

Understanding the Tea Party Response to Local Environmental Initiatives:
A Conflict Between Individualism and Collectivism

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ABSTRACT

The Tea Party movement became a significant political force in American politics in 2009. Soon after their arrival on the national scale, this movement turned its attention to environmental policymaking. In particular, it spurred a strong opposition to local sustainable development initiatives. While this conflict has run its course in most places, it remains an example of the type of opposition future environmental or sustainability work may face. This three-part study is focused on determining the extent and nature of this opposition with particular emphasis on how it reflected the broader conflict between individualism and collectivism. First, we analyzed general interest in the topics associated with the opposition using media interest and internet search trends. Next, we evaluated what was driving this opposition through rhetoric analysis of local Tea Party organizations from across the country. This helped uncover several of the predominant themes in the opposition, including a belief in American Exceptionalism, concern over our system of Governance and a strong preference for individualism. Lastly, we conducted a case study of the conflict in Roanoke, VA. This allowed us to map out the specifics of one segment of the broader conflict and explore the driving themes further. The results of all three parts point to a substantial, but diffuse, opposition that was driven in no small part by a preference for individualism. This work demonstrates that individualism can be used as a lens through which a fuller understanding of this, and future, opposition of environmental legislation may be generated.

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1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND BACKGROUND

Across the nation, local Tea Party groups have been actively engaging with local sustainability initiatives. They seem to be focused on cutting the ties between localities and organizations focused on sustainability, as well as preventing or halting the implementation of any act that could be associated with sustainability. These engagements shed light on a conflict that has existed since the very beginning of human society, Individualism vs. Collectivism. This new situation provides an opportunity to reevaluate this ancient conflict in light of the new circumstances in which society now finds itself. As humanity attempts to come to grips with how to act now that its impacts upon the Earth are becoming ever clearer, understanding this conflict becomes ever more important.

Local governments and organizations have been moved to the forefront of the push for sustainability and sustainable development. Even the actors at the level of global governance have come to embrace the need for localities to take the lead. The United Nation's *Agenda 21* is one of the leading documents referencing sustainable development and included within this document is the explicit assertion that sustainable development should be attempted at a local level (Robinson 1993, 518-520). This has been facilitated by organizations like ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, which provides resources for localities to pursue these goals. In addition to this large scale, top-down momentum, many localities are generating sustainability agendas on their own.

Meanwhile, the Tea Party has made its presence felt on the national political stage. Numerous candidates espousing connections with the Tea Party have been elected to positions at almost every level of governance. However, some of the most potent work being done by the Tea Party

is at the local level. In addition to national level groups, countless communities have now cultivated their own grassroots organizations. These local Tea Parties have complicated connections with the national organization, but they have facilitated the mobilization of their members in response to issues that are locality specific. For a time, these local groups were particularly motivated by any local actions focused on sustainability.

Agenda 21 and ICLEI have received a large amount of attention from the Tea Party. This attention has manifested itself in groups organizing themselves to speak against these ideas at local meetings and to pressure local officials to cut ties to anything associated with them. There has been significant enough negative attention directed toward these sustainability ideals to prompt many localities to take action against them. In some places, the Tea Party has been successful in dismantling legislation directed at increasing sustainability or cutting ties with groups helping to achieve these goals. The mere mention of sustainability now seems to be enough for Tea Party activists to organize against a project.

Understanding why this reaction has occurred is a difficult proposition. The goals in many places seem to be focused on negation, specifically preventing sustainability. Yet the long-term goals remain unclear. What is clear is that the conversation about sustainability at the local level has come to a head. The conversation is becoming more heated and, while there have been productive conversations in some places, there seems to be a widespread inability for the two sides to communicate with one another. Therefore, the reasons for this adamant opposition remain uncertain as each side becomes more frustrated.

One potential way to understand the Tea Party is through the lens of how it fits into the broader struggle of the individual's relation to the collective. Since the beginning of human society, individuals have made trade-offs in order to be in groups. However, in a time when membership

is not optional in many groups, such as nation-states, the appropriate level of individualism that must be sacrificed is an important question. How the individual, and the group, answers this question has significant ramifications for all involved.

In the era of the Anthropocene, when humanity has become the driving force of global ecosystems, it seems society has entered a new era of responsibility for its actions. Questions abound about the correct way to act given this new understanding of how the world works. How do we deal with the interconnectivity and interdependence of an anthropogenic biota? How do we execute our responsibility to manage ecosystem services? Is an individualist mindset conducive to an era of global responsibility? Can decisions made in a locally-based, ad hoc fashion outside of a larger plan be effective?

The Tea Party seems to embody the belief that the individual should trump the collective. This seems to be particularly true when it comes to managing our impact on the planet. Tea Party members' attempts to remove localities from collective attempts to solve the problems that now confront the planet raise questions about how collective schemes can be successful. Or, are they necessary to solve the problems at hand? Thus, we, as researchers, have been presented with an opportunity to better understand how this conflict impacts the push toward sustainability. If this push is deemed to be important, then understanding where it fits within this philosophical conflict needs to be a priority.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Why is the Tea Party opposed to local sustainability initiatives?

How does the Tea Party opposition to local sustainability initiatives inform the debate about Individualism vs. Collectivism?

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Develop a better understanding of the Tea Party.

∞

Identify the trends that dominate the Tea Party's response to sustainability.

∞

Develop a better understanding of how the Individualism vs. Collectivism conflict affects the drive for sustainability.

1.3 ROADMAP OF THE STUDY

This study has 5 main components. First, we have compiled a literature review that digs into the main components of the coming research. During this section, concepts connected with the Anthropocene, sustainability and sustainable development are explored. Then we dig into the Tea Party and how it has been understood. Lastly, the literature review touches on the conflict between Individualism and Collectivism. Within this portion, the work of Hayek is used as a lens to better understand this conflict.

Having established this foundation, we move into a broad look at interest in this conflict by examined interest in concepts connected with it. In order to grasp a better idea of how this interest fluctuated, media and internet search trends were evaluated. We learned here that there was a peak in interest from 2010-2012 in things like the Tea Party and Agenda 21. This also established that there was indeed a national interest in these issues.

In the third component of the study, we focus on developing a better understanding of what was driving the opposition. In order to do this, we evaluated rhetoric from 30 local tea party groups and 8 national level organizations that focused on the conflict with sustainable development.

These groups came from across the country and gave us a good idea of the kind of arguments that were being made against sustainable development. We identified the predominant themes in these arguments and uncovered that there were many components. However, it was clear that a preference for individualism over collectivism was playing into this opposition.

To better understand the depth of this conflict, we conducted a case study for the fourth portion of this work. We evaluated the conflict between the Tea Party and sustainable development as it occurred in Roanoke County, VA. This particular area saw the conflict take many forms and last for a long time. We examined rhetoric from the Roanoke Tea Party and affiliated sites, the record from the local newspaper and two key informant interviews to help tell this story. Several of the predominant themes from these sources were then found and examined more in depth. Again, individualism played a significant role.

The final component of this study consists of our conclusions. We evaluated just what we have learned with particular emphasis on what role individualism plays in opposition to environmental initiatives. We then lay out the gaps in our study. Lastly, we reflect on what this study means for scholarship more broadly and what research it might inform moving forward.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ANTHROPOCENE

Humanity is causing massive changes to the operating systems of the planet. This can hardly be denied. We have been using fossil fuels at a rate that is far greater than ever before. Significant portions of land on the planet have been changed drastically. Chemical cycles have been altered by myriad actions, including the artificial fixing of nitrogen and the release of numerous chemicals through fossil fuel burning. The chemical composition of the oceans is being changed

by human activity. Additionally, humanity is causing significant changes in the climatic systems of the planet. This is but a sampling of the impacts of humanity, but it can be seen clearly that humanity is acting upon the planet in significant ways. (Crutzen, 2006)

Scientists have speculated for many years about the idea that humanity is causing significant changes to planetary systems. Over the years, this idea has evolved, and various names have been attached to it (Zalasiewicz et al., 2010). These names have included the anthropozoic, noosphere, or psychozoic, but they all have signaled some attempt to acknowledge the effects of humanity on the planet (Zalasiewicz et al., 2010). Even popular writers outside of the sciences, such as Thomas Friedman, sought a label that would set this time apart from others (Friedman, 2008). He claims that we are at the beginning of the “Energy-Climate Era” (Friedman, 2008, p. 63). However, after Paul Crutzen’s use of the term “anthropocene” there seems to be agreement that a new term is necessary (Crutzen, 2006; Crutzen, 2002).

Crutzen speaks of the need to conceptualize this change as a move out of the Holocene into a completely new era, which he terms the Anthropocene. He defends his use of this term by stating that given the “still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it thus is more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by using the term ‘Anthropocene’ for the current geological epoch” (Crutzen, 2006, p. 16). The complete ramifications of the acceptance of such an idea are laid out by Steffen et al. (2011, p. 843), when they say “the term Anthropocene suggests: (i) that the Earth is now moving out of its current geological epoch, called the Holocene and (ii) that human activity is largely responsible for this exit from the Holocene, that is, that humankind has become a global geological force in its own right”.

If this is accepted as being the case, a question arises about when we should conceptualize this new epoch as having begun. Strong arguments have been laid out suggesting that 1800 should be considered the starting point of the epoch (Steffen et al., 2011; Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007). However, an extra level of complexity is introduced when the epoch is broken into three periods. The first of these is defined as the “industrial era,” which lasted from 1800 to 1945 and was typified by the early phases of the modern industrial system along with the consumption of fossil fuels that accompanied it (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007). It is argued that in 1945, we entered a new stage of the Anthropocene called the “great acceleration” (Steffen et al., 2011; Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007). During this era, neoliberal economic policies helped to foster the rapid expansion of these industrial processes and their global impacts (Steffen et al., 2011). Now, it is being speculated that we are on the verge of a new era in the Anthropocene, in which we may become part of the “stewards of the earth system” (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007). What this means is not well understood, but the general concept is that because of the approaching inability to continue the practices of the past, new systems must be put in place (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007; Steffen et al., 2011).

This new understanding of planetary systems obviously has significant ramifications. Yet, it has already been accepted by many people, especially those in the global change research community (Steffen et al. 2011). This can be witnessed simply by looking at the burgeoning field of literature touching on this idea. Major institutions are beginning to investigate these ideas to determine if they should be officially acknowledged (Kalasiewicz et al. 2010). The difficulty of studying an era as it occurs presents clear hurdles for the scientific community. However, of equal or perhaps even more importance than how to study this new epoch is how humanity should respond to it.

What is the best reaction after recognizing that we have perhaps become the greatest force acting upon the planet? One response is to continue as we have been, embracing the idea that things will work themselves out (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill 2007). This is a potentially dangerous perspective that could result in catastrophic system failures if wrong. Alternatively, some scientists, including Paul Crutzen, have advocated for a significant increase in the amount of geo-engineering (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 2007; Crutzen, 2002). In a similar vein, Friedman (2008) believes that many of our problems will be solved by a conscious move to more green technological innovation. Others fear that acknowledging the presence of the Anthropocene, which equates to a reimagining of the distinction between nature and humanity, will hamper conservation projects (Caro et al., 2012). Indeed, this reconceptualization of nature as no longer as stable as we thought has demanded new understandings of ideas like conservation (Lorimer, 2012). Clearly, no consensus has been met about the appropriate response to our newly acknowledged role of global importance.

One of the responses that has received the most attention is the belief that humanity must understand the limits it should live within if it wants to sustain itself. This task has been approached in works like the Rockstrom et al.'s (2009) Planetary Boundaries paper, compiled by many scientists from different fields. They set out to determine the boundaries which cannot be crossed if a sustainable future is to be obtained. Nine systems are defined, with thresholds set where possible by using the best scientific estimates of how they operate (Rockstrom et al., 2009). Much is unknown about these systems, including how they react to passing these thresholds. Is it a sharp drop to a new stabilization point or a slow fall to no operation at all? How does the failure of one system impact the ability of other systems to carry on? None of this is known. Yet even from the sparse data that already exists, it appears that we have passed the

sustainable threshold in three of these systems: climate change, biodiversity, and the nitrogen cycle (Rockstrom et al., 2009). What the full ramifications of surpassing these limits will be is yet to be determined. However, it is clear from the Planetary Boundaries paper that we seem to be dangerously close to many of these limits, and if we are not careful, we may wind up in a future we do not want to inhabit (Rockstrom et al., 2009).

The changes needed to stay within these limits are exposed as all-inclusive when laid out by Slaughter (2012), as

Becoming more aware of current contradictions; embracing insights into the state of the global system; acknowledging, valuing and applying signals of change; cultivating skepticism about the assumed importance of science and technology; exploring the potential of human, cultural and institutional innovation; and designing and implementing a range of high quality responses – especially in education. (p. 119)

This is but one understanding of how to move forward. Achieving these broad, sweeping changes in the human psyche may seem impossible. Indeed, Tickell (2011) points out that “it is hard even to define the principal problems without upsetting longstanding traditions, beliefs, attitudes and the often unspoken assumptions on which we build our lives” (p. 926). Tickell (2011) believes a broader understanding of these definitions may only occur if we have “what might be called benign catastrophes in which things can go demonstrably and attributably wrong and lessons can be learnt accordingly” (p. 931). What such an event might be is hard to imagine. It is no wonder that any attempt to reimagine society in this way meets with substantial resistance. However, the effect of humanity will surely last at least as long as humanity itself, meaning that these questions will have to be answered in some way, and how they are answered will have tremendous impacts.

2.2 SUSTAINABILITY

The idea of planetary boundaries set forth in Rockstrom et al. (2009) harkens back to the discussion of whether there are limits that humanity is bumping up against, as set forth in the famous book *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al, 1974). The author of this text revisited her ideas 30 years later in *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, finding that many of the same problems still exist (Meadows, Randers and Meadows, 2004). All of these seminal works argue that we are pushing against the edges in terms of what the planet can take. That is, if there is no decision to change now, at some point in the future, a change will be necessitated by the very nature of the planet. The danger here is that this mandated change will be painful in many ways and could be catastrophic. Therefore, humanity should restructure its actions to avoid this pain. Meadows, Randers and Meadows (2004) believe that any change that prevents this pain rests largely on overturning the focus on economic growth. Thus, they join the chorus encouraging an embrace of the idea of sustainability as a fundamental change in the way we look at the world (Meadows, Randers and Meadows, 2004).

Meadows, Randers and Meadows (2004) describe sustainability as a way to live in which the global systems operate in “equilibrium.” This equilibrium is based around the idea that humanity has the capacity to make its environment deteriorate. In order for this not to occur by accident, humanity must choose to live in such a way that they do not exceed the environment’s ability to recover from human activity. This means that humanity is not operating outside of specific limits or boundaries that have been determined to be the safe levels of human activity. Once they have been passed, the potential for deterioration grows drastically. By living within the limits set by the planet, humanity can sustain itself into the future.

There has been, however, a significant backlash against this concept of limits or boundaries. Even many environmentalists have discarded this idea, perhaps due to the overzealousness of the originators of the theory (Beder, 2006, p. 17). However, it does remain a potent concept, especially in the biological sciences, where it appears in the forms of carrying capacity and ecological footprint (Beder, 2006, p. 20). Additionally, given how recently the Rockstrom et al. (2009) paper came out, there can be little doubt that as humanity continues to exert an influence upon the planet, the question of global limits will persist.

Some of the backlash against the original *The Limits to Growth* publication is because of the dire predictions that it contained (Beder, 2006, p. 14). In addition to this disagreement over the gravity of the consequences of surpassing our limits, there is a fundamental disagreement between those that believe in limits and the need for sustainability and those who hold a belief that can be termed promethean or cornucopian. This promethean/cornucopian belief is based on the idea that the human mind can find work-arounds for the limitations placed by the planet (Dryzek, 2005, p. 51). Humanity is thus perceived to have the unlimited ability to manipulate the limited resources of the planet, and therefore, there is no problem with the unbounded use of resources. This is understood by the authors of *The Limits to Growth* in their newer edition, where they note the need for technological advances coupled with personal change (Meadows, Randers and Meadows, 2004). The big difference between the perspectives is regarding this aspect of personal change. Promethean/cornucopian individuals believe that “people going about their business, pursuing their selfish interests, will together ensure a bright environmental future” (Dryzek, 2005, p. 59). Sustainability advocates believe that technological advances can extend the limits, but that they will never go away, and thus, change in action must occur simultaneously.

There is a good deal of overlap between this group—promethean/cornucopian individuals—and another group that believes that these limits do not pose a large risk—economic rationalists. These people’s beliefs could also be understood to match up well with neoliberalism or free-market conservatism. These individuals, just like prometheans, believe that this “personal change” is not necessary because humanity will find ways around the limits. However, their main emphasis is not on this unbounded human creativity; rather, they focus on the power of markets and private property to correct environmental problems. They hold that if a resource is privatized, then individuals will act in their own self-interest to preserve that resource. This resource may be a new technology or simply a conservation strategy. Both of these ideas, prometheanism and economic rationalism, hold that the limits of the natural world are not something to be worried about. Even if there are physical limits, the human mind can overcome them or the market will direct humanity in such a way that it is protected. (Dryzek, 2005)

These concepts have presented sustainability advocates with significant hurdles. In response, a divide has developed in the sustainability dialogue. There are those who believe in “strong” sustainability, in which the earth has strict limits, and those who propose “weak” sustainability and deny these strict limits (Dryzek, 2005). Weak sustainability emphasizes the power of human ingenuity to overcome obstacles, like the Prometheans, but does believe that some changes need to be made to allow human life to endure on the planet. However, it is likely that most advocates fall between these two poles (Dryzek, 2005). This division can also be thought of as between those who only want to preserve human welfare (weak sustainability) and those who believe that other metrics, such as biodiversity, are important to preserve (strong sustainability) (Norton, 2005, p. 307). Norton (2005) also talks about strong sustainability as a “structured bequest” (p. 313). This means that for the strong sustainability advocate, like Norton himself, thinks such as

ecosystems should be preserved, and not just because they contribute immediately to welfare. It is viewed as important to maintain the systems as they are, because this preserves opportunities that would be eliminated if only welfare were considered.

2.3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This idea of sustainability is now often used interchangeably with the term “Sustainable Development.” While the World Commission on Environment and Development, or the Brundtland Commission, did not form this idea, it was its use of the terminology in its publication of “Our Common Future” (1987) that placed it firmly in the public consciousness, where it has stayed ever since. When it produced “Our Common Future”, a new vision of how to proceed as a society was presented (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The new paradigm set forth in this document is a proposition for how to re-vision our society to maintain ourselves into the future. To create this vision, it tied environmental sustainability to economic growth and social equity. The definition that is almost always found when people seek to understand Sustainable Development, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” comes from this text (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

With the production of this document, a new model had been put forward that sought to “recalibrate institutional mechanisms at global, national and local levels to promote economic development that would guarantee ‘the security, well-being, and very survival of the planet’” (Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard, 2006, p. 254). However, to many it seemed to be in conflict with the idea of sustainability. Previously, sustainability advocates had held that sustainability could not be compatible with growth because of the limits that would be surpassed (Beder, 2006, p. 18). However, many opponents of non-growth sustainability point out that this path would

leave many people impoverished around the plant. So, even the original *The Limits to Growth* authors later believed that some degree of social equity needs to be included in the idea of sustainability (Meadows, Rander and Meadows, 2004). It is now clear to most people that any attempt to achieve sustainability that is based on keeping a large portion of the world impoverished is unethical and that economic growth is necessary to accomplish this. Thus, this idea of sustainable development has moved to the position of chief alternative in the fight over how to act in acknowledgement of the Anthropocene.

The United Nations has been at the forefront of this idea. They were the ones who were responsible for commissioning the production of “Our Common Future” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Several years after this, they produced an even more detailed plan for how to accomplish the lofty ideals set forward in “Our Common Future”. This document, called *Agenda 21*, was created to point the way to the “integration of environment and development concerns” because “greater attention to them will lead to the fulfillment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future” (Robinson and International Union for Conservation and Natural Resources, 1993, p. 1). They suggest that “no nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development” (Robinson and International Union for Conservation and Natural Resources, 1993, p. 1). The scale of the task and the all-encompassing nature of the problem suggest that, if a solution is to be found, it will need to be driven globally and not limited to specific nation-states.

However, in addition to this focus on acting together to confront the problems of the world, *Agenda 21* also called for localities to play a significant role in this process. Chapter 28 of *Agenda 21* calls for localities to create their own plans for sustainable development (Robinson

and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1993). Many European localities have created their own Local Agenda 21's (Selman, 1998; Selman, 2000). In the United States, localities have also been prompted into action by the recognition that they have regulatory powers that do not exist at the state or federal levels (Nolon and Salkin, 2012, p. 1088). City and county level planners, in particular, have come to recognize that they have a role to play in promoting sustainable development (Berke and Conroy, 2002). Some claim that planners are "well situated to help reform self-serving unsustainable behavior" (Berke, 2002, p. 35). Localities are the local, action-oriented end of "think globally, act locally."

Planners, and localities in general, have been aiming to achieve the balance between the three E's of sustainable development (Campbell, 1996). These are social equity, economic growth and environmental sustainability (Campbell, 1996). Only by maintaining this balance can real sustainability be achieved, the argument goes. However, even with these specific goals laid out, what sustainable development really means is ambiguous. Berke and Conroy (2000) argue that it can be broken down into 6 principles. These are: harmony with nature, polluters pay, responsible regionalism, equity, place-based economy and livable built environments (Berke and Conroy, 2000). If these are all present in a community's plan, then they really are planning for sustainable development. However, they find that, even in communities that pay attention to the idea of sustainable development, the only part of the criteria that is being met consistently is the livable built environments component (Berke and Conroy 2000). It quickly becomes clear that even at the local level, where implementation should be the easiest, what it means to put this into action is difficult to discern.

This ambiguity is one of the chief obstacles for sustainable development. Even those that trumpet the importance of the term argue that it needs to be much more clearly defined (Norton,

2005; Campbell, 1996; Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard, 2006). Some critics have even gone so far as to say the term is virtually bankrupt (Luke, 2005). Luke (2005) suggests that it is simply neither sustainable nor developmental. He is disillusioned because he feels it means accepting that “sustaining the ability to develop further the prevailing modes of development is regarded as ‘the best one can get’ amidst the world’s neoliberal programs for capitalist growth” (Luke, 2005, p. 234). He believes that a more significant change in worldview is necessary.

That being said, many sustainable development advocates recognize the problems of definition and seek to salvage the idea because they think it is worthwhile. Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard (2006) believe that to really move forward, sustainable development must be broadened to include plurality and interdisciplinary research and knowledge. Campbell (1996) agrees that we need a broadened definition, where black and white visions are broken open. Norton (2005) goes in a different direction, claiming that “the term sustainable can be given a stable and useful meaning only by building it into a comprehensive theory of environmental management” (p. 54). He argues that it should be tied to what he calls adaptive ecosystem management (Norton, 2005). This can be disputed, but while most people would accept a basic understanding of sustainable development such as that proposed by “Our Common Future” or Norton’s (2005) “forward-looking living,” these concepts are difficult to apply in the real world. However it is defined, sustainable development has now risen to be one of chief ways to think about structuring society. It has, in many ways, won the battle of the big ideas (Campbell, 1996). It is being talked about at every level of governance, and is viewed by many as the way to overcome the problems of the present. At the same time, the significant hurdles it faces are hard to miss. It would have been difficult to predict that the Tea Party would become one the biggest obstacles to sustainable development in the United States.

