POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF TEA PARTY SUPPORT, 2009–2012

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The Tea Party Movement (TPM) burst onto the political scene following the 2008 elections. Early on, the movement attracted broad public support and seemed to tap into a variety of cultural concerns rooted in the changing demographic, political, and economic face of the nation. However, some observers questioned whether the Tea Party represented anything more than routine partisan backlash. And what had started as a seemingly grassroots movement that changed the face of American politics in the 2010 election was reduced to being mainly a caucus within Congress by 2012. In this article, we examine the cultural and political dimensions of Tea Party support over time. Using polling data from North Carolina and Tennessee and quantitative media analysis, we provide new evidence that cultural dispositions in addition to conservative identification were associated with TPM favorability in 2010; that these dispositions crystallized into shared political positions in 2011; and that by 2012 little distinguished TPM adherents from other conservatives.

The Tea Party Movement (TPM) was the most important media story of the 2010 midterm elections. An ostensibly grassroots movement that emerged in the wake of the 2008 election of Barack Obama as president, it gave voice to conservative voters dissatisfied with the outcome of the election (Perrin et al. 2011). By 2012, however, the movement had lost much of its public cachet and had become identified in the press as a fringe movement that could "damage" the Republican Party (Good 2011; Pew Research Center 2011a; Weigel 2012). Losing much of its broad popular appeal, what had started as a grassroots movement and changed the face of American politics in the 2010 election was reduced primarily to a hardened wing of the Republican Party and a congressional caucus by 2012.

Many view the emergence of the Tea Party as part of a normal partisan backlash, a resurgence of activism among Republicans following their 2008 defeat in

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the presidential elections. Others contend that the movement represents a broader cultural phenomenon and taps into populist discontent with what is perceived to be the changing demographic face of America. Which is true? Does the movement tap into important cultural currents, attracting public support above and beyond (or, potentially, reducing support below) what might be expected from a typical partisan backlash? And if so, has the wider cultural appeal of the Tea Party persisted over time as the movement has evolved?

To answer these questions, this article proceeds in three parts. First, we provide a historical narrative of the TPM's development. Next, we present literature and theory that accounts for the Tea Party as partisan backlash, cultural movement, or both. Evidence from fieldwork at a Tea Party rally in North Carolina, along with general press accounts, indicates that early Tea Party activism played on strong cultural themes, inspiring many in the broader public to identify with the movement. We then present polling data from North Carolina and Tennessee that show cultural and political correlates of TPM support among the general public and how that support changed between 2011 and 2012. We assess these correlates at three time points (spring 2010, spring 2011, and fall 2012), demonstrating that cultural dispositions, in addition to conservative political identification, were associated with TPM favorability in 2010; that these dispositions crystallized into shared political positions in 2011; and that by 2012, little distinguished TPM adherents from other political conservatives. Finally, we provide a topic modeling analysis of national news reports about the TPM that support our findings based on the public opinion polling data. We show how the shifting language used to discuss the TPM over time in national political discourse is consistent with the shifts we find in our analysis of public opinion.

THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT: A BRIEF HISTORY

The birth of the Tea Party is usually attributed to the so-called "Santelli Rant," in which Consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC) commentator Rick Santelli spoke from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on February 19, 2009:

> How about this, President and new administration? Why don't you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages. . . . This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? Raise their hand. . . . We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm gonna start organizing. . . . I'll tell you what, if you read our founding fathers, people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson . . . What we're doing in this country now is making them roll over in their graves. (Santelli 2009)

Santelli's call went viral on the Internet and led to the creation of new websites using the Tea Party moniker, dozens of "Tea Party" protests across American cities, and

financial support from several conservative organizations and their donors. Within 10 months, 41 percent of Americans said they viewed the movement positively (Davis 2009).

The movement was decentralized, made up of local TPM groups, many of them coordinated through several websites such as http://www.teapartyexpress.org, http://www.teaparty911.com, and most popularly, http://www.teapartypatriots.org. In fall 2010, the *Washington Post* identified approximately 1,400 "possible" Tea Party groups (Gardner 2010). In 2009 to 2010, these local groups were active in myriad local TPM events held across the country, which often included nostalgic imagery like "tri-cornered hats," Revolutionary War costumes, and icons of the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Later, in early 2011, Skocpol and Williamson (2012:90) conducted a more focused and comprehensive survey of local groups, finding 804 with an Internet presence and 164 additional groups that seemed to have met regularly since February 2009. Both Gardner (2010) and Skocpol and Williamson (2012) found that these groups of activists were: (1) established by people who had flexibility in terms of their money and their time (e.g., retired adults, small business owners, stay-at-home moms), and (2) made up largely of people who were "new to politics."

Many local Tea Party groups received major financial support from national conservative organizing groups. Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks (an organization started by former congressman Dick Armey) and other conservative funders (e.g., the Koch brothers) all contributed to the TPM, increasing its strong connection to national electoral politics (Lo 2012). In addition, several key political leaders publicly identified themselves with the Tea Party, most notably, former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin and Minnesota Representative Michelle Bachmann. Along with TPM organizations, Palin, Bachmann, and others offered endorsements to candidates for office in the 2010 election; Palin often did so through posts on her Facebook page, characterizing candidates she supported as "commonsense conservatives." Although Palin was much more restrained with her endorsements than were TPM organizations in general, a greater proportion of her endorsed candidates won (Bullock and Hood 2012). Fox News also played an important coordinating role, its anchors often providing coverage and support to movement actors and events.

Some of the highest-profile races in 2010, such as that of Christine O'Donnell in Delaware's senate race, saw TPM-endorsed candidates losing races Republicans otherwise likely would have won. Skocpol and Williamson (2012:167) attribute such losses to "national Tea Party overkill" that alienated moderate Republicans. Nevertheless, Republicans in general captured a historically large number of congressional seats (60 in the House and 6 in the Senate), and many of the victorious candidates owed at least some of their success to TPM organizing.

However, with the Republican majority in the House of Representatives and popular discourse associating the TPM with political extremism, the post-2010 dynamic saw the decline of the TPM as a primarily grassroots movement and its ascendancy as a caucus in the U.S. Congress. By spring 2011, more than 60 members of the House had joined the official Tea Party Caucus, which flexed its political muscle during

the spring 2011 budget negotiations. By many accounts, House Speaker John Boehner's uncompromising position on massive budget cuts with no tax increases reflected the demands of the TPM Caucus (Stephanopoulos and McCarthy 2011).

By the 2012 elections, the image of the TPM as extremist and responsible for Republican losses was cemented, with commentators referring to the TPM's popular appeal as "finished" and "toxic" (Reeve 2012), even as Republican leadership in Congress paid it continued respect.

The decline of the TPM's popular appeal was also evident in national polls. Ongoing polling by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press shows a drop from 34 percent in October 2010, to 19 percent in September 2011 and October 2012 (Pew Research Center 2010, 2011b, 2012b).

THE TEA PARTY AS PARTISAN BACKLASH

American politics largely have been characterized by cycles of electoral success and activism, with the lopsided success of one party in a presidential election leading to a surge of support, populist rhetoric, and activism in favor of the opposing party soon after (Tufte 1975; Campbell 1991; Jacobson 2007). Ceaser and Busch (1997) argue in *Losing to Win* that the 1994 election and the popularity of the Republicans' "Contract with America" were also the result of electoral backlash. Citing the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who once wrote that "greater dooms win greater destinies," Ceaser and Busch (1997:3) contend that the pendulum swing in presidential politics is largely due to a disposition among the electorate, particularly strong among partisans, to "throw the bums out," referring to a distrust of those ascending to power in Washington. The "out party" is able to quickly and effectively demonize the "winning party," and in the process mobilize and reenergize its base to propel itself forward for the midterm congressional elections and beyond. While "reactionary" partisan electoral politics have been part of the political landscape for much of our history, Ceaser and Busch (1997) contend that oppositional movements can develop more quickly in today's new media era characterized by sophisticated political advertising, rapid digital communication, and the 24/7 news cycle (see also Bunch 2011).

