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## The Tea Party's Influence on the Evolution of Conservative Republicanism in the United States\*

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### Abstract

After the historic victory of Barack Obama, the first African American president, a movement emerged whose adherents regarded the American dream as no longer realizable and saw the Democratic Party as a threat to the nation's existence. Rapidly garnering support from the Republican Party, particularly the conservative spectrum, this movement adopted a confrontational stance on social services, health care subsidies for the impoverished, and policies toward racial minorities. The Tea Party Movement sustained its efforts to rebuild and maintain conservative republicanism in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 presidential election with the support of the Republican Party, particularly its conservative wing. The early years of the Tea Party witnessed many successful candidates in congressional elections, which contributed to the party's stability and sustained its influence within the American political establishment. This review article investigates the way in which the Tea Party movement influenced conservative republicanism in the United States. It is argued that the Tea Party, which advocated for traditional white American values, has reconstructed conservative republicanism that was on the verge of collapse while attempting to maintain its existence despite all of its ups and downs. Furthermore, this movement contributed to the rise of Trumpism in America and was an essential factor in Donald Trump's triumph in the 2016 presidential election and his 2020 campaign.

**Keywords:** American Values, Conservatism, Donald Trump, Republican Party, Tea Party Movement

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## 1. Introduction

Many political scholars maintain the view that the Tea Party movement is, in essence, conservative republicanism. The movement that surfaced in the aftermath of the unfavorable conditions during George W. Bush's presidency captured the interest of the party, particularly its conservative wing. Affluent conservatives, endowed with substantial financial means, endeavored to support the Tea Party as a safeguard against a decline in their sway within the United States' political framework. Conservatives opposed the election of Democratic candidate Barack Obama and his campaign promises. As a result, a significant portion of the American society that held "genuine American values" in high regard organized a tea party-like march and protested to reclaim the values they believed had been lost. Republican Party conservatives and Tea Party supporters share several commonalities. This is demonstrated by anti-immigrant and racial minority legislation, support for white, religious, and uneducated men, and the allocation of social services and healthcare to these groups, which included the majority of Tea Party supporters. The Tea Party, similar to conservatives of the Republican Party, regarded as imperiled the "American Dream", which is founded upon the nation's values, and deemed it a waste of tax dollars to allocate the nation's resources and wealth to "incompetent Americans" the majority of whom were believed to be members of racial minorities.

This review article seeks to answer the following question: How did the Tea Party movement affect conservative republicanism in the US? The central argument of this paper is that the Tea Party movement successfully reconstructed conservative republicanism, which was on the brink of collapse, by utilizing the resources at its

disposal, including the support of wealthy conservative Republicans who were also on the verge of dissociation and were struggling to survive politically. Through its social capital and the fervent backing of its adherents, this phenomenon substantially influenced the Republican triumph in the 2016 presidential election and the close competition of the 2020 election. In contrast, the ability of Tea Party supporters to adjust their value priorities to Trump's strategies and align these criteria more closely with his policies for the benefit of the movement is a significant determinant of their ongoing influence in American politics. Their activist political life is exemplified, among other things, by the 2024 presidential campaign. The Tea Party movement thus revitalized conservative republicanism even though, organizationally, it declined this conservatism.

## **2. Political Opportunity Theory**

This article uses Political Opportunity Theory, as proposed by political sociologists like Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam, to analyze the Tea Party movement. This theory focuses on the external factors that shape the success or failure of social movements. It posits that movements are more likely to succeed when they can align with political elites who are sympathetic to their demands and willing to act on their behalf (McCammon et al., 2001). It emphasizes the importance of the political context, including the structure of the political system and the dynamics of politics, in creating opportunities for social movements to mobilize and effect change (Fischer & Boehnke, 2004). Tilly and McAdam, along with other scholars, have highlighted the significance of political opportunity structures in influencing the outcomes of

social movements. These structures refer to the broader political environment that either facilitates or constrains the activities of social movements (Tarrow, 1998).

By analyzing the political opportunity structure, researchers can understand how changes in the political system make it more receptive or vulnerable to the demands of specific groups (Ru & Ortolano, 2009). Moreover, the theory distinguishes between short-term and long-term favorable or unfavorable political contexts, addressing criticisms of previous social movement research and offering a more nuanced understanding of the impact of political opportunities on movement outcomes (Amenta et al., 2005). It also considers the role of framing processes, resource mobilization, and collective action in conjunction with political opportunity structures to comprehensively analyze social movements (Hargrave & Ven, 2006). Political Opportunity Theory evaluates four main elements:

### **2.1. Political Context**

Political Opportunity Theory emphasizes the importance of the broader political context in shaping the trajectory of social movements. This context includes factors such as the political system's structure, power distribution among political actors, and presence of allies or opponents within the political establishment.

