The Tea Party in American Politics

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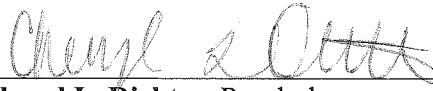
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Abstract

The Tea Party has come to prominence in the last several years as a force to be reckoned with in American politics. The Tea Party movement has affected major electoral races, publicly supporting some candidates and renouncing others, leading to placement of Tea Party-supporting representatives in Congress and losses by some highly favored opponents of the Tea Party. The movement relies on a great amount of support from Republicans, yet acts in ways that could classify it as an independent movement. In order to answer the question of what, exactly, the Tea Party movement is, and what it has the potential to become, this article examines survey data to compare attitudes and beliefs between Tea Party supporters and the rest of the population. The data point to a classification of the Tea Party as a faction of the Republican Party, with the potential for support independent of the major parties as a possible third party in the future.

On December 14, 2008, libertarian activists supporting Ron Paul's presidential campaign dumped bags of tea into the Boston Harbor in a symbolic repetition of the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Though the modern demonstration was not a protest against taxes levied by an oppressive colonial power, the maxim of the protestors was a similar cry against taxation. The object of their protest was no longer independence from Britain, but rather to voice anger at the level of taxes and a government they called "socialist." At this point, the few that observed this movement could not help but ask: were these protestors crazy, or a force to be reckoned with?

Since the initial activity of this modern-day Tea Party movement, it has been clear that this group of American voters must be taken seriously. They have attracted media attention, won elections, and been acknowledged by each of the major political parties. The elected representatives in Congress who identify with the movement formed a Tea Party Caucus similar to the Black Caucus that currently exists in Congress. In the 2010 House and Senate elections, the *New York Times* identified 138 Tea Party or Tea Party-endorsed candidates, and more than 40 of these candidates were elected (Zernike 2010a).[1] In the Republican primaries, Tea Party candidates defeated two incumbent Senators – Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Robert Bennett of Utah – and defeated several mainstream Republicans viewed as certain to win – Mike Castle of Delaware and Sue Lowden of Nevada. Defeating highly favored incumbents is no small feat in the American electoral system: between 1980 and 2008 less than 2% of incumbents seeking re-election for the Senate have not been re-nominated (Stanley and Niemi 2010: 44).

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[1] "Tea Party candidates" are defined by the *New York Times* in their report as "those who had entered politics through the movement or who are receiving significant support from local Tea Party groups and who share the ideology of the movement" (Zernike 2010a). Endorsements from prominent Tea Party leaders were not a sufficient condition for classification as a "Tea Party candidate."

Why did the 2010 election have such a strong showing for the Tea Party movement? Though some mainstream media sources claimed that there had been a sudden increase in passion among conservative voters, empirical data can further describe the changes that occurred. Data from a 2010 NBC/Wall Street Journal poll indicated that support for the Tea Party was positively correlated with increased interest in the November 2010 election. Those that were supporting the Tea Party, and not just rank-and-file Republicans, were more active and interested in the election. Of Tea Party supporters, three-quarters responded that they were "intensely interested" in the November election, as compared to only two-thirds of Republicans and half of Democrats (Wallsten and Yadron 2010). The much-discussed enthusiasm gap in the 2010 election was not between Democrats and Republicans, but between Republicans and Tea Party Republicans.

Some argue that the Tea Party will be inconsequential in the grand scheme of American politics. The precedent of third parties in the United States does not predict a high chance of survival for the modern third party within the strong two-party system. Yet polling data suggest that the Tea Party is not an isolated movement and far from insignificant. According to the January 2011 national poll by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal, an astonishing 28% of those polled considered themselves a supporter of the Tea Party movement. Even more reported being sympathetic towards the Tea Party – 32% of respondents said that they had either a somewhat positive or very positive opinion of the movement.[2] In the 2010 exit polls 41% of voters considered themselves supporters of the Tea Party movement and only 31% opponents of the movement (CNN Election Center 2010). Any politician that runs for election in the near

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[2] January 2011 rather than February 2011 surveys were used in this case because the January 2011 poll asked only whether respondents were supporters of the Tea Party movement, and did not ask about their affective opinion of the Tea Party.

future will have to acknowledge the influence of this constituency, regardless of where they seek office.

While this movement within the American political realm cannot be ignored, it is difficult to classify. A first impression of the Tea Party movement might be that it is an independent third party acting alongside the Republicans and Democrats. Yet the Tea Party does not run candidates for office under the label of a third party, and it seems to pull its members primarily from the Republican Party: 68% of those indicating that they were a Tea Party supporter identified as Republican.[3] These data suggest that the Tea Party is more of a faction within the Republican Party. However, leaders within the Tea Party movement do not agree with this classification. When critics said that the Tea Party should not comment separately from the Republican televised response to the 2011 State of the Union, Amy Kremer, a leader for the Tea Party Express, responded that the Tea Party is "not a wing of the Republican Party" (Levinson 2011). The strong issue agenda of the Tea Party, however, bears similarity to another type of political actor: social movements. Movements that act from outside of the political parties or government institutions have different characteristics from both factions and third parties, and in this respect the Tea Party is somewhat like a social movement.

Yet which of these terms best describes the Tea Party movement? Third parties and social movements can be further analyzed within a historical context. The Tea Party movement shares characteristics with certain types of third parties, factions, and social movements, and the similarities that it shares with each of these types can help to better understand it and predict its future impact. This paper will provide a brief review of the types of third parties, identify what

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[3] February 2011 NBC/Wall Street Journal poll.

distinguishes third parties from social movements and factions, and place the Tea Party movement within this context.

Are its members similar in most respects to the members of one major party, but differ in small ways from the mainstream of the party? Is it a social movement motivated by a social cause that seeks to affect the government by acting from outside of the political system, with members who are politically diverse except in relation to one social cause? Or are Tea Party supporters true third party voters that take cues from an independent party organization with little allegiance to a major party? Data from nationwide surveys are aggregated and analyzed in order to provide more information on the Tea Party movement as it stands within the electorate.

Motivations for Third Parties and Third Party Voters

Despite the high-profile nature of some third parties throughout America's political history, the great majority of our government has been controlled by two major parties at all times. There has been change in which two parties were the major parties of the day, but the structure has remained essentially the same. The presidency has not and will not soon be captured by a candidate from a third party, if history is to be any lesson. As V.O. Key (1958) observes, the two-party system in America has evolved through time, yet remains dual in nature. The fundamental decision facing voters, for the most part, is a binary one – between two major parties. The campaigns of the two major parties are built around this choice. Yet the emergence of third parties outside this dual system is interesting because of their rarity and their effects on the system. What exactly causes these third parties to develop at certain times, and who constitutes the support for these non-traditional political actors within the population?

A typical shared sentiment of third-party voters is dissatisfaction with the government and the two major parties (Peterson and Wrighton 1998). This can be described as a split of "outsider versus insider," or "the people versus the political establishment" (Ceaser and Busch 1993; Schedler 1996: 294). Third party voters will often also express their dissatisfaction with the two-party system. The broad support for anti-partyism is demonstrated by survey data indicating that a third of voters would prefer "candidates run as individuals without party labels" (Wattenberg 1996: 48). Third parties can capitalize on this anti-political establishment undercurrent by taking anti-government, anti-political elite stances. These parties have been dubbed "populist," "protest," and ironically, "anti-party" parties (Schedler 1996: 292).

The anti-partyism feeling is not restricted to third party voters. Political parties are unpopular in America; parties are seen as unnecessary and "unwholesome parts" of a normative unified ideal system, or simply as an anarchic force that breaks apart an otherwise harmonious political community (Rosenblum 2011: 289). Is this group of people simply cynical, or do they represent a concrete interest in changing the structure of government? Rosenblum (2011: 295) characterized third party independent voters as people who believe that the two major parties are stuck in a "deadly groove" of inaction, bickering, and an unsatisfactory status quo. She describes the third party independent voter as motivated by dissatisfaction with the two major parties and the belief that the parties are too rigid or are not differentiated enough from each other (Rosenblum 2011: 292-293). The campaigns of third parties can be centered on these feelings of anger and discontent with the current political environment and institutions. They capitalize on the feeling of discontent with the major parties, the candidates nominated by the major parties, or both (Allen and Brox, 2005: 624).