Many observers and scholars conclude that the Tea Party is exactly this type of partisan reaction—made up almost entirely of conservatives and Republicans. David Woolner (2010) compares the partisan response to Obama's 2008 victory with that following Franklin D. Roosevelt's victory in 1932, drawing parallels between the Tea Party and the American League, an antigovernment, promarket organization that accused Roosevelt of leading the country toward socialism.

Evidence from polling data seems to support the notion that the Tea Party is a partisan backlash. Parker and Barreto (2013), drawing on their own polling data, demonstrate that partisan loyalty and a commitment to conservatism are strong predictors of Tea Party support, with Tea Party "believers" committed to core Republican principles. Others claim the Tea Party is not just politically conservative at its core, but is specifically oriented around rebranding the Republican Party and renewing Party support

and loyalty. Street and DiMaggio (2011:xi) argue that the Tea Party rebrands the Republican Party in the "false rebel's clothing of grassroots insurgency." Based on interviews with activists, observations at rallies and committee meetings, and analysis of newspaper accounts and polls, they contend that the "Tea Party is not a social movement, but rather a loose conglomeration of partisan interest groups set on returning the Republican Party to power" (Street and DiMaggio 2011:10). They quote a Chicago Tea Party organizer who told a handful of local chapter members to "push Republican principles; just don't ever actually concede to anyone you talk to that this is all about returning Republicans to office" (Street and DiMaggio 2011:1).

Skocpol and Williamson (2012:9) also conclude that the Tea Party owes much of its success to partisan efforts to resuscitate a "besmirched" Republican brand by pouring "old wine" into a new bottle labeled Tea Party Express. They contend that Tea Party operatives are motivated by conservative free-market principles and limited government and "are keeping their eye on the right-wing prize: pushing Barack Obama out of the presidency and gaining further ground in Congress, governorships, and state legislatures" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012:29). Based on existing academic work and on some journalistic accounts of the Tea Party, some argue that the Tea Party is not new and does not tap into different cultural issues and sentiment from previously experienced backlash movements (Dougherty 2010; Taibbi 2010; Street and DiMaggio 2011). Rather, the movement is viewed as shaped by partisan loyalists seeking to advance core Republican programs and policies, resulting in its popularity among conservative Republicans.

THE TEA PARTY AS CULTURAL MOVEMENT

Other scholars argue that the movement goes beyond the push and pull of partisan politics and taps into broader cultural discontent through a process of thin cultural coherence (discussed in detail below). Skocpol and Williamson (2012) see the movement as co-opted by the Republican Party but also see it as part of a larger cultural phenomenon triggered by Obama's ascendance to the presidency. They find evidence that Tea Party supporters are worried about larger social changes beyond the 2008 election; they worry that a way of life—fishing in local streams, walking home safely at night, traditional marriage, community playgrounds—is being eroded. The Tea Party's oft-cited call to "take our country back" is about nostalgia and a sense of cultural loss, often blamed on the media, Washington insiders, immigrants, and economic change. From this perspective, the Tea Party appeal goes beyond political identification and partisanship and strikes a chord with many Americans who worry about social change and largely reject politics in general.

Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto (2013) marshal data from public opinion surveys and interviews with Tea Party supporters to demonstrate the cultural dimensions of Tea Party support. Connecting with Richard Hofstadter's (1967) work on right-wing movements, Parker and Barreto (2013) argue that Tea Party supporters are largely older, privileged, white men who are anxious about losing power and status in

America. In their view, the Tea Party resurrects Gusfield's (1963) idea of status politics, rejecting the "change" promised by Obama—change "they can't believe in." Parker and Barreto (2013) contend that Tea Party supporters are pseudoconservatives, motivated mostly by cultural issues rather than core Republican principles. They find evidence for this, in part, because Tea Party websites focused on different issues from those addressed by politically conservative magazines during the same time period. They also find that cultural factors linked to a fear of Obama predict Tea Party support over and beyond partisan loyalties.

The idea that the Tea Party's cultural roots made it appealing to people "new to politics" fits with the movement's rhetoric claiming that its supporters were drawn from a broad segment of the population well beyond traditional Republican loyalties. Pundits pointed to the election of Tea Party Senate candidate Scott Brown in Massachusetts as evidence that the movement was popular beyond red states (Katel 2010). And Tea Party spokesmen were repeatedly critical of the Republican Party and set on depicting themselves as something "new"—a postpartisan popular uprising against a government increasingly out of touch, corrupt, and oppressive (Katel 2010; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010). While the Tea Party was strongly supported by Republican loyalists from the beginning, early polls did indicate that its initial appeal seemed to be broad and diverse (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010).

PARTISANSHIP, POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, AND CULTURE

Seeing the Tea Party as either partisan backlash or cultural groundswell ignores evidence from political scientists and sociologists on the role culture plays in knitting together diverse political coalitions and cementing partisan loyalties. Scholars have shown that the two-party system tends to produce unstable conditions among diverse, even potentially contradictory interests, as parties compete for voters with diverse concerns (Manza and Brooks 1999; Miller and Schofield 2003, 2008). According to Gross, Medvetz, and Russell (2011), the coalition-building process affects not only the parties, but coalition participants as well (see also Levendusky 2009). Party coalitions are not simply organizational, but cultural: they knit together styles of thought into a common ideological identification, encouraging participants to adopt opinions also held by their ideological compatriots (Perrin et al. 2014).

Gross et al. (2011) argue that these partisan coalitions are organized around the categories of liberal and conservative, terms which increasingly stand in for cultural status groups rather than purely or mainly political-policy identifications:

> . . . for many contemporary Americans, it would seem political ideology and party affiliation do not merely reflect beliefs and organizational commitments aimed at the achievement of power; they also signal varying degrees of membership in one of two increasingly well-recognized social groups—liberals and conservatives—that are accorded (and vie for) differential amounts of social esteem in different contexts and provide people with highly salient social identities. (P. 324)

As evidence for these distinct cultural-political camps, Gross et al. (2011) point to the fact that liberals and conservatives increasingly relocate to residential areas that affirm their political identifications, subscribe to media that is segmented based on political ideology, and self-select into occupations that fit with liberal or conservative self-identity. And, the Republican and Democratic parties have increasingly become aligned to these social identities—each standing in for a cluster of cultural beliefs, lifestyle preferences and general political and social orientations (see also Martin and Desmond 2010).

Obama's 2008 election therefore represented more than simply an electoral loss for Republicans and conservatives in the push and pull of political power in Washington. If Gross et al. (2011) are correct, group formation and identity theory would predict that conservatives would perceive the Obama victory as a challenge to their social status and group identity. While this might be true for future elections—losers and winners interpret the results of an election in social terms as much as political terms—it was particularly true of 2008, given the historic nature of Obama's victory. Obama symbolized a changing America—culturally and socially. The first African American president was broadly supported by minorities and youth—95 percent of blacks voted for him, and Latinos and Asians endorsed him by a margin of 2 to 1 as did voters under the age of 30, with youth turnout at a 30-year high (Lanning and Maruyama 2010). The media's use of "Obamamania"—like Beatlemania—suggested the election was historic as much for its cultural as political accomplishments (Miller 2009). The idea that Obama represented the changing face of America—a face exotic and foreign to many Americans—was evident by the fact that as many as 18 percent of Americans (and 34 percent of conservative Republicans) thought that Obama was a Muslim (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010). And, with the Birther movement in full force, many doubted Obama's citizenship. Finally, vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's contrast of Obama and his supporters to "real Americans" served to reinforce the perception among many conservatives that the Democratic candidate was "not like us." Based on the demographics of the electorate as well as the discourse and rhetoric from both campaigns and the press, Obama's election signaled a significant cultural transformation.

