The Tea Party Movement: Conservative Political Activism in the American Context

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Abstract

In the following analysis of the Tea Party Movement – a young, conservative American grassroots social movement – social movement theory and discourse analysis methodology are bridged in order to elaborate on the strategic positioning of social movement organizations within the movement. Social movement organizations within the movement are considered as strategic actors that shape the goals and action repertoires of the movement by invoking commonly contested concepts and symbols in order to justify their organizational missions, action orientations and the larger goals of the movement. The study looks at how the movement emerged, the context it emerged within, the discourse invoked by movement actors, and how this discourse shapes the action orientations of organizations and defines larger movement goals. It is hypothesized that the movement has yet to form a common movement goal, but that the discursive practice of core movement organizations clarifies that larger movement goals that are emerging. Further, it is concluded that there is a main rift within the movement: between organizations that promote electoral activism and those that encourage activists to attend protests and rallies. This division in the movement, as well as the structural positioning of movement actors within the larger context structure, is demonstrated using discourse analysis and the frameworks of political opportunity structure and context structure.

Introduction: Research Question, Methodology and Theoretical Background

The Tea Party movement represents a unique phenomenon in the American Political landscape. It is grassroots, yet many organizations within the movement are coordinated by established Political Action Committees. It is conservative leaning – with an emphasis on smaller government, lower taxes, and individualistic conceptions of free market liberties – but with an anti-establishment stance regarding established political parties on both the left and right. The emergence of the movement signals a shifting electorate and changing demands of voters. The nearly twenty percent of the nation that are Tea Party supporters are demanding change in representation, increased transparency in Washington, and an end to the business-as-usual approach of the D.C. political elite. Having emerged in February 2009, the movement is young, and the story of the Tea Party has yet to be written.

Organizations – both new and pre-existing – have coalesced around the now congealing, but still ambiguous, movement goals. Borrowing from successful web-based organizations of the left, such as moveon.org, the main Tea Party movement organizations are generally based on the Internet. They facilitate, coordinate and organize the hundreds of smaller, disparate local and regional movement organizations. Given the heterogeneity of the movement, the debated significance of its' impact and viability and the lack of scholarship on the subject, the case of the Tea Party movement is a vibrant example of social movement activism in the United States that is ripe for study. In order to approach the case of the Tea Party, I will consider social movement organizations as actors that seek to mobilize activists by defining movement goals, explaining movement ideologies and values, and fighting over contested concepts and symbols essential for maintaining momentum and demanding change. Further, the organizations are not homogenous

in either goals or action orientations; yet, they use similar terms, ideas, and symbols to justify their particular ends. In looking to the organizations as actors shaping the direction of a movement, I will first look to context – both social, cultural, and in terms of political opportunity. Then, following an exposition of the context that has emerged from the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency in 2000 through the election of Barack Obama in 2008, *I ask how the movement emerged, what context it emerged within, what the goals of the movement are, and how the claims of the movement organizations fit within the political and social context of the United States in 2010.*

The organizations themselves – as the members of the chorus creating the polyphony of movement ideas and actions –are considered in terms of their relative positions within the movement – *who are they, who do they claim to be, what do they intend to do, and why?* I will answer these questions by dissecting their claims' using discourse analysis. *I hypothesize that the movement has yet to reach consensus on a common goal. But movement goals are beginning to form, and should be indicated by the nature of the discursive practice of social movement organizations in light of the texts that appear on their websites.* I will demonstrate that there is a gulf in movement organizations with regards to the larger movement goals – with one side promoting electoral activism, and the other side promoting community building, grassroots organizing and protest. This will be demonstrated using discourse analysis, which will also demonstrate coherence between the claims of movement actors and the action repertoires selected.

Thus, in bridging the two approaches – social movement theory and discourse analysis – I will attempt to justify the position of movement actors within the structural, analytical approaches of traditional social movement literature. But as this approach tends to be

historically-oriented, and the Tea Party movement is only now emerging, I intend to bridge the gap by looking at the claims of the movement in order to understand how they fit into the cycle of protest and social movement frameworks. The social movement analytical framework considered here is rooted in the scholarship of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, both of whom look at the emergence of a social movement and social movement organizations in light of political opportunity structure, or the **"**consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 85). These exogenous factors may enhance or inhibit mobilization potential, the nature of claims that are articulated by movement actors, and the potential for actors to affect political change (Meyer and Minkoff, 1458). This is also rooted in the more general context outside of political opportunity, defined by Rucht as the context structure, or the environment around a social movement that influences the choice in movement structure, resource mobilization potential and nature of protest (Rucht, 188). These ecological considerations include the cultural and social tone of a society at a given moment in time (Rucht, 189). Thus there are patterns in the context structure distinct from political opportunity that affect mobilization, the potential to attract allies and antagonists, and that shape the potential of the movement in affecting society at large. Therefore in looking to context, one may begin to understand the nature of the action repertoires selected by movement actors, which for the purposes of this study are the core social movement organizations that articulate movement goals, recruit activists, and mobilize activists to change political dynamics, the nature of discourse and the engagement of society at large. In order to understand the movement, its' emergence, and the nature of claims, discourse analysis will be conducted of seven core movement organizations.

Discourse analysis is the analysis of text and speech produced by social movement actors and organizations, analyzed in order to explain how ideas have shaped movement structure and action repertoires of movement actors (Johnston, 62). Using discourse analysis I will demonstrate that movement organizations share discursive practices – using similar ideas with contested meanings – but invoke these ideas and concepts in different ways in order to promote divergent action repertoires. Further, looking to the discursive practice in light of the stated missions of the organizations, it will be demonstrated that the movement has particular structure, which is concordant with the complimentary missions of particular movement organizations and demonstrates the antagonism between other organizations. Further, the movement structure fits the typology of both Rucht and Klandermans, with the Tea Party movement demonstrating hybrid action-orientations in both formulations – with organizations generally power-oriented and participation-oriented, mixed to varying degrees. Structurally, movement organizations also fit a hybrid-structure, with a mix of the grassroots-model described by Rucht and the pyramid-model described by Klandermans, on the local level. Considering the influence of central organizations such as political action committees that offer information and coordination to smaller, autonomous groups, Klandermans' pyramid structure is a better fit. Therefore, the movement as a whole has a hybrid structure between the grassroots/network model and the pyramid model, as neither of these individually fits the Tea Party structure.

In order to understand the hybrid approach of movement organizations, firstly, Rucht's conception of movement structure will be considered. Rucht describes the movement structure as the intermediate factor between context structure and strategic approach. It is shaped by cultural and social factors as well as the political opportunity structures described by Sidney Tarrow. Rucht defines a grassroots model as loose, informal and decentralized, and the party-oriented

model as more formal and centralized with an emphasis on electoral change. The Tea Party movement demonstrates a hybrid structure, and it is this very split – between heterogeneous, local and grassroots organizations coordinated through higher-level, more centralized organizations, and those more formal organizations attempting to coordinate individual activists around selected campaigns to push for electoral change – that defines the main division in the movement. This is logical as these categories are not mutually exclusive. Rucht states that a social movement may express a hybrid organizational form, including "elements of the grassroots, interest-group, and party models, all to different degrees" (Rucht 202). The similar typology described by Klandermans also supports the hybrid formation of movement structure. Klandermans offers that a movement may demonstrate a network structure, pyramid structure or centralized (federal) structure. The network structure emerges from groups of pre-existing organizations that coordinate to mobilize activists around collective action. The pyramid structure is defined by weak links between levels such that higher-level organizations provide information, strategic suggestions, and define common goals while local organizations maintain a degree of autonomy and diversity (Klandermans, 387). The federal structure is hierarchical and centralized. Considering Tea Party movement organizations en mass as indicating a movement structure it is clear that they present a hybrid between the grassroots/network model, and the pyramid model.

Beyond structural movement organization, Klandermans also describes the "action orientations" of a movement, identifying the value-oriented, power-oriented, and participation-oriented types. In this model, the value-oriented campaign highlights the importance of the organizations' actions in affecting outcomes as justified by the ideology behind them; a power-oriented campaigns emphasizes the movement's overall significance in exerting influence; and a

participation-oriented campaign is centered on the inherent value of participation. In the Tea Party movement, organizations are either oriented towards affecting electoral change, or rather organize activists around protests and rallies. The former encourage activists to get involved with campaigns and are therefore power-oriented and value-oriented as they appeal to general symbols and concepts, such as liberty and the Constitution, but not so strongly to ideological dogma. The later involve a hybrid of participation- and value-orientation (Klandermans, 388). Thus, activists in the Tea Party movement may choose to get involved with different organizations expressing different action orientations, depending on what is the most appealing claim for the individual – meeting others and building community, expressing and reinforcing the importance of American values such as liberty, freedom and the ideas embodied in the Constitution, or less-ideologically approaching the problems in the country by demanding and effecting new political representation. This diversity is not only present in the Tea Party movement but is its' defining feature. Thus, the movement is diverse while maintaining commonality in discursive practice and the grouping of organizations around particular action orientations. This demonstrates that there are gulfs emerging in the movement as organizations try to define larger movement goals, the meanings of contested concepts, and the greater purpose of the movement.

As the movement matures, and organizations carve out distinct niches within the larger movement structure, government, society and activists will respond. The response will shape the movement as the movement shapes the response, and ultimately, should define how the movement progresses. The progression depends on the reactions of allies and antagonists, supporters and detractors and the social and political context at large. Thus it is without question that the movement is shaping the discourse of the American political landscape, shaping the civic

engagement of nearly twenty percent of the country, and forcing a change in the political system. What that change may be, and how it may occur can only be considered first in describing the context – the climate of the American political system as it has changed since the election of George W. Bush in 2000. Contextual analysis will then be applied to the discursive practices of core movement organizations, and will ultimately demonstrate the shape of the movement structure, action orientations of movement organizations, and the nature of protest as articulated by the Tea Party Movement.

CHAPTER 1 – The Story of the Tea Party: Emergence, Development and Influence

The Tea Party movement has emerged at a volatile moment in United States political history. Americans are frustrated. Political interests are re-aligning. Many Americans have lost their homes and jobs and there is increasing poverty among the former middle class. The Tea Party movement has thus emerged to fill a void – creating an overflow valve of dissent for those on the right through the new, unique brand of conservative, grassroots civic activism. The movement is young, having coalesced only after the Bush Presidency – which, between 2000 and 2008, was marked by a terrorist attack on American soil, the start of two wars, the collapse of several American corporations and banks, the signing of the Patriot Act that encroached upon civil liberties, the failing of the derivatives market, a liquidity freeze and increasing joblessness. In 2009, Americans elected Barack Obama to the presidency. In the wake of these shifts in the American political and economic context, the Tea Party Movement emerged to fight big government, big spending and Washington encroachment on Constitutionally protected liberties. In light of this context, the name of the movement is significant – it is an attempt to invoke the powerful symbol of the original American Revolutionaries fighting the non-representative rule of an absentee monarch. Yet the image of the late 18th century freedom fighters is not the only significance to the name, which is also an acronym for 'taxed enough already' – perhaps the most central complaint of Tea Party activists and organizations.

The movement is a grassroots and heterogeneous. Movement activists are an extremely diverse group who often belong to or identify with other social movement organizations and networks. According to Ben McGrath's *New Yorker* article that appeared on February 1, 2010, early Tea Party gatherings were composed of "Ron Paul supporters, goldbugs, evangelicals,

Atlas Shruggers, militiamen, strict Constitutionalists, swine-flu skeptics, scattered 9/11 'truthers,' neo-'Birchers,' and, of course, 'birthers' — those who remained convinced that the President was a Muslim double agent born in Kenya" (McGrath 2010, 2). These activists are whiter (89% as opposed to 77%), wealthier, and more male than the generation population (New York Times, 14 April 2010, 4). In a *New York Times* poll conducted in April 2010, 18% of Americans were self-identified as Tea Party supporters with 4% of these having donated to movement organizations or attended rallies or protests. Tea Party supporters are overwhelmingly concerned about the economy, the job market, and generally disapprove of Obama as president, often asserting that his policies are leading the country towards socialism (which is of course a four-letter word in American politics). They have expressed frustration with his health care proposal, are upset with the growing national debt and government support of American banks and corporations. A poll conducted by the New York Times indicates their general distrust of the government in Washington to make proper decisions, with 94% of Tea Party supporters claiming they cannot trust the government to "do what is right" (New York Times, 14 April 2010, 6).