2.4 TEA PARTY

The Tea Party Movement sprung into being rapidly following the election of Barack Obama as president. There had been murmurings of dissent even before this point. Groups of right-leaning individuals were forming in an effort to distance themselves from the spending associated with the mainstream Republican Party and to speak out against the policies Obama was advocating. The point many people think the movement got off the ground was Rick Santelli's televised rant against the mortgage rescue plan. This is viewed as the moment when things coalesced and large nationwide organizations began to grow with support from the previously separated groups. These groups then created momentum, which allowed new local groups to be created. From the very beginning, there were two different parts of the Tea Party, the national umbrella organizations and the local grassroots organizations, connected and yet autonomous (Burghart and Zeskind, 2010).

Since its very inception, the Tea Party has been the source of a great deal of interest from the media and, subsequently, the public. This interest has spread into the academic world due to its public impact. Resultantly, there is a growing body of literature trying to understand the who, what, when, where and why of the Tea Party. As a start, a lot of the literature has sought to portray the Tea Party as a social movement (Zeskind, 2012; Lundskow, 2012; Karpowitz et al., 2011). This connection is valuable because it allows for comparison with other movements, especially those with conservative roots. However, Courser (2012) argues that this comparison to previous conservative movements is merely a way of dismissing the Tea Party. He argues that any easy dismissal leaves researchers missing the key points of the movement (Courser, 2012). He believes that the Tea Party is a response to the national feeling that the political system is no longer very representative, and that something must be done, if the government is to remain legitimate (Courser, 2012).

This sentiment is mirrored by Harris (2010) who thinks that all those who dismiss the Tea Party are making a big mistake. He perceives that the Tea Party is speaking out against the traditional elite-driven modes of governance (Harris, 2010). They are important because even if elite-driven governance is unavoidable, the balancing voice from outside the system serves an important purpose (Harris, 2010). How this concept of elites is understood can be tricky. If Zaller's (1992) definition is examined, it appears that anyone directing public opinion is to be considered an elite. This raises some interesting questions about who is important within the Tea Party structure. Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2012) break the Tea Party down into four categories: activists, sideline supporters, advocacy organizations and politicians who identify with the group. Of these, they find that the presence of activists creates the biggest difference in producing outcomes favorable to the Tea Party in both elections and congressional voting (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, 2012). They note that "it is the presence of rank-and-file enthusiasm - boots on the ground - that appears to drive representatives to alter their behavior" (Bailey, Mummolo and Noel, 2012, p.794). This is all counter to the top-down idea of politics associated with traditional elite-driven governance.

On the opposite side of this coin, there are many scholars who believe that the Tea Party is just as elite-driven as the rest of politics. Some researchers think that while the Tea Party may now be a genuine grass-roots movement, it started as what is called "astro-turf," or a staged grassroots (Berlet, 2011; Langman and Lundskow, 2012; Berlet, 2012). Others think that one of the defining characteristics of the movement is authoritarianism, in the form of submitting to those above and wanting to control those deemed to be below (Lundskow, 2012, Perrin et al., 2011). Abramowitz (2011) argues that the rank-and-file have been following their elites farther to the right. Others talk about the important role of Fox News in perpetuating the message of the Tea

Party and serving as the major information source of its members (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). This all seems to be indicative of an organization that is still dominated by some form of elite group. However, even if the rank-and-file's ideas are coming from elsewhere, they often come from alternative forms of communication, such as bloggers (Harris, 2010). A fascinating analysis of the use of social media within the movement shows that these dynamics are very complex (Mascaro, Novak and Goggins, 2012). While the administrators of the discussion play a large role, it is still limited and the conversation often goes in other directions (Mascaro, Novak and Goggins, 2012). The traditional top-down system may have been upset, but it is possible that it has just been replaced with a new brand of elite that is still driving the movement, in spite of the anti-elitism espoused by many in the movement.

Now, the question of how much change has really been caused by the Tea Party is a difficult one to measure. Karpowitz et al. (2011) found that endorsements from major organizations had little significant impact on election outcomes in 2010. However, they did find that endorsements and signing of the Contract from America¹ had a significant impact on who won the Republican primary in these races (Karpowitz et al., 2011). This has the effect of pushing Republican candidates standing for the general election to the right. As noted before, Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2012) find that, without activists on the ground, other Tea Party identifiers in a constituency do not mean much. Bond, Fleisher and Ilderton (2011) found that the results of the 2010 elections could be understood using metrics that did not include the Tea Party, suggesting that it did not play a large role. They do offer that it is possible that "the Tea Party's anti-debt and lower government spending message may have made the Republican Brand more appealing

¹ This is a document that lawmakers can sign off on where they pledge to support certain ideas and legislation. Its contents are mainly focused on small government and it is supported by an number of Tea Party organizations. (Contract from America)

by pushing divisive social issues to the side” (Bond, Fleisher and Ilderton, 2011, p. 13).

Jacobson (2011) disagrees with this belittling of the Tea Party’s impact, arguing that the Tea party was largely responsible for energizing the right side of the Republican Party and, thus, creating a base that were more excited about voting. It seems clear that, through all of this noise, the Tea Party plays some role, but it is difficult to understand the precise nature of this role.

The connection of the Tea Party to the Republican Party is highly debated. Some feel that the Tea Party is made up of right-leaning Republicans (Street and DiMaggio, 2012; Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011; Abramowitz, 2011). Abramowitz (2011) argues that Tea Party members are mostly republican and are more engaged than other republicans. Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin (2011) agrees saying that members tended to be conservative republicans who have been active in the past. However, others feel that the relationship of the Tea Party with the Republican Party is more complex (Ashbee, 2011; Karpowitz et al., 2011; Arceneaux and Nicholson, 2012). Arceneaux and Nicholson (2012) find that individuals who identify as right leaning independents are more likely to be Tea Partiers than individuals who identify weakly as republicans. This seems to suggest that Tea Party members are not strongly connected with the traditional Republican Party. This sentiment is echoed by Karpowitz et al. (2011). The idea of aligning themselves strictly with a party would seem to be counter to the explicitly anti-elite messaging of much of the movement, but there does seem to be a strong connection.

This complex relationship between the Tea Party and the Republican Party is mirrored in the relationship of local Tea Party groups to the national umbrella organizations. Langman and Lundskow (2012) argue that different goals exist at the different levels. They argue that the national organizations are focused on limiting government regulation and that the local groups are dominated by producerism (Langman and Lundskow, 2012). The focus on producerism, the

idea that those that produce things should garner the rewards of producing them, is also found by Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin (2011). However, their research finds a close relationship between the national organizations and the local even if they do have different aims (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). They find that the national organizations are driven by business elite donors to hold small government ideals (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011).

However, at the local level, the focus is not really on market principles, but rather deservedness (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). In spite of this disconnect, there is still a connection, with the national organizations providing speakers and training for the local groups (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). In some ways, these different problems, regulation that stifles business and taxation to help the underserved, both speak to big government and thus the national and local groups can focus on a common enemy.

This brings up the very important question of what these organizations are looking for. The complexity of the movement makes this difficult to grasp, but bits and pieces have been uncovered. It seems to have been acknowledged by most researchers that the Tea Party is focused on limiting both government spending and the general size of government (Arceneaux and Nicholson, 2012; Ashbee, 2011; Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). However, other indicators are more complicated. For instance, Tea Party members seem to be more religious than other Republicans (Abramowitz, 2011). They tend to be more conservative on social matters, as well (Clement and Green, 2011). However, these do not seem to be important issues within some Tea Party groups (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). The one exception to this rule is with regards to illegal immigration, which they are opposed to (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, 2011). This is echoed by Clement and Green (2011) who find that Tea Party constituents view border security as the best way to deal with immigration. This could be

perhaps understood with the argument put forward by some, that the Tea Party harbors racist tendencies (Zeskind, 2012; Berlet, 2011; Langman, 2012). While there is some evidence of this, this appears to be an overly simplistic way of understanding this issue (Arceneaux and Nicholson, 2012). So, how then should the actions and ideology of the tea party be understood?

There is a compelling argument made by many that the best way to understand the Tea Party is as reacting against what they find to be an undemocratic system (Courser, 2011; Etzioni, 2011). This is part of the broader understanding that the Tea Party is reacting because they are not happy with, or even fearful of, the direction of the country (Ashbee, 2011; Berlet, 2011; Perrin et al., 2011; Langman and Lundskow, 2012; Langman, 2012; Switzer, 2010). Most of humanity would acknowledge that, at this point in time, there are problems with society. This may take myriad different forms, with many of them being in conflict with one another, but the sentiment is common across the ideological spectrum. Is there then something else driving the particular aims of the movement?

Some have argued that what the Tea Party is fighting against is the threat of collectivism (Berlet, 2011; Berlet, 2012). Berlet (2012) argues that the Tea Party groups “view destroying ‘big government’ as the first step in freeing the nation from the web of collectivism” (p.567). He further notes that “Socialism and National Socialism (Nazism) are portrayed by the Tea Party patriots and Town Hall criers as two sides of the same collectivist and totalitarian coin” (Berlet, 2012, p. 567). While many of these papers are short on empirical evidence and may come from a biased position, they raise an excellent question. Where does this movement fit within the broader conflict of the Individual vs. the Collective?

2.5 THEORY: INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

Given what has already been examined about the Tea Party, a study that looks at where they fit into the age-old individualism vs. collectivism conflict appears to be quite timely. Additionally, looking at this particular conflict between the Tea Party and Sustainability seems to be an ideal way to do it. I will now lay out some of the background of the conflict of the individual vs. the collective. After laying out a brief outline of the importance of this conflict, I will explore how it has manifested itself in reference to the environmental movement. Finally, I will provide a fairly in-depth explanation of Freidrich Hayek's vision of this conflict and why I have chosen to focus there.

2.5.1 Background

From the very beginning of human society, this question of the role of the individual within the group has been paramount. It is important to note that this argument should be contemplated in regards to what is best for society as a whole. So the conflict is best understood as those who believe that society is best served by working together to achieve common goals (collectivism) versus those who hold that individuals working independently to achieve their own ends is best (individualism). This conflict has been carrying on since the birth of society, and one side of the argument was articulated by none other than Plato.

Plato (2006) articulated a strong form of collectivism where the individual should have their will subjugated to the will of the collective. He argues that each individual has their role to play, and they must do this in order for society work well (Plato, 2006). This means that those that are suited to ruling will rule and all others will obey. Individuals are deemed to be suited to rule because they are able to speak for the good of the community. So for Plato (2006), the individual exists just to play their role in the well-being of the community as defined by these leaders, and not to seek their own ends. This is the radical view of what collectivism can be. It

is the belief that every action must be guided towards achieving the good of the community (Plato, 2006).

In the 20th century, Karl Popper, like many before him, takes issue with this idea. He claims that it is unethical for the collective to require the individual to be subservient (Popper, 1963). This leads, necessarily, to a totalitarian state that controls the thought processes of its citizens (Popper, 1963). Instead, Popper (1963) argues that Plato was incorrect to associate individualism necessarily with selfishness. He separates the idea of egoism from individualism, arguing that the ideal form is an altruistic individual (Popper, 1963). This, he argues, is the foundation of western ethical thought (Popper, 1963). He insists that individuals are ends in and of themselves, and should not be used as means to achieve an end (Popper, 1963). The idea of someone else being responsible for calling something “good” is unacceptable (Popper, 1963).

Taking this individualism view even farther is the neoliberal movement. Based in the idea that individuals’ acting for their own interest is the best way to model a society, it sets out an economic system to accomplish this (Harvey, 2005). Its founders embraced the traditional liberal ideas of personal freedom and then attached the neoclassical model of economics to form a new system (Harvey, 2005). This market driven system of economics allowed individuals to seek their own ends without interference from the government (Harvey, 2005). The market was used to value ideas, so that good ideas would be valued and bad ideas dismissed, because they are not valuable (Harvey, 2005). In this way, the market stimulates individuals to do what is good for the whole because it is also good for them individually. Ultimately, this was believed to be what was best for society.

Most people do not fall at either of the extreme ends of the spectrum but rather somewhere in between. This is where the idea of a social contract is so strong. The social contract theorists

spoke to both the rights people maintain when they enter into a group, but also the responsibilities they pick up by doing so (Darity, 2007). Behind this idea, is the foundation that we want to maintain our rights, but we also want to benefit from what an organization has to offer. So, if we want the protection of the group, we might have to give up a certain amount of freedom to do that. However, a problem often arises because individuals are not consciously making this decision. When you are born in the United States, then a set list of rights and responsibilities are placed upon you. There is no way to escape other than move somewhere with a different set of rights and responsibilities. So, when the contract is not an actual choice, but rather something foisted on that individual, it does not appear as valid. This must be balanced with the fact that society cannot exist if everyone is left to set their own rules and create their own contracts.

In the end, almost everyone acknowledges the need for some help from the collective. Public safety is the most obvious example of this. It is much more effective to have a national army and police force than to have to defend oneself all the time. However, most individuals want to maintain their ability to act as they please as much as possible. How these are balanced is an open question, with societies differing from one another in drastic ways. Even in the Western world, there are significant differences about whether the good of all is more important than the ability of the individual to pursue their own goals (Pew Research Center, 2012).

2.5.2 The Environment

The connection between this conflict and environmental issues has been relatively well documented. Gundersen (1995) brings this conflict to the fore when he claims that the environment “is a collective good” (p. 3). Necessarily then, environmental protection is “the collective pursuit of environmental aims” (Gundersen, 1995, p. 10). In his view, an effective

environmental program must be based on “collective, holistic, and long-term thinking” (Gundersen, 1995, p. 159). This argument is held to be true by a number of people. We see the need for collective action in “Our Common Future” and *Agenda 21*. The environment does not respect the bounds that have been set by individual humans, and thus the need to act together seems to be unavoidable.

The Tragedy of the Commons demonstrates the importance of this issue. Hardin (1968) sets this out for us by saying that the commons are open to all, but if they are overgrazed, then they will not be able to support livestock any more. However, the individual could go ahead and put more livestock out and benefit personally. Hardin (1968) states this conflict brilliantly when he says that “the individual benefits as an individual from his ability to deny the truth even though society as a whole, of which he is a part, suffers” (p. 162). In order to solve this problem, he argues that some type of collective, agreed-upon coercion must be present (Hardin, 1968).

While he acknowledges that within liberalism coercion has become a dirty word, there comes a point where it becomes recognized as necessary and thus agreed-upon (Hardin, 1968).

Now this perception of the need for government coercion has been challenged since its inception. Likewise, the enclosure idea has not been without its own critics. It has been pointed out that humans, unlike what the neoliberal economists would say, operate in an economic system that exists within the social fabric of their community (McCay and Jentoft, 1998). They speak to a thicker description of the situation where contextual matters are of importance and where the individual and the community do not exist merely as opposing viewpoints (McCay and Jentoft, 1998). Ostrom (1990) has continued the work in this vein by looking at how communities can set up systems by themselves without coercion and large governmental interactions. The continuing importance of this issue is noted by the fact that Ostrom has won a Nobel Prize for

her work on these types of agreements (Rampell, 2012). So it can be seen that even if it is not coming from the government, collective action is often viewed as the most effective way of dealing with these problems of the commons.

Liberalism and Neoliberalism, both of which emphasize personal freedom, have run into significant conflicts when it comes to dealing with environmental issues. The links between neoliberalism and the natural world are laid out by McCarthy and Prudham (2004). They argue that not only has neoliberalism succeeded at rolling back many environmental regulations, neoliberalism is in many ways necessarily harmful to the environment (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). Many also feel that the focus on the individual pursuing his or her own aims, in liberalism, is incompatible with environmental regulation (Bell, 2002). Dobson lays this out saying:

On the face of it, liberals and environmental impulses are as opposed as it is politically possible to be, with liberalism's individualism, its endorsement of private acquisition, its support for limited government, its lauding of the market as an equitable and efficient distributor of resources, and its opposition to state support for definitive versions of 'the good life', all called into question by the environmentalist agenda. (as quoted in Bell, 2002, 703)

However, thinkers are now trying to reconcile these ideas. Bell (2002, 2005) claims that Rawls' definition of liberalism allows for environmentalism because things deemed within the "public reason" may be acted upon at the collective level. He goes on to argue that sustainability and environmental justice fall within this category (Bell, 2002).

There has now been a move to insert more individualistic elements into environmentalism. McCarthy and Prudham (2004) note that after so many years in conflict neoliberalism and environmentalism are beginning to melt together. This is most clearly demonstrated by the economic rationalists discussed earlier. They want to use market mechanisms to protect the

environment. This is most often associated with the idea of privatizing, or enclosing, everything, because people care for what they own. If there is a value attached, then it will be profitable to conserve these resources. Anything that is not already private property should be turned into a commodity and marketed. (Dryzek, 2005)

This idea is shunned by many within the environmental community, even as it has reached a level of prominence on the policy side of things. Sagoff (2008), for example, is very much opposed to this idea because of the impossibility of setting a price on everything (p. 63). He says that “the things we are unwilling to pay for are not worthless to us” (p. 63). He discusses how within every individual there is a consumer side and a citizen side. The example he uses to bring this to the fore is that of a resort being built on nearby semi-wilderness land. If his students had acted as consumers, they would be expected to approve of the resort for their own enjoyment, but instead they acted as citizens and were opposed to the resort, because it was more important to preserve the wilderness for the community. This conflict reveals that it is impossible to determine a preference-schedule that works for all individuals. So he argues that the conflict of whether to prefer the individual or the collective is within us, as well as among us. This puts an interesting twist on the discussion because, while he acknowledges that environmental protection should be conceived of as collective act, he holds that it is impossible to reconcile individual preference-schedules. When then is collective action to protect the environment allowed? He blurs the lines so that the distinctions are no longer clear. (Sagoff, 2008)

How these ideas should be balanced within environmental thought is an ongoing question that will surely continue to receive attention. Many continue to believe that environmental issues are not a problem because they will be resolved as they are met by human ingenuity. However, for those that believe that environmental problems must be solved by other means, it seems clear

that the environment has to be viewed collectively if anything is to be accomplished. Even if the solution is enclosure and commodification that puts the onus on the individual, the collective must decide that this is for the common good in order to institute such a market. This necessary collectiveness presents a significant problem because of the prevalence of individualism in many places.

2.5.3 Hayek

Hayek is one of the most important people in the economic history of the last century. He is regarded as one of the fathers of the neoliberal movement (Jones, 2012). Part of his contribution to society is the Mont Pelerin Society, which exists to maintain the individual in the face of the challenge of collectivism (The Mont Pelerin Society). Glenn Beck, who is often associated with the Tea Party, has even done an entire show promoting Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* ("The Road to Serfdom", 2010). His ideas are central to this entire debate. *The Road to Serfdom* (2007) presents one of the most potent and powerful arguments for the individual over the collective. So while his is just one of many conceptualizations of the conflict, it is one of special importance and significance.

Hayek had a very potent depiction of how society should run, and individualism was the only way forward. His conceptualization of individualism was as "the respect for the individual man *qua* man, that is, the recognition of his own views and tastes as supreme in his own sphere...and the belief that it is desirable that men should develop their own gifts and bents" (Hayek, 2007, p. 68). In opposition to this idea stands collectivism, often in the form of socialism. It is important to keep in mind that he was developing his ideas soon after the end of Nazism in Germany, and the Soviet Union was near the height of its power. These provided the examples of collectivism that he was dedicated to fighting.

He argued that individualism was the root of western culture arising from the renaissance with significant ties to the Christian faith (Hayek, 2007, p. 68). This allowed him to say that collectivism is “an entire abandonment of the individualist tradition which has created Western civilization” (Hayek, 2007, p. 73). From these kinds of statements it becomes clear that he is reacting against a trend that he sees encroaching on the way of life he considers to be right. This threat comes from socialism, which he defines as “the abolition of private enterprise, of private ownership of the means of production, and the creation of a system of ‘planned economy’ in which the entrepreneur working for profit is replaced by a central planning body” (Hayek, 2007, p. 83). It can be said that he has created a bit of a straw man to then tear down. However, he acknowledges other forms of collectivism while calling socialism “the most important species of collectivism” (Hayek, 2007, p. 84). He defines collectivism more broadly as “all types of ‘planned economy,’ whatever the end of planning” (Hayek, 2007, p. 84). Later, he again clarifies saying that the “planning against which all our criticism is directed is solely the planning against competition” (Hayek, 2007, p. 90).

Hayek’s arguments are not based only in reference to the deterioration of the Western civilization he holds so dear. He wants to do away with the idea of the “common good,” or “general welfare” by noting that these ideas presuppose “the existence of a complete ethical code in which all the different human values are allotted their due place” (Hayek, 2007, p.100-101). Because no such code exists, these ideas mean nothing. Even beyond this, he argues “it would be impossible for any mind to comprehend the infinite variety of different needs of different people which compete for the available resources and to attach a definite weight to each” (Hayek, 2007, p. 102). Therefore, “individuals should be allowed, within defined limits, to follow their own values and preferences” (Hayek, 2007, p. 102). He does not claim that humans

should not act together, but this should be only when their individual desires are aligned (Hayek, 2007, p. 102-103). He sees collectivism creeping in when technical tasks are assigned to a particular group within democracies (Hayek, 2007, p. 107). At that point, the people are being dictated to about how to act from a group they have not consented to follow. That being said, Hayek does not view democracy as an end, but rather as a means (Hayek, 2007, p. 110). Therefore, he does not place it in as high a level of importance as his free market ideals.

All this talk of freedom from the will of the group may lead one to think that Hayek was opposed to the rule of law. However, this is not the case. He believes that proper use of the rule of law “would guarantee a basic negative freedom, which [is] the state’s legitimate function outside of defense and protection of its citizens” (Jones, 2012, p. 63). By negative freedom, Hayek means that the rule of law would ensure that people have certain unalienable rights which neither the government nor anyone else can take away. Hayek’s ideas meant an acceptance of “substantive inequality” (Jones, 2012, p. 63). The rule of law was only out of line when it started “stultifying individual efforts by ad hoc action” (Hayek, 2007, p. 112). Individuals needed to feel free to express themselves within the system of law that had been set up. He says the collectivist governance could not keep itself to these principles, which prevent arbitrariness, and that “in the end somebody’s views will have to decide whose interests are more important” (Hayek, 2007, p. 113). This is indicative of the kind of slippery slope arguments he makes throughout.

Economic freedom was of paramount importance to Hayek. He believed that “economic freedom created the conditions for all other freedoms” (Jones, 2012, p. 69). It is this freedom that allows society to create itself in the best possible manner. This freedom gives rise to the virtues that carry forth society, and allow it so solve its problems. Hayek (2007) defines these virtues as “independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility, the

successful reliance on voluntary activity, non-interference with one's neighbor and tolerance of the different and queer, respect for custom and tradition, and a healthy suspicion of power and authority" (p. 219). He argues that collectivism is destroying these virtues, because it has subjugated individual freedoms to the pursuit of a common purpose (Hayek, 2007, p. 219).

This vision of individualism as superior to collectivism rings true with some of the rhetoric of the Tea Party. Thus, it is this vision which I have chosen to use as a framework to evaluate the movement. Hayek is one of the seminal thinkers on this issue. By identifying the similarities and differences between the Tea Party and Hayek, and individualism more broadly, it will be possible to start thinking about where to place the Tea Party in this conflict.

3 A BROAD LOOK AT RECENT OPPOSITION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

When Glenn Beck published a thriller based on the evils he perceived to be present in our adherence to Agenda 21 it was clear that opposition to sustainable development had reached a national audience. A certain group of people across the country saw sustainable development in its many forms as a threat that required immediate action.

Our argument here is that sustainable development opposition was a national phenomenon that captured the imagination of the public and then died away. We believe that this opposition took different forms in different places with little tactical cohesion across the nation. The broad fight against sustainable development and *Agenda 21* played out differently in every community.

However, there was a sustained attack on sustainable development that lasted several years and seemed to impact the entire country.

