Chapter 3

Political Movements, Presidential Nominations, and the Tea Party

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When CNBC financial analyst Rick Santelli took to the airwaves on February 19, 2009 to call for a modern "Tea Party" to protest government bailouts of financial institutions and overextended mortgage-holders, he set off a political movement that quickly became a major force in American politics. The "Tea Party" movement that resulted engaged thousands of Americans across the country. The movement has been called by *Washington Post* political correspondent and presidential biographer Lou Cannon "a movement that is more truly grassroots than any other of our time"[1] and by four *Wall Street Journal* correspondents "the most dynamic political force of 2010."[2] By the end of 2010, the movement had not only organized scores of chapters and sponsored numerous rallies, some of them drawing tens or hundreds of thousands of participants, it had also directly affected numerous primary and general election contests. What sort of influence might the Tea Party exert on the 2012 presidential race, and how should its efforts be judged within the context of other powerful political movements in American history?

The place to start is by defining what exactly is meant by a political movement. There are at least six broad characteristics of significant political movements in the American context. First, they are actually or potentially broadly-based but are not (yet) a majority and are driven by a relatively small hard core of activists. Second, they are organized and exhibit at least a loose hierarchy, making them an identifiable entity to outside observers, but their organization typically features a decentralized collection of both competing and collaborative structures that are less institutionalized than an existing political party. Third, they are motivated by at least a rough ideology, or generally coherent political vision of the world. Fourth, they have come (sometimes after a lengthy process of recruitment, education,

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and politicization of members) to promote change based on their ideology though political action, hence making them political, and not merely social, movements. Fifth, while not a permanent feature of the political landscape, they are not merely ephemera but have staying power beyond a single election. Finally, although their fortunes often become intertwined with particular political leaders, they are not synonymous with those leaders but rather have independent organizational existence. Genuine movements have substance beyond the individuals who serve as their standard-bearers. Although aimed at changing the political establishment, successful outside movements often forge an alliance with sympathetic insurgents within the establishment.[3]

Historically, political movements have exerted two kinds of influence in the area of presidential nominations. First, they have often influenced the outcome of presidential nomination races and, through those races, influenced the future direction of one or both of the major parties. That influence can be direct, exercised through involvement in the major parties, or indirect, exerted through a third party. Second, political movements have sometimes used their weight to push successfully for a change in the rules of the nomination game.

POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AND PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS IN HISTORY

Before looking seriously at the Tea Party and its potential for influencing the 2012 presidential nominations, it is useful to survey previous major political movements in American history since two-party competition and decentralized party nominations were regularized in the 1830s. The movements that bear examination in this period include the Free Soil movement, Populists, Progressives, conservative movement, New Politics, and religious right.

Free Soil: The Free Soil movement, aiming to prevent the expansion of slavery into the western territories, operated in the pure convention system, a system characterized by "party-activist control of nominations and platforms through the convention."[4] The system revolved around party committees chosen through local party meetings usually called "primaries" (though more like what we would today call "caucuses"). Although the character of the nominating system made it difficult for movements to operate within the major parties, lack of state-controlled ballots and ballot access laws meant that it was relatively easy to start a third party.

As the issue of the expansion of slavery became more salient in the 1840s, Americans in both major parties who wanted to stop that expansion joined forces through what became known as the Free Soil movement. However, the

movement quickly turned to the third party route. In 1848, former Democratic president Martin Van Buren was nominated for president by the Free Soil Party, whose convention chose the Whig (and son and grandson of former presidents) Charles Francis Adams as the party's vice presidential candidate. The Free Soil movement and party in 1848 drew strength from both major parties in varying places (as well as from the defunct Liberty Party), probably delivering New York's electoral votes to Whig candidate Zachary Taylor and possibly tilting other states to Taylor or Democrat Lewis Cass. (It turned out that Taylor, though himself a slaveholder, had Free Soil convictions when it came to extension of slavery into the West, but took pains during the campaign to obscure this fact.)[5]

The Free Soil Party continued organizing and ran a presidential ticket again in 1852. Free Soil ideas also continued to advance within the Whig Party among Whig politicians (like Abraham Lincoln and Thaddeus Stevens) who never joined the party. The Free Soil Party and the broader movement it represented then collapsed into the new Republican Party after 1854, guaranteeing its long-term significance.

Populists: The Populist movement of the late nineteenth century was the culmination of a series of agrarian reform movements such as the Grange, the Greenback movement, and the Farmers' Alliances. Historian Lawrence Goodwyn has called the Populists "the largest democratic mass movement in American history."[6] Concentrated in the South, West, and prairies, the Populists demanded government ownership of the railroads and telegraphs—the farmers' means of communication and transport with the outside world—as well as an inflationary currency policy. Based in the Farmers' Alliances—which had a northern wing with two million members and a southern wing with three million—the Populist movement was well-organized and had a ready-made lecture system and national reform press consisting of some one thousand journals to get their message out.

Like the Free Soilers, the Populists operated in an environment characterized by relatively difficult access into the major parties and relative easy formation of third parties. They initially pursued a strategy of influencing the major parties from the inside as much as possible, especially in the Democratic Party in the South. When operating within the major parties, the movement's supporters flooded local "primaries," sometimes overwhelming the local party establishments that normally controlled those meetings. However, the party regulars were able to reestablish control in most places within a couple of years. As a result, the Populists did ultimately form a national third party in 1892—the People's Party, or Populist Party—which ran candidates for offices from the U.S. presidency to municipal mayors. Populists and their sympathizers inside and outside of the major parties were able to maximize

their strength because of the widespread allowance in state law of "cross-listing," in which candidates could be listed as the nominee of more than one party, a practice that facilitated "fusion" tickets between major and minor parties. Although the regulars had driven most outright Populists from the major parties, the growing electoral strength of the Populist Party aided the cause of many who remained in the major parties but were sympathizers of the movement for either principled or tactical reasons. Consequently, both Democrats and Republicans in the 1890s included wings that hewed to some key Populist planks, especially currency inflation.

By 1896, pro-Populist and pro-inflationary forces had gained control of the Democratic Party in many places, and most congressional Democrats fell in that camp—much to the consternation of Democratic president Grover Cleveland, a staunch defender of the Gold Standard.[7] Cleveland had already served two (non-consecutive) terms in the White House and was unable to steer his party's nomination to a like-minded successor. As a result, that year's Democratic nomination went to William Jennings Bryan, a Populist-leaning pro-silver congressman from Nebraska, who also received the People's Party presidential nomination. The Democratic convention approved a platform that adopted many populist positions and was judged by one noted scholar to be "more radical than any presented to the people by a major party within the memory of any but the oldest living men."[8] Bryan lost to William McKinley, but succeeded in giving a new cast to the Democrats. By 1900, the Populist Party was shriveled and Populist-leaning Republicans had either returned to the fold or become Democrats; the Bryan forces remained in control of the Democratic Party for most of the next decade and permanently transformed its philosophical approach toward the use of government power in the economic realm. Bryan himself was nominated again by Democrats in 1900 and 1908, and his intra-party successes laid the groundwork for the Progressive movement.[9]

Progressives: Following hard on the heels of the Populist movement, the Progressive movement also worked in both major parties. Starting at the municipal level and working up to the state level and finally the federal level, the Progressives shared the Populists' support for more active government regulation and political reform, but were strongest in the urban middle class. The movement melded together (with some tensions) varying strands of reform, including some elements of populism, "good government" political reform as represented by the liberal Republicans of the late nineteenth century (the "Mugwumps"), civil service reform, "muckraking" journalism, the Christianity of the "Social Gospel," and advocates of social reforms for the urban immigrant populations.[10] Progressive mayors met with labor representatives at the National Social and Political Conference in Buffalo, New York in 1899, and the resulting call for direct democracy,

redistribution of income, and control of monopolies served as "the very heart of Progressivism" for the next twenty years.[11]

When President McKinley was assassinated in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became the first president who aligned himself with the Progressive movement, though he was never fully trusted by some Progressives. In 1912, Progressives in both parties sought their presidential nominations. Republican Progressives organized under the banner of the "National Progressive Republican League" while their Democratic counterparts formed the "Democratic Federation." Democratic progressives prevailed by obtaining the nomination of Woodrow Wilson (with the endorsement of William Jennings Bryan); GOP progressives were divided between Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollette and Roosevelt, who was seeking a third term after sitting out for four years. In the end, Republican President William Howard Taft won renomination despite the Progressive challenge, and Republican progressives bolted the party and nominated Roosevelt under the label of the Progressive (or "Bull Moose") Party. In the multi-candidate general election that followed, Wilson won and Roosevelt finished second, relegating Taft to a distant third.

