Party meetings from the beginning when it did not start off with the pledge or a prayer. The state Chairman of the New Hampshire Libertarian Party was seated at my right and was fairly critical about the Tea Party. He argued that “the Tea Party isn’t really that libertarian; there are a lot of social conservatives in the movement, especially in the South. Up here in the north they are more fiscally focused but all in all are generally pretty watered down libertarians.” Others at the table corroborated, saying that they too disliked or were skeptical of the Tea Party because of its “social conservative” bent. Still, this did not discourage them from mingling with the Tea Party leaders in attendance. A week later at a Tea Party meeting in a church I saw several of the individuals who had been at my table sitting in the pews.

One libertarian I talked to in New Hampshire, *Julia Howland*, had a different take on why libertarians might not have a vocal presence in the Tea Party. Julia complained that the Tea Party movement, as it expanded, began to be taken over by “Teavangelicals,” a group she described as the “Ralph Reed people.” She views herself in an internal battle for the direction of the Tea Party between libertarians like herself and those who want to transform the Tea Party movement into the “traditional religious conservative enclave.” As of now, she says the “Teavangelicals are winning,” in part because they feel more strongly and passionately about social issues than do the more fiscally minded libertarians. Despite this, Julia has not seen an exodus of libertarians because she thinks they never fully “bought in” in the first place: “In 2008, a lot of libertarians, all these liberty groups [a colloquial name for libertarian groups in New Hampshire] gravitated toward the Tea Party after the [Ron] Paul [presidential] campaign wound down. A lot of them have gravitated back toward the campaign.” Paul, whose supporters claim started the Tea Party by hosting a successful Tax Day Tea Party protest during his 2008 run for President, has since distanced himself slightly from the movement. In a 2010 Op-Ed, Paul wrote:

As one who is opposed to centralization, I am wary of attempts to turn a grassroots movement against big government like the Tea Party into an adjunct of the Republican Party. I find it even more worrisome when I see those who willingly participated in the most egregious excesses of the most recent Republican Congress push their way into leadership roles of this movement without batting an eye – or changing their policies!<sup>117</sup>

Julia’s point might be valid: there is little doubt that Paul’s supporters are extremely dedicated and passionate about their candidate and may have been involved in the Tea Party in-between election cycles simply as a way to stay

active, and may return to the Tea Party after the election. As for Julia herself, she was permanently banned from one Tea Party group for trying to defend the libertarian belief that nobody, including Muslims, should be subjected to unreasonable search and seizure.

Scholarship suggests that individuals leave because of “insufficient gratification in combination with a lack of commitment.”<sup>118</sup> One Dutch study found that more than 70% of workers who left their unions did so because they were dissatisfied, frustrated, or felt that they were not treated well by their unions.<sup>119</sup> When Tea Partiers leave, there is no formal process. A Tea Partier could easily leave a group, or just attend less regularly, and still register as a supporter. Libertarians generally display the characteristics to leave the group while remaining supporters from a distance, making it difficult to measure a decline in true Tea Partiers numbers.

However, it seems unlikely that libertarians have completely lost all their support for the Tea Party. After all, although the percentage of individuals supporting the Tea Party appears to be decreasing,<sup>120</sup> this is more likely a function of increased negative media coverage, the burden of actually governing, and less frequent events than it is of libertarians claiming that they are no longer supporting the movement. If libertarians, roughly 40% of the movement, claimed to no longer be supporting the movement, then the number of supporters would be falling even more rapidly than it appears to be.<sup>121</sup> While it is plausible that libertarians could be leaving and being replaced by social conservatives at a similar rate – especially given how popular the Tea Party is with the Christian

Right, where 70% agree with the Tea Party compared to 4% who disagree – this would have been more visible to observers on the ground.<sup>122</sup> With a few exceptions, the Tea Party group leaders I spoke with did not appear to be tapping into Christian Right membership networks or actively recruiting at churches. Without active and visible recruitment within churches, it seems unlikely that they would be able to replace members at such a torrid pace. Moreover, recent survey data from Pew and Putnam suggest that while some decline has happened, it has not been severe enough to completely negate this division.<sup>123</sup>

A more plausible explanation is that libertarians are less likely to go to meetings and less likely to take an active role in the Tea Party leadership. Most, but certainly not all, of the group leaders that I talked to displayed social conservative leanings, whereas many libertarians I spoke with expressed more dissatisfaction with the movement at large.

A recent Tea Party Patriots poll is a testament to the social conservative leanings of group leaders. Decisions within the TPP are made through internal polling of individual Tea Party group leaders across the country on bi-monthly conference calls: calls that are, unfortunately, not readily available to the press or academics. While only certain groups participate in the calls and others actively choose not to be involved with the TPP, shunning any kind of organized national Tea Party, the TPP still provide the best barometer of the movement at large. On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, a few weeks before the Iowa Caucuses, the TPP released the results of their internal polling, with which they claimed to have surveyed 23,000 “Tea Party enthusiasts” via conference call. The results were as follows:

Gingrich (31%), Bachmann (28%), Romney (20%), Santorum (16%), Paul (3%), Perry (2%), Huntsman (.3%).<sup>124</sup> The first four winners spoke on the call while the last three were invited to speak but declined. Despite this, it is surprising to see Paul finish a Tea Party poll with a mere 3% and is likely indicative of the more backseat role that libertarians are playing within movement leadership.

Although libertarians play a more limited role in the leadership of the Tea Party movement, they still appear to be involved in the movement at large. It is clear that even when we account for Tea Party Supporters and Tea Partiers, there was still a divide in the Tea Party between social conservatives and social liberals in both 2010 and 2011. Within Tea Party groups all over the country it seems that socially liberal libertarians are rubbing shoulders with passionate social conservatives, creating potential fault lines along social issues.

#### *Does the Divide Cause Problems?*

It is possible that this divide is causing disruptions within the Tea Party movement but that it is difficult to measure because these disagreements happen off the public record. Mark Williams, the former head of the Tea Party Express, told me that on the Express there used to be “knock down, drag out fights” over whom to endorse and that if someone had thrown in a question on “abortion or gay rights” to this already volatile environment “there would have been an actual fist fight.” Yet the Tea Party Express, under Mark’s watch, kept these fights internal to the group and rarely, if ever, let them spill into the public view. On the ground, far away from the Tea Party elites, it is quite possible that in private

planning meetings for group assemblies there are debates over agenda control. However, given the rarity with which individual Tea Party leaders seem to leave their group to form or join another group, it seems unlikely that there is much disagreement within the upper echelons of group leadership.

Similarly, it is also possible that individual group members are vehemently disagreeing with each other beyond the view of reporters and academics. Perhaps group members are on their best behavior on the rare occasion when reporters or academics are present.<sup>125</sup> It seems that the only way to analyze this would be to surreptitiously observe and record the dialogue of every Tea Party meeting, an impossible task. But from the meetings I have attended, read about others attending, asked Tea Partiers about, and studied the minutes of, it does not appear that there is a lot of specific face-to-face policy debate. Much more common were speakers or informational sessions where individual members reported on an issue that they had recently studied in a format similar, and perhaps derived from, Bible study groups. However, this is not to say that disagreements were completely absent: it was not unusual to hear debates over group strategy. It is also quite possible that Tea Partiers are having intense discussions outside of the established group framework, at each other's homes or in more private settings. There are few feasible steps to prove this other than those outlined above. If these arguments are happening, however, it seems unlikely that they would have been so widely missed.

## **Conclusion**

Like many social movements the Tea Party is fragmented. Just as President Ronald Reagan brilliantly forged a coalition of fiscal conservatives, social conservatives, and foreign policy hawks, the Tea Party has managed to unify individuals who have fundamentally different political philosophies under one banner. Tea Party members regularly rub shoulders with individuals who feel markedly different about social issues, foreign policy, or the role of religion in government. The next chapter will look at what holds this potentially volatile union together.

### Chapter 3: Hanging Together

*"When you're in a fight like this, you have to hang together. There's no room for dissent, even if we disagreed, which we don't."* -- Clements, an advocate for fairness in Civil War reporting<sup>126</sup>

Until the 2012 Republican primary season the Tea Party, despite a few minor glitches along the way, had not been hamstrung by any major divisions. Yet as the last chapter points out, the Tea Party has at least one major philosophical cleavage. So what, then, explains this internal cohesion? Past scholarship has pointed to the role of networks within social movements yet, as the first section below argues, this does not seem to be the case within the Tea Party. The second section answers this question by arguing that the chief reason the movement hangs together is because of the existence of a perceived external threat which, fostered and incubated within the right wing media chamber, unifies and frightens the Tea Party into consistent and coherent collective action. The impact of the media is explored in the third section, which examines where Tea Partiers get their news and how this results in both a narrow and elaborate understanding of these issues. The culmination of these factors is twofold: first, the national right wing media replaced pre-existing networks by helping members of a perceived silent majority find each other; second, this fear of the Left, both a cause and a symptom of the echo chamber, motivates Tea Partiers to overlook potential divides within the movement and work together to address the external threat.

## **Not Working, Networking**

Social movements are a creation of society. Therefore they adapt as quickly as society does, attenuating the usefulness of past scholarship on a given topic. Indeed, the Tea Party movement, with its rapid online mobilization and boost from a partisan cable news source, would be completely unrecognizable to the social movement activists of the Civil Rights movement. This is not to deride past scholarship. Indeed, Research Mobilization Theory's findings that individuals with increased resources are more likely to mobilize are reaffirmed by the largely retired, politically experienced, and wealthier-than-average Tea Partier. However, some of their findings, particularly concerning how groups hold together, do not seem to hold.

The most popular explanation of how movements hold together is that social bonds between individual members enforce and maintain norms of reciprocity and a positive desire to achieve common goals.<sup>127</sup> Individuals who are recruited to the movement by a close personal friend have stronger ties and a deeper investment to the movement's aims; numerous studies have demonstrated that this prior contact with another movement participant is the best predictor of future activism.<sup>128</sup> While movements themselves build and develop social capital over time, historically most have taken advantage of pre-existing networks in a community and built upon the backs of those prior networks. At one time it seemed quite plausible that the Tea Party rose out of the now dormant networks of

the Christian Right, a hypothesis that could potentially explain the rapid growth of the movement.<sup>129</sup>

That, however, is not the history of the Tea Party. The Tea Party actually started on Twitter with a group of around twenty activists using the same Twitter “hashtag,”<sup>1</sup> #TCOT, short for “Top Conservatives on Twitter.”<sup>130</sup> A few days after Rick Santelli’s February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009, CNBC rant that first called for the creation of a “Chicago Tea Party,” TCOT got together on a conference call that, according to one participant, was “the first time many of these people had even heard each other’s voices.”<sup>131</sup>

It is not just the top conservatives who mobilized this way. My first hypothesis about the Tea Party was that it built upon prior Christian Right networks and, in an attempt to unearth prior networks to test this hypothesis, I asked every individual I spoke with how they learned about the Tea Party and how they got involved, usually asking a specific follow-up question as to whether they knew anyone in the Tea Party movement before attending a rally or event.<sup>132</sup> Contrary to my expectations, I rarely found anyone who had learned about the Tea Party from a friend already a member. Much more commonly, I found that Tea Partiers learned about the movement’s ideals from television news reports and then found out about a local event in a newspaper, bulletin board, or online. There was no evidence at all of prior organizational membership. Indeed, Tea Party member recruitment seems to fly in the face of basic social movement

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<sup>1</sup> Hashtags are topics indicated with a “#.” They are used by communities for grouping tweets.

theory which has long held that “recruitment cannot occur without prior contact with a recruitment agent.”<sup>133</sup>

I was not the only one who reached this conclusion. Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin reported: “Although Tea Party activists themselves are often socially conservative and may be conservative Christians, the infrastructure of the Tea Party should be distinguished from the church-linked networks prominent in grassroots conservative mobilizations of recent decades.”<sup>134</sup> It seems that prior networks, including church-based ones, do not explain how the Tea Party has managed to hang together.

Perhaps the Tea Party has managed to develop social capital within the movement: members may have gotten to know each other since becoming involved. In support of this point, one 2011 study looking at the networks of Tea Party candidates on Twitter found that they are more likely to communicate with each other, use hashtags to build an internal group discussion, and are more likely to post in general than Republicans or Democrats.<sup>135</sup> These authors found that Tea Party candidates have a very dense digital network, especially when compared to Republicans or Democrats.<sup>136</sup> This tight digital network is reflected in their emails. As a member of multiple Tea Party groups in different states, I was often amazed at how quickly emails spread. For instance, I might get an email from a group in New Hampshire and oftentimes get the same email, often containing a politically incorrect joke (see footnote), from a different group in an entirely different state within hours.<sup>137</sup>

Much of the work on social capital on the Internet mirrors these findings; the Internet, and technology in general, creates “large, dense networks of relatively weak social ties.”<sup>138</sup> This is not to say that Tea Partiers, in many groups I studied, have not fostered strong ties between members, especially between individuals who take on leadership positions who grow to know each other quite well. However, most of the rank and file primarily interact with other Tea Partiers either in monthly meetings or online. Since meetings are not mandatory, many of the members I observed did not appear to know their fellow members especially well. Meetings often feature a speaker and are not particularly social or conversation based; in college terms, they often feel more like a lecture than a seminar. Most of the groups I saw did not seem to make a strong effort to develop social ties among members and much of the online interaction is somewhat superficial. Putnam has argued that face-to-face and virtual networks are like an alloy: a metal, like bronze, that is composed of two different elements.<sup>139</sup> Networks where the primary ingredient in this alloy is online communication tend to be weaker than networks where the principal component is face-to-face interactions.<sup>140</sup>

To conclude, different from earlier social movements, the Tea Party was not built upon prior internal networks. The Tea Party is certainly building social capital among its members, however, it is coming from a largely non-existent base and several factors are inhibiting rapid growth. Because of this, networks appear to be an unlikely savior for smoothing over divisions within the Tea Party.

