The Tea Party, Republican Factionalism and the 2012 Election

By

Ronald B. Rapoport
College of William and Mary

Meredith Dost
College of William and Mary

Walter J. Stone
University of California-Davis

Abstract: In this paper we examine Republican Party factional differences between Tea Party Republicans and non-Tea Party Republicans. We find, first, that at the mass level Tea Party supporters constitute a majority of Republican identifiers among those most active in Republican campaigns. We examine the large and significant differences between the two factions in terms of issues, priorities, and political style. We then turn to an examination of Tea Party activists based on a survey of almost 12,000 supporters of the largest Tea Party membership group: FreedomWorks. Although different in some ways, this group very similar to the mass sample of Tea Party Republicans on issue positions. Finally we rely on a second wave of surveys with FreedomWorks subscribers to look at their response to the 2012 election, finding that they have failed to shift toward more moderation on issues or compromise. However, it is also the case that their ideological extremism did not present an insuperable problem for their support of the Romney-Ryan ticket.

Paper prepared for the panel on Tea Party Activism at the State of the Parties Conference, November 7-8, 2013, Akron, OH.
The Republican Party made historic gains in the 2010 elections winning the majority in the House of Representatives by picking up 63 House seats, and by adding six Senate seats, drawing within striking distance of a majority. Equally important, Republicans picked up a record 680 state legislative seats, giving it its highest number since 1928. Hopes among Republicans were high heading into the 2012 elections that they could win back the White House.

A major reason that the Republicans had so much success in 2010 was the much discussed “enthusiasm gap” Gallup found that 63 percent of Republicans were “more enthusiastic than usual” about the election compared with only 44 percent of Democrats (Jones 2010). This 19 percent gap was more than twice as great as the Republican advantage in 1994. But what was rarely mentioned was that this gap was entirely due to Tea Party Republicans. Democrats and non-Tea Party Republicans showed almost identical levels of enthusiasm (44 percent versus 45 percent). It was the 78 percent of Tea Party Republicans who were “more enthusiastic” that made the difference.

However, Tea Party enthusiasm came at a cost for the establishment Republican Party as Tea Party challengers won primaries in Utah, Kentucky, Delaware, and Nevada against high ranking current or former Republican office-holders or in the case of Utah and Alaska, against incumbent Republican Senators. And the Tea Party showed its power immediately after the election, even before its newly elected supporters had taken office, confronting Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and forcing him to back off his support of earmarks.

As the Tea Party flexed its political muscle by threatening sitting Republican Senators in the run-up to the 2012 elections, Republican Senators as senior as Orrin Hatch and John McCain moved to the right to head off challenges from Tea Party candidates. When Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana did not abandon his moderate positions, he was easily defeated after 36 years in office.

Not surprisingly, given it stridency, attempts to dismiss the Tea Party date back almost to its inception. Liberal and Democratic groups have claimed that the movement is “astroturf.”
Then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) emphasized on Tax Day 2009 that the Tea Party was without serious grassroots support, its only funding coming from some of the wealthiest people in America (Fox KTVU San Francisco 2009).

Early criticism came not just from Democrats. Republican Senator Lindsay Graham in July 2010 declared that the Tea Party is "just unsustainable because they can never come up with a coherent vision for governing the country. It will die out" (Kleefeld 2012).

The Tea Party movement has proved remarkably resilient and remained a force in the Republican Party. Even though there has been a decline in Tea Party supporters (from 29% to 22% of the population since 2010), supporters of the movement still comprise between 45% and 55% of the Republican Party (NBC/Wall Street Journal surveys aggregate annual data from 2010-2013).\(^1\) In a late October NBC/Wall Street Journal Poll, taken after the government shutdown and the debt ceiling crisis, although the Tea Party was viewed positively by 23 percent of Americans, it slightly outpaced the Republicans who showed support from only 22 percent. As Alan Abramowitz points out, because Tea Party supporters are more active than non-Tea Party Republicans, they comprise a significant majority of the active Republican Party. He found that Tea Party supporters made up 63 percent of Republicans who reported contacting an elected official to express an opinion, 65 percent of Republicans who reported giving money to a party or candidate, and 73 percent of Republicans who reported attending a political rally or meeting (Abramowitz 2011, 14).

