The Tea Party's Effect on Republican Campaign Rhetoric

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Abstract
Shortly after Barack Obama was first elected President in 2008, a social movement known as the Tea Party emerged to promote fiscally conservative policy. Whereas previous scholarship has studied the movement's effects on Senate races, this study considers the extent of the Tea Party's influence on Republican candidates for the US House of Representatives. By examining campaign materials from 72 races across the 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections, this study considers whether candidates for districts with direct Tea Party influence saw more conservative campaign rhetoric than Congressional districts without direct Tea Party influence. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study finds that the Tea Party's impact on Republican rhetoric is twofold. The Tea Party has shifted the entire Republican debate to focus on their issues, while also significantly influencing future rhetoric in districts with Tea Party candidates in 2010.

Purpose and Overview

As President Obama was attempting to enact some of his campaign promises during his first hundred days in office in 2009, a right-wing movement known as the Tea Party was simultaneously gaining traction across the country. The movement promoted fiscally conservative responses to the recent economic downturn, and quickly revitalized interest in Republican politics. Since the movement is so recent, very few scholars have been able to study it in any capacity, and new research is constantly emerging regarding both the movement and its followers.

At present, most research on the Tea Party looks at either its origins, the makeup of its followers, or the political ramifications that the Tea Party has had on American politics. Although there has been some research finding increased polarization among Republican constituents, no one has looked specifically at how the Tea Party has affected the way Republicans campaign. We know that the Tea Party is generally more conservative than the rest of the Republican Party, but has that led the GOP to become more conservative, or is the Tea Party simply mobilizing and giving a louder voice to one part of the Republican base? This study seeks to answer this question by examining Republican campaign material in key Congressional districts in 2008, 2010, and 2012.

Furthermore, no study looking at the Tea Party's electoral effects has focused on elections to the House of Representatives. Instead, all studies have chosen to focus on the Senate races where the Tea Party had a large effect in 2010, which is the only election where the Tea Party was active that scholars have had enough time to analyze. This study fills that gap in the literature by focusing solely on elections to the House of Representatives, which is the ideal house of Congress to look at for several reasons. The

short terms of Congressmen make the House of Representatives more responsive to the

will of the electorate, which was an intentional decision by the founding fathers in their

design of Congress. The House of Representatives is therefore more likely to be sensitive to

sudden fluctuations in the opinions of the American public. Furthermore, the two-year

terms in the House of Representatives means that the Tea Party's effect can be studied

across several elections instead of being confined to only one election cycle. This new

subject of study, along with this study's original methodology that combines qualitative and

quantitative analysis, adds new depth to the body of research on the Tea Party.

Origins of the Tea Party

In 2009, a movement known as the Tea Party appeared on the American political

scene, seemingly overnight. In order to fully understand this movement, it is crucial to

understand where the movement came from, and many scholars offer different thoughts on

this matter. Because the movement came onto the political scene so quickly after President

Barack Obama's inauguration, some scholars posit that the Tea Party grew to prominence

as a reactionary movement to his election as president. For instance, Rosenthal and Trost

assert, "Outrage over the Obama administration's response to the economic crisis… and

questions about the legitimacy of Obama's presidency… provided key ingredients for the

political brew known as the Tea Party," (2012, 9). This paints the Tea Party as a

spontaneous reaction to one administration, but this may not be the full explanation.

In Alan Abramowitz's research on polarization in America, he asserts that the Tea

Party has grown out of years of increasing political polarization (2013, 103). Abramowitz

argues that the American public has, as a whole, become increasingly ideologically

polarized since the 1950's (2013, 7). He claims that this divide in the public has led to a

divide among their political representatives, who reflect the beliefs of their constituents. Abramowitz's theory suggests that conservative activism has been around for decades, and the Tea Party is simply its most recent iteration. Although this adds some context to the formation of the Tea Party, the reality falls somewhere in between the two theories of the Tea Party's creation. Years of increasing political polarization created a ripe environment for the formation of the Tea Party, and then the Obama administration provided the spark the movement needed to form.

