VOTER SUPPRESSION AND CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION AS PROXIMAL MOVEMENT OUTCOMES

Burrel Vann Jr

**VOTER SUPPRESSION AND CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION AS
PROXIMAL MOVEMENT OUTCOMES**

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research on social movements. While focused

mainly on the emergence of social movements (Morris 1986, McAdam 1982) or participation in

collective action (McAdam 1988; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980; Snow, Rochford,

Worden, and Benford 1986), recent scholarship demonstrates how movements matter (Amenta

2006) by highlighting the consequences of social movements. What is more, scholars of social

movements pay particular attention to the political outcomes of movements (Gamson 1990;

Guigni 1998; Amenta et al. 2010) and in so doing, have explicitly focused on distal outcomes:

the enactment of social policy. However, the explicit focus on policy enactment as an outcome is

so far removed from movement activity (usually decades between protest and policy enactment)

that it becomes much more difficult to draw the causal influence arrow back to a particular

movement. Given this difficulty, the current project will explore movement outcomes that are

more proximal to movement activity: the suppression of voter turnout and congressional

representation. In addition, this project will explore the tactics of the Tea Party; a contemporary

movement of the conservative brand that has received little attention in social movement

literature. By focusing on the immediate effects of movement activity, this project will

demonstrate the processes by which movements influence policy through their more proximal

influence on politics. This project explores the ways in which the Tea Party movement

influenced the electoral process. Specifically, the motivating research question is, under what

local conditions did the Tea Party impact the 2010 Midterm elections? Furthermore, the project

examines (1) the tactics that explain their impact on voter turnout and how that influenced

congressional representation, and (2) how movement tactics differ by local context.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Framework

Movement scholars have debated how and when movements have political impacts on the state or political environment. Much of the work on the state-related consequences of social movements focused on success of a movement in having their stated goals acted upon by the state (Gamson 1990, Piven and Cloward 1977). However, the explicit focus on whether a challenger's goals are met would qualify most movements as failures. For example, the women's movement worked to enact the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but nearly a half-century later the ERA has not been implemented. By focusing explicitly on goals, researchers fail to see what the movement *did* do. In addition, movements can do worse than failure, such as experiencing repression or restrictions (McCarthy and McPhail 1998). Given the difficulty in understanding the effects of movements in the political realm, researchers (Amenta et al. 2010) suggest focusing on movement impacts, consequences or outcomes rather than success or failure.

One important factor that shapes movement outcomes is resources. Resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 2002) argues that movements with more resources such as organizations, volunteers, money, and time commitments will be able to achieve their goals. Accordingly, being mobilized would lead movement impact. The resource mobilization approach spurred researchers to examine movement-related characteristics as determinants of influence on policy, including the presence and number of organizations (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2005, Gamson 1990), tactical choices and framing (McVeigh, Myers, and Sikkink 2004; McCammon et al. 2008), and organizational infrastructure (Andrews 2004). While mobilization, organizational presence and capacities are important for influence, movement-related characteristics are only part of the story.

Since movements interested in political outcomes necessarily target the state and political actors, researchers criticize resource mobilization scholars for ignoring the role of political context in shaping movement outcomes. Political opportunity structures are important for understanding the openings for action because certain contexts are more amenable to movement demands than others; as with the presence of "elite allies" in government (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Along these lines, political mediation theories (Amenta et al. 1994; Amenta 2006) assert that the outcomes movements achieve are the product of an interactive process between movement and political actors (Amenta 2006; Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005). Movements must adopt tactics that fit their political context, since specific movement tactics will not work for all environments. Thus, outcomes are mediated through the political context. In favorable contexts, simple mobilization (organizational presence) might be enough for a movement's goals to be met. However, in unfavorable contexts, movements will need to employ more assertive strategies to achieve their goals or have an impact (Amenta et al. 1994, Amenta 2006). For example, the women's movement can be understood as a left-leaning movement. Here, a favorable local context would be a heavily democratic district or county. The political mediation model would posit that in this context, the women's movement would not have to employ assertive strategies such as protest or lobbying in order to have political impacts. However, in unfavorable contexts such as heavily Republican counties, the movement would have to be more assertive in their strategies to affect policy change.

Taken together, in favorable partisan contexts, the resource mobilization approach works. That is, those movements with more organizational presence, more monetary resources and more volunteers will be more likely to have political impacts. Research also suggests that conservative movements likely have routine access to resources, given that they act on behalf of relatively

advantaged constituencies (McVeigh 2009). As such, in Republican partisan local contexts, the Tea Party will have to do little by way of protest and rallies. Simply by having increased organizational presence, the Tea Party will be able influence the Midterm election. In unfavorable Democratic contexts, however, the movement will need to engage in the assertive action of voter suppression to ensure their candidates get increased percentages of votes.