Not only did the Progressives succeed in moving national, state, and local policy toward more activist government, contributing to the intellectual groundwork for the New Deal two decades later, but they also succeeded in changing the character of the presidential nominating process. The Populists had endorsed innovations like the direct primary, in which nominations would be decided directly by party voters rather than through representative processes usually controlled by party leaders, but it was the Progressives who enacted them in many places. By 1912, 14 states used primaries for the selection of national convention delegates, often instituted by Republican progressives with the hope that the reform would make it easier for insurgents to block Taft.[12] The backlash against Taft's convention triumph—which he won despite the victory of Roosevelt or LaFollette in all the Republican primaries—led even more states to adopt some form of the presidential primary. Progressives redoubled their efforts, believing that Taft's nomination was "stolen by gross fraud in brazen defiance of the mass of the Republican voters throughout the country."[13] After the system stabilized around 1920, about one-third of the states (with about two-fifths of the convention delegates) typically held primaries, producing what is now often called the "mixed system." The rest continued electing delegates through local meetings ("caucuses") and state conventions.

Conservatives: In the aftermath of World War II, a new political movement arose that sought to challenge the assumptions and policies of New Deal liberalism as well as the advance of communism abroad. This "conservative movement" represented a coalition among organizations and individuals with

three broad orientations: economic conservatives (or, as they often called themselves, classical liberals) whose primary concern was the maintenance of a free market economy and limited government; cultural traditionalists; and strong anticommunists.[14] The magazine *National Review*, founded by William F. Buckley in 1955, helped to glue these elements together.

In the era of the mixed nominating system, the major parties were more open to outside movements while the third party route had become more difficult due to restrictive ballot access requirements. Prominent conservatives believed that their greatest prospect of exerting influence was to work within a major party (rather than forming a third party), and saw the Republican Party as more receptive. Upset that northeastern liberal Republicans had come to dominate the party's presidential nominations, conservatives were determined to organize on behalf of a conservative aspirant to the GOP nomination. By 1960, Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona stood out as a candidate who could articulate the conservative case and inspire conservative activists and voters. Shortly after Richard Nixon's 1960 defeat, conservatives formed a "Draft Goldwater" effort in order to pull the reluctant senator into a run. The effort was successful, and Goldwater won the 1964 Republican nomination largely on the basis of superior organization.[15] He won some crucial primaries—above all California, with the aid of nearly 25,000 volunteers on primary election day alone[16]—but won most of all by dominating the caucus/convention states, where early organization by the movement was decisive.[17] The conservative movement did not formally change the nomination process, but it did pioneer a new way of gaining the votes of caucus/convention state delegates, by trying to elect committed supporters as delegates rather than persuading delegates after they had been chosen.

Although Goldwater lost the 1964 general election to Lyndon Johnson in a landslide, his nomination was a crucial step in turning the GOP into a more consistently conservative party with a strategy focusing on the "sunbelt" states of the South and West. As scholar Nicol Rae notes, after 1964, "[T]he liberal wing would not again control the presidential Republican party."[18] Indeed, conservatives continued organizing inside and outside of the party, allowing Ronald Reagan to come within a hair's breadth of winning the nomination against incumbent Republican president Gerald Ford in 1976. When Reagan won the presidency in 1980 and turned public policy significantly to the right, he owed a considerable debt to Goldwater and the conservative movement.

New Politics: In the turmoil of the late 1960s, another important political movement arose that seriously affected presidential nominations, this time from the left. Drawing heavily from more moderate elements of the anti-Vietnam war movement (especially among students), the New Politics movement also endorsed redistributionist economics, new concerns such as environmentalism

and feminism, a permissive social ethos, strong attention to the concerns of racial minorities, and political reforms such as campaign finance reform and the 18-year-old vote. The New Politics lay somewhere between "establishment" Democrats who represented the old New Deal-labor-anticommunist consensus and New Left radicals such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The New Politics shared the general direction of the New Left, but with less radicalism and a commitment to work within "the system."[19]

There were stirrings of the New Politics in 1966 and 1967, by the end of which the dominant faction in the liberal group Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had decided to attempt to deprive Lyndon Johnson of re-nomination. Spearheading the "Dump Johnson" effort was liberal activist Allard Lowenstein, a member of ADA and former president of the National Student Association, who organized three key groups: "Dissenting Democrats," aimed at the anti-war movement; "Concerned Democrats," focusing on insurgent Democratic politicians; and a student network. The movement sprang fully to life to back the presidential candidacy of Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota in 1968. McCarthy struck his first blow in the New Hampshire primary, where as many as 4,500 student volunteers had gone "Clean for Gene" and contacted up to 60,000 voters. McCarthy came within 8 percentage points of defeating Lyndon Johnson. In the next primary state, Wisconsin, McCarthy established 41 student headquarters to coordinate volunteers who rang 800,000 doorbells.[20] Meanwhile, four days after McCarthy's unexpectedly strong showing in New Hampshire, Robert Kennedy also entered the Democratic nomination race as an antiwar candidate, drawing much of his support from New Politics constituencies as well. Facing likely defeat in Wisconsin and a protracted struggle to the Democratic convention, on March 31 Johnson declared that he would not seek renomination.

Appealing to many of the same constituencies, McCarthy and Kennedy split the remaining primaries, though Kennedy won almost all of their head-to-head battles. But on the final night of primaries, minutes after declaring victory in the important California contest, Kennedy was assassinated. In late April, vice president Hubert Humphrey joined the race as a traditional labor/anticommunist Democrat. In the end, Humphrey won the Democratic nomination, despite having entered the race too late to participate in any of the primaries. In the "mixed system," however, he did not have to. Instead, he relied on his strength in the non-primary states, which still selected a solid majority of the delegates to the national convention. (This does not mean he had less support than his opponents, though; a Gallup Poll taken on the eve of the national convention showed Humphrey with the support of 53 percent of Democratic voters nationwide to 39 percent for McCarthy.) For

his part, McCarthy did well in some non-primary states, such as Minnesota, Iowa, and Colorado, where New Politics forces were well-organized and his campaign worked energetically. Otherwise, party regulars took advantage of their position in the system and of McCarthy's negligence. Key McCarthy organizer Ben Stavis later revealed that toward the end of the primary season the campaign "suddenly realized" that the number of delegates chosen in primary states, where McCarthy had focused his energy, was "quite low."[21]

However, the New Politics movement was not finished. Like the Progressive movement before it, the New Politics leveraged outrage over a particular nomination outcome into reform of the system itself. At the 1968 convention, New Politics supporters succeeded in banning the unit rule (which some state delegations used to allocate all of their votes for the candidate who was preferred by a majority of the delegates within the state). More importantly, the convention authorized the creation of a reform commission with a mandate to "give all Democratic voters . . . a full, meaningful, and timely opportunity to participatein the selection of national convention delegates. Once named in 1969, the Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure (more commonly known as the "McGovern-Fraser Commission" after its two chairmen) rewrote the Democratic Party's presidential nomination rules. The eighteen guidelines it promulgated compelled all states to adopt explicit, written rules governing delegate selection, prevented delegate selection in the year before the national convention, required delegates to announce which presidential candidate they were supporting, and made it much harder for party officials to control precinct caucuses. Altogether, the commission aimed to make the nominating process more directly democratic (or, to put it another way, less based on the principle of indirect representation) and more open to popular forces just like the New Politics. As political scientist William J. Crotty argued, "Reform of the party's nominating process became the vehicle through which the eventual policy and leadership changes the reformers held to be so important could be realized."[22]

Meanwhile, the McCarthy-Kennedy wounds were healed and the New Politics reorganized under the banner of the "New Democratic Coalition." When McGovern ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972 as the consensus representative of the movement, he won. The degree to which the new rules aided McGovern is a matter of some dispute, but two things are clear.[23] McGovern won because he had a highly-motivated, well-organized, matured movement behind him—a movement that had benefited from the organizational sinews cultivated by the reform commission itself.[24] And, despite his crushing general election defeat at the hands of Richard Nixon, his nomination changed the Democratic Party forever, shifting its center of gravity away from labor and the lower class and toward such groups as affluent

professionals, who were more culturally liberal, more secular, and more anti-anticommunist—the "new class" that was at the heart of the New Politics.

Religious Right: Religious conservatives, especially evangelical Protestants, began organizing for political action on a wide scale in the 1970s after decades of relative quietude. These voters were outraged by a number of secular liberal advances, including Supreme Court decisions banning school prayer, striking down laws against pornography, and establishing (or, as they saw it, inventing) a constitutional right to abortion; agitation by feminists for an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, which opponents saw as a potential means of assaulting the family and imposing an androgynous social model; and proposed federal policies threatening the survival of independent Christian schools. By the late 1970s, evangelicals had become increasingly politicized and hundreds of national, state, and local organizations sprung up to defend the traditional family and religious liberty against "secular humanism." At the same time, Catholics were energized around the abortion issue in particular, and evangelicals began tentatively exploring alliances with Catholics, Mormons, and Orthodox Jews.[25] The resultant movement was often called the "religious right" (or sometimes the "Christian right").