McCain's defeat by Obama left the Republican Party and the conservative movement in turmoil. The campaign itself represented a growing dissatisfaction with the Republican status quo; McCain and Palin distanced themselves from President Bush, disavowing his record of spending, deficits, economic decline, support for immigration reform, and a costly and unpopular war (Katel 2010). There was considerable hand-wringing after the election by conservative pundits, political operatives, and media analysts who talked about the "crisis in the Republican Party," with many pronouncing the conservative movement dead (e.g., Grunwald 2009).

Research has shown that the fate of a voter's chosen political candidate can influence that voter's self-esteem and status. When the favored group wins, voters often bask in their glory; when they lose, voters may seek to distance themselves from the group. For example, voters may leave campaign yard signs up after a win or remove

them quickly after an electoral defeat (Miller 2009). But, to the extent that Obama's victory was perceived as ushering in a "new" political and cultural reality, rather than just a win or loss that could be reversed in the next round of competition, the losers in 2008 were left searching for something more than just a rematch four years later. Simply distancing themselves in the short term from the losing ticket, engaging in hand-wringing and second-guessing around campaign tactics, and laying low until the next political season were insufficient strategies for mending the identity and status loss generated by Obama's victory. Conservative Americans were longing for a fresh identity that could renew and affirm their sense of status and provide a powerful narrative for moving forward.

The Tea Party offered conservatives a set of cultural images and discourses that struck a symbolic chord. Like a new consumer brand, the Tea Party served as a new "political brand" that could appeal to existing partisans who were looking for a fresh way to express their political sentiments, political commitments, and group identity. Using a variety of cultural strategies—drawing on historical references and events, emphasizing the Constitution, dressing in costume, displaying Gadsden ("Don't Tread on Me") signs, and using slogans about taking the country back—Tea Party supporters were able to rebrand the Republican coalition as oppositional, populist, and organized around core principles of freedom, individualism, and limited government (Lo 2012).

Scholars and critics argue over whether the Tea Party movement is only a Republican backlash or whether it has deeper and wider cultural roots. We argue that both perspectives are true. Specifically, the early movement was a partisan backlash motivated in part by the challenges that Obama's victory presented for the cultural identity of conservatives and Republicans. The cultural trappings of the Tea Party provided partisans a renewed self-image, rooted in populism and history, which could serve to rally loyal Republican troops, heal internal divisions, and lead to a strategy and message to counter the Democrats and Obama's ascendency to the White House. But this early symbolic work gathered up others, beyond hardcore partisans, into its cultural net, making the Tea Party appealing to a broad segment of the population worried about discomfiting change in America. This cultural work on the part of the movement provided what Ghaziani and Baldassarri (2011) call "thin cultural coherence," allowing the movement to be ambiguous enough to grow. In the next section, we analyze the emergence and effects of thin cultural coherence and the ways it played out in the history of the TPM.

THIN CULTURAL COHERENCE, POLITICAL CRYSTALLIZATION, AND FRAGMENTATION

Social movement scholars have long been interested in how political and protest movements attract, recruit, and retain both volunteer activist and broad public support. Recent work in social movement research emphasizes the importance of culture (symbols, stories, and cognitive and discursive frames) for building solidarity and support for movement activity (Benford and Snow 2000; Polletta and Jasper 2001;

Jasper 2008; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2009). For our purposes, culture consists of these elements that connect people's individual and group identities and serve to deepen their commitments to those identities by tapping into such motivating emotions as anger, fear, patriotism, and moral indignation. Because culture allows for identification with abstract symbols that may be interpreted differently by different people, it follows, as discussed above, that culture helps to knit together otherwise disparate coalitions and factions. Powerful cultural symbols and narratives provide common ground for groups who might otherwise disagree over policy and politics. Ghaziani and Baldassarri (2011), drawing on ideas from Sewell (1999), argue that such cultural symbols are not necessarily coherent in the sense of being internally consistent, integrated, consensual, and stable. Instead, they argue for "thin cultural coherence"—a set of ideas and cultural displays anchored around common assumptions and symbols that are ambiguous enough to allow for "semiotic sprawl." This idea is consistent with Blumer's (1951) notion of "cultural drift"—or what he refers to as "uncoordinated efforts toward vague goals and objectives" (Leahy and Mazur 1980:261). The ambiguous symbols serve as a basis for consensus among otherwise disparate groups.

The early cultural work of the Tea Party, described in greater detail below, resonates with Ghaziani and Baldassarri's (2011) notion of "thin cultural coherence." As noted above, those writing about the Tea Party show that it appealed to diverse factions within the larger conservative movement in the United States—libertarians, evangelicals, staunch Republican partisans, probusiness moderates, deficit hawks, nativists, and antitax stalwarts. The cultural images of the Tea Party were sufficiently vague and consensual to allow disparate groups—all animated by a concern for the type of change represented by Obama—to find meaning and hope. Yet while many could point to vague cultural references—e.g., the Constitution, the Revolutionary War, and populist slogans—much of the mainstream press and early scholarly writing seemed puzzled over what exactly the Tea Party stood for and how to make sense of seemingly competing frames.

While social movement scholars have shown the importance of culture for solidarity, they also have demonstrated that unity can be fleeting, and political and cultural differences often lead to political infighting and fragmentation (Gamson 1995; Lichterman 1995; Robinson 2005). Fragmentation occurs as media coverage shapes and highlights certain leaders over others and as movements prioritize their political agenda, emphasizing some issues while moving other issues to the margins (Gitlin 2003). In other words, crystallization around particular movement leaders, issues, and policy positions can alienate different factions of a movement. Given the rapid emergence of the Tea Party and its fairly quick transformation into electoral kingmaker and congressional caucus, we suspect that we will find evidence that the cultural dimensions of early Tea Party support gave way as the movement progressed. If this is true, then the Tea Party represents an interesting case of the interplay between culture and politics and the extent to which broad cultural identification with a movement can hold up in the face of political crystallization. The most heavily researched and

theorized social movements over the past few decades—civil rights, the religious right, the environmental movement—often began with specific political and policy objectives and through cultural tactics (e.g., frame amplification and extension, movement narratives, slogans, music and art) to broaden their appeal and recruit new members. However, movements like the Tea Party, which arise almost overnight and attract broad public support from the very beginning, seem to follow an opposite trajectory—starting off by connecting a broad coalition around vague cultural symbols and ideas and then moving toward a more coherent political and policy agenda. The idea of thin cultural coherence coupled with literature on fragmentation and political infighting provides the basis for our hypothesis that the cultural dimensions of Tea Party support would be supplanted by political dimensions as the movement progressed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on prior research, we ask four primary research questions: (1) What themes, images, and cultural narratives characterized early representations of the Tea Party? (2) Can cultural dispositions predict early Tea Party support above and beyond political and partisan identification? (3) If cultural variables help predict Tea Party support early on, do they remain relevant as we trace the Tea Party Movement's progression and political crystallization? And (4) are changes in the political and cultural dimensions of Tea Party support reflected in press coverage between 2010 and 2012? That is, does the media's coverage shift from focusing on the Tea Party as a broad cultural movement to more narrowly covering its electoral and Congressional activity?