Tea Party Identity and Conservatism

Ever since the formation of the Tea Party movement, many scholars have sought to understand the nature of those who identify with the Tea Party. Demographically, there is very little dispute over the composition of the Tea Party. Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin wrote one of the first scholarly studies of the Tea Party, arguing that Tea Party members are generally older, whiter, and more middle class than the rest of America (2011). They argue that, because the Tea Party is generally made up of older white males, slightly higher income is to be expected (Williamson et al. 2011). Where the Tea Party identity becomes more complicated, however, is in looking at the Tea Party's definition of conservatism.

At present, the Tea Party focuses on advocating its conservative economic views. In 2010, *The Washington Post* performed what they called the "Tea Party Canvass," which aimed to "understand the network of individuals and organizations at the heart of the nascent political movement" (Miller & Walling 2012, 10). They conducted interviews with contacts from Tea Party groups in every state across the country except for Hawaii. When they asked about the most important issue to the group, the top two issues were "government/deficit spending" and "limited/size of government," with issues like same-sex

marriage, abortion, and gun rights being the three least important issues to the groups

(Miller & Walling 2012). These priorities are consistent with other research on the ideology

of the Tea Partiers.

Tea Party members are generally most uniform in their economic views. Lisa Disch

points out that 92% of Tea Party identifiers support smaller government (Disch in

Rosenthal & Trost 2012, 136). Tea Party members are also more likely than nonmembers

to prefer cutting domestic spending as a way to reduce the federal deficit (Arceneaux &

Nicholson 2012). This picture of the Tea Party is accepted both among scholars and the

general public, as the Tea Party itself talks about limiting government interference.

Where scholars diverge is on the importance and uniformity of social issue opinions

within the Tea Party. Some scholars have asserted that, as social issues are not important

to the Tea Party groups, Tea Party members are more diverse in their social views

(Williamson et al. 2011). However, this is not the case. Several studies have shown that the

Tea Partiers are more conservative than the general public on issues extending beyond the

realm of strictly economic concerns. Abramowitz found that Tea Party supporters were

more likely than both non-supporters and other Republicans to oppose health care reform,

ending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," clean energy, and stem cell research (2013). In comparing

the Tea Party to the general population on gay marriage and abortion, Arceneaux and

Nicholson also found that Tea Party members are, as a group, significantly more socially

conservative than non-Tea Party members (2012). While the Tea Party does not generally

try to influence political opinions on social issues, research suggests that uniformity of

social opinions is still an important part of the Tea Party. These social views could provide

a "litmus test" for candidates who seek endorsement of a Tea Party organization.

The Tea Party's Relation to the GOP

The Tea Party was undeniably a powerful force in the 2010 midterm elections. Although Tea Party groups generally promote themselves as independent of both the Republican and Democratic parties, most so-called "Tea Party candidates" in the 2010 elections ran under the Republican label on the ballot. This trend led scholars to investigate the relationship between the Tea Party and the Republican Party. This relationship is a fairly complicated one, as the two groups' priorities line up sometimes and fail to align others. Generally, however, the Tea Party is thought to bolster and motivate conservatives in the Republican Party while also pulling the GOP to the right ideologically (Skocpol & Williamson 2012).

There are two different views on the partisan makeup of the Tea Party, although the second is generally the most accepted view. The first viewpoint comes from the Tea Party itself, which insists that it is a broad-based movement that draws from both sides of the political spectrum. Scott Rasmussen and Doug Schoen's defense of the Tea Party exemplifies this, as they state that the Tea Party is non-partisan and that Democrats could appeal to Tea Party members just as much as Republicans if they tried to do so (2010, 8). The Tea Party's self-description portrays itself as a movement of moderates that draws in members from both sides of the political spectrum. However, while this might be how the movement wants to see itself, many researchers have collected empirical evidence that this is not the case.

The second view of the Tea Party holds that it is generally much more Republican and conservative than the rest of the country. This viewpoint tends to hold up better when scrutinized. In Arceneaux and Nicholson's study on the Tea Party, they found that 89% of

Tea Party supporters identify as or lean towards the Republican Party (2012). Alternatively, in their study, they found that only 4% of their sample identified as or leaned Democrat, and 7% were considered "pure," or non-leaning, independents (Arceneaux & Nicholson 2012). This portrayal of the Tea Party as a highly conservative movement makes more sense after looking at its members' ideological beliefs. After establishing that the Tea Party is generally made up of Republicans, one might expect that the Tea Party would strengthen the Republican Party.