What, then, explains how these salient internal divisions within the Tea Party are overcome?

### **Echo Chamber**

While Tea Partiers may have weak personal networks, they have relatively strong informational networks, which help build up a strong sense of an external threat. This holds the Tea Party together. This section looks specifically at the information system in which Tea Partiers find themselves and two of its effects: the first is that this echo chamber, largely led by the facilitator organization, *Fox News*, served the role of pre-existing organizations in initially bringing the Tea Party together; second, this echo chamber produces an elaborate understanding of a very narrow range of current day issues which helps to create and magnify the threat of the Left.

Hall, Jamieson, and Cappella argue that much of the political Right occupies an “echo chamber,” a metaphor they coined and explain as capturing:

...the ways messages are amplified and reverberated through the conservative opinion media. We mean to suggest a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal.... At times, the "echoing" is literal and works through direct citation. Limbaugh increases the *Journal* editorial page's influence when he relays its material onto the air waves and also includes it in the support material he posts on his website.<sup>141</sup>

Tea Partiers appear to be firmly tapped into this national information network.

When they watch television they invariably watch *Fox News*: 78.4% of true Tea Partiers report *Fox* as the channel that they watch most, with a total of 7.2% reporting that they watch *CNN*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *MSNBC* or any other news station *combined* (see Appendix 6). It is unlikely that Tea Partiers are watching

*Fox* in conjunction with one of these other channels. While many Americans used to consume *Fox News* alongside other, more liberal news sources like *The New York Times*, as the mainstream media has become more polarized individuals are now less likely to rely on that bipartisan mix of news media and increasingly tune in to only a select few partisan outlets that agree with their political persuasions.<sup>142</sup>

This single vantage point echo chamber results in national similarities in opinions on a variety of issues. Given the cultural differences across regions, we would expect that groups in the Midwest, Northeast, South, and West would talk about different issues. However, I find the exact opposite to be true. Groups in the Northeast, as a whole, are statistically just as likely to talk about immigration, guns, or social issues as groups in the South or West (Appendix 4).<sup>143</sup> This suggests some kind of national informational network, although not necessarily one hierarchical organization like *Fox News*. More likely it is the collective sum of organizations (cable news, talk radio, conservative blogs) comprising the echo chamber that promotes a similar message across the country.

This national echo chamber also explains what may have unified the Tea Party initially. Debra Minkoff has argued that “isolated and marginalized constituencies” – in her study, the disabled, gay men and lesbians, and the poor – rely on “national organizations [to] provide an infrastructure for collective action.”<sup>144</sup> Although Tea Partiers may not appear to be isolated and marginalized constituencies at first glance, they tend to think of themselves as such. Many have told me that before the Tea Party existed they would sit alone in their homes

yelling at the television, thinking that they were the only sane person left in America. Many used the Nixonian phrase “Silent Majority” to describe their place in a hidden, disconnected national network of frustrated conservatives.

While past groups had to spend a lot of time and effort identifying and gathering members, the Tea Party was in this sense a ready-made movement. Before it started, Tea Partiers were all working with a similar set of facts and beliefs which they absorbed from the organizations in the echo chamber. All that they needed was the infrastructure to help build the bridges between these like-minded individuals. What brought them all together? Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin argue that *Fox News* provided Minkoff’s necessary spark for collective action.<sup>145</sup> They find that *Fox*’s coverage united these individuals by promoting Tea Party events, giving the movement free advertising that, as Mark Williams, the former head of the Tea Party Express, told me, “We [the Tea Party] could never have afforded.” *Fox*, in particular Tea Party champions such as Glenn Beck, brought individuals who watched the same television shows together by raising awareness of the movement and even, initially, sponsoring group events. As Williamson, Coggin and Skocpol point out, “In early 2009, *Fox News* dubbed the upcoming Tea Party events as ‘FNC [*Fox News Channel*] Tea Parties.’ *Fox* hosts Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Greta Van Susteren, and Neil Cavuto have broadcasted their shows from Tea Party events.”<sup>146</sup>

In many regards, *Fox* played the role that high social capital networks historically did in starting and developing social movements. Because of this, the ties between members in the Tea Party were comparatively weak to begin with.

Instead of having the traditional pre-existing personal bonds, Tea Partiers merely watched the same shows and read the same books as one another. This makes for a weak alloy. Still, the Tea Party would not have emerged without *Fox News* serving as a catalyst. It promoted the brand and provided the perfect soapbox, as the largest cable news channel, for conservatives who were discouraged after the 2008 elections.

While *Fox News* may provide the baseline understanding, Tea Partiers spread a lot of information among themselves. According to *The New York Times*/CBS poll, 63.9% of true Tea Partiers were likely to say that they trusted information from other supporters more than from television or newspapers. And in those emails, which, presumably, are somewhat similar to their personal conversations,<sup>147</sup> Tea Partiers are about seven times more likely to link to a conservative blog or newspaper (e.g. the late Andrew Briebart's *biggovernment.com*, Glenn Beck's *theBlaze.com*, or *CNSNews.com*) than to a *Fox News* article or video. One person I spoke with in North Carolina is typical with regards to how she gets news: "Mostly someone else reads it first and it's in my [Facebook] news feed." In the email lists I looked at, a full third of all emails served primarily to alert fellow members of a new issue, lending further credence to the notion that not only do many Tea Partiers trust each other more than news outlets, but their primary source of information is actually each other. Many of these sites are much more politically conservative than *Fox*, suggesting that Tea Partiers do not view the news on the same political spectrum as many scholars do, with *Fox News* on the right and the mainstream media slightly to the left. For

many Tea Partiers, *Fox News* is squarely in the middle, truly “Fair and Balanced” with all of the mainstream media on the far, far left and conservative blogs leaning right.<sup>148</sup>

Much of this self-selection into conservative media outlets is reinforced by their consistent attacks on the mainstream media.<sup>149</sup> For example, Sean Hannity has a weekly segment called “Media Mash: Our Weekly Look at the Bias in the Mainstream Press.”<sup>150</sup> Dick Arney and Matt Kibbe dedicate 22 pages out of 170 in the middle of their book to talk about how the media has abused the Tea Party.<sup>151</sup> This is not a new trend, but rather one that has been compounding for years: Rush Limbaugh discussed the media on every one of his shows in 1996.<sup>152</sup> Because of this it is not surprising to see Tea Partiers disparage the media, as one Tea Partier did in response to an email linking to *The New York Times*:

...websites DO matter. New York Times, NBC affiliates, CBS, Huffington Post, Media Matters, Move On & the likes are not trusted news sources... They are generally biased against a conservative/republican point of view. They are only useful for pointing out the hypocrisy & unknowledgeable views of the left, or that they finally "get it". You'll never prove a point using news sources as those.

This helps Tea Partiers overcome some of their ideological differences by placing themselves in an effectively closed news system, a well-documented sociological situation. At first, Tea Partiers’ opinions naturally led them to more exposure with content that confirmed their innate beliefs. This biased content continues to create a self-reinforcing cycle where prior beliefs are never refuted but rather continually buttressed.<sup>153</sup> In this cycle, Tea Partiers gather supporting evidence from media outlets but also from each other, whom they rely on for information. This is very visible in their email conversations; Tea Partiers rarely disagree or push back on specific ideas or policy plans. Instead, in their emails

and in the personal interactions I observed, they are much more likely to build upon each other's beliefs by corroborating with each other. This lack of mutual accountability can often lead to incorrect conclusions that seem rational because of the sheer volume of corroborating information. Colloquially, as one Tea Partier put it in an email, "Now I have heard this from enough sources, that I feel confident that it is true."

The result of this is twofold: Tea Partiers have an *elaborate* understanding of the issues but, simultaneously, a *narrow* understanding of the issues. To illustrate this, I look briefly at how the Tea Party understands the Constitution, a topic Tea Partiers spend a lot of time studying and one which epitomizes this elaborate, and narrow, understanding.<sup>154</sup>

### *An Elaborate Understanding*

For individuals largely self-taught on the Constitution, Tea Partiers have an impressive grasp of complex Constitutional issues. *Ed Garret*, a former trial lawyer, gave me a pocket Constitution at the North Carolina Republican Convention and walked me quite cogently through the three parts of the Constitution that he felt had been abused in recent times: the general welfare clause, the commerce clause, and the necessary and proper clause. For each, Ed gave me specific examples of federal overreach that were "legally" justified by these clauses but that he felt violated the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment. While Ed is certainly one of the more knowledgeable Tea Partiers on the Constitution that I have met, he is not the exception. Even among Tea Partiers without a law degree there is a

genuine desire to learn more about the Constitution and the founding documents to truly try to understand what the founders intended. Regularly in my interviews, Tea Partiers would correctly quote various parts of the Constitution, recite the preamble, or in one case, recite the entire Declaration of Independence from memory.

This same principle holds on a variety of issues. Tea Partiers are often more likely to report being very knowledgeable about a variety of political topics, and I was consistently impressed with the minute details they were able to talk about. On several occasions I sat through often dry monologues filled with Lilliputian factoids about voter fraud, corruption in politics, how religious the founders were, and, most common of all, specific evils hidden in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Still, their knowledge of specific clauses of the Constitution, especially for individuals who developed an interest relatively recently, was remarkable.

#### *A Narrow Understanding of the Constitution*

In direct tension with this elaborate knowledge of the Constitution, many Tea Partiers have a very narrow view of it that completely aligns with their political views. When I asked Ed about disagreements between the founders he replied, “We do look at the disagreements between the founders... but they don’t really matter.” Just as they do not look at different perspectives among the founders, they often choose to discard Constitutional law and precedent: judicial

interpretations in the Warren court, for example, are largely dismissed as slow and steady steps in a bad direction that are not worth learning about.

Their knowledge, consequently, is inconsistent. For example, Tea Partiers who were impressively knowledgeable about obscure Constitutional clauses that they believed invalidated “ObamaCare” were often ignorant when asked a comparatively basic question about the failure of the Articles of Confederation. From my interviews, I noticed that whenever the Constitution disagreed with their political views Tea Partiers tended to simply overlook it. One Arizona Tea Partier told me that she was “certain” the income tax was “unconstitutional,” completely ignoring the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment which unequivocally states: “The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes.” Christine O’Donnell, a Tea Party candidate for Senate, infamously bypassed the First Amendment, specifically the Establishment Clause, when she questioned the constitutionality of the separation of church and state during her run for 2010 Senate.<sup>155</sup>

Harvard historian Jill Lepore in her recent book on the Tea Party, *The Whites of their Eyes*, is extremely critical of this selective understanding of the Constitution. She accuses Tea Partiers of practicing what she calls “antihistory,” the belief that time is irrelevant, which allows them to overcome the cognitive dissonance that arises from believing, simultaneously, that the Founding Fathers are both dead and all around us at the same time. Antihistory is demonstrated in statements such as “the founders are very distressed over ObamaCare.”<sup>156</sup> Lepore also asserts that Tea Partiers observe “historical fundamentalism,” which she

defines as interpreting historical documents with the same fervor that religious fundamentalists apply to understanding holy writs.<sup>157</sup> She argues that:

...the far right's American history – its antihistory – existed outside of argument and had no interest in evidence. It was as much a fiction as the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, reductive, unitary, and, finally, dangerously anti-pluralist. It erased slavery from American history and compressed a quarter century of political contest into “the founding,” as if ideas worked out, over decades of debate and fierce disagreement, were held by everyone, from the start.<sup>158</sup>

In some ways, the Tea Party's beliefs are reminiscent of the “paranoid style” developed by comparable individuals during the Red Scare.<sup>159</sup> Historian Richard Hofstadter described this paranoid style eloquently:

A final characteristic of the paranoid style is related to the quality of its pedantry. One of the impressive things about paranoid literature is the contrast between its fantasized conclusions and the almost touching concern with factuality it invariably shows. It produces heroic strivings for evidence to prove that the unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed... But respectable paranoid literature not only starts from certain moral commitments that can indeed be justified but also carefully and all but obsessively accumulates “evidence.”... The higher paranoid scholarship is nothing if not coherent—in fact the paranoid mind is far more coherent than the real world. It is nothing if not scholarly in technique. McCarthy's 96-page pamphlet, McCarthyism, contains no less than 313 footnote references, and the leader of the John Birch Society Robert Welch's incredible assault on Eisenhower, *The Politician*, has one hundred pages of bibliography and notes. The entire right wing movement of our time is a parade of experts, study groups, monographs, footnotes, and bibliographies.<sup>160</sup>

The best example of the resurgence of the paranoid style is the remarkably well-footnoted *The 5,000 Year Leap*, by Cleon Skousen, a disciple of Welch. *The 5,000 Year Leap* is a series of quotes from the Founding Fathers juxtaposed with biased analysis from Skousen. It comes across as meticulously researched but, despite its depth of analysis, is narrow in its argument and oblivious to obvious counterarguments and, sometimes, facts. For example, in talking about the separation of church and state, Skousen asserts that “the Founders were not indulging in any idle gesture when they adopted the motto ‘In God We Trust.’”

That motto was first authorized to be used on some denominations of coins in 1864 and only became the official motto during the Cold War, decades after the last Founding Father had died. Ironically it was President Eisenhower, Welch's communist agent, who approved "In God We Trust" as the national motto.<sup>161</sup>

### **Narrow yet Elaborate**

This narrow yet elaborate informational echo chamber in which Tea Partiers reside has two effects on the movement: first, it hones beliefs within the group, giving people great confidence in their conclusions regardless of accuracy or facts, since all of their news sources and acquaintances concur that there is one obvious right path of action. This serves to make those who stray from that path appear willfully wrong and traitorous. Second, through this synthesizing mechanism and the active demonization of the Left, the echo chamber creates an unequivocal threat that practically forces Tea Partiers to actively work together with a sense of agency to prevent this threat from coming to fruition.