Establishment attacks on the Tea Party accelerated after Romney’s defeat and 2012 election losses in key Senate. The Growth and Opportunity Project committee appointed by RNC Chair Reince Priebus in what most saw as a veiled reference to the Tea Party claimed that “Third-party groups that promote purity are hurting our electoral prospects (Growth and

\(^1\) The NBC question may understate the number of Tea Party supporters. We utilize a question asking respondents if they are: strong Tea Party supporters, supporters but not so strong, former Tea Party supporter or never a Tea Party supporter. The two “supporter” categories make up about two-thirds of Republican identifiers (63.4%), whereas the NBC survey completed around the same time (December 2011) showed only half of Republicans supporting the Tea Party.
Opportunity Project 2012, 54). Jenny Beth Martin, National Coordinator of Tea Party Patriots responded that “With the catastrophic loss of the Republican elite’s hand-picked candidate – the Tea Party is the last best hope America has to restore America’s founding principles” (Tea Party Patriots 2012).

Exchanges between Tea Party and establishment Republicans in the run-up to the debt ceiling and government shutdown have reached new levels of acrimony—both personal and ideological. Ted Cruz and others have further sharpened the divisions within the party as factionalism erupted into civil war. As one Republican Senator said after a closed door meeting with Cruz, “It’s pretty evident it’s never been about a strategy – it’s been about him. That’s unfortunate. I think he’s done our country a major disservice. I think he’s done Republicans a major disservice” (Raju 2012). For his part, Ted Cruz attacked his co-partisans, saying, “I think it was unfortunate that you saw multiple members of the Senate Republicans going on television attacking House conservatives, attacking the effort to defund Obamacare, saying it cannot win, it's a fools errand, we will lose, this must fail. That is a recipe for losing the fight, and it's a shame” (Robillard 2013).

Understanding the factional divisions within the Republican Party is crucial to understanding contemporary American politics. Much of the academic work on the Tea Party has focused on its ideology, determinants of participation in the movement, and the legitimacy of the movement itself (Ulbig and Macha 2011; Perkins and Lavine 2011; Abramowitz 2011; Rae 2011; Skocpol and Williamson 2012), but without a broad examination of Tea Party supporters and Tea Party activists and their relationship to other Republicans. This paper attempts to fill that gap.

We begin by examining the factional conflict between Tea Party and non-Tea Party Republicans--focusing on differences in issue positions and priorities at the mass level of the party. We then turn to similarities and differences between Tea Party supporters in the electorate and Tea Party activists as represented by FreedomWorks subscribers. In any political
movement, mid-level activists occupy an important role since they often supply the energy in campaigns and the direction of the movement. This is of particular interest in the case of the Tea Party since these groups have been singled out for criticism as the source of “astro-turfing.” By comparing the positions and priorities between Tea Party in the electorate and Tea Party in organizations, we show that activists and mass identifiers with the Tea Party are quite similar in their views. We conclude by examining how FreedomWorks activists responded to the 2012 election. We will see that, rather than respond to calls for compromise and adjustment from the Republican establishment, Tea Party activists have become more committed than ever to their ideological approach to politics and to their view of the Republican Party and its leaders.

Our national sample is a December 2011 YouGov/Polimetrix survey (CCES). This survey was sent to a sample of 1000 respondents to the CCES November 2010 survey—700 of whom had expressed “Very Positive” views of the Tea Party at that time and 300 of whom had not. While this gave us a sample that was much more heavily Republican than the US population (69.6% Republican, 10.6% independents, and 19.4% Democrats), weights assigned by YouGov/Polimetrix allow us to approximate a national random sample. It is also appropriate because of our heavy focus on the Republican Party. Our sample of potential Tea Party activists is based on a survey of FreedomWorks subscribers. We received usable surveys from 12,172 respondents. According to the YouGov/Polimetrix survey, FreedomWorks is the largest Tea Party membership group, including 12.9% of all of those who rated the Tea Party “Very Positive.” As the largest Tea Party membership group, FreedomWorks supporters provide a good representation of Tea Party potential activists. The survey was sent out to the entire