Additionally, we want to show that sustainable development was viewed as a threat to an existential quality of the American way of life--individualism. The purpose of this essay is to map out the timeline and uncover the scope of sustainable development opposition while also looking into the character of this opposition and how the concept of sustainable development is related to *Agenda 21* and ICLEI in this conversation.

3.2 BACKGROUND

Sustainable development is a somewhat amorphous idea. There are many specific ideas housed under the umbrella of sustainable development. However, generally speaking it represents a middle way between environmental protection and economic development. For better or worse,

this middle way can be broad and there are myriad different policies that can be connected to sustainable development in some way.

On an international level, sustainable development is often connected to two documents from the United Nations. The first of these is *Our Common Ground*, in which the term sustainable development was coined and the concept laid out. The second is *Agenda 21*, which serves as a guide for implementation of this concept. It is in *Agenda 21* that the specific policy suggestions of sustainable development are laid out.

These policies have received support from many different groups. Not surprisingly, given their role in the creation of *Agenda 21*, the biggest backer has been the United Nations. However, it has been a number of smaller organizations that have done most of the work in actual implementation of these suggestions. One of the more prominent organizations with their boots on the ground is ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. This organization works with local governments with the explicit goal of supporting sustainable development adoption. It is working to enact the suggestions laid out in *Agenda 21*.

All of these facets of sustainable development have come under suspicion during this recent period of opposition. While the concept itself was being challenged, a lot of the specific vitriol is focused on *Agenda 21*. This document is more tangible and the recommendations laid out are more specific. Meanwhile, ICLEI was a target of the opponents on a local level. While the National Republican Party was speaking out against sustainable development and *Agenda 21*, local groups were seeking to force ICLEI out. There were many other components to this conflict, but these are some of the bigger ones.

3.3 CHARACTER

The opposition seems to be focused around the threat sustainable development poses to the American ideas of freedom and property rights. Sustainable development is often portrayed by its opponents as an attempt by the international community to subvert these concepts that are at the heart of American exceptionalism. Thus the fight against sustainable development is also the fight for freedom, individual liberty and property rights.

The opponents view sustainable development as an attempt to subvert the will of the individuals for the good of the collective, and this is unacceptable. Any attempt to limit the will of the individual is in opposition to their belief that protecting individual freedom is more important than pursuing the collective good. People should be able to do what they want with their property. While there are many other components of the opposition to sustainable development, this fundamental conflict is a strain that can be seen throughout.

The opposition was led by members of the Tea Party Movement. This group had already been responsible for creating significant ripples in the American political system before turning to sustainable development. They played a role in the Republican reclamation of the House in 2010 (Williamson et al., 2011; Skocpol and Williamson, 2012). The movement is notable for its decentralized structure. While certain national level organizations were influential in the creation and propagation of Tea Party beliefs, the foundation of the movement was its myriad local organizations. At one point it seemed that every county had its own Tea Party organization.

What these organizations held to be true varied in ways that were not insignificant. There are some baseline tenets that seem to be true in most Tea Party groups though. The refrains of liberty, freedom and small government seem fairly universal (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012). However, after the national elections of 2010 when these groups pushed for a national agenda,

they each took up local issues. While their opposition to sustainable development seems to have been universal, different organizations took up the issue in different ways. The organizations looked for how they felt sustainable development was being enacted in their areas and sought to disrupt it there.

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the extent and timeframe of interest in the conflict between sustainable development and the Tea Party?

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Why was this opposition occurring?

3.5 METHODS

This decentralization makes defining the national character of this opposition difficult. To generate a better understand of this character we used media and internet search trends as indicators of key issues. Key terms were evaluated for both how frequently they were searched on Google and how often the media reported on them. This allows us to evaluate what national trends were in play when it comes to sustainable development opposition.

In order to evaluate media trends, we searched terms associated with the conflict using both Factiva and Lexis-Nexis. These databases pull together news articles from across the country and beyond. We were able to isolate articles from 2009 through 2014 and originating from within the United States. So we were able to look at general interest over these years and the interest by year within that time. For each of these years, we broke down what the media interest was in the topics we associated with this conflict (sustainable development, Tea Party, Agenda 21 and ICLEI). We were then able to search within these results for the presence of other connected ideas. For instance, we could see how many articles referenced both Agenda 21 and the Tea

Party. From these results, we could extrapolate what ideas the media shared consistently and what areas did not see as much interest. In the end, Factiva proved to be more useful for all terms because it did not limit search results. Meanwhile, Lexis-Nexis cut off results at 1000. This meant that searching for big concepts, like the Tea Party and sustainable development, was not possible in that database. However, Lexis-Nexis did provide some valuable resources with regard to Agenda 21.

Search trends were also evaluated to determine what the interest was among the general public. These trends are even easier to capture than media trends due to Google Trends. This tool allowed us to see how search frequency has changed over time, from 2004 to early 2015. Additionally, we could see which areas were the epicenters of this activity. While this tool did not provide us with search volume numbers, we were also able to use this tool to compare the frequency of several different search terms. We were able to isolate geographic areas in both and could limit the searches to within the United States to insure that we were not picking up trends from elsewhere in the world. We again identified 4 core concepts associated with this conflict (sustainable development, Tea Party, Agenda 21 and ICLEI) and evaluated how search interest in them varied over time. Additionally, we used this tool to determine which concepts saw the most interest at what times.

Together these two techniques were used to characterize the terms and concerns of those opposed to sustainable development.

3.6 RESULTS

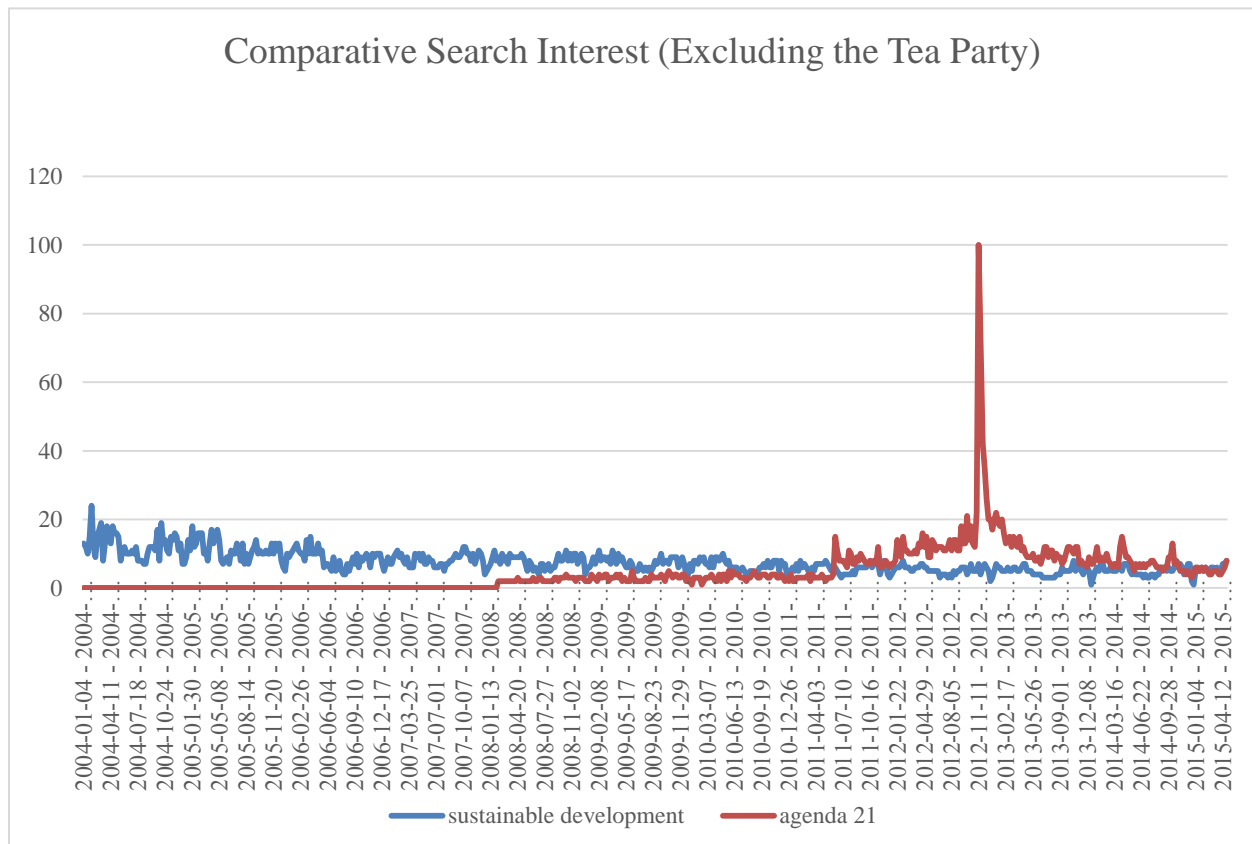
3.6.1 Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is crucial to the entire discussion. Since it was introduced in the Brundtland Report in 1987 it has been one of the predominant ideas in

environmental thinking. It has become the keystone of many attempts at the creation of environmental legislation. It represents a middle way between environmental protection and economic development. This synergy resulted in the adoption of the idea by people on both sides of the political spectrum. Sustainable development has been championed by both Republicans and Democrats. It was George HW Bush who originally signed off on Agenda 21 in 1992 (Bush, 1992).

Some previous research has shown that the general interest in sustainable development grew throughout the 2000s (Malcevski et al., 2012). However, this research focused on a number of different sources including Google Trends, news reports and scientific publications. When Google Trends was isolated it shows a steady decline in interest in the concept dating back to

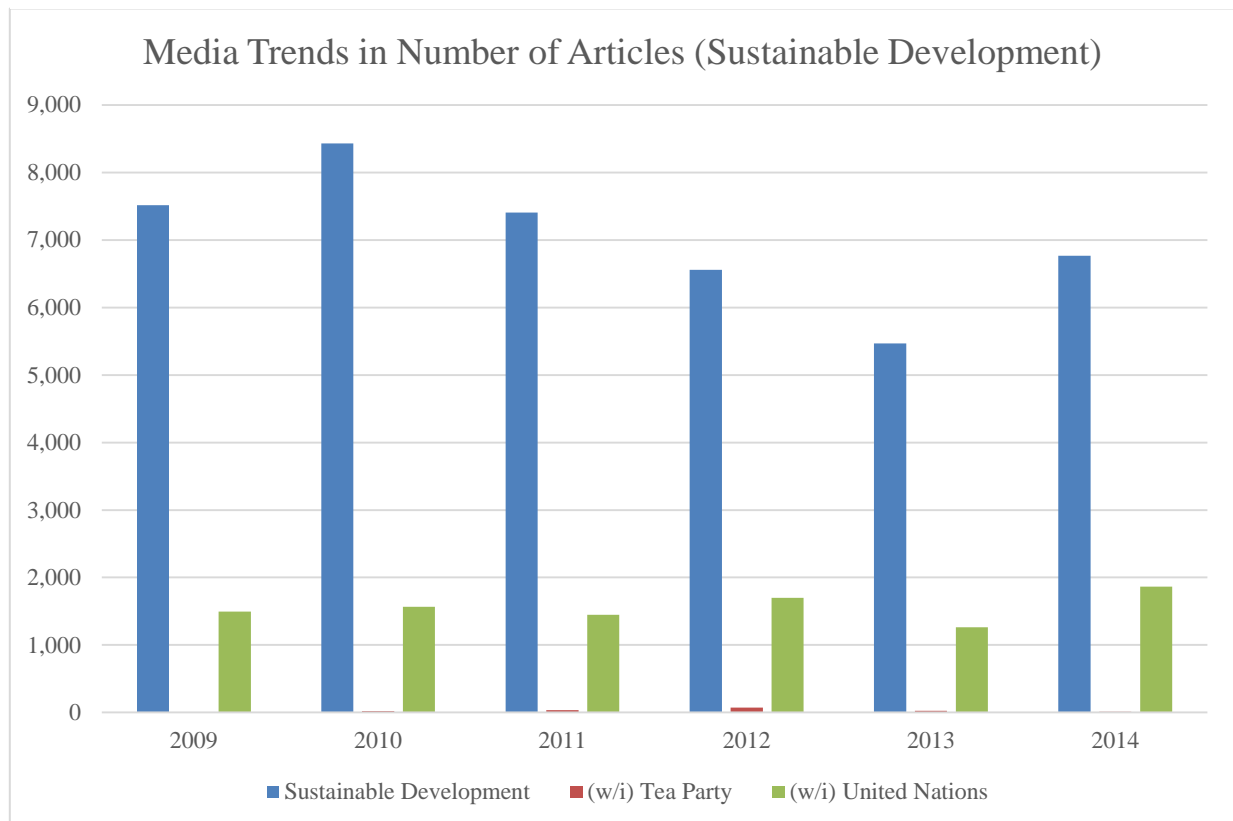
Figure 1: Comparative Search Interest (Excluding the Tea Party)



2004. Search volume in 2015 less than half of what it was 10 years ago at its peak. Within this decline there are jumps and falls but it all seems to fit with a steady decrease in interest. This means that the opposition to this concept that has been present in the last few years has not been notable enough to generate significant new interest in the concept. There were no spikes in interest that would seem to be driven by the Tea Party's interest. Instead, throughout the heart of the opposition timeline the decline remains fairly steady. (Figure 1)

It should also be noted that there was a significant amount of search interest in sustainable development, but it was not as prominent as the Tea Party. It was, however, a much more searched concept than either Agenda 21 or ICLEI, two terms that are, as mentioned above, commonly associated with Sustainable Development.

Figure 2: Media Trends in Number of Articles (Sustainable Development)



Again in isolation, the media coverage of sustainable development is steady. The last 6 years saw a fairly consistent number of articles that touched on the concept. Every year in that span saw between 5000 and 8500 articles in the United States. In addition to this steadiness, there was a stability to the number of these articles that also referenced the United Nations. Each year roughly 15-20% of the articles published would also focus on the UN. (Figure 2)

This would seem to show that the opposition to sustainable development did not drive an increase in media attention to the concept. We did find that there were a small number of articles that focused on the Tea Party and Sustainable Development. However, this was a very small number of articles peaking in 2012 with 71 in the Factiva database. There was a bit of a bell curve of interest with gradually increasing interest prior to 2012 and decreasing interest after. At no point during this time did the number of articles that referenced both the Tea Party and sustainable development make up more than a negligible percentage of the total number of articles related to sustainable development alone.

All together this would seem to show that on a national level the Tea Party's opposition to sustainable development was not significant enough to sway much national interest. Even at its height in 2012 the opposition was not sparking enough interest in Sustainable development to create general interest. The general trends simply remained constant through this time.

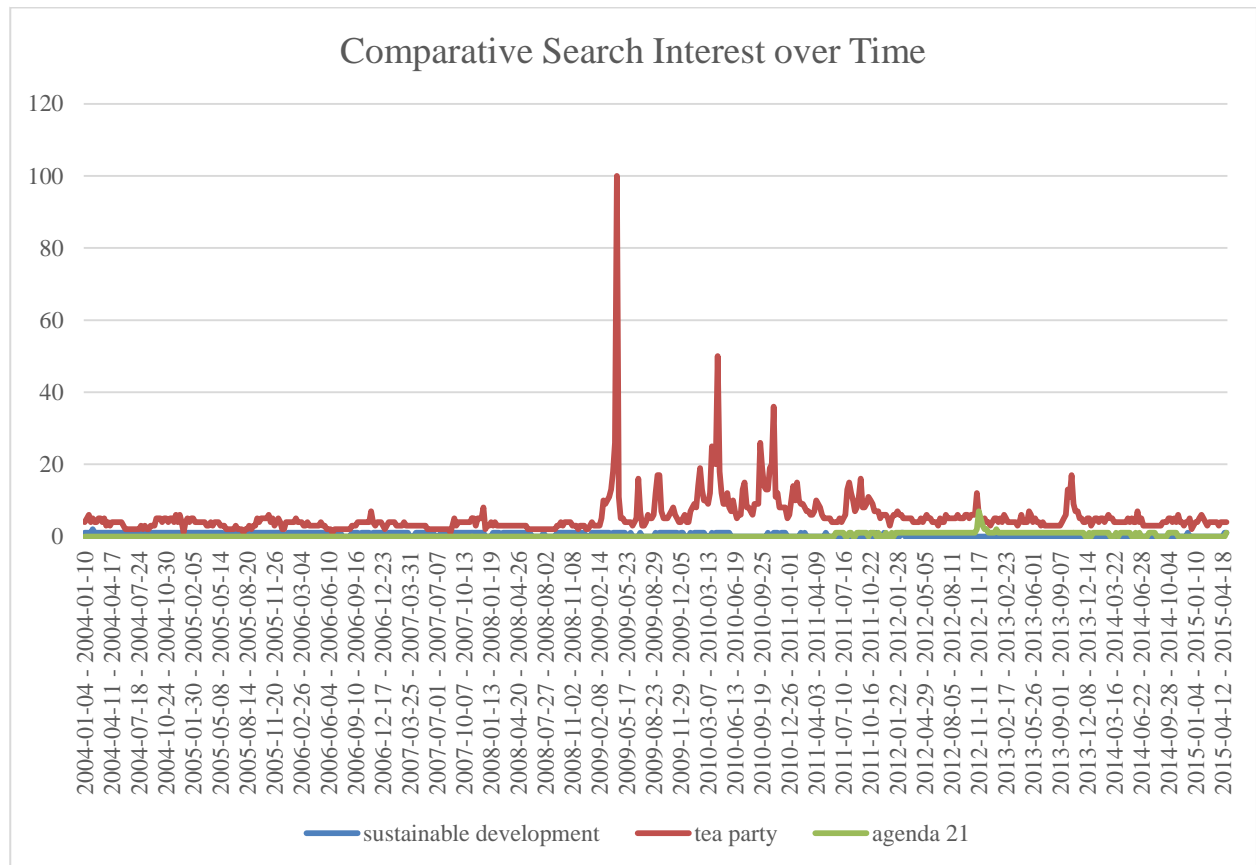
3.6.2 Tea Party

As noted above, the Tea Party has been the chief source of opposition to sustainable development during this time. There have been other organizations that have played key roles in the fight against it, including the American Policy Center and the John Birch Society. However,

their work has mainly to be to inform the work of local Tea Party groups. It is these smaller groups in the movement that have picked up the issue and run with it.

The Tea Party Movement really started gaining momentum after the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. This can be seen in the Google Trends. By far the most interest was present in the first half of 2009. This was right around the time the first national Tea Party protests started occurring (Lepore, 2010). It should also be noted here that there was significantly more interest in the Tea Party than any of the other search terms. Even before the Tea Party movement, the search term “Tea Party” was more common than the other terms ever got to be. This means that another kind of tea party is propping up this interest to some degree. However, the jump in 2009 suggests that from this point forward the movement was driving most of the interest. (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Comparative Search Interest over Time



When the movement did start in 2009, interest in the Tea Party in general was many times greater than in the other search terms, sustainable development, Agenda 21 and ICLEI. However, within this interest there were huge spikes and drops. The spike of early 2009 was never quite matched, but we do see another large spike in late 2010. This lines up very well with the congressional elections that were occurring at that time. The Tea Party is credited as having a quite significant impact on those elections (Williamson et al., 2010). This is mirrored by another small spike around election time in 2012. (Figure 3)

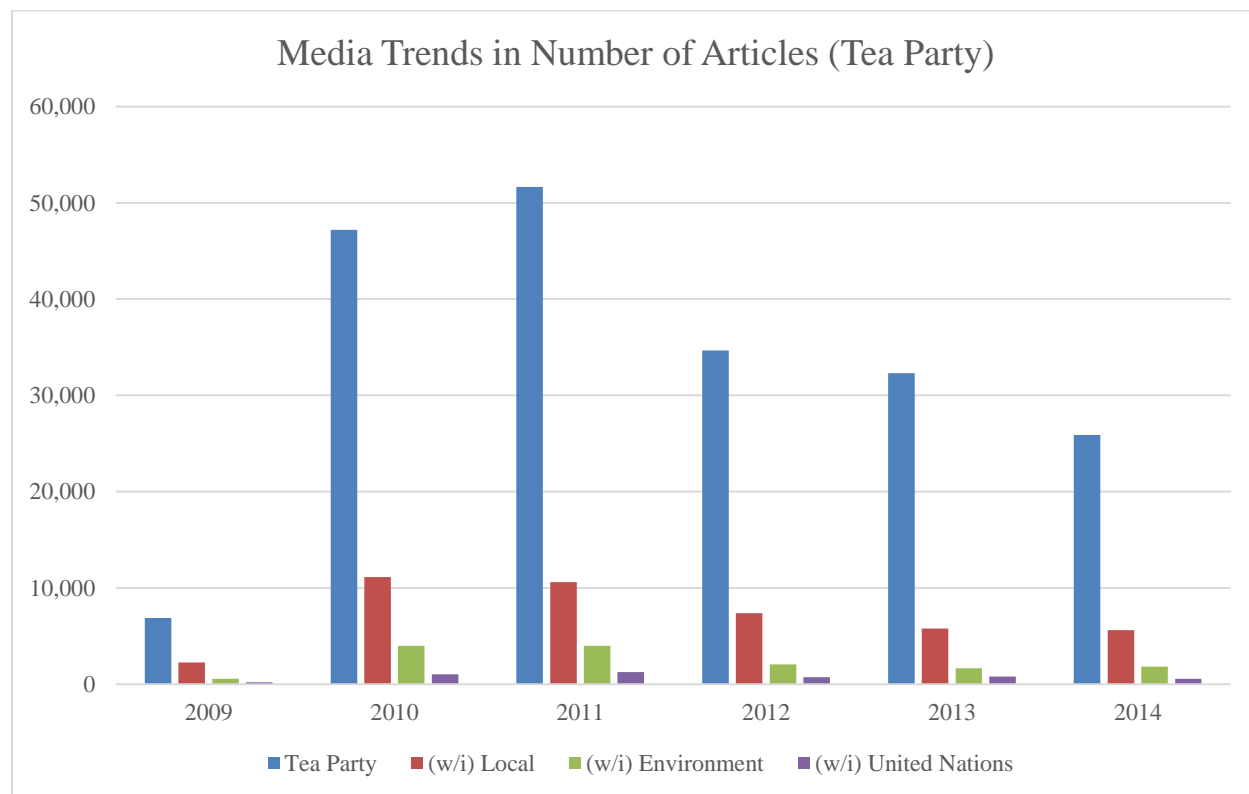
However, since 2011 the trend has generally been downward. By the end of 2014, it is back to roughly the same levels that it was at before the movement began. This more than anything else seems to show the waning influence of the movement. However, the principles it represented are likely still present in many segments of the population. (Figure 3)

The Media trends for the Tea Party are intriguing as well. We see a massive jump from 2009 to 2010 and then a significant drop off starting in 2012. However, the results in 2014 are still 4x those of 2009. The media has clearly maintained a significant interest in the movement. The movement has perhaps held the attention of the media more than the general public. Within these results there are a steady percentage that also focus on “Local”. Roughly 15% of articles for the Tea Party from 2009 to the present include a mention of local too. This would seem to confirm the grassroots focus and localized nature of the movement’s structure. (Figure 4)

A smaller percentage (anywhere from 5 and 8.5%) of the articles connected to the Tea Party also respond to the search term “Environment”. What exactly this means is unclear given the multiple meanings that environment may have. However, what is clear is that the environment is not the chief concern of these articles. It would seem to be a secondary connection. Another secondary connection is the search phrase “United Nations”. An even smaller percentage (roughly 2.5%) of

pieces touching on the Tea Party are also discussing the United Nations. However, the fact that there are this over 4000 articles that mention both the Tea Party and the United Nations from 2009-2014 suggests that there is some connection to be made. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Media Trends in Number of Articles (Tea Party)



The Tea Party was, for a time, a huge force in American discourse. From 2009-2011, it was a massive source of interest to both the general population and the media. Since then interest has diminished, particularly among the general public, but the resonance of this movement remains strong. This seems to be at least in part due to the continuing media attention the movement has received.