DATA

To answer question 1, we rely on both publicly available press and scholarly accounts of early Tea Party activity as well as interviews and observations at a local Tea Party rally in North Carolina. We do not attempt to build a systematic portrait of the early "culture" of the Tea Party. Rather, this section provides a sketch of some of the dominant themes that emerged in the initial coverage and representation of the movement.

To answer questions 2 and 3, we added relevant questions to an ongoing polling effort in North Carolina run by the first author, and added a Tennessee sample for additional data. We draw data from three such telephone polls in North Carolina and Tennessee between 2010 and 2012. These polls were performed by Public Policy Polling, Inc., (PPP) a respected polling firm in Raleigh, North Carolina, which was rated most accurate in the nation for the 2012 electoral polling season (Panagopoulos 2013). On our behalf, PPP drew random samples of registered voters in North Carolina for the June 2010, March 2011, and October 2012 polls, and additional random samples of registered voters in Tennessee for the June 2010 and March 2011 polls. Respondents were contacted via Interactive Voice Response (IVR) automated telephone calls and asked to participate in a short poll. This research was approved by the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina,

Chapel Hill (protocols 10–0987, 11–0519, and 12–1815). We received 9,725 responses to the three polls. The overall response rate for the three polls was 6.3 percent. The individual response rates were: for June 2010, 7.6 percent (7.3 percent for North Carolina, 7.9 percent for Tennessee); for March 2011, 6.9 percent (7.4 percent for North Carolina, 6.3 percent for Tennessee); and for October 2012, 3.1 percent (North Carolina only). While these response rates are low, they are not dramatically different from those of other pollsters. IVR typically results in low response rates (Dillman et al. 2009). However, the technique—and PPP in particular—have proven very reliable in predicting electoral outcomes (Bialik 2008a, 2008b; Hillygus 2011; Panagopoulos 2013), generally similar to live-person telephone interviews. Pew Research Center, for example, had an average response rate of 9 percent in 2012 for their interviewer surveys (Pew Research Center 2012a).

We based the dependent variable on a survey question that asked respondents how they felt about the Tea Party. This was included as part of a larger set of questions that asked about feelings toward certain groups or organizations, such as the Republican Party or immigrants. Respondents selected among five possible options: feel very positively about the Tea Party, feel somewhat positively, have no opinion, feel somewhat negatively about the Tea Party, and feel very negatively about the Tea Party. In the 2010 wave, 47 percent of the 2,449 respondents felt somewhat or very positively about the Tea Party; in the 2011 wave, 43 percent of the 2,509 respondents felt positively about the Tea Party; and in the 2012 wave, 51 percent of the 674 respondents felt positively. After excluding cases with missing data on the independent variables, our sample sizes for the three waves are 2,347, 2,130; and 555. We assign numeric values for each response on a 5-point scale, placing those with no opinion in the middle. Treating those with no opinion as "missing" and discarding them from the analysis, instead of placing them in the middle, increases the effect size of the libertarian scale in the second wave so that the parameter is statistically significant, but produces no other notable changes in the analysis.

Based on our theoretical expectations about partisan backlash and the political makeup of the movement, our independent variables include three main political attitude scales: (1) feelings toward the Republican Party, ranging on a 5-point scale from feeling very positive to feeling very negative; (2) feelings toward the Democratic Party on the same scale; and (3) political self-identification on a 5-point scale from very conservative to very liberal. Based on the initial cultural work of the Tea Party and the movement's history and early coverage (see below), as well as recent theorizing about the cultural and status dimensions of contemporary political identification, we also measured four cultural dispositions, above and beyond partisan and political self-identification, for association with TPM support: ontological insecurity, nativism, cultural libertarianism, and authoritarianism.

Ontological insecurity: this dimension involves the sense that things are changing too fast or too much. Concern about the pace of change has been shown to be a primary motivator for a variety of cultural conflicts and protest in the United States (Tepper 2011). Giddens (1991:54) claims that ontological security is a necessary

precondition for "a stable sense of self-identity." We measured ontological insecurity based on whether or not the respondent was "very concerned" about "the changes taking place in American society these days." In our poll, 51 percent of people who are very concerned about "changes taking place in American society these days" were TPM supporters compared to just 21 percent of those who were only somewhat or not at all concerned.

Libertarianism: this dimension captures beliefs that there should not be regulations or limitations on personal and cultural expression. We measured libertarianism by combining responses to two statements on regulations of personal expression. These were: "there should be more rules about what can be shown on television these days," and "there should be more rules about what people can wear in parks, shopping centers, and other public places these days." Respondents could select from five responses, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." We combine the two items to produce a single libertarianism scale using factor analysis. The two items have an average interitem covariance of 0.912 and our two-item scale has an alpha of 0.75. In our poll, 24 percent of TPM supporters believe there should be fewer rules regulating what can be posted on the Internet and who can read it; in contrast, 16 percent of non-TPM supporters hold this view.

Authoritarianism: this dimension captures the general value placed on deference to authority. Following current research on authoritarianism (Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009), we measure authoritarianism by summing responses to two questions about attitudes toward child rearing. These were: "would you say it is more important that a child obeys his parents, or that he is responsible for his own actions," and "would you say it is more important that a child has respect for his elders, or that he thinks for himself." We coded respondents who answered *obey parents* and *respect elders*, respectively, as providing the more authoritarian response. We combine the two items to produce a single authoritarianism scale using factor analysis. The two items have an average interitem covariance of 0.89 and our two-item scale has an alpha of 0.73. Of TPM supporters in the first wave, 61 percent agree that it is more important that a child obeys his parents, and 77 percent that a child has respect for his elders, compared with 45 percent and 59 percent, respectively, among non-TPM supporters.

Nativism: this dimension includes negative attitudes toward immigrants. We measured nativism using a question about feelings toward immigrants, with response choices on a 5-point scale from feel very positively to feel very negatively; the middle scale point was "have no opinion." Eighteen percent of TPM supporters feel very negatively toward immigrants compared with 12 percent for non-TPM supporters.

It is important to note that our measures of both libertarianism and authoritarianism emphasize their status as cultural dispositions, not political positions. We do not measure preference for political authority for authoritarianism, or economic or political libertarianism. As cultural dispositions, the two are not necessarily inconsistent, although they are often at odds.

We also included a series of demographic controls for the 2010 and 2012 waves. Unfortunately, these questions were omitted from the 2011 wave. We measured

education based on three categories: high school degree or less; some college or a college degree; and postcollege education. We also included indicator variables for race, sex, and state of residence.

Table 1 reports the correlation coefficients among our independent variables. The highest correlations were related to political beliefs and party favorability, with those high on the conservative scale likely to approve of the Republican Party ($r = 0.49$) and disapprove of the Democratic Party ($r = -0.51$). Among the four cultural dispositions, libertarianism was negatively correlated with authoritarianism ($r = -0.31$) and ontological insecurity ($r = -0.21$), but none of the other relationships had a correlation coefficient of greater than 0.2. The four measures have an average interitem covariance of 0.22, and factor analysis produces no eigenvalues greater than 1, both of which strongly suggest that these four measures are capturing relatively distinct dispositions.