It is undeniable that Republicans had a strong performance in the 2010 elections, and many scholars attribute that enthusiasm to the emergence of the Tea Party. In that election, Republicans saw the strongest results in the House of Representatives, gaining 63 seats and control of the chamber. In the Senate, Democrats held onto their majority, but Republicans still won 6 more seats than they had previously held. They also made gains at the state level, both in governorships and state legislatures. The media narrative immediately after the election was very clearly that these Republican victories were due in large part to the Tea Party. ABC News claimed that Tea Party-backed candidates scored "major victories" in the elections, while *The New York Times* proclaimed right before the election that the "Tea Party [is] set to win enough races for wide influence," (Srikrishnan, Pliner, Schlesinger, Goldstein, & Kahn 2010; Zernike 2010). Some opposing scholars have claimed since the election that the Tea Party just rode the 2010 Republican electoral wave instead of creating it (Ansolabehere & Snyder Jr. 2011). However, authors Skocpol and Williamson assert that the Tea Party rescued the Republican Party from the horrible defeat of 2008 (2012). Not only did the renewed conservative activism of the Tea Party reinvigorate the Republican Party, but Skocpol and Williamson also point out that it

refocused the political dialogue. Before the emergence of the Tea Party, much of the political discourse in the country focused on President Obama's agenda for change and enacting his campaign promises. However, once the Tea Party started becoming a stronger political voice, the debate quickly shifted to government interference and failure through programs like TARP and the auto industry bailout (Skocpol & Williamson 2012). For these reasons, scholars argue that the Tea Party bolstered the Republican Party.

While the Tea Party was able to renew conservative activism across the country, scholars have also pointed out that the Tea Party's goals do not always line up with the Republican Party's goals. As one of the two main political parties in American politics, the primary goal of the Republican Party is to elect Republicans to office. The Tea Party, on the other hand, wants to establish themselves as a new, ultra-conservative force in American politics. Skocpol and Williamson say that the Tea Party's goal was to cleanse the Republican Party of moderate conservatives and replace them with more ideologically loyal conservatives (2012). These ultra-conservatives would solidify the Tea Party's power base. The primary example of this happened in the 2010 Delaware Senate race, where the Tea Party-backed candidate, Christine O'Donnell, beat the establishment candidate, Mike Castle (R-DE), in the primary, but lost to the Democratic candidate in the general election. In analyzing the election after it was over, Daniel Reed found that, in nominating O'Donnell as the Republican candidate, the Tea Party most likely cost the GOP the Delaware Senate seat (Reed 2012). Polls prior to the election showed that Democrats only had tepid support in Delaware, meaning that the Senate seat should have been easy for Republicans to win. However, by nominating a strongly conservative candidate who did not have the same broad base of appeal as Castle, O'Donnell was not able to win over the Delawareans who

were disenchanted with the Democrats. The Tea Party was solely concerned with nominating the most ideologically conservative candidate. This goal of the Tea Party harshly clashes with the Republican Party's main goal of getting Republicans elected, and in some cases, the Tea Party has lost conservative seats by insisting on ideological purity.

Some research indicates that the Tea Party's rising influence within the Republican Party as well as their ideological goals has led to an increasingly conservative Republican Party. Using Adam Bonica's liberal/conservative scale, Williamson and Skocpol compared the Republicans in the 111th Congress (2009-2010) to the 112th Congress (2011-2012). They found that a shocking 77% of incoming Republicans in 2011 were ideologically to the right of the "typical" Republican in the previous Congress (Skocpol & Williamson 2012). Furthermore, many of the new Representatives were ideologically to the right of nearly all members in the 111th Congress (Skocpol & Williamson 2012). This research indicates that the Republican Party is becoming more conservative, and that Congress is also becoming increasingly polarized, supporting Abramowitz's research on increasing polarization.

