THE TEA PARTY: A PARTY WITHIN A PARTY

Rachel Marie Blum, M.A.

Dissertation Advisor: Hans Noel, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

It is little surprise that conservatives were politically disaffected in early 2009, or that highly conservative individuals mobilized as a political movement to protest ‘big government’ and Obama’s election. Rather than merely directing its animus against liberals, the Tea Party mobilized against the Republican Party in primaries and beyond. This dissertation draws from original survey, interview, Tea Party blog, and social network datasets to explain the Tea Party’s strategy for mobilization as a ‘Party within a Party’. Integrating new data on the Tea Party with existing theories of political parties, I show that the Tea Party’s strategy transcends the focused aims of a party faction. Instead, it works to co-opt the Republican Party’s political and electoral machinery in order to gain control of the party. This dissertation offers new insights on the Tea Party while developing a theory of intra-party mobilization that endures beyond the Tea Party.

INDEX WORDS: Dissertations, Government, Political Science, Political Parties, Tea Party
DEDICATION

To M.L.B., and all others who are stronger than they know.
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Preface

I was raised a child of the Christian Right. Born to parents who converted to Evangelical Christianity later in life, I was homeschooled and brought up in very conservative circles. I later attended Patrick Henry College, a private Christian liberal arts school that was born out of the Christian Right. Although my personal beliefs are now quite far removed from those with which I was raised, it was my immersion in the world of conservative activism for my formative years that inspired and enabled me to embark on this project. My goal has been to pierce through the more theatrical elements of the Tea Party’s rhetoric to analyze its place in the US political system. Throughout, I was inspired by the question of how movements like the one I grew up in, or like the Tea Party, emerge and achieve political victories. This project is thus both a study on the Tea Party and an investigation of conservative movement politics more generally.
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On November 5, 2008, the mood at Virginia’s Patrick Henry College was somber, tinged with panic. The small, Christian liberal arts college was founded as an enclave for the Christian homeschooling community by Michael Farris, a leader in the Christian Right and of the homeschooling movement. The day after Barack Obama’s election, groups of students had returned from failed Republican campaign efforts in a myriad of states, faced with what they saw as a bleak new world of atheism and socialism. Hushed conversations on surviving the persecutions of socialist societies took place in the dining hall. Speakers at chapel and prayer services urged students not to despair, but to continue fighting for the conservative cause.

Nearly eight years later, in March 2016, Patrick Henry College hosted a 3,000-person rally for Republican presidential hopeful, Marco Rubio. This college, its leadership, and its supporters were in some cases former activists in, or at the very least carrying on the heritage of the last major Republican insurgency, the Christian Right. Although their sympathies may fall to the right of the mainstream Republican Party on social issues, many of these conservatives took the strategic course of action following 2008 Republican losses. They attempted to galvanize others in their movement behind the Republican Party and its more electable candidates with the ultimate goal of unseating Democrats.\footnote{In 2012, Michael Farris publicly endorsed Governor Romney’s candidacy after Rick Santorum removed himself from the race. In 2016, he has said he is comfortable endorsing Marco
The confusion, frustration, and even despair experienced on November 5, 2008, by these religious conservatives is not unique to this particular faction of the Republican Party. By April 15, 2009, another group of conservatives, some religious, some not; some with a history of activism, others with none; some lifelong Republicans, others formerly unenthused, were holding Tax Day Protests across the nation and calling themselves a Tea Party. By 2010, the conservative Tea Party movement was fully formed, and it was not interested in merely galvanizing behind the Republican Party. Tea Partiers contributed in no small way to Republican House victories in the November 2010 elections, but it also gave them no pause to primary and oppose Republicans whom they viewed as ‘RINO’s’ (Republicans In Name Only, e.g. members of the Republican establishment).

This strategy of intra-party contestation did not cease in 2010. The Tea Party continued to primary and oppose Republican candidates, resulting in high profile episodes like David Brat’s defeat of Eric Cantor in a 2014 primary, John Boehner’s 2015 resignation in the face of continued opposition from the House Freedom Caucus, or even the bizarre ascendancy of Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential candidacy. Despite their marked opposition to the Republican establishment, the Tea Party also refused to mobilize as a separate entity. Tea Partiers did not choose to form its own Party with independent institutions. They preferred, instead, to contest the Republican Party from within.

The Tea Party’s strategy stands in marked contrast to that of the Christian Right in the story of Patrick Henry College. If Tea Partiers were most deeply concerned about Barack Obama’s presidency and removing Democrats from office, why did they not follow the strategy of most other conservative factions, setting aside differences in

Rubio or Ted Cruz, but has publicly decried Liberty University for hosting and supporting Donald Trump. Patrick Henry College is publicly refusing to endorse any candidate and has extended requests to all candidates for interviews.
order to back the most moderate, electable choice? If Marco Rubio was good enough for the Christian Right, why was he not an acceptable choice for the Tea Party?

In other words, it is no surprise that conservatives were dismayed at major electoral losses in 2008, especially in the context of an economic downturn, bailouts, and the promise of ‘socialized’ healthcare. Given that the Republican Party vocally championed conservative positions on these issues, especially from a fiscal angle, it would have made sense for conservatives to rally behind their party. Why, then, did a substantial group of conservative Americans choose just the opposite—a strategy of prolonged contestation against their own party, sometimes at the price of Republican electoral and policy victories?

This project the Tea Party’s strategy of intra-party contestation, arguing that its mobilization cannot simply be explained in terms of party factions or interest groups, but presents a different form of political mobilization. I call this strategy a ‘party within a party’; a party-in-miniature that colonizes an existing major party’s structures in order to remake it from within.

1.1 A Short History

Although some Ron Paul supporters point to his 2007 reenactment of the Boston Tea Party as the movement’s founding moment, the Tea Party did not begin in earnest until 2009 (Huston 2011). The movement first gained traction in the first few months of 2009, immediately following a Democratic presidential and congressional victory, a large-scale bailout, and an economic downturn (Burghart 2012; Lo 2012; Zernike 2010). On February 19, 2009, Rick Santelli of CNBC gave an extemporaneous speech (the ‘Santelli rant’) from the floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange that most commentators pinpoint as the Tea Party’s inception. Santelli criticized the Federal
Government for subsidizing “the losers’ mortgages”, compared the US to Cuba (an example of moving from the “individual to the collective”), and invited all “capitalists” to a Chicago Tea Party.

In the following two months, Tea Party rallies sprang up in locations from Oregon to Pennsylvania, with varying levels of attendance. These culminated in the April 15, 2009, Tax Day Protests, which were advertised by Fox News and organized with help from inside-the-beltway organizations such as FreedomWorks (Armey and Kibbe 2011; Skocpol and Willamson 2012; Zernike 2010).

Key figures in this early phase included former FreedomWorks CEO Dick Armey and current FreedomWorks CEO Matt Kibbe, who wrote one of the first books on the Tea Party from within the movement (Give us Liberty! A Tea Party Manifesto). Their organization had long sought an opportunity to apply new-left organizing tactics to the conservative (specifically, economic conservative) cause. They were more than ready for the energy that bubbled up in early 2009. FreedomWorks operatives organized rallies and training sessions for Tea Party activists and provided the Tea Party with resources and grassroots training. Americans for Prosperity, Fox News, Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and others soon joined the effort.

By 2010, the Tea Party stood as a national political movement. Six national Tea Party umbrella organizations, each of which possessed varying levels of alignment or non-alignment with the GOP and Washington donors, boasted at least 330,000 members, with many more activists participating in unaffiliated local chapters (Burghart 2012). Some of these organizations went on to sponsor candidates in the 2010 midterm elections (such as Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks), while others stayed away from national Congressional politics. Citizen leaders, from Jenny Beth Martin to Keli Carender, led most of these organizations, and others like them founded and led local groups across the nation (Burghart 2012; Lo 2012; Zernike 2010).
The influence of the Tea Party became impossible to ignore. Fox News heavily publicized its events (Skocpol and Willamson 2012). Candidates with a Tea Party connection performed better in the 2010 Midterm elections than did other Republicans (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012; Jacobson 2011). By 2012, exit polls for several GOP presidential primaries included a Tea Party affiliation item (CNN 2012). Groups from CBS/NYT to Pew surveyed attitudes towards the Tea Party. A 2010 CBS/NYT poll found that 18% of Americans self-identify as Tea Party supporters, and 22% of these supporters donated money to the Tea Party, protested at a rally, or attended a meeting, ranking them as activists (CBS 2010). This elite group of supporters were at the heart of the movement.

From 2009 to 2013\(^2\), the energy among these activists was frenetic. In 2009, Matthew Perdie, a young filmmaker from New York City was electrified by Glenn Beck and began a 3,600 mile walk across America in support of the Tea Party. Walking along with an American flag on his back, he met and engaged with Tea Partiers across the country, eventually creating a documentary of his trip and its connection to the movement. Anastasia Przybylski, a mother from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, led an active Tea Party group (Kitchen Table Patriots), worked with FreedomWorks, and participated in numerous appearances on the radio and television. She became a poster child for the movement, encapsulating many qualities that were shared by other activists and leaders. With no prior experience with activism, she hosted meetings, planned events, and created momentum.

Across the country, other stay-at-home moms, retirees, and people from every other walk of life followed suite, founding thousands of local Tea Party groups and holding monthly meetings, hosting speakers and candidate forums, planning and par-

\(^2\)As observed in 2012-2013, when most of the fieldwork and interviews for this project were conducted
participating in rallies, organizing canvassing efforts, educating members about topics from Milton Friedman to how to successfully navigate state caucuses, publishing blogs, and slowly but surely engineering organizational structures for the fledgling movement.

Beyond activists like these, surveys in 2010 showed 16-26% of the adult population sympathizing with the Tea Party (Baretto et al 2011; Burghart 2012, 68). These polls found that Tea Party sympathizers tended to be white, over 45, educated, well off, Protestant, and male (CBS/NYT 2010). Researchers and surveys consistently show a connection between Tea Party supporters and social conservatism. Tea Party supporters, like the most conservative wing of the Republican party, are more likely than non-supporters to identify as born-again Christians, hold a literal interpretation of the Bible, and oppose the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell” (ANES 2010; CCES 2010; Deckman 2012). Other research has shown connections between the Tea Party and libertarian ideology (Kirby and Ekins 2012), as well as racial resentment (Baretto et al. 2012; Disch 2012, 143; Parker and Barreto 2014).

After the 2012 elections, much of the initial energy of the movement had abated. Gone were the days of large-scale rallies and protests or of marches across America. Instead, the movement became more routinized, focusing its efforts less on gaining visibility and more on affecting political change. Local groups began to set their sights on winning local and then state elections, primarying Republican candidates in Congressional elections, and pressuring members of Congress to stand firm on issues such as raising the debt ceiling.

To many observers, especially in the media, the absence of retirees in patriot costumes at rallies on the national mall signaled the ‘death’ of the Tea Party (indeed, articles sounding its death knell have appeared regularly on various opinion pages since 2012). These accounts were correct that the Tea Party *qua* protest movement
was dead (see Brown 2015 for a discussion of different periods of the Tea Party). What they missed, however, was the evolution of the Tea Party’s identity into something more powerful but also less visible: a party within a party.

The Tea Party was faced with a choice after 2012. It could accept its losses and fade, as so many protest movements do, or it could take on a new identity. Perhaps one of the most obvious options would be to act like a party faction or an interest group. Like the Christian Right before it, it could have chosen a specific issue or issues and lobby for policy change. What it did instead has flummoxed pundits and scholars alike, and is the topic of this project. The Tea Party refused to constrain its policy positions to a few key issues, and it refused to act merely as a Republican Party faction. Instead, it sought to invade the Republican Party from within. This could be seen various efforts since 2012, including running candidates for local and then for state offices, strategically infiltrating Republican state nominating conventions, primarying Republicans who were not Tea Party ‘enough’, and creating a House Freedom Caucus that would eventually create a rift in the House Republican Party.

The Tea Party may have failed to secure the Republican Presidential nomination for a ‘Tea Party’ candidate in 2012, and it may have failed to defeat Barack Obama in his bid for a second presidential term, but it is perhaps no coincidence that the 2016 Republican Presidential landscape mimicked the splintered nature of the Republican Congressional caucus or of one of the many Republican Congressional primaries on which the Tea Party has set its sights. Why work against the Republican Party, creating factionalism instead of unity? Because the Tea Party wants what a party wants—electoral and policy victory—and it sees coopting the Republican Party as the clearest path to achieving these goals.
1.2 Concepts

This project centers on the concept of a **party within a party**. This is a strategy for *intra*-party mobilization, which aims to remake an existing major party from within. Movements that use this strategy can take various forms, and they can incorporate this into their arsenal of strategies or, in the case of the Tea Party, use it as their main strategy. In any case, it has three core features: it mobilizes under the auspices of an existing party; it shares the aims of a party; it has broad ideological goals.

This concept draws from four other key ideas. The first is a **group-based theory of parties**. When we say that a party within a party “shares the aims of a party”, we are assuming a certain understanding of what a party is, and what its goals are. That understanding is that parties are not necessarily tools of charismatic candidates, but are rather built of a coalition of interest groups and other intense policy demanders. This coalition is united first and foremost by their shared goals of winning elections and securing policy.

For a party within a party to exist, it needs a major party to use as a host. If the two parties are not sorted ideologically, a movement may not need to mobilize as an intra-party movement at all. For example, the lack of ideological sorting in US political parties in the early 20th Century, especially on temperance and suffrage, meant that the temperance and suffrage movement had every incentive to mobilize as an interest group, shopping their wares to both parties, rather than finding the party with which they were most closely aligned and pressuring that party. A party within a party is a creature of an era of **ideologically sorted parties**. When the two parties represent two separate ideological coalitions, a political movement has every electoral and policy incentive to work with or within the party with which it most closely aligns ideologically.
Not every intra-party movement relies heavily (or at all) on the party within a party strategy, however. Some are perfectly content to mobilize as interest groups that are clearly focused on one party, or even factions within an existing party. A party within a party, it is important to note, is not a party faction. Rather than mobilizing vis a vis one major party with the goal of achieving a few specific policy goals (a hallmark of a party faction or interest group), a party within a party mobilizes within a party because it wants the gamut of influence and organization that a party commands, not just influence on one issue. A party within a party wants to be a party, just not under its own auspices.

Finally, a movement would have no incentive to mobilize as a party within a party save in a system that present significant barriers to third parties. The US is famously one such system, where electoral and institutional rules as well as the allocation of the vote militate towards a two-party system. Only in a system where it is impossible to gain party influence in the legislature by working as a third party would a movement choose instead to remake an existing major party from within.

1.3 Agenda

The following four chapters more fully describe and evaluate the theory of the Tea Party as a party within a party.

Chapter 1 explores the idea of intra-party mobilization where a movement maintains a separate identity from a party yet shares the goals characteristic of a party. This chapter distinguishes the strategy of a party within a party from that of a social movement, interest group, or party faction. In contrast to these movement types, a party within a party need not possess any particular organizational structure. It
simply must hold electoral victory as its main goal, and attempt to achieve this goal by coopting the apparatus of an existing major party.

This chapter lays out three characteristics of a party within a party. First, it mobilizes under the auspices of an existing major party (if the party within a party were a parasite, the major party would be its host organism). Second, it shares the broad aims of a major political party: winning and maintaining control of government and enacting policy. Finally, it possesses a comprehensive ideology, more akin to a party platform than to an interest group agenda.

The next three chapters test the theory of a party within a party as a strategy used by movements that seek to co-opt an existing party in order to achieve their aims. Using the Tea Party as a case study for a movement that primarily relies on this strategy, these chapters ask: if the Tea Party is a party within a party, how might we expect it to behave, and does this strategy explain its behavior? Each chapter is in turn motivated by an unanswered question about the Tea Party movement.

Chapter 2 evaluates why the Tea Party contests both the Republican and Democratic Parties. This chapter weaves together 35 depth interviews with Tea Party activists to show that a valence dimension of party trust is of great importance to Tea Partiers, and that they think the Republican Party is no longer trustworthy. To supplement these interviews, it also draws from an original survey of Tea Party and Republican activists in Virginia who were delegates to Virginia’s 2013 Republican Nominating Convention, comparing the views and motivations of Tea Partiers to other Republicans.

Chapter 3 examines the structure of and actors within the Tea Party, seeking to answer the question: who is the Tea Party? It maps a network of hundreds of local Tea Party groups and the organizations, individuals, and resources with which they align, the investigation of which relies on social network analysis techniques. This chapter
depicts the Tea Party as a movement that mimics the federated structure of a major political party. The Tea Party emerges neither as an activist arm of the Republican Party nor as an independent movement, but rather as a movement of activists that mimics the structure of the Republican Party.

Finally, Chapter 4 addresses what ideas, if any, are central to the Tea Party movement. Through content analysis of Tea Party websites, blog posts, and interviews, this chapter shows the Tea Party as in possession of a broad ideology, more akin to a party platform than to the narrow demands of an interest group.

These chapters give a picture both of what the Tea Party is not and what it is. The Tea Party is not a mere interest group, social movement, or party faction. It is also not wholly controlled by elite interest groups or characterized by a narrow set of policy or ideological goals. The Tea Party defies narrow classifications because it has the aims and structure of a broader type of movement: a party. The Tea Party stands as a clear example of a party within a party: a movement that shares the goals of a political party, but works to achieve these goals by coopting the machinery of an existing party. Recognition of the breadth of its goals brings clarity to the findings of its animus towards the Republican Party, its federated organizational structure, and its diffuse ideology.

The strategy for intra-party mobilization, developed here in relation to the Tea Party, carries implications both for the understanding of this particular movement and for larger analysis of political movements in the US. In the context of the Tea Party, this is the first work to consider the Tea Party in terms of its place in the US party system, and in particular to consider its strategy vis a vis political parties. The explication of this intra-party mobilization strategy also provides a framework for studying other movements that neither fit the definition of an interest group nor
that of a political party, borrowing instead from multiple types of organization to achieve broad electoral and policy goals.
Chapter 2

Tea Party Strategy: Party Within a Party

What does a party faction do when it desires more influence over more issues? One solution would be forming its own party. What does the faction do when the costs of forming its own party are too high? It may choose to retool an existing party from within. I call this strategy of intra-party mobilization a party within the party, and I use it to explain the Tea Party’s contestation of the Republican Party, its organization, and its ideology.