### **2. 2. Perceived Grievances**

Social movements often respond to perceived grievances or injustices within society. These grievances can stem from various sources, including economic inequality, social discrimination, political repression, or cultural marginalization. Political Opportunity Theory suggests that the perception of these

grievances is necessary but not always sufficient for the emergence of a social movement; favorable political conditions are also required for the grievances to be mobilized effectively.

### **2. 3. Openness of the Political System**

Political Opportunity Theory argues that social movements are more likely to emerge and succeed in political systems that are relatively open and accessible. This openness allows for the expression of dissent, the mobilization of resources, and the pursuit of political change through nonviolent means. Conversely, closed or authoritarian political systems may suppress dissent and limit the opportunities for social movement activism.

### **2. 4. Alliances and Coalitions**

Political Opportunity Theory acknowledges the importance of alliances and coalitions in shaping the trajectory of social movements. Social movements often seek to build alliances with sympathetic actors within the political establishment, such as political parties, interest groups, or sympathetic policymakers. These alliances can provide social movements with access to resources, legitimacy, and political influence, enhancing their capacity to effect change.

In essence, Political Opportunity Theory provides a framework for understanding the way in which external political factors, such as alliances with political elites and the broader political context, shape the opportunities available to social movements such as the Tea Party. By examining these political opportunities alongside other key factors, researchers can gain insights into the dynamics of social movements and their potential for success or failure (McAdam et al., 2001).

### 3. The Rise of the Tea Party

The origins of the Tea Party can be traced back to the infamous "Tea Party" of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous American colonists concealed their tea products in that location. As a result of the decline in tea sales, this conflict, which ran counter to British interests and the East India Company, resulted in significant financial losses for the organization. A law enacted by the British Parliament in 1773, with the approval of King George III, granted the East India Company the authority to sell tea directly to American colonists and imposed higher taxes on American tea exports. By facilitating the sale of tea, the East India Company was able to generate financial gain. Many Bostonians relied on the tea trade for their livelihood and were incensed. On December 16, when the initial tea parcels from the British East India Company arrived in Boston Harbour, an estimated 100 individuals boarded the vessel. They dumped the tea boxes into the water. The Boston Tea Movement, which was instigated by the news of the event and brought joy to Bostonians and other colonists, served as the foundation for the eventual independence of the United States from the United Kingdom (McDonnell, 2012, p. 217; Schocket, 2010; Wright, 2021).

However, it is noteworthy that movements similar to those of the Tea Party, which share populist labels, have generally emerged in the aftermath of economic downturns in the United States. The individuals mentioned they encompass the "Green Movements" of the 1860s, Granger in the 1870s, William Jennings Bryan, a Nebraska Congressman and subsequent Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson in the 1890s, and the "Share Our Wealth" movement, which Huey P. Long, the former Democratic senator and then-governor of Louisiana, spearheaded in the 1930s. The

matter that emerged again in the early years of the twenty-first century following the 2008 financial crisis was the initial surge of protests, which commenced in February 2009 and garnered support from conservative factions in at least 25 cities across the United States. These demonstrations were directed against the policies implemented by the Obama administration (Kirby & Ekins, 2012, p. 27). This is in line with Political Opportunity Theory, which argues that social movements often arise during times of economic and political grievances.

Indeed, a development known as the Tea Movement emerged, bearing certain resemblances to the Boston Tea Movement. Rick Santley, business news editor at CNBC, introduced the movement two months later when he reported on Barack Obama's strategy to assist homeowners in escaping the housing crisis through the refinancing of 2008 mortgages. Santelli coined the phrase "Another Tea Party" and associated it with the Boston Tea Movement, the most sizable and renowned anti-tax movement in United States history, surpassing the scale of the 1773 movement by a significant margin. On April 15, 2009, when a substantial number of individuals (estimated between 250,000 and 810,000) who identified with the Boston Tea Movement perceived themselves as targets of tax hikes and rose to prominence as an emblem for anti-tax activists in the United States, they staged demonstrations throughout the country. Assemblies that served as the inception of a nationwide movement gave rise to local branches in a short period (Ray, 2023; Madestam et al., 2013, p. 1641; Braunstein & Taylor, 2017, p. 36).