Are all third party voters motivated by this cynical dissatisfaction with the government and parties, and will this sentiment necessarily result in the formation of a third party? Koch (2003) proposes that the anti-government feeling creates a political atmosphere that is ripe for third parties. His results from 1992 indicated that a causal mechanism of cynicism creating third party support was unlikely, and instead that third party candidates influence the cynicism and dissatisfaction of their supporters (Koch 2003[4]: 56-57). This suggests that third parties have the ability to draw supporters to them when the situation enables it, much as Gold (1995) argues that Ross Perot did. Stone and Rapoport (2001) identify a "push-pull" model for third party voters defecting from the major parties. This mechanism has a "push" component that consists of dissatisfaction with *both* major parties and candidates pushing the voters away, and a "pull" towards the third party candidate based on agreeable issue positions and priorities (Stone and Rapoport 2001: 51). The leaders of third parties, who are most often the candidates running for major offices, are integral in drawing these voters to the third party. As the major examples of third parties can show, leaders have played different roles in different third parties. This role depends on the political environment and affects the way that the third party acts.

A division among third parties between candidate-centered campaigns and issue-centered campaigns seems to emerge from a review of third parties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although both types have issue oriented programs, candidate centered parties coalesce around a popular leader who articulates positions that strongly appeal to its supporters; issue-centered campaigns emerge out of issue concerns primarily and are defined by their lack of a clear and singular candidate who represents the party. In the twentieth century relatively

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[4] Though Koch's (2003) findings are robust, he examines political trust and cynicism as a dependent of third party support in the 1980, 1992, and 1996 elections, and therefore his frame of research is confined to the Anderson and Perot candidacies.

successful third parties that focused on individual candidates rather than issues alone were more prevalent, whereas the nineteenth century third parties were far more issue-centered (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996: 119).[5]

Issue-Oriented Third Parties

Working from the environment of dissatisfaction with the two major parties, what are the issues which third parties can capture for their platforms to draw voters from the major parties? Major parties will often fail to address certain issues because their support base is internally divided over crucial issues. These issues can therefore become the rallying calls for third parties and prove to be an effective way of differentiating their independent party from the major parties. Because issue-centric third parties emerge from certain ignored issues, they will sometimes first appear as social movements.

The Liberty Party

A classic example of an independent political party that emerged from a social movement was the anti-slavery movement and subsequent Liberty Party. The central tenet (and the story of the formation) of the Liberty Party lends weight to the argument that it was a party built around a social cause. Its one singular mission – abolition of slavery – was enough to pull a candidate and supporters for this candidate from the major political parties.

The context of the lead-up to the 1840 presidential election was such that the abolition movement could form a third party without much hindrance. In this case, both of the dominant parties, the Whigs and Democrats, ignored the issue of slavery because each had a pro-slavery Southern contingent (Rosenstone et al. 1996). By ignoring the issue of slavery, the major parties

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[5] Successful parties are defined in this instance by Rosenstone et al. (1996) as those receiving greater than 5% of the national vote.

also ignored a large section of voters who cared about slavery – whether against or in support of abolition. The Liberty Party was inextricably linked to the major parties of the time; its formation was motivated by the failure of the major parties to pay attention to their issue of primary concern.

The narrow issue focus of the Liberty Party was its unifying issue, yet the issue-centrality of the party also contributed to its demise. The eventual demise of the party was a split determined by stances on issue platform: one group decided to continue the abolition-only platform, another decided to include other issues along with a more moderate position on abolition, and a third group decided to simply include other political issues (Rosenstone et al. 1996). The social cause of abolition created the Liberty Party and eventually drove its cooptation into the Free Soil Party and later the Republican Party. Its success was demonstrated by its ability to make the issue of slavery nationally prominent. In a pattern that developed further during the nineteenth century, the Liberty Party was co-opted into other third parties and eventually encompassed in one of the two major parties. It was clear that the central goal of the Liberty Party was to earn recognition for the social issue of slavery, and in that way it was successful.

Farmers of the Greenback Party

Economic issues also drove voters to the creation of third parties. During the 1870s, railroad companies charged exorbitant rates for transportation of goods, enraging farmers in the West and the South. They channeled this discontent into political action and formed groups called "granges" specifically for the purpose of communicating their discontent to politicians and hoping for more government anti-monopoly regulation of the railroads (Bibby and Maisel 2003:

31). This discontent may not have been directly with the political parties, yet it was expressed in the political arena and with a goal that involved the government.

The farmers who organized into granges eventually translated their organization into an independent party organization. Support for the anti-monopoly movement eventually waned, yet collapses in trade and support for greenback legal tender together fueled the formation of the Greenback Party. Greenbacks co-opted the support network of the anti-monopoly movement in the Midwest and the West, forming a significant political force primarily from farmers (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 64). In 1876 they organized into the National Greenback Party, driven specifically by the policy proposal for greenback tender, which would alleviate the debt burden of farmers by helping to reverse the deflation that had existed since the Civil War.

Just as with the issue of slavery and the Liberty Party, the two major parties refused to acknowledge the issue of greenback tender, and so the Greenback Party was able to attract supporters from both major parties. This was evidence by the electoral success in 1878, when Greenback candidates attracted votes across the Midwest. However, this was mainly for candidates who ran on "fusion tickets" with one of the major parties (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 65). Some of their success can be attributed to their ability to adopt the partial support of the major parties. Yet the Greenbacks had an unsuccessful Presidential campaign in 1880 with James B. Weaver as a candidate. The third party constituency translated to major party voters after this. Most of the former Greenback supporters moved en masse to the Democrats in 1882 (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 66).

Transformation into the Populists

Yet the third party support from farmers in the Midwest and South did not disappear. This constituent group soon re-emerged as the Populist or People's Party. The populist

movement grew from the widespread disaffection in the West and South and, again, in response to dire economic circumstances. Southern farmers under the burden of crop liens joined with the new settlers in the western states who had been severely hit by deflation following reversed economic conditions in 1887 (Rosenstone et al. 1996). Though the most well-known and central issue of the Populists was the free-silver policy, original Populists were more focused on the expansion of the money supply. Severe deflation meant that farmers had to repay loans in money that was more valuable than what they had originally received in addition to paying interest on the loans. They wished to see a greater supply of money so that the dollars with which they repaid their loans would be worth less at the time of repayment than when they secured the loans.

Because the proposal for the money supply inflation was so central to the Populists, the movement in its early days is often classified as a social movement.   Its support came from across multiple regions and political parties before it eventually evolved into its own independent party. The conditions following the Civil War that led to massive westward migration and the lack of capital in the Southern financial system created a segment of society that was angered by the lack of government protection. It was these people, and not members of only one of the two major parties, who were attracted to the Populist Party.

On a regional level, these people (mostly farmers and ranchers) eventually formed a Northern Alliance and a Southern Alliance in each respective geographic area. In the political sphere, neither movement had enough clout to effect national political change on its own. The two groups, with their somewhat-shared social cause, formed the third party in order to "take the lead in securing national measures of reform that the states were powerless to effect" (Hicks 1961: 185). Because they could not succeed in advancing their agenda on the state or national political scene as social movements, they chose the route of a third party. This transformation

demonstrates the method by which social movements can become third party movements – by congregating around a common issue which is ignored by major parties and which then becomes central to the political party.

The Populists were very successful in 1892 and 1894. Despite the fact that the Populist candidate was James B. Weaver, the former Greenback Party candidate, the party captured a significant amount of the national vote and more than the two major parties in five states (8.5% of the popular vote, and 22 electoral votes) (Gillespie 1993: 73). Somehow, the same candidate under a different party banner was able to run more effectively than he had twelve years previous. In the 1894 Congressional elections, the Populists performed better than any other third party has to this date in the US, winning nine seats in the House, and in 1896 capturing more seats in Congress, bringing the total to 22 of the total 357 House representatives and five of the 90 Senators (Gillespie 1993:73). There can be no doubt that these successes affected the government and the two party institutions.

The life of the Populist Party as a third party was short-lived, however. In 1896, they faced a dilemma that seemed to stymie many third party movements: the fear of vote-splitting. One group within the Populists, favoring independence from the Democratic Party, wanted to hold the Populist Party convention before that of the Democrats so that they could establish a clear Populist candidate around whom the Populist voters could organize. The other faction within the Populists favored fusion with the Democrats, and wanted to postpone the Populist convention until after the Democratic convention in the hopes that Populists could sway the major party constituency to nominate a candidate amenable to the free-silver movement of the Populists. The section of the Populists favoring fusion won out, and the convention was held after the Democratic convention.