The narrow yet elaborate understanding of issues explains many puzzling conclusions confidently held by Tea Partiers – who are, on the whole, very intelligent and well informed. For example, in 2010, polls showed that only 36.1% of Tea Partiers believed that Obama was born in the U.S.<sup>162</sup> Even after Obama released his long form birth certificate, many Tea Partiers still believed it was a fraud; many refused to acknowledge it as true yet also decided it was not worth fighting anymore.<sup>163</sup> In a separate 2011 survey, Tea Party members were much more likely to say that they were "very well informed" about global

warming and much more likely to say that they “do not need any more information” than any other groups. Yet only 34% of Tea Party supporters believe that global warming is a reality, while 54% say it is.<sup>164</sup> Further demonstrating their certainty, in one Pew poll of Tea Partiers’ foreign policy, they were half as likely as the general public on most questions to answer “don’t know.”<sup>165</sup>

This closed news system isolates Tea Partiers from widely held beliefs and creates a false sense that a consensus has been reached around their viewpoints. For example, despite being objectively outside the political mainstream and widely portrayed as such, 93.3% of Tea Partiers believe that the views of the Tea Party “reflect most Americans.”<sup>166</sup> Although some, like Scott Rasmussen, might claim that “Within the American mainstream, the ideas that the Tea Party stands for are arguably more popular than the movement itself,” this is because many of these concepts, for example “liberty,” are meaningless platitudes rather than the specific policy proposals behind the ideas, such as “smaller government.”<sup>167</sup>

More recently, in the debt ceiling battle of August 2011, Tea Partiers heard and told themselves that not raising the debt ceiling and defaulting on the U.S. debt would not hurt the economy seriously, despite nearly every economist disagreeing.<sup>168</sup> Through email I observed to one Tea Partier, *Holly Rege*, that it was mathematically impossible to not raise the debt ceiling and still pay for Social Security, Medicare, and the military, even if federal spending on education or welfare went to zero. Holly was shocked. Nobody had pointed out that it would not be possible to continue running these programs without raising the debt ceiling; she just felt that the spending “HAS to stop somewhere,” as she put in her

reply. Holly had an elaborate understanding of the sheer magnitude of the spending and how it had gotten out of control, but a narrow understanding of the positive effects of that spending because all of those she depended on for information, her friends and news sources, operated with the same skewed set of facts.

Since Tea Partiers hear the same narrow and elaborate messages reverberated again and again through various “trustworthy” news outlets, the problems facing America seem to them obvious and the solutions self-evident. The Democrats therefore appear more distant from the middle of the political spectrum than they actually are.<sup>169</sup> For years, psychologists have shown that individuals in closed news systems have increased suspicion and hostility toward members of the out-group.<sup>170</sup> Because of this, liberal politicians’ refusal to even begin to address these problems rationally seems, to Tea Partiers, intentionally malignant and almost personal. Take, for example, Obama’s perceived inability to handle the immigration crisis, about which Tea Partiers hear and talk an awful lot.<sup>1</sup> Most Tea Partiers agree that this is an incredibly large issue but also one with a simple solution, because most of the people they talk to agree on it. To them it is clear that Obama’s lack of a solution is more than mere incompetence: because the Left refuses to employ their simple solution to stop illegal immigration they must truly have evil intentions. The logical next step in their minds is that the Left must hate America.

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<sup>1</sup> 90% of Tea Partiers nationwide believe that immigration is “a very serious problem” compared with 55% of non-Tea Partiers, and Tea Partiers talk about it fairly regularly: 3.34% of Tea Party emails talk about illegal immigration. This makes it a more frequent topic than specific spending issues.

This is what we see. One Tea Party leader, echoing leaders across the country, exclaimed to a feisty crowd in Arizona: “If we don’t throw Obama out in 2012 I’m not sure how much America will be left to save.” One Tea Partier sent me a scathing email in especially vivid, visceral language:

On the left, we have many many people who hate America. They cannot stand free enterprise and hate freedom. In fact, many of them are in the current Administration and have proclaimed themselves, in public, to be Marxists, Communists, and Socialists. They have an agenda, whatever it may be, which can only be realized by the destruction of the United States. They despise the Constitution, and most of them haven’t even read it to give an honest opinion either way. I could write a book on specific examples, but they all have agendas that require the destruction of America and free enterprise. The bottom line, is that most, if not all of them, will do anything for money and power, and are delusional to think that they will ever achieve it. They will be eaten by their own eventually, as their agenda moves forward, and they will all end up in the pits of hell. Each of them thinks that they are superior to the others, and cares nothing about anyone except themselves. But in reality, they are criminal baffoons who are in control of very powerful things, which makes them very dangerous.

The catalyst of this email was an earlier email sent out about me to Tea Partiers all over Arizona. A day after sending out my initial wave of emails to Tea Party leaders across the state, I received the following from several Arizona groups I had been following for months, with the subject “Infiltrator Alert”:

If you, or any of your members receive [an email from William Eger]; please ignore it. We have reason to suspect this email is being sent to every Tea Party leader in the U.S. trying to gather information on how activists in the Tea Party Movement are able to mobilize so quickly.

Nearly my entire initial wave of emails went un-replied to, and I began receiving periodic hate mail like the one above. Undaunted, I traveled to Arizona as planned. Upon discovering my attendance at their meetings, despite the permission of each group leader, many Tea Partiers refused to speak. On at least one occasion, individuals walked out of a meeting that I was observing. Others

asked me to swear an oath of secrecy with regards to the content of one small group meeting I sat in on.

While these are extreme examples, it does reflect the deep-seated suspicion and angry passion that many Tea Partiers feel for the mainstream media and academics. Although no other state's groups rivaled the paranoid nature of Arizona, Tea Partiers in other states casually or implicitly mentioned their skepticism or political isolation. Many of them were visibly shocked to meet "the enemy," me, while others found it novel and fascinating to have a conversation with someone of such a different political persuasion. On several pleasant occasions, Tea Partiers mentioned being surprised at how "reasonable" some of my policy positions were, despite my openly identifying as a Democrat. This demonstrates the disconnect between the way Democrats are presented within the echo chamber and who they are in real life.

This perceived threat is simultaneously spurred on by conservative media hosts who regularly demonize the other side. For example, it is not unusual to hear Tea Party favorite Glenn Beck saying something to make the war on the Left an emotional issue:

It is not about politics, because quite honestly, we are not dealing with politicians. These are not -- the policies that are being enacted in Washington -- they are not enemies of ours. They are enemies of God because God is about freedom. God is about equal justice, not equal stuff in our homes.<sup>171</sup>

Tea Partiers really do believe that they are on an epic battlefield of good versus evil, right versus wrong, or, in their case, Left. The titles of books about the Tea Party reflect this fiery internal passion: *Boiling Mad*, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, *The Backlash*, *Give Us Liberty*, *Mad as Hell*, *the Second American Revolution*.<sup>172</sup>

Jenny Beth Martin and Mark Meckler, leaders of the Tea Party Patriots, begin their book with: “We, the people of the United States of America, felt threatened.

We felt angry.”<sup>173</sup> In his book *Taking Back America One Tea Party at a Time*,

Mark Williams vented:

Our nation IS at war. It is a war for the survival of a single flame, the flame of Liberty. This war is being fought not just in the deserts of the Middle East with guns but right here at home with lies.<sup>174</sup>

This rhetoric about this battle of biblical proportions might stem from the high numbers of evangelicals and deeply religious individuals in the Tea Party who are more likely to believe that “there are absolutely clear guidelines of good and evil,” or perhaps it stems from the large number of veterans in the movement who may be prone to violent language.<sup>175</sup> Regardless of the source, the point remains: Tea Partiers feel threatened and view themselves at war to save the country for themselves and their grandchildren. This is largely what holds the movement together.

This sense of a common enemy brings Tea Partiers together despite their inner divisions. As one said, “We still care about these other issues, but we believe we need to take care of the main issue,” which is getting the country’s “fiscal house in order.” Because of this, in their eyes, many believe that they do not have time to waste with internal bickering when there is a clear enemy. As one exclaimed: “This is the most important fight ever!” Unity, then, is a necessary temporary alliance until the U.S. can get its budget in order and Tea Partiers can take their country back.

This threat of the Left, amplified through reverberations within the echo chamber, is so frightening that Tea Partiers do not have time to bicker internally.

Their internal unity, therefore, is effectively a function of external factors. When Tea Party elites repeat the same arguments and statistics, based on facts or not, the arguments snowball, gaining influence and “truthiness” within Tea Party groups.<sup>176</sup> The threat magnifies as it becomes epically large, binding groups more closely to each other. This fear, however irrational, holds the Tea Party together in the face of its Leftist threat.

### **Counterarguments**

This section looks at three possible counterarguments to the claims made in this chapter. The first looks at other possible explanations for why these groups hold together. The second is more theoretical, and addresses the possible counterargument that only network theory should be applied in this situation, and briefly looks at New Social Movement theory for potential answers as to how groups work together. The third attempts to answer the question of why the threat emanating from this conservative echo chamber has not also held the Republican Party together.

Some have pointed out that these groups may not fight within each other simply because the members do not know each other very well. It is true that oftentimes at meetings there seem to be as many new individuals, or at least irregular attendees, as returning members. It seems logical that to disagree about something as uncomfortable as politics, there has to be an established level of social capital between members that appears to be missing. Perhaps as well, there is not enough of an established relationship to undergo awkward disagreement

through emails. In fact, however, many group members do know each other fairly well. At the Colorado River Tea Party in Arizona, I was one of two “visitors” for the day alongside about 50 regulars; at the Wilson NC Tea Party I was the only visitor at the meeting of 35 regulars and dinner beforehand. Those groups, at least, certainly knew each other well enough to argue, but rarely did. Furthermore, from the email database we can see that email disagreements occur earlier in the group’s history, rather than later: the median sequential argument of a disagreement is 410, considerably lower than the overall median sequential number of emails that I looked at (2,054) (Appendix 5). This suggests that how well different Tea Partiers know each other has little to do with the overall amount of disagreement, since they do disagree early on in their group’s history when they presumably do not know each other as well.

Additionally, one could surmise that because libertarians do not go to meetings and are not as involved in the movement as social conservatives, this divide does not exist. As established earlier, libertarians are slightly less likely, although not significantly, to be regular attendees at rallies or to have donated to the Tea Party. Tea Party libertarians may also be less likely to participate in email threads or vocally disagree, or perhaps they are more likely to fall into what Noelle-Neumann called a “spiral of silence.”<sup>177</sup> This theory posits that individuals who have a minority opinion when confronted with a vocal majority are less likely to express their views because they believe that their positions are marginal and isolated. This silence compounds as potential supporters of the minority belief

begin to think they are the only one holding this belief and that it must therefore be wrong, leading to a self-perpetuating spiral of silence.<sup>178</sup>

On the other hand, perhaps groups are becoming more homogeneous as the libertarian views converge with the social conservative views, or vice versa. We would expect that, all things being equal, the more supporters of a particular view or party that an individual talks to, the more likely he or she would be to switch her position to that view or party. The empirical evidence appears to support this theoretical position and shows that, as expected, individuals do change their minds when exposed to an overwhelming amount of single-minded individuals holding a different opinion.<sup>179</sup>

One piece of supporting evidence here is how thoroughly social conservatives appear to dominate Tea Party elites on social issues. The Tea Party Caucus in the House and Senate is comprised of the most socially and fiscally conservative members of Congress. Every single rated member of the Tea Party Caucus in the House was given a 100% pro-life, or 0% pro-choice, by the NARAL or NARC, two non-profit social issue lobbying groups. On gay marriage, similarly, every member of the Tea Party Caucus in the House was rated a 0% by the HRC, indicating an anti-gay-rights position. One could point out that this is merely indicative of the cohesion in the Republican caucus on these issues: for example, the average gay rights score for Republicans (given by the HRC) is a 6% and for abortion the average score for Republicans as given by the NARAL is also 6%.<sup>180</sup> However, given the demographics of the Tea Party we would expect their candidates to be slightly more representative of libertarian Tea Partiers.

Essentially, we would expect to see more candidates like Ron Paul and Rand Paul. Ron Paul received a 38% rating from the HRC on gay rights and a 56% rating by the NRLC.<sup>181</sup> But instead we see no candidates as politically moderate on social issues as Paul and more candidates as religiously fervent as Michele Bachmann. Bachmann – who initially became involved in politics in 2007 after she and her husband fasted for three days while imploring, “Lord is this what you want? Is this your will?” – admonished people to come out to vote because her first election directly affected “defeating radical Islam,” “the future of the family,” and “the future of freedom.”<sup>182</sup>

Social conservatives’ concerns also dominate meeting agendas. Nearly every Tea Party meeting that I attended began with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer or invocation.<sup>183</sup> Invariably the Pledge included “Under God,” a phrase the follow-up speaker often called attention to with a quip like, in the words of one speaker at a meeting in Northern Arizona, “It’s always good to be among a crowd that doesn’t forget the under God part, isn’t it?” Similarly, at Camp Liberty, “a seminar on the Founding of America” organized by Tea Party leaders in North Carolina, they did not forget the “under God part.” In their curriculum, targeted at children in a similar manner to Bible Camp, classes such as “Biblical Principles in the Constitution” were taught by local pastors. These are not isolated incidents; while a lot of groups do actively try to remain officially secular, religion generally seeps through. I asked a Tea Party board meeting in Eastern North Carolina about religion in the Tea Party and received a typical response: “Most people in the group are fairly religious... but we don’t study the Bible.” Another added, “We

always have a prayer before our meetings and nobody thinks twice about it.” One person went even further, saying, “I’d have a problem with a Tea Party group not saying that they’re religious.”