Many have written about the rise of the Tea Party and the ideology of its sympathizers and members (e.g. Abramowitz 2011; Blum and Parker 2014; Parker and Barreto 2013; Rapoport et al 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2013; Zernike 2010). Some have explored the electoral implications of the movement (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012; Bond, Fleisher, and Ilderton 2011; Karpowitz et al 2011). We know that the Tea Party includes ideological elites, elected representatives, activists, and sympathizers in the mass public. What remains largely unexamined is the overall strategy of the Tea Party, and the ways in which it exerts pressure on the modern two party system.

Most political forces in the US system take one of three forms: a social movement, an interest group, or a party (and possibly a fourth: a party faction). Each of these forms tends to correspond with a particular organizational structure, ideological agenda, goals, and strategies. A movement may have a looser structure, an
interest group narrow ideological goals, and a party an electoral strategy. The two-party system largely rules out the possibility of a movement transitioning to a party, as with a labor movement that becomes a labor party and joins many other parties to vie for seats in a multi-party parliament (see Hartz 1955; Forbath 1991; Smith 1997). Movements occasionally arise that respond strategically to these categories, navigating a hybrid space and strategy (e.g. Heaney and Rojas’s 2015 explanation of the Anti-War movement as a “party in the street”). The Tea Party is another example of a hybrid movement. While its structure may look like the diffuse organization of a social movement, its broad agenda and electoral goals lead it to transcend the narrower space of a party faction and partake of the strategies of a political party. I call this strategy of intra-party mobilization a party within a party.

A party within a party is a strategy used by a political movement. It may be one among many strategies, or, in the case of the Tea Party, the primary strategy. The party within a party strategy focuses on remaking an existing major party from within. As a strategy and not a movement type or structure, it does not require that a movement possess a certain organizational structure. Some features are more essential to understanding it than others, however. Three of the main features are as follows. First, it mobilizes under the auspices of one of the two major parties (if the party within a party were a parasite, this major party would be its host organism). Second, rather than attempting to influence policy change on a specific issue or issues, as an interest group or party faction might, the party within a party shares the aims of a major political party: to win and maintain control of government and enact policy. It does so by co-opting the electoral and political machinery of its host party. Finally, its ideology is comprehensive, resulting in a broad coalition and set of goals. In this respect, its agenda is more akin to the platform of a party than the narrower demands of an interest group or a party faction.
The concept of a party within a party allows for a better understanding of movements that at times act like parties while retaining a separate identity. The idea of a party within a party enables us to answer broader questions about the Tea Party, such why the Tea Party continues to contest the Republican Party, why it possesses such an amorphous ideology, and how to make sense of its diffuse organization. The following chapters use the Tea Party as a case study for the fuller explication of the party within a party strategy. This strategy holds explanatory power beyond the Tea Party, illuminating both movements that use this as a primary strategy and those that episodically turn to party-like behavior.

2.1 Motivating Questions

Some facets of the Tea Party movement are readily observable, such as the impact of Tea Party endorsements on electoral outcomes or of Tea Party affiliation on political ideology. These queries draw from higher order questions, such as how to explain the movement’s organization, or how to characterize its ideology. These, in turn, require an explanation of what kind of movement the Tea Party is. Perhaps the best way to understand the Tea Party is to look at how it acts, analyzing its strategy.

Attempting to unpack the Tea Party’s strategy provides a foundation for further study in two ways. First, it allows for an explanation of the movement that can speak to other movements and times. Second, it provides context for ancillary questions about this specific movement. Much as individuals’ revealed preferences tell us more about their real opinions than we can garner from their survey responses, analyzing a movement’s strategy allows us to grasp what it really wants and is, not merely what it claims to want or be. The rest of this dissertation is devoted to answering three
questions about the Tea Party, each of which teases out a specific dimension of what
it means to act as a party within a party:

1. Formed in response to the Democratic Party, why did the Tea Party so quickly
turn its sights on the Republican Party?

2. How can we understand the mixture of elite leadership and grassroots activism
in its organization?

3. What explains the scope of the Tea Party’s ideology?

2.2 Party Within a Party Defined

A party within a party is a strategy utilized by groups that share the goals of
a traditional party, namely winning elections, taking control of government, and
achieving policy outcomes through the electoral process (Aldrich 1995; Downs 1957;
Schattschneider 1942). The key distinction between a traditional party and a party
within a party\footnote{A party within a party is a strategy used by a political movement, not necessarily a type
of political movement. Throughout, I use it interchangeably with movement for reasons of
efficiency.} is that the latter does not seek electoral victory under its own aus-
pices, but instead co-opts the structures of the party with which it most closely aligns.
It may look nothing like a party in its organization, but it mimics a party’s goals.
A party within a party is thus neither a traditional party nor a minor party, but
is instead a strategy used by coalitions who know that their goals can neither be
achieved by direct cooperation with a major party nor by forming a distinct party.

In Schattschneider’s classic typology (1942), the political party, the pressure
(interest) group, and the social movement are distinct entities with distinct goals.
The political party seeks control of government by nominating candidates and

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supporting them in campaigns. The pressure group does not trouble itself with campaigns or governance, instead lobbying for the adoption of certain policies. A social movement, finally, stems from attempts by ordinary citizens to make demands on government and other elites (Tilly 2004).

Recent party scholarship, particularly that by Cohen and authors, discusses the broader interaction of interest groups, movement activists, and factions within the party structure. They argue that scholars should regard parties as a “coalition of interest groups, social group leaders, activists, and other ‘policy demanders’ working to gain control of government on behalf of their own goals” (2008, 6). Here, the party is not simply the portion of politically engaged citizens involved in the nomination and election process, but also includes all groups interested in electoral victory or in swaying a party towards particular policies or candidates (see also Bernstein and Dominguez 2003; Dominguez 2005; Grossmann and Dominguez 2009; Masket 2009; Monroe 2001; Schwartz 1990; Skinner 2005). Cohen et al. do not contest the consensus on electoral victory as the party’s goal, but instead expand our understanding of the party coalition. In particular, they acknowledge the existence of an activist dimension as one of the major changes in party organizations as they departed from the days of machines and patronage (see also Aldrich 1995).

The concept of a party within a party borrows from two facets of this existing scholarship. First, like major and minor parties alike, a party within a party’s main goal is electoral victory. Second, in the vein of Cohen et al.’s new school of party scholarship, a party within a party embraces the role of activists and other intense policy demanders as major players in the coalition. With a better understanding of what a party within a party strategy is, we turn to a discussion of why a movement would use this strategy. Namely, why a coalition would mobilize within an existing party to contest that party rather than working for the existing major party’s electoral
success. In answer, I detail three components that are likely to distinguish a movement that acts as a party within a party from other types of strategies.

**Broad Ideological Agenda**

A party within a party strategy is more likely to be adopted when a group cares about more than one issue, instead possessing an unofficial platform on a range of issue dimensions. If it had a few specific policy aims, it could work to pressure one or both parties, as happened with abolition, temperance, suffrage, and various other historical instances where “single-issue groups” are dedicated first and foremost to a specific cause (Barbrook and Bolt 1980; Gusfield 1986; Sundquist 1973). If the group’s primary focus is getting an issue onto the policy agenda or achieving change on a specific issue, it could work as an interest group or even as a party faction (see Sundquist 1973; Wilcox and Robinson 2011). A major distinction between a political party and a party faction or interest group, however, is agenda breadth. As long coalitions, parties (especially major parties) must attempt to incorporate various facets of coalition members’ agendas, resulting in long ideological coalitions (Noel 2014).

Interest groups need not necessarily restrict themselves to working within one specific party, but are free to pressure whichever party will best further their agenda, which sometimes means both parties. Although party factions rise up from within a party, like interest groups, factions focus on achieving change on a specific set of issues rather than on realizing a broad ideological agenda.

Mobilization as a party within a party, then, has something to do with a movement’s goals. The goals must be broader than those of a pressure group or faction. This broader agenda must not, however, seem achievable either working strictly in tandem with the major party or under the auspices of a separate entity. Embrace of
a party within a party strategy is intertwined with where the movement wishes to stage their fight (i.e. within an existing party), but also with what type of fight the movement hopes to have. A movement with some specific and narrow goals has no incentive to go to the efforts of taking over a major party within or achieving electoral victories. It will be content merely to achieve its specific policy goals, with or without the help of a certain party. The broader the slate of ideological and/or policy goals, the more incentive the movement has to partake of the more comprehensive mobilization strategy of a party.

HIGH BARRIERS TO ENTRY

If a movement has an ideological agenda that is both as broad in scope as that of a major party but incompatible with that of an existing major party, it may seem sensible for it to form its own party. The Libertarian Party, for example, embraces an ideological agenda that, like the agendas of the Republican and Democratic Party, speaks to most conceivable policy domains. While some Libertarians may work with major parties on different issues, others believe that their ideology is distinct enough to warrant the existence of an independent party. A minor party, even a recognized one with a broad agenda, will experience difficulties achieving electoral success or policy change under its own auspices. Whether attributable to Duverger’s Law, path dependence, or a confluence of additional factors, minor parties within the US have a poor history of electoral success (unless they mobilize at a period of party realignment, taking the place of a major party, as detailed by Sundquist 1973).

If a movement has a broad agenda and holds electoral victory as its goal, mobilizing as a completely independent entity may seem an impractical strategy. Independent mobilization may satisfy the desire to maintain an undiluted agenda, but it will not result in the desired electoral success due to advantages enjoyed by major parties,
from “brand” recognition to ballot control to fundraising apparatuses. Further, if the movement is activist dominated it will not already possess the organizational structure and leadership necessary to form an independent party. A party within a party is an entity suspended between two worlds: its agenda is too broad to allow it to constrain itself to a single-issue movement or faction, yet its goals too lofty and organization too diffuse to mobilize as its own party. In the two-party dominated US political system, a movement with broad aims and a desire for electoral success needs a major party patron, and if not a willing patron, than at least a host.

**Existing Party as Host**

Even with the existence of high barriers of entry and low success rates for minor parties in the United States, a movement with a distinct ideological agenda may, like the Libertarian Party, see independent mobilization as worthwhile.\(^2\) For a movement to use a party *within* a party strategy, it must see one of the major parties as an ally of sorts, or at least as ideologically closer than the other party. Most often, the coalition of intense policy demanders will be made up of long-time supporters of one of the major parties. These supporters may feel that they represent the ‘true’ party, and that the party has betrayed them or simply left them behind through coalitional drift. They already feel that they have a home within, or at least an attachment to, that party, and certainly do not feel at home within the other party. There are two potential angles from which movement members can arrive at the strategy of mobilizing within a major party. Some may feel they are claiming the influence to which they are accustomed and which they deserve, while others may be fighting to establish a foothold that they never possessed.

\(^2\)The persistence with which Libertarian-leaning politicians run for office under the auspices of the Republican Party speaks both to barriers to entry, even for a large third party, and to the need to find a major party host.
In the first, members of a party within a party are like members of a high society family that fell on hard times. They know what it is like to live the life of an established member of the major party coalition, and the downgrade is harder due to the comparison. Members of the Tea Party, for example, were mostly lifelong supporters of the Republican Party. When they began to feel that their Party was drifting away from them, they did not stop thinking of electoral victory as a goal or of party politics as a means to achieve their political aims. The perceived drift of the Republican Party did not suddenly drive members of the Tea Party to channel their efforts into being a social movement or an interest group. While Occupy Wall Street protesters continued to avoid alliances with political parties, Tea Party members staged some protests to garner momentum, and less than a year later turned their attention to furthering their agenda in the 2010 midterm elections. In this first instance, then, members of a party within a party are habituated to the loftier goals of a party, and to having access to the machinery that achieves these goals. A mismatch between the goals of the party host and those of the party within a party does not eliminate the latter’s desire to command the influence of a major party.

This can also be seen, in a more limited way, with the Christian Right. The Christian Right generally acted as a party faction made up of various interest groups, with a shared consensus on specific social policy items (particularly abortion), and less consensus on economics (Wilcox and Robinson 2011). A traditional party faction typically does not share the goals of a major party, and therefore need not primarily rely on a party within a party strategy. It may occasionally add this to its arsenal of strategies in order to achieve specific goals. The Christian Right embraced a party within a party strategy with the candidacy of Pat Robertson for the 1988 Republican nomination, and with threats of walk outs at various Republican National Conventions. While the Christian Right was largely content to put its items on the agenda
and rarely contested Republican candidates in primaries, it occasionally reached for the party within a party strategy, working from within with the aim of electoral victory rather than mere policy change.

Members of a party within a party may also mobilize because they have been excluded from the party process and wish to enjoy full membership in a party. The Civil Rights movement, *qua* social movement, brought pressure for social and political change, and various interest groups pressured for specific policy changes. Some members of the movement, however, wished to gain full access to the nomination machinery of the Democratic Party. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) formed as a response to the inability of African Americans in Mississippi to vote in either the Democratic primary or in the general election. Disenfranchised Mississippi voters and white sympathizers elected a separate slate of delegates from the state to the 1964 Democratic National Convention, calling themselves the only democratically elected delegates from the state (Payne 2007). The MFDP did not mobilize against the Democratic Party because its members were used to having a say in Democratic National politics (they were not). Rather, it mobilized because its members wanted to wield the influence of a major party for their aims.

One exception, of course, are movements that make political demands but eschew party politics altogether, such as Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Mobilizing at the same time as the Tea Party in response to some of the same events (the economic collapse, bailouts, and crony capitalism run amok), many thought OWS represented the Democratic counterpart to the Tea Party. OWS, however, persistently rejected alignment with the Democratic party. Why did the Tea Party embrace a partisan strategy while OWS rejected electoral politics? Both groups shared a broad set of goals that could best be achieved through policy and electoral change, both experienced high barriers to entry as independent entities, and each was closer ideologically to one of
the major parties. Although many intervening factors, such as the more international flavor of OWS or the over-representation of younger individuals in its ranks, may help explain the differences in mobilization and longevity, the simplest explanation is that one movement saw its goals as partisan and the other did not. Not every movement with broad goals will conceive of party politics as the solution. As a strategy, a party within a party is one weapon in a movement’s arsenal, not an assured course of action if certain conditions are met.

Without feeling closeness (either ideologically or organizationally) to an existing major party, a movement may not choose to adopt a party within a party strategy at all. Like Occupy Wall Street, it may shun both parties. It may choose to go in the direction of an interest group, pressuring one or both parties from the outside. The party within a party strategy is most likely to be utilized by a group that already exists within a major party but does not share the narrower goals of a party faction. A more expanded party faction with a broad ideological agenda and the electoral goals of a party may see it as most sensible to utilize the machinery it already understands in order to gain the electoral, financial, and organizational advantages only enjoyed by a major party.

SUMMARY

The reasons for choosing to mobilize within (in order to contest) a major party are variable, stemming from the breadth of a movement’s aims, the current political landscape, and the nature of the previous relationship with that party. In all instances, this mobilization within a host party is a strategy of political influence. It could be the movement’s primary strategy (as I will argue it is with the Tea Party) or one of many strategies (as with the Civil Rights Movement and the Christian Right). Whatever its place in the arsenal of tools for political influence, recognizing the existence of
this form of mobilization can help illuminate some otherwise mystifying episodes in American politics.

2.3 Implications

This chapter has sketched the broad outlines of the party within a party strategy, with limited empirical applications. Before proceeding to the applied chapters, it is helpful to explicitly state some observable implications of this theory. We can return to our original three questions about the Tea Party movement:

1. Why did it mobilize to contest the Republican Party as well as the Democratic Party?

2. How can we explain the mixture of elite leadership and grassroots activism in its organization?

3. What, if anything, makes Tea Party ideology coherent? What explains the sweeping scope of its ideology?

Why Contest the Republican Party?

Party identification remains one of the most stable attachments for most voters, helping them choose which candidate to support as well as providing them with cues on which position to take on various policy issues (see Berelson 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Carsey and Layman 2006; Miller 1991). Disturbances in party allegiances have typically come from times of realignment, party splintering, or an ideological shift in the party itself (Burnham 1967 and 1970; Key 1955; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Sundquist 1973). None of these explanations quite fit with the advent of the Tea Party. Rising at a time when the Republican Party had continued to grow both more...
conservative and more ideologically consistent (see Noel 2014), the Tea Party might have been expected to simply work with the party, or not mobilize at all. Instead, they continual run candidates against and contest the agenda of the establishment Republican Party.

If the Tea Party were an interest group or a traditional party faction, we might expect to see it lobbying and pressuring the Republican Party to emphasize certain policies (as the Christian Right did with, for example, school prayer), but not to challenge or defeat the Republicans. If it were a social movement, we might expect it to disregard established party politics whatsoever. If the Tea Party is a party within a party, however, then it would be little surprise if it took a more antagonistic stance vis a vis the Republican Party. Primarily Republican candidates, utilizing Republican machinery to run its own candidates, and emphasizing distrust and/or betrayal would all be indications that the Tea Party is using the strategy of a party within a party.

The Tea Party contests the Republican Party, under this explanation, because it has a broad agenda (including electoral success) that it wishes to achieve under the auspices of a major party. The most logical choice is the party to which many Tea Partiers formerly owed allegiance, but which they feel no longer adequately emphasizes the correct issues.

UNDERSTANDING ITS ORGANIZATION

Much of the literature looks to movement structures to categorize movement types (Aldrich 1995; Downs 1957; Gamson 1975; Schattschneider 1942; Walker 1991; Zald and McCarthy 1979). Whereas a party faction or interest group might possess a cadre of lobbying structures, a social movement might be a very diffuse coalition, and a party (even a minor party) would have a hierarchical structure and rules, a party within a party is not primarily distinguished by its structure.
A Party within a party need not have a specific structure. Its primary distinguishing characteristics are intra-party mobilization and the goal of co-opting existing machinery rather than building its own. It could be relatively diffuse, relying more on activists, or it could be slightly more hierarchical, drawing from interest groups. A movement that primarily acts as a party within a party would be united, not by a leader or leaders, but by a strategy of utilizing a party to implement its agenda, or remaking an existing party.

