The Tea Party: A Political Revolution or Tempest in a Teacup?

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Tea Party or tea party?

- The tea party is a movement, not a political party.
- Five congressional candidates in three states ran as Tea Party candidates—but none were endorsed by tea party groups.
- In Nevada's Senate race, Scott Ashjian had the Tea Party label, but Republican Sharron Angle had tea party support against Harry Reid.
- In Florida, Tea Party candidates in the 6th, 8th, and 12th House districts ran against both Republican and Democratic candidates.
- The same occurred in New Jersey’s 3rd district.
- All Tea Party (capital letters) candidates lost big.
Proliferation of "tea party" groups

- Numerous tea party groups do not make a Tea Party.
- Tea party supporters tend to be apolitical.
- From a *Washington Post* survey of 647 tea party groups nationwide.
- Seventy percent of the grass-roots groups said they have not participated in any political campaigning this year. As a whole, they have no official candidate slates, have not rallied behind any particular national leader, have little money on hand, and remain ambivalent about their goals and the political process in general.
Tea Partiers are Partisans

According to a series of Gallup Polls, tea partiers are mostly Republican:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Liberal Dem-</th>
<th>% Moderate Dem-</th>
<th>% Conservative Dem-</th>
<th>% Pure Independent</th>
<th>% Moderate/</th>
<th>% Conservative Repub-</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea Party supporters</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Based on Gallup surveys conducted March 26-28, May 24-25, and June 11-13, 2010

Gallup: "The Tea Party movement is more a rebranding of core Republicanism than a new or distinct entity on the American political scene." [July 2, 2010]
National Tea Party Groups Endorsing Candidates

- **FreedomWorks**: A nonprofit organization, headed by former House majority leader Dick Armey, that has helped local Tea Party groups get organized.

- **Tea Party Nation**: Started as for-profit social networking website, something like Facebook for Tea Partiers.

- **Independence Caucus**: Developed an 80 item candidate questionnaire, mostly on the proper role of government, tax policy and the federal budgeting process.

- **Tea Party Express**: Run by Republican consultants out of California. Helped the surprise victories of Tea Party insurgents in the Republican senate primaries in Nevada, Alaska and Delaware.

- **National Tea Party Coalition**: Organized in 2009 to "defeat tax and spend politicians at the polls on election day, November 2010."
Identifying Tea Party Endorsements

- The *Times* (10/14) classified 129 candidates as having tea party support if . .
  - they were endorsed by the national groups,
  - they were backed by local groups,
  - they signed the Contract From America, or
  - proclaimed tea party support.

- I added more names from other tea party endorsement lists, especially the Tea Party Express endorsements of October 22.
Candidates Endorsed by Tea Party Groups

- These sources endorsed a varying number of candidates—*all* Republicans—in the 2010 House elections.
- Candidates endorsed by groups among the Republican candidates who faced Democrats in 406 contested races out of 435:

![Bar chart showing endorsement counts for various Tea Party groups.](chart.png)
A total of 209 Republican candidates claimed one or more tea party endorsements:

- Only one group: 156
- Two groups: 44
- Three groups: 7
- Four groups: 1
- Five groups: 1
- No endorsements: 226

National tea party groups often endorsed different Republican candidates: 156 of the 209 were endorsed by only one national tea party group.
Regional Endorsements, Local Politics

- The dispersal of tea party endorsements reflects two factors:
  - (1) the decentralized nature of the tea party movement, and
  - (2) the decentralized nature of congressional elections.
- National tea party endorsements tended to be regional.
- Consider the 89 candidates endorsed by the Tea Party Express, which endorsed the most candidates.
- They were in 21 of the 50 states--all but 3 west of the Mississippi.
Neglecting House Races Elsewhere

- In contrast, the Tea Party Express endorsed *no* candidates in
  - Illinois, 19 seats
  - Ohio (18)
  - Michigan (15)
  - New Jersey (13)

- Considering *all* tea party endorsements, some large states drew surprisingly few:
  - Florida had none for 20 of its 25 seats
  - Pennsylvania none for 14 of 19
  - Texas none for 25 of 32.
In 2010, Republicans nationally enjoyed about a 7% "swing" in the congressional vote over 2008. So Republicans took over districts won by Democrats.
How Much Did Tea Party Support Help?

Consider the Republican % margin in 2010 over 2008 for 358 contested districts.

Except in districts held by Democrats in 2010, Republicans without tea party support ran ahead of those with tea party support.
Gabby Gifford's District: Arizona 8th

- Formerly held by Jim Kolbe (R), born in Evanston and 1965 NU political science graduate.
- After Kolbe retired, Gifford (D) won in 2006 by 54 to 42% and re-elected in 2008 by 55 to 43%.
- Her 2010 opponent was Jesse Kelly (R), endorsed by
  - Tea Party Express
  - National Tea Party Coalition
- Gifford won by only 49 to 47%,
  - Her opponent ran 4 points better in 2010 than in 2008.
  - 47 - 43 = 4
- Versus the 9.3 point gain in 2010 for all Republicans with tea party support who lost to Democratic incumbents
What Will Happen in 2012?

- Recall that tea partiers are politically inexperienced.
- Perot ran on the huge and growing budget deficit.
- He won 19% of the popular vote.
- He organized the Reform Party for the 1996 presidential election.
- But his support evaporated, and he won only about 8 percent of the 1996 vote.
- Will the tea party movement fare differently in 2012?
- I don't think so.
- Thank you.