This model of increasing conservatism also fits with the larger Downsian model of spatial political party competition. In Anthony Downs' model of political ideology, he presents the overall ideology of a society as a distribution of all voters' ideological beliefs on a linear scale. One of the main concepts of this model is that of the median voter theory, which is that, when societal ideologies are distributed according to a bell curve, the parties will converge on the center ideologically towards the median voter (Downs 1957, 142). This would mean that, if we assume that American ideologies are unimodal around the political center, we would expect the Republican and Democratic Parties to ideologically fall center-right and center-left, respectively. However, the record of increasing political

polarization fits with another piece of Downs' model. Downs' model states that, if the electorate is polarized, the parties will move away from the center ideologically to form a new bimodal distribution, and the parties would have more to gain in terms of vote share by moving to the extremes (Downs 1957, 143). If the Tea Party has successfully mobilized the right wing of the political spectrum, then according to Downs' model, we would then expect to see the Republican Party move right ideologically to capture those voters.

This research suggesting that the Republican Party has become more conservative because of the Tea Party would also suggest that Republican campaigns have become more conservative. However, no research has looked specifically at Republican campaigns. Most previous research either looks at citizens who identify with the Tea Party or members of Congress who were endorsed by the Tea Party. In addition, most research focuses on individual Senate campaigns. This study will fill this gap in research by looking at campaigns for the House of Representatives to determine whether campaign rhetoric has become more conservative with the emergence of the Tea Party. By comparing the 2008, 2010, and 2012 Congressional elections, I can get a picture of how the Tea Party affected campaign rhetoric in the same districts across time. Based on the current body of knowledge on the Tea Party, I expect to see that the presence of the Tea Party in Congressional districts in 2010 would lead candidates in those districts to be more conservative in 2012.

Case Selection and Definition of Concepts

For this study, I will be examining campaign materials released by the winners of Republican primaries in selected Congressional districts. This requires careful case selection, as I will not be able to look at every Congressional district in the United States.

Since the Tea Party was the most visibly active during the 2010 midterm elections, that is the election that will be used to divide Congressional districts into two groups: those that were directly influenced by the Tea Party and those that were not. Those same districts will then be analyzed based on the results from the 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections. In some cases, redistricting occurred in 2010, and in those places, the 2012 district that is closest in area to the old district will be analyzed.

The most difficult group to define would be districts in which the Tea Party directly influenced the election. In this study, direct influence will be based on "hit lists" released by two of the most nationally recognized Tea Party groups, the Tea Party Express and FreedomWorks. These "hit lists" indicated Senate seats and Congressional districts where each group would focus on winning. These lists will become the foundation of case selection, as they indicate an active effort by the Tea Party to influence specific districts. The Tea Party Express' list of nine targeted districts was Colorado-4, Florida-8, Indiana-9, Massachusetts-4, Nevada-3, Virginia-5, West Virginia-1, South Carolina-5, and Virginia-11. FreedomWorks' hit list was divided into "top-tier targets" and "potential targets," but since the list of potential targets had over 40 districts, only the four top-tier targets will be used in this study. The four top-tier targets from FreedomWorks are Alabama-2, Arkansas-2, Florida-8, and Ohio-15. The two lists combined produce a list of 12 Congressional districts, and those will serve as this study's group of districts that were directly influenced by the Tea Party.

This group of "Tea Party targeted" districts will then be compared to a group of districts where the Tea Party did not actively target the election. This will control for the possibility that any increase in conservatism across the elections just reflects a national

trend towards polarization and not the specific influence of the Tea Party. Every district but

two on the list of "Tea Party targeted" districts was held by a Democratic incumbent but

won by the Republican challenger in 2010. Since that is the case, the districts to examine

that were not Tea Party targeted will be selected from districts that were also originally

held by Democrats and picked up by Republicans. In addition, an attempt will be made to

select districts from states that also had a "Tea Party targeted" district, as this will show if

there are any differences between districts, despite relative similarity of issues and

demographics. After taking these factors into consideration, the list of 12 Congressional

districts not targeted by the Tea Party that will be studied are Colorado-3, Georgia-8,

Indiana-8, Washington-3, Virginia-2, Ohio-18, Pennsylvania-3, Mississippi-4, Mississippi-1,

New Hampshire-2, New Jersey-3, and New York-19. All of these races were Republican

pickups but, by most accounts, lacked Tea Party candidates.