To answer question 4, we examine 9,972 articles that were published by the Associated Press (AP) between April 2009 and October 2012 in their national, political, or Washington DC sections that used the term "tea party." We selected the AP because their stories are less likely to be regionally biased than stories that appear in the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. The articles were downloaded from Lexis-Nexis. As part of preprocessing the text before analysis, we removed all punctuation; converted all words to lower case; and analyzed only those words that appeared in at least 0.5 percent of all documents.

METHODS

For question 1 (the themes and images characterizing the movement), we look to publicly available accounts of early Tea Party activity as well as our own interviews and observations at a local Tea Party rally in North Carolina. These provide an overview of some of the primary themes that dominated the coverage and representation of the movement as it emerged, but do not constitute a comprehensive view of the cultural strategies of the movement.

For questions 2 and 3 (the cultural dispositions associated with TPM favorability originally and over time), we use linear regression models to test the effects of political beliefs (party favorability and self-placement on liberal–conservative scale), ontological insecurity, authoritarian dispositions, libertarianism, and anti-immigrant sentiment. In addition, we also include controls for education, race, and gender for 2010 and 2012. Demographic data were not available in the 2011 poll: thus, this model has a lower r-squared. The outcome measure is a 5-point scale based on how positively respondents felt about the Tea Party Movement, from "very positively" to "very negatively." Across each of the waves, there was a sizable number of respondents for each of the responses (cell percentages ranged from 12 percent to 25 percent), and tests for heteroskedasticity for each of the models suggested that the residuals were normally distributed. As such, we feel confident that linear regression is the appropriate analytic tool. As a robustness check, we also analyzed the outcome using ordered logistic regression, and found the same set of variables was statistically significant.

TABLE 1. Correlation Coefficients among Independent Variables for All Three Survey Waves (n = 5,639)

	Ontological insecurity	Authoritarian scale	Libertarian scale	Anti-immigrant	Male	Democratic Party approval	Republican Party approval	Conservatism	White (race)	High school degree or less	Some college	College degree or more	Tennessee
Ontological insecurity	1												
Authoritarian scale	0.144	1											
Libertarian scale	−0.213	−0.310	1										
Anti-immigrant	−0.0773	−0.122	0.186	1									
Male	0.0061	−0.037	−0.101	−0.034	1								
Democratic Party approval	−0.235	−0.127	0.0954	.0221	0.080	1							
Republican Party approval	0.206	0.165	−0.201	−0.115	−0.017	−0.382	1						
Conservatism	0.282	0.299	−0.359	−0.234	−0.022	−0.505	0.489	1					
White (race)	0.273	−0.048	0.0109	0.0825	0.010	−0.084	0.074	0.041	1				
High school degree or less	0.145	0.245	−0.278	−0.102	0.039	−0.049	0.097	0.182	0.206	1			
Some college	0.0301	−0.036	0.0531	0.0474	−0.014	−0.040	0.018	0.034	0.041	−0.475	1		
College degree or more	−0.176	−0.216	0.235	0.0602	−0.031	0.088	−0.116	−0.217	−0.249	−0.583	−0.438	1	
Tennessee	−0.180	0.030	−0.029	−0.0901	0	−0.012	0.014	0.016	−0.550	−0.127	−0.004	0.134	1

For question 4 (reflections in press coverage), we use 9,972 AP articles to examine how media coverage of the Tea Party Movement shifted between February 2009 and October 2012. As this large a number of articles is not easily coded by hand, we used a data reduction algorithm to extract clusters of words that are commonly used together, and then grouped those clusters into common themes based on our knowledge of the case. This strategy is similar to using factor analysis to reduce a large number of variables that are often highly correlated into a smaller set for descriptive or analytic purposes. In this analysis, the case is the newspaper article and the variables are the number of times a given word is used. Specifically, we construct our topic clusters using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003). In LDA, a text is assumed to be a mixture of different topics. While we do not directly observe the topics, we do observe combinations of words associated with various topics. Based on a set of documents and fixed number of topics, topic models produce estimates of which words cluster together and what proportion of each document is associated with which cluster of words.

As shown in Table 2, we extracted 50 different clusters of words. For each cluster, we examined the most frequently occurring words in order to categorize the cluster into distinct themes. For example, both the cluster with "florida scott rubio crist" and "indiana lugar mourdock brown" can be grouped into one theme about campaigning based on the heavy use of words related to candidates for state-wide office in Florida and Indiana, respectively. We were able to identify several distinct clusters of articles related to: campaigning, protest, political issues, the Tea Party itself, state politics or something else. Among the political issues, we separately analyzed a topic that maps onto the nativism dispositions, as it loaded highly with the words, "immigration illegal arizona law immigrants border hispanic." Notably, none of the other dispositions was related to a news topic.

We coded clusters as being related to a "campaign" theme if they largely consisted of words associated with the mechanics of campaigning, such as "million ads raised spent fundraising groups committee" or "poll points percentage economy half exit survey." We also coded clusters as being related to the "campaign" theme if it listed a series of candidates running for the same office or in the same state, such as "iowa bachmann minnesota pawlenty hampshire perry romney." We categorized 23 of the 50 clusters as primarily being related to campaigning.

For the "protest" category, we selected clusters with assorted words associated with rallies or public events, such as "protesters rally city protest movement capitol" or "crowd rally event speech saturday town hall Friday." We categorized 2 of the 50 clusters as primarily being related to protest.

We grouped clusters of works associated with various political issues and the legislative process into the "issues" category. This included a cluster associated with health care reform ("care law insurance overhaul repeat bill states coverage"), taxes ("tax taxes income sales cuts plan jobs pay"), budgets ("ryan medicare budget plan social security program" and "cuts debt boehner budget billion bill measure"), and the economy ("jobs economy economic energy oil industry companies"). Additionally, we identified

TABLE 2. Topic Model Keywords (Algorithmically Generated) and Categories (Researcher Generated). Based on Latent Dirichlet Allocation Analysis Extracting 50 Topics from 9,972 Associated Press Articles Mentioning the "Tea Party," 2009–2012

Category	Keywords
Campaign	poll points percentage economy half exit survey margin results nearly conducted error showed plus voted minus independents polling supporters
Campaign	elections control fall seats parties win races november majority may independent john big white_house bush establishment power primaries conservatives
Campaign	million ads raised spent fundraising groups committee cash help nearly group outside donors reported hand california finance reports advertising
Campaign	news debate media asked show saying video did thursday statement called comments wednesday fox interview monday should comment didn't
Campaign	care himself issues record voted elected business running spent jobs experience ads taxes saying career served senator called own
Campaign	district congressional seat won county incumbent races seats face districts november defeated john incumbents nomination elected general held lost
Campaign	iowa bachmann minnesota pawlenty hampshire perry romney poll michele early nomination straw huntsman conservatives caucuses caucus paul field rick
Campaign	romney gingrich santorum mitt newt south massachusetts rick carolina hampshire paul speaker iowa conservatives nomination win polls florida states
Campaign	florida scott rubio crist meek west miami marco charlie sink independent rick orlando bush tallahassee beach kendrick tampa polls
Campaign	romney delegates convention santorum paul caucuses won nomination caucus states nevada gingrich minnesota mitt win florida colorado super four
Campaign	paul conway kentucky rand maine snowe jack ron king grayson mcconnell bunning green favorite general drug attorney jim retiring
Campaign	colorado votes polls turnout ballots voting buck early county cast bennet voter ballot voted close supporters denver million registered
Campaign	perry texas white rick houston austin hutchison texans san antonio dallas bush conservatives anti record legislature kay bailey mayor
Campaign	illinois oklahoma walsh chicago sullivan kirk district congressional career congressman smith joe jackson votes present five pilot professional suburbs
Campaign	indiana lugar mourdock brown richard donnelly pence indianapolis mcmahon coats daniels massachusetts seat warren senator treasurer connecticut joe patrick
Campaign	reid nevada angle harry las vegas sharron leader majority reno favorite nation security unemployment backed social polls fifth ads
Campaign	virginia seat announced decision running allen chairman committee announcement kaine next seek nomination won wednesday webb special general bid
Campaign	palin carolina south haley sarah demint alaska vice nikki mccain sanford activists won trump jim endorsement columbia charleston nominee
Campaign	donnell delaware castle coons christine biden ayotte chris seat mike win vice joe upset hampshire favorite establishment held congressman
Campaign	kentucky williams louisville moffett beshear lexington county paul david frankfort steve phil gubernatorial fort businessman executive rand davis moore
Campaign	cain cruz dewhurst texas runoff ted allegations herman david nomination georgia sexual lieutenant general women bailey james dallas harassment
Campaign	miller murkowski alaska write lisa joe ballots palin votes mcadams alaskans name express anchorage count tea_party sarah win counted
Campaign	paladino cuomo new_york clinton andrew albany carl buffalo poll polls michael rick line developer attorney long city www island
Campaign	hatch utah bennett earmarks pennsylvania specter toomey arkansas sestak lee convention lake lincoln salt delegates arlen senator orrin committee