Part of the reason that social conservatives dominate agendas and the movement is because Tea Party libertarians are simply less passionate about social issues than are social conservatives. This, combined with the fact that the median member of the Tea Party is certainly a social conservative, perhaps explains why the elected elites in the Tea Party caucus tend toward the extremes on social issues. Unfortunately, it is hard to make a strong claim either way. Many of the methods that would resolve these issues – for example, identifying the political philosophy of who controls meeting agendas – are difficult to carry out in practice. Still, it is safe to presume that the relatively small number of libertarians and their more passing interest in social issues do play a role in keeping the group together. However, many groups across the country do have vocal minorities who have broken free from the spiral of silence. Many groups have demonstrated the voice of this libertarian contingent by publicly encouraging the group’s leadership to link to the Cato Institute and the Campaign for Liberty. Furthermore, as the next chapter will briefly address, the inability of the Tea Party to unite behind one candidate in 2012 to some degree implies a level of internal disunity.

The second counterargument takes as an assumption that networks do not explain what holds the Tea Party together. Networks are perhaps the most prevalent theory in American social science for how groups hold together but this

is not the only theoretical explanation possible. New Social Movement theory has been criticized for its lack of applicability to right wing movements, and may seem a slightly odd fit for the Tea Party. However, Tea Party movements do share some similarities with New Social movements, namely the focus on Inglehart's post-material issues in addition to their bread and butter economic issues.<sup>184</sup>

Although much of the work on New Social Movement Theory is biased toward left wing movements, this does not mean that its findings on the factors that hold movements together are irrelevant.

One of the most prominent New Social Movement Theorists, Alberto Melucci, has argued that movements must focus on actively constructing a "collective identity." In order to do so he outlines three crucial factors: "effective leadership, workable organization forms, and strong reserves of expressive action."<sup>185</sup> There is no arguing that creative leaders are essential in melding together social conservatives and libertarians. This solution to group unity, while valuable, changes the level of analysis. For example, New Social Movement theory explains why some individual groups hold together quite well, and Melucci is right to assert that individual group leaders are important. But this voluntaristic explanation applied nationally would seem to predict more variation than is seen in the Tea Party. If these were the only factors affecting group unity, we would expect to see a substantial number of groups breaking up because they had mediocre leaders or untenable organizational structures. Yet despite the variation in quality of local group leaders and disparity in organizational structures, two things seem to be clear nationally: 1) there are philosophical cleavages within

many Tea Party groups along a libertarian-social conservative divide; and 2) most of these groups do not seem to be suffering much because of these divisions. Because of the national prevalence of this problem, a nationwide structural solution seems more plausible than the more localized solutions generated by New Social Movement theory.

The third counterargument is that since the Republican Party is similarly influenced by the right wing media echo chamber that holds the Tea Party together, why has this same force not held the Republican Party together? Three explanations could account for this: 1) the Tea Party largely has not split from the Republican Party; 2) the Tea Party is more tuned into the right wing media echo chamber than are most Republicans; and 3) the Republican Party also is held together by this belief of an external threat.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to view Tea Partiers as a subset of the Republican Party, not as a distinct entity. While Tea Partiers do display hostility toward Republicans, especially moderate ones, they are infinitely more supportive of Republicans than they are of Democrats. For example, all members of the Congressional Tea Party Caucus are Republicans; to my knowledge, not one of the over 800 national Tea Party groups has endorsed a Democrat for office; and I have yet to meet a Tea Partier who voted for Obama. While the Tea Party may certainly speak out against Republicans, they do so as a constituency more than as a faction.

Still, there are differences between the median Tea Partier and the median Republican and while both groups largely hold together, the Tea Party appears to

be a more tightly knit group.<sup>186</sup> This is likely a function of their attention to detail in politics. Nearly all of the Tea Partiers I have met consume copious amounts of news. As Appendix 6 shows in more detail, Tea Partiers, as compared to the general public or even Tea Party supporters, are much more likely to get their news from either online sources or *Fox News*. A greater share of the Tea Partiers' emails I looked at were links to news coverage of hot button political issues than any other type of email. This attention to political detail might explain some of the Tea Party's partisanship as well. Some scholars have found that political moderation may be more due to not paying attention to the news than to buying into a set of coherent political beliefs.<sup>187</sup> This dedication to the news explains why Tea Partiers have a keener sense of a perceived threat than moderate Republicans and why this threat holds Tea Partiers together more closely than it does Republicans.

Lastly, an argument can be made that this right wing echo chamber serves to bring the broader Right together. Twitter networks among Republicans are much tighter than among Democrats.<sup>188</sup> Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to vote for their party's presidential candidate in any given year although, interestingly, they are less likely to claim that they vote for the same party.<sup>189</sup> This internal cohesion is not necessarily new and may reflect deep philosophical differences between liberals and conservatives.<sup>190</sup> As William Buckley put it years ago, "Conservatives are bound together for the most part by negative responses to liberalism."<sup>191</sup>

## Conclusion

Chapter Two showed that although the Tea Party has severe divides running through it, so far they do not seem to have crippled any groups. Historically, the explanation for this lack of internecine would be due to the strong internal bonds between Tea Partiers, most likely as the result of pre-existing networks. However, this chapter has shown that the Tea Party did not rise out of face-to-face pre-existing networks when it burst on to the scene. Instead, previously isolated Tea Partiers were brought together under one banner by *Fox News* which initially served as a “national movement organization” to build the necessary “infrastructure.” After its emergence, the Tea Party relied on some internal factors to maintain group unity, such as strong leadership and the creation of sub-committees, but it also continued to rely heavily on highly partisan news sources to do two important things: first, to unify the movement by creating a base level of information and beliefs shared among all members, creating a sense of collective identity. Second, and more importantly, to use a powerful echo chamber to create a deep emotional fear of the Left which effectively unified groups in opposition. This last point appears to solve the puzzle, presented in the Introduction, of how such a scattered, loosely organized movement has managed to overcome severe internal cleavages and accomplish as much as they have. The next chapter concludes this thesis by briefly applying the more theoretical approach outlined in this chapter to the real-world, ongoing 2012 Republican primary.

## Chapter 4: Moving Forward

*The task of sociological analysis is to understand how and why the game of solidarity succeeds or fails.* -- Alberto Melucci<sup>192</sup>

Before the 2010 midterms, the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives, had 59 seats in the Senate, and held the Presidency. In the two years since his Inauguration, President Obama had managed to pass much of his legislative agenda including a massive healthcare bill, a bail-out of Detroit automakers, and a financial reform bill – all of which were anathema to Tea Partiers. The echo chamber was working hard to make sure that the threat was clear, the stakes were high, and the movement was unified.<sup>193</sup> Speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School, Andrew Hemingway, a leader of a New Hampshire Tea Party group at the time, declared that the movement had enough Tea Partiers to win the 2012 New Hampshire Republican primary, “we just need to unite or die. We are gathering, we are coalescing, and we will be pushing the national perspective.”<sup>194</sup>

In the period following the 2010 elections, the Tea Party looked poised to unite and to fulfill Hemingway’s expectations. In early 2011, Abramowitz made a similar argument about the Tea Party on a national level. He wrote:

...given the fact that Tea Party supporters make up almost half of Republican identifiers and a much larger proportion of active Republicans, the Tea Party movement appears to have the potential to strongly influence Republican congressional and presidential primaries in 2012. Any serious Republican presidential contender will have to find a way to appeal to Tea Party supporters.<sup>195</sup>

However, this argument, like those of social scientists studying social movements, is predicated on the belief that Tea Partiers would act and vote as a consistent conservative block.

In October 2011, before the first primary, it started to become clear to politicians like Ron Brownstein that the Republican primary had become “two races running along parallel but very distinct tracks.”<sup>196</sup> On one track was the “non-Tea Party primary,” the roughly 50% of Republicans who were either “neutral” or negative” on the Tea Party; this group had begun to coalesce around Mitt Romney. On the other track was the “Tea Party primary,” comprised of the other half of Republicans who were sympathetic to the Tea Party, although not necessarily active Tea Party members. Brownstein noticed that this group was searching desperately for an alternative to Romney, whom they disliked for not being “a real conservative,” as Rush Limbaugh opined.<sup>197</sup>

Whereas the 2010 Tea Partiers had quickly identified and rallied to support their ideal candidates, the same Tea Partiers in the period leading up to the 2012 Republican primary had moved like a school of fish. A school of fish has no leaders, but instead relies upon barely perceptible clues from its individual members to determine which way the school should move. Similarly, the Tea Party has darted in various directions after different candidates, led by subliminal hints emanating from the myriad of voices inside the echo chamber, but no one voice above all others.<sup>198</sup> Without centralized leadership, Tea Partiers have relied upon each other for guidance, eventually turning in the same direction but not without first bumping into each other.

Quickly, randomly, Tea Partiers have bolted from one candidate to another, displaying their pull within the Republican Party by propelling, almost overnight, one candidate after another to the top of the polls. With the exception

of the hard cyst of Paul supporters, Tea Partiers have been all over the map. Before Newt Gingrich and then Santorum took the lead in the Tea Party primary, Donald Trump, Mike Huckabee, Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Herman Cain, Gingrich again, and Ron Paul had all, at one point or another, led in the Tea Party primary.<sup>199</sup> But for various reasons, each of them lost. Huckabee and Trump never entered the race. Perry switched between saying the wrong thing on immigration and forgetting what he meant to say altogether before dropping out.<sup>200</sup> Cain was repeatedly accused of a series of sexual harassment charges that forced him to quit. Gingrich, who still has a shot, rose twice in the polls only to falter for being, as some put it, “too Gingrich.”<sup>201</sup> Paul’s foreign policy stance has proven too extreme for Tea Party thinkers like Glenn Beck or Eric Erickson to support, so he has yet to break his 15% ceiling nationally.<sup>202</sup>

Tea Party leaders, including those in the conservative media establishment, have not yet been able to rally behind a single candidate despite Hemingway’s predictions. A number of reasons are possible for this newfound ineptitude: there are more candidates to choose from; the intensity of the media coverage and the amount of spending are vastly greater in 2012 than in 2010; elections take place in multiple states, and early states such as New Hampshire and Iowa carry undue influence; the 2012 field lacks one individual who has the ability to unify the real conservatives of the movement nationally;<sup>203</sup> and even Tea Party voters may feel more comfortable electing someone to the Senate than they might to the White House.

Because the echo chamber and Tea Party elites have yet to settle on one candidate, the message is opaque and the threat is weak. Part of the confusion within the echo chamber is because there is no clear leftist threat in this primary: the nearest one is Obama looming large in the general election. Even Romney, the bane of the Tea Party for his Massachusetts healthcare plan, has moved quite far to the right to make himself more acceptable to Tea Party voters. Skocpol recently argued in a *Washington Post* op-ed that Romney has moved so far to the right that he “has become the stealth Tea Party candidate, endorsing the essence of the movement while remaining unburdened by its public label.”<sup>204</sup> She pointed out that Romney so far in this campaign holds the toughest immigration stance, endorses the Ryan Budget, promises to continue the Bush tax cuts, and wants to slash public spending on welfare and college tuition assistance. *The Wall Street Journal* added, “Mitt Romney didn't start his run for the presidency as a Tea Party favorite. But he's campaigning as if he wants to become one.”<sup>205</sup> Ezra Klein remarked, “On policy, Romney is far to Bush’s right.”<sup>206</sup> Moreover, some Tea Party elites like Chris Christie of New Jersey and Nikki Haley of South Carolina have been very boisterous supporters of Romney throughout the campaign, creating a sense of Tea Party elite support for him and simultaneously a sense of disunity among the conservative echo chamber. These combine to mitigate the threat of a Romney candidacy. Accordingly, Romney has consistently received between 20-30% of the Tea Party vote share according to exit polls so far.<sup>207</sup>

The second reason that the Romney threat, which could serve to bring the Tea Party together in the primary, appears weak is because in some sense none of

the other candidates is “Tea Party-enough” to merit the Tea Partiers’ or Tea Party elites’ full support. Glenn Beck, for example, has publicly detailed why he does not want to support any of the candidates.<sup>208</sup> Romney, seeking to create chaos within the Tea Party primary, has capitalized on confusion among the Tea Party elites by attacking his leading opponents on their various Tea Party specific vulnerabilities. For example, Romney was the first candidate to publicly point out Perry’s soft immigration position and, indirectly, through his “Super PAC,” he ridiculed Gingrich on the airwaves for his paid role as a “historian” at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Romney has also recently targeted Santorum for his support of former Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter over a Tea Party challenger.<sup>209</sup> Instead of going after these candidates for their more obvious flaws – Gingrich’s marital problems, Santorum’s harsh stance on social issues – Romney has actively sought to paint them as equally, if not more, moderate than he is. As a result, Tea Party leaders are split among themselves, giving the threat a hollow reverberation in the walls of the echo chamber. When the Tea Party elites’ points contradict each other, the school of fish loses some of its cues and finds it harder to swim coherently in one direction.

While they may be divided in the primary, including along the social conservative-libertarian fault line that has been there all along, this does not mean that Tea Partiers will refuse to unite when the Right versus Left battle again dominates the field. Nearly all Tea Partiers agree that whomever the GOP ends up nominating will be far better than the hated Barack Obama, and most will turn out for Republicans in their 2012 effort to push aside Democrats and their President.