The Tea Party’s organization, under this explanation, could take a variety of forms, but will likely be dominated by activists/intense policy demanders. Inasmuch as the movement drew energy since its formation from various interest groups and elite figures, we may see a few influential voices presiding over the movement.

**EXPLAINING ITS IDEOLOGY**

An interest group of faction may focus on achieving change on specific policy issues, while a social movement may target broad social change. A party within a party mobilizes as such because it has goals which it think requires the co-option of an entire party apparatus. These goals should necessarily be broad. Stated otherwise, we might expect an ideology that provides coverage over many issues.

Although the Tea Party movement seems to emphasize fiscally conservative positions on economic issues, Tea Partiers themselves bring social issues, immigration, and even foreign policy under their umbrella. The positions they take on these issues are a bit to the right of the Republican Party, and are often tinged with a bit of hostility towards out groups or change.

If the Tea Party were an interest group or a party faction, then we should see a continued emphasis on some clear policy aims. Its amorphous and evolving ideology, however, bears much more resemblance to that of an actual party, or what we might
see from a party within a party. If the Tea Party is truly a party within a party, then we should expect it to deliver positions on a variety of issues from a lens that is conservative but distinct from that of the Republican Party.

2.4 Conclusion

With this conceptual apparatus in mind, I turn to the three empirical questions. In the vein of understanding the Tea Party by understanding its strategy for political influence, the remaining chapters weave data into a fuller picture of the Tea Party movement as held together by its strategy. While the results are specific to this particular movement, the detailing of a party within a party strategy may clarify other episodes in US party history as well.
Chapter 3

Why Not the Republican Party?

In the 1960s, Frank Meyer wove traditional conservatism and economic libertarianism into the “New Conservatism” of fusionism (Meyer 1962; Meyer 1969). Advanced by the conservative publication *National Review*, later embraced by Ronald Reagan, and even adopted by leaders of the Christian Right (Lienesch 1993; Moen 1992), economic libertarianism found its home in the Republican Party. It is curious that the Tea Party, a movement committed to fiscal discipline, arose a few decades later to challenge the major party that champions economic conservatism.

Conservatives exhibited high levels of resentment towards Obama and Congressional Democrats following 2008. This antipathy towards the opposing party came as little surprise to political scientists. In light of these events, it might have made sense for conservatives to support the Republican Party with renewed vigor. Rather than aiming for a reversal of the Republican Party’s electoral fortunes, the nascent Tea Party cast itself as a critic of both major parties, simultaneously blaming G.W. Bush and establishment Republicans for compromising, and criticizing President Obama and other Democrats for their perceived socialism. This opposition to the Republican Party seems at odds with conventional wisdom, which suggests that minor parties and social movements appear when no extant party champions their pet issues (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazaras 1993).

What explains the Tea Party’s animus towards its political ally? The accounts of activists confirm that the Tea Party’s initial energy drew from a reaction to the many
changes facing Americans in 2009, several of which were particularly troublesome to conservatives. The movement galvanized into a political force by defining itself in opposition to all mainstream politics. Drawing from Stoke’s theory of valence (1963, 1992), I argue that Tea Partiers never stopped agreeing with the Republican Party on policy ends. Rather, they ceased to believe that the Republican Party could be trusted to pursue these ends. Using both original survey and interview data, I demonstrate the presence of this distrust and its roots in the Tea Party’s perception of the Republican Party as insufficiently conservative.

3.1 Why Not the Republican Party? Possible Explanations

Unanswered Questions

The Tea Party is difficult to study in isolation from the Republican Party. Most Tea Partiers are or were Republicans. This can obscure differences between the Tea Party and the Republican Party as well as the conditions under which conservatives would choose the former over the latter. Most work on the Tea Party draws from large public opinion surveys (e.g. the American National Election Study) to compare the views of Tea Party sympathizers to those of other Americans, a practice that also masks variation within conservatism.

Using the limited measures of Tea Party support on these surveys (typically a measure of one’s approval of or sympathy with the Tea Party), scholars have only been able to describe Tea Partiers as more conservative than other Republicans (Abramowitz 2011; Abramowitz 2012; Jacobson 2011; Williamson and Skocpol 2012). More recently, Parker and Barreto used another mass public opinion study, the 2010 Multi State Study of Race and Politics, to argue that Tea Partiers are not more conservative than
other Republicans per se. Rather, they are reactionary conservatives who are highly resentful of out-groups (Parker and Barreto 2013).

Whether Tea Partiers are characterized by subscription to a different strand of conservatism or simply by greater intensity of conservatism, neither characterization as such explains why a large group of people would mobilize outside of the auspices of their own party (Rosenstone and Hansen 1996). Whether spurred by fear of change or resentment of out groups, Tea Partiers went on not only to contest the Democratic Party but also to primary, challenge, and distance themselves from Republicans. Additional factors are necessary to explain the continued oppositional strategy of the Tea Party.

Distrust of Republican Party

I explain the Tea Party’s mobilization as a party within a party\(^1\) as the result of a sharp decrease in its trust in the Republican Party. I conceptualize distrust as a valence issue, in the same vein as leadership ratings (Groseclose 2001; Schofield 2004), candidate trustworthiness appraisals (Enelow and Hinich 1982), economic performance ratings (Whiteley 1984), or other personal qualities of representatives that help voters decide among candidates with similar policy ends (Bianco 1994; McCurley and Mondak 1995; Stone and Simas 2010).

As I will demonstrate, Tea Partiers share the same policy priorities as non-Tea Party Republicans. They believe, among other things, in reducing government spending, defending traditional marriage, stemming the flow of immigrants, and a strong national defense. The differences rest not in their ideal points (conceived in a

\(^{1}\)Chapter 1 of this dissertation explains this theory in more detail. At minimum, a party within a party is an entity that co-opts the apparatuses of an existing party to remake that party from within. The Tea Party is the first movement to embrace contesting its host party (in primaries and otherwise) as its main strategy.
traditional left-right issue space), but in two valence (non-policy) factors: the trust-worthiness they attribute to the Republican Party, and the intensity with which they believe the Republican Party will pursue important policy goals.

The Tea Party transitioned from reactionary protest movement (Brown 2015) to party within a party because it wanted to achieve policy goals (which largely overlap with the goals of the Republican Party) but did not trust the Republican Party to further these goals without compromise. This distrust was exacerbated by the standing that Tea Partiers felt they had enjoyed within the Republican Party. Mostly lifelong Republican supporters, activists, and donors, Tea Partiers felt that their loyalty to the Republican Party was not rewarded with a response commensurate to the changes occurring in 2009 and onwards. Tea Partiers were not looking for a party that would compromise, but for one that would take up the fight with renewed vigor. As the Affordable Care Act came into law, Tea Partiers became convinced that neither John Boehner nor the rest of the Republican Establishment would carry the mantle. In response, the Tea Party became a movement that positioned itself against both parties.

3.2 Overview

Data

I leverage two sources of data: activist interviews and survey data.

Qualitative data come from semi-unstructured depth interviews conducted between March 2012 and January 2014 with more than 35 Tea Party activists and elites, spanning ten states. I asked each interviewee to explain what led them to join the Tea Party. Depending on their answers, I asked a variety of follow up questions, such as why activists chose involvement with the Tea Party instead of with
the Republican Party, what differences, if any, they saw between the Tea Party and the Republican Party, and/or why they left the Republican Party. The interviewees described their support for the Tea Party as motivated not merely by negative affect for Obama and the Democrats, but also by distrust of the Republican Party due to its insufficient conservatism and predilection for “insider” politics.

I supplement the interview narratives with analysis of the Virginia Politics Study (VPS), a 1,600-response survey of Tea Party and Establishment Republican delegates to Virginia’s 2013 Republican Nominating Convention. I fielded the VPS between November 15 and December 15, 2013, following the 2013 Virginia Republican nominating convention. The survey had a 30% response rate, and was conducted via Qualtrics. I use the survey to compare Tea Partiers and Establishment Republicans on measures of ideology and trust.

The remainder of the chapter follows the argument detailed above. I present evidence of 1) an initial reaction sparking the rise of the Tea Party, 2) growing distrust in the Republican Party, and 3) a belief among Tea Partiers that the Republican Party was insufficiently conservative. I begin each section with Tea Partiers’ descriptions, in their own words, of each of these issues, which I follow with survey data where applicable.

Not surprisingly, most interviewees began by pointing to the events of 2008 and 2009, including the economic downturn, bailouts, TARP, Obama’s election, Democratic Congressional victories, and healthcare reform.\(^2\) Tea Partiers (and most likely, other conservatives) recalled feelings of distress at this concatenation of events. After allowing interviewees to express these sentiments, I pressed them on why they chose to mobilize separately from the Republican Party rather than simply redouble their

\(^2\)Throughout, I will refer to the healthcare reform of 2009 as the Affordable Care Act and Obamacare.
commitment to helping Republicans defeat the Democratic Party. They explained concerns about the Republican Party in one of two ways: distrust of Republican Party insiders, or belief that the Republican Party was insufficiently conservative.

3.3 Initial Reaction

In explaining why they joined the Tea Party, activists’ responses fell in one of the following categories. Some described their involvement as spurred by the “perfect storm” of events such as the downturn, bailouts, TARP, Obama’s election, and healthcare. Others pointed to Obama’s election and his ideological leanings. Another group described their problem as opposition to government in general. A final group indicated Obamacare as their main impetus for joining the Tea Party.

Perfect Storm

The first group described their shock at the combination of events in late 2008 and early 2009, calling it a “perfect storm”, a “breaking point”, a “tipping point”, and a “reawakening”. Susan*, a former animal rights’ activist and Ross Perot supporter explained, “A lot of stuff happened all at once. George Bush at the end, then Obamacare, and all the big spending, and it all happened at once in one big explosion. I think that’s what woke people up.” Paul Tarver, former leader of the Mississippi Tea Party, described the events as a “perfect storm” that woke up conservatives who were “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” and alerted them to the “socialism” coming out of the Obama campaign. Mary* argued, “There’s been a bit of a reawakening. Something changed in the moral fiber of the country very distinctly with Obamacare.” A Colorado Tea Party leader, Regina Thompson, called bailouts “the genesis,

Respondents who requested anonymity were given pseudonyms, marked by asterisks*.
and Obamacare the match that caused things to explode.” She thought this combination of bailouts and Obamacare fueled the Tea Party, producing “raw passion from everyday people who are scared about the country.” Gary*, a Tea Party activist from southwest Virginia said he joined the Tea Party because all of the events of 2008 and 2009 made him “mad” and “fed up with anti-America, anti-capitalism, and anti-God.” Meredith* communicated these sentiments in milder language: “For me it was a cumulative thing. All of those things impacted me and reminded me that things weren’t going in the right direction.”

Obama

Some Tea Party members pointed to Obama’s 2008 election and subsequent actions as the main catalyst for mobilization. In the most impassioned moment of her interview, Mary stated that “Without a doubt, this whole Obama administration has made me ashamed to be an American. I cannot believe that he is trampling and trashing on our constitution everyday. Not just him, but his cohort also. They are blatant and brazen about it. When he says, ‘I don’t care what Congress says, I’ll just get around them’ are you kidding me? You don’t have that power. Not by the same document I’ve read.” Brian Stein, an activist in Pennsylvania, also attributes his involvement to Obama’s election. “I joined the Tea Party because I was in shock when Obama was elected. He wouldn’t wear the flag on his lapel, and hated white people. He was different even than Clinton, who cooperated with Newt. Obama is a phony. He got rid of Churchill’s bust in the White House, his father was part of a colonialist anti-white group in Africa, and his mother was a raging leftist. Obama’s real agenda was destructive. He meant to dismantle the country.” Sandy*, a conservative from Alabama who travelled to DC to attend an impeach Obama rally, put her thoughts succinctly: “I want the country back the way it was, and I don’t think Obama wants
the same thing.” Patti*, an elderly woman at the same rally, explained that she finally became politically active at age 77 because “Obama and the IRS are going to become like the Nazi German police force.” Jim Bacon, a conservative Virginia activist who worked closely with the Tea Party, explained that it was “the activist, statist agenda of the Obama administration that got things going,” and only later did the Tea Party begin to examine the “complexities of the constitution and fiscal policy.”

**Government Excess**

Those who gave a fiscal concerns narrative told a familiar story of the economic downturn. Matt Kibbe, President and CEO of FreedomWorks, a libertarian DC-based Tea Party organization, argued that the formation of the Tea Party centered on economics. “It started with anger about TARP, and frankly the values underlying that fight were that you should treat everyone like everybody else.” Some of the activists shared Kibbe’s perspective. Mark Daugherty, part of the Virginia Tea Party Patriots leadership committee, explained that the collapse of the financial markets between Fall 2008 and March 2009 created “a lot of fear about loss of personal wealth that coincided with a big deficit. The bailout program alienated a lot of the Tea Party folks.” The debt increased under Bush and there was no sign of it stopping under Obama, creating a “snowball effect that concerned folks enough to get involved. Americans to some degree suffer from inertia in their individual lives with families and work, but things reached a flashpoint in early 2009.” Matt Perdie, an activist from New York City, said that he identified as a liberal until Bush’s stimulus bill, which struck him as “socialistic” and led him to ask questions about the war and the economy. He then began watching Glenn Beck and reading Thomas Sowell. The combined effect led him to free market economics, libertarianism, and the Tea Party.
Anastasia Pryzbylski grew concerned during the 2008 election cycle after reading Peter Shift’s book *Up and Coming Economic Collapse*, after which she began to see signs of economic collapse in America. She was suspicious of John McCain and upset about TARP, but became most alarmed when Obama added money to the stimulus and gave a “centrist” sounding State of the Union Address. Shortly thereafter, she became formative in Tea Party efforts in Bucks County, PA, where she is the leader of the Tea Party group Kitchen Table Patriots. Bob Shannon, a Tea Party leader in Southern Virginia, emphasized that his Tea Party group limited its concerns to “the economic meltdown that was taking place in our country,” in particular becoming involved because of the TARP bailout, subsequent stimulus package, and crony capitalism. Susan* revealed that she had been upset about government spending since Ross Perot, but after the “shakeup at the end with George Bush, and then boom, right into Obama with the stimulus” she became scared. She shed tears as she described the outlet she found in the Tea Party when, “for the first time in my life—this makes me want to cry—I really feel scared for the country.”

**Affordable Care Act**

The last narrative focuses on the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2009. Paul Tarver explained that he and some of his friends from the small business community heard the televised rant by Rick Santelli calling for a Tea Party in early 2009, which “lit the fuse.” Their timing intersected with the debate about Obamacare, leading them to realize that “if Obamacare went through, the cost added to each of them would mean it would become increasingly hard to survive as small business owners.” Yvonne Donnelly, founder of the Glenn Beck 9/12 group, one of the large umbrella organiza-
tions associated with the Tea Party argued that the “tipping point in 2009” started with bailouts under Bush, and “snowballed from there. Healthcare was potentially the bigger issue. People were saying, ‘wait, this isn’t right.’” She felt “the pedal had been pushed all the way to the floor in the fundamental transformation of America. People were being told they were going to fundamentally change America and the concept America was founded on.” Some activists, such as Linda from Pennsylvania and Donna from Tennessee, simply stated that “Obamacare” inspired them to activism. Others, such as Mike*, described Obamacare as a “socialist” policy, which made its passage a catalyst for him to activism. To Mary*, Obamacare was “absolutely the nail in the coffin for me. That was so absolutely unconstitutional and against the wish of the people. That was my turning point.” Martin* agreed, calling healthcare “the catalyst in terms of getting involved.” It was so serious to him that it was not even “a party thing.”

These explanations vary slightly, but all emphasized one or more of the same set of issues from late 2008 and early 2009. The question remains: if conservative Americans were concerned about these issues, why did they organize outside of the auspices of the Republican Party, even challenging it, rather than working with Republicans to rectify the situation?

3.4 Distrust

Distrust of the Insiders

Many activists discussed distrust by talking about themselves and the Tea Party as outsiders—versus elites—whom they viewed as insiders. In most of the activists’

4Although many 9/12 groups consider themselves to be party of the Tea Party, and many Tea Partiers consider 9/12 to be part of their movement, Donnelly was careful to emphasize that the 9/12 movement is not specifically affiliated with the Tea Party.
narratives, elites were Washington ’insiders’ who were out of touch with the people. Tea Party members conceived themselves as grassroots ’outsiders,’ uncorrupted by the allure of power and DC politics. Tea Party activists most frequently leveled the charge of ’insider’ against establishment Republicans. When describing her involvement in founding the organization Tea Party Patriots, Jenny Beth Martin emphasized its outsider status, particularly with relation to the Republican Party. “One of the valuable things about the movement and TPP [Tea Party Patriots] is that we deliberately did not try to go into and live in DC and become another DC organization. We were trying to do things differently because of the way things had happened in our country, and how both parties had done things wrong, and wanted it outside of the party system.” The Tea Party, Martin said, was “not an inside, but an outside force.” She saw the Tea Party as maligned by their “opposition,” both Republicans and Democrats who do not share the goals of the “normal, average Americans” in the Tea Party, namely, “restoring fiscal sanity to our country.”

For some, the distrust of elites ran so deep that they even divided national Tea Party organizations into ‘real’ organizations versus elite (Republican controlled or influenced) organizations. Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks were two national-level Tea Party umbrella organizations that most frequently came under attack. When John Grigsby led the Northern Virginia Tea Party, one of the largest groups in Virginia, he made sure his group had very little contact with any of the national groups. “Tea Party Express was mostly Republican hacks. Very few groups had any sort of grassroots involvement that was meaningful. Mostly they are the typical inside-the-beltway operators.” Paul Tarver offered similar comments about the Tea Party in Mississippi during his time as a leader. The “main Tea Party” did more damage to the Tea Party than anything else, he argued. Tea Party activists resented groups like FreedomWorks and “wouldn’t touch them with a 10-foot pole because Freedom-
Works assumed their position by fiat,” trying to offer local organizations grants from unnamed Republican donors. Tarver refused grants for the Mississippi Tea Party, and instead focused on building a network of grassroots Mississippi organizations.