TABLE 2. *Continued*

Category	Keywords
Issue	cuts debt boehner budget billion bill measure white_house trillion lawmakers cut legislation deficit deal leaders leader compromise limit speaker
Issue	jobs economy economic energy oil industry companies business unemployment stimulus job company financial gas trade administration create coal rate
Issue	bill lawmakers committee legislature legislative session legislation measure members bills proposal georgia approved passed speaker legislators law majority chamber
Issue	military kansas war defense afghanistan iraq marine troops policy veterans members foreign service pentagon corps army armed secretary forces
Issue	ryan medicare budget plan social security program committee cuts tax programs debt seniors deficit paul future panel chairman wisconsin
Issue	budget billion million school program funding education programs fund schools lawmakers cut help cuts students fiscal dollars services funds
Issue	care law insurance overhaul repeal bill states coverage legislation exchange reform amendment measure buy mandate americans issue medical should
Issue	immigration illegal arizona law immigrants border hispanic issue mccain enforcement country citizenship sheriff status bill hispanics legal phoenix mexico
Issue	tax taxes income sales cuts plan jobs pay increase million raise revenue benefits cut budget increases economic business businesses
Issue	abortion gay marriage rights women social issues life religious same issue amendment right church sex such should woman christian
Midwest Unions	michigan signatures ballot county detroit snyder petitions petition oakland township running tea_party recall lansing general enough mayor grand group
Midwest Unions	wisconsin walker thompson recall johnson milwaukee madison feingold scott wis four spent elections assembly ron elected senators tommy million
Midwest Unions	ohio union workers unions labor bargaining collective rights employees walker wisconsin bill teachers capitol budget scott pay pension benefits
Tea Party	group tea_party movement groups members activists idaho express organization leaders county local conservatives chairman patriots committee www meeting coalition
Protest	protesters rally city protest movement capitol beck signs crowd occupy protests tax tea_party held boston rallies park country activists
Protest	crowd rally event speech saturday town hall friday monday country tour meeting supporters bus events spoke steele nation visit
Other	don't want we still know right very good see lot got doesn't really too here work need things down
Other	states missouri ohio dakota north virginia maryland wisconsin governors john won louis blunt florida pennsylvania win illinois south big
Other	family school university old father college children home wife young life then son center high mother story man took
Other	nebraska news place post journal times daily falls star reporting staff herald union terry white albany nelson buffalo
Other	commission investigation filed ethics law attorney records complaint did pay report paid information case officials department company county letter
Other	court law supreme_court judge justice legal ruling case lawsuit attorney decision voter elections general department constitution officials filed county
Other	police old county city tennessee home death man tenn violence officials gun arrested nashville officers officer charged killed memphis
Other	giffords arizona shooting tucson kelly gabrielle district congresswoman shot saturday wounded sunday know attack old victims care six hospital
Other	black mississippi king white alabama civil naacp rights racial jackson barbour malley nation martin african racism south blacks racist
Other	should www online americans nation american world these such must may news country united_states times need system recent america

a cluster with social issues ("abortion gay marriage rights women social issues life"). In total, we categorized 9 of the 50 clusters as primarily being related to "issues."

We also identified a cluster associated with descriptions of the Tea Party ("group tea party movement groups members") and three clusters associated with political fights between Tea Party supported governors and state unions. Of the remaining 8 clusters that did not fit into our schema, several appeared related to newspapers and practices associated with newsgathering, while others were associated with the judicial system and the shooting of Representative Giffords in January 2011.

RESULTS

Culture of the Tea Party

In 2009 to 2010, the movement was characterized by the myriad of local TPM events held across the country that often included nostalgic imagery like "tri-cornered hats," Revolutionary War costumes, and icons of the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence. While journalistic and academic observers noted the false nostalgia of TPM events and discourse (Lepore 2010), the TPM's activation of cultural imagery, metaphor, and history gave this movement its powerful symbolic resonance, animated its activists, and dominated media coverage of the movement.

The TPM's cultural work began with the name itself, a nostalgic connection to the American Revolution's protest against taxation without representation (Formisano 2012). It can further be found in the TPM's recurring cultural theme of returning to the ideals of the Constitution, evoking a historical/constitutional temporality (Perrin et al. 2006). Like the Tea Party name, this theme is selectively nostalgic; it encourages TPM members and the public to "return" to values claimed to have been lost. According to one of several Tea Party volunteers we spoke with at a rally in North Carolina in 2010: "We don't want the big government that's taking over everything we worked so hard for . . . the government's becoming too powerful . . . we want to take back what our Constitution said. You read the Constitution. Those values—that's what we stand for." A key task of TPM cultural work, this claim ties nostalgia—the loss of a prior time—to contemporary political claims about the size of government.

But the "values" of the Constitution are of course varied and certainly not univocal (Sunstein 1993; Lepore 2010:124–5). Such emotional statements as those above are rooted in feelings of ontological insecurity—what Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to as the "instability of social life"—when people's sense of who they are and what they should do is disrupted by external events. As mentioned above, this sense of insecurity was particularly acute for many conservative Americans after the 2008 election. Obama's victory resulted in status anxiety consistent with expressions of earlier right-wing movements that were based in status defense and organized around traditionalism and a desire for a simpler, purer past. Ontological insecurity is just one of four cultural dispositions we identified as displayed by TPM supporters between 2009 and 2012. In addition, TPM supporters also displayed nativist, cultural libertarian, and authoritarian dispositions.

Related to ontological insecurity, Tea Party supporters also displayed a nativist disposition, another cultural strand that has animated conservative movements at various points in American history. One Tea Party rally organizer in North Carolina displayed how insecurity and nativism reinforce one another when he stated: "And why do you think they [illegal immigrants] wanted to come? They wanted to come because it [the United States] is successful. But after they get here, what do they want to do? They want to change it. And see, you can't change it and be successful. It just won't work. . . ."