To channel these efforts, Baptist pastor and "televangelist" Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority in 1980. The Moral Majority quickly gained prominence, as it aided Ronald Reagan's 1980 election and successfully targeted a number of liberal Democratic senators. After Falwell's group closed down in 1989, the Christian Coalition was formed by Pat Robertson. Robertson, also a Baptist pastor and televangelist (though, unlike Falwell, from the "charismatic" strand of the evangelical world), had run unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for president in 1988, but used his extensive lists of campaign volunteers and contributors to build the Christian Coalition.[26] Much more than the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition was a grassroots organization which aimed at influencing politics at the local level, then translating that success into influence at the national level.

Both Falwell and Robertson saw the Republican Party as inherently more hospitable to social conservatism, and their organizations worked primarily within the GOP (and served to bring no small number of socially conservative former Democrats into the party). By the 1994 midterm elections, the Christian Coalition claimed 1.4 million members; by one journalistic estimate, the Christian right was "dominant" in 18 state Republican parties and a "substantial force" in 13 more.[27] By the end of the decade, the Christian Coalition was also facing organizational difficulties, though it still operates. Although the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition received the lion's share of media attention in the 1980s and 1990s, the religious right movement was and continues to be much broader and deeper, featuring a variety of

organizations such as the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, American Family Association, Traditional Values Coalition, and many others at the national, state, and local level.

As three prominent scholars of the religious right note, "[T]here have been numerous obituaries for the movement—followed by dramatic revivals of its fortunes."[28] Though it has had mixed success in obtaining its public policy objectives, the religious right movement has been highly successful at assuring that the Republican Party remains committed to a socially conservative platform, including support for conservative judges and opposition to abortion and (more recently) gay marriage. Unlike the conservatives in 1964 or the New Politics in 1972, the religious right has been unable to unite its forces behind a single standard-bearer in recent Republican presidential nomination fights. Even in 1988, when Pat Robertson himself was a candidate, Jerry Falwell endorsed George H. W. Bush in the Republican primaries while candidates such as Jack Kemp and Pete du Pont also received considerable support from Christian right voters and activists. Instead, key figures and activists in the movement have typically divided their support among a number of aspirants.[29] In 2008, for example, Robertson endorsed Rudy Giuliani, James Dobson of Focus on the Family supported Mike Huckabee, and the National Right to Life Committee backed Fred Thompson. In spite of this lack of unity (or perhaps because of this diffusion of effort), Republicans have not nominated a pro-choice candidate for president since the religious right became active.

Other Movements in Recent History: These movements are far from the only social/political movements to have actively influenced the presidential nominations of major parties in recent years. The feminist movement has been the mirror image of social conservatives, swinging the Democratic Party to an uncompromising pro-choice position on abortion. This movement's influence within Democratic circles has been sufficient that many big-name Democratic presidential aspirants, including Edward Kennedy, Al Gore, Richard Gephardt, and Jesse Jackson, moved from a pro-life to a pro-choice position as the price of remaining viable contenders. Feminists also got the Democrats to adopt a rule that compelled state parties to select national convention delegations that were equally divided between men and women.

Jackson, a black minister and civil rights leader, also stood at the head of something of a movement that he called the Rainbow Coalition—a coalition of black activists, affluent white leftists, and the radical edge of organized labor. Particularly essential were the organizational resources of the black churches and portions of the civil rights movement. Although it was more dependent on Jackson's personality than a real movement would have been, the Rainbow Coalition survived his two presidential runs (in 1984 and 1988)

to play a small role in the 1992 Democratic nomination race and in some local elections. (As a candidate in 1992, Jerry Brown—who came in second behind Bill Clinton in delegates—sometimes succeeded in tapping into the Rainbow Coalition for support.)[30] Jackson, who was strong enough to finish third in delegates in 1984 (behind Walter Mondale and Gary Hart) and second in 1988 (behind Michael Dukakis), was able to force Democrats to modify their nominating rules again, reducing the threshold percentage required for a candidate to win delegates, delaying the election of "superdelegates" until after primary voting begins, and (after 1988) abolishing non-proportional primaries.

In 2008, Barack Obama's campaign was sometimes likened to a movement, insofar as it drew intense support from broad masses of voters, organized those supporters into a grassroots army, and benefited from the spontaneous growth afforded by the innovative use of social media. In some sense, Obama's support was also undergirded by the recent development of the progressive "netroots," which shared certain characteristics of a movement. However, Obama's drive to the presidency was ultimately a highly personalistic one. His supporters—however intense and well-organized—were drawn to him much more than he latched on to a preexisting movement that had substance before and beyond him.[31]

THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

The most recent major political movement on the American scene is the Tea Party movement. It emerged in a complicated context which was defined above all by the financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession, and the policies devised by the federal government to combat those economic ills. Throughout 2008, the George W. Bush administration fought an *ad hoc* battle against the impending collapse of a number of important financial institutions. Things came to a head in mid-September when Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy and the dam appeared ready to break, threatening the entire financial system. No longer convinced that it was workable to handle these problems on a case-by-case basis, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson proposed that Congress establish a large fund that could be used to shore up threatened banks and other financial institutions.

After considerable debate and one failed attempt, Congress finally passed the $700 billion Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). It had been proposed by a Republican administration and supported by both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates (John McCain and Barack Obama) in the midst of the campaign, but Republicans in Congress were considerably less enthused by what they preferred to call the "bailout bill." To many

conservative politicians and commentators, the “bailout” was of a piece with the fiscal recklessness that they had come to see as a hallmark of the Bush administration. Even before the financial crisis exploded, a slowing economy (later deemed to have entered recession in December 2007) had led Bush and Congress to agree on a $160 billion stimulus package.

Obama was elected in November 2008 largely on a promise of “change,” but the primary change in economic policy instituted by the new administration was to accelerate the sort of interventionist measures begun by Bush. Obama embraced and distributed TARP, took a controlling share in General Motors and Chrysler to prevent their bankruptcy, and proposed both a mammoth economic stimulus package valued at $787 billion and a new plan to provide financial aid to homeowners threatened with foreclosure. Subsequently, Obama sought to make good on his promise to “transform America” by promoting (and ultimately winning) passage of a federal government takeover of health care, federal takeover of all federally subsidized student loans, and budget policies that ballooned federal spending to 25.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 2010 (it had been less than 20 percent as recently as 2007), threatening to add $9 trillion or more to the national debt over the next decade.

To many observers, the roots of the discontent that turned into the Tea Party could be found in the TARP proposal and in Bush’s subsequent declaration that “I’ve abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system.”[32] As a movement, the Tea Party itself can be traced to the debate over the Obama stimulus and mortgage relief proposals in February 2009. First, with the aid of author and blogger Michelle Malkin, conservative blogger “Liberty Belle” Keli Carender hosted a “Porkulus Protest” in Seattle to rally against the controversial programs. Then, on February 19, an on-air commentary by CNBC financial analyst Rick Santelli did more than any other event to spark the movement. Broadcasting live from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Santelli harshly criticized Obama’s aid to financial institutions and delinquent homeowners, called the latter an injustice to those paying their mortgages on time, and called for a “Chicago Tea Party” where derivative securities would be dumped into Lake Michigan. Santelli’s call went “viral” online and inspired a key conference call the next day among about 20 activists to plan a response. The call would lead to about 50 Tea Party protests around the country on February 27 and a much larger set of Tax Day Tea Party protests on April 15, which was were primarily promoted online but also received publicity from talk radio and from such Fox News commentators as Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck. The Tax Day protests drew hundreds of thousands of participants in more than 800 cities. A burgeoning nationwide movement had been launched.[33]

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WHO IS IN THE TEA PARTY?

Every political movement has leaders and followers—in other words, people who organize and coordinate the movement and the ordinary voters who support it in various ways. The Tea Party, like other major political movements, is a decentralized coalition rather than a single hierarchical group. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify key leaders and organizations that have helped coordinate its efforts at a national level.

In response to Rick Santelli's impassioned plea (or rant, as some preferred to call it), an *ad hoc* coalition was formed by the leaders of three online social media groups: Top Conservatives on Twitter, American Liberty Alliance, and Smart Girl Politics. The group called itself the National Tea Party Coalition and promoted the first national day of Tea Party protests on February 27. A month later, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich's organization, American Solutions for Winning, became the fourth member of the Coalition. In May, the umbrella group Tea Party Patriots was incorporated, claiming 2,800 local affiliates across the country by November 2010. [34] Then, in the summer of 2009, Republican political consultant Sal Russo and several associates formed the Tea Party Express, a national bus tour to drum up support for the Tea Party. The Tea Party Express also tapped into Russo's political action committee, the Our Country Deserves Better PAC, to fund sympathetic candidates.[35] Other groups such as Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks, headed by former Republican House majority leader Richard Armey, helped fund and coordinate some Tea Party activities. Later in the year, the for-profit group Tea Party Nation took its place in the movement, organizing social networking and a national Tea Party convention, though it was criticized by many in the movement for straying from the original spirit of the movement by charging for the event.