The trepidation with which Tea Partiers view Obama simply cannot be understated. In many ways, the Tea Party was founded around the goal of stopping Obama and held together by the belief that if they fail, there might not be much America left to save. Even national facilitators, like FreedomWorks, which have threatened to boycott the Presidential race if Romney is the nominee, will eventually come around. “It seems really irresponsible to me,” Christen Varley, the leader of the Greater Boston Tea Party, said. “We all have to get together and back whoever it is in the end. That's what I think is ridiculous. If the nominee is Mitt Romney, is FreedomWorks really going to sit out the 2012 election? Of course not.”<sup>210</sup>

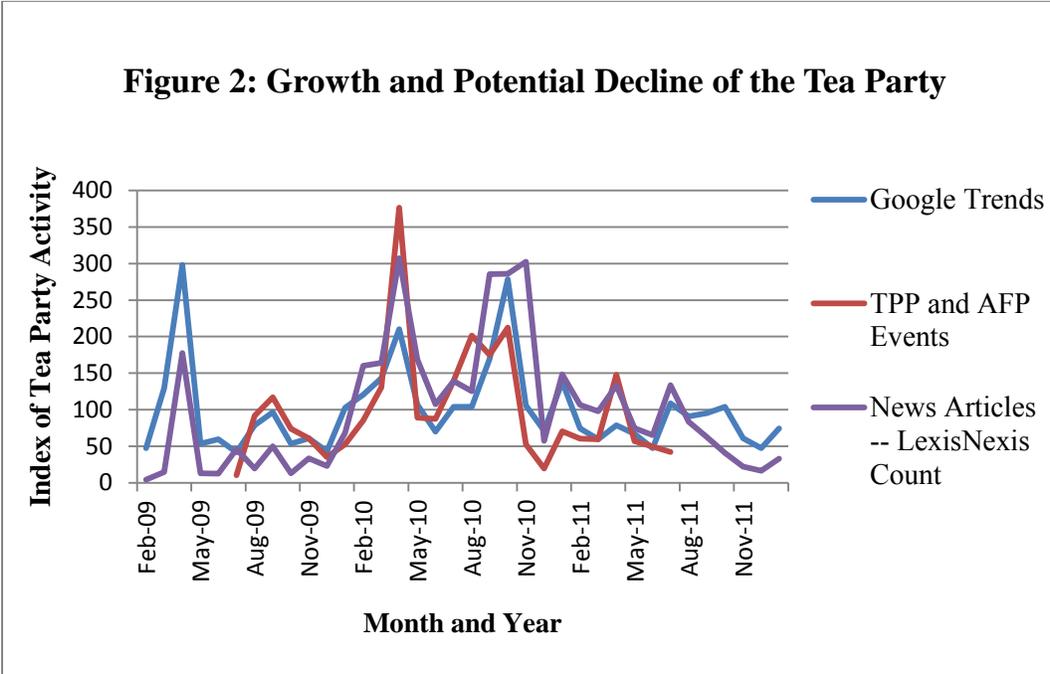
While many factors explain the disunity between 2010 and 2012, one of the most relevant is how the movement, in the absence of an external threat, has lost its internal unity. This is what this thesis has argued. The Tea Party did not come from a pre-existing network, nor has it actively fostered strong ties among its members in the aggregate. Rather, it has largely been held together by the perception of an external threat. A vast right wing echo chamber has built up an immense and sometimes irrational perceived threat among Tea Partiers that has served to keep the movement unified and motivated. This sense of threat stems from a narrow yet elaborate understanding of political issues and is stoked by an intellectual media environment that actively polarizes its base and isolates them from the political mainstream – an isolation that, sadly, appears to be occurring in the broader American public as well.<sup>211</sup>

Epitomizing the difficulties of covering a current day movement, this thesis is due on March 6, “Super Tuesday,” and it is impossible to know exactly what will happen next. Still, I have little doubt that in the 2012 election, when the threat returns, the Tea Party will once again hang together in an effort to defeat Obama, even if it means replacing him with the politically moderate Romney. However, this might not be enough to keep the movement alive. Although Tea Partiers will be motivated to defeat Obama and will rally around the eventual nominee, it remains to be seen whether the nominee will, in turn, support them.

The Tea Party brand in American politics is not a strong one. In fact, the Tea Partiers are less well liked by out-group members than Atheists, Muslims, Liberals, and Conservatives.<sup>212</sup> Knowing this, it seems likely that the eventual nominee will tack back toward the center and assume that he has the Tea Party support strongly in his corner, no matter how far to the center he shifts. Indeed, I predict it will be the Democrats, not the Republicans, who talk most about the Tea Party in an effort to paint the eventually Republican nominee a Tea Party extremist.

If that is the future for the Tea Party, it seems that its influence has peaked (see Figure 2).<sup>213</sup> The number of Google searches is down. The number of events is down. Most crucially, media attention, as measured by the number of news articles mentioning the Tea Party, is also down, meaning that nobody is fanning the flame of the movement to keep its passion burning.<sup>214</sup> There is certainly some irony in the Tea Party’s dependence on the media since the Tea Party, which hates the liberal mainstream media more than anything else, was largely created by the

media. If it were not for the attention that the pundits, beyond just those on *Fox*, lavished on this new exciting movement, it would not have grown as quickly nor to the extent that it did. But the media, tirelessly attuned to sensationalism, gradually lost interest and slowly shifted its focus away to the Republican Primary and the Occupy Movement.



The media attention may have faded, but the individuals at the party in Wilmington, North Carolina, have not disappeared. One Carolinian at that party, *George Soroka*, told me that a long time – twenty, maybe thirty years – ago, he was actively involved in a local movement like the Tea Party, a group called the “Taxpayer Association.” Nationally that group faded out, too, but in George’s town they kept meeting. When I asked why the group was not meeting any more, George sat back and ran a hand through his weathered gray hair. “Well,” he said, “I guess most of them are dead.” From what George told me, the Association was very successful when it was around and actually managed to elect some members

to local office or to chair the local Republican Party. Although George survived to be the last Taxpayer, so to speak, he lamented those who had dropped out along the way. “A lot of them got tired of fighting it, they wanted to win the war in one battle and didn’t look at the long haul.”

It is easy to look at the Tea Party’s struggle as a war, but that would be a mistake. In the arc of American history, the Tea Party’s fights are yet another battle between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, the New Deal and the Old Deal, Democrats and Republicans, Left versus Right. While many of its members likely do not realize it yet, the Tea Party’s biggest impact and most lasting legacy is that it has set the stage for new grassroots movements. In fact, as Gamson argued, the surest sign of their success so far may be that the Tea Party inspired a countermovement in Occupy Wall Street. The Tea Party, like the Taxpayer Association, will have life well after its obituary has been written by the punditry. At the next election some of the newly elected Tea Partiers will lose but others will win and an even smaller sampling of them will keep winning. As the Tea Party fades into the periphery, Tea Partiers would be doing themselves a disservice to look at this fight as a war lost. Rather, this adventure has been several battles won, several battles lost, and a unique opportunity to reshape and reenergize the Republican Party while enshrining themselves as a permanent footnote in American history.

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Meetup Tea Party Groups are likely similar to other Tea Party Groups**

There are several ways to show that Meetup Groups are similar to other Tea Party groups. Although the best would be to sample the demographics of all 79 groups and then compare this to the national movement at large, this is largely unfeasible due to the resistance of Tea Partiers to taking surveys and communicating with academics and members of the mainstream media. Furthermore, given the risks and inherent difficulties with conducting a census of Tea Partiers, it is not clear the results given would be accurate. There are two methods I propose to show that Meetup groups are not that systematically different from the Tea Party group database assembled: the first is to compare the issues that Meetup Groups talk about and groups that they link to the larger Tea Party movement; the second is to see how the collection of Meetup Groups varies by region.

The 79 Meetup Groups are not statistically significantly different from the 961 national groups (see Appendix 3) on every issue, although they are minutely statistically significant at the .1 level for Guns and Healthcare references. There is no plausible reason why Meetup groups would be slightly less concerned than other groups about these two specific issues and this seems largely a result of sampling error. This similarity in issue focus is an important finding because it suggests that Meetup groups are largely similar in the topics of discussion to most other Tea Party Groups. The second major finding from this analysis is that Meetup groups are almost completely indistinguishable from regular Tea Party Groups in the regularity of their events. Given that setting and announcing meeting times is the primary function of Meetup groups, it is reassuring to see that Meetup groups meet about as often as the larger body of Tea Party Groups.

However, there are some differences between other Tea Party websites and Meetup groups. First, Meetup groups are substantially more likely to have more members, multiple authors, and officers. These can all be explained by the structure of the Meetup website compared to other website types: Meetup groups post how many members they have in the group and, because of their fee, tend to be the primary website of the group. Also, anyone with an email account can sign up to join a Meetup site. For most other groups that reported group numbers, we relied on Facebook “likes” of the official groups, or reported members who were on their Ning page. This systematically undercounted some groups for four reasons: 1) it is easier to “unlike” something on Facebook than it is to leave a

Meetup group; 2) interviews revealed that some individuals are hesitant to publicly identify themselves as Tea Partiers, which suggests that they might be willing to create an anonymous Meetup account (which is fairly easy) while not be willing to “like” something in the more visible Facebook; 3) Meetup groups provide more benefits for members (for example, an email list and an easy to use calendar) than Facebook does, making it more important for a member to join a Meetup group than a Facebook group.

Meetup groups are likely to have multiple authors because of the ubiquitous “Message Board” feature on Meetup, which clearly reports who “posted” a new message. Most other sites do not distinctly identify other authors, or list all postings under a “moderator” title, which would have been counted under our methodology as one author. Meetup groups are likewise likely to have officers because under the Meetup member page is an “Organizer” heading that the creator of the website would have to “opt out” of filling in, whereas other groups need to “opt in” to report their leadership team.

With the inexplicable exception of the regularity of links to the Republican Party and the explicable exception of links to *Fox News*, Meetup groups are very unlikely to link to other groups. This is simply a reflection of the structure of the Meetup groups in comparison to other groups. Most other groups contain their links in a “Recommended Links” page on their website. Meetup groups are not as flexible and pages cannot be added as easily. Accordingly, Meetup groups do not link to other groups, especially other local Tea Parties, as frequently. While there is no plausible explanation as to why Meetup groups systematically under-link to the Republican Party, it makes sense that they link to *Fox News* because much of the members’ communication, as I reference, revolves around sharing news with other members.

In short, there are three main reasons we would suspect the Meetup sample to not be representative of the movement at large: 1) we only look at citizens with online access; 2) there could be differences between groups who choose to use Meetup and those who choose a different server or to design their own website; and 3) the groups that make their past emails easily accessible might be different from the groups that do not. However, correspondingly, 1) many Tea Partiers have Internet access; 2) Meetup groups appear to be reasonably similar to other Tea Party groups based on the issues that they talk about on their website; and 3) there does not seem to be a large difference between groups that make their past emails accessible and those that do not. The sample is not perfectly statistically representative, but it gives us a general idea of what internal Tea Party communication looks like.

**Appendix 2: There is an important difference between Tea Party Supporters and true Tea Partiers**

Since the Tea Party movement burst on to the scene in April 2009, it has been closely tracked by national surveys. Unfortunately, nearly all of these polls asked respondents if they were Tea Party “supporters,” which is a slightly different demographic than Tea Partiers. This has led to confusion and a fundamental misunderstanding of who the movement contains and what the movement’s aims are. A much more logical and representative definition of “Tea Partier” is to define Tea Partier as the comparatively few individuals who have either donated to the Tea Party and/or have attended an event.

**Table 5: Tea Party Supporters versus Tea Partiers**

		Know "a lot" about the Tea Party	Favorable Opinion of the Tea Party Movement	Tea Party Views "Reflect most Americans"
Not a Tea Party Supporter	Count	143	73	106
	%	20.1%	10.3%	14.9%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	315	574	550
	%	46.9%	85.4%	81.8%
Tea Partier	Count	143	187	181
	%	73.7%	96.4%	93.3%
Total <i>Full table available below</i>	Count	607	848	851
	%	38.2%	53.3%	53.5%

Unfortunately, not a lot of large scale surveys have broken Tea Party supporters into supporters and true Tea Partiers. The largest publicly accessible national survey that has done this is *The New York Times/CBS News* Poll of backers of the Tea Party movement. It surveyed 1,580 adults and oversampled for Tea Party adults, surveying 881 Tea Party supporters for the purpose of analysis and then weighing them back to their proper proportion. The margin of error for all numbers from this poll in the thesis is plus or minus 3%.

Since Tea Party supporters (those who claim to “support” the Tea Party but have not gone to any events or donated to a Tea Party Group) always vastly outnumber “Tea Partiers” (those who have gone to an event or donated) the size of this survey makes it one of the few surveys that allows us to study true Tea Partiers (n=194). As can be seen in Table 1, there is a large and significant difference between those who are against the Tea Party, Tea Party Supporters, and Tea Partiers regarding how much they know about the Tea Party, how favorable their opinion is on the Tea Party, and whether they think the views of the Tea Party “reflect most Americans.” This table also reveals that differentiating Tea

Partiers from Tea Party Supporters makes a lot of sense: true Tea Partiers should know a lot about the movement, they should have a favorable opinion of the movement, and they should believe that it is largely representative of most Americans.

When we look at the results with the Tea Party population broken down into supporters and Tea Partiers, we can see that Tea Partiers are slightly more homogeneous (Appendix 5), and more conservative than Tea Party supporters (Table 6). Members of both groups are much more conservative than those who are not Tea Party Supporters. While there are certainly some flaws with general stereotypes about Tea Partiers, the general demographic stereotypes hold up fairly well. Tea Partiers are indeed more likely to be older, whiter, and Republican – as are Tea Party supporters.