---

2 The large sample size allows us to compare respondents who reported membership in FreedomWorks with respondents who reported membership in other organizations comprising the Tea Party movement. Across eleven issues areas, three measures of ideology, and assessments of twenty-two political figures and groups, the correlation (Somer’s d) between group membership and each of these 36 variables exceeded .10 in only one case. Those in the sample who were members of groups besides FreedomWorks (but not FreedomWorks) were somewhat more active in both 2008 and 2010 and more supportive of the Tea Party movement, but this likely reflects their greater general involvement in Tea Party groups (since they were not only receiving emails from FreedomWorks but had joined an additional,
FreedomWorks email list of 700,000 subscribers; however, according to the organization, about 60,000 individuals open any given email, so our response rate based on those opening email is just over 20%³. We conducted the second wave survey of 10,000 wave-1 respondents in spring 2013 and received 2,600 completed surveys.⁴

**REPUBLICAN FACTIONALISM**

In the CCES sample from December 2011 only slightly more than one-in-five Republicans (counting Republican leaners) were strong Tea Party identifiers, but more than 40% were “Supporters, but not so strong.” Only slightly over a third of Republicans were either former Tea Party supporters or “never Tea Party supporters.” More than 60 percent of all Republican respondents, then, called themselves “Tea Party supporters.”

But, consistent with Abramowitz’s findings, Tea Party supporters are even more influential than these numbers suggest because they are much more active than non-Tea Party supporters. In 2008, Tea Party Republicans performed 1.42 activities for the presidential and congressional tickets on average, compared with only .41 activities by non-Tea Party Republicans. In 2010, with the only races at the national level being those for the US House, Tea Party Republicans performed on average 0.68 activities versus only 0.12 by non-Tea Party Republicans. In that campaign, Tea Party supporters were responsible for the vast majority of all campaign activity performed by Republican Party supporters.

---

³ By the AAPOR standards using the total number of subscribers, though, it is slightly under 2%.
⁴ The reason for having a smaller send-out for wave-2 than the total wave-1 respondents is that approximately 6000 had taken themselves off of the FreedomWorks email list. Although there are some differences between those dropping out and those in the wave-2 mailout group, such differences are consistently small. Across a set of 69 variables including all the issue variables, the political figure evaluations, all the activity variables (for both Tea Party and Republican candidates), attitudes towards the system, and all demographic variables, there are only 3 in which some r’s d is greater than .05 and none in which it is as great as .08.
Figure 1 shows striking divisions across a wide range of issues between Tea Party and non-Tea Party Republicans. On all issues, except limiting imports a majority of Tea Party Republicans took one of the two most conservative positions, whereas on no issue besides Obamacare did a majority of non-Tea Party Republicans take one of two most conservative positions. The mean difference across the 10 issues is 31 percent. Remarkably, on four of the 10 issues (giving vouchers to families, environmental regulation, abolishing the Department of Education, and abortion), non-Tea Party Republicans were actually closer to the Democrats in the sample than they were to the Tea Party Republicans.

Figure 1
Percentage Taking Most Conservative Positions on Issues (CCES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Tea Party Republicans</th>
<th>Non-Tea Party Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abolish DOE</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose environ. regulation</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give vouchers</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeal Obamacare</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose affirmative action</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose big government programs</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce deficits by cutting prog.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose reducing deficits by raising</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit immigration</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit imports</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each issue the scale was Strongly agree, Agree, Slightly agree, Slightly disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree. We took the two most conservative positions and combined them for this figure. On immigration, import restrictions we define favoring restrictions on immigration and protectionism as the conservative position, although however we define “conservative” the results are similar.
Factional differences on issue positions extend to the priority given to those issues. In Figure 2, we show the percentage of each group that rates an issue as their top priority issue. Whereas more than a third of all Tea Party Republicans pick either “Shrinking Government” or “Repealing Obamacare” as their top priority, such is the case for only 4% of non-Tea Party Republicans. In fact, “Repealing Obamacare” is the second most important priority for Tea Party Republicans but is tied for last of the eight issue areas for non-Tea Party Republicans. On the other hand, jobs and the deficit dominate the list of priorities for the non-Tea Party Republicans with 60% picking one of the two, compared with only 40% of Tea Party Republicans. When asked directly which should be a higher priority, jobs or the deficit, almost two-thirds (63.1%) of Tea Party Republicans selected the deficit, while a majority (53.2%) of non-Tea Party Republicans selected jobs.