This mix of ontological insecurity and nativism is illustrated by the distance TPM supporters felt from President Obama and the social and racial issues that often found their way into TPM events and statements, prompting opponents of the TPM to label the movement as racist and regressive (Zernike 2010a:144–5). In our June 2010 survey (described in detail below), 41 percent of TPM supporters felt that former President Clinton was "not at all" like them, while 81 percent felt that way about President Obama, a sign that it is more than just the president's party affiliation that alienated TPM supporters. Another 2010 poll–based study found that opposition specifically to President Obama was a key element distinguishing TPM supporters from other conservatives (Maxwell and Parent 2012). In addition, a poll in May 2010 by the *Washington Post* and ABC News reported that 61 percent of TPM opponents believed that racial prejudice was a motivating factor in joining the movement. And in October 2010, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in coordination with the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, released a report contending that the Tea Party not only was giving a platform to "well-known anti-Semites and white supremacists," but attracting white nationalist organizations seeking new recruits from within the ranks of TPM members (Burghart and Zeskind 2010; Zernike 2010b). Our larger point is not whether or not the TPM was explicitly racist or xenophobic, but rather that its "nativist" cultural disposition shows up in varied accounts where movement participants express concern about the country's changing demographics.

Prominent spokespeople insisted that the "Tea" in Tea Party stood for "Taxed Enough Already," and therefore that the movement was specifically about low taxes and small government. These feelings reflect a libertarian political position, the cultural ideal of citizens free from an intrusive and domineering government. The TPM invoked the cultural memory of the Boston Tea Party, which is strongly linked to favoring limited government, and claimed that the tax revolt of the Revolutionary War matches the call for lower taxes and limited government today. One Tea Partier from the North Carolina rally we attended stated: "You have a government which can always tax and tax and tax . . . and this is just one concept that the Tea Party recognizes as a problem: the greed of centralized government . . . which takes away the responsibility of individuals to do anything."

While no one of these cultural dispositions applied to all Tea Party supporters (for example, many supporters were libertarian without being nativist), the cultural images of the Tea Party were sufficiently vague and consensual to allow disparate groups—all

animated by a concern for the type of change represented by Obama—to find meaning and hope in the Tea Party message.

Predictors of Tea Party Favorability, 2010–2012

Do partisanship and conservative political identification entirely explain Tea Party support, or do we see evidence of cultural identification above and beyond partisanship? Table 3 shows the results of ordinary least squares regression models for support of the Tea Party in 2010 (Model 1), 2011 (Model 2), and 2012 (Model 3). In 2010, our three political attitude variables are all strongly correlated with Tea Party support. Democratic Party approval is negatively associated with Tea Party support; Republican Party approval and conservative political self-identification are positively associated with support. Controlling for other factors, our four cultural disposition measures are all positive and significantly correlated with support for the Tea Party in 2010. As we predicted, this provides evidence that support for the Tea Party early on was rooted in both political identification and cultural dispositions.

However, what happened as the TPM progressed and became more active in electoral politics and legislative debates in 2011 and 2012? As shown in Table 3, support for the movement shifted from being explained by a combination of cultural and political variables in 2010 to being explained entirely by partisan factors in 2012. In the 2011

TABLE 3. Linear Regression Models of Favorable Attitudes toward Tea Party Movement by Survey Year. Unstandardized Parameters Estimates Are Shown Along with *t*-Scores in Parentheses

	2010	2011	2012
Ontological insecurity	0.251** (4.61)	0.339** (6.26)	0.125 (1.03)
Authoritarian scale	0.150** (3.26)	0.0827 (1.48)	0.0423 (0.44)
Libertarian scale	0.0212 (1.94)	0.0852** (6.48)	−0.0157 (−0.79)
Anti-immigrant	0.0458** (2.80)	0.0189 (1.03)	0.0435 (1.24)
Political beliefs			
Democratic Party approval	−0.321** (−17.56)	−0.0787** (−4.09)	−0.274** (−6.77)
Republican Party approval	0.317** (16.76)	0.284** (14.33)	0.392** (9.17)
Conservatism	0.317** (13.31)	0.230** (8.50)	0.222** (4.41)
Controls			
Male	−0.0234 (−0.53)		−0.0778 (−0.88)
White (race)	0.0599 (0.89)		−0.0408 (−0.33)
No high school degree	−0.117* (−1.97)		0.0166 (0.14)
Some college	−0.0745 (−1.31)		−0.0469 (−0.40)
College degree	−0.176** (−2.85)		−0.130 (−1.13)
Constant	0.267+ (1.89)	0.0624 (0.62)	0.739* (2.43)
Observations	2347	2130	556
Adjusted R²	0.552	0.241	0.587

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Note: *t*-Statistics in parentheses 2010 and 2012 models include controls for education, race, and gender.

wave of the survey, only two of the four cultural dispositions (ontological security and libertarianism) are significant, this time both at the $p < 0.01$ level. In the third wave of the survey, none of these four measures is significant. While the sample size is smallest for this survey, somewhat limiting our power to detect effect sizes, each of the coefficients is also smaller than in any other wave, suggesting that the impacts of these factors in support of the Tea Party have all declined. In an analysis that excludes the Tennessee respondents, the effect size for the authoritarian scale shrunk and was no longer significant for the 2010 data. As a robustness check, we tested whether the effect of any of our four dispositions on the likelihood of supporting the Tea Party varied between the two states in our samples. We estimated additional models for the 2010 and 2011 surveys that included an interaction between state and each of the disposition measures. None of the interaction effects was significant and likelihood ratio tests suggested there was no significant improvement in model fit for either 2010 ($p = 0.84$) or 2011 ($p = 0.30$). As such, we are confident that the nonsignificance of the cultural disposition measures in 2012 are not an artifact of excluding Tennessee from the sample.

In contrast, throughout all three time periods, support for the Tea Party is strongly correlated with all three of our measures of political beliefs. Those who are favorable toward the Democratic Party significantly dislike the Tea Party in all three time periods, while those who are favorable to the Republican Party and view themselves as conservative are favorable to the Tea Party.

The story of the cultural rise, political crystallization, and eventual reincorporation of the TPM, then, is reflected through the changing dynamics of public opinion in North Carolina and Tennessee. During the rise of the movement, its appeal tapped into important cultural sentiments, with the four dispositions we identified being strong indicators of TPM support in 2010. By fall 2012, TPM support largely had been incorporated into the extant Republican coalition, and its import as a social movement uniting distinct cultural dispositions had diminished a considerable extent. These findings support the idea that the Tea Party's early symbolic display provided a "thin" cultural coherence that knitted together disparate groups, but that such coherence withered in the face of a hardened political agenda, eventually leading to a disconnect between those cultural elements that we identified in 2010 and Tea Party favorability in 2012.