**Table 6: Tea Partiers Political Beliefs**

		Which Category Best Describes Your Political Philosophy?				
		Very/Somewhat liberal	Moderate	Somewhat conservative	Very conservative	Total
Not a Supporter	Count	128	328	115	51	710
	%	17.9%	46.2%	16.2%	7.2%	100.0%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	25	149	243	238	672
	%	3.7%	22.2%	36.2%	35.4%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	4	24	50	114	194
	%	2.1%	12.4%	25.8%	58.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	199	505	411	408	1591
	%	21.5%	31.7%	25.8%	25.6%	100.0%

**Appendix 2 continued:**

		<b>How much do you know about the Tea Party movement?</b>					Total
		A lot	Some	Not much	Nothing	DK/NA	
Not a Tea Party Supporter	Count	143	263	148	152	4	710
	%	20.1%	37.0%	20.8%	21.4%	0.6%	100.0%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	315	307	46	4	0	672
	%	46.9%	45.7%	6.8%	0.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	143	46	5	0	0	194
	%	73.7%	23.7%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	607	624	200	156	4	1591
	%	38.2%	39.2%	12.6%	9.8%	.3%	100.0%

		<b>What is Your Opinion of the Tea Party Movement</b>					Total
		Favorable	Not favorable	Undecided	Have not heard enough	Refused	
Not a Tea Party Supporter	Count	73	226	119	284	8	710
	%	10.3%	31.8%	16.8%	40.0%	1.1%	100.0%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	574	6	58	32	2	672
	%	85.4%	0.9%	8.6%	4.8%	0.3%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	187	2	4	1	0	194
	%	96.4%	1.0%	2.1%	0.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	848	234	182	317	10	1591
	%	53.3%	14.7%	11.4%	19.9%	0.6%	100.0%

**Appendix 2 continued: True Tea Partiers are more Homogeneous than Tea Party Supporters and Non-Supporters**

		Has Obama moved the country toward socialism?	Is global warming having an impact now?	Is the country on the wrong track?	Do you have firearms in your household	Do you identify as something other than White or Caucasian?	Are you over 45 years old?
Not a Supporter	Count	279	321	351	268	118	506
	%	39.3%	20.2%	49.4%	37.7%	16.6%	71.2%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	626	74	625	372	39	548
	%	93.2%	4.7%	93.0%	55.3%	5.8%	81.5%
Tea Partier	Count	191	10	190	113	11	164
	%	98.5%	0.6%	97.9%	58.2%	5.7%	84.5%
Total	Count	1111	405	1179	760	1386	1228
	%	69.8%	25.5%	74.1%	47.7%	87.1%	77.1%

		Which category best describes your political philosophy?						
		Very liberal	Somewhat liberal	Moderate	Somewhat conservative	Very conservative	DK/NA	Total
Not a Supporter	Count	6	122	328	115	51	48	710
	%	0.5%	17.2%	46.2%	16.2%	7.2%	6.8%	100.0%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	3	22	149	243	238	17	672
	%	0.4%	3.3%	22.2%	36.2%	35.4%	2.5%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	0	4	24	50	114	2	194
	%	0.0%	2.1%	12.4%	25.8%	58.8%	1.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	50	149	505	411	408	68	1591
	%	3.1%	9.4%	31.7%	25.8%	25.6%	4.3%	100.0%

\*\*Source for Appendix 2 graphs is *New York Times*/CBS News 2010 Survey of Tea Partiers

**Appendix 3: Differences between Meetup Groups and All Other Groups Are Largely Negligible**

Name	Multiple Authors	Average Number of Members	Median Number of Members	Officers	Event Frequency	Federation Website	Part of Federation	TPP Affiliate	Links to Other Local TP groups	Links to TPP
Meetup Average	0.95	238.10	122.00	0.80	2.65	0.01	0.05	0.05	0.23	0.27
National Average	0.37	443.28	158.00	0.30	2.70	0.06	0.11	0.17	0.59	0.53
Sample Size	84	72		81	80	76	76	76	75	77
Chi-Squared	77*	95*	8*	66*	0.07****	2.5***	2.05***	6.38**	16.94*	9.49*
Name	Links to Freedom Works	Links to AFP	Links to Republican Party	Links to Campaign for Liberty	Discusses Fox News	Discusses Budget Spending	Discusses Obama's Citizenship	Discusses Terrorism	Discusses Immigration	Discusses Social Issues
Meetup Average	0.05	0.03	0.17	0.41	0.38	0.88	0.07	0.30	0.37	0.17
National Average	0.29	0.22	0.25	0.19	0.47	0.86	0.11	0.30	0.48	0.26
Sample Size	75	75	75	78	77	80	76	76	76	75
Chi-Squared	14.33*	12.96*	1.67***	19.88*	1.53***	0.02***	1.16***	0***	1.89***	2.2***
Name	Links to TP Express	Links to TP Nation	Links to 9/12 Project	Links to Heritage	Links to Cato	Discusses Wall Street	Discusses Environment	Discusses Health-Care	Discusses Guns	Discusses Religion
Meetup Average	0.12	0.00	0.73	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.33	0.48	0.45	0.43
National Average	0.18	0.08	0.43	0.37	0.14	0.10	0.43	0.65	0.33	0.40
Sample Size	75	74	80	74	75	75	76	77	76	77
Chi-Squared	1.31***	5.94**	15.55*	13.93*	6.81***	2.69***	1.69***	3.51**	3.21**	0.21****

\*Significant at the .01 level, \*\*Significant at the .05 level, \*\*\*Significant at the .1 level, \*\*\*\*Significant at less than the .2 level

**Appendix 4: There is a Surprising Lack of Regional Variation in Issue Focus of the Tea Party in a variety of issues, including Guns, Immigration and Social Issues.**

Census Region	Social Issues				Immigration				Guns			
	West	Midwest	South	Northeast	West	Midwest	South	Northeast	West	Midwest	South	Northeast
Observed Instance	34	75	102	26	97	103	180	54	55	87	118	43
Total States	187	229	375	122	187	228	377	123	186	229	375	123
Chi Square	0.82	1.26	0.04	0.23	0.35	0.14	0.00	0.17	0.19	0.67	0.08	0.05
P-Value	0.365	0.261	0.841	0.879	0.554	0.708	1	0.68	0.663	0.413	0.777	0.823

\*\*Based on the prevalence of each of these issues in the National Tea Party Website Database. Census regions available here (as of 10/15/2011): [http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us\\_regdiv.pdf](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)

**Appendix 5: What Tea Partiers Disagree About**

	Median Number	Word Count	Sum Media	Debt	Spending	Islam	Immigration	Social Issues	Religion	Guns	Health-care	Local Politics	Group Issue
Disagreement Emails	410	126	5.6%	0.0%	13.9%	8.3%	0.0%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%	5.6%	5.6%
All Emails	2054	62	24.3%	1.7%	3.0%	1.9%	3.3%	1.8%	4.1%	2.8%	6.5%	4.4%	4.4%

\*\*Source is Tea Party Meetup email database. Chi-Square test not run due to a small N in disagreement emails.

**Appendix 6: Where do Tea Partiers get their news from?**

		Which source do you trust more for information?					Total
		Other supporters	Television or newspapers	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	DK/NA	
Tea Party Supporter	Count	269	293	33	53	24	672
	%	40.0%	43.6%	4.9%	7.9%	3.6%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	124	35	13	12	10	194
	%	63.9%	18.0%	6.7%	6.2%	5.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	395	329	46	66	45	881
	%	44.8%	37.3%	5.2%	7.5%	5.1%	100.0%

		Where do you get your information about the Tea Party from?								Total
		Internet	E-mail	Meetings	Phone calls	Television	Newspapers	Other source	DK/NA	
Tea Party Supporter	Count	128	19	0	3	373	70	71	8	672
	%	19.0%	2.8%	.0%	.4%	55.5%	10.4%	10.6%	1.2%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	54	18	10	8	64	15	17	8	194
	%	27.8%	9.3%	5.2%	4.1%	33.0%	7.7%	8.8%	4.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	183	37	10	11	439	85	89	27	881
	%	20.8%	4.2%	1.1%	1.2%	49.8%	9.6%	10.1%	3.1%	100.0%

**Appendix 6 Continued:**

		What television news do you watch?								Total
		ABC, NBC, CBS	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC	Do not watch news	Other	Combinatio n (Vol.)	DK/N A	
Not a Tea Party Supporter	Count	234	132	90	40	96	28	80	10	710
	%	33.0%	18.6%	12.7%	5.6%	13.5%	3.9%	11.3%	1.4%	100.0%
Tea Party Supporter	Count	84	49	402	8	44	13	70	2	672
	%	12.5%	7.3%	59.8%	1.2%	6.5%	1.9%	10.4%	.3%	100.0%
Tea Partier	Count	4	6	152	2	11	2	14	3	194
	%	2.1%	3.1%	78.4%	1.0%	5.7%	1.0%	7.2%	1.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	323	188	657	50	151	43	164	15	1591
	%	20.3%	11.8%	41.3%	3.1%	9.5%	2.7%	10.3%	.9%	100.0%

\*\*Source for above graphs is *New York Times*/CBS News 2010 Survey of Tea Partiers

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## Citations

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<sup>1</sup> (Clement and Green 2011)

<sup>2</sup> For the Republican Party's move to the right see: (Bonica 2010)

<sup>3</sup> (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988), (Melucci, Nomads of the Present 1989)

<sup>4</sup> (Jamieson and Cappella 2008)

<sup>5</sup> (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011, 6)

<sup>6</sup> (Leibovich 2010)

<sup>7</sup> This number is similar to the number of Tea Party groups that Emily Ekins found (1500). Both Ekins and the Washington groups failed to weed out groups that were nothing more than a defunct webpage or a Facebook group, which explains the discrepancy between our number and their numbers. Additionally, *The Washington Post* list includes several duplicates and groups that aren't necessarily Tea Party groups. (Ekins, Tea party signs by the numbers 2010, 7) (Washington Post 2010)

<sup>8</sup> Poll available at: [http://poll.pollcode.com/Dz4\\_result?v](http://poll.pollcode.com/Dz4_result?v). Other options included "I hope so" (11%), "God help us, no" (11%), "Unfortunately yes" (10%), "Not at all" (11%), "Not Sure" (11%). 84 total votes were cast as of 3/1/2012.

<sup>9</sup> No groups' Facebook, Meetup, or Ning page came close to those numbers. In the groups I interacted with, no group came close to those numbers nor have I heard of any individual group with 100,000 members. This is not necessarily malicious; accurate headcounts are difficult to do at rallies, and most individuals, Tea Partiers included, grossly exaggerate their political activity. (Bowers 2010) (Prior, The Immensely Inflated News Audience: Assessing Bias in Self-Reported News Exposure 2009) (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010)

<sup>10</sup> (King, Keohane and Verba 1994) emphasize the importance of this throughout their book.

<sup>11</sup> If I assume that a third of the locked groups gave me access (about the same rate at which contacted group leaders would speak with me) and then if I assume that about a third of responders had the right type of emails (the same rate as non-locked Email groups), I would only have added about 3 extra groups ( $24 * .3 * .38$ )

<sup>12</sup> Many Tea Partiers, due to a suspicion with the media, did not want to talk to me. Because of this, I am confident that the cross section of Tea Partiers I was able to speak with is not representative of the Tea Party movement at large which is why at no point do I try to do any kind of textual analysis on my interview response. Knowing this at the outset, I deliberately did not record any of my conversations and for all quotes in this paper I rely on my handwritten notes from conversations. Accordingly, the quotes in this paper are intended to add color and flavor rather than be definitive statements.

<sup>13</sup> (Brinkley 2010)

<sup>14</sup> (Reynolds 2009). Pelosi was referring to a popular left wing belief that the Tea Party movement was part of a vast coordinated rightwing machine, the "Sam Adams Alliance," which received money from the Koch family to fund the nationwide rallies. The original article was taken down and does not appear to be available in full form anywhere. A biased summary of the event is available in Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe's book (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 75-76). An equally biased account is available on the DailyKos, a liberal blog (whenwego 2009). *The New Yorker* published an article at a later date that went into more detail about the role that the Koch brothers played in funding the Tea Party through Americans for Prosperity (Mayer 2010).

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<sup>15</sup> (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 16); see also: (Klandermans and Oegema, *Potentials, Networks, Motivations and Barriers: Steps toward Participation in Social Movements* 1987)

<sup>16</sup> (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 16); see also: (Klandermans and Oegema, *Potentials, Networks, Motivations and Barriers: Steps toward Participation in Social Movements* 1987)

<sup>17</sup> (Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* 2012, 22): this number was calculated by looking at the roughly 800 active national groups which was then multiplied by the average number of group members (200). Group membership numbers were calculated by the number of people who were members of the Meetup group or liked the group on Facebook. Given the number of single-email older couples, this number could be slightly higher but it is a good ballpark estimate and certainly much lower than the earlier gaudy numbers. (New York Times-CBS News 2010)

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, despite some early claims to the contrary, (O'Hara 2010, 16) Tea Partiers are overwhelmingly Republican. (Blake 2011)

<sup>19</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *American Grace* 2010, 573)

<sup>20</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *American Grace* 2010, 572)

<sup>21</sup> The study, done by Emily Ekins, was not published in a journal but was covered in several news outlets: (Ekins, *Tea party signs by the numbers* 2010); (Gardner 2010)

<sup>22</sup> (New York Times-CBS News 2010)

<sup>23</sup> (New York Times-CBS News 2010)

<sup>24</sup> Generated from looking at the titles of the various Tea Party emails, larger words are indicative of more frequent usage.

<sup>25</sup> (Glenn Beck Show 2009). This was not an isolated incident. Beck also said on air: “You have three people in the White House that are in love with eugenics or whatever it is you would call it today. ... Please dear God, read history. Please dear God read the truth of what these people have said in their own words, and ask yourself this one question: Do you trust these people enough to give them control over who lives and who dies? Because that's what healthcare is when you have no other choice but to go to the state.” As quoted in: (Milbank 2010)

<sup>26</sup> <http://yavapaiteaparty.org/AboutUs.aspx> Accessed 10/7/2011

<sup>27</sup> There is a striking similarity in prevalence of issues across the country – that is, groups in the Midwest or Northeast are statistically just as likely to talk about religion, immigration, guns, or social issues as groups in the South or West (Appendix 4). This does not necessarily mean that individual Tea Partiers feel as strongly about these issues in difference areas, further research is needed to demonstrate that. Regardless, this lack of a regional variation is a surprising finding. One logical explanation for this would be that the Tea Party is governed in a top down manner. This simply is not the case. There is no national Tea Party organization – however, there is something of a party mouthpiece in *Fox News*.