“KEEP THEM ACCOUNTABLE, MAKE THEM HURT”

This distrust was enough to make activists seek avenues through which to chastise the Republican Party. Several interviews listed electing principled candidates and keeping them accountable as main practical goals of the Tea Party. In Mike’s* words, “The Republican Party’s all about getting elected, period,” while the Tea Party is “about principle.” A Tea Party member should not “elect someone because they have an R behind their name. I believe in three things: limited government, fiscal reform, and free markets, period. If you stand for those three things, even if you tell me you’re a communist, I’ll vote for you!” Mary* also emphasized core principles that trump a candidate’s party affiliation: “fiscal responsibility and liberty.” If a candidate believed in these “founding” principles, “I would vote either way and have no problem, and mean it truly.” Her main goal was to make “the people doing this accountable, and I’m deadly serious about this.” When asked to describe what Tea Party success would look like, Regina Thompson answered: “We would gradually elect more people who understand the constitution, not those driven by avarice, wealth, power, or influence. If you get enough people like this in office, we won’t have to scream so loud.”

In describing the relationship between the Virginia Tea Parties and the Republican Party, Mark Daugherty explained that a “healthy portion” of Tea Party members participate in local Republican party meetings in order to “remind the Republican party of the creed of individual responsibility.” In particular, members often participate in the local Republican Party so they can “have a voice at the convention in terms of selection of candidates.” In many of the more rural areas, Tea Party members did not
associate with the Republican Party at all, but worked with “Tea Party candidates” because more “congruence” existed between these candidates and Tea Party principles than between Establishment Republican Party candidates and the Tea Party.

Other activists discussed the need to pressure the Republican Party from the outside by using its machinery. Brian Stein argued that the Tea Party’s relationship with the Republican Party could be understood in the following terms: “Tea Party is being pragmatic. Parties are machines. The machine in the GOP is willing to take the Tea Party’s help.” In his opinion, it was acceptable for the Tea Party to continue working alongside the Republican Party as long as it did not “compromise.”

To emphasize the independence of the Tea Party from the Republican Party, Jim Bacon argued that the Tea Party would have existed even if McCain had won in 2008, or if Romney had won in 2012 “because the Tea Party is not a branch of the GOP, but exercises influence on the GOP.” If “any other group could act as a viable player in the political marketplace, the Tea Party might drop their support for the Republican Party.”

Bob Shannon also cautioned against trusting the Republican Party: “There are a lot of people in the Tea Party who are blindly loyal to the Republican establishment. When you pinpoint that the Republican Party is just as corrupt as any other party, it’s blinding, it’s like you hit them between the eyes because no one has ever confronted them with the truth.” He sees the future of the Tea Party as either fracturing over loyalty to the Republican Party, or involving “a very bloody fight with the Republican Party.” His distrust of the Republican Party ran so deep that his Tea Party groups mainly participated on behalf of Independent local candidates. Shannon was not alone in this sentiment. John Grigsby, one of the founders of the Virginia Tea Party Patriots who later left the Tea Party because of tactical issues, criticized those who saw the real solution as finding more people who were aligned with Tea Party principles, putting
them in office, and keeping them accountable. He saw the real solution as “making
the GOP hurt” in elections.

EVIDENCE OF DISTRUST

To further examine distrust, I turn to the VPS. Delegates to Virginia’s 2013 Repub-
lican Nominating Convention comprised the entire survey population, and these del-
egates received the survey following massive Republican losses in statewide elections
in November 2013. As might be expected from the interviews and from previous
work on the Tea Party, Tea Partiers demonstrated stronger anti-Democratic and
anti-Obama sentiments than did non-Tea Partiers. More striking, however, are the
heightened levels of distrust of the Republican Party expressed by Tea Partiers. I
present responses on two topics that illustrate the presence of distrust as an impor-
tant valence issue to Tea Partiers.

2008 AND 2009: DIFFERENT FEARS

Figure 1 shows responses to a survey item that highlights the importance of dis-
trust to Tea Party activists. Respondents received the question: “Here are a series of
statements that describe how some people felt during 2008 and 2009, when the finan-
cial crisis began and Barack Obama was elected President. Which ones describe how
you remember feeling at the time? Check as many as apply.” The options included:
“Distrust in both parties,” “Distrust in Congress,” “Anger at Bush,” “Anger at Wall
Street,” “Anger at mortgage defaulters,” “Anger at Obama,” “Scared of socialism,”
“Scared about the US’s financial future,” and “Scared about my personal financial
future.”

This figure displays the difference in means between the percentage of Tea Partiers
choosing each option and the percentage of Establishment Republicans choosing the
same option. No statistically significant difference exists between the means for Tea Partiers and Establishment Republicans on “Anger at Wall Street” (51% of Establishment Republicans and 48% of Tea Partiers), “Anger at Mortgage Defaulters” (39% of Establishment Republicans and 42% of Tea Partiers), “Scared about the US’s financial future” (78% of Establishment Republicans and 79% of Tea Partiers), and “Scared about my personal financial future” (both at 53%). These feelings do not distinguish Tea Partiers from their Establishment Republican counterparts.

In keeping with what we might expect of Tea Partiers, they reported fear of socialism and anger at Obama with more frequency than Establishment Republicans, and these differences reach statistical significance. 81% of Tea Partiers were afraid of socialism, as opposed to 62% of Establishment Republicans. When it came to anger at Obama, an overwhelming 94% of Tea Partiers chose this option, as opposed to 78% of Establishment Republicans.

These sentiments are consonant with the argument that the Tea Party exists to the right of the Republican Party ideologically, possibly even representing a separate strand of conservatism (see Parker and Baretto 2013). The most novel difference between the two groups comes into relief on the last three measures: distrust of both parties, distrust of Congress, and anger at Bush. Tea Partiers chose these options at higher percentages than did Establishment Republicans, and all three differences again reach statistical significance. 63% of Tea Partiers reported feeling distrust towards both parties, as opposed to only 39% of Establishment Republicans. Although neither group harbored particularly warm sentiments towards Congress, 90% of Tea Partiers registered distrust of Congress, as opposed to 81% of Establishment Republicans. Finally, Tea Partiers noted anger at the most recent Republican president, George W. Bush, at 64%, as opposed to 42% of Establishment Republicans.
Feelings about events of '08-'09

Figure 3.1: Virginia Politics Study Responses to Events of 2008 and 2009
These differences, especially for anger at Bush and distrust of both parties, indicate Tea Partiers’ heightened distrust of the Republican Party. Tea Partiers and Establishment Republicans alike were angry and scared following 2008 and 2009. Most of their responses trend in the same direction. However, the magnitude of Tea Party distrust notably exceeds that of Establishment Republicans. Tea Partiers remember feeling greater animus towards Obama and clearer fear of socialism, but their anger at the sitting Republican president and distrust of both parties presents the most substantial difference between their attitudes and the attitudes of Establishment Republicans.

Assessments of Republican Leaders

Respondents were also asked about key Republican figures: Mitt Romney, the most recent Republican presidential candidate at the time, and other political actors who were important in 2013 Virginia Republican discussions. Tea Partiers exhibited much less trust in the establishment leaders of the Republican Party than Establishment Republicans.

First, respondents were asked: “Thinking back again to the 2012 presidential election, when Mitt Romney was the Republican nominee, how much did you trust Mitt Romney to lead the country?” Options ranged from 1 (Distrust a lot) to 5 (Trust a lot). Although the majority of Tea Party and Establishment respondents alike chose “trust somewhat” or “trust a lot”, the distribution of responses is telling. A higher percentage of Tea Party respondents chose “distrust a lot” or “distrust somewhat,” while Republicans chose “trust somewhat” or “trust a lot” with greater frequency.

These results fall in line with the interview responses, which show Tea Party distrust of those Republican figures they view as insiders or part of the establishment. To assess the prevalence of these sentiments, respondents were asked to indicate the favorability of their feelings towards a variety of political figures (and one organization,
Levels of trust in Romney

% of Respondents by group

- Distrust a lot
- Distrust somewhat
- Neutral
- Trust somewhat
- Trust a lot

1-5 scale

GOP
Tea Party

Figure 3.2: Virginia Politics Study Responses on Mitt Romney
the Chamber of Commerce). About half of these figures were non-establishment, Tea Party friendly political figures. The other half were establishment Republican figures. If distrust of the Republican Party, at least in part, distinguishes Tea Partiers from other Republicans, we might expect Tea Partiers to approve more strongly of non-establishment figures like Ron Paul, while approving of establishment Republicans at lower rates. Respondents were asked to rank these figures from 1-5 (not at all favorable to very favorable). Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents in each group who ranked the figure in question 5 (a rating of very favorable).

Respondents’ options included libertarian political figure Ron Paul; Tea Party darling and anti-establishment Senator Ted Cruz; Tea Party favorite Sarah Palin; conservative Virginia Lieutenant Governor candidate E.W. Jackson; conservative Republican Virginia Gubernatorial candidate Ken Cuccinelli; Christian conservative activist Michael Farris; former establishment Republican Senator George Allen; former Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell; House Speaker John Boehner; and (not a figure), the Chamber of Commerce. Arguably, the latter four figures and the Chamber of Commerce are more closely associated with the establishment Republican Party, while the first set of figures are either explicitly associated with the Tea Party or are considered very conservative Republicans.

As expected, Tea Partiers gave the non-establishment set of figures “very favorable” ratings with much more frequency than did Establishment Republicans. Although both Tea Partiers and non-Tea Partiers alike exhibited much less enthusiasm over the establishment figures, Republicans viewed these figures more favorably than did Tea Partiers. Establishment Republican respondents were generally less-enthusiastic about all figures listed, potentially due to their disenchantment with the Republican Party’s performance in Virginia’s November 2013 statewide elections (held only a few weeks before the survey). Despite these losses, Tea Partiers remained enthusiastic
Figure 3.3: Virginia Politics Study Political Rankings
about non-Establishment candidates. This is in keeping with their claim that they are not invested in the general electoral fate of the Republican Party, instead only devoting attention to the fate of Tea Party-oriented candidates.

These data do not prove the existence of a distrust dimension, nor that this dimension helps explain the Tea Party movement. They do, however, suggest a division between Tea Partiers and Establishment Republicans, with Tea Partiers showing high levels of favorability towards non-establishment Republicans. This division could certainly be one of distrust (whereas the non-establishment flavor of these particular figures constitutes much of their appeal to the Tea Party). Figures favored by Tea Partiers are also more intensely conservative. This brings us to a discussion of an additional issue related to distrust: perceived failure of the Republican Party to uphold conservative principles.

3.5 Failure to Uphold Conservative Principles

Republican Party ‘unprincipled’:

When asked why they chose the Tea Party over the Republican Party, many interviewees pointed to the Republican Party’s lack of ideological consistency, particularly on economic issues. As Shaun* summarized, “We have an issue with Republicans on big spending, just not as bad as the Democrats, not as big.”

Many Tea Party activists were Republicans prior to the advent of the Tea Party, and only sought a different channel of recourse because the Republican Party did not seem appropriately principled. Donna, for example, had been a registered Republican since 1982, and described being “thrown out” of her local Republican Party because she stood against an “unprincipled candidate.” Tricia* and her husband sought political involvement when they retired. At first, they attended Republican Party meet-
ings. To them, the Republican Party was, however, “so weak that we weren’t learning or accomplishing anything.” One day they saw a Tea Party road sign, and began attending Tea Party meetings. There, they found themselves in the company of others who “believe in freedom” and were focused on “real change”. Brian Stein made a few attempts to attend Republican Party meetings and fundraisers, but felt “nauseated by the GOP and its liking for big government.” After moving to Colorado in 2007, Regina Thompson received Glenn Beck’s e-newsletter and saw a link about a need for grassroots precinct leaders to take over the Colorado Republican Party. She attended two caucus trainings and tried to get involved with her local Republican Party, but the county leader was unresponsive and disinterested.

To Regina, this episode exemplified the failings of the contemporary Republican Party: Republican officeholders were only “interested in the title,” and not “invested in the process or in finding good candidates.” As Paul Tarver stated, “The GOP has drifted from principles, and there isn’t a lot of difference between the two major parties in Washington. The GOP says smaller government, but whenever they get their hands on the government it doesn’t get any smaller. They want to direct how it’s going to grow.” In Donna’s words, both parties were in “loyal opposition” and simply want big government, whereas the Tea Party wanted “self-government under the people.”

Survey Evidence

Does this distrust stem from a perception of the Republican Party as unprincipled and untrustworthy on the issues conservatives care about? To answer this question, I present two additional survey analyses. First, to demonstrate a heightened perception among Tea Partiers of the Republican Party as insufficiently conservative, I show
results from a split-level experiment where respondents were asked to rank the conservatism of various instantiations of the Republican Party. Second, to illustrate that this difference is not one of distinct policy ends but of intensity, I show respondents’ rankings of various policy issues.

**Ranking of the Republican Party’s Conservatism**

In a split-level experiment, all respondents received one of three questions asking them to assess the conservatism of the Republican Party in comparison with their personal conservatism. 1/3 of respondents were asked about the Republican Party, 1/3 about Republicans in Congress, and 1/3 about the Republican Party in Virginia. This set of questions serves two purposes, the first regarding Tea Partiers and the second regarding their perception of the Republican Party. First, it helps illustrate heightened conservatism among Tea Party members, who see none of the instantiations of the Republican Party as adequately conservative. Second, Tea Partiers are in line with Establishment Republicans in seeing variation in the conservatism of different parts of the Republican Party. Tea Partiers rank the Republican Party and Republicans in Congress as less conservative than Virginia’s state Republican Party, perhaps in keeping with their suspicion of insiders and a feeling that they have more of a voice with their state and local politics than they do in the national machinations of the Republican Party.

Figure 4 shows these rankings. The bars correspond with the percentage of each group (Tea Party versus Establishment Republicans) who indicated that the entity in question was more conservative than them, about the same, or less conservative than them. We might expect to see the majority of Tea Partiers indicating that none of the Republican groups are sufficiently conservative, while Establishment Republicans...
should be more likely to perceive the Republican Party’s conservatism as ‘about the same’ as their own.

Two patterns emerge from these results. First, Tea Partiers viewed all instantiations of the Republican Party as less conservative than their own personal brand of conservatism. This trend is starkest when respondents were asked about the Republican Party generally (96.27% of Tea Partiers perceived it as less conservative than them) and Republicans in Congress (95.73% of Tea Partiers saw it as less conservative). Although less skeptical of the Republican Party in Virginia, a full 88.97% of Tea Partiers still viewed it as less conservative than they are.

Establishment Republicans, in contrast, thought of themselves as more in line with the Republican Party. 47% of them saw the Republican Party as less con-
servative (only 14% more than saw it as in line with their conservatism), and a
majority (73.18%) saw the Republican Party in Virginia as close to their own conser-
vation. When asked about Republicans in Congress, 45.63% chose the less conserva-
tive option, only 8% more respondents than chose the ‘same’ option.

This analysis shows that Tea Partiers do see a marked difference between them-
selves and the Republican Party, a difference not perceived to the same degree by
Establishment Republicans. A final question remains: are there certain issues on which
Tea Partiers are more conservative than the Republican Party, or is this difference
one of intensity rather than of disagreement over ends?

ISSUE INTENSITY

A final survey item captures information about issue priorities and the intensity with
which respondents prioritize these issues. Respondents were given a list of contempo-
rary policy issues, including: cutting taxes; reducing the size of government; cutting
the national debt; repealing Obamacare (the ACA); putting a stop to illegal immigra-
tion; decreasing the number of abortions; defining marriage as between one man and
one woman; putting prayer back in schools; protecting the US from terrorism; and,
electing Republicans. They were asked to rank the importance of these issues on a 1-5
scale (from not at all important to very important). Figure 5 shows the percentage
of Tea Partiers and Establishment Republicans in the sample who chose option 5, or
“very important”, for each of the policy issues in question.

The results do not support the conclusion that Tea Partiers possess overwhelm-
ingly different policy ends than Establishment Republicans. Tea Partiers ranked eco-
nomic issues as very important at higher rates than did Establishment Republicans
(although over 50% of Establishment Republicans also think these issues are very
important). Tea Partiers, not surprisingly, were more likely to think that repealing
Figure 3.5: Virginia Politics Study Rankings of Policy Issues
Obamacare was very important, and to rank “putting a stop to illegal immigration” as very important. They even ranked traditional social issues, such as reducing the number of abortions, defining marriage as between one man and one woman, and putting prayer back in schools as very important at higher percentages than do Establishment Republicans.

Establishment Republicans placed a greater emphasis on three issues in this graph: they were more likely to emphasize protecting America from terrorism, reducing unemployment, and electing Republican candidates. As with most issues, their rankings did not differ substantially from those given by Tea Partiers.

The Tea Party certainly represents a group of individuals who see economic issues as exceedingly important, but their general organization of issue priorities—with economic issues and repealing Obamacare at the top, immigration, terror, and unemployment in the middle, and social issues at the bottom—mirrors that of Establishment Republicans. They differ mainly on the intensity with which they regard these issues as important. This indicates that the key distinction between the Tea Party and the Republican Party is one of valence. Tea Partiers want action on traditionally conservative issues yet view the Republican Party as insufficiently conservative and unworthy of their trust.

3.6 Conclusion

Why did the Tea Party mobilize to further economic conservatism in the face of a major party that champions fiscal responsibility? Because, to Tea Partiers, the Republican Party did not reliably champion conservative fiscal policy. Tea Partiers perceived the Republican Party to be the perpetrator of a massive bait-and-switch, using the rhetoric of economic conservatism but differing very little from the Demo-
cratic Party in its spending patterns. The combination of Tea Partiers’ loss of trust in the Republican Party and the heightened importance of conservative issues to them provided the impetus for contesting the Republican Party rather than wholeheartedly supporting it.

This argument raises questions about distrust, especially about the intersection of ideological extremism and distrust. Political science literature on distrust is only sparsely developed, mainly focusing on citizen distrust of government or specific branches of government (Citrin 1974; Hetherington 2005; Levi and Stoker 2000). Often, movements exhibiting high levels of distrust towards the government eschew applied political solutions, preferring to work outside of the system, as with the New Left and Occupy Wall Street. Unlike these groups, the Tea Party’s strategy and identity are bound up with the party system.