Figure 2
Top Priority Issues (CCES)

- Tea Party Republicans
- Non-Tea Party Republicans
The rancor surrounding the recent government shutdown and debt ceiling fights between Tea Party and non-Tea party Republicans suggests that bridging issue differences and building a Republican consensus may be difficult. In order to do so, both sides would need to be willing to compromise. However, when we asked respondents their position on the statement, “When we feel strongly about political issues, we should not be willing to compromise with our political opponents,” Tea Party Republicans were particularly resistant to compromise. Non-Tea Party Republicans were, on the other hand much more open. In fact, as Figure 3 shows more than six times as many Tea Party Republicans as non-Tea Party Republicans “strongly agree” with the statement (22.5% versus 3.5%) and almost twice as many Tea Party as non-Tea Party Republicans either “agree” or “agree strongly” (57.7% vs. 32.1%). The combination of an issue chasm on both position and priority, coupled with a lack of agreement on tactics and compromise helps explain the conflict within the Republican Party over the national debt and the government shutdown.

**Figure 3**
Percent who agree/agree strongly with "When we feel strongly about political issues, we should not be willing to compromise with our political opponents" (CCES)

- Tea Party Republicans
- Non-Tea Party Republicans
Because the factional divide within the Republican Party is characterized by greater activism among Tea Party supporters, it is not surprising that we saw Tea Party candidates challenging more traditional Republicans and winning primaries. We turn next to the FreedomWorks sample to shed additional light on the activist stratum within the Tea Party movement.

EXAMINING THE TEA PARTY’S ACTIVIST BASE

Numerous academic studies show that it is the activist base that supplies much of the energy and manpower for parties and organizations, and explains party change (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Herrera 1995, Rapoport and Stone 1994, Claassen 2007). Carmines and Stimson (1989) are explicit in assigning a major role to activists in transmitting changes in party positions to a less involved electorate. The role of Tea Party activists in recruiting and promoting primary challenges to incumbents and establishment Republicans has been well documented (Berry, Sobieraj and Schlossberg 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). As Abramowitz (2011) finds by analyzing decades worth of ANES data, the emergence of the Tea Party movement at the grassroots level can be understood as an outgrowth of the increased conservatism of the Republican electoral base, especially the activists within that group.

Given the importance of Tea Party rallies and other Tea Party events in publicizing the movement (Madestam et al. 2011), the role of activists in showing support and transmitting the positions of the Tea Party are self-evident. In new movements, like the Tea Party, activists may be even more significant than identifiers in the population. As an important component of the Tea Party movement, FreedomWorks supporters are an additional lens through which to understand the Tea Party movement.

In general, activists are more extreme than less active group members, just as party activists are more extreme than rank and file identifiers (Kirkpatrick 1976, Miller and Jennings 1986, Aldrich 1995, Stone 2010, Maisel and Berry 2010). Claassen and Nicholson (2010, 18) find that as a consequence of partisan and ideological self-selection, group members express
more extreme opinions than nonmembers. Thus claims about “astro-turfing” by Tea Party organizations like FreedomWorks might suggest wide disparities in the mass base and the organizational activists.

That FreedomWorks subscribers are organizational activists is beyond dispute. More than 80 percent of FreedomWorks subscribers have done at least one activity for the Tea Party (compared with only 19.9 percent of Tea party Republicans, and more than half have performed three or more activities (compared with only 3.3 percent of Tea Party Republicans). On the other hand because of the unique qualities of the Tea Party movement—its strong ideological component and the rapidity with which it developed—it is unclear whether we should expect to find the same discontinuity between activists and non-activists that Claassen and Nicholson (2010) suggest.

Figure 4, we compare Tea Party Republicans and the FreedomWorks sample. The gap we found between Tea Party and non-Tea Party Republicans dwarfs the differences between mass and FreedomWorks Tea Party supporters in Figure 1. Both The Tea Party Republican and FreedomWorks groups are close to unanimous in their opposition to increased environmental regulation, affirmative action, and “Obamacare.” And on all other issues, except for abortion and abolishing the Department of Education, the differences are less than 10%. The largest difference between the two groups is on abolishing the Department of Education, where more than 90% percent of FreedomWorks supporters either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the proposal but “only” 75% of Tea Party supporters in the mass sample did.