<sup>28</sup> I almost never saw any member of the Tea Party audience question and statement by the speaker, no matter how incredulous the talk was.

<sup>29</sup> (Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* 2012, 136)

<sup>30</sup> (Mayer 2010)

<sup>31</sup> (Brafman and Beckstrom 2006) have traced similarly structured “spider” organizations (in contrast to more top down “starfish” organizations).

<sup>32</sup> (McCarthy and Zald 1977)

<sup>33</sup> (Mayer 2010)

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- <sup>34</sup> (Harvard 2011)
- <sup>35</sup> 59% of Tea Partiers have a favorable opinion of Beck (against 15% with a negative opinion) while the same percentage (59%) of non-Tea Party Republicans say they haven't heard enough about Glenn Beck to form an opinion. (New York Times-CBS News 2010)
- <sup>36</sup> The official Tea Party Patriots website lists 1,000 member groups but I have seen several public appearances where Jenny Beth Martin, the official chairman of the Tea Party Patriots, claims that there are over 2,800 groups and 15 million members.
- <sup>37</sup> (Tea Party Patriots n.d.)
- <sup>38</sup> (Downs 1957), (Schlesinger 1985)
- <sup>39</sup> The median voter theorem as initially outlined by Harold Hotelling (Hotelling 1929) and honed by Duncan Black (Black 1948)
- <sup>40</sup> (Lipset 1972) uses a similar framework to define social movements
- <sup>41</sup> (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988, 695)
- <sup>42</sup> For example, see (Crossley 2002, 2)
- <sup>43</sup> Martin 1920 in the *Behavior of Crowds* as quoted in (Gamson, *The Social Psychology of Collective Action* 1992, 54)
- <sup>44</sup> For example: (Davies 1962), (Gurr 1970)
- <sup>45</sup> For example: (Smelser 1962), (Kornhauser 1959)
- <sup>46</sup> (Olson 1968)
- <sup>47</sup> (Zald and McCarthy 1977) see also (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988)
- <sup>48</sup> (Mueller 1992, 3)
- <sup>49</sup> For an excellent list, see: (Mueller 1992, 5)
- <sup>50</sup> (Marx Ferree 1992, 41)
- <sup>51</sup> Quote from Melucci 1989 as quoted in (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 3)
- <sup>52</sup> (Gamson, *The Social Psychology of Collective Action* 1992, 54)
- <sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, much of his work is in his native Italian tongue. In English see: (Melucci, *Challenging Codes* 1996), (Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* 1989)
- <sup>54</sup> (Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* 1989, 218)
- <sup>55</sup> (Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* 1989, 29)
- <sup>56</sup> (Tarrow 1994, 4)
- <sup>57</sup> An excellent discussion of Tarrow's book can be found in (Klandermans, *Social Movements: Trends and Turns* 2000)
- <sup>58</sup> (Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (second edition) 1990, 28)
- <sup>59</sup> (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988, 727)
- <sup>60</sup> (Tarrow 1994, 93)
- <sup>61</sup> (Tarrow 1994, 93)
- <sup>62</sup> (Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (second edition) 1990, 147)
- <sup>63</sup> (Beal, et al. 2003, 989) (Cartwright 1969)
- <sup>64</sup> (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988)
- <sup>65</sup> (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 29)
- <sup>66</sup> (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997)
- <sup>67</sup> (Gamson, *The Social Psychology of Collective Action* 1992, 61)
- <sup>68</sup> (Fantasia 1988) Some psychology experiments have also bolstered this theory, and emphasized the importance of individual leaders: (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Aberane 1997)
- <sup>69</sup> For example, see: (Gerlach and Hine 1970), (Von Sechel, Kirk and Pinard 1971), (Bolton 1972), (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988)
- <sup>70</sup> (Friedman and McAdam 1992, 162)

<sup>71</sup> (McAdam, Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer 1986)

<sup>72</sup> (Gamson, The Social Psychology of Collective Action 1992, 61-64)

<sup>73</sup> For example: (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988), (Schwartz and Paul 1992). Likewise, rational choice theorists argue that individuals would not participate if they had no chance of success (Olson 1968)

<sup>74</sup> (Olson 1968)

<sup>75</sup> (Klandermans, The Social Psychology of Protest 1997, 95)

<sup>76</sup> Psychologists have identified five primary factors that influence what they term “group cohesiveness:” members’ similarity, entry difficulty, group size, group success, and external competition and threats.

An important component of social conflict theories is the hypothesis that external conflict promotes internal cohesion see: (Simmel 1955); (Mack and Snyder 1957); (Boulding 1962); (Levine and Campbell 1972)

<sup>77</sup> (R. M. Williams 1947)

<sup>78</sup> (Markides and Cohn 1982)

<sup>79</sup> (Guarino 2011)

<sup>80</sup> (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 65)

<sup>81</sup> Please note that Ekins added: “When cross-tabulated, 67% of Tea Partiers provided the “correct” or consistent response, being they favored abortion being available or available with limits and gay marriage/civil unions or opposed any legal recognition for gay couples and opposed abortion. 32% opposed one of the social questions but approved of the other, the primary driver of this were those who believed abortion should be available or available with limits but did not want legal recognition for gay couples.” (Ekins, The Character and Origins of the Tea Party Movement 2011, 28)

<sup>82</sup> (Ekins, The Character and Origins of the Tea Party Movement 2011) – All of the analysis done in the prior paragraph looks at Tea Party supporters not Tea Partiers because of the small N that results when culling out Tea Party supporters.

This data is based upon the CBS/NY Times survey but numerous surveys have revealed similar trends: (CNN 2010) (Ponnoru and O’Beirne 2010), (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010), (NBC/Wall Street Journal 2009). However, because the CBS/NY Times poll was by far the largest I primarily use that one. In an op-ed Campbell and Putnam (2011) Claim that their own private survey data says that the Tea Party movement was not a response to the recession.

<sup>83</sup> Please note that the difference in composition between Tea Party Supporters and Tea Partiers is not statistically significant:

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.378 <sup>a</sup>	2	.304
Likelihood Ratio	2.478	2	.290
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.374	1	.123
N of Valid Cases	881		

<sup>84</sup> N= 27, conducted between 8/25/2011- 8/21/2011. Questioned mirrored that of standard demographic Gallup polling. Given that the poll was an online opt-in only poll and not scientifically rigorous, it is not relied heavily on in this paper, other than to provide brief example of an individual group.

<sup>85</sup>

**Correlation between Libertarians (linking to Cato, CFL, or Both) and talking about social issues**

		Cato/CFL	Social Issues
Cato/CFL	Pearson Correlation	1	.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	961	961
Social Issues	Pearson Correlation	.250**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	961	961

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

<sup>86</sup> I do not divide the Tea Party social conservatives and libertarians up into Tea Partiers and Tea Party supporters here because that division makes the N too small to be particularly helpful.

<sup>87</sup> (Bellah Fall, 2005)

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.northbaypatriots.com/new-about-us/required-for-liberty-1> accessed 2/13/2012

<sup>89</sup>

**Correlation between Libertarians (Linking to Cato, CFL or Both) and talking about Religion**

		Libertarian	Social Conservative
Libertarian	Pearson Correlation	1	.131**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	961	961
Social Conservative	Pearson Correlation	.131**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	961	961

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

<sup>90</sup> (Bishop 2008)

<sup>91</sup> (Skocpol and Williamson, The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism 2012, 37)

<sup>92</sup> Putnam and Campbell argued: “the strongest predictor of being a Tea Party supporter today was a desire, back in 2006, to see religion play a prominent role in politics.” This regression analysis says little about the divide within the movement, but does speak to the

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religious zealotry of many Tea Partiers (Campbell and Putnam, *Crashing the Tea Party* 2011)

<sup>93</sup> (Mill 1974), (Dahl 1972)

<sup>94</sup> (Fishkin 1995), (Fearon Spring 1998)

<sup>95</sup> (Mutz and Mondak 2006), (D. Mutz 2006), (Pattie and Johnston, *Conversation, Disagreement, and Political Participation* 2009)

<sup>96</sup> See, for similar neighborhoods: (Bishop 2008); for the sorting of online information see: (Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* 2011); (Pariser, *Ted Talk* 2011)

<sup>97</sup> (Moscovi and Zavalloni 1969) and (Myers and Lamm 1976)

<sup>98</sup> (Huckfeldt, Medez and Osborn 2004)

<sup>99</sup> (Huckfeldt, Medez and Osborn 2004)

<sup>100</sup> (Festinger, Schachter and Back 1950), (Ulbig and Funk 1999)

<sup>101</sup> (Mutz and Mondak 2006) see also: (D. Mutz 2006). Note that other researchers have reported either no correlation between exposure to disagreement and participation (Nir 2005) or a positive association between the two (Leighley 1990).

<sup>102</sup> (Pattie and Johnston, *Conversation, Disagreement, and Political Participation* 2009)

<sup>103</sup> (Huckfeldt, Medez and Osborn 2004) and (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, *Political environments, political dynamics, and the survival of disagreement* 2002)

<sup>104</sup> In 1951 psychologist Stanley Schachter ran an experiment that showed that groups comprised of individuals with similar opinions were much more intent on excluding a deviant individual than groups made up of mix of student opinions. The same groups were quicker to stop talking to the person with the contrary opinion and much less likely to rate her favorably. (Schachter 1951)

<sup>105</sup> (Boorstein 2010) the specific poll in question is (Jones and Cox 2010), part of the 2010 American Values Survey from Public Religion and initially published by the Brookings Institute.

<sup>106</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *Crashing the Tea Party* 2011)

<sup>107</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *Crashing the Tea Party* 2011)

<sup>108</sup> (Posner 2011)

<sup>109</sup> (Kilgore 2011)

<sup>110</sup> (Sessions 2011)

<sup>111</sup> (Stanley 2010)

<sup>112</sup> (Hagerty 2010)

<sup>113</sup> These numbers come from 2007 Pew Center data of individuals who self-identify as evangelicals. (Cox and Smith 2007) Campbell and Putnam also make the point that the Tea Party is comparable or less religious than the average Republican (574)

<sup>114</sup> (Clement and Green 2011)

<sup>115</sup> Campbell and Putnam's survey data is not yet publicly available. Much of this information was discussed in person and over email with Robert Putnam.

<sup>116</sup> The overall dataset is quite large, but because the *NYT/CBS* survey oversampled for Tea Partiers it is actually larger than the number of Tea Partiers in the Putnam dataset (881 to 650). Email conversation between Robert Putnam and the author, 2/23/2012 – 2/25/2012

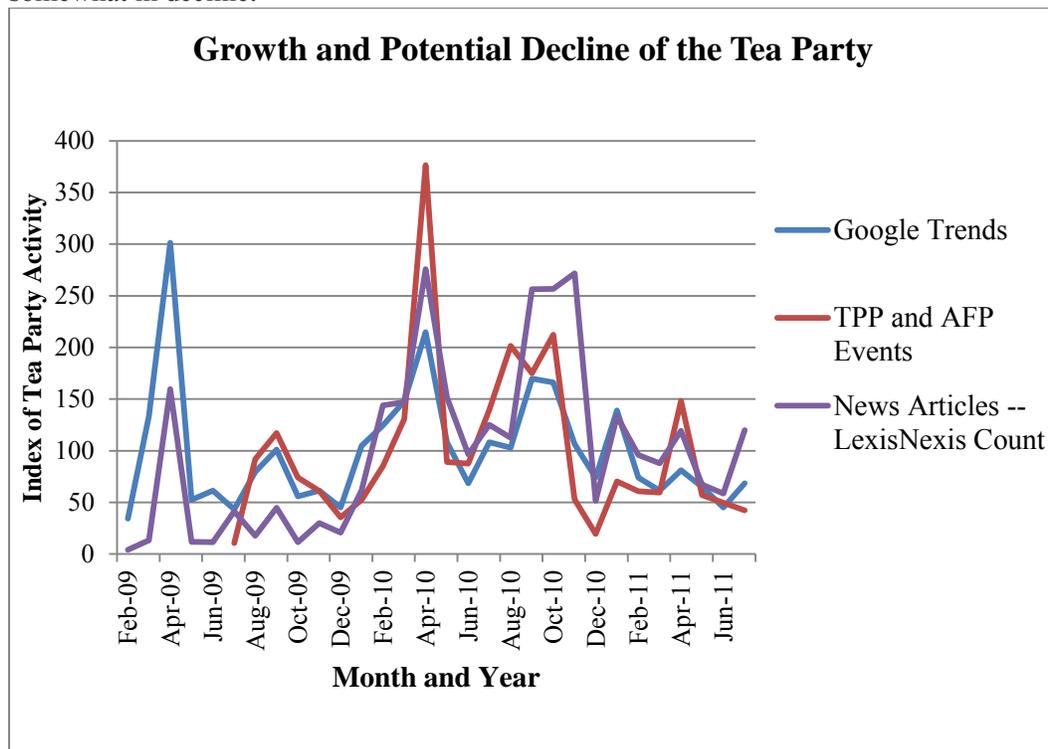
<sup>117</sup> (Paul 2010)

<sup>118</sup> (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 98)

<sup>119</sup> (Van de Putte 1995) as quoted in (Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* 1997, 99)

<sup>120</sup> Data from New York Times/CBS collection of polls. The full report is available here (as of 3/1/2012): <http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/229918/the-full-results-from-the-new-york-times-and-cbs.pdf>

<sup>121</sup> There has been a rapid decline in the number of Tea Party events located on major websites as well as the number of Google searches. It appears that the movement is somewhat in decline:



Data retrieved from the Tea Party Patriots website (<http://teapartypatriots.org/Today.aspx>) on August 5, 2011. Total number of nationwide events listed on their website per month. Data retrieved from the AFP Google Calendar (<http://www.americansforprosperity.org/events>) on August 5, 2011. Original metric used by (Keyes 2011) Google data was retrieved from [www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends) on August 5, 2011. Number of Google searches for “tea party.” Data retrieved from LexisNexis on August 5, 2011. Monthly sum of the number of newspaper articles in the United States that used the phrase “tea party” five or more times.