Yet prior to the coalescing of these valuational commonalities, Tea Party movement activism began with the actions of an individual. The first call for a "Tea Party" took place in February 2009, as the reality of a collapsing derivatives market was coming to the fore, the impact of which was being felt in many American homes. CNBC correspondent and former futures trader Rick Santelli – furious with the government's mortgagee reform plan – proposed a nationwide internet referendum to address the mortgage subsidy problems during an interview on CNBC in Chicago. He specifically called for the organizing of a Chicago Tea Party (McGrath, 2010, 3). Soon websites began popping up, groups began to form, and conglomerates of already existing organizations and newly formed grassroots collectives began to build under the Tea

Party banner. The main organizations in the movement are the core of the analytical approach of this work, and include, the Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Express, Our Country Deserves Better, Liberty First, Patriot Majority, Patriot Caucus and FreedomWorks.

These organizations have acted to coordinate the actions, goals and values of the movement. Yet, the discourse over the movement – who is involved, what they want and what the movement means for the country – have raged in a media debate. Although outside the purview of this work, it is clear that there has been a tremendous media impact on the movement. From the emergence of the movement spurred by a CNN correspondent, to the continuous mainstream media coverage of movement events, it would be difficult to escape images and stories of the movement and movement activists in the United States. This has arguably affected the initial mobilization around the movement. Major news networks have been hosting representatives of Tea Party organizations to explain their missions', offer advice for joining groups and rallies, or to unabashedly call activists to help oppose the current enemy of American liberty: the United States Government. Television personalities from Fox News' Pundit Glenn Beck –who founded a Tea Party-sympathetic organization, the 9/12 Project – to CNN's Lou Dobbs, to those on the left including John Stewart and Steven Colbert, have found fodder in the Tea Party debate. The debate has raged over whether the movement is xenophobic, whether they have real goals and staying power as a political force, and where and why the "liberal media" has been debasing the movement as a bunch of radicals and racists, or worse, a tool of the Washington Republican establishment. Yet, regardless of the nature of the debate, it is without question that the movement has affected the political landscape of the United States. So beyond the context and emergence of the movement, it is significant to look to the affect of movement

actions in light of the repertoires movement organizations and activists have chosen to express their frustration.

Most recently, on Thursday, April 15, 2010, a coordinated rally took place in Washington, D.C. in which Tea Party activists came out in full force to express frustration over extensive taxation and government spending. The effort took place on the 15th in order to coordinate the event with the last day allowed for filing tax returns. Attendees reportedly filled the entire west lawn of the capitol and marched on Freedom Plaza. Beyond the event in Washington, "more than 1,500 smaller protests were staged alongside state and local government offices nationwide" (Gardner and Ruane, 16 April 2010). Protestors reportedly carried signs reading, "You Can't Fix Stupid, but You Can Vote It Out," "I Have Awakened," and "When Injustice Becomes Law, Resistance Becomes Duty" (Gardner and Ruane, 16 April 2010). This is all in line with past protest activity, including most notably the September 12, 2009 protest against the health care reform proposal. At the September 12 event, between 60,000 and 70,000 people (according to ABC News) came to Washington to express frustration with the program – both in its' imposition on state's rights, as well as the impact it would have on increased taxes, higher government spending and intrusion into the consumer freedom of Americans – all central issues among Tea Party supporters (Rossmeir, 14 September 2010).

In terms of types of action besides the heavily covered tax day protests that occurred across the country in early April, other movement activity has been more directly focused on affecting electoral change. This strategic approach seems the impetus behind the National Tea Party Convention that was hosted on February 6, 2010 in Nashville, Tennessee. The for-profit event was sponsored by Tea Party Nation, a social networking site dedicated to the movement. The convention featured Sarah Palin as keynote speaker. According to the New York Times

Caucus Blog, organizers indicated their belief that the convention was a moment in which the movement would start to reach maturity and recognize the significant power they will gain through future political impact – with the goal of electing a conservative congress in 2010 and a conservative president in 2012.

Yet, despite heavily coordinated efforts over protests, conventions and electoral activism, the movement is not without its divisions. Most notably, prior to the convention, a *New York Times* article drew attention to a controversy surrounding the convention – arguably exposing a rift among movement activists and organizers. According to the article, in the days leading up to the convention, sponsors were leaving the event following frustrations of "profiteering" and citing the preventatively expensive ticket price and the influence of Republican National Committee-related groups (Zernike, 25 January 2010). The *Wall Street Journal* coverage also drew attention to the discussions discouraging activists from attending rallies while encouraging that their activism be geared towards supporting conservative candidates in 2010 – working on tangible, electoral change.

Electoral change has come via Tea Party involvement, particularly with a significant electoral turn on November 3, 2009 when Democrat Bill Owens took a special election victory in New York's 23rd District. The House seat had been held by Republicans since 1872, and the win itself elucidated the divide among former GOP party-liners, many of whom are now involved in the Tea Party movement (Bacon Jr., 4 November 2009). The election was held following the appointment (by President Obama) of Republican Congressman John M. McHugh to the position of Secretary of the Army. Owens beat out Doug Hoffman, running as the nominee of the Conservative Party of New York, by 49% to 45% of the overall vote. Yet, the election was not so straightforward. On the evening before the election the Republican nominee, state

Assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava, dropped out of the race and endorsed the Democrat, Bill Owens. This strategic blow to the Republican Party followed many "prominent Republicans" distancing themselves from Scozzafva – the "moderate Republican". According to the article, "leading national Republicans, most notably former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, injected themselves into the race to back Hoffman and blast Scozzafava" (Bacon Jr., 4 November 2009). Thus, the backing of a Conservative over the Republican candidate indicates a shift to the right among upstate New York voters – indicating the potential influence on future elections of the anti-establishment Tea Party.

Given the tone of the country at the moment, it is not surprising that the party chose to distance itself from Scozzafava, who supports gay marriage, has ties to generally Democratic-leaning labor unions, and supported the economic stimulus package that has been one of coalescing issues of the Tea Party movement. In contrast, Hoffman was opposed to the stimulus plan, opposes climate change legislation, is adamantly pro-life and opposes gay marriage (Bacon Jr., 4 November 2009). In terms of impact, the "conservatives, expecting a Hoffman victory, had already started talking about which moderate Republicans they would take on next, suggesting that those who back Democratic initiatives could face trouble winning primaries next year" (Bacon Jr., 4 November 2009). Further, "many conservatives attempted to frame Mr. Hoffman's defeat as a victory, saying that despite Mr. Hoffman's loss, conservatives prevailed because the moderate Republican candidate, Dede Scozzafava, was forced out of the race" (Peters, 3 November 2009). Yet, beyond this election in upstate New York, which indicated a trend towards supporting more conservative candidates among GOP-voters, Scott Brown's winning bid for former Senator Ted Kennedy's seat in Massachusetts further indicated the power of the Tea Party in facilitating electoral change.

Edward Kennedy, a life-long politician and member of perhaps the most famous American political family, served nine terms as a Senator from Massachusetts beginning in 1962 and ending with his death in August 2009. Following the Senator's passing, a special election was held on January 19, 2010 to fill the vacant seat that had been consistently held by a Democrat since 1953. Considering this legacy the election was seen as a guaranteed win for the Democrats. But following a contested election, the Republican challenger Scott Brown won the seat by five points against the Democrat – State Attorney General Martha Coakley. This is unique in a historically Blue state where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by three to one, but, with over half of the state's registered voters not affiliated with a party, the swing in the electorate is not unheard of (Tumulty, 30 April 2010). Yet, the election results were surprising in a state where Obama won 62% of the vote in 2008 (Cooper, 20 January 2010). Additionally, the election of a candidate supported by the Tea Party movement, according to the *New York Times*, "struck fear into the hearts of Democratic lawmakers, who are already worried about their prospects in the midterm elections later this year" (Cooper, 20 January 2010).

The election was hard fought and tightly contested. As of December 2009, Brown was facing a 30-point deficit. By January, he managed to squeeze by with a five-point win on the one-year anniversary of the Obama Inauguration, which has arguably signaled a shift in direction for the forthcoming mid-term elections. The final tally indicated Brown had 52% to Coakley's 47% of the overall vote (Cooper, 20 January 2010). There were certainly factors of campaigning that affected the election – Brown drove his old pick up truck campaigning around the state, he spent time at sports events and made his face and name known as a populist icon for Massachusetts voters. He also explicitly opposed the health care legislation and promised voters that he would be the Senator that would bring power back to the Republicans so they could block

the bill – going strongly against the trend of Kennedy's life-long push for universal health coverage (Tumulty, 30 April 2010). His campaign points also included pushing for increased transparency in government and reducing taxes. He also supports waterboarding as an interrogation technique and opposes cap and trade legislation to curb global warming. Additionally – in line with Tea Party concerns over immigration issues – Brown opposes any citizenship path for illegal immigrants currently in the United States (Cooper, 20 January 2010). Additionally, Coakley did not run a strong campaign, and along with the party, seemed to assume a win for the Democrats with minimal effort, which was proven wrong via Brown's strong campaign. With his win, Democrats no longer control the 60 Senate votes required to overcome a Republican filibuster – a significant blow to the party as it tries to finalize the passing of the contested health care legislation (Cooper, 20 January 2010).

In terms of the Tea Party influence on the election, it was largely Tea Party activists that facilitated the web-based "money bomb" approach (adopted from moveon.org), which raised over $1 million for Brown in 24-hours. According to PRwatch.org, "Given the inevitable political stalemate this stunning Republican upset will cause in Washington, the most interesting political action in 2010 is going to be found in examining what takes place at the grassroots among populists of both the Left and the Right". In terms of forthcoming elections, Tea Party organizations have already begun to rally around the mid-term elections, with notable influence already present in Arizona, Florida and Nevada. Thus it is clear that Tea Party activists have affected elections, and Tea Party organizations are lining up behind candidates for the upcoming election season. Further, politicians and political parties are recognizing the significance of this new faction of voters and adjusting their support for candidates in kind. But, as will be demonstrated in the discourse analysis section, certain groups are not enthusiastic about pushing

their influence directly towards electoral change. In summation, regardless of direct impact, it is clear that voters are demanding different types of candidates, and the parties are choosing to respond. How this will play out in the mid-term elections is unclear, but it is evident that the influence and ideological pull of the Tea Party is currently affecting a shift in electoral politics in the United States – both in effecting elections, and in expressing dissent over policy change through protest. And as 18% of the nation support the movement (as indicated by the New York Times poll), it is clear that this is not a fringe movement, but rather a rising social movement looking to ground itself in the discourse of the nation during a moment of change.

CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review: Social Movements, Political Opportunity, Context and Movement Structure

2.1 Political Opportunity Structure and Context Structure

The Tea Party movement is made up of many diverse organizations ranging from the local and regional to the national. Some are new, having formed to oppose the campaign of Barack Obama or to embed themselves within the larger Tea Party movement frame, while others are older and more established, such as the John Birch Society, or the various Patriot organizations and political action committees that have been in existence prior to the 2008 election. Therefore, the movement is composed of established organizations and new organizations working together within the current framework of political and contextual opportunities currently present in the United States. In order to understand the emergence of this diverse and heterogonous movement one must look to context, the interplay between strategy and opportunity, the formation of organizations and the nature of movement claims – articulated through organizations – that shape the mobilization potential of the movement. Fundamentally, this is rooted in social movement theory, including theories of context structure and political opportunity structure. According to Charles Tilly,

> From their eighteenth-century origins onward, social movements have proceeded not as solo performances, but as interactive campaigns. Like electoral campaigns, popular rebellions, and religious mobilizations, they consist of interactions between temporarily connected (and often shifting) groups of claimants and the objects of their claims, with third parties such as constituents, allies, rival claimants, enemies, authorities, and various publics often playing significant parts in the campaigns' unfolding. (Tilly, 12)

It is clear from the above quote that a social movement cannot be considered alone. Nor can its respective actors – both allies and antagonists – and social movement organizations, be

considered outside of a historical and political context. The traditional conception of the historical and institutional context is the political opportunity structure. Most simply, political opportunity theory looks to the world outside of a social movement and considers the exogenous factors that "enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised, and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy" (Meyer and Minkoff, 1458). According to Sidney Tarrow, political opportunities are a main explanatory factor in the emergence of social movements. Tarrow defines the political opportunity structure as "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 85). This is a question of incentive to mobilize people and resources, including resources both internal and external to the movement. The four fundamental changes in political opportunity structure are: access to participation; shifts in ruling alignment; availability of influential allies; and cleavages within the elite (Tarrow, 86).

Meyer and Minkoff elaborate further on the concept of political opportunity structure in looking more closely at the interplay of opportunity, mobilization and political influence. Fundamentally, the question is whether to conceive of political opportunity structure broadly or narrowly, and how to specify the assumptions of the mechanisms "through which political opportunity translate into action" (Meyer and Minkoff, 1457). Building on the work of Tarrow, the authors address three key issues: distinguishing between general openness in the political system as opposed to openness to one constituency; considering whether to emphasize formal, structural access to political channels or the perceived openness/opportunity; and finally, assessing the effect of the impact of political opportunities on outcomes for actors (Meyer and

Minkoff, 1458). In terms of access to the polity – the more open the access, the more likely challengers in the form of social movements will attempt to influence the system of party politics and decision-making (Rucht, 192). Considering a social movement in the United States, the relative inelasticity of the party system and the relatively high access to decision-making via professionalized channels (including, most notably, the power of lobbying for interest groups) are significant factors. According to Rucht, "strong executive power structures in a given political system tend to induce a fundamental critique of bureaucratic and hierarchical political forms, which is then reflected in the movements' emphasis on informal and decentralized structures" (Rucht, 192).