The most difficult concept to define in this study is the concept of "conservatism," as

it has many different definitions and is constantly evolving. While there are about as many

different conceptual definitions for "conservatism" as there are conservative academics,

many of them are too broad to be used for this study. For this reason, the concept of

"conservatism" has to be approached in a different manner. Instead of looking at a broad

conceptual definition, I will instead focus on the ideals that the Tea Party espouses, using

their definition of "conservative" to determine whether we see an increase in Tea Party

rhetoric in Tea Party districts alone or across the board. This definition comes from the two

Tea Party groups that were used for selection of districts, namely FreedomWorks and the

Tea Party Express. Pulling from their websites, I will be looking for the following key words

and phrases: "bailout," "stimulus," "raising taxes," "out-of-control spending," "federal

spending," "balanced budget amendment," "earmarks," "regulation," "government takeover,"

"big/large government," "government run health care," "unfunded mandate," "rationing of

health care," "entitlements," "domestic oil/energy production," "dependency on foreign oil,"

"school choice," "workplace freedom," "card check legislation," "close loopholes," and

"simplify tax code." This definition of "conservatism" will be used to conduct content

analysis, the explanation of which follows.

Research Design

This study examines the conservatism of the Republican primary winners in each of

the 24 Congressional districts above through content analysis of campaign materials from

the 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections. Since this study is most interested in determining how

the Tea Party has changed candidates' campaign rhetoric, campaign materials from outside

interest groups, the Republican National Committee, and the National Republican

Congressional Committee were not used.

Two different types of candidate campaign materials were analyzed, the first of

these being the candidate's website. In the modern age, all candidates for federal office

have a website of some kind, and most list their positions on issues on their campaign

websites. They generally use that digital space to spell out their beliefs and positions, which

serve as a good measure for how conservative that candidate portrays him or herself.

Thanks to online resources like the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, I was able to view

campaign websites as the candidates had them before Election Day, not an updated version.

This shows how the candidate positioned him or herself on a broad range of issues. Using

my operationalized definition of "conservatism," I counted how many times each word or

phrase is used in a candidate's website. The accumulated total for all of the phrases divided

by the total number of issue sections measures of how conservative a candidate's website was.

I also analyzed campaign ads. Many candidates have their own YouTube channels where they will post ads that have aired on the local airwaves. This study also extends the content analysis to these candidates' TV ads. This gives a different perspective on the candidates' messages, as candidates are more likely to emphasize the most important parts of their messages in campaign ads. With campaign ads, "conservatism" was operationalized as the average number of mentions of key phrases per campaign ad instead of the total overall. This is because candidates had different numbers of campaign ads available for analysis, so I controlled for this when constructing my variable.

From here, I then conducted means comparison t-tests to see if there is a significant difference between conservatism in Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts. For these tests, my independent variable was Tea Party influence, and my dependent variable was the change in conservatism of the campaign material. One test looks at the conservatism of the website, while another looks at the conservatism of campaign ads. Since my definition of conservatism is based on a Tea Party definition, I expected to see that the measure will increase from 2008 to 2012. However, by comparing the Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts, I investigate whether the Tea Party really had an effect on selected districts, or if there was simply a uniform increase across all districts. If my hypothesis is correct, that is, that Tea Party influence in a district will make the Republican candidate more conservative in following elections, then I expected to see a greater change in conservatism from 2008 to 2012 in the Tea Party targeted districts than the non-Tea Party targeted districts.

Observations from Content Analysis

As the data was collected from campaign websites and advertisements, several main observations struck me that affected my further analysis. The first is that there was no consistent direction of movement in the conservatism measure from 2010 to 2012. While some candidates appeared to become much more conservative in 2012, others seemed to reach a "peak" conservatism in 2010, moderating their message in 2012. In addition, some candidates hardly changed their platforms at all, especially since many of the 2012 candidates were the winners from 2010. Since it was not obvious during the content analysis which election year would have the more conservative rhetoric, t-tests were run for the differences between 2008 and 2012 as well as the differences between 2008 and 2010 to get a more complete picture of the data.