Populist supporters were therefore faced with the choice of joining with the Democrats and voting for William Jennings Bryan, or splitting the free silver vote by voting for a third party candidate. On the one hand, the Populists wanted to maintain their separate third party identity, yet their primary policy position was shared with the candidate of the Democratic Party (Gillespie 1993: 75). By sacrificing their identity and voting for Bryan, they were able to support their preference on the issues, and thereby not enable the opposing major party to win the election. The demise of the Populists demonstrates a central problem with "success" of a third party – when circumstances change and the major parties do address the issues that motivated the creation of the third party in the first place, the third party becomes irrelevant.

Candidate-Centered Campaigns

The other side of third parties is those that have focused more on candidates. Voters for these third parties are often motivated by their allegiance to a specific candidate – most often presidential – rather than to a party. These parties might indeed have strong issue platforms and capitalize on those issues that the major parties do not sufficiently address. A number of third parties can be examined to derive knowledge about the characteristics of this subtype of third parties, though it is important to note that issues still play a role in the third parties, despite being less salient than in some of the parties already discussed.

1968: George Wallace

The candidacy of former Alabama Governor George Wallace deserves some recognition as one of the major attempts to run nationally in a difficult ballot access era of the twentieth century. His main issue agenda was built upon the racial conflict that was highlighted during the integration reform efforts of the 1960s. His issues of "law and order" and "urban unrest" were

veiled allusions to resentment of racial acceptance in the South. His first attempt at the

Presidency was his primary campaign of 1964. Despite little monetary support and significant

opposition from each of the major parties, Wallace was able to gain an astonishing percentage of

the vote – 34% in Wisconsin, 30% in Indiana, and 43% in Maryland (Rosenstone et al. 1996:

110).

After his failure in the 1964 Presidential race, Wallace continued to capitalize on the

racial resentment common to many Southern white voters. He began a campaign again in 1966

after ending his gubernatorial term, and formed an ad hoc third party, the American Independent

Party, which claimed that the two major parties were too similar. His third party was not,

however, a party in any respect outside of his candidacy; he ran without a vice-president on his

ticket in states that would allow it (Carlson 1981: 74). On the whole, George Wallace did not

expect to win the presidency on the national arena in 1968. He was dissatisfied with the progress

of the two major parties, as were many voters, and so he formed his own third party organization

and hoped to capture a significant portion of the electoral votes.

Wallace's support was mainly in the South and typically consisted of low-income less

educated whites and a great proportion of young people (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 113). However,

Wallace was more motivated by creating "political havoc" within the party structure of the

United States to accomplish his goals and further his agenda (Green 2010: 81). As usual with

third parties, his largest support group was those who did not identify strongly with either major

party (Gillespie 1993: 119). His goal was to win enough states that neither the Democrats or the

Republicans would have a majority in the electoral college, and then to bargain with the two

major parties, offering his electoral college votes.

Although failing in his electoral strategy, Wallace did influence the election, the major parties, and the platform of major party candidates. Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign had initially been fairly neutral on civil rights, possibly even leaning towards the liberal position. Yet faced with the strong Wallace constituency and a Southern white stronghold of voters that had a more conservative stance on civil rights, he changed his campaign strategy. He co-opted the issues that the Wallace campaign had stressed, adding "law and order" to his platform as a priority, and thereby winning significant portions of the Southern white vote away from Wallace in the subsequent weeks (Green 2010: 83). While Wallace might not have won the election, the impact of his campaign on the major party candidate was undeniable. Nixon's strategy of maintaining a "Southern eye" on issues of racial basis continued into his terms in office, demonstrating a long-term impact of the Wallace candidacy on the major parties - and eventually caused most former Wallace supporters to defect to the Republicans (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 113; Gillespie 1993: 108).

1980: John Anderson

John Anderson's campaign of 1980 demonstrates just how incredibly candidate-centric a third party can be. Anderson formed the National Unity Campaign and took a variety of controversial stances on issues that would not otherwise have made a traditional platform (Gold 1995: 754; Gillespie 1993:125). The diversity of his issue stances was reflected by his diverse support base of young, affluent, and well-educated people in the Northeast (Abramson et al. 1982). Part of this may have been due to the fact that his National Unity Party was based solely around his candidacy and did not have a clear message (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 189).

As a moderate Republican whose support weakened in the months approaching the election, Anderson attracted a surprisingly large portion of the vote. He earned over 6% of the

national vote in November, despite a lack of broad party organization (Allen and Brox 2005).

However, the votes that he did win were from voters who would have likely voted for the

Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter, and whom Carter desperately needed (Abramson et al.

1995: 245; Rosenstone et al. 1996; Gillespie 1993: 125). His effect on the overall election was

small in number of votes but still noticeable.

One of the most interesting qualities of the Anderson candidacy was who he attracted.

Anderson garnered strong support from Independents, which Gold (1995: 754) suggests is a

requirement for success among third party presidential candidates. Yet a great deal of his

support came from voters who picked him as the only alternative to two unsatisfactory

candidates. The "push" component of his support was far more substantial than the "pull"

component. He won 13% of the vote among people who did not care which of the two major

party candidates won the election (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 119). Rather than attracting voters

who liked his platform, Anderson collected the disaffected voters from both Republican and

Democratic camps. For someone without much of a positive issue platform, it was noteworthy

that he gained the amount of support that he did.

1992: H. Ross Perot

One of the most charismatic third party candidates, and perhaps the most personally

appealing to voters, was H. Ross Perot. In 1992, Perot had what was one of the most successful

of third party presidential runs. His success – 19% of the popular vote in the election – was due

in major part to the steep drop between 1991 and 1992 in satisfaction with the state of the nation

and the trust that voters had in their government (Zernike 2010). Perot's campaign was

incredibly candidate-centric (his Reform Party was simply the organization that sprung up in

order to run his campaign), yet it cannot be discounted. He existed on ballots in all fifty states

without a party network, and was placed on these ballots by the mobilization of an impressive network of supporters.

Perot ran in an environment of voters who were generally unhappy with both major party candidates – 59.2% had a strong negative opinion of one or both of them (Gold 1995: 759). Many voters believed that George H.W. Bush had lied earlier in his presidency, and that Clinton was also untrustworthy (Frankovic 1993: 121). In contrast to this, Perot was believed to be a breath of fresh air and often described as straightforward and plain-speaking (Gold 1995: 755).

Indeed, voters were affected much more by the candidate Ross Perot rather than by his party – which in 1992 did not even exist. Drawing from survey research done after the 1992 election, Stone, Rapoport, and Schneider (2004: 456) found that activists for Perot's Reform Party were motivated most significantly by evaluations of their candidate and not their party. Gold (1995: 767) found that 37.9% of Perot voters described the reason that they cast their vote was because of the candidate, and not the third party movement, their own political philosophy, or the issues. The impact of a candidate can be tremendous and can be more important than other factors in motivating the third party voter.

Perot's main legacy was the remarkable effect on the composition of the government following his campaign. In the Congressional elections of 1994, Republicans took over the House for the first time in 40 years. The Republican success was aided in large part by the "Contract with America" on which Republicans ran, which was specifically tailored by Newt Gingrich to attract the Perot voter base (Green 2010: 153; Bibby and Maisel 2003: 45). Furthermore, Gingrich's strategy of attracting former Perot voters who had been dissatisfied with the Republican Party was successful. Of those who had voted for Perot, two thirds voted for Republicans in 1994 (Stone and Rapoport 2001: 53). The effect of the Perot candidacy in 1992

was considerable in the major party system, though the third party itself did not gain any official governmental power.

The pattern of candidate-centered third parties, different from those centered around specific issues, has emerged for the most part during the twentieth century. The main message of these parties seems to be that whether or not a campaign has a strong issue platform, a strong candidate can succeed in attracting support. Wallace, Anderson, and Perot have all been appealing individuals and have attracted at least some of their support because of this personal quality. All candidates drew from a base of independent voters, though Perot probably did this best, winning 27.2% of independents or partisan leaners as compared to Anderson's 13.9% and Wallace's 16.9% (Gold 1995: 757). All candidates employed a "pull" strategy to attract voters who were already affected by a "push" away from the major parties.

On the whole, third parties employ certain strategies to accomplish their goals of wooing voters away from the major parties. Issue-centric and candidate-centric third parties both will offer an attractive party agenda or platform to the population as a way to make voters believe that their interests will be better represented by them. Both of these types of third parties will attract voters who have a set of beliefs that is shared by much of the third party, and ideologically distinct from that of the major parties. Furthermore, third parties and their candidates have the ability to direct voters because of their shared beliefs and their positions as opinion leaders.

Factions: are they different?