Although Tea Partiers speak of their distrust for establishment politicians, they ultimately work for solutions within the framework of the existing partisan system. As indicated by the interview responses, the energy behind the Tea Party was born of a moment when American conservatives were angry about changes brought about by Obama and Congressional Democrats and to some degree blamed these events on the insufficient conservatism of the Republican Party of George W. Bush or John McCain. Their goal was never to revolutionize the political system, but instead to work within it for the creation of a Republican Party that it can trust to be sufficiently conservative.
Chapter 4

From FreedomWorks to Grassroots: Who is the Tea Party, and What is its Network?

It is difficult to establish whether the Tea Party movement has leaders, and if so, who they are. Equally difficult is deciphering whether certain organizations and figures count as *Tea Party conservatives*, and if so, what differentiates them from other conservatives. This is a movement that scorns leaders, yet seems capable of organizing behind candidates in primaries and state nominating conventions. It claims to depart from establishment conservatism, but it does not offer a clear set of criteria for what it means to be part of the Tea Party. These apparent contradictions make understanding the Tea Party’s identity challenging at best.

The value of uncovering its identity is not limited to this particular movement in US politics. Inasmuch as the Tea Party contains elite voices, it presents another way to examine the influence of elites on movement formation and ideology. Like a political party, the Tea Party contains a mixture of elites, activists, informed sympathizers, and less informed sympathizers. The Tea Party’s distinctiveness stems from the heavy involvement of its activists. Although literature on parties and movements includes some mention of activists (see Carmines and Stimson 1989; Cohen et al. 2008), the role of activists in movement organizational structure remains under examined. The Tea Party allows for the investigation of a strong activist component in a movement, and its impact on the movement’s leadership and structure.
This chapter approaches the question of elites and activists by analyzing an original social network dataset of local Tea Party groups. Utilized in the study of political institutions and political parties (Box-Steffensmeier and Christensen 2014; Cho and Fowler 2010; Fowler 2006; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2010), terrorist networks (Krebs 2002), historical movements (see Diani and McAdams 2003), and even contemporary movements on the left (Heaney and Rojas 2011), network analysis is uniquely suited for inquiry about the relationships among actors in political movements. The Tea Party is no exception, and its use of the Internet for organization and information dissemination makes information about its networking activities highly visible. Drawing from these websites, the network analyzed in this chapter shows connections between Tea Party websites and the other organizations, groups, and actors to which they link.

Two features of this network are key. First, elite actors do exist in the network, and they are largely Tea Party-affiliated actors. Their centrality to the network does not provide information about their leadership, but it illuminates which voices are core to the Tea Party. Second, regional clusters of Tea Party groups dominate the network. While most of the groups seem to be listening to the same few people, they organize in smaller subsets around local issues. This analysis shows the Tea Party structure mirroring that of a major political party, with most of its leadership occurring at the national level and its variation occurring locally. Of specific relevance to this dissertation, this network is one we might expect to see from a party within a party. Chapter 1 of this dissertation explains this theory in more detail. At minimum, a party within a party is an entity that co-opts the apparatuses of an existing party to remake that party from within. The Tea Party is the first movement to embrace contesting its host party (in primaries and otherwise) as its main strategy.
4.1 Motivation

The motivations for this chapter are twofold. First, a network analysis of the Tea Party will enable a better understanding of the interaction of activists and elites in movements such as the Tea Party. Second, this chapter addresses what a party within a party’s network might look like, and how it differs from alternative networks.

Tea Party

The Tea Party’s identity is difficult to analyze because of limitations both with existing data and current methods of analysis. Existing views of the Tea Party highlight at least two ways in which its identity is observed. Some conceptualize the movement primarily as an astroturf phenomenon wherein elites are the main actors. In this perspective, the Tea Party is engineered, guided, and funded by conservative political operatives like the Koch brothers. Others, such as members of local Tea Party groups, insist on the movement’s grassroots nature. Many resent the inside-the-beltway elites associated with major Tea Party organizations, and chafe at the suggestion that their efforts are dictated by these elites. Further complicating matters are episodes, such as David Brat’s May 2014 defeat of Eric Cantor, where the grassroots groups involve themselves (sometimes successfully) in political contests without the help of the astroturf organizers.

Data that could illuminate the identity of the movement has been difficult to obtain. Data exist on campaign spending and sponsorship by Tea Party associated PACs (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012), but looking primarily to this data invokes an assumption that elite-level activity holds the answer to the Tea Party’s identity. Data on local groups, their activities, and members also exist, although much more
sparsely (Skocpol and Willamson 2012). Constructing and analyzing a Tea Party network dataset provides the first opportunity to study these two elements in tandem.

**Elites**

Decades of scholarship document the influence of elites on American politics. Intellectual elites influence the ideology of political parties (Noel 2014). Generally, elites shape public opinion (Zaller 1992), often by focusing on certain issues that benefit them (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Riker 1986) or by framing issues in a particular way, sometimes with effects that persist over time (see Carmines and Stimson 1989; Druckman, Fein and Leeper 2012; Kellstedt 2003). It is likely that Tea Party members, whether sympathizers in the mass public or movement activists, also receive opinion cues from some elite sources. Who constitutes the Tea Party elite, however, remains unclear.

Beyond uncovering who exerts elite influence over the movement, we wish to understand the interaction between Tea Party activists and elites. Zaller (1992) and others have noted differences in the way high information and low information voters respond to cues from elites, but no one has yet examined how activists, or a movement dominated by activists, might respond to elites. Even if a clear set of elites exists in the Tea Party, whether activists in the movement follow these elites remains an open question.

**Party Within a Party or Something Else?**

If a party within a party is indeed a unique strategic option for movements, and if the Tea Party primarily utilizes this strategy, then we might expect it to organize in a manner that furthers its achievement of party-like electoral goals. A party within a party, we recall, mimics the structure and goals of a major party (see Chapter 1).
It differs from the major party in that it does not possess its own organizational apparatus. Instead, it works within the major party to achieve electoral and policy victories. If we were to map the network of a party within a party, we might expect to see a something that mirrors a major party. A party’s network might show central voices speaking on national elections and issues, with local party chapters led by activists to address local and regional issues. Similarly, we might expect a party within a party’s network to feature key leaders who address national issues as well as containing substantial local and regional variation.

It is possible that the Tea Party could be explained alternatively. It could be broken into particular ideological factions (libertarians, Christian conservatives, etc.) Heaney and Rojas’s work on the Anti-War movement provides a glimpse at a network with several distinct clusters (even factions) corresponding to different Anti-War interest groups. No central leadership exists, nor does variation occur along regional lines (see Heaney and Rojas 2007; Heaney and Rojas 2014). In line with the grassroots explanation, it could instead follow the loose structure of a social movement, where activists occasionally protest together, but follow no clear organizing principle or set of leaders. Finally, if the Tea Party is dominated by astroturf organizations, we could expect a network organized around a few popular figures. In this sort of structure (called a core-periphery structure), Tea Party groups would have very few connections to one another, and would only be part of the network because they all linked to the same elites. Example of this sort of network would be a tweet and retweet network (where retweeters are only connected by their connection to the original tweeter), or a friendship network held together by some popular figures (see Gonzalez-Bailon et al. 2011; Rombach et al. 2013).
Hypotheses

This chapter considers various explanations of the movement’s identity, testing each in turn.

1. **Ideological factions**: The Tea Party draws from multiple different ideological sources, including but not limited to Christian conservatives, libertarians, anti-immigration groups, and establishment conservatives. The Tea Party network might contain pockets of like-minded groups associating closely within each group and sparsely across groups.

   - What to expect: A network with distinct ideological communities.\(^1\)

2. **Amorphous activists**: The Tea Party may be a relatively unorganized group of activists with no allegiance to a particular set of leaders or ideology. Rather, as Zernike (2010) argued, it could simply be a collection of conservative citizens who are ‘boiling mad’.

   - What to expect: A network with no central leaders and no clear logic to intra-network divisions.

3. **National structure**: The influence of the Koch brothers and related D.C. interest groups on the Tea Party leads many to argue that the movement is merely part of a large-scale interest group operation. A Tea Party network might show local groups with little autonomy or regional variation, instead distinguished by their allegiance to the agenda of national interest groups and figureheads.

\(^1\)As explained in the next section, ‘communities’ in network analysis refers to clusters of nodes with many ties to each other within a group but few ties outside of the group.
• What to expect: A network dominated by a few central leaders (with a core-periphery structure) and no significant regional or ideological variation in communities.

4. **Federated Party structure (party within a party):** Finally, the Tea Party might be explained, as this dissertation argues, as a party within a party. It might mimic the federated structure of a major political party, with national leadership accompanied by regional and local branches addressing issues at those levels.

• What to expect: Some national leadership accompanied by multiple communities associated with different states and localities.

• One caveat: the existence of a federated party structure could simply signal that the Tea Party is an activist arm working within (rather than against) the Republican Party. To rule out this possibility it will also be necessary to remove all political party groups and resources from the network and analyze a Tea Party-only instantiation.

4.2 **The Data**

There are many conceivable ways to analyze the Tea Party network. Potential networks include connections among Tea Party elites and interest groups, connections among Tea Party politicians, connections between Tea Party politicians and their donors, or connections between groups of which Tea Party members are a part (say, the local Tea Party and the local Republican Party). For various reasons, many of these are difficult or impossible to instantiate. One of the most relevant ways to analyze the Tea Party is also the least obscure: an analysis of its online network. This
sort of network attends to the impact of the Internet age on this movement, and to
the transparency of its organization, particularly at the activist level.

The dataset analyzed in this chapter is thus one of the network of Tea Party web-
sites. To illustrate the importance of the Tea Party’s online network, we return to the
May 2014 story of David Brat in Virginia’s 7th Congressional District. Eric Cantor
was presumed safe in his seat as the House Majority leader in a solidly Republican
District. To Establishment Republicans, Cantor seemed to be part of the Tea Party.
Both the national Republican Party and the national Tea Party PACs turned their
attention to more interesting races. Brat nonetheless managed an upset, taking the
Republican nomination, and later the district. How did he do it? With the help of
numerous local Tea Party groups concentrated in and around Virginia’s 7th Congres-
sional District.

Coordinating and mobilizing via their websites, this activist arm of the Tea Party
achieved a surprising electoral victory which one would only see by looking at the open
channel through which these activists communicate with one another: the Internet.
Tea Party groups advertise local events, opportunities for mobilization, and other
groups events on these websites. They also provide their members with reading list,
links, and countless other resources to inform them on their road towards activism.
The online network captured in this dataset is thus integral to the story of the Tea
Party’s organization.

DATA ATTRIBUTES

This dataset contains two types of observations, or nodes in social network analysis:
1) Tea Party organizations, and 2) resources to which they link. The links between Tea
Party organizations and these resources are called edges. The network’s structure is
determined largely by which resources receive the most links and which groups link to
the same resources. This network contains 665 unique local Tea Party groups. These
groups altogether link to 5,521 unique resources.

The collection of these links took place between May 2013 and May 2014. First,
I compiled a comprehensive list of local Tea Party websites, starting with popular
aggregator websites, such as Tea Party Patriots, FreedomWorks, Tea Party 9-11, and
TeaParty.org. After establishing a base list, I then searched each website on the list
for links to other Tea Party groups in their state or locality, resulting in a substantial
expansion the list. Finally, I performed google searches for Tea Party groups by state,
adding more groups to the list. I finalized the list compilation when all google searches
began to return duplicates of sites already on the list.

Of this list of over 1,000 Tea Party groups, I eliminated those groups that only
used Twitter, Facebook, password protected Ning sites, Meetup sites, or did not in any
way link to any other websites on their sites. This produced the final list of 665 local
Tea Party groups to include in the network. In the second stage of data collection, I
scraped information about any link posted on one of the Tea Party websites. Most
of the sites contained a clear section of “resources”, “blogroll”, “further reading”, “like-
minded groups”, and so forth. Others linked more informally on their main page to
a few groups. Once collected, I standardized the spelling of resource names. This
produced the final set of 5,521 resources.

Figure 1 shows a portion of this data in network form (in network terms, this sort
of dataset is an ‘edgelist’, or a list of connections between two types of observations).
Each Tea Party group is listed once for every link it sends. These links are to major
national Tea Party groups, conservative figures, news sources, local Tea Party groups,
and other resources.

Figure 2 provides a graphical presentation of this network. The points represent
the nodes (Tea Party groups and resources), and the lines show the edges (connections
Figure 4.1: Portion of Tea Party Edge List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Patriot's Stand</td>
<td>Tea Party Patriots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Patriot's Stand</td>
<td>Project Vote Smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Patriot's Stand</td>
<td>American History Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Americans for Limited Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Downsize DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>FreedomWorks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Free Enterprise Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Liberty Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>MegaVote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>My Gov Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Patriot Action Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Pop Vox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Project Vote Smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Tea Party Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Tea Party Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Tea Party Patriots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>Tea Party Sunshine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Tea Party</td>
<td>A Patriot's Stand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
between nodes). The most prominent feature of this graph is the size of the network, which translates into a visually dense graphic. Although each of the node points is colored white with a thin border, the sheer number of nodes and edges in this graph accumulate to create what looks like a dark mass of connections.

Because it is difficult to decipher much of substance from a network graph of this size, we turn to network statistics (Table 1). The first two statistics, unique organizations and unique resources, are the number of organizations and resources in the network, as discussed above. The following statistics allow us to answer other questions about the network, including whether the network is dominated by a few key actors or if power is more diffuse, if most actors are reciprocating ties to one another, and the number of sub-groups. I explain each in broad terms here, with a fuller explanation of network-specific terms in the appendix.

The \textbf{degree} and \textbf{InDegree} statistics provide information about the power structure in the network. They can also be interpreted as providing information on which actors control the flow of information through a network. For our purposes, the InDegree statistic provides the most relevant information. This statistic indicates which

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Tea Party Blog Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Degree Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number isolate communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Social Network Statistics
Tea Party Networks

Figure 4.2: Social Network Graph
Tea Party resources are linked to the most frequently be Tea Party websites, and it will later help answer questions about national leadership and dominant voices. The maximum InDegree score is 237, which means that 237 out of the 665 local Tea Party groups share a link to the same resource.

To put the 237 score in perspective, we can examine the degree distribution of the network. If 200 Tea Party groups consistently link to the same resources in this network, then 237 is a less meaningful number. If the average number of links received by any given resource is less than 10, however, 237 means that certain resources are much more popular than others. Figure 3 shows that the majority of observations in the entire network sense and receive very few links. The number of observations sending or receiving more than 4 links is so small that the bars are not distinguishable from 0 on this scale. The gap between the most popular and the average observations in the network signals that: 1) overall, connections among observations in this network are not very dense, and 2) the resources receiving very high degree scores will provide important insight about information flows in the overall network.

Another statistic, modularity, and a corresponding network component, community detection, will be key to the analysis that follows. A network with low mean degree distribution and low density could have several causes. First, Tea Party groups within the network could only be residually connected to other groups by ties to a few central groups. Second, the network could be explained as a collection of myriad smaller communities of Tea Party groups, which are densely connected to one another but sparsely connected to other groups. The first explanation would support a core-periphery argument, while the latter could support a party within a party or an interest group argument.

A key way to tell if the network is simply sparsely connected or if many smaller communities are present is to look at the modularity statistic. A higher modularity
statistic indicates the presence of multiple clumps within the network that are densely
connected within and sparsely connected without. In network terms, these clumps are
called communities. A very low modularity statistic, in contrast, means that the net-
work does not proliferate with sub-groups. The modularity statistic here is 0.45. While
no tried-and-true standard for a high modularity statistic exists, 45% modularity is
relatively high, indicating the presence of multiple sub-groups (communities) within
the network.

To confirm the presence of multiple communities, I ran a community detection
algorithm on the network, which detects network observations that cluster together,
and then returns a list of these clusters (communities) and their members. This algo-

Figure 4.3: Tea Party Network Degree Statistic

To confirm the presence of multiple communities, I ran a community detection
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algorithm shows that the network contains 272 communities of varying sizes. The mere
presence of communities could support many of the hypotheses, meaning that further
analysis will be necessary of what guides the clustering of various observations in the
network. The remainder of the chapter will address why certain observations in the

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analysis will be necessary of what guides the clustering of various observations in the
network. The remainder of the chapter will address why certain observations in the
network are ‘members’ of the same community, and how the communities differ. In network analysis, observations that are part of a community are referred to as ‘members’ of that community, terminology that will be used throughout the rest of this chapter.

From these basic statistics we gain a picture of the Tea Party network as one that is large, loosely interconnected, having a few more central groups, and containing multiple communities of groups. This initial snapshot works against the core-periphery explanation, but a full evaluation of the hypotheses requires an investigation into the substance of these statistics.

4.3 Evaluating the Claims

This section considers each of the potential explanations—ideological factions, amorphous activists, national structure, and federated party structure—in turn.

Ideological Factions

As discussed earlier, community detection provides one of the best ways to discover sub-groups in the network, and will help assess whether divisions in the network are the result of ideological factions. Community detection algorithms found that all observations in the network cluster into 272 communities. Communities in network analysis are groups whose members have much in common with one another, but little in common (or few ties) to other members of the network. If ideological divisions characterize the Tea Party network, then the organizing principle of membership in these different communities should be ideology. In a Tea Party dominated by ideological factions, different communities would exist for religious activists, libertarian activists,
activists associated with different groups within the Tea Party movement (e.g. Glenn Beck’s 9-12 project), and so forth.

Figures 4-6 display the communities in this network as grouped by organizing principle. Out of all 272 communities, only 7 contained more than 100 members. Figure 4 shows the 237 ‘smaller’ (under 100 member) communities for which region is the organizing principle. These regional communities account for 89.43% of the smaller communities in the network. Classification of a community’s organizing principle (e.g. region, ideological faction, blogs, and so forth) required that all or most observations in that community be primarily characterized by the same feature.

For region, then, to be considered a community’s primary organizing principle, a majority of a given community’s members had to fall within a single state or region.\(^3\) In most cases, all of a community’s members were particular to one state, if not to a certain county within that state. Table 2 provides a snapshot of a typical community. Community 45 is one of the ‘small’ communities in the network, classified as within region 7. The core of community 45 is Hood County, TX, and in particular the Hood County Tea Party. This community, as is typical of most communities in the network, is oriented around the local precinct and state elections.