Scholarship on political opportunity deals primarily with mobilization as the dependent variable, with opportunities generally belonging to the environment outside a movement that determinate the nature of mobilization or the extent of that mobilization. But it is not only political opportunity that shapes the chances for movement mobilization and goal articulation. In looking beyond the rigid conception of political opportunity, Dieter Rucht focuses on the structural basis of mobilization – looking to the societal context and how this affects the emergence and strategic positioning of social movement organizations (Rucht, 185). Dieter Rucht defines these external variables as the context structure, which can be broadly understood as the environment around a social movement that influences the choice in movement structure, resource mobilization potential and nature of protest (Rucht, 188). In this sense, context structure is both a reference point and a mechanism by which organizing occurs. According to Rucht, context structure includes the conditions and resources that "shape a movement's forms and activities" (Rucht, 189). There are patterns in the context structure – distinct from political opportunity – that can work in favor of mobilization, such as a general dissatisfaction with elites,

or the loss of political allies. This may also include the relevant cultural and social context that affect the shaping, innovating and organizing of a movement. In this respect, the cultural context includes the "attitudes and behaviors of individuals…[which depend] on how resonant a movement's issues and demands are with the experiences and interests of larger sections of the population" (Rucht, 190). This includes the concordance of movement claims with the general values and issue perceptions of the larger society. Additionally, the political context includes the state, political alignments, the presence or absence of allies and antagonists. This also includes formal access to the party system, policy implementation capacity of power holders and the alliance structure (Rucht, 190).

Rucht further distinguishes the external context structure between political opportunities, movement structures and mobilization structures. Movement structure is composed of the "organizational bases and mechanisms serving to collect and use the movements resources" (Rucht, 185). The movement structure is therefore distinct from the mobilization structure as the movement may not only exist for mobilization. Further, movement structure can vary, but generally has an overall configuration "based on relatively stable patterns of interrelations" (Rucht, 187). Thus, movements themselves, in light of their political and contextual opportunities facilitate the emergence of different structures and organizational variants due to the heterogeneity and informal nature of early social movement mobilization. David S. Meyer corroborates these ideas in claiming that the context in which a movement emerges influences both the development of a movement and its potential impact. He emphasis the relationship between structure and agency, indicating that to understand agency, one must look to structure, stating further that "activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context dependent" (Meyer, 126). But there is another distinction in

terms of how external factors shape the development of a movement – those affecting opportunities for mobilization and those affecting opportunities for influence. For instance,

> Unfavorable changes in policy can spur mobilization, even at such times when mobilization is unlikely to have much noticeable effect on policy. Indeed, social movements that arise in response to proposed or unwelcome changes in policy may see their influence in moderating the efforts or achievements of their opponents, or more favorably, maintaining the status quo. (Meyer, 137)

But beyond direct changes in policy, general change in a state – social, political or cultural – may create the conditions for social movement emergence. Mobilization begins once movement actors, including social movement organizations, recognize the conditions for movement emergence. In the first phase of a movement there is the convergence of support around ideas, reinforced with the articulation of a common worldview or ideology. Articulation of a common worldview creates agents of the movement (Hiller, 347). In this phase common goals are discussed, and if organizations are formed, or already exist, they are "either wholly informal or small scale for it is acute interest in the movement's goals which brings people together" (Hiller, 347). The second phase is the protest phase, which indicates that a movement has gained enough support to move into new strategies with the awareness that the greater change has not yet occurred, and further action must be taken to achieve goals (Hiller, 348). Finally, during the perspective phase "hostility slowly subsides and participants place greater emphasis on the respectability of the movement… [and] an elaborate organization is needed to maintain some central control over the wide diversity of activities it sponsors to keep its goals before the people" (Hiller, 354).

Yet, the emphasis on common goals is misleading. In the Tea Party movement it has been claimed that the movement has no goals, or that the goals of the movement are divergent – some portions support political activism and a changing of the party system with new elected

representatives, while others emphasize protest of particular policy choices with no direct emphasis on electoral change. There are several core organizations that act as an anchoring force to the diverse and heterogeneous local and regional groups within the movement. These independent, local groups that benefit from the centralizing effects of the larger organizations. Therefore, the central social movement organizations act in an organizational capacity for the smaller groups. As groups form within the movement with different intentions and strategies, the conflict structure begins to emerge. In the Tea Party movement, this differentiation has begun most significantly with the founding of an oppositional group, Patriot Majority. According to Meyer, the alliance and conflict structure may include other activist groups and organizations, counter-movement organizations and counter-movements. This also includes state action, such as repression. Meyer claims that "state action affects not only the volume of participation but also its form and location" (Meyer, 131). It is clear then, that as the conflict structure is emerging, common goals may not be essential to movement development and SMO formation. In order to clarify this, social movement organization formation and mobilization potential must be considered.

2.2 Social Movement Emergence and SMO Formation

In terms of the early moments in the formation of a movement, following the initial mobilization around political and contextual opportunities, organizations begin to emerge. Social movement organizations, as the building blocks of mobilizing structures, are coupled with kinship networks, informal networks of activists, movement communities as well as formal organizations, supportive organizations, movement associations and parties or interest groups (Kriesi, 152). Functionally, the SMOs facilitate the organizational development of a movement structure, the nature of which may determine the potential success of a movement. This includes

internal structure resulting from resource flow, formalization, professionalization and integrative mechanisms, the goal of which is the creation of a constituency and patronage (Kriesi, 154). This external environment, including constituents, allies and authorities, therefore affects the progress of a movement (Kriesi, 155). Alliances affect both movement viability and structure. But fundamentally, the formation of social movement organizations requires entrepreneurs – organizers – who must first gain support for an organization, and then organize mobilized activists around action repertoires. Using the example of protest, Meyer clarifies that to achieve protest action, organizers need activists to believe it is necessary and potentially effective such that organizers and groups will articulate claims "that represent part of a larger ideological agenda that is useful for mobilization and education, issues that seem both urgent and amenable to action" (Meyer, 139). This requires an awareness of the social, cultural and political context.

The ideological agenda articulated by movement organizations therefore makes participation and action more or less appealing for potential activists in light of the conflict structure. In terms of participation in a movement, an individual must consider collective versus selective incentives, with the former indicating the larger significance of the goals of a movement. This rests on the number of participants that believe participating will lead to the success of the movement (Hiller, 385). Therefore, the mobilization potential of a movement is in direct proportion "the [number of] individual members of a society who are, in general, willing to support the movement" (Hiller, 386). This requires active targeting by movement organizations and organizers and depends on the nature of the framing: how unjust is a given situation, and how possible is it that the movement will correct for this injustice. This depends on the nature of the organizations, how many they are, whether they have defined common goals, etc. This is referred to as the multiorganizational field. This field contains both alliance and

conflict structures. Here, Klandermans considers movements as actors, composed of social movement organizations (SMOs). Looking to what makes participation in a movement appealing, and how the nature of support will change with the cycle of protest, Hiller states that

> Social movements are persistent efforts to either instigate or thwart change and thus possess an element of durability in that they posses an ideology, recruit and make demands on followers, and prescribe tactics. Social movements arise because of the perceived unacceptability of some aspect of the status quo, and as a result of the movement possessing some cohesiveness, the movement seeks to confront and interact with the wider society. (Hiller, 345)

This interaction with the society at large is rooted in the nature of the appeal of the movement. As clarified above, in terms of taking advantage of political and structural opportunities, Hiller looks to the response of society and to the claims and repertoires of a movement that respond to greater, contextual forces. Finally, following the articulation of claims, and the emerging support of movement organizations by activists, an SMO reaches a point where its action campaigns have drawn support from a constituent base and forged recognition within the political sphere. Kriesi offers that at this moment of maturation a movement can undergo oligarchization, which is a concentration of power, goal transformation (a shift towards conservatism), or a shift in organizational maintenance towards membership commitments and fundraising (Kriesi, 156). This is called the Weber-Michels model, which focuses on changes in goals and structure, conflict, external and environmental forces and the fluctuation of organizational viability (Zald and Ash, 328). Oligarchization is generally understood as morally wrong by members, who tend towards apathy while a movement becomes more conservative (Zald and Ash, 328). This additionally implies a shift in the action repertoire of a movement, which " is expected to become more moderate, more conventional and more institutionalized" (Kriesi, 156). In elaborating on the Weber-Michels model, Kriesi additionally

offers four different potential transformations for an SMO that correspond to the types of movement organizations distinguished above (Kriesi, 156). He states,

> An SMO can become more like a party or an interest group; it can take on characteristics of a supportive service organization; it can develop in the direction of a self-help group, voluntary organization or a club, or it can radicalize, that is, become an ever more exclusive organization for the mobilization of collective action. (Kriesi, 156)

Therefore the process of the emergence, development, growth and decay of social movement organizations is tied to "the encounter between [groups] and [their] antagonisms…which [provide] models of collective action, master frames and mobilizing structures that produce new opportunities" (Tarrow, 96). As new opportunities are taken advantage of, and new forms of collective action emerge, authorities are unprepared and must adapt and respond. While they are adapting, new forms of action again emerge, and new opportunities are opened (Tarrow, 97). Further, political parties are apt to take advantage of the opportunities created by social movements when there is a range of mobilization, rather than disparate actions by individual movement organizations (Tarrow, 98). It appears that without question this is the moment approaching for the Tea Party movement and it's respective organizations.

Tarrow states further "By opening challenges to elites and authorities, 'early risers' expose the vulnerability of powerholders to attacks by others…[these] groups more easily collapse because they lack the resources to sustain collective action when opportunities close" (Tarrrow, 86). In terms of the Tea Partiers, the early movement included a wide range of unaffiliated individuals and some already existing organizations without coherent or identifiable goals. As the movement continues, it will inevitably meet resistance from the government, and perhaps more strongly from political parties that cannot effectively mobilize the activists for

electoral purposes. This resistance may come in the form of cooption of the movement – a claim that some activists have already begun to levy following the national convention. This is in line with Tarrow's claim that "The legitimation and institutionalization of collective action are often the most effective means of social control" (Tarrow, 96).

But, regardless of choices made within a movement with regards to strategy, action repertoires, and the response of authorities, allies and antagonists, it is necessary not only to consider the social movement organizations as an individual units, but as a collective that takes form within the movement structure. There are three basic variants of the structural relationship of movement organizations. The first is the grassroots model, typified by a loose, informal and decentralized organization. This type of structure is generally characterized by protest as the essential component of the action repertoire. The interest group model is characterized by a formal organizational structure with an emphasis on influencing policy change. The third model is party-oriented, again indicated by a formal organization with an emphasis on the electoral process – changing party politics (Rucht, 188). But beyond this consideration of movement structure, it must be clarified that the typology is not only internal – organizational modes depend also on the context structure as defined above. Klandermans also offers a structural typology: the network structure, pyramid structure or centralized (federal) structure. The network structure emerges from groups of pre-existing organizations, whose coordination mobilizes and organizes collective action. The pyramid structure is defined by weak links between levels such that higher-level organizations provide information, strategy, and define common goals (Klandermans, 387). In this scheme, "local organizations are relatively autonomous, maintaining their diversity and spontaneity" (Klandermans, 387). In a centralized formation, groups are coordinated by a national organization with an hierarchical structure.

Moving down from the movement structure, the action orientations of a mobilization campaign can be value-oriented, power-oriented (geared towards exerting influence), or participation-oriented. A value-oriented campaign must demonstrate the importance of an organization's actions in affecting change and achieving their goals. The goals of the organization in this case are justified by the ideology behind them. A power-oriented campaign emphasizes the movement's effectiveness in exerting influence. A participation-oriented campaign emphasizes the inherent value in participation (Klandermans, 389). Based on their action orientation, movements appeal to different motivations of potential participants (Klandermans, 389). Yet these categories are not mutually exclusive – according to Rucht, a social movement may include structural elements of the "grassroots, interest-group, and party models, all to different degrees" (Rucht, 202). Following the logic of the two models, both structure and action orientation could potentially appear in hybrid form. This is the case with the Tea Party movement.

