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Yes: The Tea Party Is a Legitimate Political Movement

The Tea Party Is a Grassroots Organization Representing Mainstream Concerns

J. Wesley Fox
The Tea Party movement is a unique, grassroots collection of citizens' groups that are worried about the direction the country is headed and concerned about issues such as excessive government spending, the economy, and the expansion of government power. The Tea Party's supporters are largely mainstream Americans who are frustrated with both Democrats and Republicans and who are interested in using legitimate political activity to change Washington.

The Tea Party Had Many Key Victories in the 2010 Midterm Elections

Mary Claire Kendall
Tea Party activists are angry at a government that they view as too big and too aligned with wealthy corporations that do not care about ordinary, hardworking Americans. The Tea Party used that anger in the 2010 midterm elections to retake the House of Representatives for Republicans, in addition to several Senate seats.

The Tea Party Has a Good Chance at Remaining Viable

Justin Quinn
Only time will tell whether the Tea Party movement can be sustained long term, but it has several advantages. For example, the Tea Party has attracted experienced political operatives and has acquired the financial backing of big business. These factors give the Tea Party a good foundation for future growth.

No: The Tea Party Is Not a Legitimate Political Movement

The Tea Party Is Not a Genuine Political Movement

Stuart Whatley

America is known for its history of successful social and political movements, but the Tea Party is not a legitimate movement in this tradition. Rather, the Tea Party has no clear goals, coherent messages, or solutions to the country’s problems, and it is an example of the exploitation of frustrated Americans by corporate interests.

The Tea Party’s Importance Has Been Exaggerated

Stephanie Mencimer

The Tea Party’s power has been exaggerated, because it lacks the essential capacity to oppose big corporate interests. This was seen in Congress’s 2010 passage of a food safety bill that was supported by large agricultural interests and in the earlier passage of a health care bill that was backed by the insurance industry. Even the angriest group of grassroots activists are no match for corporate money.

The Tea Party Is a Movement Funded and Exploited by Corporations

Larisa Alexandrovna

The United States does need a third party but not the Tea Party, whose members lack a basic understanding of American history. The Boston Tea Party was a protest against corporate interests, yet the Tea Party movement is actually funded by corporations and is used as a pawn to achieve corporate interests.

Most American Voters Oppose the Tea Party as a Third Party

Sean J. Miller
The rise of the Tea Party movement shows that the American public is unhappy with both Democrats and Republicans, but most voters do not want the Tea Party to be the alternative third party. A 2010 poll found that 54 percent of respondents favored a third party but two-thirds of Democrats, 42 percent of independents, and 45 percent of Republicans rejected the Tea Party as the third party choice.

Chapter 2: Is the Tea Party Movement Racist?

Yes: The Tea Party Movement Is Racist

Tea Party Activists Include White Nationalists and Other Racists

Bill Berkowitz

One of the issues that could derail the Tea Party is the charge of racism. This charge has arisen because Tea Party activists tend to be almost all white and because some supporters have shown up at rallies with racist signs and slogans. This racist element must be eliminated for the Tea Party to become an effective political force.

Tea Party Supporters Are Upset About a Black President

Eugene Robinson

It is not racist to criticize President Barack Obama, but the Tea Party's vitriolic attacks on the president are difficult to explain without considering the possibility of racial prejudice. Tea Party supporters claim they want to take their country back, but no such rhetoric was heard during the presidency of George W. Bush, despite his legacy of two wars, large deficit spending, and creation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). The only factor that makes Obama different is his race.

The Tea Party Is All About Race

Bob Cesca
The explanations of Tea Party members for why they are so outraged by President Barack Obama are nonsensical, so the real reason for their anger is likely race. In reality, the Tea Party is just an extension of conservative talk radio and the Fox News network, which is known for race-baiting and outright racism.

No: The Tea Party Movement Is Not Racist

The Tea Party Is Not a Haven for Racists

_Cathy Young_

A University of Washington poll on racist attitudes among supporters of the Tea Party found that Tea Partyiers are similar to mainstream Americans in this regard. Although it is true that Tea Party supporters are mostly white, more likely to be male, and staunchly Republican and conservative, this does not make them racists.

Race Is Not the Motivator Behind Tea Party Activism

_Robert Chapman-Smith_

The claims that the Tea Party is motivated by race are unfounded because the movement's anger did not begin with and is not directed solely at President Barack Obama. The roots of the Tea Party's rage are a repudiation of George W. Bush's presidency; to ignore this history is intellectually lazy.

African American Tea Party Activists See No Racism in the Movement

_Aaron Goldstein_

Liberal commentators are using allegations of racism as a weapon to discredit the Tea Party. However, black Tea Party supporters say that these charges are completely fabricated. It is really the Tea Party's message of small government that critics do not like.

Claims of Racism in the Tea Party Are Hyperbole

_Michael C. Moynihan_

Various commentators have compared Tea Party protests to incidents of genocide and violent racism, but there is no evidence to support claims of violence or overt racism by Tea Party activists. Instead, claims of Tea Party racism are just examples of heated rhetoric that should be toned down.
Chapter 3: Is the Tea Party Movement Compatible with the Republican Party?