A few months after assuming office, Barack Obama's administration was called to order by this event. During a period when Democrats were still in a state of composure following their

victory over Republican opponent John McCain, a collective of individuals staged a march through the streets of America, denouncing a number of the policies that Obama had proclaimed but had yet to be executed. Numerous political experts in the United States were taken aback by this action, with many misinterpreting it as a racist and conservative backlash against the nation's first African-American president. The movement's subsequent analysis and other facets were elaborated over time (Ward, 2023; Churchill, 2014, p. 569).

In 2009, Tea Party supporters were preoccupied with taxation and limited government. Sarah Palin, appointed governor of Alaska in July, tendered her resignation as the inaugural Republican vice-presidential candidate to campaign in tandem with John McCain for the 2008 presidential election. She intended to assume the role of an unofficial Tea Party spokesperson. Palin delivered the keynote address at the National Convention for the Tea Party in the following February. That year, the discourse surrounding Obama's health care reform legislation and its ancillary aspects provided an opportune moment for the Tea Party movement to mobilize its adherents effectively. As a result, proponents of the Tea Party directed their demands toward politicians who endorsed the health plan proposed by Obama (Crawford & Xhambazi, 2015, p. 111; Reynolds, 2013).

As Democratic members of Congress engaged in consultations to establish the foundation for the bill, Tea Party supporters and followers disrupted order with disruptive behavior to express their discontent with the legislation's passage, a contention that arose regarding the execution of this legislation. However, with the bill's passage in 2010, the Tea Party movement suffered its initial political setback. This dispute was short-lived, as the Tea Party



emerged victorious in the midterm congressional elections, asserting its influence over its Democratic adversaries. By presenting candidates under the guise of the Republican Party, the Tea Party participated in this election and secured its position within the party by nominating 45 candidates. The establishment of Tea Party branches across the United States and the endorsement of the Republican Party and the conservative spectrum contributed to this momentous occasion in the movement's history. As a result, numerous Tea Party commentators were elevated to the mainstream right (Haltinner, 2016, p. 397; Fetner, 2012, p. 762).

During the 2010 Republican election victory in Congress, the most significant in recent history, opinion polls revealed that the Tea Party was supported by over 25% of the American public and approximately half of Republicans. This support amounted to 32%. However, shortly after the 2010 election, general opinion polls started to indicate a declining Tea Party popularity trend. According to Gallup polls conducted between March 2010 and 2011, the Tea Party's unfavorable image increased from 40 to 47, while its favorable image decreased from 37 to 33. Favorable and unfavorable views increased by 39 and 33 percent and 42 and 47 percent between April and March 2011 (Newport, 2014b; McCarthy, 2019).

Sixty individuals comprised the Tea Party in the House of Representatives in 2010, of which only 52 were nominated for office in 2012. The Tea Party's support base, which consisted primarily of Republicans, experienced sustained growth and an upward trend in popularity. The percentage of Tea Party supporters rose from 28 to 30 percent in a Gallup poll of supporters and opponents between April 2010 and 2011 (Newport, 2014b; McNitt, 2014, p. 799). In other words, dissident conservatives and the

Republican Party, in a poor shape following the 2008 election, resurrected and backed the Tea Party movement. This movement's adherents alleged that Barack Obama lacked the constitutional authority to assume office. Consequently, Democratic officials have consistently refused to acknowledge the Tea Party movement as a popular independent movement and have regarded it as an organization associated with the more conservative wing of the Republican Party. Similarly, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi characterizes the Tea Party as a mere extension of the Republican Party and the conservative spectrum, which are allocating substantial financial resources to contest the policies of the Obama administration. Others in politics have concurred with this assertion and referred to the Tea Party as a moniker change from the conservative Republican Party. In addition to this assertion, it has been characterized by some as a contemporary departure from the Angry White Man movement of the 1980s, which perpetually portrayed individuals of Caucasian descent as the targets of inequitable treatment (Hood et al., 2015, p. 108).

The religious right, which has mobilized a substantial number of conservative Christians to increase its influence within the Republican Party, is viewed by some as the movement's representative. This may explain why Tea Party supporters exhibited greater political engagement and party loyalty compared to other Republican factions. It was evident that the Tea Party comprised a predominantly male and white membership, adhered to conservative ideologies, and vehemently opposed protectionist policies and tax hikes. Their primary objective was to secure electoral support for congressional candidatures concerning matters of personal significance (Braunstein & Taylor, 2017, p. 36; Bramlett & Miles, 2015, p. 71).