3.6.3 Agenda 21

Agenda 21 seems to be at the heart of a lot of the opposition to sustainable development. After the political jargon is stripped away, Agenda 21 is essentially a United Nations document laying

out some of the steps to sustainable development. However, Tea Party rhetoric makes it out to be much more. It quickly became one of the chief targets of opposition and at the heart of everything bad the UN is doing. Anything that can be associated with this document quickly becomes problematic for politicians or sustainable development proponents.

For a long time there was little to no interest in Agenda 21 in the United States. It was not until 2009 that a gradual increase in search interest for “Agenda 21” began. This steady rise continued until the middle of 2011 when there was a substantial jump in interest. From this point until the end of 2013 there was a steady, but significant, rise in interest. (Figure 1)

November 2012 saw the release of a book about Agenda 21 from one of its most prominent opponents. The publication of *Agenda 21* by Glenn Beck coincided with, and is probably responsible for, a huge jump in search interest. This huge spike in interest soon died down. However, there was an elevated level of interest for several months afterward. Since that time there has been a continued downward trend in interest with levels being similar to those present before the publication of Mr. Beck’s book. (Figure 1)

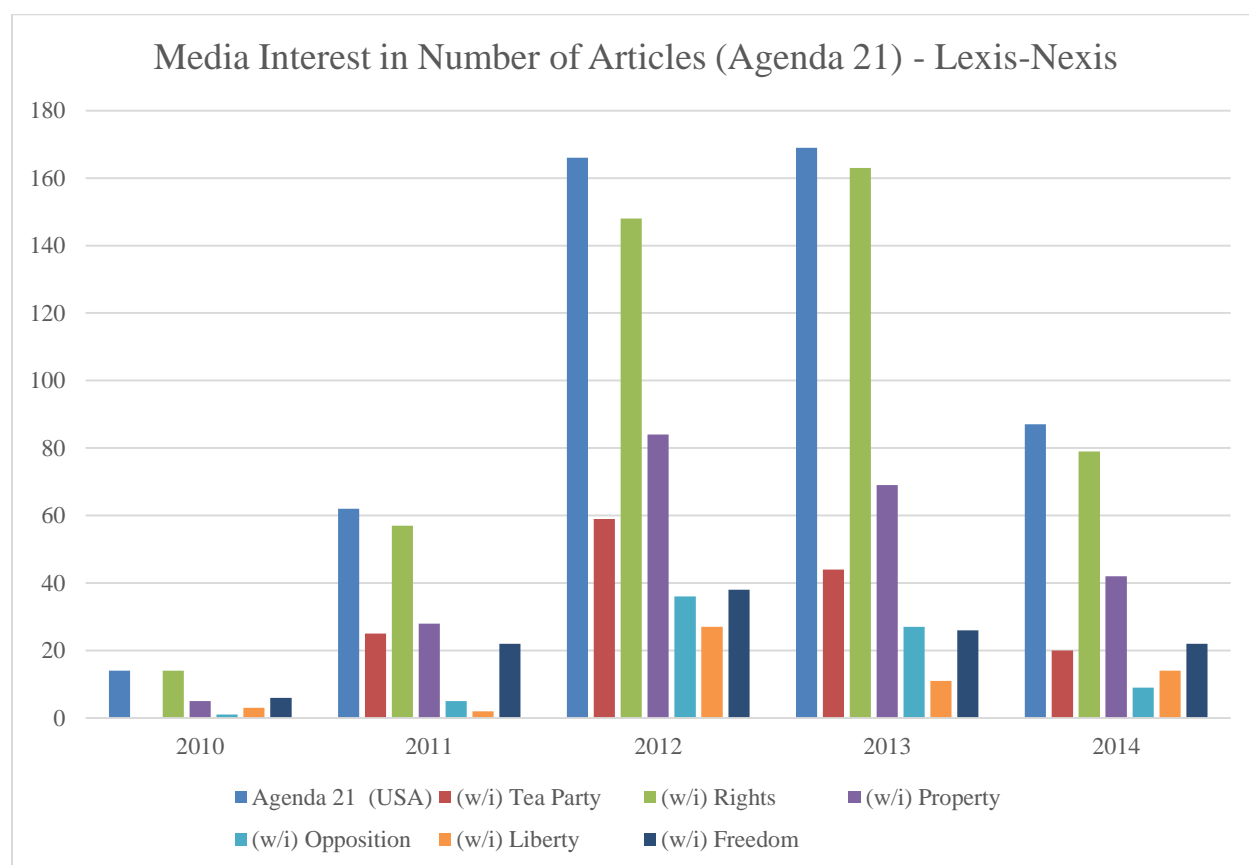
Also of note is the fact that for the past several years, it has been searched more frequently than sustainable development. Agenda 21 seems to have captured the imagination in a way that the more abstract concept of sustainable development struggled to. While the search interest for both was about the same in 2015. For several years, Agenda 21 was getting a significant amount more attention than the topic it was built around. (Figure 1)

The same cannot be said to be true of the media attention. There have been around 60 times more articles written about Sustainable Development than Agenda 21 between 2009 and 2014. Even the year that Agenda 21 was most commonly written about, 2012, saw over ten times as many

articles that touched on sustainable development. So while the media was not spending particularly much time on Agenda 21, the world of the internet was very interested.

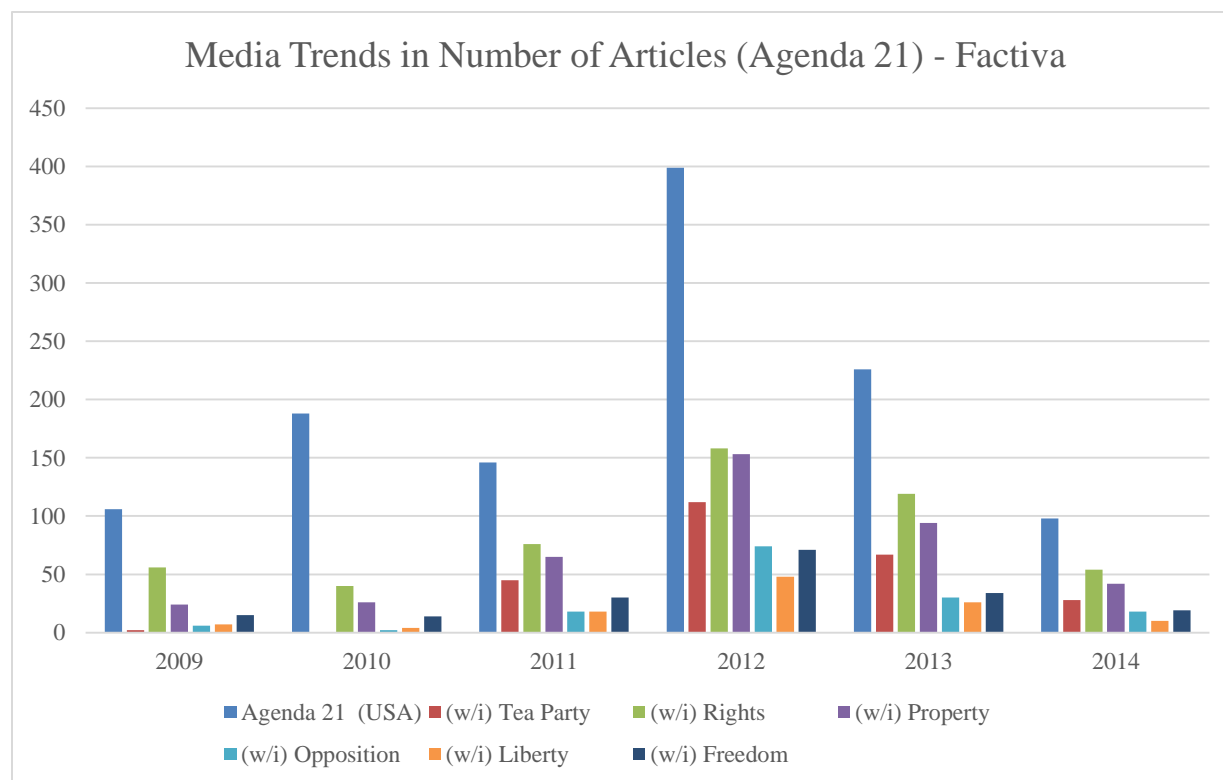
The media was most interested in 2012 and 2013. However, Lexis-Nexis and Factiva have fairly significant differences about this. Factiva shows a significant jump in 2012 and then a big drop off to a still elevated rate of interest in 2013. Meanwhile, Lexis-Nexis shows both years being about the same. However, what is clear from both is that these years represents the height of media interest. This seems to line up fairly well with the timing of search frequency. This time from the middle of 2011 through 2013 seems to represent the height of interest in Agenda 21. (Figures 5 and 6)

Figure 5: Media Interest in Number of Articles (Agenda 21) - Lexis-Nexis



In both databases, a significant number of articles focused on Agenda 21 were also focused on ideas connected to the terms “opposition” and “Tea Party.” Additionally, a significant percentage of the Agenda 21 articles also mentioned “Property”, “Rights”, “Opposition” and “Freedom”. Property and Rights are the most commonly attached terms, 34% and 41% respectively in the Factiva database. These are both among the chief refrains of the Tea Party opposition. These results begin to show how individualism is central to the argument of opponents to sustainable development. The ability to do whatever one wants with their property and a strong belief in individual rights are both tenets of the opposition that are consistent with individualism. (Figures 5 and 6)

Figure 6: Media Trends in Number of Articles (Agenda 21) - Factiva

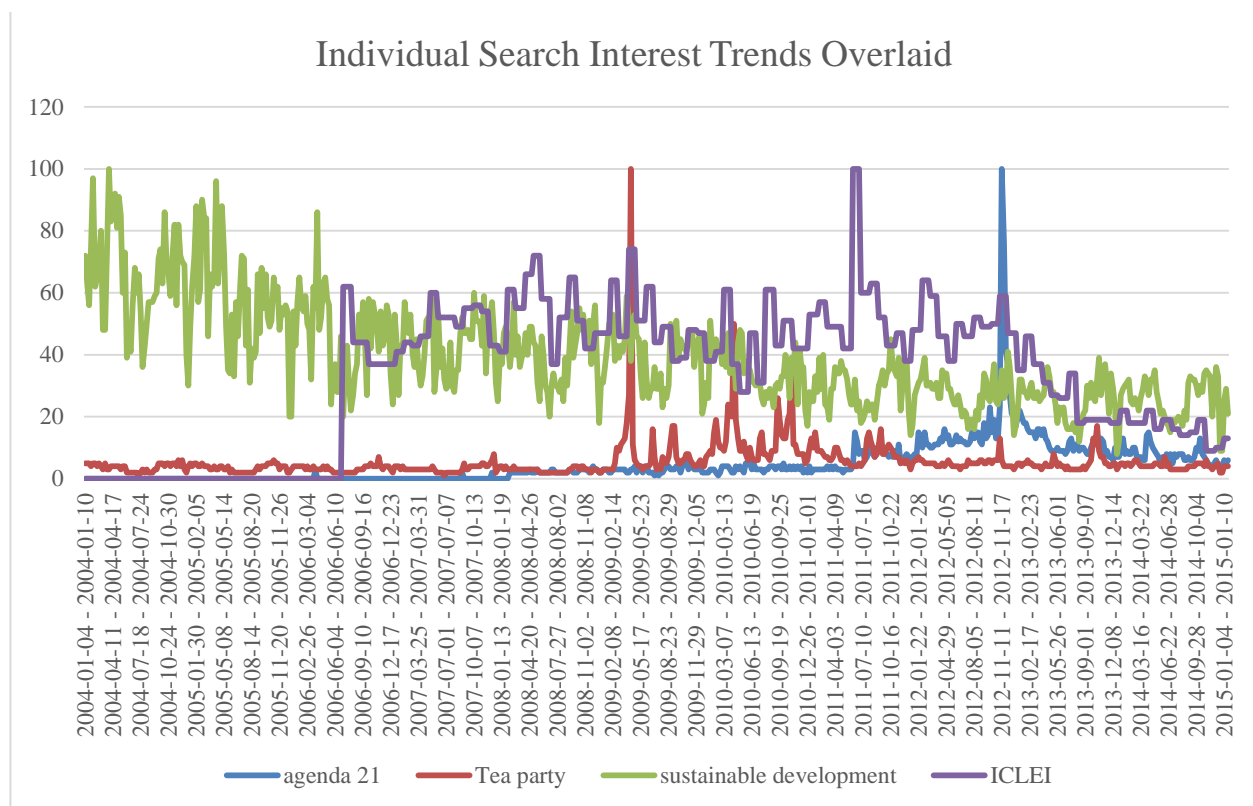


Agenda 21 was a little known document that received little attention in the general public prior to 2011. However, since it rose to prominence then, it has been a big issue in the grassroots online

networks of the Tea Party. While media attention has not been as large, it reached a massive crescendo of interest in 2012 with the release of Mr. Beck's dystopian novel about the future we face with Agenda 21. Since then there has been a drop in interest, but it has retained a higher level of interest than before 2011. Mr. Beck continues to stoke this interest with a sequel to the earlier novel that was released in January 2015 as interest has continued to dip.

Additionally, what news reports did focus on Agenda 21 were linked to the opposition through the usage of language that is consistent with the opposition's attacks. This language included terms like freedom, property and rights that are often found in conjunction to articles about Agenda 21. This would imply that the spike in attention from the media was driven by the opposition. Even more, it would suggest that the focus on these terms suggests that the opposition is focused on individualism across the country. These terms, such as freedom,

Figure 7: Individual Search Interest Trends Overlaid



property and rights, are closely associated with the concept of the individualism.

3.6.4 ICLEI

ICLEI is one of the specific examples of a local target for opponents of sustainable development.

Many localities have seen it become a point of contention (Casey, 2014, Krause, 2015). ICLEI

itself is a nonprofit organization focused on promoting sustainability in local communities

(ICLEI). It provides resources, often in the form of software and professional advice, about how

communities can tackle climate change and build a more sustainable future. However, they

became the target of a lot of attention, because they are promoting the same ideas found in

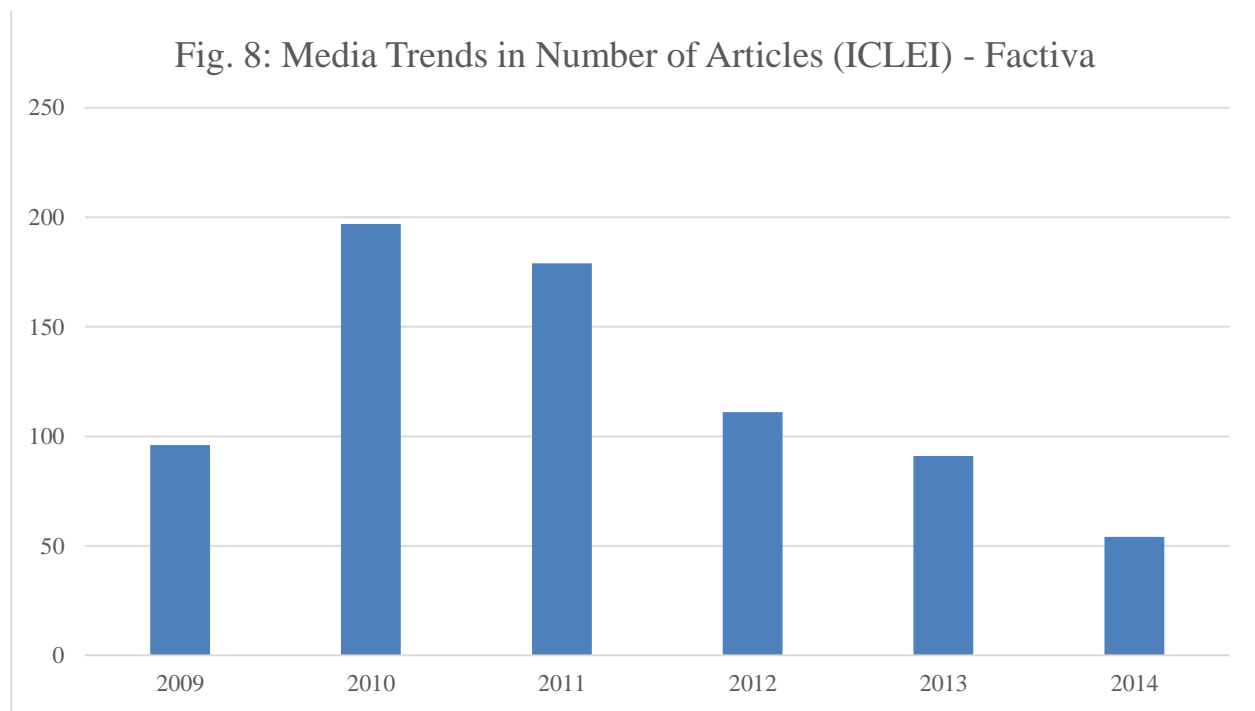
Agenda 21 and pushed by the United Nations. This has led many opponents to claim that ICLEI

is little more than an arm of the United Nations pushing their agenda on American localities.

Since 2006, internet search trends for “ICLEI” have been relatively stable. There have been the

usual rises and falls, but overall the trend was remarkably consistent until 2013. At that point a

Figure 8: Media Trends in Number of Articles (ICLEI) - Factiva



decline began. That decline was fairly consistent until the end of 2014. However, even including this downward trajectory, interest has remained more steady than the other search terms noted. The one exception to this stability was in the middle of 2011. There was a significant jump at that time. However, this jump was temporary and only lasted a very short period of time. (Figure 7)

Just as search interest was low, media interest was also lowest for ICLEI. Lexis-Nexus only found 94 articles on ICLEI from 2010-2014. Factiva was a little better finding 509 articles from 2009-2014. It is also interesting to note that while Lexis-Nexus found the most articles in 2012, Factiva found a significantly higher number in 2010 and 2011 than any other year. This raises questions about how universal the opposition to ICLEI was. Of the 509 articles Factiva found over that time period, a remarkable 67 were from the Roanoke Times. (Fig. 8)

ICLEI was, and still is, a little known organization that became the target of a lot of negative attention from the opponents of sustainable development in during this conflict. However, there was no large increase in the amount of national attention paid to this organization. In fact, interest has been dropping the last few years. It seems clear from this that opposition to ICLEI in particular was not as widespread as opposition to Agenda 21 as a whole. It represents only a small part of the conversation.

There are many components of sustainable development at the local level. ICLEI is but one small piece. The fact that the opposition took it on suggests that each community is fighting this fight in a different way. There is no universal push for what local policies need to be changed. This is perhaps because of the vastly differing nature of many local governments. But it is likely also because fighting sustainable development on the local level requires taking on many different policies. One of the hearts of ICLEI opposition, Roanoke County, VA, has seen the local group

take on Urban Development Areas, participation in the Cool Counties Initiative and the comprehensive plan (Roanoke Tea Party). This is no doubt true of many other localities as well.

3.7 CONCLUSIONS

3.7.1 Timing and Place in General Politics

This data shows a peak in linkages between SD and oppositional terms occurring from late 2011 through 2013. 2012 seems to have been the biggest year for the opposition with it having significantly faded by 2014. While this period showed little movement on interest in Sustainable Development as a general concept, there was much higher interest in Agenda 21 during this time. This jump was present in both media and search interest. Smaller signals, like the number of articles related to both sustainable development and the Tea Party, were also elevated during this time.

Given this sense of timing, it is clear that the opposition to sustainable development was part of a second wave of Tea Party activism. The original push of the Tea Party, which can be seen in both sets of interest trends, was in 2009-2011. This issue only came to prominence after this main push had lost some momentum. This would seem to show that the sustainable development controversy was of secondary interest to the Tea Party movement. The movement was founded on other principles that were later transferred to this new issue.

As noted in the opening of this article, the Tea Party is a decentralized movement. It is made up of local groups focused on local issues. Sustainable development is part of this trend. Local groups took issue with things like ICLEI that were present in their communities. While they were still being informed through an informal national network of activists, the movement became much more focused on how it could leverage its influence on local and state politics. In this way, the opposition to sustainable development fits perfectly with the general trend of the Tea Party.

Additionally, there are some key opponents to the issue that have been at work for many years now. So it could be more a story of how these opponents were able to attach their pet issue to the broader concerns of the Tea Party. They were able to find people who thought the same way they did in these groups.

What is clear is that widespread interest in *Agenda 21*, which is almost universally associated with the opposition, dropped off sharply after the spike in interest. The issue does not have the same anonymity that it did before, but it is also no longer of the same importance to the Tea Party as before. However, while the spike in interest was fairly short, it was intense. This was one of the most important issues in local politics for a short period of time and this was true across a broad swath of the country.

3.7.2 Reach and Coordination

There seems to be quite a broad reach to these concerns. While Washington, DC often saw a higher search frequency than elsewhere, many other localities saw this opposition grow. It even got to the point of enough significance that the national Republican Party made a statement officially opposing Agenda 21 (“American Exceptionalism”). The Google trends show that many areas across the country, from the Northeast to California had interest in the issue. There were hotspots, but these were scattered across the country.

This idea of hotspots of interest is furthered by the lack of widespread interest in ICLEI. This seems to imply that each locality took up issues differently, rather than being nationally coordinated. Certain areas were very engaged in the issue, while others were not very invested in it. It seems likely that some groups have been very involved with this issue and have then spread this opposition throughout their sphere of influence. Many communities are fighting against Agenda 21, but that battleground is different everywhere. The individual communities hear about

Agenda 21 through an outside source, such as Glenn Beck. They then go about figuring out where their community might be in alliance with Agenda 21 and then attempting to cut these ties. This would suggest there is not national coordination of exactly what policies need to be opposed.

This lack of coordination is perhaps also responsible for the lack of staying power in this discussion. Each community picked its own fight, which they often won, and then energy fizzled out. It was very hard to transfer this energy to a new piece of legislation because there was no coordination of what needs to be targeted. Once the battle was won, it was assumed the war was over too.

3.7.3 Character of Opposition

The opposition seems to have several other significant characteristics that show up in the articles related to Agenda 21. Here we see that a large number of these articles are connected to Agenda 21 and also concepts like Rights, Property, and Freedom. This implies that these concepts are closely connected to the growth in interest to this issue. The fear seems to be that implementation of sustainable development would theoretically infringe upon the rights, especially property rights, of individuals.

This fear is perhaps not entirely misplaced. Environmental legislation, because it is always focused on large scale processes, is always going to prioritize the collective over the individual. This was true with the classic pieces of environment protection, such as the Clean Air Act or the Clean Water Act. But it is even more true with attempts to deal with climate change. Climate change is a global problem and must be dealt with globally.

Sustainable development represents an attempt to deal with this problem and organizations like the UN and ICLEI are pushing for global adoption. They want to see drastic changes in the way

that the global population behaves. This is going to require individuals to make different choices. The current legislative model for doing this is to limit the choices that individuals have.

This collective control of an individual's actions would represent a loss of freedom and is thus deemed inexcusable by the opposition. These opponents seem to be most vocal in their opposition to anything that runs counter to individual freedoms. They do not want these to be impinged upon for any reason. The concepts of liberty, freedom and individual rights are the foundation on which they believe everything should be based. These ideas can already be seen to be present in these articles about Agenda 21. These articles are being written because opposition has sprung up and the news source is attempting to explain the cause of this conflict. So the news reports are connecting the idea of *Agenda 21* with the opponent's refrains about how it limits property rights and freedom.