Chapter Preface

Yes: The Tea Party Movement Is Compatible with the Republican Party

Tea Party Activists Are Just Republicans by Another Name

Perspectives

The 2010 midterm elections will likely mark the end of the Tea Party movement because Tea Party activists are really just Republicans. They vote Republican; they tend to be white, male, and higher-income; and their policy goals are Republican—e.g., opposing health care reform and cap-and-trade energy legislation, and supporting tax cuts for the wealthy. Now that Republicans are winning again, there will be no need for Tea Party activism.

The Tea Party Is Just More Republican Radicalism

Tim Rutten

In the 2010 midterm elections, Tea Party and Republican candidates criticized President Barack Obama as radical and accused him of leading the country into socialism. In reality, the Republican Party has nominated some of the most radical candidates America has seen in more than a century, and there is little difference between the views of the Tea Party and more mainstream Republicans.

The Tea Party Message Is an Ultraconservative Republican One

Ole Ole Olson

The Tea Party is a fledgling grassroots movement that was taken over by corporate groups in response to the progressive awakening that was threatening to change policies in ways that corporations did not support. These corporate players then changed the Tea Party message from a libertarian one to an ultraconservative, Republican one. The Tea Party’s new policy statement—the Contract from America—reveals this message clearly.
No: The Tea Party Movement Is Not Compatible with the Republican Party

Tea Party Libertarians Are Fundamentally at Odds with Republicans

Glenn Greenwald

The Republican Party is trying to reinvent itself by absorbing the energy of the libertarian Tea Party movement, but this will not work because Republicans and libertarians are completely incompatible. Republican rule is always characterized by expanded government powers and deficit spending, but when they are out of power Republicans like to pretend they are for small government. This fraud will soon be exposed.

The Tea Party Disagrees with Republican Positions on Foreign Policy

Barry Gewen

Although it is difficult to clarify the Tea Party’s positions on foreign policy issues, it is likely that Tea Party supporters will challenge many mainstream Republican ideas. For example, the Tea Party is suspicious of free trade, which the Republican Party has always supported, and of other foreign policy issues such as American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq; the Tea Party may find more in common with Democrats.

The Tea Party Will Cause Republicans to Lose the 2012 Presidential Election

Mark Shields

Historically, grassroots insurgent groups such as the Tea Party terrify party leaders, prompting them to adopt the insurgent group’s positions. This happened to the Democratic Party when antiwar protestors during the Vietnam War caused the party to become antiwar, and it is likely that the Republican Party will pander to the Tea Party in the same way. This could help President Barack Obama win reelection in 2012.

Chapter 4: What Is the Future of the Tea Party Movement?

Chapter Preface
The 2010 Midterm Elections Begin a Period of Increased Tea Party Activism

Jennifer Levitz, Cameron McWhirter, and Douglas A. Blackmon

Although some Tea Party candidates lost in the 2010 midterm elections, the many Tea Party wins suggest that the movement could become a major force in Congress. Supporters say that the elections are just the beginning of their fight for smaller government, with some Tea Party groups organizing around issues such as balancing the federal budget and repealing health care reform.

The Tea Party Will Be Betrayed by Corporate-Funded Politicians

Dave Johnson

Tea Party supporters oppose free trade agreements, bank bailouts, and other policies favored by corporate America, but many Tea Party candidates were funded by these same corporations. It is likely, therefore, that Tea Party members of Congress will vote against the interests of the Tea Party on issues important to their funding sources.

The Tea Party Will Survive Only as a Republican Party Faction

Matt Steinglass

The Tea Party movement has some progressive commentators worried about its extremist views, but often right-wing parties tend to flame out quickly. The Tea Party, however, might have a more lasting impact largely because it has been organized as a faction within the Republican Party. This might allow the movement another couple of years of protests.

The Tea Party Will Soon Be Absorbed by the Republican Party

Doyle McManus

Once a grassroots organization angry with both political parties, the Tea Party is rapidly becoming a part of the Republican Party, helping it to rebrand itself as a party concerned with fiscal issues. There is no question, however, that the Republican Party will soon co-opt and absorb the Tea Party, causing its demise.
The Tea Party Must Take Over the Republican Party to Succeed

James R. Keena

After winning in the 2010 midterm elections, the Tea Party must define a path forward for the country based on limited government principles. The best way to do this is to engulf and take control of the Republican Party. The Tea Party then must try to create a big-tent program that will attract a broad spectrum of the electorate—one that embraces not only limited government but also principles such as fiscal responsibility, economic growth, and a strong national defense.

The Tea Party Will Fail if It Embraces Conservative Social Issues

Jim Yardley

After the Tea Party’s wins in the 2010 midterm elections, some conservatives have called for the Tea Party to embrace conservative social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. This would be a mistake, however, because social issues are not important to voters at this time. Including these issues in the Tea Party’s agenda would only keep the Democrats in power.

Tea Party Ideologues May Prevent Constructive Lawmaking by Reasonable Republicans

Steve Benen

Reasonable congressional Republicans have been put on notice by the Tea Party that they may be targeted for defeat in the 2012 election cycle if they do not embrace extremist Tea Party policies. This threat may hinder Congress from constructive policy making and push even moderate Republicans to adopt obstructionist stances.

The Tea Party Could Produce Political Chaos

Steven J. Gulitti
The Tea Party will soon find that governing is much harder than winning elections. The Tea Party’s rhetoric must now be reconciled with political realities such as Congress’s institutional nature, the difficulty of achieving spending cuts during an economic slowdown, and the power of lobbyists and wealthy special interests. Instead of an acceptance of Tea Party values, the result could be political chaos.

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