Statistics also indicate that the Tea Party movement was gaining more support from Republicans. The majority of Republicans, including those who supported the Tea Movement in 2014 and 2015, remained steadfast through 2018, according to a 2019 Pew Research Centre survey. This indicates that 3% of Republicans have defected to the Democratic Party, while 71% of Republicans and 26% of leaning Republicans remain Republicans. However, this is an additional point of contention among Republicans and opponents of the Tea Party. 56% of Republicans and 28% of leaning voters are Republicans, according to Pew statistics, and 14% have defected to the Democratic Party. Supporters of the Tea Party are, in fact, more Republican than its detractors (Pew Research Centre, 2019).

Some regard the Tea Party's significant influence within the Republican Party as such. They contend that the party's and other far-right supporters' efforts to support Donald Trump in 2016 and vote for him at the polls influenced his election as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Without their backing, Trump would have remained a media celebrity and never would have achieved the highest political office in the United States (Brenna, 2021).

#### **4. Convictions and Predispositions**

In the early twenty-first century, the rise of the Tea Party movement is one of the most challenging developments in American domestic politics. Supporters perceive it as an effort to reestablish authentic American values. At the same time, detractors regard it as a racist demonstration that contradicts the evolving circumstances of the United States, such as multiculturalism and multiracialism. Some argue that the Tea Party movement's

objective was not merely to oppose the policies of the Democratic Obama administration, but instead to influence the character of future political leaders. Certain scholars attribute the rise of the Tea Party to discontentment with the treatment of immigrants and racial transformations; conversely, others perceive Tea Party supporters' animosity towards Barack Obama as an indication of their party's cohesion. A subject that gains additional clarity upon closer scrutiny of the beliefs and perspectives of its proponents (Philbrick, 2021; Hood et al., 2015, p. 108; Mead, 2011, p. 29).

Tea Party supporters are the most financially secure and experience the lowest unemployment rate in the United States. Surveys indicate that over thirty% of their families earn an annual income of over seventy-five thousand dollars. Statistics reveal a disparity of 12% between the percentage of American citizens educated by the Tea Party and the remaining 25%. Approximately 90% of Tea Party movement supporters were identified as white, while 25% held the belief that Obama favors blacks over whites, and 30% held the belief that Obama was born outside the United States. A majority of the American populace, exceeding 50%, holds the view that black problems are exaggerated, in contrast to only 28% of the American populace who does not think as such (NAACP, 2010).

As a rule, Tea Party participation in foreign policy discussions is minimal. However, movement proponents advocate for the continued maximization of American power to counter other nations, particularly China and Russia. Proponents have always accused Obama of this movement of being lenient with China. Concerning this matter, a 2012 survey examined the following topics: international financial instability, Mexican drug violence, China's emergence as a world power, North Korea's nuclear

program, and Iran's nuclear program. The results revealed that Tea movement supporters are more concerned about the matters above than Republicans who are not part of the Tea Party regarding the first four options (Johnston & Shen, 2015, p. 70).

Tea Party supporters, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with domestic issues such as tax cuts, gun rights under the Second Amendment, opposition to the legalization of abortion and homosexuality, and stricter immigration regulations. Consequently, surveys indicate that the perspectives of this movement's adherents are significantly more religious and oriented to the right on a variety of issues in comparison to those who do not support the movement. Partisanship towards same-sex marriage and opposition to abortion rights are examples of such contentious issues that are viewed more negatively (Johnston & Shen, 2015, p. 64).

Thus, according to a 2010 Pew Research Centre survey, over 53% of Tea Party supporters and 46% of abortion opponents cited their religious beliefs as the primary reason for their opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion, respectively. 69% of individuals who are identified as right-wing have reached the same conclusion as the Tea Party. In addition, 34% of white evangelical Protestants are members of the Tea Party, and 45% are members of the religious right. In a survey conducted between 2010 and 2011, white evangelical Protestants comprised the majority (44% in favor; 8% opposed) of the Tea Party. White Protestants constituted 30% and white Catholics 33%, respectively. 49% of Jews were in opposition to the Tea Party. Among them, a mere 15% expressed support for the movement. For this reason, the majority of Tea Party supporters consider the United States to be a Christian nation, and a significant number of evangelical Christians were elected to Congress in 2010 with Tea Party support (Clement & Green, 2011).