Inside of the subtype of issue-centric partisan movements, there is yet another type of movement that deserves attention, but cannot be classified as true "third parties" – that of

political party factions. Factions, like third parties, have often been seen as a natural outlet for dissatisfaction with the two major parties (Reiter 2011: 42). Factions are an inevitable result of a highly permeable two-party system. Many scholars have observed the peculiar reality that only two major parties exist to encompass an array of ideologies that exist in this heterogeneous nation (e.g. V.O. Key 1958). So it is only natural that multiple groupings would develop within a single party.

To distinguish factions from third parties, it is important to note that a faction is an actor within a larger group, vying for control over other sections of that group (Beller and Belloni 1978: 419). Factions of political parties act by affecting their respective parties' political abilities to carry out their duties (Reiter 2011: 42-43). Major parties without factions can be viewed as a mental heuristic for voters in making informed decisions; a faction within a political party inherently makes that heuristic less useful because deep divisions within a party cannot be encompassed by a singular party label.

Beller and Belloni (1978: 441) note that while a traditional view of factions is that they disrupt unified political parties, factions can also serve to unify a party by serving as a "safety valve" that contains conflict within a party. By moderating internal disagreements within parties, factions can potentially help solve conflicts by making important issues more salient. Factions in the two-party system will have pressure to compromise their differences with the mainstream of their party in order to avoid losing an election to the opposing major party (Zariski 1978: 26). Yet factions in American politics have seemed to do well at remaining separated from the mainstream of a party and affecting the major party's platform.

It is not impossible for factions to maintain their differences and still remain in power, as the example of the Southern Democrats demonstrates. In 1948, the Southerners within the

Democratic Party walked out of the 1948 Democratic convention after it adopted a strong civil rights platform. This party plank, introduced by Hubert Humphrey, forced the Southern Democrats to the realization that their ideology was so different from the mainstream message of the party that they had to separate. As a reaction to the liberalizing civil rights platform of the Northern Democrats, the Southern Democrats, or Dixiecrats, formed the States' Rights Party. Ostensibly, they wanted to champion the cause of the rights of the states, rather than the federal government, to legislate.

Unlike some of the other factions and third parties that have emerged from the major parties, the Dixiecrats attempted to use the existing structure of the Democratic Party to get their candidate on the ballot as the official Democratic nominee. They were successful in this in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. In all other states they appeared as the States Rights party, which had met in convention to nominate their preferred candidate, Strom Thurmond, for the presidency. Thurmond himself, after earning the nomination, characterized the split between Dixiecrats and ordinary Democrats as a temporary "fight within our family" (Bibby and Maisel 2003: 36). Neither the faction nor the major party viewed the States' Rights Party as a true third party, and the eventual absorption of most Dixiecrat candidates (and voters) back into the Democratic Party evidences the lack of any independent party organization. Yet the strong issue platform constituency was demonstrated by the concentration of support in the election – while earning only 2.4% of the national vote, Thurmond collected 22.4% of the vote in the South, where voters were most concerned about civil rights issues (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 109.

Some factional parties have split from the major parties, taking a substantial portion of major party voters with them. In the early twentieth century, factionalism in the Republican

Party caused a split to develop and led to the formation of the Progressive Party under Theodore Roosevelt. This resulted from the nomination of the establishment character William Howard Taft, the incumbent president, by the Republican Party convention in 1912. Delegates who supported Roosevelt walked out of the convention, beginning Roosevelt's third party campaign. Running under the Bull Moose Party banner in 1912, Roosevelt split the Republican vote in the presidential election and beat Taft's eight electoral votes with a total of 88 (Gillespie 1993: 87). The third party directly enabled the victory of Democrat Woodrow Wilson, who was elected to the presidency with a plurality of only 41.8% of the vote (Bibby and Maisel 2003: 33). While the Progressive faction has split originally from the Republicans, its candidacy in 1912 enabled the election of a Democrat. This demonstrates how devastating the "spoiling" effect of a third party candidacy can be in elections.

Some party factions have been more influential than others. The Religious Right, sometimes called the Christian Right or the Christian Conservatives, emerged as a faction of the Republicans in the late 1970s. This section of voters mobilized within the party in order to protect what they perceived as a threat to their traditional values (Green, Conger, and Guth 2006: 24). Their strong emphasis on moral issues and their base primarily among fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant voters has had a definite impact on the platforms of both major parties, yet their major influence has continued to be within the Republicans (Green and Guth 1988: 151). While their agenda as "purists" was certainly different from the mainstream of the party at the beginning of their existence in the GOP, it is these religious conservatives who represent the average Republican voter in the most recent elections.

While predictions were easily made about the Christian Right in its early years that it was far too radical to effectively influence the Republican Party as a whole (e.g. Green and Guth

1988), they have been absorbed into what constitutes the main support network for Republican candidates in modern elections. Voters in the 2004 Presidential election cited "moral values" as the most important of issues in influencing their vote, and these morals-motivated voters were a major factor in securing George W. Bush's eventual victory (Rozell and Das Gupta 2006:14). Religious voters are not, of course, exclusively limited to this group of conservative voters – there are religious Democrats and independents, yet the largest faction that has developed and maintained its influence on the national scale has been the Christian Right. The religious conservatives within the Republican Party have often taken over the main party organization because of their greater numbers within states, and found this to be an effective strategy when mobilizing voters in general elections (Gilbert 2006: 155). Where other factions have failed at having a pronounced or prolonged effect on the major party, the Christian Right has been so successful at this that it is considered to be a solid demographic group of supporters for Republican candidates, and rightly so – of those who cited "moral values" as important to them in the 2004 election, 80% voted for Bush, the GOP candidate (Rozell and Das Gupta 2006: 17).

What motivates voters to support the factions within major parties, and why are they distinct from supporters of true third parties? Scholars have looked at the individual characteristics of factional voters in presidential elections, and found geographic as well as personal differences that are key in predicting involvement in a faction. The areas where factions have historically flourished have been in the Northeast, the Great Plains, and in the West, and most often among people who value ideology and "principled behavior" (Reiter 2011: 44). This suggests that factions are made up not of people whose ideology has diverged from the mainstream of the party, but people who view the party as departing from its traditional ideology and principles. When examining the reasons why voters identify with factions, Zariski (1978:

22) identified political competence as the most important factor encouraging faction support.[6] This contrasts with the typical third party voter, who rejects both major parties. Taking into account the structural definition of factions as groups that act within the party, the separation between factions and third parties seems two-fold: they differ in terms of voter support and in terms of the way that they act inside the political system.

Social Movements in the Political Arena

Looking to the third party movements of the late nineteenth century, it is clear that discontent was a large factor in attracting voters. This mass discontent often manifested itself first as a social movement and then as a third party. What makes a social movement different from a third party, and why do these movements sometimes become a political party and sometimes not? Social movements are built exclusively around issues, and so are most similar to the issue-centric third parties in American politics, yet they differ in the way that they act.

The social movement is broadly defined as an "uninstitutionalized collectivity" in that it principally emerges as a group outside the political system that seeks to affect political decisions (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 2007: 7). This position of acting from the outside of the political system is key in developing a shared definition for members of social movements of "us" and "them"; an ingroup versus an outgroup. Sometimes the members of the social movement may share ideology and goals with one another, yet the crucial idea around which members organize their collectivity is unique to the social movement (Stewart et al. 2007). Unlike third parties, which often form from a base of voters who are demographically similar and also motivated by a specific issue, social movements are more diverse in their political makeup yet homogenous in

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[6] Political competence is defined by Zariski as political knowledge, political activity, and efficacy.

beliefs about the issue that is central to the movement. Social movements are important in politics because while they are invented institutions for a social cause, they can easily develop into other forms of politics. Tilly (2004: 37) posits that certain conditions, namely the presence of political entrepreneur leaders and communication and collaboration with other social movements, will ensure the evolution of social movements into the political arena.

By classifying social movements as an inherently mutable organization, it might be possible to lose track of their role within politics. It is, in fact, easiest to define social movements by defining what they are not. In addition to being collectivities that act from outside of the established institution, social movements have leaders or spokespersons; members or followers; and organizations that work to organize the supporters of the movement. Social movements do not, however, have a single leader or a single organization, yet they can be made up of individual social movement organizations (SMOs). Their goal is not one single action or time-delimited, but their actions can consist of such individual campaigns and organized events (Stewart et al. 2007: 3-7).

When social movements do move into the political sphere, they will often affect the campaigns and actions of other political actors. Movements are not, however, groups that already command substantial resources, connections, or prestige that might give them a right to direct negotiation with the government (Tilly 2004: 5). This means that they must rely on other organizations or institutions in order to accomplish their goals of political change. They work to reach this goal, utilizing a set of strategies that are specific to social movements.