Although research focuses on policy impacts of movements, the current project examines voter turnout and voting behavior as two interrelated political outcomes. Following Amenta (2006), I argue that movements adapt their strategies to their context and in an effort to create their own opportunity for success (Cornwall et al. 2007), movements in unfavorable contexts try to alter the political structure of that context. The Tea Party altered local Democratic political structure by first engaging in tactics to 1) decrease voter turnout from the previous election, in order to 2) increase the likelihood of Tea Party candidate victories. Since little research has examined the Tea Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011; Zernike 2010), and none have examined the influence of movements on immediate electoral outcomes that shape later outcomes, I explore how the movement suppressed voter turnout in local Democratic partisan contexts and how suppression ultimately led to the successes of Tea Party candidates in the 2010 midterm elections (see McDonald 2011).

The Tea Party Movement

The national Tea Party Movement emerged in January of 2009 as a reactionary movement, in response to the election Barack Obama. Obama's plans for remedying the economic woes of the Recession included expansion of government programs (e.g health care coverage), signaling the expansion of government, increased spending and taxes, and increased regulations on the market economy; all of which are at odds with what traditional Republicans

believed was the appropriate role of government. In response, the Tea Party staged heavily attended rallies and protests, and garnered media attention (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Composed of people associated with the Religious Right, the Tea Party began grassroots movement with a mission of constitutionally limited government, fiscal responsibility, and free markets (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Despite a national focus, the Tea Party movement was comprised mainly of local, civic organizations that were loosely tied to one another (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Importantly, the Tea Party flexed its muscle through their endorsement of congressional candidates during the 2010 Midterm elections (Miller and Walling 2012). To be sure, the Tea Party had an impact in the Midterms, but because no work has explicitly elaborated on their effects, this project will unpack the Tea Party's proximal political impact.

Broader Contributions

This project explores the broader gaps in social movement theory on political outcomes, with particular insight into conservative movements. While literature suggests that movements have influence on the electoral process, and much has work has been done to show the impacts of movements on social policy, little systematic research has addressed the relationship between movement tactics and electoral changes (McAdam and Tarrow 2011). In addition, movement tactics and their influence on the electoral process can be best conceptualized as the first stage in the process of policy outcomes; even before the agenda-setting stage. By addressing outcomes more proximal to movement activity (as opposed to distal policy outcomes, where there is the potential for added external influence on the outcome), we can have increased confidence that the outcomes were influenced actual movement tactics. Focusing on how movement influence on proximal outcomes shapes distal policy outcomes, this study highlights how movements in

unfavorable contexts engage in tactics to alter the structure of their political environment, making the process achieving distal goals more likely.

METHODS

Data and Measures

Given the interest in characteristics of the national Tea Party within local contexts, I include United States demographic Census data for all U.S. counties, taken from the American Community Survey 2005-2009. The data from 2005 to 2009 are utilized, given that it (1) spans the time frame in which Barack Obama elected and (2) precedes movement tactics in the 2010 Midterm elections. Using these data, I control for county-level characteristics outside the variables of interest. Given that many Tea Party supporters are religiously affiliated with Fundamentalist or Evangelical denominations, I control for religious makeup of the county using data from the Association of Religion Data Archives. The data set includes the proportion of people in the county affiliated with different denominations. These data are included to demonstrate that net of religious factors, the Tea Party was able to influence the Midterms.

The primary independent variables come from the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights. These include the number of Tea Party organizations in the county and the number of movement rallies and protests between January 2009 and November 2010. I operationalize Tea Party mobilization as the number of organizations in the county and Tea Party tactics as the number of rallies and protests in the year prior to the 2010 Midterms. These data will allow me to isolate the effects of Tea Party mobilization and tactics, net of demographic and religious factors.

In addition, from Congressional Quarterly's *America Votes*, I include a measure of partisanship, operationalized as the percentage of the vote in 2008, coded as 1 for majority

Democratic and 0 for majority Republican. Additionally, given the interest in overall changes in electoral politics, I include two primary dependent variables: suppression of voter turnout and Tea Party vote. Voter suppression is measured as change in county voter turnout from the 2008 national election to the 2010 Midterms, as a proportion of eligible voters. I use the term voter suppression because as other scholars have demonstrated (McDonald 2010, 2011), voter turnout decreases from national elections to midterm elections. As such, this project will explain *how much* of that decrease can be explained by Tea Party mobilization and tactics. Since I believe voter suppression influences the electoral outcome of the Midterms, my second measure is the percentage of county votes for the Tea Party-endorsed Senate candidate. I use senate candidates because the Senate votes are directly related to states, and counties are a more stable unit of analysis, whereas boundaries House congressional districts frequently change. Tea Party candidates are coded as those endorsed by the Tea Party Express (Tea Party Express 2010); the only Tea Party faction that endorsed candidates during the 2010 Midterms.