However, although most Tea Party supporters identify themselves as Republicans, their objective has consistently been to elevate the party's conservatism to a higher standard. Tea Party members are twenty percent more likely to want to deal with illegal immigrants, and more than half of them rank establishing a way to deport illegal immigrants as a top priority, according to immigration surveys. They consistently opposed immigrant programs during the Obama administration. They supported anti-immigration policies, including the deportation of immigrants who entered the country as children, out of concern that the values of white Americans would transition from those of the majority to those of the minority. Therefore, one of their preferred policies is Trump's anti-immigration agenda (Clement & Green, 2011; Amadeo, 2021; McVeigh et al., 2014, p. 638).

Without a doubt, the Tea Party's stance on immigration stems from the particular racial perspective held by its adherents. The Tea Party contends that government services, including welfare and treatment, disproportionately benefit racial minorities. At the same time, white workers, who bear the brunt of the burden and pay the highest taxes, are put at a disadvantage by the provision of such services. Indeed, some perceive this as a conflict between diligent individuals and the inept and undeserving segment of the American society. It has come to light that proponents of this movement have employed posters and signs to demean individuals of color as a whole and to spew criticism towards Obama specifically (NAACP, 2010).

This has also been demonstrated in surveys. In contrast to other conservatives, Tea Party activists hold more extreme racial views, including the notion that blacks and Latinos are less intelligent, less dependable, and socially more deficient than whites. Tea party

supporters strive to conceal their racist sentiments due to the adverse social repercussions, and they do so by attributing them to the opposing faction, people of color, through the use of the term "racial inequality towards hardworking whites" (Haltinner, 2016, p. 399).

However, the Tea Party Movement's most steadfast convictions concern economic policies, which have consistently permeated their rallies, slogans, and discourse, while also being laden with racial sentiments. The Tea Party's economic stances are as follows: opposition to financial assistance and the provision of health services to people experiencing poverty, particularly people of color; reduction of government spending and, by extension, debt, and strengthening free-market capitalism while decreasing government intervention. Tea Party members desire that the government respect their financial decisions; therefore, tax increases would violate their constitutional rights. While advocating for a reduction in government debt and small government to mitigate the threat to national sovereignty, they also pursue free-market capitalism by imposing restrictions on state legislation (Haltinner, 2016, p. 398).

The rationale behind prioritizing economic concerns can be attributed to the fact that while Tea Party supporters may hold differing views on social issues, their demands in the financial sphere are remarkably unified and cohesive. This results from a proportion of liberals being involved in the movement and the Republican conservatives' divergence on social issues constituting points of contention. In a 2010 Virginia survey, the Quito Institute posed the following three questions to conservative and liberal Tea Party supporters: "To what extent do you support the government?" A robust government versus a free market? Do you endorse or

oppose the conventional values that underpin a society? The research revealed that Tea Party liberals advocated for minimal government intervention, free market principles, and no government support for values. Conversely, conservative Tea Party supporters supported limited government and free market operations, but desired government intervention to uphold traditional values (Kirby & Ekins, 2012, p. 41).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the relatively minor impact of liberals and the substantial influence wielded by conservatives and Republicans within the Tea Party. As previously mentioned, a significant body of research on the Tea Party Movement has unequivocally demonstrated the preponderance of Republican conservatives. This trend has continued since the inception of the Tea Party in 2009, with this influence exerting a more radical impact as liberals have declined. This subject will be expounded more succinctly by analyzing the correlation between conservative Republicans and Tea Party adherents.

## **5. The Tea Party and Republican Conservatism**

In the wake of the Tea Party's ascent and the exposure of both overt and covert aspects of this movement—such as the supporters' character, political leanings, and affiliations—the sponsors' ideology and inclination towards conservatism were deemed by several analysts to be an integral component of this movement. Consequently, numerous political writers likened this movement to the conservative era led by Ronald Reagan, conflating the two concepts within the same framework. A more succinct analysis of the Tea Party's strategies reveals a strong correlation between the movement and the traditional right-wing ideology. Thus, there are



instances where it contradicts Reagan's conservatism. A significant emphasis on reducing government spending and, by extension, government debt is one such example. The matter that Reagan advocated a campaign slogan, which he failed to address, was derided by his followers as a conventional interpretation of conservatism (Salam, 2012, p. 153).