I also noted in my content analysis that there were different levels of the frequency of mentions of these key conservative terms. For instance, some candidates had very few issues listed on their website, but those issues would hit many key phrases. On the other hand, other candidates might only have two issues out of their fifteen listed issues that really addressed the Tea Party concerns, but due to the sheer number of issue sections, that candidate would end up having more "Tea Party phrases" than the first type of candidate. For this reason, I decided to divide the total number of terms used by the number of issue sections on the website, giving me a measure of average number of terms used per section. This gives me a statistic that measures not only frequency, but also intensity of conservative phrases used.

Finally, consistent access to campaign materials was a problem across candidates. Almost all candidates consistently had either accessible campaign websites or a House

website with their issue positions listed. However, not even a majority of candidates had

ads available on YouTube, meaning that a t-test on the YouTube ads alone would not hold

as much meaning as a combined measure of conservatism. For this reason, I combined

website conservatism with YouTube conservatism to give a joint measure. I found that

many candidates who had extensive YouTube channels had less-developed websites.

Therefore, adding the two averages together seems like a reasonable measure for overall

conservatism.

Statistical Analysis

In an attempt to reject the null hypothesis that the Tea Party had no effect on the

conservatism of Republican campaign rhetoric, several t-tests were performed to compare

the Tea Party targeted districts to the non-Tea Party targeted districts. First, t-tests were

conducted to compare conservatism of Tea Party targeted districts and non-Tea Party

targeted districts each year in order to look for significant differences in behavior between

the districts. A difference of means t-test was performed on measures for combined

conservatism of website and ads, conservatism of just the website, and conservatism of just

the ads. Figure 1 details the results of these t-tests.

Figure 1: Statistical values for test of differences in mean conservatism (Tea Party – non
Tea Party)

Test for difference between TP & non-TP	T	P-value
Combined conservatism of 2008 candidate	-0.937	0.359
Combined conservatism of 2010 candidate	0.994	0.331
Combined conservatism of 2012 candidate	0.604	0.552
Conservatism of 2008 candidate's website	-0.894	0.381
Conservatism of 2010 candidate's website	-0.049	0.961
Conservatism of 2012 candidate's website	1.735	0.097*
Conservatism of 2008 candidate's ads	-0.205	0.839
Conservatism of 2010 candidate's ads	1.435	0.165
Conservatism of 2012 candidate's ads	-0.54	0.595

*Significant at the 0.1 level of significance

As one can see, there were very few tests where there was any significant difference between Tea Party targeted districts and non-Tea Party targeted districts. The only test that had significance at any level was in 2012 when comparing candidates' websites. With a t-value of 1.735 and a resulting p-value of 0.097, this result is only significant at the 0.1 level, which is one of the highest levels of significance acceptable for this type of research. However, this indicates that there is a moderately significant difference between the conservatism of campaign websites between Tea Party targeted districts and non-Tea Party targeted districts in 2012. This could support the hypothesis, as it suggests that the Tea Party may have led their districts to diverge in rhetoric from the other non-Tea Party targeted districts.

In addition to examining the difference between districts in each year, I also calculated a variable that indicated the change in conservatism between years, where a positive value indicated that the district was more conservative in the later election. These values were calculated between the 2008 and 2010 elections, as well as between the 2008 and 2012 elections. I then ran t-tests to determine if there was a difference in the mean changes between Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts. As with the previous set of analyses, this produced mixed results. Figure 2 shows the results from these t-tests.