\*Calculated by using 100 as the average for each dataset. Original average of Google Trends: 5.54, TPP and AFP Events: 257, and LexisNexis News Article Count: 378. Individual graphs available in Appendix 1.

<sup>122</sup> (Clement and Green 2011)

<sup>123</sup> (Clement and Green 2011), email conversation with Robert Putnam 2/23/2012 – 2/25/2012

<sup>124</sup> The results may have been biased slightly: “The top four candidates in the poll participated in the call, which was also a fund-raising event. The three who came in last were invited but were unavailable and did not participate.” (Seelye 2011)

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<sup>125</sup> This certainly appeared to be true. Watching Tea Partiers talk to each other before talking to me made me feel like I was, sometimes, talking to two different people. Especially on sensitive issues like race, Tea Partiers were careful not to say anything that could be misconstrued as racist or politically incorrect.

<sup>126</sup> (Horwitz 1999)

<sup>127</sup> For a discussion on social capital and its waxing and waning in modern American history see: (Putnam 2000)

<sup>128</sup> For example, see: (Gerlach and Hine 1970), (Von Sechel, Kirk and Pinard 1971), (Bolton 1972), (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988)

For an extensive list, see: (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 21: Social Movements 1988, 707)

<sup>129</sup> For more on religious networks see: (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2009, 209). David Campbell has argued that these networks are quite effective. Looking at a situation in Alabama where a referendum on legalizing the lottery to raise revenue was defeated. Research leading up to the election showed that 81% of the evangelicals in Alabama opposed the lottery while a mere 25% of the rest of the state electorate was against it. Furthermore, he found that the large discrepancy between evangelicals and non-evangelicals was not because of a different in religious beliefs between evangelicals and the rest of the state. Yet evangelical voters had been mobilized and almost spontaneously turned out en mass, voting with a much greater frequency than they did in traditional elections. (Campbell, Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement 2004, 169-173)

<sup>130</sup> (Meckler and Martin 2012, 17)

<sup>131</sup> (Santelli 2009), (Meckler and Martin 2012, 17)

<sup>132</sup> A paper I wrote for a seminar two years ago, in some ways the predecessor to this thesis, argued that: “This [paper] suggests a previously untouched idea: the Tea Party was able to grow as quickly as it did because it capitalized on the strong social networks developed by the Christian right. The same network that allowed the Christian right to rapidly disseminate information and action plans among its members likely accounts for some of the Tea Parties meteoric growth from being a non-factor to a power national lobby group in a mere two years.” (Eger, The Tea Party and the Christian Right December, 2010)

<sup>133</sup> (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980) as quoted in (Friedman and McAdam 1992).

For more detailed discussions on the role of pre-existing networks see also: (Klandermans, The Social Psychology of Protest 1997)

<sup>134</sup> (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011, 6)

<sup>135</sup> (Livne, et al. 2011)

<sup>136</sup> (Livne, et al. 2011)

<sup>137</sup> In one case, I received the same email from a group in North Carolina and New Hampshire within 24 hours of each other. It read: “Animals that were formerly self-sufficient are now showing signs of belonging to the Democratic Party..... as they have apparently learned to just sit on their ass and wait for the government to step in and provide for their care and sustenance. This photo is of a Democrat black bear in Montana nicknamed...: Bearock Bearama.”

<sup>138</sup> (Hamptom 2003, 417)

<sup>139</sup> Conversation with the Putnam, 2/23/2012

<sup>140</sup> (Putnam 2000, see specifically 166-180), (Gladwell 2010), (Hamptom 2003)

<sup>141</sup> (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 76)

<sup>142</sup> (Jamieson and Cappella 2008), (Prior, Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections 2007)

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<sup>143</sup> This does not necessarily mean that individual Tea Partiers feel as strongly about these issues in difference areas. One logical explanation for this would be that the Tea Party is governed in a top down manner yet there is no national Tea Party organization. There is, however, something of a party mouthpiece in *Fox News*. Appendix 4 shows the surprising regional similarities.

<sup>144</sup> (Minkoff 2001, 183-4)

<sup>145</sup> (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011)

<sup>146</sup> (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011, 15)

<sup>147</sup> It appears that little research has been done on this, but it seems that individuals are more likely to say things, especially angry or unkind things, through the relative anonymity of email than in person. Still, the general contours of the conversation are similar.

<sup>148</sup> “Fair and Balanced” is a slogan used by Fox

<sup>149</sup> (Jamieson and Cappella 2008)

<sup>150</sup> For example see: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M22nWc\\_-UB0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M22nWc_-UB0); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVPF8Vo5LDk>; or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmNixEbnctU> (both accessed 3/1/2012) for select samples of the weekly program

<sup>151</sup> (Armey and Kibbe 2010)

<sup>152</sup> (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 147)

<sup>153</sup> (Slater 2007)

<sup>154</sup> Many Tea Party groups go out of their way to hire organizations like Wall Builders to come in and lead a seminar on, in Wall Builders case, the role of Christianity in the founding of the country. For more information see: (Wilentz 2010), (Lepore 2010)

<sup>155</sup> (Romano 2010)

<sup>156</sup> (Lepore 2010)

<sup>157</sup> (Lepore 2010)

<sup>158</sup> (Lepore 2010, 96)

<sup>159</sup> (Wilentz 2010)

<sup>160</sup> (Hofstadter 1964)

<sup>161</sup> (Wilentz 2010)

<sup>162</sup> (New York Times-CBS News 2010)

<sup>163</sup> No nationally conducted polls have measured the number of Tea Partiers who believe that Obama was born in this country. Kate Zernike of *the New York Times* has suggested that a sizeable portion of Tea Partiers do not believe that the newly released birth certificate is legitimate. (Zernike, *The Persistence of Conspiracy Theories* 2011) As recently as March 2<sup>nd</sup>, a Tea Party Facebook “friend” posted:

Holy Cow! Sheriff Arpaio [a Tea Party favorite from Arizona] really has a case for a forged document. It's all the same stuff we've seen presented by dozens of 15-year olds on the internet when the Long Form Birth Certificate was released in 2011, but this has full weight. But the investigation is thorough and the Q&A at the end is interesting - There is no way someone could have used this to get a passport. Asking Obama to produce another different birth certificate.

See also: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy4rpLH80HA&feature=relmfu>

<sup>164</sup> (Leiserowitz, et al. 2011)

<sup>165</sup> (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2011)

<sup>166</sup> Poll data from *NYT/CBS* 2010 poll.

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Most polls and polling questions show statistically different results for Tea Party Supporters and the general public. As I have shown earlier, true Tea Partiers tend to be more homogeneous and conservative in their political beliefs than supporters. Additionally, the individuals that the Tea Party sent to Congress were significantly more conservative than the congressmen already there. (Bonica 2010) and (Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* 2012, 169)<sup>167</sup> (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 140)

<sup>168</sup> For example, a member of the Tea Party Patriots claimed on NPR: Martin: ... A key one of them is a very strong commitment to fiscal conservatism, and some people are saying they're against raising the debt limit at all. Is that your perspective?

Blakely: That is the reflection of the intensive internal polling and surveying we have done of Tea Party Patriots membership and local coordinators. [A strong indicator of the movement as a whole]

Martin: Do you not think that a default is a big deal?

Blakely: I don't think that default needs to be necessary. We take in enough money, we take in \$220 billion a month. We need \$11 billion of that to pay the servicing fees on the debt. That leaves over \$200 hundred billion left over to pay monthly bills.

(NPR Staff 2011)

<sup>169</sup> (Cappella, Turow and Hall 1996, 16)

<sup>170</sup> (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002); (Tajfel and Turner 1986)

<sup>171</sup> (Beck 2010)

<sup>172</sup> (Zernike, *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America* 2010), (Lepore 2010), (Armey and Kibbe 2010), (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010), (Meckler and Martin 2012)

<sup>173</sup> (Meckler and Martin 2012, 13)

<sup>174</sup> (M. Williams 2010, 32)

<sup>175</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *American Grace* 2010, 498)

<sup>176</sup> A "word of the year" from satirist Stephen Colbert defined as: "truth that a person claims to know intuitively 'from the gut' or because it 'feels right' without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts."

<sup>177</sup> (Noelle-Neumann 1974)

<sup>178</sup> (Noelle-Neumann 1974)

<sup>179</sup> (Pattie and Johnston, *Conversation, Disagreement, and Political Participation* 2009).

For parties see: (Huckfeldt and Sprague, *Citizens, politics, and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign* 1995) or (Pattie and Johnston, *People who talk together vote together: An exploration of contextual effects in Great Britain* 2000). For attitude change: (Pattie and Johnston, *Talk as a political context: Conversation and electoral change in British Elections* 2001)

<sup>180</sup> This is all research collected from a variety of sources that I compiled. Individual level sources available on request. Primarily this data was from: [ontheissues.org](http://ontheissues.org); [thepoliticalguide.com](http://thepoliticalguide.com); and [issues2000.org](http://issues2000.org)

<sup>181</sup> Paul did get a 0% rating from the NARAL reflecting the somewhat subjective and complex nature of the rating groups (Issues 2000 2011)

<sup>182</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *American Grace* 2010, 332)

<sup>183</sup> Meeting notes published online from other groups suggest that they only begin with the Pledge of Allegiance or nothing at all. Still, many groups do begin meetings this way.

<sup>184</sup> (Pichardo 1997); For example, (Karpowitz, et al. 2011) draw a link from Inglehart to the Tea Party

<sup>185</sup> (Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* 1989, 218)

<sup>186</sup> Evidence for this is largely anecdotal, but see also (Livne, et al. 2011)

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<sup>187</sup> (Keith, et al. 1992); (Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* 2010)

<sup>188</sup> (Livne, et al. 2011)

<sup>189</sup> (Keith, et al. 1992, 105)

<sup>190</sup> For this see the work of Jonathan Haidt : (Haidt, *Jonathan Haidt on the moral roots of liberals and conservatives* 2008), (Haidt, *What the Tea Partiers Really Want* 2012)

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in: (Cappella, Turow and Hall 1996, 59)

<sup>192</sup> (Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* 1989, 218)

<sup>193</sup> One measure of internal movement unity is the number of endorsements from groups. Unfortunately, this is a very difficult statistic to track. Still, in 2010 endorsements were so ubiquitous among national and local Tea Party groups that they formed the basis of several studies of the Tea Party. (Karpowitz, et al. 2011), (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2011) (Zernike, *Tea Party Set to Win Enough Seats for Wide Influence* 2010). At this point, none of the organizations profiled in those pieces have made endorsements in the 2012 Republican Presidential Primary although I have little doubt that they will eventually endorse the eventual Republican nominee.

<sup>194</sup> (Harvard 2011)

<sup>195</sup> (Abramowitz, *Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement* 2011, 16-17)

<sup>196</sup> (Brownstein 2011)

<sup>197</sup> (Limbaugh 2011)

<sup>198</sup> Several have pointed this out as a reason that the Tea Party has failed to come together behind one candidate: Skocpol points out that “the Tea party has never been a unified organization, so it was never really in the cards that there would be a single ‘tea party candidate’ for President.” (Skocpol, *Mitt Romney, the stealth tea party candidate* 2012) Allen West, the popular Tea Party representative from Florida, agreed. He claimed on CNN that “the tea party, [is] much like Steve McQueen’s movie, ‘The Blob.’ They’re kind of different from each state to each state. There really is no centralized organization or structure to it, so each organization in its respective state or even North Florida down to South Florida can differ.” (Lee 2012)

<sup>199</sup> (Skocpol and Williamson, *Whose Tea Party is it?* 2011) and (Klein, *Was Rick Santorum good? Or was he lucky?* 2012)

<sup>200</sup> See also: (Feldman 2011)

<sup>201</sup> (Klein, *Was Rick Santorum good? Or was he lucky?* 2012)

<sup>202</sup> (Klein, *Was Rick Santorum good? Or was he lucky?* 2012)

<sup>203</sup> For example, see: (Sullivan 2011) and (Klein, *Where are the Republican heavyweights?* 2011)

<sup>204</sup> (Skocpol, *Mitt Romney, the stealth tea party candidate* 2012)

<sup>205</sup> (White and Nelson 2012)

<sup>206</sup> (Klein, *On Policy, Romney is far to Bush's right* 2012)

<sup>207</sup> (CNN 2012)

<sup>208</sup> (Martel 2011)

<sup>209</sup> Further compounding Santorum’s woes, Spectar later switched parties from Republican to Democrat, (Madison 2012)

<sup>210</sup> (Peoples 2011)

<sup>211</sup> (Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* 2010), (Bishop 2008), (Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* 2011). Others disagree: (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2010)

<sup>212</sup> (Campbell and Putnam, *American Grace* 2010, 571)

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<sup>213</sup> Calculated by using 100 as the average for each dataset. Original average of Google Trends: 6.71, TPP and AFP Events: 257, and LexisNexis News Article Count: 340. Data collected from Google Trends (which includes GoogleNews and Google searches); number of LexisNexis articles that use the phrase “Tea Party” five or more times (to have articles that focus on the Tea Party and cull out those that mention it in passing). Data from the Tea Party Patriots stops as they changed websites no longer allowing individuals to retroactively view their monthly calendar.

<sup>214</sup> Sociologists have long shown that the media is incredibly instrumental in the success of a social movement. Tarrow has argued that there are three major ways in which social movements engage the status quo: violent encounters, organized public demonstration, and creative disruption. These three are all examples, he argues, of “public performances.” (Tarrow 1994, 93) This echoes claims made by William Gamson in 1990 edition of *Strategy of Social Protest* where Gamson asserts that “today every, virtually every aspect of a challenger’s experience – recruitment efforts, organization, strategy, tactics – is affected by a potential or actual media presence.” (Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (second edition) 1990, 147)