---

Activities included convincing someone to join a Tea Party group, attending a meeting, supporting a Tea Party candidate, joining a local group, joining a national organization, and contributing money.
Figure 5 shows that Tea Party Republicans and FreedomWorks supporters are also quite similar in their issue priorities (again to a much greater degree than Tea Party and non-Tea Party Republicans in the electorate). In fact, the only issues on which priorities differ by more than 5 percent are jobs (selected as the most important issue by 14.6 percent of Tea Party Republicans but only 7.8 percent of FreedomWorks subscribers) and “shrinking the size of government,” selected by 31.4 percent of FreedomWorks subscribers but only 16.0 percent of Tea Party Republicans.
One other difference between FreedomWorks supporters and the rank-and-file Tea Party Republicans concerns partisan attitudes. While virtually all respondents in each group rated the Democratic Party as “poor” or “well below average,” Tea Party Republicans were less negative towards Republicans than FreedomWorks subscribers: while less than half of Tea Party Republicans rated the party above average, they were about 10 percent more positive than FreedomWorks members, and about 9 percent less likely to rate the Republican Party negatively.

**RESPONSE OF TEA PARTY TO 2012 ELECTION**

As noted, GOP Chair Reince Priebus initiated the Growth and Opportunity Project to focus on causes for the party’s defeat in 2012, and to help plot future strategy. In the first report from The Growth and Opportunity Project, there are thinly veiled criticisms of the Tea Party and
the candidates it supported. The report concludes that “Third-party groups [widely interpreted
as the Tea Party faction] that promote purity are hurting our electoral prospects” (Growth and
Opportunity Project 2012, 54), emphasizing that “our standard should not be universal purity; it
should be a more welcoming conservatism”(5). It clearly faults The Republican message for
failing to engage women, younger voters and minorities, and it draws particular attention to
Romney’s poor showing among Hispanics. It concludes that “we must embrace and champion
comprehensive immigration reform. If we do not, our Party’s appeal will continue to shrink to its
core constituencies only.” It calls for greater levels of pragmatism and less ideological purity by
asserting that “just because someone disagrees with us on 20 percent of the issues, that does
not mean we cannot come together on the rest of the issues where we do agree. “These
sentiments reflect the goals of Karl Rove’s Conservative Victory Fund initiative, which are to
block future Akins and Mourdock from winning Senate primaries while paving the way for less-
ideological and extreme candidates that have better odds of winning the general election”
(Zeleny 2013). Rove faults the Tea Party for the loss of six Republican Senate seats over the
past two election cycles.

In contrast to this “establishment” view, 19 conservative leaders, including leaders in the
Tea Party, wrote an open letter on the FreedomNow website, arguing that Rove is wrong in his
attempt to “blame conservatives and the tea party.” Rather they argue:

In 2012, the only Senate [non-incumbent] Republican winners were Jeff Flake, Deb
Fischer, and Ted Cruz—all of whom enjoyed significant tea party and conservative support.
Meanwhile, more moderate candidates like Tommy Thompson, Heather Wilson, Rick Berg,
and Denny Rehberg went down to defeat despite significant support from [Karl Rove’s
organization] Crossroads” (ForAmerica 2013).

In early October 2013 during the government shutdown, past Republican presidential
nominee Mitt Romney attacked Ted Cruz for spearheading the attachment of anti-Obamacare
provisions to the government funding bill; Cruz brushed off the criticism lightly, refusing to
compromise (Kopan 2013). And the conflict within the Republican Party is already spilling over
into the 2014 primaries, with primary challenges to Lindsay Graham, Lamar Alexander and even
Mitch McConnell. After the failure to capture the Senate in 2012 and with many more Democratic seats at risk in 2014 but not in 2016, this time the stakes will be even higher.

Although self-identified Tea Party members of congress since the election have shown little evidence of movement in the direction of the Growth and Opportunity Project recommendations, there has been virtually no in depth attempt to assess changes in Tea Party supporters and activists over this period.