Social movements will establish a moral contrast between the social movement and the institutionalized norm in order to motivate supporters. Sometimes movements will exaggerate this source of legitimacy by creating a dramatic and prolonged good vs. bad mentality among its

members (Stewart et al. 2007: 18). The legitimacy of the movement as an anti-establishment force is grounded in this contrast, and by carefully crafting it the movement can be sustained beyond a single protest or campaign event.

Furthermore, movements will attempt to form a collective identity for the social movement through which the movement is defined as a heroic figure for the people against the political establishment. Schedler (1996: 293-294) describes an "imagined community" that movements claiming to represent the people will attempt to create. Rather than stressing similarities among the people who support the movement, the movement will emphasize the commonly opposed establishment. Snow and Benford (1992: 137) pinpoint the strategy of building collective action frames, which are "accenting devices" that re-orient supporters towards a set of actions in order to address an unjust or immoral institution. The institution, establishment, or policy to which the movement is opposed was previously seen as unfortunate but tolerable; the collective action frame redefines it as requiring action. Social movements use these frames to communicate that urgent action is needed, though followers might not have thought this beforehand.

The example of the peace movement, which called for a nuclear "freeze" is an example of how collective action frames can redefine an issue and create a call to action. Though the call for peace and nuclear disarmament was not new, by reframing the issue in the context of safety and peace rather than security and defense, the peace movement was able to attract a broader support group. Movements will likely succeed in enabling mass mobilization when they use these frames, and will generate much more support from a previously inactive group of the population. Other scholars agree that reframing the issue is an important strategy of social movements, and point to social psychological research in schemas. Social movements create a

new schema that causes supporters to look at the issue from a new perspective (Gamson 1992: 67). Actions that might have previously been thought of as radical or extremist will then be considered justifiable.

Social movements will also utilize all possible methods of organizing themselves in order to attract more followers. In particular, social movements have historically been able to co-opt the framework of existing activist organizations to do so. If the collective identity of membership in several smaller and loosely-related organizations is redefined as including participation in an overarching social movement, the members of these groups will become active in a social movement simply through virtue of their identity as members of other groups (Friedman and McAdam 1992). The social movement does not need to provide its own unique incentives for participation nor does it need to recruit from the general population – it simply has to harness the members of groups that have overlapping views.

A simple example of this is the Berkeley free speech movement's use of existing campus political groups to recruit members. Political activists participated in the free speech demonstrations because it became a part of their collective identity and the norm of behavior for groups of which they were already members. By transforming the already existing communal institutions into environments that are sympathetic to the expression of social movement views, movements can develop a support base with more solidarity.

Social movements are also defined by the presence of internal social networks. The social groups made of social movement supporters help to uphold the cohesiveness of the movement as a whole. If supporters have continuing social relationships with other supporters, they will create a "primary social support network" that helps develop solidarity within the movement (Gamson 1992: 61-62). Especially in high-risk environments where participation in

the movement may imply danger for individuals, strong ties to other group participants will help

maintain participation and ameliorate the attrition rate of supporters (McAdam 1986).

Results of Social Movements

The end goal of the social movement is to eventually bring about some change in policy

or halting an action of the opposition establishment. However, in order to accomplish this, the

movement must negotiate and bargain with the established institutions. Such bargaining is often

considered an outrage – to both sides. Communicating with social movements can undermine

the authority of the government, as it admits the legitimacy of the movement. The outcome of

such negotiation is doubtful for the institution, as they can rarely gain anything from the social

movement; by nature the movement's bargaining tool is their collective action and protest.

Ending protest is the goal for the institution, yet there is no middle ground or compromise

immediately available. Additionally, social movements and especially the most fervent

supporters of movements may believe that compromise of any sort is a "moral outrage" (Stewart

et al. 2007: 20-21).

What about the instances in which social movements do not succeed? There can be

problems with social movements that are broadly defined in terms of a collective identity. After

the initial stages of recruitment, a broad all-inclusive mission will effectively exclude potential

activists. Though this is counterintuitive, the inclusive conception of a group's values will create

internal conflict within the group. The movement will have challenges in retaining members if

their views on issues conflict (Friedman and McAdam 1992). This problem is more likely if

more attitudes are included in the group.

The problem of too much centralization can be demonstrated by the example of the

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the 1960s. Though the movement was

successful on the national front, it ran into problems because it attempted to encompass too diverse a group of activists. When circumstances changed and adversaries demanded responses from the SDS, the national organization made public statements on behalf of the movement. However, because of the individual "affinity groups" internal to the movement, individual supporters did not necessarily support the national organization's stances (Gamson 1992: 64). The dilemma of the social movement therefore lies in the choice to either accept a broad set of views or adopt a narrow conception of the movement's goals. In one case, individual supporters might feel isolated from the major organizations of the movement yet consider themselves a part of the social network that defines the movement; conversely supporters can be loyal to the organization yet not identify with the social identity of the group (Gamson 1992: 61).

How do social movements fare when they act within the political arena, and which strategies help to make them more successful at effecting political change? Tilly (2004: 157) predicts that social movements of the twenty-first century will continue some of the trends seen in recent years of organization. Specifically, movements will increasingly professionalize structural elements, such as staff and modes of communicating with political actors. This would also be accompanied by more exclusion from the social movement sphere of people who might have previously been uninterested or uninvolved. As more social movement professionals are parts of the infrastructure, traditional activists will no longer be the driving force behind the movements. While the composition of movements is important in understanding the effects that they will have, it seems that the social movement literature often ignored the second half of the picture when examining social movements in politics. While much attention is paid to the mobilization of voters and the methods in which social movements act in order to protest the

establishment, the effects of such movements on government decisions also merit examination (Grossman 2006: 117).

Prospects for Third-Party Movements

In order to assess the success of third party movements it is first important to establish a metric by which to examine this success. Using the classification system of Donald Green, the third parties of the past two centuries are cut down to eleven successful ones.[7] What factors helped to make the political environment more receptive to third party success? Primarily, the third parties have benefited from a party realignment occurring after changes in partisanship among black voters and Southern white voters. Additionally, a trend of declining affective evaluations of both major parties by voters has meant less partisan attachment, resulting in more split-ticket voting, and campaigns more focused on candidates rather than party, so less influence from the major party organizations (Bibby and Maisel 2003: 40).

Another trend, not necessarily restricted to successful third party candidacies, has been the increase in state- or local-level third party campaigns. Successful third party candidates on the national scene have been rare and have never won a presidential race. However, in individual state-level races third parties are more prevalent and seem to have a far greater effect. More voters are represented by the variety of alternative political candidates running and their respective platforms, yet these third-party candidates run the risk of diluting the vote and

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[7] Green (2010:141) defines success with three requirements: 1. Changing the outcome of the election by either winning a seat (presidential, congressional, or otherwise) or enabling a victory by another candidate that would not have happened without the influence of the third party; 2. The main ideas of the third party become law or have an influence on the political system. "Main ideas" are the rallying issues that define the third party, whether a social, fiscal, or policy preference; 3. Attracting mass support, as defined by greater than or equal to 10% of the popular vote.

enabling another candidate to win the election with a plurality. This classic dilemma of third parties afflicts even the most minor electoral races, yet is not as dramatic when on the state or local level.

In order to better understand the success of third party movements, it is important to look at who supports these vote-earning parties. What describes these voters? Looking at evidence from the Nader campaign of 2000 and the Perot campaigns of 1992 and 1996, Allen and Brox (2005) point out that the electoral context of a particular region or state can have a strong effect on the proportion of the vote that a third party candidate can earn. It might be hypothesized that this effect could be attributed to less restrictive voter registration laws, yet their data do not indicate any relationship between severity of voter registration laws and the percentage of the vote earned by the third party candidate. Their results also show that Nader, Anderson, Perot, and Roosevelt were all successful in specific and strongly correlated regions (Allen and Brox 2005: 629). While Nader and Roosevelt could be considered left-leaning candidates, Perot and Anderson were not. This suggests a more complicated mechanism than left-right ideology that drives voter motivation to support third parties.

The issues that third-party voters consider to be important are also different from major party voters. Stone et al. (2004: 458) found that Perot supporters had a different ideological makeup and did not value traditional left-right issues, but instead others, such as economic nationalism and political reform. Supporters of third party candidates seem to be attracted to the concept of a third party regardless of ideological leaning and share a subset of third-party-specific issues.