Figure 2: Statistical values for test of differences in mean change in conservatism (Tea Party – non Tea Party)

Test	T	P-value
Change in overall conservatism (2010 – 2008)	1.46	0.158
Change in website conservatism (2010 – 2008)	0.637	0.53
Change in ad conservatism (2010 – 2008)	1.678	0.107
Change in overall conservatism (2012 – 2008)	0.943	0.356
Change in website conservatism (2012 – 2008)	2.197	0.039**
Change in ad conservatism (2012 – 2008)	-0.37	0.715

**Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

As with the previous set of t-tests, only one test in this set produced significant results. When comparing the change in conservatism from 2008 to 2012 between Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts, websites in Tea Party targeted districts were found to become significantly more conservative than the websites in non-Tea Party targeted districts. With a t-value of 2.197 and a resulting p-value of 0.039, this is significant at the 0.05 level, which is an appropriate level of significance to use for social science research. This means that websites from Tea Party targeted districts became significantly more conservative from 2008 to 2012 than websites from non-Tea Party targeted districts. This particular test fits with the hypothesis, as it shows that the Tea Party does have an effect on the conservatism of some of the Republican campaign rhetoric. However, while it shows that the Tea Party targeted districts become more conservative than non-Tea Party targeted districts, this test does not show any sort of overall effect of the Tea Party on the Republican Party. The next set of tests sought to answer this question.

While Tea Party targeted districts became more conservative than non-Tea Party targeted districts, it is important to establish if the non-Tea Party targeted districts were significantly more conservative in 2012 than they were in 2008. The previous test only showed that non-Tea Party targeted districts were relatively less conservative than the Tea Party targeted districts, but movement within the non-Tea Party targeted districts could also indicate that the Tea Party has an effect on the Republican Party as a whole. Therefore, t-tests were performed comparing the mean conservatism in 2008 and 2012 among Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts.

Figure 3: Statistical values for test of difference in conservatism among district types (2012 – 2008)

Test for difference between 2012 and 2008	T	P-value
Conservatism of website, Tea Party	2.929	0.008***
Conservatism of website, non-Tea Party	1.241	0.228
Conservatism of ads, Tea Party	1.164	0.257
Conservatism of ads, non-Tea Party	1.856	0.083*
Overall conservatism, Tea Party	3.072	0.006***
Overall conservatism, non-Tea Party	2.299	0.031**

* Significant at the 0.1 level of significance
** Significant at the 0.05 level of significance
***Significant at the 0.01 level of significance

This battery of tests indicates some interesting results. I expected to see a broad increase in conservatism across the board in 2012 because conservatism was operationalized using a definition from 2010. Overall, this pattern seems to hold, since both Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts saw significantly increased overall conservatism from 2008 to 2012. However, in campaign websites, which is where I found significant differences in the previous tests, only the Tea Party targeted districts saw a significant increase in conservatism from 2008 to 2012. The campaign website from non-Tea Party targeted districts saw no significant change in conservatism from 2008 to 2012, as the t-value for that test was 1.241 and the resulting p-value was 0.228. The Tea Party targeted districts had a t-value of 2.929 and p-value of 0.008, which is significant even at the 0.01 level of significance.

What do these mixed results mean for the hypothesis of this study? First, the overall increase in conservative Tea Party rhetoric across districts indicates that there has been a general re-focusing around these Tea Party issues in the Republican Party as a whole. More importantly, though, the Tea Party appears to be having the greatest effect on the rhetoric in individual districts through the campaign websites. Campaign websites in Tea Party

targeted districts became significantly more conservative in 2012 than they had been in 2008, and they changed significantly more than websites in non-Tea Party targeted districts. Because of consistency issues with the YouTube advertisements, the campaign website is the best and most consistent test that I have of my hypothesis. As such, I can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the Tea Party has had a significant effect on the conservatism of Republican campaign rhetoric.

Analysis and Conclusions

The original hypothesis of this study predicted that Tea Party influence in a Congressional district would lead subsequent Republican campaigns in that district to have more conservative rhetoric than their non-Tea Party counterparts. With direct influence from such a conservative movement, it would make sense that candidates in future elections would make their rhetoric more conservative, thus fitting with the new normal established by the Tea Party. While this study produced some mixed results, there were two main conclusions that can be drawn from the results.