Figure 6 shows that FreedomWorks supporters had a very different view of causes of the Republican loss in the 2012 presidential election than the Growth and Opportunity Report. In fact, as Figure 6 shows, almost twice as many thought that Romney’s not being conservative enough was a “major cause for his defeat” as thought the lack of outreach to Hispanics was a major cause of his defeat; only 5% thought that his being too conservative was an important cause.\(^7\) Fewer than one-in-six (16%) thought Romney’s association with the Tea Party was a major cause of his defeat. In fact if we combining those who select either minority outreach or Romney’s conservatism, or his association with the Tea Party or his campaign’s overconfidence, still gives us a smaller percentage than those selecting “Romney not being conservative enough” alone.

---

\(^7\) There were eight causes which respondents rated as being either “Very important,” “Important,” “Not too important” “Not important at all” for Romney’s defeat. On average respondents picked reason for Romney’s defeat. A majority of respondents selected either one or two of the eight items as a “very important” reason. The items, in addition to the ones discussed were voter fraud, Romney’s Mormonism and the electoral college system.
If Romney’s failure was an inability to make the case for conservative Tea Party positions, then there is little incentive to reach out. FreedomWorks subscribers showed no significant shift on immigration, an issue which received so much post-election attention from the GOP report and from Republican leaders like John McCain, Lindsay Graham, and even Marco Rubio, nor do they show any decline in support for an amendment banning abortion. In fact, in both cases there is a slight increase in the percentage taking one of the two most conservative positions. Overall, 42.8 percent took one of the two most conservative positions on both issues, up from 38.8 percent only 15 months earlier. The lack of softening on issues is but one example of a rejection of the GOP report. Appeals for stylistic change towards greater pragmatism also failed to resonate.

In fact, in the aftermath of the 2012 election FreedomWorks subscribers were more purist and less willing to compromise than they had been in the pre-nomination period (Figure 7). While in December 2011 a third of FreedomWorks supporters strongly agreed that “we should not be willing to compromise without political opponents when we feel strongly about...
political issues,” by spring 2013 that had risen to almost half. Reflecting agree with Ted Cruz who said in a Fox News interview “I don’t think what Washington needs is more compromise…I think what Washington needs is more common sense and more principle” (Latino Fox News 2013).

Willingness to compromise to win “half a loaf” finds scant support in the FreedomWorks sample. But this unwillingness to compromise on issues carries over to purism regarding nomination candidate choices. More than three-quarters of FreedomWorks subscribers prefer Republican nominee candidate “running well behind in the polls, but with whom they agreed on the important issues over one who was even or ahead in the polls but with whom they disagreed on some important issues. This purism on issues and preference for ideological candidates clearly reflects a perspective that clashes with establishment Republicans like Karl Rove who put a much higher value on winning elections, even with ideologically sub-optimal candidates.

The purist views of FreedomWorks subscribers explain their willingness to take on more moderate but electable Republicans like Richard Lugar in Indiana and Mike Castle in Delaware in nomination contests in favor of more ideological and extreme candidates like Richard Mourdock Christine O’Donnell; and is reflected in the title of the book by Matt Kibbe, president of FreedomWorks, Hostile Takeover.
Attitudes toward the Republican Party

This strongly principled unwillingness to compromise extended to increasingly negative feeling towards establishment Republicans including the Speaker of the House. Figure 8 shows that FreedomWorks supporters ratings of the Republican Party went from bad to worse between 2011 and 2013. Speaker Boehner, however, came in for the biggest fall as the figure shows. While he was actually rated more positively than negatively in 2011, by 2013 his positive ratings had fallen by more than half and his negative ratings had more than doubled.
On the other hand, leading Tea Party Senators like Ted Cruz and Rand Paul received extremely high ratings, with more than 95 percent positive and less than 2 percent negative.

**Dimensionality of Evaluations**

The fact that establishment Republicans rate low and Tea party supporters rate high might imply that both groups are being evaluated on a common scale—conservatism, purism, or just support for the Tea Party. If this were the case, a factor analysis would display a single factor encompassing evaluations of the full set of political figures. On the other hand, and more interestingly, we might expect to find that there are actually two separate dimensions on which candidates are being evaluated: an "establishment Republican" dimension and a “Tea Party
dimension. Under this latter scenario, candidates could be high on both or low on both, or high on one and low on the other.