The chief place that these opponents seem to think that the individual is being threatened is their right to private property. Over a third of all news articles on Agenda 21 also focused on property. The right of people to do what they want with their property would seem to be a core principle for these opponents. Anything that puts limits on what these individuals can do with their land is unacceptable. They have seen these rights eroded by things like zoning and the proposed changes from Agenda 21 represent a bridge too far. It is more important to these opponents that individuals be able to do what they want with their land than that they act in a way that is good for the collective.

This focus on the individual over the collective is not surprising given the connection with the Tea Party. While the argument here is related to environmental issues, it is similar to the support the Tea Party has placed behind an individual's right to bear arms. The individualism present there has a similar complexion to that present in the sustainable development opposition. The

belief that supports both these movements is that it is most important to protect individual freedoms. The common good is defined for them as whatever protects individual rights. These individual rights are the most important aspect of our society.

4 TEA PARTY OBJECTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A DIVE INTO THE TRENDS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Tea Party is built on local foundations. It has risen to national prominence, but it has done so as a decentralized movement. There are countless local organizations that fall under the purview of this movement across the country engaging both nationally and locally. At their height, there were county level organizations in just about every county in the country. The movement was mimicking traditional political organizations. These local organizations were engaging at every level of political discussion and even nominating candidates for office.

Each of these organizations had its own perspective that was informed by the individuals that make it up and the locality it is situated in. These groups built on the foundation of the national movement, but they did not all engage in the same way. While they were all part of the same movement, each group is a little different.

Sustainable development was one of the issues that each group took up differently. Despite these differences, the opposition of these groups to sustainable development was widespread and passionate. It was a hot topic for several years and spawned some serious attempts to uproot local sustainable development initiatives. Across the country, local Tea Party groups fought sustainable development initiatives with a ferocity that advocates struggled to understand. Environmental activists were left wondering what was causing this new backlash.

The purpose of this project is to uncover and discuss the reasons that these local groups felt led to fight sustainable development. It is our argument here that while there were many reasons that

opponents fought sustainable development, one in particular is the need to protect individualism against collective ways of thinking. Amongst all the reasons for opposition, this one stands out.

This preference for individualism comes in many different forms. It can be as easily ascertainable as a belief in the foundational importance of inalienable individual rights. Or it can be seen more subtly in the statement that there should not be limits on choice. Individualism can also be seen as important through the support these groups have for American Exceptionalism and the democratic system. The clues that individualism is at the core of this argument are sprinkled throughout their literature in clear and subtle ways.

4.2 BACKGROUND

The Tea Party came into being in 2009 with a flurry of support and activity (Williamson et al., 2011). The movement's early trajectory focused on fiscal responsibility and small government after the massive bank bailouts (Williamson et al., 2011; Arceneaux and Nicholson, 2012; Ashbee, 2011). They rose to prominence with surprising alacrity and captured the attention of the masses. From the very beginning the Tea Party has been an interesting mix of a decentralized movement with local groups doing much of the driving and top down control (Berlet, 2011; Bailey et al., 2012). The massive uprising of support they found has led to a number of different explanations for why this happened and what it means (Williamson et al., 2011; Harris, 2010; Courser, 2012).

As the movement aged, its focus shifted. In the beginning, it was largely focused on the government bailouts (Arceneaux and Nicholson, 2012; Ashbee, 2011). Later it would direct its efforts onto trying to do away with the Affordable Care Act (Bendersky, 2014). It would also play a role in the national elections in 2010 and beyond, but the extent of its role changing

outcomes is less than clear (Karpowitz et al., 2011; Carson and Pettigrew, 2013; Aldrich et al., 2014).

In 2011 the movement began focusing on environmental issues (Frick et al., 2015). This focus took many different forms, but was almost always opposed to traditional environmental legislation. The chief target of this opposition was sustainable development (Frick et al., 2015). With this focus, they spent a lot of energy attacking the connection between sustainable development and United Nations. The United Nations has long been a driver of sustainable development. They were behind the production of *Our Common Future* and *Agenda 21*, perhaps the two most important publications in the sustainable development library.

However, this antipathy towards sustainable development did not stay just at the national and international levels. The movement also began to attack such legislation at the local level. Many local groups fought for their localities to disband their connection with ICLEI, which is essentially a consulting and information organization focused on promoting sustainable development. Other groups sought to distance their communities from any kind of outside environmental influences on their legislation and planning.

This movement against local environmental initiatives seems to have lost some steam, but many of the groups that propelled it still exist. Further, the issues that undergirded the conflict still exist. As this opposition dissipates, it is almost certain that similar arguments will come back in the future.

4.3 WHY FOCUS ON TEA PARTY WEBSITES?

The sustainable development opposition movement has taken full advantage of modern technology. In particular, they have made great usage of the internet to facilitate communication. Ideas were propagated quickly through links to opposition material. Most local organizations have their own websites and/or blogs to facilitate internal and external communication. This only makes sense given the ease of creating a new website at this time. In the end, these organizations created a repository of resources about what they believe in these websites and blogs.

The blogs allowed for groups to have continuous communication with their followers. Blogs allowed influential individuals and organizations to share both specific local information and a local perspective on the national level stories. It is quite common on these blogs to see articles pulled from other places and reposted. Information flows rapidly with each stop along the way adding a new layer of complexity.

Most original information is coming from relatively few national-level organizations. They articulate positions and rationale that are then available to every local organization in the country. This information provides a foundation on which the local organizations are built. It is very hard to imagine these smaller organizations thriving without the ready supply of information and connections supplied by national organizations.

However, just because local organizations are pulling from these national organizations does not mean that they are always in sync on positions and rationale. These local organizations seem to recognize their connection to the larger movement, but retain a strong sense of independence. They are working things out for themselves and not counting on the national level organizations to hand them the answers. This can lead to differences in the message presented by the different

organizations. Often the information that comes from national organizations is used as a platform to share additional thoughts from the individuals and organizations that are sharing.

These organizations communicate in ways beyond just sharing links online. There are also a number of speakers that make the rounds amongst these local organizations. These speakers often have their own pet issues that they share with others. These issues can be very broad, such as *Agenda 21* and climate change, or very specific, such as smart meters and urban development areas. Additionally, the leaders of these local organizations are often in contact with one another. They are sharing resources and advice. These more personal connections are just as crucial to the organizations as the online connections.

That being said, the online communication represents the front door of these organizations. Their websites and blogs are where they can share what they believe to be true. It is how they reach outsiders and position themselves in the general political spectrum. So while there are complexities that are not captured in these online places, it is a great starting point to understand the movement and what the local organizations are focused on.

4.4 METHODS

With this perspective that the organizational websites are a good introduction to the positions and rationale of tea party groups, we have studied them to deepen our understanding of the movement and its opposition to sustainable development. As noted above, there are countless local organizations and many of them have websites and blogrolls. However, because we are focused on the relationship of movement to environmental issues, we were able to focus in on a few organizations.

In the end, we chose to evaluate 30 organizations that have sections of their website or blog that are expressly dedicated to environmental issues. These organizations were chosen by looking through over a hundred websites and identifying those that dealt specifically with this issue. These sections took different forms. Some were focused on Agenda 21 and sustainable development, while others were more broadly focused on environmental legislation or wildlands protection. In addition to these local organizational websites, 8 national level organizations that were associated with the Tea Party movement and the environmental issues were also evaluated.

For each of these information streams, the rhetoric they had created about their opposition to sustainable development and other environmental initiatives was pulled. This data was then coded to find trends and commonalities. Once we had coded these documents, we analyzed the results to determine the predominant trends present and driving the opposition. These themes were then grouped together if they seemed to be connected to one another. Additionally, we were looking for where local and national organizations diverged and where some organizations might be different from others. We were looking to create a comprehensive overview of why these local organizations oppose sustainable development.

4.5 RESULTS

4.5.1 Structure and Organization of Arguments:

The websites that were evaluated came from across the country. There does not seem to be a discernible geographic pattern. These organizations came from both rural and urban areas. They were present even in areas that tend to lean to the left of the political spectrum. Not all Tea Party webpages focused on sustainable development. Many pages did not mention it, while others had quite a bit of content.

The websites themselves had a variety of different setups. Some were just a static page with a few links. Others had many static internal pages. Still others facilitated the spread of information through a blog. Some pages had a vast amount of information. Others were sparse and cryptic.

The source and attribution of posted information varied a great deal as well. Overall, there was a lot of information that was reposted. Documents created by one organization were shared word for word on multiple sites. Several national level documents were present on most every site. Even if a document was not reposted, it was often linked to. Many of these pages have a number of links that can be perused. Additionally, the sharing of videos on the topic was quite common.

Some sites contained considerable original content created by the local organizations. This original content would take on different forms as well. For instance, many times the original content would be a few sentences commenting on the information found in a link. In other places, it would be content related to the specific issues at play in the geographic area of that organization. Other places built their own articles and editorials based on the issues as they perceived them.

4.5.2 Rationale and Positions of Arguments

We are particularly interested in the positions and rationale articulated on these sites. They offer a window into understanding how the opposition to sustainable development and Agenda 21 should be understood. Both borrowed and original content are valuable in understanding this. The most commonly borrowed documents would seem to be the foundation of the opposition in many ways. Meanwhile, original content was created for the specific organization in play and thus perhaps represents a better understanding of the thoughts of any one organization.

With all this in mind, many different possible causes for the opposition were exposed when the rhetoric was examined. These explanations are varied and cover a lot of ground. However, as will be shown, many of them are interrelated. We believe that the most compelling reason for the opposition lies in their preference for individualism over collectivism. This will be explored in a bit, but first several alternative explanations will be explored.

4.5.2.1 Trust

The websites express a great deal of distrust of the organizations and individuals promoting sustainable development and argue that anything that comes from these distrusted sources needs to be questioned. The scientific need for sustainable development is questioned. The methods of implementation are questioned. The real reasons behind the changes are questioned.

This need to question everything can clearly be seen when the Hocking Hills Tea Party website says:

What can we expect if the goals of the United Nations Agenda 21 are fully implemented? Changes. More than we ever bargained for. Note that these will come gradually, a little at a time. They will be “voluntary” perhaps at first, in some cases, and they will be supported by “scientific studies.” It has been noted that most people today put a great deal of trust in anything called “scientific.” But the time has come to question this.

The writer here clearly believes that there is a danger to trusting too much. Even science, which as they note is often held in such high regard, is not to be easily believed.

Within the scientific field, the whole idea of grant funded research is not something this group of people seems very comfortable with. Grant money is viewed as being almost a bribe to ensure that the outcome goes in a particular direction. Their distrust of grant funding is also tied up in how the federal government uses funding to promote sustainable development principles. This distrust is not limited to the realm of scientists. The Moore Tea Citizens website channels the

anger over grants going to local governments, saying that “[f]or a few filthy dollars in grants dangled before them, these politicians have signed away not only their own souls, but the souls of all those over whom they govern.” The demands attached to this grant money lead many opponents to believe that impartiality is impossible.

However, this anger is not just directed at the local politicians. An oft-quoted piece from the American Thinker lays the blame on the federal government. It says that “the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal and state agencies may attempt to deny grant funds to states and cities that do not adopt smart growth plans.” This kind of coercion is part of the reason that these groups feel they cannot trust the people and organizations behind the sustainable development agenda. First, our local governments are being forced to accept sustainable development. Second, if the science is guided by these grants that come from groups that lean a particular direction, then the trustworthiness of the research itself is called into question.

They are also convinced that the sustainable development lobby is using all kinds of other manipulative tactics to institute its agenda. Right Side News comments on one such ploy, saying:

ICLEI has succeeded in implementing the sustainability agenda through something called the Delphi Technique. All activists need to understand the Delphi Technique. Originally created by the Rand Corporation as a consensus building methodology for scientists, Delphi has morphed into a subversive tactic for imposing malevolent leftist agendas on an unsuspecting public who would never agree if they understood.

This idea of a hidden agenda is prevalent throughout the opposition. In the quote from the Hocking Hills Tea Party above, they mark this hidden meaning with quotation marks. The opposition finds that many words and phrases used by the sustainable development advocates

seem innocuous but are actually covering for destructive ideas underneath. Tea Party Manatee beseeches its audience to watch out for these “buzzwords”:

This agenda may already be driving your community "development", so be alert to the clues. Notice buzzwords such as "visioning," "partners," and "stakeholders."

The Tri-County Tea Party lays out what they think is underlying this coded language, saying “Environmentalism, with all of its ‘newspeak’ code words, is just the means by which our new feudal lords are selling us on the idea that private property is detrimental to society.” The search for these code, or buzz, words is a clear demonstration of the distrust these individuals and organizations have for the sustainable development field.

This distrust is fostered by this quote that many of the websites use from J. Gary Lawrence, an advisor to President Clinton:

"Participating in a UN advocated planning process would very likely bring out many of the conspiracy-fixated groups and individuals in our society. ... This segment of our society who fear "one-world government" and a UN invasion of the United States...would actively work to defeat [Agenda 21]. So we call our process something else, such as comprehensive planning, growth management or smart growth."

This statement by a government official is used to validate the concern that Tea Party groups have something to be worried about. It suggests that the wool is intentionally being pulled over their eyes and they are being manipulated.

Additionally, this distrust seems to feed on the lack of transparency present in many sustainable development initiatives. They are certain that there is money changing hands and that communication is occurring that they do not know about. This anxiety is laid bare by the Tea Party Manatee, who says:

They probably don't even want you to know what they are doing until the regulatory framework is well under way. You may read in your local paper about "visioning", working groups, Total Quality Management, and partnership between churches, welfare

and social service agencies, and other community groups. These are clues that, behind the scenes, the plan is moving forward.

These oppositional groups are deeply uneasy about what all this means. They see people and organizations they do not trust saying things that mean other things and working towards an end goal that we haven't seen yet. All this provides a solid foundation for opposition. These groups and individuals do not want to be manipulated into anything and have begun to question everything that comes from this particular field because they are convinced that they have been misled before. They are not going to let it happen again.

4.5.2.2 Guilt by Association

Often times the only thing necessary to make an idea unacceptable is to show where it came from. The fact that the concept of sustainable development was generated by a member of a socialist political party means that it is always going to face opposition. As the Hocking Hills Tea Party says, “the name and concept of sustainable development was first presented to the United Nations by Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, vice chairman of the world Socialist party. Does a red flag go up here?”

It is quite true that Brundtland has been associated with several explicitly socialist groups. However, in the mind of the writer of that statement, no further argument is necessary to show the problems with sustainable development. The second-degree association with socialism is enough to make the idea untenable. This line of reasoning can also be seen when the Clermont Tea Party website denounces a sustainable development event, saying:

These notable, top-level keynote speakers...are a who's who of Marxists, Socialists and Communists. E.O. Wilson wrote in his book *The Ants* “Carl Marx was right, Socialism works.” Jared Diamond wrote in his book *Guns, Germs and Steel*, “Farming spread mainly through farmers' outbreeding hunters...then driving them off the lands suitable for agriculture.” Olafur R. Grimsson, Iceland's President and head of the People's

Alliance political party (a combination of socialists/communist views) from 1987-1995 amended Iceland's Constitution deeming "all natural resources public property". While futurist Stewart Brand advocates for squatter cities where "informal economies" are created.

The fact that these people support sustainable development is deemed reason enough to oppose it. The argument seems to be that if they think this is a good idea, there must be something wrong with it. It is also notable that it does not take that much to be discredited. Maurice Strong and Al Gore are others who are routinely portrayed as sustainable development supporters who invalidate its claims.

The United Nations is one of the key villains in Tea Party rhetoric and thus any association with it is tainted. "Sustainable development" as a framework was generated by the United Nations and the UN remains one of its biggest proponents. The Kanawha Valley Tea Party shows part of the problem facing sustainable development when it says, "There are two more, very good reasons to be wary of Agenda 21 and the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) that supports it: George Soros and the United Nations." Superstitions 9.12 Tea Party Patriots go a little farther and say, "I'm disgusted that any elected official in this country would sell out my rights and their duties on the basis of a UN scheme of world governance."

Clearly these groups are not fond of the United Nations and what they believe it stands for. We can go back to the Kanawha Valley Tea Party website to understand a bit of why they believe the UN is problematic. It says, "[a]s regards the UN, that organization's problems with America's appreciation of freedom and self-determination is one that needs no explanation." With this understanding of the beliefs and goals of the UN, it is a short step to see why any association with it would be problematic.

Organizations that are in favor of sustainable development have been forced to distance themselves from the UN. However, for many it is too late: they are already guilty by association. The Villages Tea Party notes that ‘in its “Agenda 21: Myths and Facts” document found on the APA [American Planning Association] website, the group goes to extreme measures to distance itself and its policies from Agenda 21, specifically saying “The American Planning Association has no affiliation regarding any policy goals and recommendations of the UN.”’ As this calling out on the website suggests, the attempt at distancing is unlikely to work. Even worse, it may add to the feeling that there is a lack of transparency.

Both of the pro-sustainable development organizations listed above, ICLEI and the American Planning Association, are now seen as villains in and of themselves. They have been tainted by their association with sustainable development. Now anyone that is associated with them is tainted in the same way.

4.5.2.3 American Exceptionalism

As illustrated by the statement from the Kanawha Valley Tea Party site above, arguments of patriotism run throughout the websites. The belief in American Exceptionalism appears to be a strong motivator for opposition to sustainable development. American exceptionalism can best be understood as the idea that America is special and stands apart from the rest of the world in a positive way (Lipset, 1997). Opponents view sustainable development as an attempt to take away everything that makes the United States special.

For example, the Bayshore Tea Party critiques the Agenda 21 document:

Within its pages are a substantial attack on the American Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. The primary target for the changes proposed in 1992 is the United States of America.

This quote makes it clear that the UN and Agenda 21 are a threat to the principles on which the United States was founded. Sustainable development is seen as an attempt to make the United States just like any other country.

The East Bay Tea Party lays out their opposition as follows:

The United Nations is no friend to our Constitution and our freedom. Their viewpoint is completely anathema to the hard-fought values and principles this country was built upon -- liberty, freedom, individualism.

The United Nations seems to represent everything that United States does not want to be. Not only are they standing in opposition to American values, the UN is theoretically trying to impose its contrary values on the United States.

One commonly found assertion is that Agenda 21--a UN action--is undermining the US Constitution. The Riverside Tea Party states that their opposition to sustainable development is an attempt to “restore the Republic and the Constitution of the United States.” They go on to phrase it a little differently, saying “the Question is, will the American people demand that it be done within the framework of the Constitution of the United States that secures our unalienable rights and private property or are we going to allow them to be shredded by the New World Order?” The Constitution is held up by these groups as absolutely essential. It is absolutely crucial to them that it is upheld. It represents everything they believe is good about the United States. It is the heart of American Exceptionalism.

4.5.2.4 Lack of Cause/ Cost

Beyond the reasons mentioned so far, opposition to sustainable development is also based in the belief that there is no need for the change and that the proposed changes will cost too much. The need for sustainable development is clear to its supporters. However, for many opponents the

threats from environmental degradation and social injustice that are perceived to be so real by the supporters are just not substantial problems.

Many opponents argue that supporters of sustainable development are creating the crisis and then providing their solution. They do not see any problems present at the moment. They argue that threat of environmental degradation is not nearly as significant as sustainable development supporters would have us believe. Further, they claim the inequalities present in the economic system are not something that needs to be rectified.

These opponents take particular issue with the use of climate change as a driver for sustainable development adoption. They simply do not believe that there is a problem. For this group, climate change is either not really happening, a natural phenomenon or just something that doesn't need to be solved. Freedom Advocates, a national anti-sustainable development group, questions the validity of the movement, saying "ICLEI uses the false premise and outright lies of anthropogenic global warming to change our way of life, for the worse." The Valdosta Tea Party lays out their concerns about one particular piece of legislation, saying "[it] is the nation's first mandatory greenhouse gas cap and trade regulating entity. This waste of tax dollars is responsible for 'making an impact on climate change' in 10 Northeast states. Never mind that GLOBAL WARMING ISN'T EVEN REAL!"

In the eyes of these opponents, if the whole foundation for concern is wrong, then the solution of sustainable development is no longer necessary. Why should they support something that is asking them to change their lives when there is no need for it? The tacit understanding beneath this rhetoric is that if there was a good reason, the opponents might feel differently. However, the last quote above makes it clear that there is a cost-benefit analysis taking place here and that

these proposals simply cost too much. The Rainy Day Patriots note that “This program costs the taxpayers billions upon billions of dollars.” Again the Valdosta Tea Party uses stronger language and says, “The corruptocrats in Washington are completely responsible for this gigantic waste of tax dollars. Everyday Americans work hard to earn money and provide for their families while Washington fat cats get paid to accomplish nothing!” It seems that the opponents have little stomach for what they see as wasteful policymaking.

4.5.2.5 Human Exceptionalism

Another of the values that is being challenged in the mind of these opponents is their human exceptionalism. Human exceptionalism is grounded in the belief that humanity is special and somehow more important than other facets of the planet (Catton and Dunlap, 1978). Arguments on the websites suggest that the exceptionalism of humanity is being called into question by sustainable development. The arguments assert that humanity may even be reduced to a status below other species. The Moore Tea Citizens lay out their concerns saying ‘if Agenda 21 succeeds, animals will become more important than man as will plants and trees. We can already see ample evidence of this process in motion today. Agenda 21’s real message is: “Man is the problem. Nature must be preserved and take precedence. Mother Earth must not be scratched.”’ The Hocking Hills Tea Party says “no small fish is worth saving if it destroys people. Created animals were made to serve man, not the other way around. The most endangered creature on Earth just now is the human child.”

The creation aspect of this second quote reveal that this perspective can be based in Christian theories of creation. Within this perspective, humanity is seen as the pinnacle of creation and thus more important the rest of things. So any threat to human exceptionalism also carries a bit of a threat to religious identity too. Additionally, this belief in human exceptionalism is really a

values assessment. As with most groups, an attack on their values is always going to require refutation. The Highlands Tea Party believes that sustainable development requires such a change and fears “indoctrination into believing that nature is more important than man and the group is more important than the individual.” This is something they find clearly unacceptable.

4.5.2.6 Governance

Another component of the opposition to sustainable development is that many opponents believe that it will require operating outside the traditional and acceptable governance structures of the United States. This is closely connected to the opposition to American Exceptionalism mentioned above. The argument is that the system of government found in the United States is both vitally important to its success and also an example of how all countries should operate. It is at the heart of American Exceptionalism. The opposition websites suggest that sustainable development, as it is currently being considered, would be a threat to this most American of systems. This threat seems to touch on many different aspects of the system.

Democracy

Democracy is the heart of the American system of government. The people get to decide what direction should be taken on every government action. Because of the number of issues to be handled and the complexity of these issues, the people elect individuals to make decisions for them. This system has been in place for a long time and it is believed by many to represent the apex of political theory. For many Americans, no better system has ever been created and it is doubtful that one ever could be. That sustainable development implementation circumvents this system is very problematic for them.

This problem can be seen when the Hocking Hills Tea Party calls out Agenda 21, saying ‘it was never ratified by the United States. President Bill Clinton by executive order set up an agency to “harmonize U.S. government policy with Agenda 21.” Thus the United Nations’ proposal began insidiously to appear as American law, though it never touched Congress.’ The fact that the president could do this without input from the people or Congress is not acceptable. The Kanawha Valley Tea Party lays out the problem with executive action this way:

This effectively pushed the UN plan into America’s large, churning government machine without the need for any review or discussion by Congress or the American people.

This raises serious doubts in the mind of many opponents about the legitimacy of this sustainable development agenda. Not only is it bad that it was implemented this way, which is counter to what makes the United States special, the fact that its proponents felt the need to push it through this path raises questions about their ethics and respect for the American system.