Although House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and a number of other Democrats accused the Tea Party of being "Astroturf"—that is, driven from the top down with only a pretense of grassroots support—the individuals and organizations at the top always seemed to be more in a support and coordination role rather than a controlling one. They were attempting to ride and channel a genuine outburst of public sentiment. In fact, state and local Tea Party committees usually sprang up spontaneously and sometimes even in competition with each other, often headed by new activists with little experience in politics. In this, the internet played a crucial role, with social networking sites often serving as magnets for activism. Indeed, it may be more accurate to call this cluster of organization and activities the Tea *Parties*, rather than the Tea *Party*, given its fundamentally decentralized character.

So what were the ordinary activists and supporters of the Tea Party like? A number of surveys taken throughout 2010 helped to clarify the profile of Tea

Party supporters. It is not as easy as it might seem to determine how many Americans were Tea Party supporters. At the broadest level, Americans were frequently asked by pollsters whether they had a "favorable" (or sometimes "positive") or "unfavorable" (or sometimes "negative") view of the Tea Party. In 36 surveys taken between November 2009 and September 2010, an average of about one-third of Americans said they had a "positive" or "favorable" view of the Tea Party (32.2 percent); slightly fewer had an "unfavorable" or "negative" view (30.5 percent), and the rest had no opinion or did not know. [36] In other surveys, a slightly smaller proportion (usually around one in four, though sometimes more) called themselves "supporters" of the Tea Party, an ambiguous phrase that could be interpreted as providing some active support (rather than merely passive approval). Other surveys asked more directly whether respondents considered themselves "members" of the Tea Party movement or "part of" that movement. These surveys usually showed that somewhere between 8 percent and 18 percent of Americans considered themselves members in or part of the movement (the average in ten surveys was 14 percent).[37] Finally, when asked whether they had taken specific actions to aid the Tea Party movement, one CNN poll showed that 2 percent of Americans had contributed money, 5 percent had attended a Tea Party rally, and 7 percent had taken "other active steps"; a Democracy Corps survey showed that 2 had given cash, 3 percent had rallied, and 3 percent had done both.[38]As Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen have noted, public opinion about and participation in the Tea Party can best be seen as a series of concentric circles that include (moving from the periphery to the center) "sympathizers," "supporters," "members," and "activists."[39]

Survey results of Tea Party members or supporters must be viewed cautiously partly because of these uncertainties in how to define the group, and partly because most of the data are from national surveys, in which Tea Party affiliates make up only a small subset of the respondents and which are therefore subject to high margins of error. Nevertheless, some patterns can be identified.Politically, only a handful of Tea Partiers are Democrats. Most surveys show that a majority are Republicans, but they are joined by a strong representation of Independents. For example, an in-depth *New York Times*/CBS News survey indicated that 54 percent were Republicans, 36 percent Independents, and 5 percent Democrats (the rest refusing to state or in third parties, most likely Libertarian and American Constitution Party).[40] Three out of four Tea Party activists at a major Washington, D.C. rally voted for John McCain in 2008 and George W. Bush in 2004. However, it is clear that the Tea Party has been fueled by dissatisfaction with both parties. Of those same activists at the rally—who identified 43 percent Republican, 36 percent Independent, and 9 percent Democrat—more than half said they

did not trust either party.[41] Indeed, when top Republicans, such as Republican National Committee chair Michael Steele, sought to bring the movement under their wing, Tea Party Patriots published a "Tea Party Declaration of Independence" from the GOP, which it accused of consistently betraying conservative principles.[42] In this respect, the Tea Party can be considered the revolt of fiscally conservative Republicans and Independents who were angered by George W. Bush's assault on the principles of limited government, even if they voted for him as the lesser of evils, well before Obama's leftward lunge pushed them over the edge. In the tradition of many prior political movements, they were "not a wing of the GOP but a critique of it,"[43] mobilizing not merely to support the Republican Party but to transform it from within.

Geographically, most surveys showed particular strength for the Tea Party in the South and the West, particularly the Plains and Mountain states (rather than the West Coast) with relative weakness in the Northeast. Demographically, the average Tea Partier is disproportionately likely to be a non-Hispanic white, though there is disagreement among analysts over whether the movement is much more white than the population as a whole or only slightly so.[44] Tea Party members are also a bit more likely to be men (around 55–60 percent), though women play key leadership roles in the Tea Party Express, the Tea Party Patriots, and many local organizations. Most (but not all) surveys show them to be older on average than the general population; most surveys also show them to be considerably more likely to be married and to have a college degree or some post-graduate education than the average American. Evidence was mixed regarding the average incomes of Tea Party members, but it seems clear that those incomes are at least as high as the average and very possibly quite a bit higher. (For example, one CNN survey showed that two-thirds of Tea Party members had incomes over $50,000, compared with only 42 percent of all Americans, but most studies showed a smaller gap or none at all.[45]) Significantly, it appears that an outsized proportion of Tea Party members own their own small businesses. In general, much of this picture is not unexpected given the general profile of the politically-active in America.

WHAT DOES THE TEA PARTY BELIEVE?

The Tea Party starts from an ideology which is generally hostile to centralized, activist government. Somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of Tea Party members identify themselves as "conservative" and no more than 10 percent as "liberal."[46] Over 90 percent of movement members

nationwide say they prefer smaller government providing fewer services to a larger government providing more services. A *Politico* survey of participants in a large Washington, D.C. Tea Party rally on April 15, 2010, though not a representative national sample, also indicated that 88 percent thought government was trying to do too many things and 81 percent thought that cutting taxes and spending were more important than maintaining government services.[47] Most self-identified Tea Party members also express a willingness to accept some social inequalities as a price for the maintenance of liberty and limited government.[48]

These general principles lead to a definite set of policy priorities and positions. While sharing the general national concern with jobs and economic conditions, Tea Partiers are significantly more likely than are Americans more generally to list the deficit and spending as top issues. Tea Party members nationwide told a *New York Times*/CBS News survey that the main goal of their movement should be to "reduce the federal government" generally, cut the budget, or lower taxes.[49] Likewise, the Tax Day protestors listed the national debt, the rate of growth of government, the recently-passed health care reform bill, and "government intrusion" as the chief objects of their anger (in that order).[50]

Their positions on specific issues follow from these general principles and priorities. According to a variety of surveys:

- Tea Party members favor significant cuts in government programs, including entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare.
- They were twice as likely as most Americans to think the stimulus bill made the economy worse, and three-quarters thought it would be better for the government to cut spending than to spend more money attempting to create jobs.[51]
- Three-quarters also believed the bank "bailouts" were unnecessary.[52]
- Tea Partiers were considerably stronger than the average American in their opposition to the health care reform bill. Over 80 percent opposed the bill as a whole, opposed the "individual mandate" requiring that Americans purchase health insurance, and thought the passage of the bill was a "bad thing." Before the vote, nine in ten thought that Obama should scrap the bill and start over again.[53]
- At a time when Americans favored increased bank regulation by a 56-32 percent margin, Tea Party supporters opposed it by a 48-42 percent margin.[54]
- Tea Partiers were skeptical of other sorts of government regulation as well. Surveys showed that they were more than twice as likely as the general

populace to say that global warming either had "no serious impact" or did not exist.[55]

- As a movement, the Tea Party has embraced the "Repeal Act," a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow two-thirds of the states to overturn a federal law.