We ran a principal components analysis with varimax rotation including evaluations of all the prospective 2016 Republican candidates as well as the Tea Party, Republican Party and Republican Congressional leader evaluations. What we found is strong support for the two factor model. In fact only two factors emerge with eigenvalues above 1, and these dimensions are easily defined--commonality in evaluations of the Congressional leadership, Chris Christie and the Republican Party clearly define “establishment Republicans,” while those of Mike Lee, Rand Paul and Ted Cruz, as well as the Tea Party) clearly define the “Tea Party” factor.

In Figure 9 we plot each of the figures in two-dimensional space based on their factor loadings. If we divide the plot into four quadrants based on factor loading scores, it is clear that only two of the four quadrants are really occupied to a significant degree. What this means is that by and large, these figures really load on only one of the two dimensions,

Not surprisingly those loading highly on the Tea Party rate more positively, while those loading more heavily on the establishment Republican factor tend to be less well regarded (although only Boehner Christie, and the Republican Party actually are rated negatively by more than rate them positively). rate those in the bottom right very highly and those in the top left much less positively.

But not everyone. Marco Rubio and Paul Ryan, both load quite highly on both dimensions. two of the candidates in the middle (i..e. loading on both dimensions) remain very popular with the FreedomWorks sample (more than 85 percent positive and less than 10 percent negative) in spite of this middle position. These are individuals are perceived by respondents as linked to both the Tea Party and the establishment. Rubio and Ryan are indicative of the fact that under the right circumstances a Tea Party candidate can be viewed as linked to more establishment Republicans without sacrificing his popularity. We might speculate
that it is candidates in this middle position who provide the possibility to bring tea party and non-Tea Party Republicans together.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our analysis points to a party divided, but one with a Tea Party majority among rank and file identifiers. Approval of the Tea Party, although down from its high point (of 29 percent), has remained stable over the past year and, is still as high, or higher than that of the Republican Party. Under these circumstances attempts by established leaders of the Republican Party to shed or tame the Tea Party are unlikely to succeed.
Instead, the chasm in issue positions and priorities presage continued conflict, particularly as the party moves towards 2016. The bitter factional conflict over the government shutdown, the debt limit, and the budget all present serious difficulties for a party trying to gain power, particularly when, for a significant part of the party ideological purity trumps electability.

Despite the deep divisions in the Republican Party, massive defection by Tea Party supporters seems unlikely, even if the GOP nominates a more moderate candidate like Chris Christie. Reluctance to compromise on issues and a clear preference for nominating ideologically appealing if less electable candidate does not transfer into an unwillingness to support the Republican nominee when the alternative is a liberal Democrat. As much as Tea Party supporters have reservations about the Republican establishment, and as much as they are willing to support Tea Party candidates for Congress in Republican primaries, the prospect of continued Democratic victory is unacceptable. In essence the choice set changes when we move from nomination contest to general election. Even if Tea Party supporters are willing to nominate a candidate with whom they agree, but running well behind, when it comes to the general election the Democrat. Thus, we expect a bitter contest between the “establishment” and Tea-Party wings over the presidential nomination, but that the general election contest will inevitably and reluctantly motivate Tea Party supporters to back the Republican nominee.

The 2012 election presents a case in point. Even though at the beginning of the nomination contests in December 2011, more FreedomWorks respondents said they could not support Romney for the nomination than said that he was their first choice, once he was nominated there was a significant rallying around him. As Table 10 shows, with the exception of Ron Paul supporters, 75 percent of FreedomWorks supporters backers of 2012 Republican nomination losers were active for Romney general election campaign against President Obama. Even among FreedomWorks supporters who had rated Romney negatively in December 2011 63 percent ended up being active on his behalf.
Figure 10
Percent Active for Romney-Ryan by December 2011 by Republican Nomination Preference (FreedomWorks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Choice for Nomination (December 2011)</th>
<th>Romney</th>
<th>Santorum</th>
<th>Gingrich</th>
<th>Bachmann</th>
<th>Huntsman</th>
<th>Perry</th>
<th>Paul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


CNN. 2012. Lessons learned from the 2012 vote. 10 November.[Video]


Fox KTVU San Francisco . 2009. Pelosi on the Tea Party: "We call it astroturf".