The Tea Party, according to Theda Scotchpool and Vanessa Williamson in their book *Tea Party and the Rebuilding of Republican Conservatism*, embodies conservative Republican populism and is not merely an independent grassroots movement supported by right-wing media outlets. At the time of the election, white, affluent Americans attended church and cast ballots for candidates who opposed the policies of Obama and other Democrats. Contrary to the notion that the Tea Party is solely a popular movement, other analysts have referenced research that examines its electoral behavior and attitudes. These findings suggest that the party receives substantial financial backing from affluent and influential conservative individuals (Ventura, 2012; Wright, 2021).

David Hamilton Cook, a conservative billionaire who opposed Obama, and co-owner of Cook Industries, his brother Charles and former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, are cited by some sources among the movement's founders. Cook Industries is a political organization that operates under the umbrella of the Tea Party and is affiliated with conservative groups such as Fried Works. Individuals such as Michael Jones, a former analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation, are likewise regarded as Tea Party founders. Fox News, a prominently conservative American television network, has historically maintained a substantial alliance with the Tea Party, as evidenced by the consistent

coverage of its programs (DiMaggio & Street, 2011, p. 11; Amadeo, 2021).

However, the funding strategy of the Tea Party Movement was impacted by the 2010 Supreme Court decisions concerning election rules and its expenditure, which established "super PACs" in addition to "political action committees" in the U.S. electoral system. An action that, by the super PACs' ability to support their peer-to-peer spectrum without constraint, established a novel capability and resulted in more influential conservative organizations and individuals devoting more time and energy to aiding the Tea Party movement (Dreier, 2012, p. 758; Prior, 2014, p. 301).

Supporters of the Tea Party's conservative stance are also reflected in their statistics and analyses. Pew Research discovered in 2010 that Tea Party supporters are not only more conservative than Republicans on social and economic issues, including taxation and abortion, but also on the subject of same-sex marriage. For instance, the Centre found in one survey that 88% of voters leaning toward the Tea Party supported a smaller government with fewer services. In contrast, 80% of voters leaning Republican supported a smaller government (Clement & Green, 2011).

Additionally, the 2014 Gallup polls demonstrate that Tea Party Republicans are more conservative. These individuals were likelier to delegate government duties to individuals (88%) than other Republicans and non-Republicans. A 14% gap separated the Tea Party Republicans from other Republicans on the issue of federal authority. Eighty-four percent of Tea Party Republicans and 66% of surveyed Republicans deemed trade regulations excessive (Kirby & Ekins, 2012, p. 9). However, it should also be noted that while the Tea Party has supporters who lean towards other

political ideologies with divergent views on social, economic, and racial issues, are not all conservatives insofar as specific surveys indicate an 18% liberal constituency within the movement. As a consequence, several scholars have taken a more extreme stance by alleging reductivism on the part of Tea Party conservative supporters, arguing that it is overly simplistic to confine the movement to a codified political framework like conservatism (Uluorta, 2016, p. 98; Arceneaux & Nicholson, 2012, p. 703).

This viewpoint is undeniably distinctive in its manner, yet is widely disregarded by analysts. Some hold that the approach and nature of inquiries presented in specific Tea Party-related surveys indicate that many of the movement's adherents are independent individuals or organizations. Using standardized inquiries, it becomes evident that most Tea Party members are former politically active conservative Republicans (Williamson et al., 2011, p. 27).

Those consistently garnered the backing of affluent Republican conservatives and party members. Billionaires on the far right who advocate anti-government surveillance, free trade, and tax increases were instrumental in the 2016 election and Donald Trump's victory. The Cook brothers exerted considerable sway over Trump administration's tax policy by closely associating with former vice president and extreme tax advocate Mike Pence, who also possessed special policy authority (Williamson, 2016).

The 2008 election occurred when the Republican Party was experiencing a noticeable deterioration in its standing within the United States political sphere. The factors that contributed to the decline in political influence included the party's significant loss in

the presidential election, the election of the first African-American president in U.S. history, the majority of congressional seats being won by Democratic candidates, the declining popularity of George W. Bush Jr., and the Republican Party. Due to the intensity of the debate, numerous authorities compared the political movement to an individual nearing his final moments of life. An area that underwent an unexpected transformation with the emergence of the Tea Party movement, which rescued the Republican Party from its perilous state.