As these data indicate, Tea Party participants were mobilized into the movement as a result of economic policy issues and concerns about the growth of government, not social issues. The *Politico* survey of Washington ralliers showed that gay marriage was dead last on the list of things driving the anger of the crowd, and in the wake of the 2010 midterms some Tea Party leaders cautioned Republicans against emphasizing social issues.[56] However, this de-emphasis on social issues should not be taken as meaning that Tea Partiers are not socially conservative. To the contrary, although there is a libertarian wing to the movement, the evidence shows that Tea Party members are significantly more likely than the average American to call themselves "pro-life," to consider the *Roe v. Wade* decision a bad thing, to favor restrictions on abortion, and to oppose gay marriage.[57] (In fact, one survey showed Tea Party members more likely to oppose gay marriage than self-identified Republicans.[58]) Other social issues show a similar pattern, with Tea Partiers more supportive of gun rights and more concerned about illegal immigration than other Americans.[59] An extensive survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute concluded that on most dimensions Tea Party members were considerably more traditionalist than most Americans, though less so than white evangelicals. Nearly half (47 percent) of Tea Party members considered themselves also part of the Christian conservative movement, and Tea Party members were even more likely than white evangelicals to say that the United States is a "Christian nation."[60]

Altogether, throughout 2010, Tea Party members were more likely than most Americans to say the nation was headed in the wrong direction, more likely to distrust Washington D.C., more likely to hold negative views of the state of the economy, and less likely to approve of the performance of the Democratic Congress or President Obama. (It should be pointed out that their responses here differed only in degree, not in kind, from those of their fellow Americans.) In one *New York Times*/CBS News survey, a whopping 96 percent of Tea Party members disapproved of the job Congress was doing, while 88 percent disapproved of Obama's job performance and 94 percent declared themselves either dissatisfied or angry with Washington.[61] Three of four Tea Party members saw Obama as failing to share the basic values of most Americans, while overwhelming majorities consistently expressed a belief that Obama was pursuing a "socialist agenda" and had expanded government power "too much."[62]

Another common theme among Tea Party participants has been a fear that government was ceasing to represent the people, a concern shared by the large majority of Americans who told pollsters in 2010 that they believed the nation was no longer run on the basis of the "consent of the governed."[63] This fear was particularly inflamed by the health care bill, which Obama and the Democratic congressional leadership pushed through despite voluminous evidence that most Americans opposed it. It was also undergirded by significant evidence that a wide gulf existed between the views of (as Rasmussen and Schoen put it) the "political class" and "mainstream Americans" on issues ranging from taxes to immigration.[64]

This belief added a dimension to the Tea Party agenda that was not easily quantifiable, though it was arguably at the heart of the movement. Aside from specific issues of economic or other policy, the Tea Party was driven by broad constitutional concerns about the role of government, particularly the federal government, in national life and by the fear that it has strayed far from the wise design of the Founding Fathers. As Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen note, those who participated in the Tea Party protests "felt their very liberty was at stake."[65] Broadly speaking, the movement believed that the federal government had overstepped its legitimate powers as outlined in the enumerated powers of the Constitution and, as a natural concomitant, unduly infringed on the rights of the states and of the people. These views might be said to represent "Large C" constitutional concerns. A parallel set of "small c" constitutional concerns accompanied them, having to do less with an interpretation of the written Constitution than with the informal distribution of power and the overall character of the government and the people. Here, the Tea Party feared a concentration of government power that would threaten to turn America into a European-style social democracy, with a very large welfare state, very high taxes, and an enervated and dependent population. In this view, Obama and the liberal Democrats who controlled Congress, if left to make policy unhindered, would turn America into Sweden in twenty years; France, where infantilized citizens were rioting in the streets to protest an increase in the retirement age from 60 to 62, in thirty years; and Greece, tottering on the edge of complete insolvency, in forty years. In the end, much of what the Tea Party is about is American Exceptionalism—or the idea that America is a special nation with a different and better way—and the perception that Barack Obama does not believe in it.

As with every significant political movement seeking change, the Tea Party was not free of a fringe, which its opponents liked to emphasize. Tea Partiers were slightly more likely than other Americans to express doubts about Obama's citizenship and to say that violence against the government

might sometimes be justified. However, the differences were not large. While 20 percent of Americans expressed doubts that Obama was born in the U.S., 30 percent of Tea Partiers did so; where 16 percent of all respondents said violence might sometimes be justified, 24 percent of Tea Partiers did so.[66] The Tea Party's opponents were concerned enough (or unscrupulous enough) that on several occasions acts of political violence were immediately—and it turned out, incorrectly—blamed on the Tea Party.[67] In response, the national leadership of the Tea Party has taken steps to keep "birthers" and other extremists from using the movement as a platform for their views, including banning them from organizational Web sites.[68] Despite a total lack of evidence connecting the Tea Party to the shooting of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, polls taken in its aftermath showed that the attacks were having a negative effect on the movement's popularity.[69]

The Tea Party movement as a whole was also accused by its opponents of racism, and polls showed that about a quarter of Americans were likely to ascribe a significant amount of racism to the movement.[70] The evidence for this charge, however, was thin. In one case, Tea Party Express spokesman Mark Williams, a Sacramento radio host, resigned after caricaturing a black person in a blog post. Another Florida Tea Party activist was drummed out of the movement after forwarding an email depicting Obama as an African witch doctor with a bone through his nose. Of greater note, shortly before the final health care vote in Congress, members of the Black Congressional Caucus claimed to have had racial slurs shouted at them and to have been spit at while walking through a Tea Party protest on Capitol Hill. Video evidence confirmed uncivil conduct by some protestors, but no independent evidence surfaced to corroborate the claims of racist comments, despite a $100,000 reward offered by conservative new media figure Andrew Breitbart. In surveys, Tea Party members were more likely than others to hold that blacks and whites had an equal chance in today's America and that too much has been made of the problems of racial minorities, though such views are at least as consistent with color-blindness as with racism.[71] And, as we will see below, Tea Parties backed several racial minorities as candidates in the 2010 elections.

WHAT HAS THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT DONE?

The Tea Party movement has been active in two main ways: organizing wide scale protests against federal policy and involving itself in a number of primary and general election races in 2009 and 2010. Each type of activity deserves a detailed examination.

Protest: The modern Tea Party—like the original 1773 version—was first and foremost a protest movement. From the first Tea Party protests on February 27, 2009, a major focus of the movement has been to express anger at federal policies and exert pressure on federal policymakers from the President on down. The protest character of the Tea Party movement was made clear in its adoption as its unofficial emblem of the Revolutionary War "Gadsden Flag," the famed yellow banner sporting a coiled rattlesnake and the motto "Don't Tread on Me." After the first waves of protests, the summer of 2009 saw increased activity. Most notably, Tea Party protests were prominent on Independence Day and Tea Party activists made a major show of force during town meetings held by members of Congress home for the August recess.

On July 4, 2009, a coordinated wave of Tea Party rallies reached an estimated 1500 cities.[72] During the August recess, Tea Party Patriots, FreedomWorks and others worked to motivate supporters to turn out for congressional town meetings. Tea Party Patriots also provided instructions for those attending, including directions to be loud and to question the representative's support of a "socialist agenda." Heavily focused on the pending health care bill, town meetings across the country provided many Democratic congressmen with an immediate taste of the unhappiness simmering among many of their constituents. Many of the meetings received national media attention as unruly crowds confronted their representatives. Some Democratic members cancelled their sessions, and some prominent Democrats and media figures expressed fears about violence from the outraged audiences. (However, the worst violence that was recorded in this period came when a pro-Obama member of the group MoveOn bit a finger off of a Tea Party protestor at a rally in Thousand Oaks, California.[73]) Of course, the Tea Party was not the only force driving public protest at congressional town meetings, but it was the force whose efforts were most organized and coordinated.

Further major protests surrounded the health reform legislation. Above all, a major rally held in Washington, D.C. on September 12, 2009 mobilized a new cohort of Tea Party activists. The Taxpayer March on Washington, also known as the 9-12 Project, was the brainchild of Fox commentator Glenn Beck and was subsequently organized and implemented by FreedomWorks and national and local Tea Party groups. The protest, held a few days after President Obama's health care speech to a joint session of Congress, drew at least 75,000 demonstrators according to mainstream media reports (some conservative bloggers claimed the attendance may have been closer to a million). As Congress drew close to a final vote on the legislation in March 2010, a new round of rallies was held, drawing thousands more to Washington to plead with representatives to "kill the bill."

2010 Elections: When Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy, sometimes called the "liberal lion of the Senate," passed away in late 2009, it was widely assumed that a Democrat would be elected in the special election to fill the vacancy. Republican state legislator Scott Brown's surprising victory in the vacancy election in January 2010 owed more than a little to the Tea Party movement, which rallied around Brown's pledge to be the "41st vote against health care reform" in the Senate. The Tea Party Express took a lead in organizing support for Brown, and for many around the country Brown's election became a catalytic event. As one Tea Party sympathizer from Georgia related, the Massachusetts special election produced "this feeling of solidarity, that people are finally waking up. It was this feeling that 'Yeah, we can make some changes. We can make a difference.'"[74]