The most successful and prominent vote-earning third party presidential candidates, except Perot, have been "splinter candidacies" that split from a major party (Bibby and Maisel

2003: 14). These factions or splinter candidacies have been based either on regional or

nationwide dissatisfaction with the major party. This could indicate that in order to be

successful, third parties will utilize the major party framework in attracting initial support before

splitting from the major party and establishing an independent party infrastructure. Just as social

movements make use of existing social organizations to attract followers, third parties possibly

gain the majority of supporters from major party networks.

      While the splintering effect can have benefits for the third party in establishing itself and

attracting supporters, it also seems to have implications in the eventual fate of the movement:

more often than not, splinter third parties have been co-opted (either by policy, voter

constituency, or both) into a major party after a stint as a truly independent party. The demise of

the third party, ironically, is often a success for the principle or principles that the party stood

for; when the major parties adopt the issue preference and priorities of third party supporters in

order to pull them back to the major party, they give a more substantial voice to the preferences

than a third party could (Stone et al. 2004: 447-448).

      Even when their support base disappears or is co-opted by a major party, third parties can

still have a profound effect. Taking for an example the American Independent Party of George

Wallace, it is clear that campaign strategies of the major parties and candidates will adapt to the

presence of third parties in a lasting manner. Not only did the major party platforms change

when Wallace ran in opposition to major candidates, but also when he was no longer a player in

the election. After the actual collapse of the American Independent Party, Richard Nixon

continued to tailor his campaign strategy to the South in order to gain the votes of former

Wallace supporters (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 113-114; Bibby and Maisel 2003: 38). Third parties

in general hold weight with a group of voters who could potentially be won over to a major

party, and so will always be relevant to the major parties. Major parties will alter their platforms or issue priorities because of third parties, and even more so when the third party constituency is larger (Stone et al. 2004: 447). Additionally, these efforts are successful – despite the anti-party rhetoric of third party candidates, after the disintegration of third parties their activist supporters will often mobilize for a major party. Stone et al. (2004: 463) found this effect among Reform Party/Perot activists from the 1996 election when looking at activism for the Republican Party in the 2000 election.

Some overarching messages seem to remain relevant throughout the survey of third parties in American political history. As a trend, third party support is not driven by left- or right-leaning ideology and is not confined to one side of the left-right spectrum. The "third party voter" is characterized by anti-establishment sentiment and can have beliefs on the left or the right side of the ideological scale. Regardless of whether the third party persists, the major parties will adapt to address third-party issues and third party supporters will subsequently become more politically engaged for the major parties.

The Tea Party in American Politics

Having reviewed the history of third parties, factions, and social movements, it is possible to now examine the Tea Party movement and place it within the literature of these different types of independent political organizations. Other scholars have attempted to do this, and their findings will be discussed first.

Zernike (2010b: 52) points out that though Tea Party supporters share a great deal of their ideological beliefs with other conservative uprisings, it seems that the main motivation driving the Tea Party movement is the anti-government sentiment. This hearkens back to the Boston Tea Party and the American revolutionary fight against an overbearing British government in an

apropos manner that Tea Party leaders seem to utilize on a regular basis. The anti-government sentiment was identified as a key component of third parties in America.

This leads Zernike (2010b: 58) to her comparison of the Tea Party movement with the "middle American radicals" of the 1970s. Supporters of both movements have been dissatisfied with the standing of the country on moral and cultural issues, combined with a sense that the politicians in power were not listening or responding to them. She goes further, contrasting the Tea Party movement with the 1994 Republican Revolution that resulted in the Contract With America. While the 1994 movement came from the Republican leadership and elected officials, the Tea Party seems to have come from outside the establishment (Zernike 2010b: 45). Interestingly, this fits with the sociological definition of a social movement.

To extend the comparison between the Tea Party movement and the Republican Revolution of 1994, it is interesting to examine the reasons for the divide in both cases. While the Republicans under Gingrich in the 1990s were a result of frustration with the lack of national unity and compromise with Democrats, the Tea Party is structured around a frustration with too much compromise across party lines. One of the main problems that Tea Partiers seem to have is the perceived trend of moderation within the Republican Party. In many past third party movements, partisan extremism has exacerbated frustration with the political system and driven voters to third parties. This helps to explain the factionalism and third party activity of the 1990s, yet not the current Tea Party movement. This would point to a classification of the Tea Party movement not as a third party, but rather a highly politicized social movement.

Stewart et al. (2007: 14) describes the Tea Party movement as a "revivalistic social movement" in that it wants to return society to a venerable idealized past.[8] The Tea Party seems to fit well with this definition, and within the social movement literature that would predict certain strategies for furthering the agenda of the movement. The Tea Party movement absolutely takes advantage of the collective action frames that are typical of social movements. While the problems about which Tea Party supporters are outraged are not new, the social movement has redefined them such that they require action. By selectively accenting the perceived injustices within the American political system, the Tea Party movement fulfills the predictions that Snow and Benford (1992) make about how social movements can mobilize widespread action.

As discussed earlier, a general quality of social movement organizations is the formation of a collective identity; that is, an agreed-upon meaning that the label of the social movement has in terms of attitudes and behavior (Friedman and McAdam, 1992). Individuals in the Tea Party present some challenges to this classification, as many members of various Tea Party organizations will have similar views yet will often disagree on the best path of action to accomplish their goals. Additionally, the set of values held by Tea Party activists will differ on many of the smaller issues not directly related to size of government and taxation. Views that are based more on personally-held morals, such as abortion or gay marriage, are not always the same across members of the Tea Party. There are many associations with the label of "Tea Party," yet this cannot be called a collective identity. The collective identity of the Tea Party is neither well-established or well-known.

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[8] This is opposed to two other variants of social movement – the innovative social movement (which seeks to replace social norms with new ones) and the resistance social movement (which seeks to block change in favor of maintaining the status quo).

It is interesting to return to the characterization of independent voters by Rosenblum (2011) as identifying with third parties because of a desire to escape the broad and identity-crushing nature of parties. Tea Party supporters do not seem to match this description, as they are apt to identify with Tea Party organizations rather than act alone, and do not seem to have a national organization that demands strict adherence to a set of attitudes. In this sense, Tea Party voters are not the traditional third-party voters who act outside the structure of organizations.

Tea Party movement leaders tend to speak in a way that defies classification for the Tea Party or its supporters. Amy Kremer was quoted in February 2011 about the Tea Party, saying "we do not touch social issues, typically speaking, because once we do that's when you lose people, divide people" (Segal 2010). She and other leaders of the Tea Party movement seek to focus on the fiscal issues, which Tea Party supporters believe the major parties have neglected to address. She is clearly cognizant of the fact that social movements rely upon a shared ideology and vision for action, and are not always receptive to a broad range of beliefs and opinions on the desired outcome for the movement. Yet other statements Kremer makes seem to place the Tea Party outside the political establishment, and definitely outside of the major parties. The image that is espoused by Tea Party leaders is confusing for an outsider, as it seems to reject classification as a faction of the Republican Party, yet also not defined by a social cause.

Data and Analysis

The question still remains: in what ways does the Tea Party compare to other third parties, social movements, and political party factions? In order to explore what the similarities are, specifically in the area of voter motivation and behavior, several different datasets will be used. This paper uses CBS/New York Times as well as NBC News/Wall Street Journal surveys in order to examine a variety of responses on different issues. The CBS/New York Times polls

are used for their consistent analysis of voters' issue positions, while the NBC/Wall Street Journal polls have more consistent use of questions regarding the Tea Party. In addition, CBS/NYT polls are restricted to three-point scales of political ideology and opinion on some issues, while NBC/WSJ polls use both five-point and seven-point scales. When data are compared across time, this is done only within one of the two surveys rather than between CBS/NYT and NBC/WSJ surveys.[9] In addition, datasets with specific issue opinion questions were used for regression analysis so as to examine how these opinions varied.

In order to answer the questions posed about the Tea Party movement, the supporters of the movement must be compared to other voters in the electorate. To the degree that the Tea Party is, in fact, an incipient third party, we would expect that the views of Tea Party supporters would differ from those of major party supporters. More importantly, and related to the potential for it to become a true third party, is the opinion of supporters about whether the Tea Party is or could become a third party. However, to the degree that the Tea Party is a social movement, we would expect broad support for the movement across the two major parties. If the support for the Tea Party is not broad – that is, it is focused in one party yet ideologically distinct from that party – then the Tea Party movement would resemble that of a political faction. This classification as a faction would be further reinforced if Tea Party supporters differ in their views from the mainstream of the major party with which they identify.