Following the 2010 election, many Tea Party members assumed seats in Congress, marking a pivotal moment in the movement's history. This development brought to the forefront the Tea Party's steadfast alliance with the Republican Party. This is in line with Political Opportunity Theory, which emphasizes the influence of political context as well as alliances in the rise of social movements. Elections in which candidates of the Republican Party who sported the Tea Party label received more votes than those who did not receive a Tea Party endorsement. This significant theme underscored the Tea Party's position within the political framework of the United States. Republicans, who comprised the majority of the affluent in American society, tended to restrict the government and further reduce taxes. By endorsing the Tea Party and affiliation with its adherents, the men endeavored to rid the Republican Party of individuals they considered substandard to conservatism. Although the Tea Party's association with the Republican Party was conspicuous, its adherents invariably proclaimed its impartiality (Gervais & Morris, 2012. p. 245; Karpowitz et al., 2011, p. 306).

The Republican orientation of the Tea Party is exemplified by the emergence of candidates such as Scott Brown in the Senate in

2010, following his victory over longtime Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy in Massachusetts. This state had remained a Democratic majority for almost half a century. In the interim, the Tea Party Express Pack, a prominent advocate of the Tea Movement, contributed \$350,000 to Brown's campaign to secure his victory. Simultaneously, two congressional seats were won by Republican candidates, Ted Cruz and Rand Paul, in Texas and Kentucky, respectively. Johnson, a staunch supporter of Donald Trump and the 2020 election fraud conspiracy theory, was defeated in Wisconsin (Pengelly, 2022).

Meanwhile, it is essential to acknowledge that aligning the Tea Party and Republican Party interests does not necessarily imply unqualified Republican support for the Tea Party in most situations. Indeed, the Republican Party has not consistently held a favorable stance towards the Tea Party. On the contrary, the Tea Party members have consistently endeavored to purge the Republican Party of its liberalism and indoctrinate its members. This correlation is more distinctly illustrated in a Pew Research Centre survey spanning 2010 to 2016. A month after the inaugural Tea Party rallies, in March 2010, 48% of Republicans held a favorable view of the Tea Party. This favoritism decreased to 28% between September 2015 and the end of six years. Furthermore, opposition to the Tea Party had risen from 4% to 11% over time. Despite approaching 36% in August of 2016, the Tea Party's decline in support among Republicans is readily apparent (Pew Research Centre, 2019).

Similarly, Tea Party Republicans hold views that differ from those of other Republicans. The importance of the federal deficit was deemed critical by 55% of Republican Tea Party members and 40% of other Republican respondents to a 2014 Gallup poll.

Taxation and immigration are regarded as highly significant by 35% of Republicans and 42% of Republican Tea Party members, respectively. Other Republicans place a higher priority on matters about the availability of quality employment, equal pay for women, and climate change compared to the Republican Tea Parties (Newport, 2014a).

## **6. Trumpism and the Tea Party**

The relationship between the Tea Party and Republicans during the 2016 election is also noteworthy. Numerous scholars have attributed a portion of Trump's victory to the movement's support. In contrast, Trump is the culmination of years of Tea Party activism within the Republican Party. According to research, Republicans who supported the Tea Party movement in 2014 and 2015 were among Donald Trump's most vocal supporters in the election. The renowned campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" employed by Trump resembles the slogan embraced by Tea Party supporters during their "Take Back the Country" movement. Both parties have been associated with spewing vitriol against Mexican immigrants and Muslims, harboring negative views towards minorities, and providing unasked-for assistance to white supremacist organizations (Carter, 2019; Lowydes, 2021; Formisano, 2016).

There is widespread consensus that the Republican Party's radicalization in the years after the Tea Party's ascent contributed significantly to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory. Republican candidates received considerably more support in districts where the Tea Party was active between 2008 and 2016, according to available statistics. The situation is comparable to that

of elected officials in these regions. In regions devoid of tea party support, they tend to exhibit a more conservative stance than other Republican delegates (Blum & Cowburn, 2023).

Pew Research Centre provided data on the level of support from Republican Tea Party members for four presidential candidates competing in the Republican primary race from December 2015 to April 2016. Donald Trump maintained a significant lead over his rivals, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich, during this period. In the poll conducted in December, Trump received 35% of the vote, Cruz 24%, Rubio and Kasich 1%, and 10%, respectively. However, in April, Trump's lead exploded, and he received 44% of the support of Tea Party members. Cruz was awarded 35%, Kasich was given 7%, and Rubio was given 2%. The surge in popularity persisted in a positive direction after the election of Trump (Pew Research Centre, 2019).