In light of the above framework it becomes clarified that the decentralized, grassroots character of the Tea Party movement is not only logical in light of its' internal logic, but also in terms of the structure of the state, access to the political system, and the general social and cultural context of the United States (Rucht, 195). In the United States, considering the women's movement and environmental movement, Rucht states that "most characteristics of the context structure are also consistent with the existence of a relatively strong and diversified movement structure" (Rucht, 200). This results partly from the openness of the decision-making system, which encourages professional movement organizations, but leaves no space for third party activity. The two party system, though outwardly rigid, leaves room for new issues and groups to affect influence (Rucht, 200).

Therefore, movement structure, as influenced by context structure and forces outside of the traditional conception of political opportunity, is an important "intervening variable" outside of movement strategy, resource and personnel mobilization (Rucht, 191). This is a feedback cycle, centered on the innovation and response to innovation – opportunities shape a movement structure, but the structure will in turn impact strategies, forms of mobilization and outcomes (Rucht, 191). Therefore,

> The movement structure can be considered an intermediate factor between the context structure and the strategies, actual mobilization, and eventual mobilization outcomes…[as] movement structures do not depend exclusively on the political setting in which social movements are embedded. Social and cultural structures come into play as well". (Rucht, 202)

It will be demonstrated that Tea Party movement fits within the structural typologies of Klandermans and Rucht, as well as the action orientation approach of Klandermans. This is indicated by the nature of the organization, goals and relationships between the main Tea Party movement organizations. Discursive analysis of their texts and the actions advocated by the various organizations will reinforce that Tea Party movement organizations are either power-oriented or a hybrid of participation- and value-oriented with regards to action repertoires. Structurally, movement organizations also fit a hybrid-structure, mixing the pyramid- and network-structure described by Klandermans, or the grassroots model described by Rucht. Therefore, this study of the Tea Party movement is descriptive, so building political opportunity in this context will be case specific but based on logical indicators of political opportunity and context structure, including the state of the economy, job market, and most importantly, the events surrounding the two terms of President George W. Bush. Using opinion poll results from the Pew Center for the People and the Press political opportunity will be framed in terms of the

general tone of the country in the last ten years in order to elaborate upon the conditions for mobilization.

CHAPTER 3 – Laying the Groundwork: Political Opportunity Structure from George W. Bush to Barack Obama

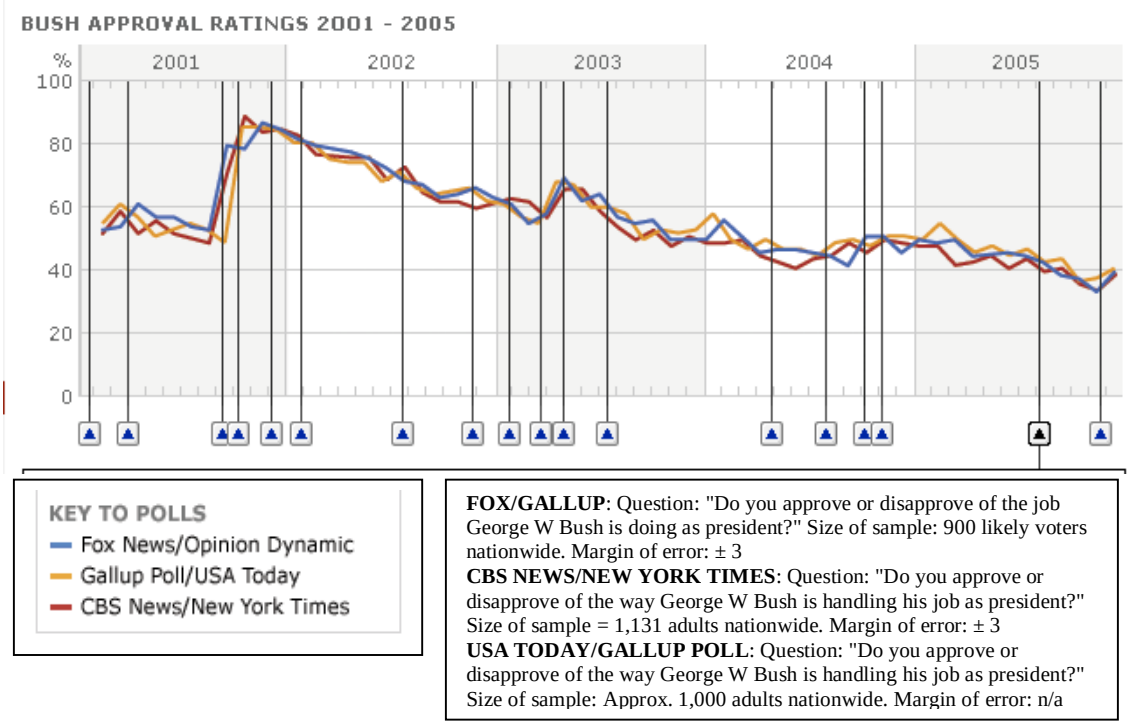
The election of George W. Bush in 2000 marked a significant shift in American governance. His term would be marked by a terrorist attack on American soil, the start of two wars and the collapse of several American corporations and banks. With signing of the Patriot Act that encroached upon civil liberties, domestic wire-tapping was put in place and advanced interrogation techniques used on suspected terrorists not given access to due process. The end of the term culminated with the collapse of the derivatives market, a liquidity freeze and increasing joblessness. Therefore, following the two Bush presidencies much in the nation had changed. With the erosion of the banking system many Americans lost their homes and jobs. The war in Iraq, in which ground operations had been declared complete in 2003, continues to rage on, leaving many American and Iraqi lives hanging in the balance. The economy and job markets continue a slow growth after a sharp decline, and following the election of Barack Obama the TARP legislation was finalized, as well as the later bailout package, prompting frustration over excessive government spending and the growing national debt. Further, Obama has come as close as any president in history to completing a reform of the health care system, with the promise of facilitating access to coverage for millions of uninsured Americans. Fundamentally, one must look back to the Bush presidency to understand the events of the past ten years, the nation's response to these events, and the subsequent 2008 election that marked a final fracturing of the American populace that has prompted the rise of the Tea Party movement. In order to understand the emergence of the movement, one must look back to the context – both social and political – that has served as the Petri dish of social unrest in the United States.

3.1 The Presidency of George W. Bush

> After both the attacks on September 11, 2001, and the commencement of the war in Iraq, presidential approval surged dramatically (by almost 40 percentage points in the first instance and 15 percentage points in the second). A lesser but noticeable rally occurred when Saddam Hussein was captured on December 13, 2003…[but] Bush's job approval does decline after these rallies. (Eichenberg et. al., 789)

Considering the events described above, the graph below, compiled by the BBC, traces President Bush's job approval rating based on three independent polls of American voting age adults (BBC News, 10 October 2006). It is clear that following his inauguration on January 20, 2001, until the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, general approval ratings were between 50 and 60%, despite confusion and frustration around the 2000 election. Following the Al Qaeda attack, Bush's approval ratings saw "the largest single jump in approval ratings in the history of polling…[reaching] the highest level ever for any president (90 percent on September 22), and it lasted longer than any previous rally" (Eichenberg et. al., 787). Following the September 11 attacks, the opinion polls increased again at the start of the war in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. His approval ratings steadily declined from December 2001, with the bankruptcy of American corporate giant, Enron, with a continuing negative trend through the July 2002 bankruptcy (and subsequent fraud indictments) of Worldcom and its' executives. Following the scandals surrounding the decline of these two major corporate forces, Bush facilitated legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security on November 25, 2002. Yet, it was not until the beginning of the Iraq invasions on the 20th of March 2003 that his approval rating experienced a surge and peaked during his famous declaration, on May 1, 2003, that combat operations in Iraq had come to an end. According to a Pew Center report, as of April 16, 2003, his overall approval rating was 72% (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 December 2008, 25). This is logical in light of the findings from

Eichenberg et. al., who claim that "When opinion leaders – in and out of government – are supportive of the president…public approval tends also to be high" (Eichenberg et. al., 786). The congressional support of the war would meet these criteria. Further, following the capture of Saddam Hussein on December 13, 2003, approval ratings rose slightly. From this moment onwards, the President's approval rating continually dropped. Consistent low approval ratings came in the wake of the April 29, 2004 publication of images depicting detainees being tortured and humiliated in Iraqi jails by American soldiers, and the July 9, 2004 Senate Intelligence Committee report stating that the military intervention in Iraq was largely based on false intelligence. In summation, from March 20 to August 28, 2004, Bush's approval rating dropped from 67% to 50% (Eichenberg et. al., 790).



Approval ratings improved leading up the reelection of George W. Bush on the 4th of November 2004, following the highly contested and divisive campaign against the Democratic candidate John Kerry. Yet, the overall downturn of his approval was also the result of a partisan split: as of May 2004, 85% of Republicans, but merely 13% of Democrats approved of the

President's job performance (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 December 2008, 10). The next major moment in the Bush Presidency came on August 25, 2009, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, killing over 1,000 city residents and leaving tens of thousands without homes. The relief effort was heavily criticized, as is indicated from the declining approval rating following the event. According to a *Washington Post-ABC News* poll conducted following the event, 54% of Americans disapproved of Bush's handing of the disaster (Fletcher and Morin, 2010).

On October 22, 2005, the death toll for United States soldiers in Iraq reached 2000, and was marked by vigils and protests, as well as a slight upturn in approval. According to Eichenberg et. al., "Bush has, to a large extent, been a "war president" – his approval rating was not affected by economic performance after the war in Iraq began, but it has been substantially affected by several key rally events and by the casualties suffered in the Iraq War" (Eichenberg et. al., 784). By the midterm elections in 2006, the gulf had again grown, with nearly 60% of Americans disapproving of the job Bush was doing as president. In the wake of the mid-term election of a Democratic congress, a 2007 Pew survey reveals that as of January 2007, when the newly re-aligned congress took office, 66% of respondents believed that the country was more politically divided than in the past (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 December 2008, 13). Overall approval numbers steadily decreased until leading up to the election of Barack Obama on November 5, 2008.

3.2 The 2008 Election: John McCain, Barack Obama, and Sarah Palin

To set the stage for the election, with an ongoing, unpopular war overseas, the job market had drastically slumped – there were 600,000 more Americans unemployed on September 1, 2008 than there had been in January 2008 (Walker, 1105). In addition to a stifled job market, the

banking system had begun to erode. Under the Bush administration, major portions of the financial sector were nationalized following a lending freeze and diminishing liquidity (Walker, 1105). Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, two major mortgage institutions, were taken into national conservatorship, Lehmen Brothers went bankrupt, Merrill Lynch was purchased by Bank of America, AIG was bought with $85 billion of taxpayer money, and Washington Mutual was taken over by JP Morgan Chase. These events "provoked populist resentment of Wall Street across much of America, and deep alarm overseas" (Walker, 1105).

In the wake of these events, the candidates selected to run in the 2008 presidential race were Democrat Barack Obama, a freshman Senator from Illinois, and John McCain, a "perennial rebel against party orthodoxy who glorified in the defiant title of 'maverick'" (Walker, 1095). Obama "promised a different kind of [presidency] and would symbolize a different America from the unilateralist warrior state of the past eight years…[his campaign was marked by] extraordinary appeal and rhetorical power" (Walker, 1096). Further, Obama came to the election season as an early opponent of the increasingly unpopular war and with a tremendous potential to appeal to young and African American voters. On the Republican side, McCain was confident of picking up working class voters, enthusiasts of Ronald Reagan, and socially conservative Catholic and ethnic voters (Walker, 1096). This was concordant with his stance as a party outsider**.** McCain, although initially supportive of the president leading up to the Iraq invasion, later became an outspoken critic of the war and explicitly criticized Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfield. Thus, both politicians were outwardly opposed to traditional Washington politics – McCain with his independent voting record in the Senate, and Obama as a young, idealistic force standing for change and progress.

Further, Obama did a tremendous job of raising grassroots support, running a huge portion of his campaign on social networking websites including Facebook and Myspace. His campaign "organized over 8,000 web-based affinity groups and 750,000 active volunteers, and recruited over 1.6 million donors…In February alone Obama raised $55 million" (Walker, 1099). In the first three months of his primary campaign, Obama raised over 90% of his funds from donations of $200 or less, totaling over $273 million through the primaries (Walker, 1099).

In the campaign, McCain was in the awkward position of both needing to court the party base and run against the mainstream GOP trends, which he forwarded in his selection of Sarah Palin as running mate (Walker, 1102). On the other side, Obama, whose outsider appeal led to a tremendous surge in support from African Americans and young voters on the left, chose Senator Joe Biden as his running mate. As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee with 35 years experience in the Senate, Biden seemed to be part of the Washington establishment that Obama had positioned himself against. But the selection was an attempt to balance the lack of experience on Obama's part, particularly in the areas of national security and foreign policy (Walker, 1103). In this sense, both candidates were forced closer to the center as the election approached.