Executive Action

As noted above, one of the threats to the American system of government comes from executive overreach. These groups are very concerned about Presidents overstepping their boundaries and imposing their will without Congressional approval. The fact that the sustainable development agenda has been pushed forward by perceived executive overreach means that it is not legitimate in the eyes of many. The Greater Phoenix Tea Party Patriots lay out their opposition by saying “both President Bill Clinton and most recently President Barack Obama have signed executive orders directing all agencies of the Federal Government to work with state and local community governments in a joint effort to ‘reinvent’ government using the guidelines outlined in the United Nations Agenda.” This opposition seems to have less to do with the content of the orders and more to do with how they were produced.

This executive overreach is not limited to the federal level. The Asheville Tea Party lays out their problems with the actions of former Governor of Maryland, saying “Maryland Governor Richard O’Malley is forcing what he calls ‘Plan Maryland’ through Executive Action rather than through the state Legislature. That means no votes from representatives of the people.” That last sentence is perhaps the most important. It is there that the full danger of executive action is seen. Passing an action through the legislature, be it state or federal, is where the people’s representatives give it legitimacy.

Executive actions are often perceived as undemocratic. The people are bypassed. This process thus resembles, in the logic of tea party, tyranny or dictatorship. The Valdosta Tea Party lays it out this way:

Truly, these are the elected officials that you and I have been looking for to take a stand against the forces of tyranny that have been relentlessly enforcing the UN’s Agenda 21 policy of Sustainable Development for so long.

This group sees the actions that have been taking place as clear indications of a tyranny. The way out of this unwanted tyranny is through having elected officials that represent the people take control of government. Clearly, executive overreach is viewed as a significant problem that must be dealt with swiftly and decisively. It is a threat to the system and, by extension, the country as a whole.

Bureaucracy/Unelected boards

Many of these opponents are also concerned by the changes that are being made in more local situations. They are particularly concerned with Regionalism, which is perceived as an unconstitutional addition to our governmental systems. Broadly speaking, Regionalism is a move to have some political decision-making occur at a regional scale, rather than locally or at the

state level. The Spartanburg Tea Party speaks out against such practices by saying, “regionalism promotes councils that develop policy that is rubber-stamped by elected officials without any public input or oversight. This is actually an extra level of government that operates outside the provisions of the constitution.” These regional councils are unelected and, thus, are counter to the idea of democracy as sustainable development opponents understand it.

These unelected boards are viewed as a kind of illegitimate, undemocratic shortcut used by sustainable development proponents. The New Hampshire Tea Party Coalition lays out this viewpoint when they say, “it is no secret that the attempt to implement the UN’s Agenda 21 “sustainability” plan through backdoor, unelected “regional planning commissions” is in full swing in towns and cities in New Hampshire and all over the USA.” Suggesting the councils are a “backdoor” insinuates a degree of illegitimacy into the proceedings.

The Valdosta Tea Party believes that the processes leading to sustainable development are just the first step in a complete overhaul of how the United States is governed. Speaking about a specific piece of legislation, they say “the new transportation law mandates Regional Government, and begins the fundamental change from elected representation to appointed Councils and Authorities with the power to tax and spend. Citizens Review Panels, and appointed boards with a few elected officials, [are] only window dressing.” The Whatcom Tea Party makes these concerns even more plain when they say “in essence, our local, state and national governments are ceding authority to an unelected external body. Do we really want to abandon 230 years of self-determination?” Again, the opposition here has little to do with the actual content of sustainable development action and much more to do with how it is being implemented.

Solution is Worse than the Problem

Even if these opponents believed the threats of climate change were real, their arguments suggest they still would be unwilling to embrace sustainable development. They fear big government too much and see solutions to climate change as requiring a bigger more aggressive government. These solutions then become a threat to the things held most dear by the opponents, such as freedom and democracy.

This fear is also echoed in the unease with which government bureaucracies are viewed.

Arguments on the websites suggest that opponents fear the country is witnessing a change to ever more powerful bureaucrats. Sustainable development is a big driver of the change because of its emphasis on land use rights. The Asheville Tea Party believes that “the scheme shifts control of land use from local government to dictates by unelected state bureaucrats.” The South MS Tea Party goes even farther claiming that “the plan calls for government bureaucrats to take control of all land use and not leave any of the decision making in the hands of private property owners.”

The most immediate problem in their minds is that the individual is going to have much less ability to do what they want with their land. They do not think that any government body should be able to make such dictates. However, these quotes also indicate that allowing bureaucrats to make these decisions is even worse than letting local elected officials do so. This empowerment of the bureaucrat that the opponents perceive to be present in these sustainable development actions represents a direct challenge to the American system of governance.

Superstitions 9.12 Tea Party Patriots lays out the mindset of the opponent. They say:

“No, Mr. Bureaucrat, I did not elect you and I did not give you power over my life.”
“No, I didn’t.” “You do not have that authority.” Try telling that to the IRS, the EPA,
the NSA, or your local Council of Government for that matter.

There is clearly anger in this statement. These opponents are arguing that bureaucrats should have less power. It would seem that some opponents believe there may not be any room for bureaucrats and technocrats at all. They hold up elected officials as the basis of legitimate government. Their opposition to sustainable development seems to be partly based in the belief that it represents an upsetting of the traditional government system that they uphold as ideal through the increased reliance on bureaucrats and appointed unelected boards.

Further, these opponents have significant concerns that the “western way of life” will be destroyed by these policies. They think people will no longer be able to live as they want. Instead they would be forced to act in accordance with the wishes of a few elites. The Lehigh Valley Tea Party writes that the ‘UN Agenda 21's policies center around driving people out of suburbs and concentrating them in cities where their freedom and independence can be eradicated more easily by the "We Know Best," Elitist, government officials.’ These opponents believe that everything from where we can live to what kinds of hobbies people can have will be determined on high. People will no longer have the freedom to choose what they want. Instead they will have to accept what is handed down from above.

These opponents do not necessarily think that everything is perfect. In various statements from above it is clear that they want to create a lot of change too. However, they are greatly opposed to the changes being mandated from on high. The Tea Party Manatee asks “who would willingly give up cars, private back yards, and freedom to hike in local forests unless they share a vision that's worth the sacrifice?”

NGOs

The lack of citizen voice also seems to be the motivating factor for expressed concern that NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are playing too large a role in the process. The Moore Tea Citizens argue that sustainable development is being led by ‘non-governmental organizations (or "NGOs") that are unelected but all powerful. They are controlled by a small minority in the community and will make you ask permission for anything necessary to live in the community.’ The concern over unelected people in positions of power can clearly be seen here. There is also a concern about elitism here. These opponents want the power to reside with the people. Anything that concentrates power in the hands of a few is something to be feared.

The concern about these NGOs being led by unelected people is echoed in numerous quotes on these organization’s websites. The New Hampshire Tea Party Coalition praises some residents who stood up to these NGOs saying:

In attempt to stop unelected leaders from non-governmental, foreign organizations from taking over their towns, brave residents took on the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission in Windham to stop the town from signing an agreement to participate in their organization.

It is clear that the opponents don’t just dislike the idea of these NGOs being more involved. There is also the belief that sustainable development is pushing this agenda to promote a vast reworking of how these NGOs are involved in governance. The Superstitions 9.12 Tea Party Patriots lay out their concerns as follows:

[I] read the Agenda 21 chapter on NGO’s. The instructions are concise and clear. It says quite plainly that the (every) national government is to include and enable non-governmental organizations into processes and funding. Read that last sentence over again and let that sink in. The UN is telling member governments to empower NON-governmental organizations, thereby going around the constitutional process of representative governing. In some cases they are giving these NGO’s taxing authority.

To sweeten the pot, the national (Federal) government creates grants for the NGO's to hire bureaucrats and to put regulations in place.

This group is putting forward the idea that the UN is seeking to undermine national governments. The underlying belief would seem to be that the UN is seeking to take ever more control of these countries. This means that the actions of these NGOs to promote sustainable development not only represent a threat to the American system of government, but also the very sovereignty of the country.

Globalism/Sovereignty and Outside Interests

This belief in a threat to sovereignty is fairly pervasive. The groups involved in this opposition are very patriotic. Their belief in American Exceptionalism has already been discussed. Anything they perceive as a threat to the United States needs to be dealt with quickly and with force. Sustainable development seems to fall directly into this category.

Several organizations just lay it out as bluntly as can be. The Spartanburg Tea Party says, "we strongly reject the U.N. Agenda 21 as erosive of American sovereignty." The East Bay Tea Party claims "the United Nations is actively working to gain control over the United States and its political system." The article in the American Thinker that is largely credited with bringing this issue into the public consciousness brings these issues to the fore when it says "Agenda 21 is a direct assault on private property rights and American sovereignty, and it is coming to a neighborhood near you."

Concerns about what these international sustainable development actions mean for US sovereignty has been an issue from the very beginning of the opposition. These opponents believe that the United States should be able to have complete control over its destiny. Anything

that tries to wrest control of the country away from its people must be opposed. Sustainable development is viewed by many opponents as a tool to cede control to a system of global governance.

The Highlands Tea Party raise these concerns saying that “Agenda 21 is the 21st century PLAN for a “New World Order” through GLOBAL GOVERNANCE.” The Riverside Tea Party Echoes this belief saying that “UN Agenda 21 grows at the local, state, and federal levels with new rules, regulations, executive orders, private-public partnerships, and declarations, accelerating the United States’ inclusion into one world government.” Tea Party 911, a national clearinghouse of information, goes a little farther in explaining the concerns in the statement “I believe this all is intended to centralize all financial and political power into the hands of the elite few who will be the government for the world, The UN.”

The loss of sovereignty that is perceived to be occurring is partnered with an increased role for outside interests in government. As stated many times before, the opponents believe strongly in a government of the people. No outside influences, be they other governments, corporations, NGOs, etc., should be involved in the decision-making of the people. These outside interests taint the whole process. Locals are no longer deciding local issues. They are being manipulated by outsiders to act for them.

The Valdosta Tea Party discusses this issue, saying “the initiative for a community to become a sustainable community almost always comes from outside the community.” This implies that were the movement to start from within it would be much more tolerable. However, because this push is viewed as coming from elsewhere, it is viewed as a threat to the self-determination of these localities. Tea Party Manatee hones in on this loss of local control saying, “each item is

linked to special interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and globalist advocates who have been given authority (by no elected official) to plan the regulations that will control our lives.” This obviously paints a very bleak picture of communities being able to govern themselves. This alone seems to be reason enough for the opponents to take issues with the sustainable development agenda.

However, guilt by association plays a strong role with this as well. You can already see that in the quote from Tea Party Manatee, but it is much more explicit in another quote from their website. It says:

Would you like a glimpse of the special interest groups that guide this Agenda? Its list of donors and supporters includes feminist, globalist, environmental, and welfare organizations.

It is bad enough that outside interests are exerting pressure on localities. What makes it even worse is that these outside interests are supportive of things that these Tea Party groups feel are detrimental. Associating these outside interests with these groups is a way of showing they do not reflect the local community.

In the minds of these opponents, these outside groups are pushing their agendas onto the localities and we have lost some of our sovereignty. They seem to believe outsiders are using manipulative tools, often grants, to pressure the localities to change. This is all taking decision-making out of the hands of the people and further perverting the American system of governance.

Consensus Process

One final way that the American system of governance is thought to be threatened is through the use of consensus processes in sustainable development adoption. It has become the norm for

sustainable development implementation to begin with public engagement. Typically these include some kind of consensus building exercises (Bunting, 2010; AlQahtany, Rezgui and Li, 2014). This process is viewed by many that promote sustainable development as absolutely essential. They view it as insuring that everyone is on board with what is happening.

The opponents of sustainable development do not see it this way at all. Right Side News, one of the national level publications, lays out their concerns about consensus as follows:

Once the goals are identified and organized, the next step is to develop consensus. Consensus is NOT agreement. Consensus is the absence of expressed opposition. Testimony by attendees of such a meeting reveals that objections are put off by the facilitator. The questions are never answered and the objections are never made public and all are dismissed, ignored, or discredited.

For them consensus is a way of quieting dissent and dismissing individual voices. The whole process is about getting a collective response. This runs counter to the idea of the individual's voice being paramount.

They also view it as another form of manipulation. It is another way for outsiders, and insiders, to push their agenda on others. One of the ways to promote consensus that has seen the most push back is the Delphi Technique². The New Hampshire Tea Party Coalition describes the manipulation present in this technique, saying that sustainable development practitioners 'are experts in the Delphi Technique. Just look at the list of their clients... and peruse some of their PDF Library on the art of persuasion using the old "create the crisis/provide the solution" recipe.' They seem to believe that the sustainable development practitioners they are talking about here should be discredited solely because of their connection to this consensus building

² The Delphi Technique is a specific kind of consensus generating process (Hsu and Sandford, 2007).

technique. The model itself is reason enough for it to be a problem. There is also clearly a lack of trust here. Anyone knowledgeable about consensus is going to manipulate proceedings.

Tea Party Manatee urges its followers to “know how to resist the consensus process. Ask questions, but don't always trust the answers. Remember, political activists, like self-proclaimed education ‘change agents’, have put expediency above integrity.” The consensus process is presented as problematic because it is seen as silencing voices that disagree, and risking trampling on the rights of the minority.

4.5.3 Individualism vs. Collectivism

While all of the above arguments play a role in the opposition to sustainable development initiatives in the United States, the biggest single driver of the opposition seems to be a belief that sustainable development represents a move away from individualism towards collectivism. One of the quotes above from the Highlands Tea Party clearly makes this argument. It suggests that sustainable development is trying to indoctrinate people to believe that the “group is more important than the individual.” Other quotes used above have made similar references to threats to individualism.

Finding the balance between individualism and collective wellbeing has been a difficult and persistent question since the birth of this nation and, truly, society itself. The divide between people who think more collectively and individualistically is one of the known drivers of cultural and political differences (Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman and Lee, 2008).

Americans tend to be more individualistic than citizens of other nations, though this is often debated (Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman and Lee 2008). We would rather focus on individuals independently pursuing their own wellbeing than try to create a collective

sense of wellbeing. This tension was in high relief in most rhetoric when the United States was engaged in the Cold War. Communism was, and still is, seen as an expression of collectivism. Meanwhile, the democracy and free markets of the West can be seen to be built on individualism.

A number of different aspects of the rhetoric of these opposition groups shows that individualism is at the core of what they believe in.

4.5.3.1 Individualism

As the Highlands Tea Party did above, a number of organizations make their belief in individualism being superior quite clear. The Greater Phoenix Tea Party Patriots claim that “our society is shifting from one that cherishes individual liberties and freedoms to one that is fully embracing collectivism.” They strongly believe that this is the wrong direction. They argue the United States, and every country, should be based on the promotion of individual liberties and freedoms. The East Bay Tea Party makes it clear how important individualism is: the “viewpoint [of sustainable development proponents] is completely anathema to the hard-fought values and principles this country was built upon -- liberty, freedom, individualism.”

One of national level opponents of sustainable development, Right Side News, explicitly takes on collectivism. It says:

“Social Justice” assures the right “to benefit equally from the resources afforded us by society and the environment” = equal distribution of wealth = communism. “Social Justice” assures that “every worker/person will be a direct capital owner” = dictatorship of the proletariat = communism. “Sustainability” means that “individual rights will have to take a back seat to the collective.” How about that? Individual rights don’t matter, and as you should know, “collective” = communism.

This quote is obviously calling out the trigger issues brought up earlier. However, this piece goes further and equates those issues to communism. Of most interest here is the fact that collectivism is equivalent communism in the minds of these opponents.

The importance of individualism also shows up in little ways through these organizations. When the American Policy Center, another national organization, says “you will be required to give up your individual freedom, your personal property and redistribute your wealth”, the language used is very important. They give away their preference for individualism by openly referring to “individual freedom”. However, their use of the personal, singular words “you” and “your” also makes it clear that this is going to interfere with our lives as individuals. How anything affects the individual is the standard against which everything is judged.

The South MS Tea Party makes this clear, saying:

My own thought is that every man and woman gets to be king and queen of their own land. It's an honorable and reasonable and satisfying goal to achieve. Today's leftists want to take that away from us. They want to be part of the bureaucracy that sucks up to the big government power in order to have for themselves a sniff of power over someone else.

The problem seems to be that the individual is losing their status and power to the collective.

4.5.3.2 *Freedom*

The ability of individuals to do what they want can also be called freedom. The proponents of individualism believe that people should be free to do as they please. This freedom of action is one of the foundations of Western society. The American people have long focused on freedom as one of their chief virtues. However, just how far this freedom extends has been a difficult question for that entire time. Throughout history there have been things that have been

determined to be off-limits by society. Societies have decided that individuals should not be free to murder, rape and rob one another without consequence. Most people can agree on this.

What is clear is that the opponents of Agenda 21 and sustainable development argue that any attempts to implement it will result in the loss of their freedom. The 24 Hour Patriots claim “most Americans are unaware that one of the greatest threats to their freedom may be a United Nations program known as Agenda 21.” Just a few paragraphs back a quote was used that came from the American Policy Center, but has been used all over the place, which states that the implementation of Agenda 21 will require people to “give up their individual freedoms”.

These opponents often place this perceived loss of freedom at the very center of their arguments. It crops up over and over and over again. The East Bay Tea Party claims that sustainable development adoption is “the beginning of the systematic destruction of freedom for every American citizen”. The Florida Panhandle Patriots reveal just how central this argument is when they claim “it is all about private property and whether we will live free or under the heavy hand of ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE”. For them their private property rights and ability to live free are what the whole argument is about.

The Greater Phoenix Tea Party Patriots lay out what they feel the choice is when they say sustainable development means “individual liberties and freedoms must be sacrificed for the good of the planet”. These groups seem to suggest there is very little that could convince them that they need to curtail individual freedom.

4.5.3.3 *Rights*

One of the ways that individual freedom has been guaranteed is through the promotion of rights. People, as individuals, are believed to have certain rights. The Tea Party groups often present

arguments about unalienable rights -- rights that do not depend on any human authority. These rights are usually presented as having been granted by God and thus cannot be trumped by concerns about sustainable development.

A different understanding of rights can be found in the idea of human rights. These are rights that humans have bestowed on one another. They do not have the same divine foundation. Rather, they were created by humans to serve their needs. In the eyes of the opponents of sustainable development, this means that human rights can be given, or taken away, depending on the whims of the government in power at that time. In their minds, this is not a true right. Some of the arguments on the tea party websites suggest there is nothing other than the unalienable rights that we have been granted by God.

Freedom Advocates created a chart that was used in several places within the movement and lays out the distinctions between individual vs. community rights. According to this source, individual rights are inalienable, as mentioned above. The government's job is to protect them. Community rights, in contrast, are created by the government, which can then change them at any time. This situation is presented as untenable. This argument often goes on to dismiss community rights as unviable. Community rights cannot, and should not, exist. Rights are not something humans can be involved in creating.

Freedom Advocates also lays out the discussion of unalienable rights quite clearly, saying:

“The dictionary meaning of unalienable rights has been corrupted. School children are no longer instructed about this most basic element of the Declaration of Independence. Leading liberty minded legal and “think tank” organizations often fronting the freedom movement, treat or label the seeking of unalienable rights protections as outdated. They argue a system of “civil rights” as the appropriate man-made replacement.”

Clear in the above statement is the intertwined nature of belief in unalienable rights and belief in American Exceptionalism. The above statement focuses on the Declaration of Independence as the place where unalienable rights are laid out. This feeling is echoed by the Tri-County Tea Party, which says quite plainly that “the founders understood the concept of inalienable individual rights, rights that necessitate the ability to own property, rights that are derived from our Creator and are above the reach of government. They wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to secure and protect those rights.” With this in mind, any threat to the idea of unalienable rights is also a threat to the American system. The very basis of this system can be found in these unalienable rights.

The Freedom Advocates lay out just how central these unalienable rights are to the United States when they ask, “can the American experiment in freedom continue without a foundation predicated on the notion that each person possesses a life that is their own? I conclude that without the political recognition of unalienable rights it cannot be assured that the political system will recognize that your life belongs to you.” In this argument, the whole American Idea is dependent on the recognition and protection of humanity’s unalienable rights.

Property rights are almost always among the unalienable rights held forward by these opponents. The right of individuals to hold and use private property is held up as of great importance. The Freedom Advocates makes this case when they say ‘the succeeding effort to abolish private property is the primary cause for the continuing collapse of freedom in America. George Washington warned; “Private property and freedom are inseparable.”’ This statement clearly shows the belief that private property is foundational to freedom and American Exceptionalism. In this argument, property rights are not something that should ever be questioned. Instead they should be viewed as the foundation on which we build everything else.

When something threatens these property rights, these people are going to speak up and fight against it. They see this fight being about ensuring that our freedom and unalienable rights are maintained. The opponents of sustainable development believe strongly that it, in the form of Agenda 21, is interfering with these foundational rights. The Kanawha Valley Tea Party claims that “the Agenda 21 plan openly targets private property”. The Moore Tea Citizens state that the goals of Agenda 21 are to “(1) erode Private Property rights and Individual Liberties; (2) expand government control over land use, water rights, and lifestyles”. These statements show that the opponents not only believe that sustainable development is a threat to property rights, but also that they think the proponents of it are specifically targeting these rights.

4.5.3.4 Control/Lack of Choice

One of the quotes above notes that one of the goals of sustainable development is to “expand government control.” This is one of the biggest trends found flowing through the literature of sustainable development opposition. The opponents believe that the real goal of Agenda 21 and sustainable development is to more tightly control humanity. The environmental concerns are just paving the way for governmental bodies to take control of what individuals can do.

This is the opposite of freedom. Within the free society imagined by the opponents, people are allowed to do as they please with very few limits. Any outside body that controls the actions of these individuals is unacceptable. Individuals should be in control themselves. Any diminishment of this self-determination is a threat to freedom and individualism.

Sustainable development and Agenda 21 are seen as just such threats. The opponents believe that what is proposed is not just a limiting of individual freedom. Rather, they argue that sustainable development is the beginning of a move to exert total control. The Asheville Tea Party claims

that “Agenda 21 is designed to control every aspect of human life on every square inch of planet earth.” The South MS Tea Party puts it even more succinctly, saying “Sustainable Development = Centralized Control over ALL Human Life on Planet Earth”. The Rainy Day Patriots echo these sentiments claiming that if Agenda 21 is passed, then “from the day you are born, every aspect of your life will be totally controlled by big government”.

All of these quotes make it clear how seriously these organizations perceive the threat. Sustainable development is not viewed as a minor inconvenience. Rather it is a threat to everything we hold dear. If it is allowed to go ahead, these opponents believe we will lose our freedom and essentially become slaves of the state. What individuals can do with their lives will be dramatically curtailed. They think a few powerful elites will wind up making all the decisions about what everyone can and cannot do.

The Jefferson County Tea Party lays bare their opinion that this is a few radicals that want to exert control over all when they say:

Basically, those that hold to this form of radical environmentalism believe that humanity is utterly destroying the planet, and therefore the goal should be to create a world where literally everything that we do is tightly monitored and controlled by control freak bureaucrats in the name of “sustainable development”.

The Villages Tea Party makes this viewpoint more clearly, saying “the ELITISTS will use the government to take your money, exercise more power and to control every aspect of your life”.

There is obvious anger in these statements. They are clearly upset that they may have their lifestyle changed by someone they don’t even know. They are also angry that some people feel they are better than others. There is a healthy strain of egalitarianism in this anger. No one

should be able to make decisions for others because we all are best able to make decisions for ourselves. No one knows what is good for the individual more than the individual him or herself.