For ease of graphical presentation, I aggregated these state and sub-state community classifications to the regional level.\(^4\) Labels for each region mark the number

\(^3\)For cases where not all of a community’s members were easily categorized, I classified each community based on characteristics of its 20 most central members.

\(^4\)The regional groupings follow those of the US Census regional divisions. Division 1: New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont); Division 2: Mid-Atlantic (New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania); Division 3: East North Central (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin); Division 4: West North Central (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota); Division 5: South Atlantic (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington D.C., and West Virginia); Division 6: East South Central (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee); Division 7: West South Central (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas); Division 8: Mountain (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community 45: Hood County, TX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Sharia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Watchdog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas GOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood County Tea Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass Roots Texans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precinct Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elephant Watcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God The Original Intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions for America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Honest Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood County GOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood County Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Texas Tea Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rally Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Colony Tea Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Civil Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Inside Rankings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Budget Busters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Sample Membership of a Regional Community
of communities within it and the state that contains the largest community in that region (this could also be interpreted as the most dominant state in the Tea Party network in that region). Of these 237 small regional communities, the largest number of communities (44) fall in the East-North Central Region, dominated by states like Pennsylvania. 36 communities exist in the South Atlantic region, which is dominated by Florida. The remaining communities are dispersed relatively equally among the other seven regions. Not only does region appear to be a powerful organizing principle in this network, but the Tea Party is not primarily concentrated in any one region. Somewhat like a party, its activist out posts are evenly dispersed across the country.

Figure 5 shows the 28 small communities that are not organized based on region. Of these 28, ideological factions characterize nine. These include communities pri-

(Figure 4.4: Tea Party Network Small Community Distribution)

New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming); Division 9: Pacific (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington).
Figure 4.5: Tea Party Network Small Community Distribution (other)

marily oriented around religion, immigration, objectivism, and libertarianism. The other 28 small communities are generically conservative, made up of popular figures, newspapers, or blogs. Four communities correspond with informational resources, including historical texts and contemporary civic resources.

The seven large communities (with over 100 members) in the network are also comprised of regional, conservative, informational, and factional resources, as shown in Figure 6. The largest community contains the most central voices in the network (detected by InDegree), about which more will be said later. Two out of the remaining large communities are again characterized by a state (Florida) or groups and resources
from three of the most dominant states in the network (Florida, Arizona, and Texas). Only one out of the largest communities is primarily distinguished by ideology: a community organized around Glenn Beck’s 9-12 group, which closely associates with the Tea Party, but refuses to claim the Tea Party mantle. Although not all Glenn Beck associated Tea Party groups in the dataset fall within this one community, it reveals that some Glenn Beck groups only link to other Glenn Beck resources.

Although ideological factions exist in the Tea Party, they are not the primary determinant of its structure. This analysis of the characteristics of communities in the network reveals that some members of the network are indeed ideological, linking
only to others who subscribe to their particular ideology (whether Christianity or objectivism). In general, being part of the same geographic area is the primary indicator of whether certain members of the network will cluster together. Of the 272 communities in the network, 87.86% are based on shared locality.

AMORPHOUS ACTIVISTS

The dominance of regionalism in the network rules out the explanation of ideological factions. It also shows that the Tea Party is organizing primarily around local and state issues and elections. One explanation for the proliferation of regional organization is that the Tea Party is truly a grassroots phenomenon. The network abounds in activists with various local focuses, but might lack national direction or leadership.

The InDegree statistic discussed earlier indicated that a few observations in the network enjoyed an outsized amount of popularity. These observations can be interpreted as the most central to the network, since at least 1/3 of Tea Party groups are linking to them. If national leadership exists, it will be found in these central observations.

Figure 7 shows the observations that received the most links from Tea Party groups. The most popular, Tea Party Patriots, has an InDegree (number of links) of 237. The 20th most popular resource (Townhall, an online blog of the Heritage Foundation) received almost 60 links.

Although Tea Party groups are organizing locally, they are also linking in high numbers to the same set of national groups and figures. The most popular of these are associated with the Tea Party. Tea Party Patriots, Glenn Beck’s 9-12 Project, FreedomWorks, and Americans for Prosperity are four of the largest national Tea Party ‘umbrella’ organizations. Other top resources, such as Glenn Beck himself, his publication The Blaze, the conservative website Breitbart, and blogger Michelle
Malkin are strongly associated with the Tea Party movement. A portrait of national Tea Party leadership emerges from this list. Not all Tea Party groups listen to these national groups to the same degree, but when Tea Party groups do turn their attention to elites, they follow a collection of Tea Party-specific figures.

A smaller group of top resources are more traditionally conservative: Heritage Foundation, Drudge Report, Cato Institute, Fox News, and Red State. A final subset of resources fit with the Tea Party’s identity as a movement geared towards civic activism: the Constitution, representative contact information for the US Senate and the US House, and the Declaration of Independence.
A picture begins to emerge of a movement that contains regionally clustered groups who generally listen to the same voices, most of which are explicitly affiliated with the Tea Party movement. The extent of the leadership of these groups is difficult to measure from centrality statistics, but it seems that the movement is not bereft of national leadership.

**National Structure**

The presence of this national leadership could support an astroturf explanation. It might be that the only thing uniting Tea Party activists is allegiance to these national voices. This would lead to a network that follows a ‘core-periphery’ structure. It would contain a few popular groups at the center, and other groups would be united only by their connections to these central groups, like spokes in a wheel.

Of all of the potential explanations, the national leadership is most easily ruled out by the features of this network. A core-periphery network typically stands in contrast to a network with high modularity (e.g. multiple communities) (Rombach et al. 2013) because the two types of networks draw from opposite structural forces. An example of a core-periphery network would be a social circle with two tiers of individuals: a few popular and well-networked friends, and multiple individuals who are only part of the circle via their connection to the popular friends. In contrast, a high-modularity network could look like a high school. A few well-known students would exist, but most students would mainly associate with a clique of other students who share their interests or hobbies. These cliques would show up in network analysis as distinct communities.

As discussed earlier, the modularity score for this Tea Party network is relatively high: 0.45, and the network contain 272 distinct communities. These communities not only exist, but are organized by a non-national principle: regionalism. Although this
network is not that of a directionless grassroots movement, it also does not correspond with what we might see if the Tea Party were a truly astroturf, top-down phenomenon.

Federated Party Structure

A final explanation remains: the Tea Party network’s combination of activist organization at the state and local levels and generally recognized national leaders looks somewhat like a party (Beck 1974; Crowder-Meyer 2010; Green and Coffey 2010). It could be the case that the Tea Party has organized like a party because, as is the argument of this dissertation, it is a party within a party. It shares the electoral and policy goals of a major party, and may be organizing in a way to best achieve these goals.

The remainder of this section examines three facets of what it would mean for the Tea Party to be a party within a party. First, I present evidence that it not only organizes regionally, but that this organization occurs at the level of the Congressional District.

Second, I demonstrate that, like a party, the Tea Party is more active in some districts than others. If its goal is to elect Tea Party representatives by remaking the Republican Party and primarying its candidates, then we might expect the most activity in two types of seats: moderately Democratic seats where the Tea Party feels it can provide the voice of conservatism, and somewhat safe Republican seats where it sees opportunities to primary existing Republicans. We should expect to see fewer Tea Party groups in seats that are extremely Democrat or extremely Republican. In the former, the likelihood of large numbers of Tea Party activists living in the district is low. In the latter, the need for a conservative counter-movement may seem less stark.
Finally, I verify that the Tea Party is in fact acting independently of the Republican Party, rather than merely serving as its activist arm. I do so by briefly analyzing a version of the network with Republican Party observations removed.

**Variation at Congressional District Level**

Community detection demonstrated that the Tea Party network features activist groups who organize at the regional, if not at the state level. The distribution of Tea Party groups in the network by state can be seen in Figure 8.

This does not establish, however, that the Tea Party is organizing at a local level, much less that its identity is that of a party within a party. To address this, I geocoded the Tea Party groups in the network at the Congressional District level. This map is found in Figure 9. Some Congressional Districts contain no Tea Party groups, while others contain 10 or more. On this map, districts with more Tea Party groups are shown in darker colors, while those with fewer are shown in lighter colors.

This map shows both regional and local variation in the Tea Party. Not only do some states have more groups than others, but different regions within each state contain different numbers of Tea Party groups (e.g. New York’s 23rd Congressional District, California’s 46th and 48th Congressional Districts in Orange County contain more Tea Party groups than other regions of each state). This map shows that Tea Party groups (not including the resources to which they link) are structured in a way that cannot be captured except by looking at variation within states.

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5Note: these are only Tea Party groups that included in this network. This is not the most comprehensive or only list of Tea Party groups, but it is enough to give a sense of the distribution of Tea Parties across the US.
Figure 4.8: Tea Party Network Map of State Patterns
Figure 4.9: Tea Party Network Map of Congressional District Patterns
Tea Party Groups and District Characteristics

It is difficult to fully grasp patterns in the distribution of Tea Party groups from viewing a map. If the Tea Party were merely a reaction to liberals, then more activity would occur in Democratic districts. If it is simply a response to conservatism in a district, then we would see more groups in highly Republican districts. If the Tea Party is, instead, a party within a party, then it would concentrate its activity in districts where it thinks it can have the most electoral impact: barely safe Democratic seats and Republican seats that are safe enough to warrant primary challenges of Republicans.

The relationship between the number of Tea Party groups in a district (0-10) and the party identification of their member of Congress (as of the 113th Congress, the Congress during which the Tea Party network data was collected) is plotted in Figure 10. This plot presents two patterns. First, Tea Party groups are relatively evenly concentrated between Democratic and Republican districts. Second, very few districts contain more than 6 Tea Party groups, but these districts are Republican. Like a party, Tea Party groups are present in most districts, but slightly more present in conservative districts.

A representative’s party identification does not tell the entire store of a district’s ideology, however. Figure 11 depicts the relationship between number of Tea Party groups in a district and that district’s percentage of Republican vote share in the 2012 presidential election. Again, more reliably Republican districts contain more Tea Party groups, but this relationship is not monotonic. The number of Tea Party groups spikes in districts with 60% Republican vote share, but drops off again in extremely conservative districts (districts with 40% and 80% Republican vote share look remarkably similar).
Figure 4.10: Scatterplot of Tea Party Groups by Representative’s Party ID
Figure 4.11: Scatterplot of Tea Party Groups by GOP Presidential Vote Share in 2012
We may wish to understand more precisely the impact of a district’s conservatism and its probability of having no Tea Party groups, some Tea Party groups, or the maximum number of Tea Party groups. To clarify the relationship between Republican vote share and the number of Tea Party groups I performed an ordered logistic regression. Number of Tea Party groups (ranging from 1-10) was the dependent variable, and percentage of Republican vote share in 2012 per district (Nir 2012) served as the key independent variable. I included a binary indicator of the Representative’s party identification as well. Figure 12 shows predicted probabilities for the maximum and minimum levels of Republican vote share and their impact on number of Tea Party groups.

The graph of maximum Republican vote share shows that highly conservative districts, as we suspected, contain fewer (0-5) Tea Party groups. Districts that are less ardently conservative are more likely to contain larger numbers of Tea Party groups. This is not to say that Tea Party groups mainly concentrate in extremely Democratic districts. The graph of minimum Republican vote share shows a similar pattern. Extremely liberal districts predict 0-1 Tea Party groups. As with the initial scatter plots, presence of Tea Party groups is not predicted by Congressional district extremity (in either ideological direction). Rather, Tea Party activity is greatest in districts where the Tea Party could have an electoral impact. Again, this corresponds with the behavior we might expect if the Tea Party’s identity were that of a party within a party.

**Activist Branch of Republican Party?**

Finally, we must rule out the possibility that this party-like structure is not the result of the Tea Party’s identity as a party within a party, but is created by an attachment to the Republican Party. The Tea Party could look like a party because it is the
Figure 4.12: Predicted Probability Plots of Impact of GOP Presidential Vote Share on Likelihood of Tea Party Group Formation
## Characteristics of Tea Party Blog Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Full Network Statistic</th>
<th>Tea Party Only Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique Organizations</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Resources</td>
<td>5,521</td>
<td>5,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree max</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Degree Max</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.00036</td>
<td>0.00038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modularity</td>
<td>0.4503</td>
<td>0.4401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number communities</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number isolate communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Comparative Network Statistics

Activist wing of the Republican Party, organizing around the state and local offices of the Republican Party. Here I present analysis of a separate network where all major party groups and organizations (e.g. Novato County Republican Women; Maricopa County GOP, etc.) were removed.

Table 3 compares basic statistics for the two networks. The ‘full’ network statistics are the same as those presented earlier, and the ‘Tea Party only’ network statistics correspond with the network that remains after the removal of all major party groups. In total, only 178 major party resources existed in the network, resulting in a small overall decline in the number of unique resources. Correspondingly, almost no difference exists in any of the key statistics except for in the number of communities. 21 more communities exist in the Tea Party only network, 13 of which are new ‘isolate’ communities (with only one member). This means that out of the entire network, only 13 observations were connected to the rest of the network solely by major party groups.
Finally, it is possible that removing the major party groups alters the composition of the network communities. To rule out this additional possibility, I coded the main organizing principle of the communities in this smaller network as well.

The breakdown of community types differs only negligibly between the two networks. The Tea Party only network has slightly more regional and conservative communities, and slightly fewer communities based on factions and figures, but the overall percentages between the two networks indicate that major party groups were in no
way integral to the structure of the original network. The federated structure stems from the structure of the Tea Party as a movement rather than from ties to the Republican Party.

It seems, then, that Tea Party groups organize locally. Combined with the regional patterns found in community detection, these analyses present the following picture of the Tea Party: although heeding key national voices, activists work with other local organizations on local, state, and regional issues. Rather than being a movement composed of a few ideological factions, disorganized activists, or strong national leadership, the Tea Party is a party within a party.

4.4 Conclusion

Two aspects of the Tea Party’s identity emerge from this analysis of the Tea Party network. First, a Tea Party elite exists. The detection of certain key elites in the network does not mean that other elites are not important to the Tea Party, that these elites agree with one another, or that all members takes cues from these elites, but it does tell us the identity of key elites. Tea Party elites are, by and large, Tea Party affiliated individuals and umbrella groups; the very groups and individuals that have been guiding the Tea Party since its inception. The presence of generically conservative elites in the list confirms that the Tea Party is indeed a movement that aligns closely with conservatism. Finally, the dominance of civic resources in the top centrality lists underscores the Tea Party’s mission as one of political change. Tea Partiers do not simply want to listen to elites talk about important issues, they also wish to act through political channels on these issues.

Second, the presence of multiple distinct communities signals that Tea Party activists are organizing into subgroups based on some principle beyond elite direction.
The discovery that these subgroups are regionally and locally concentrated and that they vary by Congressional District shows that the Tea Party has organized itself much like a party would.

Based on these points, I argue that the Tea Party’s identity is that of a party within a party. If the Tea Party were indeed a party within a party, using the Republican Party to achieve its own electoral goals, then we might expect exactly what we find: a movement that mirrors the Republican party’s federated structure while maintaining an identity distinct from the Republican party. Like a major party, it draws information and resources from national leaders who focus on national issues. Like a party, it possesses state and local arms with varying agendas and degrees of autonomy. The best explanation for the Tea Party’s identity, then, is that it is a movement that acts like a party because, as I argue throughout this dissertation, it shares the goals traditionally associated with a party.

Finally, this chapter provides a rare look at the actions of political activists. The unique degree of transparency in Tea Party websites and local activities allows for the mapping of this network, something that is not possible in a study of a major party or interest group (whose websites are more carefully curated) or a political movement with less of an organizational apparatus (which may not have websites at all). Analysis of this network is thus a step to filling in the vacuum of scholarship on political activists. We find that these activists do follow cues from elites, as we have long expected (Zaller 1992), but that they filter and act on these cues in an independent fashion. 1/3 of the Tea Party groups in the network self-report listening to the same elites, but these groups, as well as the 2/3 who do not align themselves with these elites, choose where and in which contests to mobilize.
4.5 Additional Information on Network Statistics

More on Degree and Indegree

An indication of how information and power flow through a network, Degree and Indegree statistics are computed by counting the number of ties possessed by any given node. High numbers on Degree statistics mean that a few nodes are power brokers, while lower numbers mean that power is relatively evenly dispersed. In this network, the maximum degree number is 280, meaning that at least 1 node has 280 ties. Indegree statistics follow a similar logic. These measure which of the receiving nodes are the most central. Here, this is done by counting the number of ties sent by the Tea Party groups (sending nodes) to the resources (receiving nodes). The maximum number of ties for any resource is 237, which is also close to the overall maximum density score. The Indegree statistic highlights which resources in particular are central to the network.

Because this is a directed network, the same nodes are the most central using both Degree and Indegree measures. Other centrality measures (Betweenness, etc.) also yield a list of the same central nodes. Indegree is reported in this chapter for theoretical reasons, because we mainly wish to examine the centrality of certain receiving nodes.

Density

Although the network graph shown in figure 2 appears dense to the naked eye, density in network analysis is a term of art. A network is only dense if a large number of actors send and receive connections to one another. In this network, most Tea Party groups are not linking to one another, but to national and local resources, and most of these resources do not link back to the Tea Party groups (this is called a directed network).
A network where no actors reciprocated any links would have 0 density. In this case, the network has a low (but non-zero) density score of 0.00036, which means that .036% of possible connections are reciprocated. This .036% comes from the ability of Tea Party groups to act both as groups and resources. For example, many Tea Party groups will link to other local Tea Party groups on their website, creating some reciprocity. This provides little substantive insight into the network other than assuring us that we must look beyond the graph for answers.

**Community Detection Algorithm**

After experimenting with various communities detection algorithms in the igraph package in R (Fastgreedy, Edge-betweenness communities, etc), I report result from the Walktrap algorithm. Because of the size of the network, algorithms reached a resolution limit. Of the less memory-intensive algorithms, Walktrap is regarded to be the best at discovering small communities within a network. It does so by a process of random walks throughout the subgraphs in a network (see Pons and Latapy 2005).
Chapter 5

A Party Platform? Disentangling Tea Party Ideology

Chapter 1 presented the possibility of understanding the Tea Party as a party within a party; a movement that shares the aims of a party but mobilizes within the auspices of an existing party to co-opt its machinery. Chapter 2 asked the most obvious question arising from this assertion: Why would the Tea Party co-opt the GOP rather than cooperating with it? There, I offered the explanation of distrust, an element of which was ideological distance. Chapter 3 turned to the question of who guides this strategy, presenting evidence that the Tea Party mimics the structure of a political party, guided by some national voices but with significant regional variation.