Perhaps the most significant figure to have emerged from the election season, besides Obama, is without question McCain's running mate Sarah Palin, whose story has lent itself particularly well to the Tea Party agenda. Sarah Palin now stands out strongly as the anti-politician politician. She grew up in a small Alaska town, loves hunting, is married to a dog sled race champion and is mother of five. A self-declared "hockey mom", she started her political career locally, later to move up to state politics. She holds to an informal, colloquial manner of speech while "[reinforcing] her words with winks and nods and wrinklings of her nose that seem

meant to telegraph intimacy and ease" (Gourevitch, 22 September 2008). As early as her 1992 run for City Council in Wassila, Alaska, and later during her Mayoral run in 1996, she invoked images of the cronyism and elitism that won her the populist acclaim that framed her Vice Presidential run in 2008 (Gourevitch, 22 September 2008). Palin is an evangelical Christian – a significant boon to McCain, who had reportedly difficult time courting evangelicals. Further, Palin believes creationism should be taught in schools, she is pro-life, opposed to big government, and committed to transparency in the political process (Gourevitch, 22 September 2008).

In terms of her selection for Vice-Presidential nominee, conservative blogs began highlighting her as early as 2007. Following the initial attention, she held meetings with writers from the *Weekly Standard*, *New York Times* columnist William Kristol, the editor of the *National Review*, Jack Fowler, and former George W. Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson (Mayer, 2). These meetings prompted the first major story on the then governor, "The Most Popular Governor", which appeared in the *Weekly Standard* on July 16, 2007. Further, Kristol, in his appearances on Fox News, as well as in his columns for the *New York Times*, consistently heralded her as a great pairing for McCain (Mayer, 3).

Her ultimate selection as Vice Presidential nominee was made just days before the Republican National Convention, with other choices seen as too risky (former Democrat and pro-life Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman), and some as too conventional (former Representative Rob Portman of Ohio and Governor Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, most notably) (Mayer, 4). Following a brief vetting process, and a call with McCain, Palin was selected on August 28, 2008 (Mayer, 5). After her selection, she made her first major appearance at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota in 2008. Despite her initial lack of

visibility on the national scale, Palin has made strong inroads with the evangelical base of the Republican Party. She has often mocked the liberal media and strongly criticized Barak Obama. From the convention onwards, Palin's speeches depicted the candidate as " an antidote to the élitist culture inside the Beltway" (Mayer, 1). She appeared as the reformer and the outsider, aptly responding to an interview question about her experience in saying that,

> We've got to remember what the desire is in this nation at this time. It is for no more politics as usual, and somebody's big fat résumé, maybe, that shows decades and decades in the Washington establishment . . . Americans are getting sick and tired of that self-dealing, and kind of that closed-door, good-ol'-boy network that has been the Washington elite. (Mayer, 1)

She also served an essential role for McCain, whose candidacy had arguably gotten off track from the core premise of his campaign: experience and national security. This occurred as it was learned that Palin's 17-year-old daughter Bristol was pregnant. It allowed the campaign to tell the story of a troubled teen, supportive parents, and the importance of strong family values. According to Gourevitch, this chapter in the story of Palin "managed to change the subject from a debate about John McCain's seemingly impulsive abandonment of what had been the premise of his campaign" (Gourevitch, 22 September 2008). In terms of polling around the election, a Pew Center Survey on September 18, 2008 showed general trends in the electorate holding early in the campaign: 46% to 44% Obama, as opposed to the 46% to 43% percent Obama in the August poll held prior to the conventions of both parties. According to the report, "the race remains close largely because Obama continues to be seen as the candidate of change, and voters remain divided over whether McCain would govern differently than President Bush" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 September 2008). Although McCain made headway on the economy, national security, and the role of lobbyists, despite concerns that he would be a similar president to George W. Bush. Further, following the convention and the nomination of

Palin, McCain arguably increased general positive perceptions of the Republican Party – with half of registered voters expressing a favorable opinion of the party, which was the highest since Summer 2005. In terms of Obama, "[his] strong suit is in being seen as the candidate most likely to bring about change. And Obama's biggest weakness continues to be the widespread belief he is not as qualified as McCain" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 September 2008, 4).

Notably, the report credited the appointment of Palin with swinging favor to the Republican Senator, with 54% holding a positive view of her, as opposed to a 52% favorable rating for Obama's Vice Presidential nominee, Senator Joseph Biden. Further, "22% of all McCain supporters say they "almost wish" Palin were the GOP nominee instead of McCain. Just 10% of Obama supporters express the same sentiment about Biden" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 September 2008, 5). Among Independents, 60% held a favorable opinion of Palin, with 45% holding a favorable view of McCain. Following McCain's loss to Obama, Palin has become an outsider political figure, frequently making appearances at Tea Party events, which has become a divisive issue within the movement. Her role is without question significant.

According to a June 10-14, 2009, Pew Center poll, opinions of Palin have held consistent since her run with McCain: 44% of the general population has an "unfavorable impression" of the politician, while 45% hold a "favorable view" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 24 June 2009, 3). Within the Republican Party, 73% have a favorable opinion of Palin, with 84% of white evangelical republicans and 80% of conservative republicans holding a favorable opinion. She polls better with men than women, better with conservatives than centrists, better with the less educated, and better with those from the South rather than the Northeast. But her overall approval since a mid-September 2008 poll has dropped from 50% to 42%, currently. Overall, "Sarah Palin remains a broadly popular figure within the Republican Party" (Pew Center for the

People and the Press, 24 June 2009, 3). She also remains popular among a portion of the Tea Party movement, with her frequent appearances at Tea Party Express events causing a stir among movement activists who feel that this is an indication of a Washington takeover of the movement.

Despite Palin's appointment and strong campaigning on both sides, Obama beat John McCain by 52% to 46%. Overall, according to a Pew Center Report, between the beginning of Bush's second term and December 2008, towards the end of his presidency and prior to Obama's taking the White House, his overall approval rating dropped from 50% to 24%, showing a tremendous dissatisfaction with the Bush White House overall among American voters (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 18 December 2008, 5). Yet, prior to Obama winning the White House, John McCain ran a strong campaign against the young, Democratic Senator from Illinois. Although McCain ultimately lost the race, his Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin has made a tremendous impact on the American political spectrum and has since impacted the emergence of the Tea Party movement.

Yet even prior to the election of Obama, Andrew Sullivan of the *Atlantic Monthly* aptly argued that the campaign was less about Obama and McCain, and more about the moment in which the election took place. Thus, the candidacy and subsequent election were a transformative moment in American politics, as Americans have been in a battle over ideas, ideologies and the definitions of being American more than specific goals and what there is to be done on the ground (Sullivan, 1). This is reinforced by the events of the Bush presidency, as indicated by his extremely low approval ratings towards the end of his term. Thus, in looking to the relatively similar policy proposals among the candidates during the election, Sullivan frames the issue clearly in terms of context structure, stating

> We are talking about a world in which Islamist terror, combined with increasingly available destructive technology, has already murdered thousands of Americans, and tens of thousands of Muslims, and could pose an existential danger to the West. The terrible failures of the Iraq occupation, the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Pakistan, the progress of Iran toward nuclear capability, and the collapse of America's prestige and moral reputation, especially among those millions of Muslims too young to have known any American president but Bush, heighten the stakes dramatically…Of the viable national candidates, only Obama and possibly McCain have the potential to bridge this widening partisan gulf. (Sullivan, 2)

Yet, the wide partisan gulf in approval ratings is not only a factor of Obama as president but rather a function of the political dynamics of the United States in the last ten years marked by the trials that Americans and the American political system have faced of late. Since Obama's election, this is reflected in opinion polls. According to a Pew Center Poll, as of April 2, 2009, Obama had "the most polarized early job approval ratings of any president in the past four decades" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 2 April 2009). The poll results indicated that 88% of Democrats and 27% of Republicans approved of the job Obama is doing as president – a 61-point gap as opposed to the 51-point gap in April 2001, early in the first term of George W. Bush. The gap in the early months of Bill Clinton's first term was also smaller than the current Obama gap. According to the report, this has been a consistent trend following from a much less divided approval of both Nixon and Carter at early moments in their respective presidential terms (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 2 April 2009). Further, as of April 23, 2009 Obama's 79% approval rating among Democrats was higher than Bush's 71% approval among Republicans at the same point in his first term. Yet, Republican disapproval of Obama is still higher than Democratic disapproval of Bush at the 100-day mark (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 23 April 2009).

In terms of economic issues at the 100-day mark, 60% approved of Obama's handling of economic issues, with 33% disapproving. Whereas, in terms of his handling of the budget deficit,

50% approve as opposed to 39% who disapprove. Obama also generally received higher approval ratings on foreign policy and terrorism as opposed to health care, tax policy and the budget deficit. But generally his is better liked personally than recent presidents. According to the report, **"**While Obama garners relatively weak job approval ratings among Republicans, his personal favorability among members of the opposition party are higher than both Bush's and Clinton's marks" (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 23 April 2009). Beyond general approval, the significant partisan divide and his higher approval among the poor than the rich, Obama's presidency is also marked by drastic generational differences in approval. Among Democratic respondents, 40% of believe the president is listening more to the liberal members of the Democratic Party than moderate members, while 68% of Republicans believe this to be the case. According to the Pew Center findings,

> Americans under 30 years of age generally give Obama high ratings across the board…but people 50 and older are more skeptical of the way Obama is handling his job and dealing with individual issues. The largest differences are in opinions about Obama's handling of health care: 63% of those younger than 30 give him positive marks, compared with 55% of those 30 to 49, 42% of those ages 50 to 64, and 40% of those 65 and older. (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 23 April 2009)

3.3 Conclusions

In summation, the 2008 election was marked with a need to blend soft and hard power, "to isolate the enemy, to fight where necessary, but also to create an ideological template that works to the West's advantage over the long haul" (Sullivan, 2). Thus, in leading up to the election, the balanced ideological template may have been significant, but following Obama's election, the partisan split – marked by ideological divergence among the electorate – has again emerged, most significantly in the form of the Tea Party. Further, in terms of the presidential campaign, "Senator Obama broke all records for fundraising, by harnessing the internet to collect

huge numbers of small donations, as well as larger sums from corporate donors. He also demonstrated the ability to gather crowds of 100,000 people or more to his rallies" (BBC News, 9 October 2009). In terms of campaign talking points, Obama made bold promises to meet with "hostile world leaders", create tax cutes for the middle class, and defend Social Security (Sullivan, 3). He excited young voters, promised change in the country and an end to the business-as-usual politics in Washington. In terms of impact following his election, Obama has been putting tremendous effort into passing healthcare legislation. His international focus has tended towards nuclear disarmament and climate change, although these efforts have had less tangible results. In terms of the Iraq war, the Iraqi army is growing in strength and leaving room for slow American withdrawal. But the war in Afghanistan has been marked with recent troop surges (BBC News, 9 October 2009).

Beyond specific policy initiatives and events, there is an apparent split in the electorate, marked by the divergent approval ratings of Obama along partisan lines. There is also a generational split - the young overwhelmingly support him, where older Americans do not. Where the economy was not a significant factor in Bush's approval ratings, it has had greater importance for the Obama administration that has had to face the full force of American frustration with economic issues. With the passing of the bailout package, the drafting of healthcare legislation, high levels of joblessness and a deflated housing market, the administration is facing the convergence of economic and social issues that have been building through the two-terms of the Bush presidency. Thus, the social frustrations that have been percolating for the last ten years came to the fore around the 2008 election, and since have filtered into the Tea Party movement and its' social movement organizations, leading to protest, political influence and civic activism among a politically reinvigorated electorate.

CHAPTER 4 – Discursive Practice of Core Organizations Within the Tea Party Movement

4.1 Introduction: Discourse Analysis Methodology

In light of the political and contextual opportunities that have emerged in the last ten years – marked by an ongoing war, high unemployment, increasing national debt, government support of the financial sector, a push to reform health care, and an emerging partisan split in the electorate – the Tea Party movement emerged, claiming that the standard practice in Washington has undermined the core values of the United States embodied in the Constitution. This can be demonstrated in looking to core Tea Party movement organization website texts' and considering what claims are made, how these claims are articulated, and what strategies are advocated to promote movement goals. Looking to these texts to elaborate on movement goals fits the discourse analysis approach, because as Skillington aptly states, "discourse is a paradigm of political action" (Skillington, 495). This is relevant also in that the nature of the claims made will have different potential for mobilizing activists and promoting particular action repertoires. Using discourse analysis the coherence of claims and actions will be clarified.