The first conclusion is that the Tea Party has had an effect on the rhetoric of the Republican Party as a whole. When looking at how the combined measure of conservatism changed from 2008 to 2012, it was clear that candidates in both Tea Party and non-Tea Party targeted districts saw an increase in conservatism. Because "conservatism" was operationalized based on the issues that the Tea Party advocates for, it was expected that there would be an increase in conservatism, at least among the Tea Party targeted districts. However, the fact that even the non-Tea Party targeted districts had increased "Tea Party conservatism" indicates that the Tea Party was able to shift the entire Republican debate.

They brought their economic issues to the forefront of Republican campaign debate, even in districts where they were not explicitly trying to affect the outcome of those elections.

While the Tea Party does appear to have an overall effect on Republican campaigns, it also appears that they have a significantly greater effect on those districts where they explicitly attempt to influence the election. In districts where the Tea Party actively tried to influence the election, the candidates in the following election became significantly more conservative in how they presented themselves on their campaign websites than candidates in non-Tea Party targeted districts. The campaign website is really the best measure of how a candidate wants to present themselves, and it was the most consistent campaigning medium studied in this research. The fact that the websites in Tea Party targeted districts became significantly more conservative than non-Tea Party targeted districts really speaks to the desire of these candidates to appeal to the conservative Tea Party voters.

While this study is a first step towards understanding the Tea Party's impact on Republican campaign rhetoric, several limitations exist that could potentially be improved upon in further research. This study only looked at a selected group of Congressional districts, and while the sample size was sufficient to conduct some statistical analyses, the analysis would be strengthened by a larger sample size.

Furthermore, the redistricting following the 2010 Census created some unique problems that were not anticipated at the start of this research. While districts were consistently labeled as the same number in 2008 and 2010, a few changed district numbers in 2012. Luckily, in the cases chosen, the geographic area of these few districts did not change very much, meaning that it was reasonable to assume that the makeup of the

districts did not change much either and that the districts simply changed numbers. However, if this research were to be extended, a further look into the geopolitical makeup of these districts could add to the research. While minor geographic changes do not generally change the makeup of the district, it is certainly possible that the small addition or removal of area did drastically affect the district. This study would benefit either from being repeated during election years with consistent district boundaries or conducting a more in-depth analysis of the new districts to make sure they are comparable to the old districts.

I would also like to see further research that examines the rhetoric of Democratic campaigns, as it is possible that these have also been influenced by the Tea Party. Although Tea Party candidates don't generally run under the Democratic label, it's entirely possible that Democrats have also adopted some of the Tea Party rhetoric in order to lessen the influence of the Tea Party. A study that employs the same methodology as this one but looks at Democratic candidates could give a more accurate picture of the Tea Party's influence on elections. If the Tea Party is having an effect on campaigns outside of the Republican Party, it could have some broad implications for the future of American elections.

As it stands, the results of this study have some interesting implications for the future of the Republican Party. After losses in two consecutive presidential elections, many commentators are speculating as to how the Republican Party will be able to recover in the future. The three elections studied in this paper have shown some deep divisions within the Republican Party, divisions that have only gotten deeper after Mitt Romney's loss in 2012. The struggle between the establishment wing of the party and the more conservative

wing, which includes groups like the Tea Party, has almost dominated political speculation surrounding the Republican Party since November 2012. While the establishment Republicans are attempting to make some electoral changes that cut out the more conservative Republicans, this study suggests that it might not be so easy to do so. The Tea Party has had more of an effect on the Republican Party than simply mobilizing some strongly conservative voters every other year. The movement has fundamentally changed the rhetoric of Republican candidates, shifting them towards the more conservative wing of the party.

Not only that, but this study has also shown that the Tea Party is very capable of exerting its influence over districts that it chooses to target. In these districts, the Tea Party has shaped the dialogue even more, and many of the candidates elected in these districts have carried on the Tea Party message beyond the initial election in which they received Tea Party support. By pushing their message so much in these districts that they chose to influence, the Tea Party has made it difficult for the Republican establishment to push the movement aside. Even if the Republican establishment is able to prevent further Tea Party influence in districts, it is clear that the Tea Party has already had a significant effect in some areas. Only time will tell how long the Tea Party's influence will last within the divisive atmosphere of the Republican Party.

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