The Tea Party in the News: Shifting Discourses, 2010–2012

We found little evidence of media coverage of the movement's cultural dispositions. We expected more coverage to focus on images of the Constitution; the performative aspects of Tea Party rallies; and other slogans, signs, and nostalgic imagery. Had we analyzed accompanying photographs, television transcripts, and other more visual media, we might have found more focus on cultural representations. Instead, coverage of the movement was largely framed in terms of protest, partisanship, or political issues (Table 2). We observed a major shift from a movement whose coverage blended discussion of protest, issues, and electoral politics to one that emphasized electoral politics
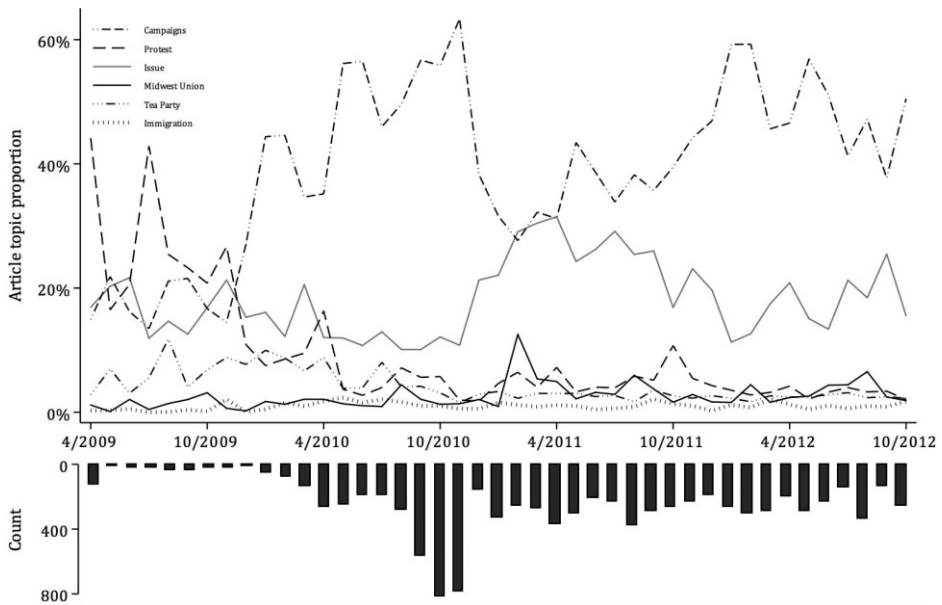
FIGURE 1. Tea Party Media Attention by Category and Month, Based on Topic Model (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) Analysis of 9,972 Associated Press Articles Mentioning the "Tea Party," 2009–2012. Bottom plot shows overall quantity of coverage; top plot shows the proportion of articles in each category by month.

with waves of issue coverage. Based on the topic proportion found in each article, we estimate that approximately 44 percent of the AP coverage mentioning the Tea Party was about campaigning; 19 percent was about specific political issues; 6 percent was on protest and rallies; 3 percent on state-level union issues; and 3 percent was on describing the movement, with the remaining coverage associated with other coverage themes.

However, these patterns in coverage were not uniform over the entire time period. In Figure 1, we plot both the overall amount of coverage that the movement received (lower section) and the proportion of articles that were devoted to each of the categories by month (upper section). In both April and summer 2009, movement coverage was largely about movement tactics. This is the period associated with the first Tax Day protests on April 15 and Tea Party members attending town hall meetings held by members of Congress that summer. This is the only period when coverage of the movement was associated primarily with movement activities. Only a small fraction of the movement's coverage during this time period, less than 5 percent, was associated with the issue of immigration. As noted above, this was the only newspaper theme that was associated with a cultural disposition. Similar to our survey analysis, this theme peaked early in the movement and was never again prominent in movement coverage. In addition, this period from April to summer 2009 is associated with the lowest average amount of coverage. While the movement did receive substantial coverage in

terms of volume in the first month, overall coverage in the movement's first year was lower than it would be in subsequent years, based on the number of articles mentioning the movement. Finally, this was also the period when there was most likely to be coverage describing the movement, suggesting that later coverage moved to more adjectival coverage (e.g., "Tea Party candidate") without the need to explain what "Tea Party" meant.

News coverage of the movement in 2010 largely was within a campaign frame. Leading up to the midterm elections, roughly half the coverage of the movement was in a campaign context. Issue politics was second for all but one month—in April, roughly 20 percent of coverage was tactical, presumably associated with the second year of Tax Day protests. This period was also the peak of the movement's coverage in the AP, with more than 500 articles being published on the wire service each month in September, October, and November, mentioning the Tea Party.

Republican electoral success in 2010 was followed by an increase in the proportion of coverage of the movement associated with issues and the legislative process. The threatened shutdown of the government as a result of the debt ceiling put Tea Party politicians on the front page as legislative actors, and the ongoing dispute in Wisconsin over public employees' collective bargaining protections fueled the image of TPM supporters as active, extreme, and vocal.

In the latter half of 2011, movement coverage became increasingly campaign related, such that roughly half the coverage was related to campaigns in 2012. Issue coverage was the second most popular, averaging roughly 20 percent of the coverage each month. Volume of coverage was relatively constant during this last phase, averaging roughly 200 stories a month, still a substantial volume of mentions.

CONCLUSION: ELECTORAL MOVEMENTS AND DECLINE

The early outpouring of interest and support for the Tea Party suggests that the movement resonated with many conservative citizens. While some commentators have argued that large-scale funding from national players made the movement "astroturf" instead of an authentic movement, it is not plausible that the level of mobilization it engendered can be explained entirely as astroturf (Lo 2012). The symbolic chord of the TPM resonated loudly and widely in part because Obama's 2008 presidential victory presented a significant challenge to the identity and status of conservatives. As conservative and liberal self-identification come to represent competing life styles and political status groups (Gross et al. 2011), electoral defeat may increasingly challenge social identities in ways that make cultural and symbolic movements like the early Tea Party appealing to many. The Republican Party experienced a significant defeat in 2008, and conservatives in America were reeling—disaffected, angry, and uncertain about whether they could win elections in the future and more importantly, uncertain about the status of their social identity as conservatives. Pundits described this time period as the end of a conservative era, a sea change, a pendulum shift. In such a period of uncertainty and anger, the Tea Party represented an attractive brand. Using a variety of

cultural strategies, Tea Party supporters were able to rebrand the Republican coalition and provide a cultural home for a broad segment of the population who were fearful of the changes represented by Obama.

Importantly, this rebranding process was largely cultural—involving symbols and stories—and not strictly political. In other words, many Americans liked the *idea* of the Tea Party without subscribing to the full political or policy implications of its views. This is a case of thin cultural coherence: people with widely different political views can be held together by powerful, shared cultural symbols. But if the early Tea Party brand is an example of "thin coherence" at its inception, as the movement made political gains, took policy positions, elected people to office, and moved from the strictly cultural sphere into the political sphere, things changed.

The overall arc of the TPM from 2009 to 2012 was from cultural–political identity to a partisan political identity. In 2010, three of the four identified cultural dispositions were correlated significantly with TPM support in our regression model, while by 2012, none of the four was significant, although political beliefs remained significant throughout the period from 2010 to 2012. It appears that TPM supporters learned from their cultural attraction to the movement, becoming more politically united around specific positions as the movement continued.

The pattern of news coverage supports this shift as well. Our analysis of coverage of the TPM in the AP shows how the movement went from being covered briefly as an activist group to a brand for some Republican candidates. In 2009, coverage followed movement activism, including tactics; in 2010, the TPM received more campaign and issue coverage, which continued in 2011 and 2012. Coverage of the economic issues associated with the TPM was the most prominent theme only after the Republican takeover of Congress following the 2010 elections. At all other times after the movement was established, the dominant mode of coverage was associated with coverage of Republican electoral politics. The move from activism and tactics coverage to campaign and issues coverage aligns with the polling data, further supporting our argument that the TPM moved from cultural identification with a grassroots movement at its beginning to partisan alignment at its end.

By 2012, both public opinion and news coverage show that the TPM was integrated into the extant Republican coalition and had become synonymous with hard-line Republicans in Congress. Thus, views and positions that had been pioneered by the earlier, "thin cultural coherence" version of the TPM had become indistinguishable from the claims of Republican candidates in general by the 2012 election. This, in turn, allowed Democrats to brand Republican candidates as "extreme," in some cases explicitly using the Tea Party label as synonymous with extreme positions. This carried over into the 2013 experiences with the sequester and government shutdown, in which TPM-identified hard-line Republicans were able to implement policies that were outside the mainstream of their party, only one electoral cycle earlier. While the cause of this dynamic is outside the scope of our data, it is consistent with our findings to claim that the cultural work done by the TPM likely contributed to these policy outcomes.

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