Fundamentally, the broad goal in discourse analysis – the analysis of text and speech surrounding social movement actors, and social movement organizations in particular – is to determine the role of ideas in collective action (Johnston, 62). This is related to the larger frames, cognitive structures, and hierarchy of ideas present in a given society and political culture. Further, discourse is part and parcel of the discursive field, or the symbolic space encompassing what is being talked about. This is based on conflict, contention and struggle of challenging the familiar through ideas. This strikes at the root of discourse analysis – the emergent and socially

constructed nature of textual production (Johnston, 67). Organizational discourse is of particular importance in this respect because "when a movement is structured according to different social movement organizations (SMOs), their textual production forms part of the polyphonous voice of a movement's discourse" (Johnston, 68). As there are currently seven central organizations in the Tea Party movement, the nature of their voice in the chorus of discourse is important for determining how the nature of claims in text impact organizational strategy. Fundamentally, the goal is to "intensively [analyze] textual materials with the goal of laying bare the relationships between movement discourse and the discursive field of the broader culture" (Johnston, 69). This comes in finding patterns, commonalities, linkages and differences in the larger structure of ideas.

Yet, there is the issue of representativeness: can looking at the content of the seven key organizations be generalized to indicate larger patterns in the movement? In this case, these organizations together have become the most pivotal force in the movement, and collectively act as a centralizing force for the many smaller, local movement organizations. This is why studying these organizations and their discursive positioning is essential to determine the fit of the movement into the broader political and social context. Using the methodology articulated by Skllington, this analysis will look at discursive arguments, statements in text and the dynamics of the content on organization websites in order to "take an expansive view, identifying each discursive formation as a narrative situated in a contested, or potentially contested, environment" (Skillington, 496). This case study will therefore use text-oriented discourse analysis to examine wording, particularly whether the organizations are seeking a legitimation of claims, or rather if they are predominantly looking to blame others and externalize responsibility for their stated issues and concerns. Additionally, the texts will show common concepts, contested definitions

and the nature of framing – What are the competing narratives and recurring themes in the texts, and what does this say about the movement? Analysis will also consider information presented and the composition of ideas. More generally, the analysis will look to thematic structure – are organizations intending to define and evaluate concepts and values or make normative statements and concrete demands? This is relevant as "The actor, as a social agent, is able to reflexively construct the social and take account of it often in a way that is innovative, leading to the re-ordering of a public discourse over time". (Skillington, 496)

Therefore, one is then left to question whether the Tea Party movement is altering public discourse, and if so, to what extent and with what intention? This study will look to the recurring themes in text on organization websites, the ordering of concepts and the nature of discourse, specifically as it relates to defining meaning – in terms of the goals and action repertoires of the movement. The critical question then, in light of the political opportunity structure and context structure as outlined in Chapter 3, is where the fractures within the Tea Party movement are located in terms of their stated goals, strategies and mobilizing frames? This is significant in considering the goals of the movement as a whole, and how these fit into the general political and social context of the United States in 2009-2010?

The purpose of this discourse analysis of core organizations within the Tea Party movement ties back to network analysis. Because social movements, and their complex of organizations, essential act as a network, considering organizations as such is essential to understanding the dynamics of a movement. In referencing shared ideas, ideologies, and the nature of discourse – looking at the commonalities and the differences in discourse of organizational texts – this analysis will look to the position of movement actors within the network to begin to explain their behavior and particularly the action repertoires they advocate

(Diani 2002, 175). Beyond this, the goal is to "focus on the linkages between groups and organizations with different degrees of formalization in order to identify the main lines of fragmentation within a social movement, or to explore the substantive influence of the most central organizations in the network" (Diani 2002, 176). The discourse analysis will clarify the "lines of fragmentation" and what this means for the goals, action repertoires and dynamics of the movement.

4.2 The Case Study: Discursive Analysis of Organization Texts

> Politics may be largely conducted *in* language but more importantly political acts are sustained *through* language, even when these acts are not expressly articulated. (Skillington 502)

4.2.1 Tea Party Patriots

The Tea Party Patriots are an established, non-profit, activist organization comprised of web-based membership. According to their website, Tea Party Patriots, Inc. is a 501(c)(4) certified "social welfare organization" that is non-partisan, non-profit and dedicated to "furthering the common good and general welfare of the people of the United States… by educating the public". They emphasize that their site and blogs should be used to discuss and exchange ideas in a "civil and responsible manner". Further, organizing and centralizing activists is a key component of the Tea Party Patriots strategy. As of April 4, 2010, Tea Party Patriots had over 154,000 fans on Facebook, and over 81,000 members on their website. The site is mostly oriented towards organizing activists – offering advice for starting a local party or joining an already existing group. They provide limited print materials for organizers and offer lawn signs and shirts for purchase. Upon registering for the website, one is asked to list talents and skills in order to build networks of volunteers on ability. The following main page quote, from April 4, 2010, demonstrates that this is core to their mission,

> Tea Party Patriots has been here from the very beginning…Tea Party Patriots built the first Tea Party website where individuals could find Tea Party events. We also helped over 1,500 new groups get started by holding weekly local leadership teleconferences. (Tea Party Patriots, n.d.)

The mission statement of the organization is brief, consisting of two sentences. The first explains the "impetus" for the movement, with the second sentence describing the "mission". The impetus is "excessive" government spending and the mission is to attract, educate, organize and mobilize "our fellow citizens" to "secure policy" consistent with the core values of the organization. These core values as described in the introductory chapter of the paper are fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets. The references here to the government are impersonal, with the references to other citizens as personal, indicated with "our". Therefore the goal of the Tea Party Patriots is to change policy through mobilizing activists. But being that there are no concrete claims to how to affect change, the group fits into the action-orientation defined by Klandermans as the "participation oriented" although the use of ideological claims indicates that there is a hybrid form with the value-oriented approach as well.

Considering the organizations values, three core values are broken down and described. Fiscal responsibility is described first in terms of government, which, in being responsible with spending "honors and respects the freedom of the individual" (Tea Party Patriots, n.d.). Additionally, the reference to constitutionally limited government is correlated with "protect[ing] the blessings of liberty". If government does not do so, it "unjustly restrict[s] liberty", and by association, is not respecting the Constitution. Further, it is the national debt that "compels" action from the movement, because the increasing debt is a "grave threat" to "national sovereignty", and the "liberty" of future generations. Here, the statements begin with referencing ideal government that respects these core values, using positive language (honor; respect;

freedom; blessings; liberty) to reinforce this. The later portion of the statement uses negative verbs (threat) but action verbs to describe what should be done (compels us).

The second core value – constitutionally limited government – begins with a "we" affirmation of the movement in that "we…are inspired by our founding documents and regard the Constitution as the supreme law of the land". They claim that it is possible to understand the vision of the founding fathers, and to "stand in support of that intent". Further, they tie the group and the group's actions to the Constitution and its creators – "like the founders we support states' rights" (Tea Party Patriots, n.d.). Again, this paragraph references personal liberty, but within the "rule of law", which based on previous statements is regarded to be embodied in the Constitution. This seems to set up an antagonism – the group supports personal liberty in line with the rule of law, indicating that an 'other' is opposed to that personal liberty and the rule of law. Yet, the blame has not been specifically externalized, but the implication is clear.

The third core value is free markets, which are described as an economic consequence of "personal liberty". They again reference "the founders", who believed that "personal and economic freedom were indivisible", tying them back to their own beliefs ("as do we"). In this statement, a reference to the other is made clear – "our current government's interference distorts the free market and inhibits the pursuit of individual and economic liberty". Again, liberty is tied to the free market, and now, the enemy of these liberties has been clarified to be the government of the United States. They close by again calling back to founding principles, opposing intervention "into the operations of private business". The statement closes not with another reference to personal liberty but the operation of private business.

The philosophy section reinforces many of these themes, but includes a deeper description of the organization as non-partisan, grassroots, and composed of individuals "united

by our core values derived from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States of America and the Bill of rights". They cite civic responsibility, localism, and the rights given "by our creator" and protected in the aforementioned documents. The Tea Party Patriots "stand[s] with our founders…to claim our rights and duties which preserve their legacy and our own" (Tea Party Patriots, n.d.). The final sentence is a call to protect private property and prosperity, "secured by natural law and the rights of the individual". Here, overall, the theme of liberty is constantly referenced, along with individualism and the importance of the free market. Yet all of these claims are legitimized either in light of the founding documents of the nation or the vision of the founders themselves. In this respect, the text implies that the organization understands the true intent of the founders, and the standing government is acting to undermine their intentions and the principles of the Constitution (Tea Party Patriots, n.d.).

4.2.2 Patriot Majority

Patriot Majority is a political action committee formed in October 2009 that works towards affecting electoral change – backing candidates that support "patriotic policies". They emerged in an oppositional stance to Tea Party organizations, but strategically invoke many of the same concepts and rhetorical practice. Patriot Majority is an official As a PAC filed with the Federal Elections Commission. Patriot Majority claims explicitly to not take payment from, or coordinate with, campaign or party committees. Currently, the organization is funding television ads for Democratic Senior Senator from Nevada, Harry Reid, as he runs for his fifth term as Senator against conservative Republican frontrunner Sue Lowden, and trailing Republican challenger Danny Tarkanian (Mishak, 1). According to a National Public Radio Blog, Patriot Majority "reported getting $1.5 million from AFSCME (a government employee union affiliated with the AFL-CIO), as well as $125,000 from the Teamsters Union" (NPR, 30 October 2008).

Therefore, this group is more inclined towards power-oriented action – affecting political change by directly influencing the campaigns of chosen politicians.

In terms of discourse analysis, firstly, there is no "mission statement" or "organizational philosophy" sections of the website, only an "About" section that appears in a bulleted format with introductory paragraphs at the top of the page. In terms of organizational goals, they aim to promote policies that "protect the American Dream", as well as strengthen national security and provide for the "common good" of the growing and "dynamic" population of the United States. Additionally, they cite acting "independently" towards electing candidates that support "patriotic policies". Thus, rather than calling to the Constitution or founding fathers, they more generally call to patriotism and the American dream – both ambiguous and contested concepts.

In a bulleted list the text explains what is meant by the "American agenda" – Strengthening national security, supporting American soldiers and keeping promises to American veterans. They cite jobs and the economy, particularly the "return to a vibrant job-creating economy" that will keep the country at the forefront of global competition of "technical development and innovation" (Patriot Majority PAC, n.d.). They also specifically support sustainable energy policy, "clean energy", and ending dependence on foreign oil from countries "that either hate us or harbor those who plot to harm us". They call to strengthen an "affordable" health care system and promote the flow of information vital to a "well informed citizenry" in order to ensure "transparency in public life and among government officials…[and to] serve the common good rather than special interests" (Patriot Majority PAC, n.d.). They claim the group will provide benchmarks for "promoting American democracy and patriotism…[by] actively oppos[ing] misguided policies". Here there is a concordance between the discursive practice and organizational mission – they are promoting electoral change and particular types of policies.

Yet, despite offering a bulleted list of policy goals, the organization still leaves tangible specifics out of the text. Therefore, like Tea Party Patriots, they are using terms that have contested meaning – patriotism, the American Dream and the American Agenda. There are also commonalities in calling for creating a vibrant economy with sustainable jobs. Yet, they do not call themselves "patriots", nor do they claim to understand the true meaning of the Constitution or the true vision of the founders of the nation. Therefore, both groups are invoking different terminology with contested meaning in order to promote missions but with ideological differences (Patriot Majority PAC, n.d.). Further, these groups have distinct action orientations – Patriot Majority being power-oriented, and Tea Party Patriots as value- and participation-oriented.

4.2.3 Tea Party Express

Tea Party Express is most well known within the movement and in the media for hosting rallies across the country in which established political insiders, politicians and celebrities speak to crowds of activists. These rallies have a core message located on the main page of their website, which states,

> You, the politicians in Washington, have failed We The People with your bailouts, out-of-control deficit spending, government takeovers of sectors of the economy, Cap & Trade, government-run health care, and higher taxes! If you thought we were just going to quietly go away, or that this Tea Party movement would be just a passing fad, you were mistaken. We're taking our country back! (Tea Party Express, n.d.)

Tea Party Express is funded by another political action committee called Our Country Deserves Better, serving a very specific role in hosting rallies funded by OCDB. In the "about" section of the website, they are clear about their mission – leading not with an ideological statement, or listing general goals and ideas, but rather stating where the bus tour will start,

when, and where and when it will conclude. They do not clarify their mission, but the specifics of what will take place at the events and that the tour will highlight "some of the worst offenders in Congress" that have voted for policies leading to "higher spending, higher taxes, and government intervention in the lives of American families and businesses" (Tea Party Express, n.d.). The last sentence is directly accusatory towards these "offenders", as they have "infringed upon the freedom of the individual". They also refer to "us", but not as frequently as on the Tea Party Patriots website. According to the concluding sentence, it is time for "us to say: 'Enough is Enough!' Apparently, the implication is that by attending these rallies one will make such a statement. Thus, not through protest, but by attending rallies, individuals can tell the offenders in Congress that they disapprove of their voting records. Therefore, in this case, the discourse clearly leads to a particular type of action repertoire, or rather, the later leads to the former. This is clearly participation-oriented: they intend to encourage people to participate in events hosted by the organization. Further, as Our Country Deserves Better funds Tea Party Express, it may be that Tea Party Express serves a specific functional role in fulfilling a portion of the mission of OCDB (Tea Party Express, n.d.). Looking to this mission statement should clarify the relationship.