With the passage of the health care bill in March 2010 in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Tea Party, the movement refocused its efforts on electoral politics. In a large number of states, Tea Parties threw their weight behind selected candidates in the upcoming Republican congressional primaries. In U.S. Senate primaries, local and/or national Tea Party organizations got behind insurgent Republican contenders such as Marco Rubio in Florida, Rand Paul in Kentucky, Mike Lee in Utah, Joe Miller in Alaska, Sharron Angle in Nevada, Ron Johnson in Wisconsin, Ken Buck in Colorado, and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware. In each of these cases, the insurgent Tea Party-supported candidate won. Rubio drove popular Republican governor Charlie Crist from the primary and into an independent campaign; Lee and Miller defeated Republican incumbents; the rest won against an assortment of establishment-backed Republicans. One of the most dramatic instances came in Delaware, where Tea Party favorite O'Donnell beat the incumbent at-large Congressman and former Governor Mike Castle, a more moderate Republican who nevertheless had voted against both the stimulus and health care reform. Castle had been widely considered a shoo-in in the general election. Not all Tea-Party supported insurgents won their Senate primaries: former NFL star Clint Didier in Washington state and Ovide Lamontagne in New Hampshire both fell short. And not all Tea Party-supported candidates even had a primary: Republicans Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania and Rob Portman in Ohio seriously cultivated Tea Party support, but stored it up for the general election, having no serious primary opponents. Indeed, local Tea Parties showed the ability to work with the Republican organization and to support more established and experienced candidates, such as Toomey, Portman, Roy Blunt of Missouri, and Dan Coats of Indiana, even when they had provoked considerable displeasure in the past. (In the case of Blunt, who had voted for TARP and George W. Bush's Medicare prescription drug entitlement, the candidate had to sign a "tea party treaty" pledging himself to support spending cuts and health care repeal.)[75]

At the other end of the spectrum, Ron Johnson represented perhaps the purest form of a Tea Party candidate. A successful businessman, Johnson rose from obscurity on the basis of a short speech that he delivered at a Tea Party rally. The speech was picked up by conservative talk radio in Wisconsin, leading to an upsurge in support for a Johnson candidacy. He decided to throw his hat into the ring, ran a strong primary campaign, and won going away with 85 percent of the vote.

Tea Parties also played a role in gubernatorial primaries in many states. Notably, in South Carolina, they backed Nikki Haley, an Indian-American woman who faced and defeated three establishment Republican aspirants. In New York, Tea Party-supported Buffalo businessman Carl Paladino defeated former Republican congressman and 2000 U.S. Senate nominee Rick Lazio by a 2-1 margin in the gubernatorial primary. And in Colorado, an obscure figure by the name of Dan Maes, a local Tea Party activist, won the Republican nomination after the campaign of his opponent, former congressman Scott McInnis, imploded due to a plagiarism scandal.

Not least, local Tea Parties involved themselves heavily in a significant number of U.S. House primaries, successfully supporting (for example) Kristi Noem in South Dakota, Tim Scott in South Carolina, Allen West in Florida, Jesse Kelly in Arizona, and Jeff Landry in Louisiana. Scott would become the first Republican African-American congressman from South Carolina since Reconstruction; West the same in Florida. Working in concert with Tea Party organizations were some big-name Republicans, especially 2008 vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin and South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint, who backed insurgent candidates with important primary endorsements at all levels. Although the vast majority of the primaries in which Tea Parties intervened were Republican, not all were. In Florida's 11th district, Tea Party member Tim Curtis defeated incumbent Kathy Castor in the Democratic primary.

Local and national Tea Party organizations remained active in the general election. In Senate races, the results were a mixed bag from a Tea Party standpoint, though one that tilted in a positive direction. Toomey, Portman, Rubio, Johnson, Paul, and Lee all won. O'Donnell lost in a landslide, Angle and Buck lost nail-biters, and Miller was defeated in the general election by the Republican he had beaten in the primary—Lisa Murkowski—when she successfully ran a write-in campaign to hold her seat. Likewise, in gubernatorial races, Haley won, while Paladino and Maes behaved erratically and were crushed. Maes collapsed so thoroughly that former Republican congressman Tom Tancredo, running as the gubernatorial candidate of the American Constitution Party, filled the vacuum and finished a strong second behind the Democratic winner (John Hickenlooper). Maes was ultimately

repudiated by his local Tea Party chapter and finished with 11 percent of the vote. In House races, Tea Party candidates—like other Republican candidates—caught the national wave and rode it to considerable success. Indeed, House Republicans took positive action to catch the wave in September, when they unveiled a campaign document called "The Pledge" which embraced the movement's key themes. No fewer than 32 Republican House seat pick-ups, about half the total, were made by candidates who had received significant Tea Party support.[76] Overall, the Tea Party Express, just to cite one group, compiled a donor list of more than 400,000 and spent more than $5 million on advertising for candidates.[77]

These results led immediately to a debate in Republican circles about whether the Tea Party had been a net plus or a net minus for the party in the 2010 elections. On the minus side, critics pointed to the Delaware Senate race, where O'Donnell's primary victory almost certainly cost the GOP a seat, and to Nevada and Colorado, where the more polished establishment candidates who were defeated in the primaries might well have succeeded against the unpopular Democratic incumbents. The weaknesses of the Tea Party candidates allowed their opponents to paint them as "extremists" and to turn the election from a "referendum" into a "choice." Former George W. Bush speechwriter and commentator David Frum consequently argued that "three ridiculously winnable Senate seats" were "thrown away."[78] Critics could also point to the Paladino and Maes disasters as examples of the Tea Parties' poor judgment in candidate selection, though in New York it was unlikely that any Republican nominee could have won.

On the positive side of the ledger, Tea Party-backed candidates won more swing Senate races than they lost, and not only in conservative states but in blue states such as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania (as well as Massachusetts, if one includes Scott Brown's January 2010 special election victory). Tea Parties backed a number of candidates likely to prove attractive spokespersons for the Republican Party in the future, such as Nikki Haley, Marco Rubio, and Tim Scott. As noted above, about half of Republican House gains were attributable to Tea Party-supported candidates.

Less quantifiably, the Tea Party mobilized a crucial segment of the electorate for Republicans nationally. As one news account noted, "the movement re-energized—and in some cases, scared—conservatives demoralized and dispirited in the aftermath of the Bush presidency and Obama victory."[79] Nearly three in five Tea Party members had not been active in campaigns before 2010.[80] The Tea Party leadership also made a crucial decision to work within the GOP rather than pursue a third party strategy, which would have been catastrophic to Republican chances. In a handful of local cases, third party candidates ran under a Tea Party label of some sort, but these were rare

instances, not supported by Tea Party organizations and never very serious (although Sharron Angle was worried enough about the third party "Tea Party" candidate in Nevada to try to convince him to leave the Senate race). The potential harm to Republicans of a third-party Tea Party was evident in a number of surveys throughout 2010 that showed that Democrats would win a plurality of the House vote if a generic Tea Party candidate was on the ballot, but were invariably outvoted by the combination of Republican and Tea Party supporters.[81]

Finally, as former Reagan speechwriter and *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan pointed out, the Tea Party succeeded in forcing Republicans back to their traditional themes of limited government and constitutionalism, after the interlude of "compassionate conservatism" or "big government conservatism," just as those traditional themes were gaining resonance with the broader electorate. In Noonan's view, the Tea Party rescued the GOP.[82] Altogether, exit polls showed that Tea Party supporters outnumbered Tea Party opponents among House voters on Election Day by a 41-30 percent margin.[83]

THE TEA PARTY AND 2012

By most of the criteria that define political movements, the Tea Party clearly qualifies. It is broadly-based but not (yet) a majority and is driven by a modest hard core of activists. It is organized enough to make it an identifiable entity to outside observers, but its organization is a decentralized collection of both competing and collaborative structures. It is motivated by a fairly well-defined set of political principles, and is seeking to promote change based on that ideology though political action. It is not synonymous with any political leaders, much less at their service, but rather has independent organizational existence. Like other influential movements, the Tea Party has been ridiculed and disdained by its opponents; like other movements, it has combined a vigorous populist appeal to the "outside" with substantial support from within the party structure by insurgent figures such as Senator Jim DeMint. Aided by modern technology, the Tea Party has blossomed more quickly than past movements like the Populists, Progressives, or conservatives.

By definition, movements are not fully institutionalized, permanent fixtures in the political landscape. Rather, although they have some staying power, they tend to arrive with great passion and fade as the issues that gave rise to them are either resolved or prove intractable and give way to new concerns. While not a permanent feature of the political landscape, they have staying power beyond a single election. Thus a key question in the 2012 presidential

election—and especially in the Republican presidential primaries—is what role the Tea Party will play. In this regard, it is almost certain that the Tea Party will indeed continue to be active through at least the 2012 election. The issues that have given rise to the movement—national debt, federal spending, and fears of a move toward democratic socialism crystallized by health care reform—were not extinguished by the 2010 elections, and will doubtless continue to be salient at least as long as Obama remains in the White House.

A movement's two greatest enemies are failure and success. Consistent and complete failure leads to discouragement and dissolution; too much success leads to complacency by supporters and perhaps even the eclipse of the mobilizing issues. In the 2010 elections, the Tea Party experienced enough success for activists to remain engaged, but not enough to lead to complacency. If anything, the movement seemed energized and eager for the next round. On election night 2010, Tea Party Patriots national coordinator Jenny Beth Martin proclaimed that "No one in this movement is stopping today. This is not an endgame. This is just a beginning."[84] Tea Party activists remain primarily interested in policy change, not in electoral activity as an end in itself, and they consistently express the intention of holding the 2010 congressional winners to their promises of lower spending, lower taxes, and health care repeal.