Supporters of the Tea Party undeniably come from a skewed portion of the population. While not entirely from one major political party, the members of the Tea Party movement are predominantly Republican and share few with the Democratic Party. Table 1 demonstrates the

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[9] However, little longitudinal data are presented here. Preliminary results from October, November, and December 2010, as well as January and February 2011, indicated change across time that was not significant enough to warrant additional examination of multiple time periods.

party makeup of supporters of the Tea Party, demonstrating that an overwhelming 74% of Tea

Party supporters were either Republican or leaned towards the Republican Party before the last

election. A minute amount – 10% – of Tea Party supporters come from the Democratic Party.

As such, there is little support for the idea that the Tea Party is a true cross-party social

movement. There are not enough supporters of the movement outside of the Republican Party

that they merit an incredible amount of consideration.

Table 1: Tea Party support by party identification[10]

Party Identification	non-Tea Party supporters	Tea Party supporters
Democrat	54%	10%
Lean Democrat	11%	0%
Strictly Independent	15%	15%
Lean Republican	4%	21%
Republican	16%	53%
N	774	264

Table 2: Party Identification by percentage supporting the Tea Party[11]

	Party Ideology				
	Democrat	Lean Democrat	Strictly Independent	Lean Republican	Republican
non-Tea Party supporters	94%	99%	75%	37%	46%
Tea Party supporters	6%	1%	25%	63%	54%
N	444	89	154	89	262

Though the Tea Party movement seems to have little support outside the Republican

Party, within the GOP it is a majority, as shown by Table 2. The Republican Tea Party

supporters have also been the most vocal of activists, and for the most part the best

[10] CBS News/New York Times poll, October 2010.
[11] CBS News/New York Times poll, October 2010.

representation of the movement as a whole. With rare exceptions, candidates who run for office

as Tea Party candidates have been running as Tea Party Republicans, despite the tendency of

movement leaders to shy away from affiliation with the major party. Yet the supporters of the

Tea Party are not the same as the mainstream rank and file members of the Republican Party.

While the idea of a cross-party social movement does not seem relevant due to the concentration

of the movement within the Republican Party, the idea of a political party faction is far more

likely given the concentration of Tea Party supporters within the Republican Party and its

electoral strategies up to this date.

. If the Tea Party movement is a faction, the beliefs of its Republican supporters should

be distinct from those of mainstream Republicans. What issues distinguish Tea Party voters

from the rest of the GOP? The following issues shed more light on the distinction between Tea

Party supporters and non-Tea Party Republicans. As we have discussed, the Tea Party has

emphasized small government and low taxes. Although these have long been part of Republican

Party platforms, the Tea Party movement has faulted mainstream Republicans for not following

through on the promises. When we look at the results from Table 3, it is clear that Tea Party

Republicans do differ significantly from non-Tea Party Republicans on domestic fiscal issues.

Tea Party supporters overwhelmingly support a smaller government, want to decrease

government spending and maintain low taxes.

Table 3: Issue preferences among Republicans and Tea Party supporting-Republicans[12]

	non-Tea Party Republicans	Tea Party Republicans
Government Size Preference		
Smaller government, fewer services	81%	95%
Bigger government, more services	19%	5%
(N)	(112)	(138)
Opinion: Cutting Social Security Benefits		
Favor	25%	43%
Oppose	75%	57%
(N)	(120)	(129)
Opinion: Letting the 2001 Tax Cuts Expire		
Good idea	38%	11%
Bad idea	62%	89%
(N)	(115)	(134)

But are there other areas in which the views of Tea Party and mainstream Republicans also diverge? There has been particular emphasis on the role of social issues in producing Tea Party support. The area of race especially has been a point of contention between Tea Party supporters and critics with claims of racism and misrepresentation thrown about by both sides. As Tables 4 and 5 show, there are differences between Tea Party and non-Tea Party Republicans on the issue of allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, the opinion of racial opportunity in the US, and whether the US should withdraw from Afghanistan. Yet these differences are not as substantial as the differences seen on government spending issues. Furthermore, these are all issues of which Tea Party organizations and spokespersons have tried to steer clear.

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[12] CBS News/New York Times poll, October 2010.

Table 4: Issue preferences between Republicans and Tea Party supporting-Republicans., non-fiscal issues[13]

	non-Tea Party Republicans	Tea Party Republicans
Opinion: gays in the military		
Oppose	22%	52%
Favor	78%	48%
(N)	(723)	(234)
Do blacks or whites have a better chance to get ahead in America?		
Whites have more opportunity	26%	17%
Equal opportunity	74%	83%
(N)	(110)	(130)

Table 5: Foreign policy preferences between Republicans and Tea Party supporting-Republicans[14]

Should the US Withdraw Troops from Afghanistan?	non-Tea Party Republicans	Tea Party Republicans
Withdrawal should begin immediately	35%	27%
Only if progress is made	65%	73%
(N)	(116)	(134)

Apart from these issues, we know that Tea Party members are more conservative than others in the Republican Party. As shown in Table 6, they are older, more conservative, more likely to be evangelical, have lower income, were less likely to have voted for Obama, and predominantly Protestant. In order to assess whether the differences in opinion between Tea Party supporters and non-Tea Party Republicans, the impact of these demographic characteristics must be controlled for.

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[13] CBS News/New York Times poll, October 2010.
[14] CBS News/New York Times poll, October 2010.

Table 6: Control demographics by Tea Party support[15]

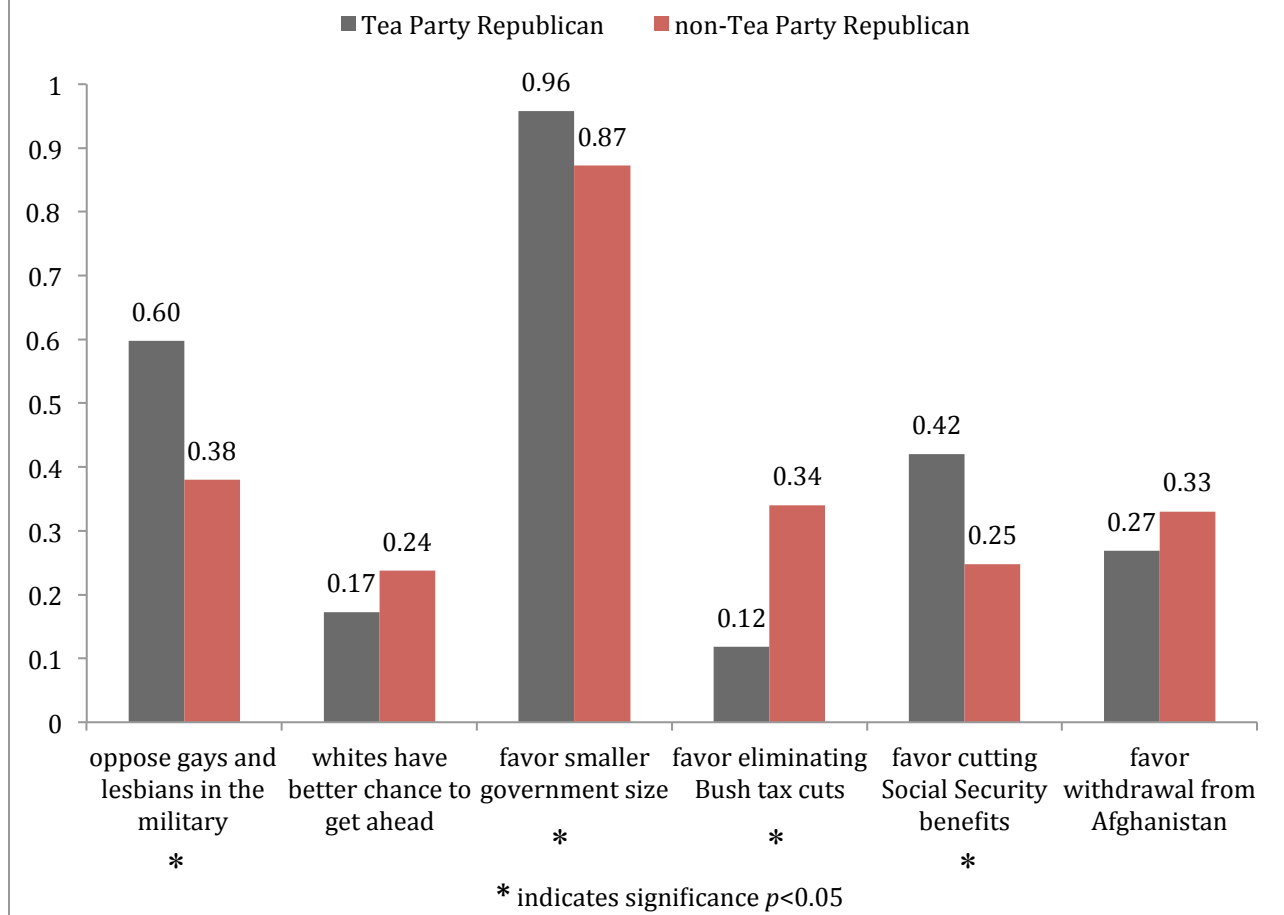|	Non-Tea Party Republicans	Tea Party Republicans
Average Age *	51.3	56.1
Conservative *	54%	82%
Evangelical *	24%	47%
Colleg Graduate	41%	44%
Income $100k+ *	32%	20%
Female	46%	48%
Vote for Obama 2008 *	28%	5%
Protestants *	50%	65%