Analytic Strategy

It is argued that the movement was able to have an impact on electoral politics in two ways: by mobilization in Republican contexts or through voter suppression in Democratic contexts. First, the Tea Party engaged in tactics at the local levels that were aimed at suppressing voter turnout. Not only were local organizations staging rallies and protests, many even took up legal means, claiming voter fraud against Democratic registration organizations. In addition, in the weeks leading up to the election, local organizations held a number of protests, perhaps in efforts to intimidate voters in order to decrease their turnout. Secondly, these decreases in voter turnout ultimately led to (mediated) Tea Party Republican successes in the Midterms. Importantly, however, Tea Party organizations operated within different local partisan contexts

across the nation, some favorable by being heavily Republican, others majority Democratic and unfavorable. Furthermore, it is expected that the Tea Party tried to "fit" their tactics to their local political contexts, and these tactics will be (1) more or less assertive and (2) more or less effective dependent upon the local partisan contexts in which the organizations operated. As such, voter suppression will operate differently in these contexts. For example, voter suppression might not be a necessary tactic in favorable Republican contexts.

Taken together, there are three possible pathways to the types of influence in the 2010 Midterms. In Republican local contexts, the Tea Party simply being mobilized in a local context (without assertive tactics) will lead to Midterm influence by getting Tea Party-endorsed candidates a large percentage of the vote. These favorable contexts would experience less assertive tactics (less protest), thereby not suppressing voter turnout, which would lead to higher proportions of the vote going to Tea Party backed candidates. In Democratic partisan local contexts, however, there are two possible pathways to influence. It is believed that in Democratic local contexts, simply being mobilized will not be sufficient for Tea Party candidates getting an increased percentage of the vote. Alternatively, by engaging in increasingly assertive tactics (protest and rallies), the Tea Party will be able to achieve one outcome that will influence a second: suppressing voter turnout which leads to higher percentages of votes for the Tea Party candidate. This latter pathway is the most interesting in that it demonstrates how a movement adopts assertive strategies to influence (and discourage) voters as a way of overcoming their unfavorable position in that context, and ultimately restructuring that context.

Given these expected pathways to influence, I compute a series of OLS regressions, followed by a supplemental logistic regression. First, I predict voter suppression using an OLS regression, accounting for Tea Party mobilization and tactics, while controlling for partisanship

and demographic characteristics, and including state-level fixed effects. The fixed effects design

allows for increased confidence in the findings for county-level effects, and is equivalent to

including a dichotomous variable for each state. In the second analysis, I include the voter

suppression as an independent variable. This OLS regression will be used to predict the

percentage of the vote for Tea Party candidates, accounting for voter suppression, Tea Party

mobilization and tactics, while controlling for partisanship and demographic characteristics, and

including state-level fixed effects. Finally, I compute a logistic regression to calculate the

likelihood of a candidate winning in a county, accounting for voter suppression, Tea Party

mobilization and tactics, controlling for partisanship and demographic characteristics. This

supplemental analysis will explore factors that lead to a Tea Party candidate winning in a county.

Limitations

There are, however, limitations that inhibit making claims about the Tea Party's proximal

impact in the 2010 Midterm elections. First, not all states held Midterm elections in 2010, and

any results gleaned from the analysis are only generalizable to those states and counties that held

elections. However, since the analysis demonstrates the conditions under which the Tea Party

was able to impact the electoral process, the findings might be applicable to local contexts with

similar conditions. Secondly, the data included in this study are for Senate, not House candidates.

This issue is both substantive and methodological. Although the Tea Party endorsed more House

candidates than Senate candidates, there were substantively sufficient numbers of Senate

endorsements to allow for variability between states. Additionally, since the boundaries of House

congressional districts frequently change between elections, counties provide a more stable unit

of analysis. Third, specific Tea Party organizations engaged in legal suits with Democratic voter

registration organizations, it might be appropriate to include these in the analysis of movement

tactics. However, because there are no adequate data on tactics outside of protest and rallies, these must be overlooked. Finally, given these issues, the current study does not make causal arguments between the Tea Party's mobilization and tactics and their outcomes in the 2010 Midterms. Rather, I draw comparisons about the conditions under which the movement achieved certain outcomes, based on their tactics, mobilization and context.