Moreover, although the movement is controversial, it is clearly tapping into real concerns held by millions of Americans who do not consider themselves part of the movement. In the last half of 2010, pollsters frequently found a small plurality of respondents disapproving of the Tea Party. Yet when respondents were asked in ten polls whether they agreed or disagreed with the concerns raised by the movement, a plurality always agreed.[85] The movement has reflected a more general trend toward greater conservatism in the electorate. Though this could change, the movement has been swimming with the current, not against it, even if it has been swimming faster than the current requires.

As in 2010, Tea Party activists will have to decide whether to support a third party or, in the words of one organizer, work to "co-opt the Republican Party" through the primary and precinct caucus process.[86] When the movement involves itself in the 2012 Republican presidential primaries, it is far from clear what the effect will be. For the time being, the movement is focused on substantive policy and electoral outcomes. However, based on past movement experience, one should not rule out the possibility that it might direct its energies toward procedural reform if its members feel unfairly treated through the 2012 process.

Among frequently-mentioned potential candidates, Sarah Palin is often assumed to be the favorite among Tea Party supporters. In 2010, Palin

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stood out for her early and enthusiastic embrace of the movement and her endorsement of many of the movement's preferred primary candidates. Nevertheless, surveys of Tea Party members or supporters in 2010 showed no clear front-runner among prospective Republican presidential aspirants. A *New York Times*/CBS News survey taken in April 2010 showed that among Tea Party members, the most admired political figure living today was Newt Gingrich with 10 percent, followed by Sarah Palin with 9 percent, Ron Paul with 5 percent, and a wide smattering of others. One out of four respondents did not offer a name. While Palin was rated higher by Tea Party members than by other Americans, only 40 percent of members held that she would make an effective president (to 47 percent who said she would not).[87]

The *Politico* survey of participants in the April 15, 2010 Tax Day Tea Party protest revealed a similar diffusion of support and seeming disenchantment with the options. Palin was named the politician today who best exemplifies the Tea Party by 15 percent, followed by Paul with 12 percent, Representatives Michelle Bachmann and Paul Ryan with 8 and 6 percent respectively, and a collection of others in low single digits. Here, one in three offered no name. When asked which of a list of potential candidates they might consider supporting for president, Palin and Gingrich tied with 44 percent—but 53 percent said they would not consider them. Mitt Romney would be considered by 42 percent, but not by 55 percent. Other political figures went down from there. If forced to establish a presidential preference, the Tax Day protestors named Palin (15), Paul (14), Romney (13), Gingrich (9)—and Obama (8).[88] And, while they rarely place very high in national surveys, Senators Jim DeMint of South Carolina and John Thune of South Dakota, former Governor Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, Governor Rick Perry of Texas, Representatives Mike Pence of Indiana and Michele Bachmann of Minnesota (founder of the congressional Tea Party Caucus), and some others attracted noticeable support among Tea Party activists as possible presidential contenders. (As of this writing, Thune, DeMint, and Pence have both announced they would not be running for president in 2012; Perry is still on the fence.)

In other words, as the midterm elections settled and the presidential race began, the Tea Party constituency was wide open. Although some potential contenders (including Romney and Gingrich) would have to overcome the disadvantage of close association with the party establishment, Tea Party Patriots national coordinator Mark Meckler declared that "I don't think anyone's disqualified," while Amy Kremer of the Tea Party Express echoed that "I don't think there's anybody we should rule out, or anybody we should rule in. I think it's a completely level playing field."[89] This meant that every Republican aspirant was likely to try to attract Tea Party support. Indeed, potential candidates such as Palin, Gingrich, Romney, and Huckabee were

already busy courting the movement even before the midterm elections were over.[90] A key question will be whether the movement will end up coalescing behind a single candidate, as conservatives got behind Barry Goldwater and the New Politics behind George McGovern in 1972, or will spread its support around as the New Politics did in 1968 and as the religious right has typically done since 1988.

Within the Republican Party as a whole, surveys in late 2010 pointed to an electorate split three ways. One-third of Republicans said they did not support the Tea Party movement. Another one-third said they supported the movement but identified more as Republicans than Tea Partiers. The final one-third considered themselves part of the movement and actually identified with it more than with the party. Moreover, these three groups evaluated Republican leaders differently, with Romney considered the "most important leader" among the first group, Palin and Huckabee among the second group, and Gingrich among the third group.[91]

In early 2011, it was not clear whether national Tea Party groups would endorse anyone, though it seemed probable that at least some local groups would do so. National organizations planned a variety of other efforts to influence the Republican race. The Tea Party Express arranged to co-host (with CNN) a presidential primary candidates debate focusing on issues of particular interest to the Tea Party. Tea Party Patriots invited all the candidates to an American Policy Summit in February 2011, while FreedomWorks established a Political Action Committee to assist candidates.[92] Complicating the picture further will be the degree to which the Tea Party is a decentralized, grassroots phenomenon not subject to easy hierarchical control. The national Tea Party Patriots and Tea Party Express could easily wind up as less important in the nomination process than the local Tea Parties in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, key early caucus and primary states. Moreover, as political scientist Zachary Courser argues, continued extreme decentralization of the movement may limit its effectiveness as it attempts to affect elections and policy.[93]

Whether it backs one candidate or many, the Tea Party will also face the perennial dilemma posed to every ideological movement: how to manage the tradeoff between ideological purity and stylistic compatibility on the one hand and electability and governing ability on the other. Movements such as the Populists, conservatives, and New Politics changed their parties and American politics in dramatic ways, but they did so in a long process that included running candidates who were notably unsuccessful in the short run: Bryan lost three times, while Goldwater and McGovern were each at the losing end of historic landslides. If that history is any indication, there is a real possibility that the Tea Party will saddle the GOP in 2012 with a nominee

who inspires the movement and articulates its message but who cannot win. Indeed, it already did exactly that in a number of cases at lower levels in 2010. Yet the movements that obtained long-term change also learned how to meld ideology and pragmatism; it was a key moment in the conservative movement when *National Review* founder William F. Buckley declared that the guiding dictum of the movement should be to support the most conservative primary candidate who could win. A key test of 2012 will be whether the Tea Party (or Tea Parties) will follow the Delaware model, where the movement preferred losing with a Christine O'Donnell rather than winning with a Mike Castle, or the Missouri model, where the movement made peace with a Roy Blunt and sailed to easy victory in a swing state. Some analysts predicted that the Tea Party would help re-elect Obama by pressuring Republicans to nominate someone who could be portrayed as an extremist.[94] Discussing the upcoming presidential primaries, Brendan Steinhauser of FreedomWorks predicted to the contrary that "[P]eople are going to be very prudent about this. Who do we have who can beat Obama that agrees with us on 75 to 80 percent of the issues? We're going to have a lot of hard choices to make as a movement."[95] One of the biggest questions of the 2012 Republican nomination fight will be whether he is proved right.

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3. See Andrew E. Busch, *Outsiders and Openness in the Presidential Nominating System* (Pitsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 22.

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31. Indeed, some commentators expressed concern that his campaign had introduced a sort of personalistic political idolatry seldom seen in American politics but often seen in the Middle East and Latin America. See Fouad Ajami, "Obama and the Politics of Crowds," *Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 2008.

32. Douglas A. Blackmon, Jennifer Levitz, Alexandra Berzon, and Lauren Etter, "Birth of a Movement," *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 2010, A1.

33. For a history of the origins of the Tea Party movement, see Blackmon, Berzon, Levitz, and Etter, "Rebel Movement Takes Center Stage"; Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen, *Mad as Hell: How the Tea Party Movement Is Fundamentally Remaking Our Two-Party System* (New York: Harper, 2010); Kate Zernike, *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

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34. Jennifer Levitz, Cameron McWhirter, and Douglas A. Blackmon, "As Races End, Tea Party Plans for Next Phase," *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2010, A10.

35. Matea Gold, "Ad Man Fueling the 'Tea Party,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2010, A1.

36. Included in this number were surveys from Democracy Corps, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*/CBS News, CNN, Fox News, Pew Research, Common Cause, ABC News/*Washington Post*, Quinnipiac, Gallup/*USA Today*, Associated Press/Gfk, George Washington University, and Bloomberg News.