This final chapter addresses a topic hinted at in each that precedes it: Does the Tea Party have a coherent ideology, and if so, what is it? Part of the complication in answering this question arises from the seeming lack of a unifying principle in Tea Party ideology. Although Kirby and Ekins argued that libertarian economics undergirds Tea Party support (2011), most evidence points to a less organized ideology. As seen in Chapter 2 (and Abramowitz 2011), Tea Partiers take the more conservative position than their Establishment counterparts on nearly every issue. This has led some to suggest that the Tea Party does not possess a coherent ideology at all, but instead is a manifestation of conservative reactions to change and out-groups (see Parker and Barreto 2014).

This chapter neither takes issue with the findings of broad conservatism in previous chapters or with the lack of Tea Party coherence identified in other scholarship.
Instead, I aim to explain this breadth in terms of the Tea Party’s identity as an intra-party movement. In the context of the group-based theory of parties (Cohen et al. 2008), the Tea Party can be understood as a group of actors who are not adequately served by the aims of any existing group within the Republican Party. In response to what they perceive as being underserved by their party, these actors have created a separate organization of structures that mimic those of a traditional party. This imitation of a party structure extends to their ideology.

The broad ideological tent of the Tea Party bears closest resemblance to the platform approach of a political party. Much as the Democratic and Republican parties have increasingly fallen in line with broadly liberal and conservative ideologies (themselves products of coalitions, see Noel 2014), the Tea Party has united its coalition members—some libertarian, some religious, some ethnocentric, and others simply disaffected—under a broad ideological platform. The Tea Party does not seek to secure a few specific policy goals, as we might expect from an interest group or party faction, but rather to get the ‘right’ people in office in order to affect outcomes on a large range of policies.

This analysis of Tea Party ideology draws from two original datasets. The first is a collection of mission statements and over 42,000 blog posts from 1,053 local Tea Party groups across the nation, documenting issues of import to Tea Party groups between February 2009 and December 2015. Second, this chapter also examines the 35 depth interviews with Tea Party activists and elites. Both datasets give a picture of important issues to the Tea Party as described by Tea Party members in their own words. The investigation of both datasets relies on automated content analysis techniques.

Throughout, I argue that an attempt to explain the Tea Party’s ideology that does not take into account its identity will result in an inaccurate and overly-simplistic view
of the movement. The Tea Party does not possess a coherent ideology; rather, it holds positions on a range of issues, as a party does. If the Tea Party’s ideology is really akin to a party platform, we might expect to observe two things. First, rather than emphasizing one key issue (as an interest group or party faction might), Tea Party members will emphasize taking positions on a range of issues. Second, Tea Party members will emphasize the distinction of their group from the Republican Party in general. That is, they will not simply be regurgitating the Republican platform, but will be articulating their own platform in keeping with their identity as a distinct intra-party movement.

5.1 Coalition and Ideology

Explanations of the Tea Party’s ideology take one of two forms, each of which relies on tacit assumptions about the Tea Party’s identity. The first sort of explanation looks for a single, unifying issue in Tea Party ideology (e.g. Kirby and Ekins). These accounts implicitly place the Tea Party in the camp of single-issue focused movements, such as interest groups or party factions. Like the importance of suffrage to the early women’s movement or repealing Roe v. Wade to the Christian Right, a Tea Party as interest group or party faction ought to be distinguishable by a single issue. The best candidate for such an issue is, of course, fiscal discipline, expressed by Tea Party supporters in their concern for government spending, the budget, the debt, the size of government, or taxes.

The reduction of the Tea Party’s focus to a single issue domain would greatly simplify the task of explaining the Tea Party. As we saw in chapter 2, and as is documented in various other work on the Tea Party (Abramowitz 2011; Blum and Parker 2015; Parker and Barreto 2014; Skocpol and Williamson 2012), explaining the
Tea Party as a single-issue movement tends towards the Procrustean. Tea Partiers do care about economic issues, but they also hold strong positions on immigration, foreign policy, abortion, LGBT issues, education policy, and so forth. Any explanation of the Tea Party’s ideology must take into account their emphasis on issues in a variety of domains.

Accounts that acknowledge the breadth of the Tea Party’s ideological focus also make assumptions about the movement’s identity. Although not expressly stated, the accounts above all regard Tea Party supporters as a group of far-right Republicans. All see the Tea Party as distinguished by a different brand of conservatism than establishment Republicans, but lacking enough of a distinct focus to be regarded as a party faction or interest group. Most of these accounts seek primarily to explain the opinions or even psychology of group members, not to explain its identity.

This chapter picks up where these accounts have left off, arguing that understanding the Tea Party’s identity is integral to gaining a purchase on its ideology. The Tea Party is, indeed, a group of conservative individuals who align more closely with the Republican than with the Democratic Party, but who nonetheless see themselves as ideologically distinct. The theory of parties as coalitions of interest groups and activists (in other words, group-based instead of candidate centered, see Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008) helps illuminate this aspect of the Tea Party’s identity. In this framework, parties are coalition-based, and their candidates, as well as their ideology (see Noel 2014), are products of compromises and bundling between different groups in the coalitions.

This theory furthers understanding, not only of the Tea Party’s relationship with the Republican Party and its ideology, but also of the Tea Party’s ideology. Most broadly, we can see the Tea Party as a group, broadly within the Republican camp,
that saw itself as underserved by the existing groups in the coalitions. Why did it feel underrepresented? Because of the ideology of its members.

Internally, the Tea Party acts like a party in miniature. This group is made up of various groups of actors who care about different issues. Some are libertarian, some are religious, some are ethnocentric, and others simply do not like what they perceive as change that has happened too fast. The Tea Party’s ideology is the product of this coalition of smaller groups compromising to form a platform that stretches across various issues. Just as the platforms of the two major parties are not the product of ideological consistency, but of packaging by coalition merchants (Noel 2014), the ideology of the Tea Party is the product of compromises by these various discontented groups.

Viewing the Tea Party as a party within a party, an entity with its own coalition, yields two predictions for an examination of its ideology.

First, we should expect to see an ideological package that is in fact broad. Members should take positions on a range of issues that are important across the coalition.

– In keeping with the idea of Tea Partiers as underserved, we might expect them to emphasize issues that are not as much a part of ‘mainstream’ conservatism.

Second, we might expect to see Tea Partiers emphasizing their distinct identity from the Republican Party.

– This may take the form of asserting a Tea Party-specific activist or electoral mission rather than outright animosity towards the Republican Party.
5.2 Data and Methods

Datasets

Both datasets analyzed in this chapter measure ideology at the activist level. Until now, most analysis of the Tea Party and its ideology has relied on mass-level surveys with closed response formats. Such surveys measure responses on items of interest to the researcher, but artificially constrain respondents’ preferences. Further, these surveys rely on questions about respondents’ sympathy with or support of the Tea Party as proxies for Tea Party activism. While this captures important information about what Tea Party-sympathizing citizens might think, it does not capture the ideological preferences of those activists who participate in and lead local and national Tea Party groups. If we accept the idea of parties as coalitions of activists and intense policy demanders, measuring the voices of Tea Party activists is key.

Tea Party Websites

One barrier confronting data on the Tea Party, especially activist-level data (which is typically in the form of qualitative interviews), is national representativeness. To solve this problem, I analyze the first comprehensive dataset of all existing Tea Party websites (1,051), their missions statements, and their blog posts. This approach provides an understanding of what issues Tea Partiers emphasize, in their own words.

The list was originally compiled in May 2013. Its creation proceeded in three steps. First, I compiled a list of all Tea Party groups listed on the websites of major Tea Party organizations, including but not limited to Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWords, Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Express, Glenn Beck’s 9-12 group, and Tea Party Nation. I then expanded my search to other platforms that aggregated data for Tea Party groups, including TeaParty.org, TeaParty911, and TeaPartyConnect. In the
final stage, I included any additional Tea Party groups appearing on the “other groups” sections of the Tea Party websites of groups already on my list, allowing this list to snowball until no unique additions could be found. Overall, 1,051 groups had websites that continued to be active by 2013 and contained, at minimum, a mission statement. Some groups had inactive or empty pages or relied only upon Twitter, Facebook, or Meetup sites. These groups were not included in the final 1,051. Of these final groups, about 200 also had blogs connected with their websites.

The mission statements and blog posts of these Tea Party websites provided two separate sources of data. The mission statements were coded by hand. Coding a test set of 100 posts yielded a codebook and set of categories for mission statement topics. This set of categories was comprehensive enough that none of the remaining mission statements contained mentions of topics not included in the coding scheme. The topics in the coding scheme were: taxes, size of Government, religion/Christianity, private property, personal responsibility, anti-Obama/Democrats, individual rights, immigration, the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare, the 2nd Amendment/personal firearms, free markets, fiscal responsibility, distrusting the GOP, having an election mission, having an education mission, national defense, the Constitution, and keeping the Government accountable. Any mention of one of the following topics resulted in a “1” for that Tea Party group for that category. If the topic was not mentioned, that Tea Party group received a “0” for that category.

For example, Indy Defenders of Liberty West, a Tea Party located just outside of Indianapolis, listed the following as their mission statement: “To restore limited government, fiscal responsibility, and accountable representation through citizen activism and education, in order to preserve the Constitution of the United States of America.” (emphasis added). This statement was coded as “1” for the cate-
categories size of government, fiscal responsibility, accountability, having an educational mission, and the Constitution.

The process for categorizing the blog posts was markedly less straightforward, due to greater text length. First, I used web scraping techniques to save a copy of each blog post, which I converted to text. I then turned to automated content analysis to investigate the dominant topics and the frames used to discuss them (both for the blog posts and for the interview analysis in this chapter). Beyond providing a more efficient means than hand coding for summarizing large corpuses of data, automated content analysis also presents the possibility of discovering themes underlying a set of documents. The automated content analysis methods will be discussed at more length later in this section.¹

INTERVIEWS

The second dataset is that of depth interviews with Tea Party activists and elites. These 35 interviews were conducted between March 2012 and February 2014, and included leaders of national Tea Party groups (Matt Kibbe of FreedomWorks, Yvonne Donnelly of Glenn Beck’s 9-12 group, and Jenny Beth Martin of Tea Party Patriots); state and county leaders in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Mississippi, Utah, and Colorado; and other activists from New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Washington. Interviews were conducted in person whenever possible, and by phone in limited cases. As much as possible, interviews followed a semi-unstructured format. All interviewees received similar questions at some point in the interview, such as “What led you to join the Tea Party?”, “Why the Tea Party instead of the Republican Party?”, “What do you see as the main focus of the Tea Party?”,

¹One caveat pertains to automated content analysis: like other forms of content analysis, it is descriptive. Automated content analysis summarizes documents, but it does not facilitate predictions or inferences about relationships between variables.
and so forth. In answer to these and other questions, interviewees were encouraged to tell their stories in their own words.

The result—explanations of what the Tea Party stands for, believes in, and means in the words of people intimately involved—form a corpus of explanations that can be analyzed for common themes. Whereas chapter 2 wove the interviews into a synthetic narrative, this chapter relies on machine learning techniques in order to perform automated content analysis, which will detect underlying frames (cite people).

Automated Content Analysis

I utilized topic models to summarize themes in the Tea Party blog posts and interviews. This family of probabilistic models explains a set of documents (a corpus) as a mixture of latent topics, which are multinomial distributions over words. (Blei and Lafferty 2006; Blei et al. 2003; Buntine and Jakulin 2004; Griffiths and Steyvers 2004; Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014; Rosen-Zvi et al. 2004; Wang and McCallum 2006). Much like factor analysis, topic models are a technique for dimension reduction and data summary. Through the use of clustering algorithms topic models discover latent topics in the data in a way that simulates how an expert human coder might classify themes within a document.

Analysis of blog posts and interviews was performed separately. For both, I preprocessed the documents using conventional techniques. All documents were stripped of foreign symbols (e.g. @ or %), punctuation, numbers, English stop-words (e.g. “and”, “the”), and white spaces. I also transformed all words to lower case, and reduced words to their common stems, such as “educ” for “education”. Word stems appearing in fewer than .3% of documents were also removed (Hopkins and King 2010; Hopkins 2013; Grimmer 2013).
I then utilized a Correlated Topic Model (CTM). One of the clearest forms of notating CTM is that of Blei and Lafferty (2006). Let \( \{\mu, \Sigma\} \) be a \( K \)-dimensional mean and covariance matrix, with topics \( \beta_1 : K \) be \( K \) multinomials over a fixed word vocabulary. CTM assumes a document of \( N \) words results from the process:

1. Draw \( \eta \mid \{\mu, \Sigma\} \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu, \Sigma) \).

2. For \( n \in \{1, ..., N\} \).
   - Draw topic assignment \( Z_n \mid \eta \) from \( \text{Mult}(f(\eta)) \).
   - Draw word \( W_n \mid \{z_n, \beta_i : K\} \) from \( \text{Mult}(\beta_{zn}) \).

Parameter estimation maximizes the likelihood of a certain corpus of documents as a function of topics \( \beta_{1:K} \) along with the multivariate Gaussian parameters \( \{\mu, \Sigma\} \). Using the \texttt{R} package \texttt{topic models}, we perform variational expectation-maximization (VEM) to maximize the bound on the log probability of our collection of documents. After experimenting with various numbers of topics, I asked the model to identify five clusters for the Tea Party blog posts, and four for the interviews. The reasons for choosing five and four respectively are twofold. First, the models would not converge when asked to detect more than these numbers of topics. Second, selecting fewer than these numbers topics meant omitting one or more distinct categories, tantamount to discarding meaningful data.

5.3 Results

Website Data

Before moving to content analysis of the blog posts, we can gain a general idea of core ideological principles to the Tea Party by examining mission statements. Nearly all Tea Party websites contain some sort of mission or ‘about us’ statement. Figure
1 shows the aggregated topics of these statements, using the scheme discussed previously.

The most common issue emphasized in mission statements was the US Constitution. Over half of the mission statements also mentioned the size of government, fiscal responsibility, and free markets. At least one quarter of mission statements mentioned having an educational mission, individual rights, keeping governmental officials accountable, taxes, religion/Christianity, and personal responsibility. Less than one quarter of mission statements mentioned an election mission, national defense, immigration, private property, guns, antipathy towards Obama or liberals, the ACA, or distrusting the Republican Party. Each of these issues was coded as a separate topic in the coding scheme because multiple Tea Party websites mentioned these phrases or issues separately.

These descriptive results are illuminating, but not conclusive. The emphasis on the US Constitution and broad fiscally conservative principles as the top four most common aspects of a mission statement is not surprising. After all, the most common phrasing for a Tea Party mission statement included a mention of “3 core values,” which were: limited government under the Constitution, free markets, and fiscal responsibility. These mission statements provide a broad ideological vision, but are less indicative of a general ideological pattern than revealed preferences in blog posts might be.

**Blog Data**

Figure 1 shows the frequency of posts on Tea Party blogs by month between the Tea Party’s inception (roughly, April 2009), and the end of data collection (December 2015). The earlier days of the Tea Party produced fewer posts per month as the Tea Party gained national recognition, steadily increasing until 2012. Peak Tea Party
Figure 5.1: Website Data on Issue Priorities
blog activity occurred in late 2012 and early 2013. Although some spikes in activity occurred after early 2013, Tea Party activity began to taper off steadily under December 2015, plateauing around late 2009 levels.

Beyond providing a coarse description of the Tea Party’s trajectory, this figure also serves as a validity check. Frequency of Tea Party blog posts coincides with real world events that were impactful to the movement. The first spike occurred in April 2009, concurrent with the first major Tea Party event, the April 15, 2009 “Tax Day Protests.” A similar spike (not labelled) is seen in August 2009, in conjunction with Glenn Beck’s Rally to Restore Honor. Posts again increase in volume with the final passage of the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare in early 2010, steadily increasing from this point through the midterm elections of 2010. Several additional events coincided with increases in post frequency throughout 2012, including the US Supreme Court’s June 2012 decision on the ACA and the Benghazi ‘scandal.’

In 2013, spikes correspond with the Boston bombings and what Tea Partiers regarded as a politicized set of decisions by the IRS towards Tea Party groups applying for nonprofit status. Despite a presidential election in 2014, posts began to slow, spiking only with the Clinton email scandal, and then briefly again in 2015 with the US Supreme Court’s second ACA decision. The clear overlap between Tea Party blog activity and real world events of import to the Tea Party provide an initial assurance that the posts collected do indeed correspond with what we might expect of Tea Party posts, given real world events.

The next figure shows the five topics detected by CTM and the proportion of blog posts that fall within each of these topics. Each topic is represented by the five most distinctive words within it. Distinctiveness is calculated by subtracting the baseline frequencies of other words within each topic to find the most defining words. A list of the 20 terms of the highest average importance to each topic is shown in table 1, and
gives a more comprehensive idea of the content of these topics.\textsuperscript{2} Because this data represents a time span of six years, we can track the ebb and flow of topics by day, as seen on the Y axis for each figure.

As predicted, these five topics cover a range of issues rather than focusing on any single area. A topic questioning Obama’s American identity lends support to scholarship that sees the Tea Party as animated by antipathy towards Obama’s America (Parker and Barretto 2014). The next topic, however, focuses on the Constitution, and in particular the constitutionality of Common Core. A third topic emphasizes the importance of the Tea Party’s involvement in electing conservatives, in keeping with an understanding of the Tea Party as a movement that takes on the aims of

\textsuperscript{2}The terms in table 1 and discussed throughout are stemmed, meaning they are the shortest version or root of the English word in question. This allows each term to pick up multiple uses of the word, e.g. “senat” includes both “senate” and “senator”.\textsuperscript{2}
a party. The fourth topic centers around discussions of the rule of law, narrowing in on immigration policies. Only one topic, the fifth, has a fiscal focus. Rather than emphasizing libertarian economic principles in the abstract, however, it shows a discussion of economic issues as they pertain to the ACA/Obamacare. A more in-depth discussion of each topic follows.