At its heart this battle against increased control of people is an individualist argument. Any government action that requires adherence is going to be viewed as an increase in control. The fact that these acts would require adherence is limiting the individual in his/her choices. Even if sustainable development is a good idea, these opponents would argue it should not be implemented in such a way that people are forced to accept it. Anything that interferes with the individual's right to choose is wrong and should be done away with. This path leads to seemingly irreconcilable differences between proponents and opponents.

The Greater Phoenix Tea Party hints at these difficulties when they say 'those that promote the philosophy underlying Agenda 21 believe that human activity must be "managed" and that letting people make their own decisions is "destructive" and "dangerous".' The supporters of sustainable development do believe that changes need to be made. They think that, for a variety of reasons, the way humanity is acting is wrong and they want to change this. If it is not changed, then there are grave dangers that face humanity. In order to create this change, the most common tactic of sustainable development proponents has been to push forward restrictions on certain types of behavior.

The opponents recognize this and fear what these restrictions mean moving forward. The Moore Tea Citizens lay out their concerns by saying "Agenda 21 is a totalitarian comprehensive environmental program that, when fully implemented, will direct where you live, how much water you can use, and how and where you can travel." The opponents believe that these restrictions will create a much worse place. The Bayshore Tea Party asks "if you were to hear

that in the very near future the United States will have no privately owned property, no air conditioning, no dams, no paved roads, no way to correct rivers for flood control, no golf courses, no pastureland used for grazing, would you believe it?” They think this is the future that sustainable development holds.

4.5.3.5 Socialism

Socialism has long been associated in US political rhetoric with the loss of individual freedom (Hayek, 2007). Socialism is the political embodiment of putting the community ahead of the individual in decision making. A socialist system is based around trying to ensure that societal interests are put first, rather than ensuring individual’s interest are provided for. At its heart socialism is an economic system in which society owns the means of production and decisions are made collectively (Leone, 1986). This is the antithesis of the free market which is basis of capitalism. In capitalism, individuals pursue their own ends and theoretically everyone will benefit. So roughly speaking socialism equates to collectivism while capitalism relates to individualism (Hayek, 2007).

What is clear from the rhetoric of sustainable development opponents is that they argue sustainable development is nothing less than slightly veiled socialism. Right Side News states that “this project has everywhere and always been about socialism. They don’t even hide it too well.” The Tea Party Manatee believes that sustainable development “calls for a shift in public consciousness from the old nationalistic-free enterprise system to the new globalist-socialist paradigm”. They clearly associate sustainable development with socialism and locate this as in opposition to the free market. The presumed link between sustainable development and socialism is made clear by the Tea Party Manatee who say, “The answer is simple. Marxist economics has never worked. Socialism produces poverty, not prosperity. Collectivism creates oppression, not

freedom.” Socialism and collectivism are used as synonyms here. There is no distinction between the negative outcomes they produce.

The Gainesville Tea Party argues in opposition to sustainable development because they see it as a socialist threat to capitalism. They state that “the Agenda 21 and sustainability paradigm also rejects and undermines Adam Smith’s belief that mankind’s natural tendency toward self-interest, profit and self-improvement results in greater prosperity, opportunity.” This belief in the ability of the free market to effectively produce the most good is found throughout these groups. It is clear to see why when the capitalistic system is based on freedom to do as people please.

Agenda 21 and sustainable development do not always line up very well with the free market concept. There is a lot of talk about Public-Private Partnerships in the promotion of this idea. However, the Kanawha Valley Tea Party lays out just why this is unacceptable, saying that “in the world of business Agenda 21 is not a free market friend, preferring PPPs or Private Public Partnerships where the government decides which companies will receive tax breaks and are allowed to stay in business”. These opponents seem to dislike anything that interferes in the system of individuals acting on their own. They do not want the government to be involved if at all possible.

All of these quotes show the perceived danger of collectivist thought and action poised by sustainable development and laud the individualist, inalienable rights. Together they demonstrate how central the perceived danger from collectivism is to this whole argument.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

4.6.1 Individualism and Governance

From the discussions above a few things become clear. One of these is that the opposition has significant fears about the threat sustainable development poses to both individualism and the American system of governance. There are clearly other things in play here as well, but questions of governance and individualism seem to be among the most prominent.

This is particularly interesting because there is a strong correlation between the American system of governance and individualism. Dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville, there has been an understanding that the democratic system is deeply individualistic (Tocqueville, Mansfield and Winthrop, 2000). Democracy uses the individual as the ultimate arbiter of things. In a democratic society, society is made up of individuals pursuing their own ends.

With this in mind, the protection of the American system of governance, with all its myriad forms, represents another form of preference for individualism. When the opposition is speaking out against unelected boards and executive action, it is in part because these things are in conflict with the idea of all people as individuals deciding things. Those that prefer individualism as much as the opposition seems to believe that anything that takes decision-making out of the hands of individuals is problematic.

4.6.2 Individualism and American Exceptionalism

American Exceptionalism is another of the major concepts to come out of the above discussions. This too is closely related to individualism. Individualism is indeed one of the chief characteristics of American Exceptionalism (Lipset, 1997).

Surveys have shown that Americans are much more interested in individuals being able to pursue their ends than they are in allowing for all people to have what they need (Pew Research Center, 2012). This is just one piece of evidence that shows that part of what sets America apart from the rest of the world is its strong belief that individuals need to look out for themselves. This is the natural progression of the idea that the most important thing for a society to do is protect individual rights and freedom. This is the idea many of the opponents believe can be found in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Anything that would require people to help someone else represents an encroachment on those rights and freedoms and an encroachment on American Exceptionalism.

American Exceptionalism is also often defined by our adherence to the free market (Lipset, 1997). Our belief in capitalism is, for many, a foundational component of American life. Capitalism and support for the free market are really just more examples that individualism is at play in every part of this conversation.

American Exceptionalism can mean different things to different people. However, it often boils down to facilitating individualism. For many a threat to individualism is a threat to America and vice versa. The issues are always going to be linked.

4.6.3 Climate Change Denial

One of the few arguments made by the opponents that does not come back to individualism, is that there is no climate change crisis that necessitates the proposed change. Many of these opponents simply do not believe there is a problem that needs to be solved. They see serious flaws in the logic of climate change and refuse to accept that it is happening.

Climate change is such a big part of why sustainable development is being pushed. So, if a large portion of the population doesn't believe in it, proponents are going to have a hard time getting it enacted. Even if there were almost no sacrifices required to implement sustainable development, the lack of need would mean it probably would not be enacted. In the eyes of opponents, it is now just a waste of time and money.

Even if they did believe climate change is an issue, it is hard to know what it would take to convince these opponents that there is a genuine need for action. They would still have to weigh the perceived benefits against the perceived losses. The bar needs to be pushed quite a distance in the minds of the opponents to make the equation work out well for sustainable development opponents. They would have to be convinced there are fairly catastrophic results from inaction.

It is hard to imagine just what could get these opponents to change their minds so much.

However, it is a huge hurdle in overcoming this opposition. These opponents are always going to be convinced that we shouldn't go down this path as long as they don't perceive a real need and this need outweighs the cost. Many of the opponents will surely never believe there is a real need.

However, it may not be impossible to convince some of these opponents of the need for sustainable development even if they do not believe in climate change. There are several mentions in the literature to how they are not opposed to environmental issues. They simply don't believe climate change is a legitimate environmental issue. If sustainable development could be more focused on these other more "legitimate" environmental concerns, such as clean water and air, there may be more traction. This would of course require something of an uncoupling of sustainable development and climate change and that could be counter to the

purpose of the whole project. Either way, these opponents are not going to be willing to accept any kind of action unless there is a documented need.

4.6.4 Individualism

The question then becomes what action will be acceptable once the need has been determined. How do you flip that cost/benefit analysis in favor of sustainable development? This is where the knowledge that these groups adhere to pretty strict individualism comes into play. This individualism takes many different forms, but it always seems to be present. The idea that individuals should be able to do largely as they see fit is found throughout. This makes it unclear if there is ever a place for environmental legislation.

Every piece of environmental legislation requires a collective mindset. At its core all environmentalism is focused on what is good for the group as a whole. This means it will always be about curtailing the actions of a few in order to benefit others. This perspective seems to be irreconcilable with the opposition. Evidence points to the opposition believing that it is more important to maintain individualism over everything else.

This individualism is based not just in what is good for society, but is wrapped up the foundation of humanity. These opponents believe that we were granted rights by whoever our creator is and to curtail these rights is untenable. To do so would be out of line with how society was built to function. Because of the divine nature of these rights, there is also no room for compromise.

Were this individualism believed to be a human creation, there might be more flexibility.

However, as it stands, there is almost no likelihood that it will be in play any time soon.

Additionally, this individualism is based in a theory of small government. There are few, if any, restrictions or regulations that the government can put into play which would be deemed

acceptable to the opponents. They believe that government needs to stay out of the lives of individuals wherever possible. Any incursion of the government is likely to result in a great deal of fightback from these groups.

This means that it is hard to imagine they will ever find environmental policy acceptable. Even if they accepted the need for such policy, which they don't seem to, there is little to suggest they would support any type of mandatory action to rectify it. Any environmental initiative that is going to get their support has to be voluntary. Even voluntary actions that are supported by the government are seen as interference in individual decision-making. Additionally, it probably has to be created locally and not be connected to outside groups. All together this paints a difficult picture for those that believe that legislation is the best way to foster environmental action.

Sustainable development that is voluntary, completely local and non-governmental is a difficult thing to imagine working. Even as individuals start to find financial benefit in moving toward more sustainable behavior, this is often because of government action. Voluntary action is always going to mean that some people don't accept the change. Usually these non-adopters are those that benefitted from the previous circumstances and thus are likely to attempt to perpetuate it. Systemic change of the kind that sustainable development is seeking to create is going to require a significant majority of people and organizations to change. For many proponents, piecemeal action is simply not enough.

Further, the idea of action or legislation being entirely local is hard to imagine. In this day and age, most local governments are taking their lead from other places. They are all sharing ideas with one another. So just what it means for an action to be locally driven is up in the air. It is

unclear whether opponents would be ok with newcomers to an area driving action or if any organization can be involved in any capacity.

Lastly, it is hard to imagine a group that is powerful enough to enforce most of the changes that sustainable development advocates without that group being governmentally based. National and international level environmental action is going to require some level of government action.

They are the only ones big enough and interested in creating this kind of change. Further, it is likely that sustainable development needs the enforcement capacity that government offers.

All this leads to a point of severe pessimism about the ability to engage these opponents in sustainable development in a way that is ok with them. The only potential path forward seems to be in small-scale, locally-based initiatives that focus on non-sensitive aspects of the sustainable development agenda. However, that is exactly what the opponents have taken issue with here. So perhaps there is not much room for agreement to be found at all.

5 A DEEPER DIVE INTO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OPPOSITION: A CASE STUDY FROM ROANOKE COUNTY, VA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As opposition to Sustainable development was spreading across the country several years ago, Roanoke County in Virginia wound up being heavily engaged with the issue. Other localities dealt with this conflict and then had it melt away. It remained a hot button issue in Roanoke County for much longer than most localities. Just up the road in Albemarle County, VA, the opposition won the battle to remove ICLEI and controversy quieted down. In the other direction, opponents of the New River Valley Livability Initiative made a scene. But then they too moved on to other issues.

Roanoke County's lengthy conflict meant that most of the arguments that opposition groups from around the country used all had time to bubble up in one place. It wound up making this particular conflict a tremendous place to dig into the broader discussion. It is an excellent window into the rationale behind the national opposition because there are so many data points to draw from. Most contexts do not touch on every aspect of the conflict, but Roanoke County's conflict was wide ranging and thus touched on most of the big issues at play.

Our purpose here is to tell the story of the opposition to sustainable development in Roanoke and show how a preference for individualism over collectivism was a major driver in this conflict. Almost certainly, every person in the opposition had a slightly different reason for their stance. However, there were several trends that seem to be the most prevalent. Amongst these, a strong belief in the importance of individualism seems to be the most important. It informs many of the

other reasons for opposition in addition to being an explicit explanation for the choices made as well.

5.2 BACKGROUND

There seem to be several reasons that the conflict lasted so long in Roanoke. Understanding the background of Roanoke County and its environs is crucial for being able to understand the more specific story here.

Roanoke County is nestled into the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia. Its natural resources are perhaps its biggest draw. Many people choose to live there because of the natural beauty present. With this in mind, municipal leadership has historically been fairly active dealing with environmental issues. For example, it signed up for ICLEI's³ help limiting emissions. The county also created RCCLEAR, or the Roanoke County Citizen Leaders Environmental Action Roundtable, as an advisory group. Further, the comprehensive plan for the county was built with sustainability in mind. However, all of these moves in favor of environmental responsibility would eventually be seen as problematic by the opposition to sustainable development.

Roanoke's position amongst its neighbors also played a role in this discussion. It is closely associated with Virginia Tech, a major research university just down the road. This meant that the county is connected with the forward thinking research, and the associated grants, happening there. The connection is a source of some of the environmental legislation in Roanoke County. This would later serve as a source of problems as well.

³ Local Governments for Sustainability

Further, Roanoke is situated close to several early adopters of sustainable development opposition. To the southwest of Roanoke, Donna Holt, a fairly prominent property rights activist, was speaking about the danger posed by sustainable development. A couple hours to the Northeast, Albemarle County was one of the first localities to sever ties with ICLEI and was one of the first places where this conflict reached a boiling point. Lastly, the American Policy Center, one of the most vocal and commonly quoted sources of the opposition, is just a few hours away too. This physical proximity means that there was significant cross-fertilization between the different efforts in opposition.

Across the country, the Tea Party was the biggest driver of opposition to sustainable development (Frick et al., 2015). So it only makes sense that the Roanoke Tea Party would play an important role in this conflict. The Roanoke Tea Party was built with the same momentum that sparked the movement as a whole. It was both connected to and distinct from this national upheaval. As with many of their brethren, they took on the issues surrounding sustainable development with purpose and energy.

There are several things that make Roanoke County's struggle the perfect place to dig into the Tea Party's opposition to sustainable development. First and foremost, they made their opposition to sustainable development a central issue and kept it that way for an extended period of time. Many of the other areas that had such conflict resolved it quickly. ICLEI was often cast aside soon after the opposition voiced its opinion. In Roanoke, the Republican members of the Board of Supervisors did not bow to the wishes of the opponents and a long battle ensued.

In large part because of the length of this conflict, there was a massive amount of content created. The local Tea Party group kept a well-maintained website. They posted an almost daily

blog for a while. Not every post touched on environmental side of things, but it was a common source of posts.

This conflict was also a source of content for the local newspaper, The Roanoke Times. The most prominent of their columnists wrote several lengthy articles negatively referencing the opponents to sustainable development. This only served to further enflame tensions. But it did create even more conflict for us to analyze.

5.3 METHODS

In order to get a grasp on what was driving the conflict, several sources were used to triangulate the story. First, the official news record of the Roanoke Times was analyzed. Within this data source, there are columnist pieces, news articles, editorials and letters to the editor. The columnist pieces tend to be strongly in support of sustainable development. The letters to the editor were in both directions. Overall, there were an incredible number of articles that touched on ICLEI in the Roanoke Times during the timeframe of this conflict. It had by far the largest number of articles connected to these issues on Factiva database.

Next, we examined the rhetoric the Roanoke Tea Party was putting out on their website. This included over 60 blog posts and articles that touched in some way on the sustainable development conflict. Some of these were in-depth pieces on the issues at hand. Other pieces were brief and tangentially related. The language and arguments of these pieces was examined.

This website also allowed for the group to link to a lot of other resources. We analyzed these as secondary data points. Further, there is an additional website, called Virginia Green Menace, that is closely related to the work done by the Roanoke Tea Party. The connection between these two

groups is hard to ascertain, but they overlap at many points. For instance, Virginia Green Menace gave the President of the Roanoke Tea Party an award for environmental stewardship. Further, the Virginia Green Menace seems to focus its energies on the Roanoke area. This resource is analyzed as a secondary source as well.

Lastly, we conducted two key informant interviews with leaders in the opposition. These semi-structured interviews were focused on building upon the understandings built through analysis of the website rhetoric. They were designed to provide a more in-depth understanding of what the argument at play actually was. Together all of these sources provide us with a significant amount of data to build upon.

5.4 THE MANY FACETS OF OPPOSITION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ROANOKE COUNTY

The conflict in Roanoke County took many forms. Over time, the opponents to sustainable development had many targets that would rise and fall: windmills, UDAs, and ICLEI, RCCLEAR, and other projects. Each of these targets was related to sustainable development in some way.

5.4.1 Wind Power

The first point when this conflict reached the public consciousness was over proposed windmills in the area. Public officials were deep in conversation with a private energy company to put up windmills in portion of Roanoke County that the energy company thought would work for the production of wind energy. The Roanoke Tea Party jumped on this as a serious problem. They were adamantly opposed to the building of these windmills.

On their website, the Roanoke Tea Party wrote “a windmill project is a supreme waste of resources (as they are wildly inefficient), dangerous (they catch fire, kill birds etc) and funded primarily with your tax money (stimulus money at work). The county has a duty to vote no on this ordinance and protect the property rights of nearby residents and the county as a whole.”

There are several big reasons for the opposition listed here. The waste of money and resources and threat to property rights are refrains that are heard again and again in later discussions. They are clearly also present even in these early exchanges.

In the opening salvos, we also see that the transparency of the process is also an issue. The Roanoke Tea Party asks, “[w]hat County officials, to include non-elected officials, have met with Invenergy, when have they met, are there minutes to those meetings, and was the ordinance discussed with Invenergy and deemed acceptable to them?” The opponents are clearly concerned that things are not being done in a forthright and democratic manner. The idea that sustainable development will result a breakdown in how government should work is not isolated to this one example. The opponents think there is something undemocratic about backroom meetings with unelected groups and corporations and they believe sustainable development will only increase these activities. This refrain would only grow.

There is also the belief that there is no need for these windmills to be built anyway. The website goes on to say that “[e]ven if you accept the false premise of global warming, the reduction of carbon emissions touted here would have no impact on the global warming.” So, first, the rationale for needing windmills, Global Warming or Climate Change, is false so we don’t need them. Second, it wouldn’t do any good anyway. The opponents go on to say that there are “well documented environmental risks involved in this project.” They claim the environmental high ground here. These opponents are the ones who really care about our environmental well-being.

This fight would eventually end with the County not approving the proposed windmills at this time. It was a fairly short skirmish that resolved quickly. However, it would serve as the ignition point of the conflict. The themes that showed up here would show up throughout the rest of the conflict. Property rights, waste of effort, climate change denial and threats to democratic process are consistent refrains from this point forward.

So the opponents were eventually able to at least delay the arrival of windmills to the area. This first small battle was the start of bigger things to come. The, at least partial, victory over these windmills gave them the political momentum they would roll into a much bigger discussion. It would move from this particular issue to the more broadly defined sustainable development found throughout various policy fields.

5.4.2 UDAs (or Urban Development Areas)

After the skirmish over windmills, there are many courses the conflict could have taken moving forward. The interest in things could have waned after the windmill issue took on less prominence. Or there could have been a shift to other environmental policies related to alternative energy. Or any number of other outcomes could have occurred. However, the place the conflict went to next is enlightening to some degree.

The state had recently mandated that counties and cities develop Urban Development Areas (or UDAs) in order to promote higher density living (VA Code §15.2-223.1). This is a pretty standard smart growth tactic. The idea is that more densely populated areas mean that resources can be centralized and fewer resources in general will be needed (McCormack, 2008). However, it would soon catch the ire of some Roanoke County residents. The Roanoke Tea Party explained it as follows:

For now over 60 communities have to submit plans to create these high density housing areas. Roanoke County must, per the state, submit plans this year to move towards this goal, which is what the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday is about.

They were not the only locality to take issue with this state mandate. It became a big issue in Roanoke just like other localities. The Roanoke Tea Party understood early on that this was connected to the windmill issue and the broader sustainable development conversation. They would say about UDAs, that they “are part and parcel of the sustainable development plan”.

As the Tea Party ramped up their opposition to this mandate from the state, new reasons for this opposition would come to the surface. In support of their opposition, they claim “these new regulations essentially encourage the building of high density housing and discourages the building of single family homes.” To many in the opposition this means that UDAs are threatening to the traditional model of American homeownership and, thus, the American way of life. There is also a question here of whether the government should be involved in things like this that are essentially about individual choice. The opponents believe people should be able to live wherever they wish. This belief in the need for people to be able to act as individuals rather than as part of a collective will become a louder refrain soon.

The opponents of UDAs do not necessarily believe that people will be forced into urban areas. Rather, they believe that “many will voluntarily leave and move closer to the city.” This is to them at least as nefarious as strict regulations that would force people to do so. The government is prioritizing the needs of denser areas over the needs of more rural areas. This is obviously problematic for the rural population and thus angers a certain group of the population.

However, one of the main reasons for the opposition to UDAs comes up in another quote. The Roanoke Tea Party says that “it is essential that vital planning decisions for communities stay

local, and not in the Capitol, where they can easily be manipulated by nefarious special interests.” The opponents want as many decisions as possible to be made at the local level. As can be seen from their quote, they believe this is the way to ensure that decision making is as untainted as possible. The inclusion of outside interests into the discussion automatically taints whatever conclusion comes.

It was at this point that the local media became interested in the conflict. The Roanoke Times reported that “[a]fter hearing eight or so speakers warn of eroding property rights and a dangerous insinuation of the U.N. and ICLEI (formerly the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) into local governance under cover of the state mandate, the supervisors wanted nothing to do with it” (Editorial Staff, 2011). From this you can see that the opponents were able to mobilize their support and convince the Board of Supervisors that they should opt out of this state requirement. This victory led to another increase in the momentum for the opponents of sustainable development.

One of the quotes above shows that the opposition to sustainable development is the tie that binds all these smaller issues together. This last quote shows that it is tied into problems with ICLEI and the UN which will become crucial moving forward. The UN and ICLEI are intricately tied into this discussion of sustainable development and serve to move this conflict forward.

5.4.3 ICLEI

The Roanoke Tea Party soon made it quite clear they had designs on changing the county’s relationship with environmental initiatives more broadly. The next individual target was ICLEI. They stated outright that, “one of our goals is to remove Roanoke from the International Council

for Local Environmental Initiatives⁴ (ICLEI).” This conflict over the relationship of Roanoke County to ICLEI would be quite lengthy and over its course numerous arguments were made as to why this connection should be severed.

The local newspaper, The Roanoke Times, picked up on this conflict soon after it started. In a piece published on July 27th, 2011 they laid out the basics of the conflict when they said:

A political group that claims credit for helping persuade the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors not to adopt new urban development planning rules last month was back before the board Tuesday. This time, about 10 speakers, many mentioning ties to the tea party movement, put pressure on the board to disaffiliate from an international organization the speakers said helps promote those types of regulations...apparently at the urging of the Roanoke Tea Party's leadership and Web page, which predicted an end to the connection if people expressed their concerns, speaker after speaker called on the board to abandon its \$1,200-a-year affiliation with the group. (Lowe, 2011)

The opposition had clearly mobilized their people again around a new issue.

One of the primary reasons that can be seen above is the cost for the county to associate with ICLEI. The Roanoke Tea Party (RTP) would ask “why are we paying \$1200 a year to ICLEI to get this kind of ridiculous regulation?” This was clearly a waste of money in their eyes. This money could be better spent. However, this quote also shows that the work that ICLEI is doing for the county is contentious.