37. *New York Times*/CBS News survey, February 5–10, 2010 (18 percent); The Winston Group survey, February 22–23, 2010 (16 percent); Public Religion Research Institute survey, "Religion and the Tea Party in the 2010 Election," October 2010 (11 percent); Quinnipiac University survey, March 16–21, 2010 (13 percent); ABC News/*Washington Post* survey, April 22–25, 2010 (8 percent); Fox News/Opinion Dynamics survey, April 20–21, 2010 (17 percent); Quinnipiac University survey, April 14–19, 2010 (15 percent); Quinnipiac University survey, July 13–19, 2010 (12 percent); Center for American Progress, "Doing What Works" survey, May 10–22, 2010 (18 percent); Quinnipiac University survey, August 31-September 7, 2010 (12 percent). Unless otherwise indicated, this and other survey data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

38. Democracy Corps/Campaign for America's Future survey, July 26–29, 2010; CNN Opinion Research, February 12–15, 2010.

39. Rasmussen and Schoen, *Mad as Hell*, 137–141.

40. *New York Times*/CBS News survey, "National Survey of Tea Party Supporters," April 5–12, 2010.

41. *Politico*/TargetPoint survey, April 15, 2010.

42. Rasmussen and Schoen, *Mad as Hell*, 177.

43. Peggy Noonan, "Why It's Time for the Tea Party," *Wall Street Journal*, September 18–19, 2010, A15.

44. At one extreme, one CBS/New York Times poll indicated that 95 percent of Tea Party members were white, as opposed to 77 percent of the full national sample; at the other end, a Gallup survey showed only 79 percent of Tea Partiers—as opposed to 75 percent of all Americans—were white.

45. See CNN, February 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010 and Gallup, March 2010 also showed Tea Partiers as more affluent. NYT/CBS February 2010 and Winston Group February 2010 showed no difference between Tea Partiers and the national average.

46. See Winston Group, February 2010; CNN, February 2010; Gallup, March 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010; and Public Religion Research Institute, October 2010.

47. *Politico*, April 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010.

48. The Public Religion Research Institute poll (October 2010) showed that 64 percent of Tea Party identifiers agreed that it is not too big a problem "if some people have more of a chance in life than others."

49. In this April 2010 survey, 45 percent of Tea Party members said the main goal should be to reduce the federal government, 6 percent said cut taxes, and

6 percent said cut the budget, adding up to 57 percent. Nine percent said create jobs, 7 percent electing candidates, 7 percent "something else," and 18 percent "all of them." This means that altogether at least 75 percent included reducing the federal government as their top priority. See also WinstonGroup, February 2010.

50. *Politico*, April 2010.

51. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

52. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

53. Winston Group, February 2010; Gallup, March 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010.

54. NYT/CBS, February 2010.

55. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

56. Ben Smith and Byron Tau, "GOP is Urged to Avoid Social Issues," *Politico*, November 14, 2010, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1110/45110.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

57. Gallup, March 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010.

58. Kathleen Hennessey, "Republicans Seek to Address Issues of 'Values Voters,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 2010, A8–A9; Michael M. Phillips, "Social Conservatives Line Up To Get a Seat at the Tea Party," *Wall Street Journal*, September 18-19, 2010, A4.

59. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

60. Public Religion Research Institute, October 2010.

61. NYT/CBS, February 2010; NYT/CBS, April 2010.

62. NYT/CBS, April 2010; *Politico*, April 2010.

63. Rasmussen polls in February and July 2010 showed only about one in five Americans believed the country operated on the basis of consent of the governed. http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/general_politics/february_2010/ only_21_say_u_s_government_has_consent_of_the_governed; http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/general_politics/july_2010/23_say_u_s_government_has_the_consent_of_the_governed (accessed January 11, 20110.

64. Rasmussen and Schoen, *Mad as Hell*, 81–109.

65. Rasmussen and Schoen, *Mad as Hell*, 127.

66. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

67. In one instance, in September 2010, a man named James Lee invaded the Discovery Channel headquarters and took hostages before being shot by police. Although some commentators assumed he was somehow connected with the Tea Party, he was actually a mentally disturbed individual espousing an extreme environmental manifesto. Then, in January 2011, the horrific shooting of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and 18 others by Jared Loughner led to a similar outpouring of commentary until it became clear that he was a mentally disturbed loner with no coherent ideology or record of political activism. Ranting about "conscious dreaming" and government control of grammar, identifying the *Communist Manifesto* and *Mein Kampf* among his favorite books, it turned out that the only tea party Loughner was affiliated with was the one presided over by the Mad Hatter and the Red Queen.

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68. Kenneth P. Vogel, "Conservatives Target Their Own Fringe," *Politico*, February 27, 2010, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0210/33621.html; Kenneth P. Vogel, "Weak Tea? Partiers Fear Fallout," *Politico*, March 22, 2010, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0310/34790.html (accessed January 11, 2011).

69. Dan Balz and Jon Cohen, "Poll Shows High Marks for Obama on Tucson, Low Regard for Political Dialogue," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2011 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/17/AR2011011703262.html?hpid=topnews (accessed January 21, 2011).

70. The April 2010 ABC News/ *Washington Post* poll showed that 19 percent of Americans thought that racial prejudice accounted for "a great deal" of the Tea Party's antipathy to Obama, while another 9 percent believed prejudice accounted for "a good amount," 21 percent said "just some," and 43 percent said "not at all." In a July 2010 CNN/Opinion Research poll, 10 percent replied that "almost all" Tea Party members were prejudiced against minorities and another 15 percent judged that "most" were; 35 percent said "some" and 38 percent said "just a few" or "almost none."

71. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

72. http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/07/04/tea.party/index.html (accessed January 11, 2011).

73. Ben Smith, "MoveOn: California Fracas, Finger-Biting 'Regrettable,'" *Politico*, September 3, 2009, http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0909/MoveOn_California_fracas_fingerbiting_regrettable.html (accessed January 11, 2011).

74. Blackmon, Berzon, Levitz, and Etter, "Rebel Movement Takes Center Stage,"A1.

75. James Oliphant, "GOP insiders hitch a ride on 'tea party' bandwagon," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 2010, A23; Neil Ling, Jr., "Tea Parties Forge Alliances in Bid to Advance Agendas," *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2010, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704847104575532693771514772.html (accessed October 7, 2010).

76. "Repainting the House," *New York Times*, November 4, 2010, P16.

77. Gold, "Ad Man Fueling the 'Tea Party,'" A25.

78. "The Tea Party's Impact: Will Newcomers' Influence Derail Any Compromising?" *USA Today*, November 4, 2010, 2A. See also James Rosen, "DeMint earns praise, rebukes after election," *The Post and Courier*, November 7, 2010, http://www.postandcourier.com/news/2010/nov/07/demint-earns-praise-rebukes-after-election (accessed January 11, 2011).

79. Blackmon, Berzon, Levitz, and Etter, "Rebel Movement Takes Center Stage," A6.

80. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

81. At least five such surveys were taken, with the following results: 31 percent Democratic (D), 26 percent Republican (R), 8 percent Tea Party (TP) (*National Review* Institute, January 19-20, 2010); 46 D, 32 R, 16 TP (CNN, February 2010); 36 D, 25 R, 15 TP (Quinnipiac, March 2010); 36 D, 24 R, 13 TP (Fox News, April 2010); 34 D, 27 R, 16 TP (Fox News/Opinion Dynamics survey, August 10–11, 2010).

82. Peggy Noonan, “Tea Party to the Rescue,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2010.

83.National House exit polls, www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls. (accessed November 2010).

84. Levitz, McWhirter, and Blackmon, “As Races End, Tea Party Plans for Next Phase,” A10.

85. NYT/CBS, February 2010; *Washington Post*, March 2010; Pew, March 2010; AP, April 2010; AP, May 2010; Pew, May 2010; Pew, June 2010; Pew, July 2010; AP, August 2010; and AP, September 2010.

86. “After Election Victories, Tea Party Activists Look Ahead to 2012,” Fox News Channel, http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/11/05/election-victories-tea-party-activists-look-ahead (accessed January 20, 2011).

87. NYT/CBS, April 2010.

88. *Politico*, April 2010.

89. Michael O’Brien, “2012 Republican presidential hopefuls getting a jump on the Tea Party courtship,” *The Hill*, December 24, 2010, http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/135069-2012-gop-hopefuls-have-tea-party-courting-to-do-groups-say (accessed January 11, 2011).

90. See O’Brien, “2012 GOP Presidential Hopefuls;” Peter Wallsten, “Tea Party Already Shapes ’12 Race,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2010, A1; Michael Kranish, “Tea Party Success Could Hurt Romney’s Chances at a Presidential Bid in 2012,” *Boston Globe*, November 6, 2010.

91. Wallsten, “Tea Party Already Shapes ’12 Race.”

92. O’Brien, “2012 GOP Presidential Hopefuls.”

93. Zachary Courser, “The Tea Party at the Election,” *The Forum*, Vol. 8, Issue 4. Article 5. http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol8/iss4/art5 (accessed January 13, 2011).

94. Andrew Rawnsley, “Why Barack Obama is Looking Good for a Second Term in 2012,” *The Guardian*, November 7, 2010 http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/07/barack-obama-second-term-2012/ (accessed January 20, 2011).

95. O’Brien, “2012 GOP Presidential Hopefuls.”