To better understand the influence that the Tea Party movement has on these issue positions, regression analysis was conducted to develop a model of opinion responses. We controlled for education level, age, income, gender, political philosophy, and whether the individual was fundamentalist or evangelical. The results from these regressions indicated that Tea Party support was a significant predictor of opinions on the issues of government size, cutting social security benefits, letting tax cuts expire, and whether or not gays and lesbians should be allowed in the military.[16] In addition, logistic regression was conducted to produce probabilities of issue positions based on Tea Party support. These results are presented in Figure 1, comparing these probabilities between Tea Party Republicans and non-Tea Party Republicans.

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[15] Significant differences, determined by $p < 0.05$, are indicated by a *
[16] Significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

Figure 1: Probability of issue positions

■ Tea Party Republican   ■ non-Tea Party Republican

		0.96			
		0.87			
0.60				0.42	
0.38			0.34	0.25	0.27 0.33
0.17 0.24			0.12		

oppose gays and lesbians in the military
*

whites have better chance to get ahead

favor smaller government size
*

favor eliminating Bush tax cuts
*

favor cutting Social Security benefits
*

favor withdrawal from Afghanistan

* indicates significance *p*<0.05

The Tea Party currently looks much like an issue-oriented faction acting within the Republican Party, though with some influence among Democrats and Independents. Some factions have the ability to become third parties, though. Crucial to this ability would be the belief of supporters that the incipient party is a separate party. Just as for major parties, an important part of a third party is the party's ability to direct the votes of its supporters. Is this true of the Tea Party movement?

Table 7: Self-identification among those who are Tea Party supporters, compared longitudinally.[17]

Tea Party supporter or Republican?	Survey Date			
	Nov 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan 2011	Feb 2011
Supporter of the Tea Party Movement	41%	49%	45%	47%
Republican	51%	49%	48%	47%
Both	5%	2%	2%	3%
Not sure	3%	1%	5%	4%
N	194	171	163	176

Table 7 demonstrates that the self-identification of Republican Tea Party supporters as either a supporter of the Tea Party or a Republican has remained rather constant over time, though increasing after November 2010. It is fairly important for the future of the Republican Party that, of those who are registered Republican voters and said they support the Tea Party in February 2011, 47% said that they were best described as members of the Tea Party and 47% said they were best described as Republican. The primary allegiance of the ordinary members of the Republican Party now lies equally with the Tea Party and with the main Republican establishment. This effect has remained constant since the 2010 election, and should send a strong message to the major party leaders that they will soon lose (or have already lost) their influence and ability to direct the opinion and votes of a large portion of the Republican Party.

Not only are these Tea Party voters separate from the major party organizations, but they are also a strong force. When looking at the enthusiasm of voters before the 2010 midterm elections, it is clear that Tea Party voters were more interested, active, and enthusiastic than other voters about the votes that they cast. As already discussed, a significant portion of Tea Party voters expressed their intense interest in the elections before November. Going even further than this, we can see that Tea Party voters were more enthusiastic about the November 2010 election

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[17] NBC News/Wall Street Journal surveys, November 2010, December 2010, January 2011, and February 2011.

than they were about previous elections. An overwhelming majority of 70% of Tea Party

supporters reported being more enthusiastic about the most recent election, as opposed to only

45% of the rest of the population.[18] Tea Party voters might not have been enthusiastic about past

elections, but they are now incredibly interested and willing to voice their opinions. This shows

again just how important these Tea Party voters will be in future elections.

Conclusions

Study of the descriptive data about Tea Party supporters, as well a historical review of

third parties, social movements, and the various types of each leads to a relative placement of the

Tea Party movement. Tea Party supporters are concentrated in the Republican Party yet are

distinct from the mainstream members of the party. The ways that the Tea Party acts in

elections, combined with these data, point to the categorization of the Tea Party as a faction. It

seems to have a clear policy focus of fiscal issues and its supporters mobilize much like those of

a social movement. If it were to develop into a true third party, it would no doubt be similar to

the issue-centric third party campaigns that have been seen in American political history.

It still remains to be seen what will happen to the Tea Party movement. Schedler (1996:

305) describes four end results for anti-establishment parties and movements such as the Tea

Party: normalization, radicalization, disappearance, or institutionalization. It is possible that it

could be absorbed into the mainstream Republican Party, accompanied by a shift in the party

agenda. Because they are more interested than the average non-Tea Party supporter in the

Republican Party, it is likely that they will be in a position to dominate the Party's platform. On

the other hand, the Tea Party could also remain its own distinct movement, either outside or

inside the GOP, and remain critical of the major party.

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[18] Data are from the October 2010 CBS/New York Times poll.

When looking at the success of the Tea Party movement, however, questions could be raised as to the sustainability of the movement. Will the movement continue once sufficient "Tea Party candidates" are elected? Will these Tea Party candidates be absorbed into the mainstream Republican Party once elected because of the two-party based structure of Congress? Given the fervor of Tea Party supporters in the electorate, it seems likely that the movement would remain despite the election of candidates, and especially if these candidates are absorbed into the major party establishment. What will happen to the voters who are satisfied after the election of their preferred Tea Party candidates?

Drawing from the study of Perot supporters, it seems that third party voters are likely to continue to voice their opinions even beyond the independent party context. The political activity of Perot supporters from 1992 translated into activity for the Republicans in 1994 and afterwards (Stone et al. 2004, 452). Perhaps the future activity of Tea Party activists will mirror this pattern. If so, the overall effect of the Tea Party will go beyond the platforms of major parties, but create a lasting effect on the activism of the populace – a hallmark of democratic health.

Pathways for Future Research

Given the descriptive data from this paper, there are clear avenues to explore for future research. During late May of 2011, we hope to send a web-based survey to a large number of Tea Party Express supporters. This will be a highly representative and broad group of Tea Party movement supporters that has remained untouched by previous research in the field. Gaining access to this sample of supporters will give a much broader array of views and allow for more accurate description of the "Tea Party voter" than nationwide samples have done up to this point.

In addition, another survey will be sent to the sample of former supporters of the Perot movement used by Stone et al. (2004). In doing this, we hope to answer the question of whether those who support the Tea Party are motivated in ways similar to Perot voters. Given the discovery of Stone et al. (2004) that Perot supporters-turned-Republicans remained highly active in politics, it would be interesting to see whether there are former Perot activists now mobilizing for the Tea Party movement. This would not be surprising, given the large donations that Perot family members have given to Tea Party and other small-government candidates, most recently in the 2010 midterm elections (Willis 2011).

Administering a web survey is a new method to be used on a sample population who was previously surveyed using only paper mail. The methods used in the future research have strong grounding as a valid way to assess public opinion. However, because of the relatively recent development of web surveys as a method by which to contact and survey a sample, it is important to look at the possible problems associated with this method of survey administration. Though internet-based surveys show distinct advantages in terms of cost, time, and staff required, their validity is commonly doubted. These doubts are especially in the question of whether web survey will bias a sample because respondents are not truly random. The belief in this problem is predicated on the belief that the internet is disproportionately available to younger, wealthier, and better-educated people. While this may remain true, it is important to note the rising degree to which the internet is available to the general population. Pew Internet and Life results from 2010 indicate that over three quarters of the population has access to the internet.

Empirical research supports the position that web surveys do not bias a sample to yield data that are not valid. Atkeson, Zilberman, Adams, and Saunders (2007) conducted both web

and paper mail surveys, utilizing a mixed-mode method in which participants were sent a paper letter providing a web address where the survey could be completed as well as the option to request a paper copy of the survey. The results of this research indicated that respondents in both paper and online surveys were slightly biased towards a voting population (that is, non-voting registered voters were under-represented) and age, yet this bias did not affect the validity of the results in predicting election outcomes. This demonstrates that despite a possible slight selection bias in demographic characteristics, the attitudinal data gleaned from internet-based surveys are still a valid measure of public opinion.

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