Despite these issues, the current study extends the political mediation model. Instead of a focus on policy outcomes, which are distal from movement mobilization and activity, the current study focuses on proximal outcomes that are closer to movement activity in order to draw clearer connections between movement and outcome. The focus on voter suppression and congressional representation allows scholars to focus on a new and mediated first stage of the policy process. Furthermore, if political context mediates movement outcomes, and that context is prohibitive for movement demands, movements can more proximally restructure their political environment by suppressing voter turnout as a means of increasing the likelihood that more favorable actors will replace previous actors, in order to ensure success of distal policy goals.

Timeline

	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	Jul 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013	Oct 2013
Data Collection							
Data download / coding	▓	▓					
Data Analysis							
Statistical analysis	▓	▓	▓				
Literature Review							
Case History / Literature		▓	▓				
Article Writing							
Introduction / Literature			▓	▓			
Data / Methods / Results				▓			
Discussion / Conclusion					▓	▓	
Presenting Research							
Conference Abstracts						▓	▓
Funding Proposals						▓	▓

References

Amenta, Edwin. 2006. *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security*. Princeton University Press.

Amenta, Edwin, Drew Halfmann, and Michael P. Young. 1994. The Strategies and Contexts of Social Protest: Political Mediation and the Impact of the Townsend Movement. *Mobilization 56*:1-25.

Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, and Sheera Joy Olasky. 2005. Age for Leisure? Political Mediation and the Impact of the Pension Movement on U.S. Old-Age Policy. *American Sociological Review 70*:516-538.

Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, Elizabeth Chiarello, and Yang Su. 2010. The Political Consequences of Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology 36*:14.1-14.21.

Andrews, Kenneth T. 2004. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy*. University of Chicago Press.

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Christine Mahoney. 2005. "Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda." Pp. 65-86 in Meyer DS, Jenness V, Ingram H, eds. *Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy, and Democracy*. University of Minnesota Press.

Cornwall, Marie, Brayden G. King, Elizabeth M. Legerski, Eric C. Dahlin, and Kendra S. Schiffman. 2007. Signals or Mixed Signales: Why Opportunities for Mobilization are not Opportunities for Policy Reform. *Mobilization 12*:239-254.

Gamson, William. 1990. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Wadsworth.

Giugni, Marco. 1998. Was it Worth the Effort? The Outcomes and Consequences of Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology 24*:371-393.

McCammon, Holly J., Soma Chaudhuri, Lyndi Hewitt, Courtney Sanders Muse, Harmony D. Newman, Carrie Lee Smith, and Teresa M. Terrell. 2008. Becoming Full Citizens: The U.S. Women's Jury Rights Campaigns, the Pace of Reform, and Strategic Adaptation. *American Journal of Sociology 113*:1104-1147

McAdam, Douglas. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McAdam 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdam, Doug, and Sidney Tarrow. 2010. Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements. *Perspectives on Politics 8*:529-542.

McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald. 1977. Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *American Journal of Sociology 82*:1212-41.

McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald. 2002. "The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements." Pp. 533-65 in Turner JH, ed. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

McDonald, Michael P. 2011. Voter Turnout in the 2010 Midterm Election. *The Forum 8(4)*:1-8.

McDonald, Michael P. 2010. "American Voter Turnout in Historical Perspective," Pp. 125-143 in Leighley J, ed. *Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press.

McVeigh, Rory, Daniel J. Myers, and David Sikkink. 2004. Corn, Klansmen, and Coolidge: Structure and Framing in Social Movements. *Social Forces 83*:653-690.

McVeigh, Rory. 2009. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. University of Minnesota Press.

Meyer, David S. and Debra C. Minkoff. 2004. Conceptualizing Political Opportunity. *Social Forces 82*:1457-92.

Miller, William J. and Jeremy D. Walling. 2012. *Tea Party Effects on 2010 U.S. Senate Elections: Stuck in Middle to Lose*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Morris, Aldon. 1984. *The Origins of Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Free Press.

Piven, Frances Fox and Richard Cloward. 1977. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Success, How They Fail*. Random House.

Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Oxford University Press.

Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven Worden, and Robert Benford. 1986. Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review* 51: 454-481.

Snow, David A., Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment. *American Sociological Review 45*:787-801.

Tea Party Express. 2011. "Previous Endorsements." Retrieved September 15, 2012 (http://www.teapartyexpress.org/previous-endorsements).

Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin. 2011. The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism. *Perspectives on Politics 9*:25-43.

Zernike, Kate. 2010. *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America*. New York: Times Books.