4.2.4 Our Country Deserves Better

The Our Country Deserves Better website, like that of Tea Party Express, has a clear statement on the opening page indicating the mission of the organization. The first sentence references directly the election of Barack Obama and the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. The text states that "we knew things were going to get worse for America", and that since the election of the president, things are getting worse. Again, using "we", they state that the country is "under assault" from the liberals in Congress who have gone on a $10 trillion

"spending spree". They directly reference bailouts being passed "without our consent", the raising of taxes, government intervention in business, and finally that "Obama-Pelosi-Reid want to have the government take over our health care choices" (Our Country Deserves Better, n.d.). The closing statement is a call to activists: "Our Country Deserves Better and we ask you to join our fight for conservative beliefs as we strive to make this a better and brighter America." Here, not only do they call out to activists, but make a play on their name, as in the Taxed Enough Already application of the "tea" in Tea Party (Our Country Deserves Better, n.d.).

Following this clear and poignant opening statement, the "about" section is quite brief. Consisting of only two parsed sentences, the first makes clear that the organization is about action, as they are "leading the fight" to "champion Reaganesque conservatism" (Our Country Deserves Better, n.d.). This means fighting for lower taxes, smaller government, strong national defense and the "strength of the family". Further, the family is the "core of a strong America". The statement closes with the threat at hand: the future of the nation "is at stake". In order to alleviate the danger posed by liberalism in Washington, the organization states that "we" must stand up. Specifically how this is to be done is unclear based on the statements, but links to more specific "campaign" sections ask for donations, and offer links to the organizations' videos explaining the position of OCDB in regards to given policy initiatives. Other sections include links to phone numbers and email addresses with the suggestion to fax, email, phone or sign petitions to express dissatisfaction with certain policies. In light of these suggestions, it is interesting that the organization has many commonalities in their statements with Patriot Majority, despite being on opposite sides of the debate – with the former clearly more leftist than the later. But both call for strong national defense and it may certainly be argued that the

American Dream is rooted in the conception of a strong family (Our Country Deserves Better, n.d.).

4.2.5 Patriot Caucus

In the upper-left hand corner of the Patriot Caucus website there is a brief statement about the organization: “Patriot Caucus is a coalition of Tea Party activists & organizers who believe we have a duty to engage the movement in electoral activism” (Patriot Caucus, n.d.). Therefore, unlike Tea Party Patriots, which are more ideological and serve an organizational role for smaller groups, Patriot Caucus wants electoral change, and does so firstly through endorsing candidates on the main page of their website. This again demonstrates a power-oriented approach. Additionally, as with Tea Party Express, Patriot Caucus is directly affiliated with an established PAC - Liberty Now.

The group calls itself a “coalition”, but also claims to be a “project” of Liberty First PAC filling a “void” that many in the movement believe has “yet to be filled”. This void is a locally lead “GOTV (get out the vote)” arm of the movement. They claim to operate independently of the “beltway usuals”, distancing themselves from other organizations that “seek to further build their value” using the Tea Party label. Their goal is to “work with existing movement entities” to create a more effective “locally operated grassroots movement that can affect the outcome of elections” (Patriot Caucus, n.d.).

They reference the importance of “relationships” within the movement as building “unified activism”. They claim to emphasize “relationship development and social networking”. They also cite tangible organizational goals. They are working in six states to “develop statewide infrastructure and communication networks” via regional coordinators and precinct captains – indicating not only a mission but a structural vision for the movement. This is the first

organization of the seven considered in this case study to be self-reflective in regards to the organization of the movement and the differing potential effectiveness of different types of movement structures. They also cite building a strong web-based presence, and developing coalitions for "injecting activists into political campaigns". They also, in one statement later in the "about section" refer to "you", the activist, saying that "you'll get a heavy dose of training through the Patriot Caucus" (Patriot Caucus, n.d.). The section ends with a claim that they operate under an "advisory team" of Tea Party activists and organizers. Perhaps this is another claim to be a legitimate representation of the movement, but what is truly meant by "advisory team" is unclear (Patriot Caucus, n.d.).

4.2.6 Liberty First

In line with their affiliated organization – Patriot Caucus – Liberty First is committed to electoral change, again indicating a power-oriented approach. They claim to be a committee of "Tea Party organizers, activists and liberty minded bloggers" (Liberty First, n.d.). They refer to the "liberty movement" as shifting into "campaign mode" and claim to want to focus action towards "a carefully chosen slate of races" that could be affectively changed via activism. The organization claims firstly to never support incumbents. In terms of principles, the organization shares commonality with the others above in citing less government, less regulation and lower taxes.

Under the "our principles" section, they further specify what is meant by liberty. They state that they support candidates who "place liberty (the Constitution) first" when voting and making political decisions. They oppose decision-making based on "special interests" and "populist issues", calling instead for "LIBERTY FIRST". They also oppose any political candidate that as voted for "Cap and Trade, Government Healthcare, TARP, and Stimulus

Bailouts" (Liberty First, n.d.). In terms of other action strategies they claim to be building "an online action network that will translate online activity into offline political success" (Liberty First, n.d.). This is done in facilitating activists' work in contacting representatives, organizing plans and events and local political campaigns. In the text "we" is used only to refer to the organization – not activists and Tea Partiers' at large. The statements are mostly descriptive of the organization itself and the purpose it fills, not directed outwardly towards activists as part of the organization, or vice versa.

Overall, the text consistently references "liberty" and the importance of liberty in affecting the decisions of lawmakers and politicians. They also emphasize the importance of making online activism translate offline by affecting political change directly with involvement in campaigns. It is without question that they texts of Liberty Now and Patriot Caucus share many themes and pursue similar goals with the former as the direct connection to activists and organizers, and the later serving as the umbrella organization. Whereas the first has direct links to "Training", the later has a link to "Candidates" and none to training, with the opposite situation in the former. Thus, the organizations' websites (and respective texts) are complimentary but distinct, as they both serve the same general mission (Liberty First, n.d.).

4.2.7 FreedomWorks

FreedomWorks is a Washington D.C. based Political Action Committee that was founded in 1984. The chair of the organization is former U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey, who has appeared recently at Tea Party rallies and events. In terms of relationships to other organizations, FreedomWorks supports the for-profit Tea Party Nation, a social networking website that hosted the National Tea Party Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. In supporting Tea Party Nation, they are directly funding a participation-oriented project. Further, the

FreedomWorks Website has two sections related to the organization: an “About” section and an “our mission” section. In the former, the organization claims to have “hundreds of grassroots volunteers nationwide”. Additionally, “FreedomWorks members know that government goes to those who show up, and are leading the fight for lower taxes, less government and more freedom” (FreedomWorkd, n.d.). The section ends with a call to activists: “Join Us!”. Within this section they claim to “recruit, educate, train and mobilize hundreds of thousands of volunteer activists…[because] FreedomWorks believes individual liberty and the freedom to compete increases consumer choices and provides individuals with the greatest control over what they own and earn” (FreedomWorks, n.d.). They further refer to their “volunteer grassroots army” as the key feature of their “aggressive, real time campaign” strategy in demanding policy change. Further, their campaigns “activate” the “grassroots army to show up”. Thus, they imply their ability to mobilize activists around policy change. In the “our mission” section of the website, the organization claims to fight for lower taxes, less government, and “more economic freedom for all Americans” (FreedomWorks, n.d.). They also do not claim to be grassroots, but rather claim to “combine the stature and experience of America’s greatest policy entrepreneurs with the grassroots power of hundreds of thousands of volunteer activists”. The group facilitates policy change by “training and mobilizing” Americans to “engage” others and “encourage” political representatives to “act in defense of individual freedom and economic opportunity” (FreedomWorks, n.d.). Thus, along with Tea Party Nation, FreedomWorks is power-oriented, but as with the other power- and participation-oriented campaigns, make general valuational claims to justify participation on part of activists.

4.3 Conclusions

In light of this complex of organizations, each with distinct strategies and framing of organization goals, the relevance of context again comes to the fore. According to Skillington, "it was not always the preferences or intentions of an actor which determined their construction of problems but also the conditions of their context which established certain issues as important ones" (Skillington, 502). This reference gets to the heart of the matter of discursive formation – context matters in defining goals and shaping how these goals are articulated. From the third chapter it is clear that there are larger forces affecting the shape of a movement, its' organization, and the repertoires of movement actors, as well as broader movement goals. This is true of the movement as a whole, as well as of the organizations that act in a network, essentially forming the core of a movement by mobilizing activists around shared goals but with distinct action repertoires. These organizations, as the heart of the case study, were considered using discourse analysis and textual analysis to determine how their goals, ideas, and general stance on particular problems are articulated. In light of their stated missions, and the articulation of their goals and ideas through the text on their websites has shed light on their action strategies, the impact of externalities on movement development, and the nature of the ideological toolkit with which the movement works. Generally, groups are either power- or participation-oriented, but all use general ideological claims to justify (or make appealing) participation in a given organization.

Considering the organizations above there are a few key distinctions in their discursive practice. Some directly cite the Constitution and the founding fathers – maintaining a more open and ideological stance – while others directly cite policies, political elites, and the importance of affecting electoral change. Some discuss policies generally, others in terms of their ideological stance, and others with an emphasis on particular policies such as TARP or healthcare. Yet, with

the exception of Patriot Majority, all organizations cite three common core values: fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets. Further, all reference liberty. Patriot Majority more generally references the American Dream, but the commonality of these concepts is apparent.

In terms of specific issues, Tea Party Express and Our Country Deserves Better both directly cite the deficit, government control of businesses, cap and trade, health care, and taxes. OCDB also cites national defense and defending the "strength of the family". Further, Patriot Majority, which is in an oppositional stance to Tea Party movement goals, is the only other organization to cite national defense as a key issue aside from OCDB. Where Tea Party Express places blame on the "offenders" in Congress, OCDB more explicitly references the "liberals" in Congress. But both claim that there are members of Congress that are opposed to Tea Party values based on their voting record on key issues. These organizations together compose a coordinated effort to organize activists around rallies – some hosted by Tea Party Express, and others hosted by OCDB. In terms of affecting change in regards to these issues, or placing blame for policy change that is discordant with the Tea Party values, there is a distinction between calls to activists to demand policy change and those to affect elections or choice of candidates.

Thus, one distinction is between calls to demand policy change, and those to directly influence elections. Patriot Caucus is an advocate of the later. They endorse candidates on their website as a cue to activists as to which elections are significant for the movement. Liberty First is also committed to affecting elections. In line with their choice of action repertoire, Patriot Caucus is committed to a get out the vote effort to affect election outcomes. They also promote activists' getting more directly involved with campaigns they deem important. In terms of distinction between the two organizations, Liberty First adds the caveat that they do not support

any incumbent – not only do they want to support candidates that back their values, they demand new candidates to do so. Liberty First also cites the issues of the deficit, cap and trade and health care in common with Tea Party Express and Our Country Deserves Better. But they also directly reference TARP and the subsequent bailout of banks with taxpayer money – reinforcing the theme of economic concerns and the relationship between personal liberty and free markets. This is reinforced by the poll of Tea Party supporters conducted by the *New York Times* and summarized in the third chapter. In the survey, Tea Party supporters overwhelmingly disapprove of the job Obama is doing as president (88%), they disapprove of his healthcare proposal (93%), and his economic strategy (91%) (New York Times, 14 April 2010, 7). Further, when asked about 'the important issues facing the country', 78% of Tea Party supporters emphasized economic issues, while 80% of the general population agreed. Of the organizations considered above, FreedomWorks places particular emphasis on economic issues.

FreedomWorks is an established political action committee along with Liberty First and Our Country Deserves Better. They discuss "policy change", but without including specific issues as in the case of Tea Party Express, Our Country Deserves Better, Patriot Caucus and Liberty First. They also do not cite electoral change as part of their organizational mission. In terms of values, they place the most emphasis on economic opportunity and economic freedom, and they equate these with individual freedom. The economic considerations of Tea Party Express – the organization coordinating events and rallies – include references to government intervention in American families and businesses. They do so while chastising the "worst offenders in Congress" for their decisions to vote on policies leading to such interference. Tea Party Patriots more generally opposes government intervention "into the operations of private business", but do not reference political elites and decision-makers in their statements.

FreedomWorks also specifically references consumer choices as part of the motivation for protecting free market principles. This ties back to the most commonly cited principle in all of the texts: liberty.