About 21% of the blog posts fall within Topic 1, **Obama**. The key terms in this topic can be categorized around three themes. The first set question Obama’s American identity (american, nation, islam, white, muslim). The second discuss some of Obama’s actions that have been particularly troublesome to Tea Partiers, particularly Obama’s “war on guns” (war, gun, attack). The last set of words show an emphasis
on sharing and spreading this information, e.g. facebook, friend, report, twitter, news. When Tea Party posts discuss Obama, then, they are frequently questioning his American identity, either by discussing his citizenship or by noting what they see as a threat to their American way of life.

Posts about this topic occurred most frequently at three intervals. The first, likely pertaining to ‘birther’ debates near the beginning of Obama’s term, occurred at the inception of the Tea Party: April 2009. The second occurred during debates about gun control legislation following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012. The final spike occurs at the end of the time period observed, late 2015, again corresponding with debates about gun control.

A slightly smaller percentage of total posts, around 18%, fall under the second topic, Education, and more specifically, Common Core. Tea Partiers are particularly invested in their opposition to the new Common Core standards, which they view as unconstitutional and an overreach of governmental power (as evidenced by terms such as state, power, educ, law, common, freedom).

As with topic one, topic two was most discussed in the first several months of 2009, corresponding with the initial introduction of Common Core, but also with the Tea Party’s emphasis on constitutional/civic education. Discussion of this topic remained steady for the next several years before seeing a sharp drop off at the end of 2015.

The largest share of blog posts, 32%, are encompassed in topic three, electing conservatives. The two most prominent words in this topic, tea, and parti, express a Tea Party-specific emphasis on electoral activism. Words such as vote, elect, candid, counti, meet, support, polit, and voter describe the type of activism as having to do with electoral contexts and organization, frequently as local (county) levels. The importance of the words republican and conserv, although logical in this context, add confusion to our interpretation of this topic. Although CTM can tell us that these
words frequently appear together, it cannot tell us whether mentions of Republicans are more frequently found in posts where the Tea Party urges their members to galvanize behind the Republicans, or in posts where they contrast Tea Party and conservative candidates with Republicans. Although we may expect the latter to be the case from various findings in other chapters, the most definitive conclusion we can draw from this analysis is that Tea Partiers are focused on electing conservatives, which may at times include Republicans.

In contrast, topic three was not an initial motivation to Tea Partiers, taking a few months to reach its first peak. Discussion of electing conservatives has remained relatively steady since, spiking around primaries and elections. Again, it drops off steeply near the end of data collection.

The fourth topic, **laws and immigration**, contains about 13% of the blog posts. This topic mainly contains posts about legal action, both legislative and judicial. Many of the posts described by this topic may simply capture the Tea Party’s emphasis on policy action. Two of the words in this topic, *illeg* and *immigr* illuminate the specific kind of policy with which Tea Partiers are concerned. Just as the education topic was focused on Common Core, the legal topic emphasizes ‘illegal’ immigration.

Topic four sees its first spike in late 2009 and early 2010, corresponding with debates over Arizona’s controversial immigration legislation and discussion of the 111th Congress’s attempt at comprehensive education reform. A few spikes occurred in 2011 and 2012, with discussion of Alabama’s immigration law (2011), and Obama’s directive about deportation of young immigrants (2012). Another surge of posts occurs around June 2013, when the Senate passed an immigration bill. The final surge comes in late 2015, perhaps corresponding with many of Donald Trump’s comments at the time about immigrants.
The fifth and final topic, **budget and Obamacare**, encompasses about 18% of posts. This topic encompasses Tea Party concerns about government spending with words such as *tax, money, million, spend, increas, pay, feder, fund, job, budget, and cost*. The focus is very clearly on federal spending, and in particular on spending related to the ACA (*plan, health, feder, care, obama, obamacar*). Although fiscal issues are undoubtedly important to the Tea Party, it is worth noting that this topic encompasses as many posts as does the topic of Obama’s identity, and that Tea Partiers are mentioning fiscal concerns mainly in the context of Obamacare.

The initial surge on this topic occurs early in 2009, possibly simply in relation to Tea Party concerns about government spending. A predictable and sustained spike then takes place from July 2009 to July 2010, corresponding with the introduction of and debates about the ACA. The topic remains popular, with final spikes in Jun 2015 (with the Supreme Court’s opinion on the ACA), and December 2015 (possibly with discussions of repealing Obamacare taking place among Republican hopefuls).

Before moving on to a discussion of results from activist and elite interviews, it is worth noting what has and has not been illuminated by this content analysis of Tea Party blog posts. First, this is the only existing, comprehensive analysis of Tea Party content at the activist level. Second, this analysis falls in line with the prediction that the Tea Party sees itself, not as an interest group or faction, but as a party-like movement, one that emphasizes electoral victory and policy goals. Third, this analysis also affirms the prediction that a movement like this would emphasize a broad swathe of ideological issues, rather than focusing on only one or two issues areas. These topics show both that Tea Partiers are concerned with the process of electoral politics, but also that they view this process in terms of specific policies that may not be as popular with the Republican Party as a whole (especially their stances on Common Core, illegal immigration, and Obamacare).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Elect conserv.</th>
<th>Laws/Immigr.</th>
<th>Budget/Obamacare</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 obama</td>
<td>govern</td>
<td>parti</td>
<td>state</td>
<td>tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 presid</td>
<td>peopl</td>
<td>tea</td>
<td>bill</td>
<td>govern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 facebook</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>republican</td>
<td>law</td>
<td>year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Table 5.1: Blog Post Topics Expanded
There are some things this analysis has not been able to confirm, however. As with all content analysis, it cannot yield predictions. Rather, it provides a summary of discourse, which can complicate interpretation. Four of the five topics could be interpreted in a relatively straightforward fashion, but the third topic (electing conservatives) may or may not lend support to the idea that the Tea Party sees itself as independent from the Republican Party. The largest obstacle confronted by this analysis is that we cannot detect the valance of the Tea Party’s discussion of these issues. Nonetheless, in the absence of any hitherto existing data on Tea Party priorities, this analysis helps us move beyond the realm of speculation to a discussion of activist emphases.

INTERVIEW DATA

The interview data provides a slightly different look at the Tea Party. In contrast to the 42,000 blog posts, each of which focused on a discrete topic, this analysis consists in only 30 interviews, each of which covered multiple topics. We thus might expect to see more broad emphases, as not enough data exist to discover specific policy targets. Nevertheless, this data serves two purposes. One is to distill lengthy and often rambling interviews into their core points, and to search for commonalities across interviews. The second is an understanding of what Tea Party leaders and activists emphasize in face-to-face conversations about their movements. Given the differences in responses typically found in different survey modes (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008; Malhotra and Krosnick 2007; McDonald and Thornburg 2012; Tourangeau and Smith 1996), we might expect to gain purchase on different aspects of the Tea Party’s identity from these two formats of data collection.

For the interview analysis, the CTM algorithm detected four unique topics. These are shown in figure 3 and table 4. Unlike the blog topics, the interview topics have
a less policy-specific focus. They are also more action-oriented. Because these topics stem from only one time point, no dates appear on the x-axis.

For example, topic one, convince friends, which covers about 18% of interview content, is not focused on a policy at all. Rather, it summarizes a key strand running through all 30 interviews: the emphasis interviewees placed on an almost evangelical mission of spreading news about the Tea Party to others in their lives and communities. This emphasis is seen through words such as time, right, friend, vote, talk, person, system, believ, thought, and so forth. In line with my experience conducting these interviews, this trend highlights the one-fifth of interview content that stemmed from activists talking about how their efforts in the Tea Party are a response to a specific time in American history, a point of crisis, and one to which they must alert their friends and neighbors.

The second topic, need for activism, covers a larger portion of interviews (30%). Again, activists are not focusing on specific policy issues, but on the need to organize conservatives to educate others, vote for, and elect conservative candidates, as well as working against President Obama.

Third, the elect conservatives topic addresses similar issues from a slightly different angle. With around 25% of interviews falling under this topic, elect conservatives emphasizes local involvement. In contrast to the comparable blog topic, the interview topic emphasizes libertarians as well as Republicans, and includes mentions of both the Constitution and of fiscal issues.

The final topic, budget, encompasses roughly 29% of the interviews. Healthcare is again lurking in the background (pay, care, and so forth), but it is not the main focus of the budget topic. Activists are concerned with people learning about the law, but also with work, business, and the federal government more generally.
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The activist interviews provide a less robust picture of ideology, but one that is nonetheless illuminating. First, it is important to note that some words appear in multiple contexts (topics). *People* is important throughout, as are words like *govern*, *conserv*, and *organ*. When describing their involvement in and views of the Tea Party, as well as other concerns that they broached during interviews, activists tended to emphasize different aspects of what they saw as activism by people like them in government, and the need to organize. What does not come out of these activist interviews is a coherent ideological emphasis. When speaking to an interviewer in a one-time setting on their movement, activists were more likely to talk about the more party-like features of their movement: who is involved, at what level it works, and how to implement change. This contrasts with the blog posts, in which other activists
(perhaps even some of the same people), are writing to audiences of their supporters about issues that are important rather than talking to an outside source about the movement as a whole.

5.4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analysts of the Tea Party have been unable to discover a coherent, underlying principle in its ideology—not for lack of trying, but because they are looking for the wrong thing. If the Tea Party is not in fact a single-issue interest group or faction, then attempts to discover a coherent ideological principle will fall short. The ‘conservatism’ and ‘liberalism’ of the contemporary Republican and Democratic parties only loosely connect an amalgamation of policy positions. These parties are instead united by pursuit of shared goals of electoral victory and policy change, which over time have converged with packages of ideological positions on various issues. Similarly, if the Tea Party is acting like a party in miniature, then we might expect to see various ideological positions connected by a coalition that has agreed to pursue electoral and policy goals.

In a sense, this chapter did not directly answer the question: What is the Tea Party’s ideology? Rather, it argued that due to the Tea Party’s identity as an intra-party movement, it will not possess a coherent ideology. I predicted that analysis of activist blog posts and interviews would reveal two things. First, the Tea Party would emphasize a broad array of policy positions that are somewhat off-dimension of those of the Republican Party (in other words, a separate platform). Second, the Tea Party would accentuate its electoral goals, highlighting its mission as a separate structure from the Republican Party.
Both predictions found support in this data. The Tea Party, as seen in the blog posts, does indeed emphasize an array of issues, from guns to Common Core, and these issues are slightly different from the core emphases of the Republican Party. Both the blog posts and especially the activist interviews also show that Tea Partiers see themselves as representative of an entity with a distinct electoral mission, not necessarily as an activist branch of the Republican Party.

Although this chapter illuminates the range of Tea Party ideology, it does not analyze the contours of its ideology in depth. Why, for example, are Tea Partiers concerned both with Obama’s citizenship and with Common Core? This chapter can explain the importance of both topics in terms of the breadth of a party platform, but does not venture to explain the political psychology underlying these commitments. Future work on the Tea Party could build on these analyses, delivering more substantive explanations of the topics comprising the Tea Party’s ‘platform.’
It came as little surprise that conservatives were not enthused with Obama’s 2008 election or his 2012 reelection, Democratic Congressional victories in 2008, TARP and the bailouts, or the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Why, instead of unifying behind the banner of the Republican Party, did a subset of conservatives break away to challenge both parties? This is the central question of this project, and one that grows increasingly relevant in the face of a splintered Republican Party in the 2016 presidential election cycle.

This project presents an answer. The Tea Party mobilized as an intra-party movement (a party within a party) to contest the Republican Party. It did this because it wants the things a party wants: electoral and policy victories. Tea Partiers did not believe that they could trust the Republican Party to elect representatives or enact policy in line with their interests. If we conceptualize parties as coalitions of various interests (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008), the Tea Party is a group that no longer felt served by the Republican coalition.

Three ancillary questions form the core of this project. First, why did Tea Partiers choose to contest the Republican Party? In answer, this project argued that Tea Partiers no longer trusted the Republican Party, largely because of what they saw as its ideological moderation and betrayal of conservative principles.

Second, who is the Tea Party, and how does this impact the movement’s structure? An investigation of a national Tea Party network found that the Tea Party is
structured like a party. It’s ‘who’ includes elite national voices, but these are refracted through a regional party structure, where local actors play the leading roles.

Finally, what constitutes Tea Party ideology, and can it be understood as coherent? Rather than finding that the Tea Party emphasizes a single issue, as an interest group or party faction might, I found evidence of a broad platform of issues that are off-dimension of those emphasized by the core of the Republican Party. The Tea Party’s ideology bears more resemblance to a party platform than to anything else.

Addressing these three questions creates a picture of the Tea Party movement as more than a group of protestors on the National Mall or the movement behind the occasional far-right Congressperson. It instead produces a view of the Tea Party as a party in miniature, with the goals, structure, and ideological breadth we might expect from a traditional party, but carried out under the auspices of an existing major party.

6.1 Implications for the Tea Party

Accounts of the rise of the Tea Party and the opinions and psychology of its members and sympathizers exist in both journalistic (Zernike 2010) and academic (Parker and Barreto 2014; Skocpol and Willamson 2012) form. While this project adds contours to these stories of the Tea Party, it is neither a history nor a study in political behavior. Rather, this project places the Tea Party in the context of the system which produced it, and within which confines it operates.

Viewing the Tea Party as an intra-party movement has implications for how we talk about and understand it, as well as for its future. When the Tea Party is seen as a movement dominated by an eclectic collection of individuals, authoritarianism, or any other behavioral cause, it is difficult to understand the role it has played in primaries, elections, or dissension within the House. If we instead regard the Tea
Party as a movement that shares the goals of a party and works within the party system to achieve these goals, we can finally begin to make sense of its tenacity in the political arena. In other words, if we normalize the movement as a response to a set of political institutions, driven by a specific set of goals, it is easier to understand everything from why the Tea Party primaries members of its host party to why it does not have a specific issue focus.

The Tea Party’s strategy as an intra-party movement also has implications for its future. Political movements in the US historically have a few options. If they arise in a time of party realignment, they may become (or heavily influence) the formation of a new party, or at the very least, a new party’s identity (Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1973). If they exist as more amorphous movements, they may eventually become the stuff of interest groups and institutionalization, as happened with the Women’s Movement in the Twentieth Century. Finally, if they are a faction that operates within one specific party, they may eventually be subsumed by that party in a move that dilutes the movement’s ideological purity, but may benefit both the faction and the party electorally (as with the Christian Right).

Understanding that the Tea Party neither has the amorphous structure of a social movement nor the specific issue focus of a party faction helps us understand its future. It will neither be routinized as an interest group nor subsumed as a faction. Rather, it has and is attempting to remake a major party from within by continually resisting that party’s policy agenda and its chosen candidates. The Tea Party may not exist under that name forever, but its impact on the Republican Party will, at the very least, be a period of deep instability, or at the most, a period of realignment.
6.2 Implications for the Republican Party

The divisive impact of the Tea Party on the Republican Party is not without historical parallels, most of which come from eras of party splintering. In the election of 1912, a strong personality (Theodore Roosevelt) curated support among a faction of the Republican Party behind his third-party candidacy. Although the Bull Moose party did not endure beyond the 1912 election, the fissures it left behind took several years for the Republican Party to repair.

In contemporary times, the Tea Party and Donald Trump could be seen as drawing from the same energy. Both represent a group in the Republican coalition who no longer (or perhaps never did) feel fully served by that coalition. Whether Donald Trump is truly a Tea Party candidate is difficult to answer conclusively, but his success seems inconceivable save for the Tea Party. Inasmuch as 2016 bears parallels to 1912, the Tea Party movement may not outlast this presidential election, but the division it has created within the Republican Party will take time to mend.

The Tea Party’s choice of organization also bears implications for the Republican Party. Given the importance of political parties’ roles as organizations, it is key that the Tea Party has largely resisted forming an independent organizational structure, and instead continues to rely on that of the Republican Party. Unlike the election of 1912, the Dixiecrat split of 1948, or even the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party of 1968, both of which created a separate ticket, the Tea Party has not established itself as a truly independent entity. There was no Tea Party ticket at the 2012 Republican National Convention, nor will there be one in 2016.

Although it is possible to create deep fissures within a party without forming a separate party, the mobilization of the Tea Party within the Republican Party may signal the continued strength of the Republican Party as an organization. Unlike 1912,
1948, or 1968, the parties of today are more ideologically sorted than they have been at any point prior (Noel 2014), which may well endow them with greater strength.

6.3 Implications for Scholarship on Political Parties

Few have discussed strategies for intra-party mobilization, and those that have tend to address intra-party mobilization in terms of factions, either in work on realignment (e.g. Sundquist 1973), or in studies of prominent factions (see Wilcox and Robinson 2010). This project uses the case study of the Tea Party to discuss intra-party mobilization in greater depth. In an era of ideologically sorted parties and in a system with few options for third parties, it is no surprise that groups exist within the major parties that have broader demands than those of a faction but realize the limitations of mobilizing as independent entities.

Instances like the Tea Party, or even potential mobilization of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, show a new option for mobilization. When a movement feels under-served by the party coalition of which it is a part, wants the things a party wants, and is ideologically more on the side of one party than another, we might expect to see that movement adopt the strategy of a party within a party. Understanding the motivation and mechanisms behind intra-party contestation helps illuminate episodes of intra-party conflict as something beyond glitches in the system.

This view of intra-party conflict also holds ramifications for discussion of polarization. Most work on political polarization examines differences between the two parties (e.g. Carsey and Layman 2006; Gelman 2009; Lenz 2012; Levandusky 2009; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). The Tea Party, and its strategy of intra-party mobilization, requires us to attend to polarization within parties as well, and the potential impact that intra-party polarization can have on inter-party polarization.
6.4 Concluding Thoughts

What can we learn from the Tea Party, and specifically from its strategy as a party within a party? It serves as a reminder, first, that the boundaries between movements, interest groups, and parties are more fluid than we sometimes allow. It also illuminates an option for dissent against the major parties in a strongly two-party system. Finally, it underscores the need to take this movement seriously. Protestors, gaffes, ethnocentrism, and other potentially unsavory parts of the movement aside, the Tea Party demands that students of politics take intra-party mobilization seriously, however removed from mainstream political discourse they may seem.
REFERENCES