An additional similarity between the Tea Party and the MAGA movements was the use of aggressive language towards Democrats, particularly Obama, which both groups viewed as existential threats to American patriots who had transgressed constitutional values. Indeed, Trump referred to the same antagonistic sentiments directed at socialists, communists, and liberals as "our rift against them". This pessimistic perception of prejudiced opinion contributed significantly to the involvement of numerous extremist Tea Party members in the 2021 assault on the United States Capitol, which occurred after Trump's presidential defeat (Glasberg, 2024).

The only distinction between MAGA and the Tea Party is the absence of a leader. Trump has accomplished his objective of attaining the presidency in the United States by incorporating the

tenets of the Tea Party into his campaign slogans. This pattern is anticipated to persist in the 2024 electoral cycle (Elving, 2022).

Despite actions taken during Trump's presidency that contradicted the beliefs of Tea Party supporters—such as failing to reduce the deficit, increasing the national debt, and repealing the Affordable Care Act—his popularity among this group remained substantial. As a result, numerous Republicans supported the \$320 billion budget increase finalized in 2019. Rand Paul's criticism of the Tea Party, a conservative senator from Kentucky, had no impact on the approval procedure. In the region above, the national debt escalated alongside the persistent deficit, and the Affordable Care Act, a policy that Tea Party supporters had consistently criticized, remained unrepealed. As a result, Donald Trump, who advocated for eradicating the United States' national debt, has characterized the debt as inconsequential (Peters, 2019). This issue has historically shut down conservative Republicans in Democratic administrations. However, despite the recurrence and persistence of this matter, Tea Party adherents refrained from voicing a substantial objection towards the Trump administration. Some consider the economic demands of the Tea Party movement to have been a pretext to exert pressure on Obama and his Democratic administration since the movement's inception. This implies that the matter will solely be accorded precedence under the governance of a democratic government. Indeed, the Tea Party represents the values of Caucasian America in political and social discourse, and it is willing to sacrifice other issues to achieve these values. One persistent concern is the Tea Party movement's ongoing endorsement of Donald Trump (Sykes, 2021).

After his loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election, Trump has maintained his influence within the Republican Party by



retaining Tea Party supporters, a significant portion of whom backed him during the 2020 campaign. Although some authentic Republicans opposed him, their influence on this shift in party strategy was negligible (Plummer, 2024).

Indeed, in the wake of the Republican Party's conservative wing's unique support for Donald Trump in 2016, the influence of organizations associated with this movement was also emphasized. Additionally, the Tea Party movement supported Trump. However, considering Trump's distinct perspectives and his independent methods on numerous matters—which also drew the disapproval of numerous Republicans and prompted them to oppose his choices—it is evident that a significant portion of the similarity between the views held by Tea Party supporters and those of Trump stems from his extreme views and the tea party's stance on various issues in the American society.

## 7. Conclusion

The conservative spectrum in the United States comprises individuals who advocate for the preservation of traditional values associated with being a white, religious American citizen. These individuals perceive an invasion by racial minorities as a threat to the very essence of their nation. This spectrum, which resides primarily within the Republican Party, questioned the legitimacy of Barack Obama's citizenship after he became the first African-American president in the American history. It subsequently organized protests in numerous American cities and entered the political arena as the Tea Party movement. In addition to a weakened conservative spirit, which contributed to the Democratic nominee's 2008 victory, the Republican Party was beset by

unfavorable conditions at the time. As a result, influential and wealthy conservative Republican movement supporters seized the opportunity to support this emerging movement. Indeed, by leveraging its supporters' capacities, material, and spiritual support, the Tea Party successfully obstructed this flow and infused new life into its artery through its ideological affiliations with conservative Republicans and their support for traditional values in the United States. The occurrence precipitated the ascent of conservative Republican ideology within the political framework of the United States.

Furthermore, in the years that followed the Tea Party's ascent, a president whose campaign slogans and policies during his presidency aligned with the sentiments and convictions of Tea Movement supporters in 2016 was elected. The Tea Party movement, which participated in the 2020 election despite the non-fulfillment of specific demands by Tea Party supporters, continues to play a similar role in the 2024 campaign. As of late, Trump's distinctive strategies, which frequently coincide with the views of Tea Party supporters, have not alienated these individuals from the Republican elite; instead, they have shifted their attention toward him. Thus, Trump is in some way spearheading the Tea Party activism within the Republican Party, which has persisted since its inception even with the absence of a public leader.

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