Liberty is the most commonly cited concept, save for the three core values that the movement organizations share. Liberty First even goes so far as to directly equate liberty and the Constitution. Tea Party Patriots discuss the freedom of the individual, liberty and free markets. In terms of government, they claim that fiscally responsible government leads to freedom for the individual. They also cite the Constitution as the "supreme law of the land". Here, personal liberty and economic liberty are equated and are understood to be protected by the Constitution. Tea Party Express discusses government intervention as imposing on the freedom of the individual. This includes taxes, mandated health care and interference in the market as limiting freedom. For FreedomWorks, individual liberty must be aligned with the freedom to compete in a marketplace in order to increase consumer choice and facilitate control over one's earnings. Therefore, liberty and freedom are interchangeable terms in these texts, with an overwhelming emphasis on freedom tied to the market, and liberty protected in the Constitution. In the transitive sense, the implication is that in protecting Constitutional principles to promote liberty, one must also value a free market and individual control of earnings, embodied by consumer choice. Freedom, liberty, and the free market are tied together, and notably, are generally framed in individualistic terms, save for the few references to the "American family".

In summation, some of the groups considered above frame their agenda in terms of the Constitution and the founding fathers, other in terms of policies that are in opposition to their values, while other organizations direct their frustration towards political elites and demand electoral change. But despite the divergent framing of values and mission statements, the

commonalties among the organizations considered are in the three main core values: fiscally responsible, constitutionally limited government with an emphasis on the importance of free markets. The promotion of freedom and liberty are also framed in individualistic terms. And these values are tied directly to the free market. Thus, it is clear that the texts of a given organization above align with the nature of action they promote activists to take. It is also apparent that there are commonly cited values and concepts, but distinct approaches to how achieve movement goals. This indicates the main fracture in the movement: those who promote electoral change; those who promote policy change; and those who present a hybrid of these approaches. This is outlined in the Figure 1 below.

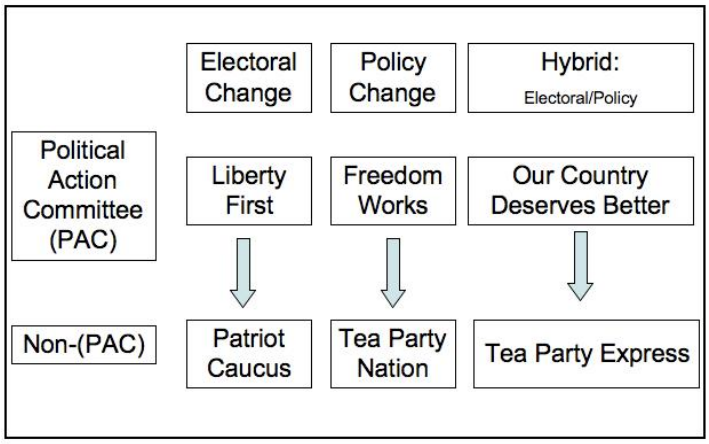


Figure 1: Tea Party Movement Goal Split

Beyond considering these texts – with the rhetorical distance between organizations having been demonstrated to be quite small – the question remains as to the relationships between the political actions committees and the "grassroots" Tea Party organizations that they support. It is unclear whether the discursive similarities result from top-down information flow, or rather indicate the forming of common movement values and goals. According to a Lie Machine post that appeared on the *Rolling Stone* Magazine website, the relationship between FreedomWorks and Tea Party Patriots is one of top-down coercion. According to the post,

> After FreedomWorks orchestrated the original Tea Party protests last April, it ostensibly handed over the reigns of the movement to a third group, called Tea Party Patriots…[but] in June, after activists on the [listserv] began advocating to change a Tea Party logo, a top official from FreedomWorks stepped in and shut down the discussion. (The Lie Machine, n.d.)

Further influence from the organization occurred when famed anti-global warming tactician Frank Lunz drafted documents instructing Tea Party activists on how to disrupt the national Town Hall discussions regarding health care reform. The document was forwarded along the Tea Party Patriots listserv. Therefore it is clear that FreedomWorks has some particular control over Tea Party Patriots' actions. Further, Our Country Deserves Better, which orchestrated the Tea Party Express bus tours, changed its name in October from Russo Marsh & Rogers. The tours have tremendous fundraising potential, having raised nearly $2.7 million since July 2009. These funds have been used to affect elections, as the organization has been "airing hundreds of thousands of dollars in ads supporting Republican campaigns such as Scott Brown's successful special election for Senate in Massachusetts and blasting Democratic ones, such as Senate Majority Leader Reid's reelection bid in Nevada" (Vogel, 14 April 2010). Such actions have led activists to denounce the relationship as Republican intervention in the grassroots movement. According to Vogel's article, a representative of OCDB told Politico that the organization intentionally re-shaped its goals by "eschewing some of the national security and social issues on which it focused during the campaign…in favor of a narrower concentration on the fiscal issues that unite much of the tea party movement" (Vogel, 14 April 2010). The organization has also funded television advertisements praising Sarah Palin. Here, the relationship between Our Country Deserves Better and Tea Party Express, and FreedomWorks and Tea Party Patriots has been clarified and explains comments from, most notably Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, that the movement is not grassroots but rather maintains the

appearance of grassroots despite Republican influence – a process dubbed “astroturfing”. Therefore, these claims of “astroturfing” are not baseless, and it is significant that despite OCDB not being explicitly directed towards electoral activism, they have been affecting elections via the airing of campaign ads. Further, the control over Tea Party Patriots by FreedomWorks indicates that the later does not want the former to have complete control over symbols of the movement – taking a stance against the changing of a logo. The full extent of this influence is unclear, but is significant in considering the many commonalities between political action committee texts and those of the subsidiary organizations that they support.

Conclusion: Context, Movement Structure and Action Orientation in the Tea Party Movement

In this study, I intended to answer the question of how the Tea Party movement emerged, what context it emerged within, what the goals of the movement are, how the claims of organization discourse fit within the political and social context of the United States in 2010, and how these claims reinforce movement goals and action orientations. I hypothesized that the movement has yet to solidify a common movement goal, but that at this early stage marked by attempts at mobilizing and coordinating activists, movement goals are beginning to form and should be indicated in the discursive practice of movement organizations. Further, the nature of the discourse in defining movement goals should affect certain choices in action orientation as most relevant in the current context. I discovered that in fact there is a fracture in the movement with regards to goals – affecting electoral change or organizing and coordinating activists around rallies and protests. This has been reinforced by the discursive practice and the nature of protest of movement activists and organizations.

Considering political opportunity structure and context structure, I have demonstrated that the Tea Party movement emerged in a moment of relative volatility, both politically and economically, that has influenced the social dynamics of the electorate. The Tea Party movement emerged following a prolonged period of economic decline punctuated with the collapse of the derivatives market, and immediately converged after the election of a young Democrat to the White House following eight years of Republican representation. Further, the state of the economy and the job market has strained many American families. And as demonstrated in survey results, Tea Party activists are older, wealthier and whiter than the general population. Therefore, these older, retired, or laid off Americans, together with other sympathizers, have

come together to express their frustration about the state of the country. These activists are not acting on their own, despite the prominence of local, autonomous Tea Party organizations within the movement. Central organizations including established political action committees have been working towards coordinating these smaller organizations and articulating movement goals while keeping enough distance to maintain the grassroots character of the movement.

Looking to the movement level, it has been demonstrated that the organizations within the movement – considered in this study as actors that make strategic choice in organizational structure, tactical considerations such as the nature of mobilization and action repertoires, and discursive practice to clarify movement goals – demonstrate a hybrid structure bridging the gap between grassroots- and pyramid-models described by Dieter Rucht. This is evident in the relationships between movement organizations as described through their discursive practice. There are central organizations in the movement, most notably the established political action committees including FreedomWorks, Our Country Deserves Better and Liberty Now, that fund subsidiary organizations that in turn directly pursue organizing and mobilizing and articulate action repertoires. Further, these political action committees and their subsidiaries generally share commonalities in their discursive practice.

In considering these organizations in terms of movement level first, then moving down to local and regional organizations, it is clear that the political action committees in Washington use their influence to coordinate subsidiary organizations that in turn attract both individual activists and other, small, local organizations within their larger organizational umbrella. Here, the grassroots-model described by Rucht is present on the local and regional level, as indicated by a decentralized and informal organizational structure. This is also in line with Klandermans' network structure, where pre-existing organizations coordinate information and mobilization

efforts around collective action. But, it is not clearly one or the other, as movement organization among Tea Party groups is not fully decentralized, nor composed of exclusively pre-existing organizations. Here, the relatively decentralized local groups are autonomous, and there are pre-existing organizations that facilitate coordination. So the local and regional levels represent a grassroots/network model. But, moving upward, political action committees and their subsidiaries coordinate the efforts and actions of smaller organizations. This fits Klandermans' pyramid structure, defined by weak links between levels where higher-level organizations exist to provide information, strategic approaches and define movement goals (Klandermans, 387). Thus, overall, the movement has a hybrid structure between the grassroots/network model and the pyramid model.

Using discourse analysis – looking at the text produced by social movement organizations to determine how certain ideas have shaped the movement – it is clear that nearly every organization cites liberty as their most commonly invoked concept. The ambiguity of this concept, as well as its central importance to the American ethos, make its use as a rallying cry for mobilization a logical strategic choice of movement organizations. Further, equating freedom with free markets has been another common strategic discursive choice. By this logic any government spending or regulation of the economy may be called unnecessary, and thereby, an imposition on the freedoms of Americans, American businesses, and consumer choice. Thirdly, the Constitution, as the founding document protecting American liberties and guaranteeing the separation of powers and states rights, is the dogma of the American state. Justifying activism in light of the Constitution not only legitimizes activist actions, but also offers a significant symbolic rallying cry against the government. If the Constitution provides certain god-given protections embodied in the rule of law, and these protections are assumed to be undermined,

then it is not only that the government is making disagreeable policy choices, but in doing so, is undermining the founding principles of the nation. Overall, these themes provide significant rhetorical justification for the movement that is concordant with the social, political and economic difficulties facing the American populace.

In light of this discursive practice, it has been demonstrated that the texts of movement organizations reinforce not only the values of activists, the structural relationship outlined above, but also the action orientations of movement organizations. The action orientations are binary among movement organizations – either directed towards facilitating electoral change, or more generally towards organizing and mobilizing activists around protests and rallies, often with the intention of voicing concern over particular policies or elected representatives, but with no explicit intention of electoral activism.

Here, again, the action orientation of the movement as a whole can be seen as a hybrid, or, in moving to the level of the organizations themselves, may be seen as a mark of polarization within the movement. The later interpretation is significant, as it beings to clarify the nature of antagonism within the movement, which, although not explicit in any organizational text, is clearly a fracture that will affect the progression of the movement as it matures. In terms of action orientation, a value-oriented campaign highlights the importance of the organizations' actions' in affecting outcomes, and thereby achieving their goals that are in turn justified by the ideology behind them. A power-oriented campaign emphasizes the movement's effectiveness in exerting influence. A participation-oriented campaign emphasizes the inherent value in participation (Klandermans, 388).

Fundamentally, we have seen that the main divide in organizations are among those looking to mobilize activists around general concepts – such as liberty – or with an ideological

grounding in the Constitution; or organizations' that are directed towards exerting electoral influence. The later are power-oriented by encouraging activists to get involved with particular campaigns, with the goal of electing a conservative Congress in the mid-term elections in 2010. The former are between the participation-oriented and value-oriented as they appeal to general symbols and concepts, but not so strongly to ideological dogma. Significant concepts include liberty, Constitutionally protected freedoms, small government and limited taxation, which are certainly values around which to mobilize activists, but not strongly coherent, ideological underpinnings. Therefore, the Tea Party organizations not directed towards electoral activism demonstrate a hybrid form between the participation- and value-oriented models.

Where the movement will go from here is unclear. Certainly, the upcoming mid-term elections, the nature of the candidates and their campaigns, and the strategic choice of the established parties in response to these candidates may indicate the power of the Tea Party activists in affecting electoral change. It is also significant how the relationships between movement organizations evolve, and how entrenched each becomes in its' selected action orientations. As the movement matures, and funding information becomes public following the 2009-2010 tax season, future study with a focus on funding chains using network analysis will be extremely fruitful for reinforcing the relationships that have been elaborated here using discourse analysis. And as the smaller organizations within the movement are discursively similar to the larger organizations, a proper network analysis based on funding will be a logical approach to identifying clusters within the movement. Thus, the movement is young, and the nature of this study reflects the early moment in the movement. As the movement matures and affects electoral and policy change, and as tax information on these organizations becomes public, it will become much more clear where the light from the prism of the movement will focus, or rather, whether it

will spread in all directions, diffuse, and make way for another movement to emerge in the cycle of protest.

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