This is expanded on when the RTP wrote that it is “property rights and the rule of law that are really the crux of the ICLEI issue.” These opponents believe that “the tactics used by ICLEI to create a sustainable county invariably will infringe on property rights and ‘encourage’ people to live in ‘clustered developments’.” These opponents felt that ICLEI was really taking away their foundational right to do what they want with their own property. This was viewed as absolutely

⁴ At this point, the organization mentioned was actually no longer called this. They kept the acronym ICLEI, but changed their official name to Local Governments for Sustainability.

untenable. They believed that ICLEI is one of the drivers of “a comprehensive plan that eventually will force rural landowners off of their land.” They even go so far as to claim that ICLEI’s goals are “antithetical to property rights.” These groups believe this right to own and control property is of vital importance. This again goes back to a belief in the importance of individualism. They are really arguing that individual rights should not be curtailed even if it behooves the collective.

Further, there are even more questions to be asked about the legitimacy of this relationship. The Tea Party sees “evidence that shows the agenda of ICLEI and their ties to the United Nations and other groups that have agendas well beyond the environment.” From this quote, it would seem that if ICLEI were only about environmental issues it would be more palatable. The fact that ICLEI, and sustainable development as a whole, ties in other societal processes, in particular the assumed socialist tendencies of the United Nations, makes it problematic. But this quote also seems to imply there is nefariousness about the whole arrangement. It is not what it claims to be in the eyes of these opponents.

The connection between ICLEI and the UN is a significant issue for the environmental organization. The opponents question the legality of partnering with such an organization. They argue that in “signing this agreement, they made a pact with a United Nations proxy group, that certainly qualifies as a ‘governing body...inconsistent with the Constitution...’” This whole connection is unconstitutional in their eyes. These opponents hold up the Constitution above all as the ideal political document. The exact reasons for this are unclear but there is an undertone of American Exceptionalism and appreciation of the recognition of our inherent rights found there. Whatever the reasons, anything that is perceived as going against the Constitution in any way is

viewed as dangerous and subversive. The opponents also just don't like the UN very much. Anything associated with them is likely to be problematic.

As soon as this opposition arose, it was greeted with disdain by many of the supporters of sustainable development. The fight would quickly become ugly. One of the chief protagonists in this conflict was Dan Casey, a columnist for the Roanoke Times. He began calling out the inconsistencies he saw in the logic of sustainable development opponents and dismissing their concerns almost as soon as they sprang up. Around the time of the first opposition to ICLEI at the Board of Supervisors, Casey wrote:

Somehow the Tea Party figured out it was part of Agenda 21, our sneaky, "UN-sponsored effort to destroy property rights." That's what their website says. As you know, this scheme has been the U.N.'s highest priority for years. We had thought Roanoke County was the perfect dupe from which to launch a nationwide takeover. (2011)

The antagonism and sarcasm present in this statement would be found in many of Casey's subsequent posts that touched on the issues at play. His antagonism really served to fan the flames of the opposition.

Unlike the previous fights over windmills and UDAs, the opponents were not to achieve immediate success. Instead they found that the Board of Supervisors was not particularly receptive to their ideas. The Board makeup, four Republicans and one Democrat, might lead you to believe that they would jump on this opposition agenda because of the Tea Party's connection to the Republican Party. This was not the case. Three Board members refused to sever the connections to ICLEI. The one Democrat was joined by two moderate Republicans to ensure that the county maintained this connection.

The opposition would not take this laying down. Instead they made it one of the central issues of the next election cycle in 2014. The Roanoke Times noted that during the Republican primary debates, “they spent about 90 minutes navigating seven questions that touched on topics such as the county budget, taxes, contributions to ICLEI and education” (Casey, 2013). The \$1200 spent on ICLEI was now put on par with these mainstays of local politics. Further, this excerpt was from an issue of the paper that came out almost two years after the original conflict broke out over ICLEI. The opponents were able to maintain their momentum over that entire time.

Not only did they maintain their relevance over this time, they were actually able to replace 2 of the candidates that voted to keep ICLEI. One of these new board members put the ICLEI question back on the top of the agenda in one of his first meetings (Purdy 2014 a). The conflict over ICLEI would come to an end a few short months later when the Board voted to dissolve their relationship with ICLEI. The Roanoke Times wrote of June 12th of 2014 that “the political fight over ICLEI membership was long and arduous, and ultimately ended with a vote by majority of the board”. This is one month short of three years into the conflict. The opposition had finally achieved victory.

5.4.4 RCCLEAR

During this extended battle over ICLEI, the opponents to sustainable development would not limit themselves to this one issue. They had a number of targets during this period. One of these targets was the citizen advisory board for environmental issues, called RCCLEAR (Roanoke County Citizen Leaders Environmental Action Roundtable). In May of 2013, The Roanoke Times published an editorial from one of the opponents to sustainable development titled “Evidence ICLEI is taking over as clear as RCCLEAR” (Gregory, 2013). This title gives away

the connection that opponents found to be present between these two projects focused on environmental issues.

One of the biggest issues the opponents had with RCCLEAR is that it was claiming to make a difference that they did not believe in. They believe that all of the work done by this board is fundamentally flawed. Of particular interest to the opponents were the outcomes that RCCLEAR claimed to be responsible for. At one point, the Roanoke Tea Party says “restating the methodology doesn’t make the claim that RCCLEAR saved 200 tons of carbon emissions by handing out fliers any less ridiculous.” The opponents find this idea just laughable.

In addition to having problems with how the group sets about determining its impact, the opponents also just think many of the numbers don’t make any sense. At one point they say “RCCLEAR should amend their report findings to the correct reduction in the County’s carbon footprint from the baseline report of 1.82 million tons! It should read 1.5%, not 3.3%!” It is of course an open question whether they are finding these supposed flaws because they don’t believe in the work to begin with or their opposition is being driven by such perceived flaws. Either way, there is a significant lack of trust.

They also seek to discredit the work of RCCLEAR by implying that their work is connected with people who have a financial incentive in showing global warming is real. They make their sentiments clear when they ask “That his job [...] depends on him promoting the dangers of global warming should be telling enough, but he is arrogant enough to think his public ‘dog and pony show’ in support of ICLEI/RCCLEAR would not be examined.” The fact that this gentleman makes a living doing research on these issues makes him unqualified to comment on it because of his perceived bias. It is also clear through this statement that they are tying

RCCLEAR to ICLEI to show how bad it is. They try to tie all of these projects and initiatives together to show how pervasive the threat is. They do this again with RCCLEAR when they refer to it as “a group that partners with the Cool City Coalition.” Now both of these projects are tainted.

Even after their concerns, the opponents didn't necessarily find the suggestions of RCCLEAR to be bad in and of themselves. They were more concerned with the fact that it was being funded in part by government money. This is made clear when they say on their website that “there is nothing wrong with the message of the website other than one simple fact. It was paid for with our tax money. When did it become government's job to assume I am incapable of making my own decisions on what lightbulbs to buy?” This statement quite simply shows that they really don't think the government needs to be involved. These should be individual choices and the government has no place in this decision-making. It would be best to allow individuals to just gather their own information and make their own choices.

After the new Board of Supervisors took office in 2014, it quickly became clear that things would be changing for RCCLEAR. As it became clear that the county was going to cut ties to ICLEI, the advisory committee wondered what their role could possibly be moving forward. They would not have access to the data that had enabled them to undertake so much of their work. The Roanoke Times went on to report on June 12 of 2014 that “chastened by a Roanoke County Board of Supervisors decision to cut access to carbon emissions data, a volunteer citizen advisory committee has elected to disband” (Purdy 2014). This was yet another victory for the opponents of sustainable development. At this point they had prevented a wind farm from coming in, convinced the county to go against the state on UDAs, caused the dissolution of the

connection between the county and ICLEI and caused the disbanding of RCCLEAR. It is not a stretch to say that they had been incredibly successful.

5.4.5 Other Targets

In addition to these main targets that received the brunt of the attention, the opponents had several lesser targets. These targets received varying levels of attention. It is hard to know why some targets got more energy and some less. They all seem to be connected with sustainable development and it may just have been a matter of which fights the opponents thought they could win or simply which conversations came up first.

One of the lesser targets was the Partnership for a Livable Roanoke Valley (PVLV) and the plan they were creating, the “Livable Roanoke Valley Plan”. The Roanoke Tea Party on their website claims that while they were “focusing on removing ICLEI from the County, they (PVLV) have been busy putting together a regional plan straight out of Agenda 21 over at the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission.” With this simple statement the opponents were able to tie everything back to Agenda 21 and its perceived negative ramifications.

Virginia Green Menace claimed “a new socialist utopia for the Roanoke Valley is likely only a breath away as the [Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission’s] climate change arm, the Partnership For a Livable Roanoke Valley, enters their Livable Roanoke Valley Plan’s final development phase.” Developing a connection between these initiatives and socialism is a common tactic to show how bad they are. To further cement how bad this plan would be, Virginia Green Menace urged people to ask how this will “affect your property rights and liberty.”

Another group, Roanoke Valley Cool Cities Coalition, would come to be painted with this same brush. This is not surprising given that the RVCCC is focused on limiting greenhouse gas emissions from the area. But the Roanoke Tea Party connected them with the Partnership for a Livable Roanoke by saying “no surprise, the RVCCC (Roanoke Valley Cool Cities Coalition) is one of the focus groups” included. The RVCCC is also referred to as one of the “ICLEI groups pushing this radical UN agenda.” Now all of these groups are considered radical and it is just assumed they have a connection with the UN.

The Comprehensive Plan was also a consistent target of the opponents. However, it is something of a mystery why they never made a significant push to change the plan like they did with their other efforts. Their rhetoric on their Roanoke Tea Party website included the Comprehensive Plan as a significant problem. They argued that “since the current Comprehensive plan is rife with Agenda 21 concepts, we also urge you to engage local leaders to review and revise the Comprehensive Plan to protect the environment and property rights.” Their particular complaints seemed to focus around how it promotes urban living and seemingly discriminates against rural areas.

They urged their supporters to “notice how much of the county will be designated as Conservation or rural reserve.” They are worried that this plan will limit what people are allowed to do with their rural properties. They claim that the plan is intended to make “wide swaths of the county eventually off limits for human interaction.” While the plan itself only says that people will be encouraged to live in “clustered developments” and higher density areas. The opponents want to know “how will you encourage clustered development? How will you discourage people from not living in clustered development?” They are worried that this encouragement may actually be more forceful than it appears.

The Virginia Green Menace, in the heart of the struggle against ICLEI, called on its support saying, “we need to carry the fight on and convince this Board of Supervisors to sever ties with ICLEI, rewrite their Comprehensive Plan and protect our property rights from the Green Menace. This not only affects us here in Roanoke, but can light a fire for freedom in other areas.” In the eyes of the opponents to sustainable development, this fight was about so much more than making Roanoke safe from outside influences. It was about a much broader fight to protect our rights and freedom.

They view this as a huge fight with absolutely vital importance. With so much significance in this fight, no target is too small. Anything that infringes on our freedom is unacceptable, no exceptions. With this in mind they even have concerns about the local greenway. Citing a scenario where eminent domain was used, Virginia Green Menace asks “how close are property owners in the Roanoke Valley to a similar scenario as the bike lane / Greenway spreads like a wildfire through the valley?” Even something as seemingly innocent and positive as a greenway is perceived a potentially significant threat to these opponents.

5.5 UNPACKING REASONS BEHIND THE OPPOSITION

Each individual opponent of sustainable development no doubt looks at the issue a little bit differently. However, there do appear to be themes that permeate the arguments. The key arguments are discussed here: climate denial, exceptionalism, governance, and individualism

5.5.1 Climate Denial

There is perhaps no bigger place to dig into the opposition than with how they perceive there to be no need for any kind of change to be made. The supporters of sustainable development use a number of arguments to highlight how it might benefit society. However, the main driving force

behind most of these supporters is their belief that sustainable development will help halt climate change. Many of the supporters would argue that these measures are absolutely necessary for preventing this environmental catastrophe from happening or at least limiting its negative consequences.

The opponents simply do not believe this to be true. They could not be any more clear about how this threat is contrived. The Roanoke Tea Party website says straight out that “man made global warming is a hoax.” They go even further and claim that “the man made global warming threat is being pushed by companies with a direct financial stake in alternative energy sources.” Not only do they simply believe the threat to be false, they think it part of nefarious plot to give more control to a few companies.

Bill Gregory lays out how central this issue is to the conversation in a Roanoke Times Editorial from May 13th, 2013. He says:

It really all comes down to this: Do you believe man-made CO2 emissions are a major contributor to global warming? If you have bought into this theory, being presented as fact by global-warming alarmists, then **ICLEI** and this agenda is for you. For everyone else who is skeptical (now known as climate-deniers), you need to be concerned. Educate yourself and those you care about concerning the agenda. (Gregory, 2013)

This statement makes it very clear that if you are wise, and thus skeptical about climate change, then you will necessarily become concerned about the work of ICLEI and sustainable development more broadly. The only reason you could reasonably support such work is if you believe the “global warming alarmists.”

This same discussion reared its head in the interviews. Subject A, a leader in the local opposition, talked about his problems with the discussion by saying:

My biggest issue with the whole green movement right now is the fact that the carbon dioxide issue isn't really an issue. But there are a lot of environmental issues that are issues. There really should be time and money working on [them]. We chase around this carbon dioxide monster. Which is ridiculous. And we have convinced half the population that, if we don't fix carbon dioxide in the next five years, we're all going to be awash in seawater, which is again kind of fanciful.

This particular leader of the movement is not discrediting everything to do with environmentalism, they are simply concerned about the type of threat being targeted. Subject A believes that by focusing on global warming, environmentalists miss having a chance to face the real issues that need support. They believe the whole threat from climate change is far-fetched and hard to believe.

Subject A would go on to say further that:

Not only does it not make sense from an it's not happening perspective. But it doesn't do any good if the United States implements every green energy resource idea that everyone has ever come up with, if China and Russia and all the rest of the world keeps polluting and doing the things they are going to do. So we're cutting off our nose and we are all still going to die anyway.

So here we can see that even if the threat were perceived to be real, we should not be doing much about it because our actions alone cannot fix things. This is a slightly different perspective, but it essentially comes back again to the question of need. Why do we need to cut our emissions if it won't fix the problem? So it doesn't really matter whether the threat is real or not. Either way, there would have to be big changes in circumstance before it is considered a necessary policy. As it stands right now there is no need to take action to combat climate change. It is either not happening or there is nothing we can do about it.

5.5.2 American Exceptionalism

The idea in the quote above that Americans cannot allow themselves to damage their own interests for the benefit of others is a part of the American Exceptionalism that runs through the opposition. The fact that the United States will never be the most impacted country by climate change means that adopting sustainable development is always going to be a stretch. Climate change, the main driver of sustainable development, is at its core about global problems. Thus, sustainable development as a response to this global threat is always going to be focused on the international community. This seems like it is always going to make some portion of the opposition uneasy.

Those that believe strongly in American Exceptionalism have difficulty placing the United States in this larger dialogue. Proposals that purport to fix problems that affect the United States, such as water and air pollution, are much more likely to garner significant support. Proposals that benefit the rest of the world do not resonate very well with these opponents. A Roanoke Times letter to the editor lays this dissatisfaction bare when it says “Not only did the RCCLEAR leaders reject reasonable alternative resolutions, they also damned themselves by displaying their true dedication and allegiance to a worldwide ideological agenda - an admission that constituted the core of adversaries' repeated allegations” (Beyer, 2014).

These opponents seem to believe what best benefits the United States should be the only thing playing a role in policy-making. To do otherwise is deemed to be passing your “allegiance” to something other than the United States. This is completely untenable.

Not only do the opponents view sustainable development as really giving in to an outside agenda, they believe it to be harmful to the America they find so exceptional. The Roanoke Tea

Party proclaims “If you keep electing people beholden to these ridiculous ideas and schemes that are antithetical to the basic premise of this nation, we will soon not have an America any of us recognize.” Further, this group goes on to claim that “the stated goal of the Agenda 21 crowd is to redistribute our wealth so that we are more like a 3rd world country.” They clearly view this legislation as a threat to the country.

The size of the threat opponents see is laid bare when the conversation turns to individual rights (a topic we will explore more fully, below). The Roanoke Tea Party says that “because of our emphasis on individual liberties, anyone can thrive and pursue their happiness. We don’t want to spread the wealth around. We want to give everyone their God given right to pursue their individual goals.” Now the United States becoming more like other countries is no longer a threat just to our monetary well-being, it is a threat to something even more sacred. These rights and liberties are the very core of American Exceptionalism. Interview Subject B claims “you are born with inherent rights. That’s a concept that American civilization is founded on, which is completely different from the European model where rights are granted by a king.”

So liberty is part of what makes America so special in the eyes of these opponents. When America broke away from Europe it was about setting up a system of inalienable rights. Interview Subject B would go on to say that “the Declaration of Independence explains the government’s responsibility is to protect our rights. That’s the only responsibility it was given.” This is what makes America special and it is exactly what is under threat from sustainable development. The opponents believe that if sustainable development were enacted, it would result in a curtailment of individual rights and a change in the responsibility of government. This is reason enough for the opponents to mobilize and take action.

5.5.3 Governance

The question raised above about the role of government is another consistent thread through this discussion. Interview Subject B said earlier in our conversation when asked for the reason behind their opposition that “it is not necessarily the activities of sustainable development. It’s more or less the government taking authority that it doesn’t actually have to force people to comply with it.” So clearly this question of proper governance is important. The statements above make it very clear that many of the opponents prefer a small government with very restricted capabilities.

The opponents also seem to be strong believers in the form of government set out in the American Constitution. They believe in a very strict definition of what is constitutional. When asked whether there is a role for the federal government in environmental policymaking, interview subject A says the Constitution “doesn’t give them any power to do anything on the environment.” A would go on to say that “that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t have something on there...you should amend the Constitution to allow it.” So in A’s eyes there may be a role of the federal government, but you would have to change the Constitution to make it legal. Interview Subject B agrees and says “if you want to have that kind of a society, well then you have to amend the Constitution.”

A lays out the reason he believes there needs to be strict adherence to the Constitution when he says:

There needs to be something in writing. If you let the EPA just run willy-nilly and do whatever it wants to, the president can just give them free reign to write whatever rules they want to. You have taken out the legislative initiative out of it. You just took the ball about 50 yards down towards tyranny. Now it is just the president can do what he wants to and he can have the EPA do what they want. So there are no constraints. There's no constitutional authority. It's a mess.

So essentially the opponents worry that if the Constitution becomes flexible, then anything will become permissible. With this as their background, they hold strongly to the tenets set forward in the Constitution and use it as their foundation for many arguments.

Virginia Green Menace demonstrates this tactic well when talking about one piece of legislation. They note that “since these contributors are professors and lawyers, you’d assume they’ve read our Constitution and might’ve noticed how the Covenant conflicts with our Constitution and our rights.” This same kind of argument is specifically applied to this case in an editorial to the Roanoke Times which states “there are questions about the constitutionality of local governments being members of ICLEI. Article 1 Section 10 of the U.S. Constitution prohibits states or their subdivisions from entering into any “treaty, alliance or confederation” with a foreign political organization. ICLEI Global is a foreign organization” (Gregory 2012). This line of reasoning about the unconstitutionality of sustainable development is repeated countless more times.

These opponents also believe that this threat is being propagated by a change in the way we are governed. They are strong believers in the preeminence of democracy and proclaim how much they want power in the hands of the people. These opponents have found that sustainable development proponents often use what they feel are shortcuts around this democratic process. The Roanoke Tea Party asks “how do the citizens feel about planning that creates non-elected boards, councils and regional governments to enforce their policies, which actually diminish the power of the officials they elected, severely reducing citizen input into policy?” They see a proliferation of dangerous unelected boards deciding things.

They want the power to remain in the hands of elected officials as much as possible. They strongly believe this is how citizens will get the most input into policymaking and thus prevent tyranny. The fact that planners are not elected but are responsible for making decisions is a problem. The opponents also worry about new structures of governance that further complicate things. Regional governmental bodies are one of these threats. The Roanoke Tea Party responds to these bodies by saying “Regionalism is one way Agenda 21 is already being implemented in this country. Regionalism separates you from city, county and state government, where you (for now) still have a voice in your government.”

Of further importance is that when the decision-making is not kept in the hands of politicians and not focused on the written plan of the Constitution, the government is going to be able to exert the kind of control over our lives that the opposition seems to fear is at the heart of sustainable development. Interview subject A explains that “from our perspective a lot of the sustainable development is really about the control issue versus the actual fixing the environmental issues.” This reasoning is echoed throughout the messaging of the opposition. Virginia Green Menace wrote that “under a ‘green’ agenda they hope to achieve their goal of centralized control and planning of every facet of society.” Virginia Green Menace also states that at “the root of the problem are the socialists who want to use a green agenda to control land and thus our lives.”

The Roanoke Tea Party buys into this as well. They claim that one particular piece of the promotion of sustainable development in the United States, Executive Order #13575⁵, “is the final push for total control from the Federal Government to enforce the UN’s Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development.” They also claim that the purpose of ICLEI “is to create another

⁵ Executive order #13575 was issued by President Obama in 2011 and established a White House Rural Council to guide policymaking for rural areas (Executive Order 13575, 2011)

control mechanism on global society”. They think that sustainable development is going to mean a lot more government control. They seem to be quite fearful of this control.

It is important to note in this that the government is the agent most often exerting control.

Interview Subject B explains a bit about why this is problematic when they claim:

The problem with government having control is it's going to be at the pleasure whoever controls the government. If that person...controlling the government couldn't be trusted to make decisions freely without the control, how can we trust them in charge of the thing that's now going to force us into certain activities?

The opponents clearly do not trust anyone, least of all the government, to be able to dictate things that they must do. The only way they can see to it that you don't wind up with a person in control that shouldn't be there is by limiting how much control is in that position. This is part of why they believe in strict constitutionalism and keeping decision-making in the hands of elected officials.

All in all, these opponents are very concerned with how the United States is being governed now. They see the Constitution being constantly challenged and misinterpreted and the governmental structures they believe to be best being subverted. This results in a government they seem to think is too big with too much control. They seem to believe that sustainable development is part of a bigger plot to subvert the American system of government and replace it with one that controls every aspect of their lives.

5.6 INDIVIDUALISM VS. COLLECTIVISM

While these previous themes played out in the debate, there is a more central thread that runs through everything. A preference for individualism over collectivism can be found just about everywhere in this discussion. Many of the opponents see sustainable development as a move to

subjugate the individual to the collective and they find this to be unacceptable. There are several different areas where this belief in individualism comes through.

5.6.1 Governance and Individualism

The above discussion of governance is great place to see individualism come to the fore. The preference for democracy is a signal that the individual is to be deemed the most essential component of our society. The opponents seem to believe that when society itself becomes more important than the individual you are on the path to tyranny. They also want governing decisions to be based at as small, or local, a level as possible. This keeps the individual as close to the decision making as possible. This is a big part of why they oppose regionalism; it interferes with local governance.

It is also worth noting that when something conflicts with our Constitution, this goes hand-in-hand with a conflict with our rights in the minds of opponents. As was made clear in the discussion of American Exceptionalism, these individual rights are what make America so special. Our government exists only to protect individual rights in the minds of many of these opponents. These rights are considered unalienable and come from a divine authority. For many, this is where the predominant belief in individualism comes from. It is understandable that a person would consider the individual most important if they believe that a divine authority made it so.

As we saw above these opponents are also quite worried about the government obtaining too much power and exerting too much control. The government is then existing for things other than just protecting our rights. Further, control equates to individuals not being able to do as they please. Interview Subject A laid it out well, saying that “if there is a continuum of total anarchy

and total control, I want to keep it closer... somewhere between the middle and anarchy.” This idea of “total anarchy” is essentially absolute individualism. It is comprised solely of individuals doing as they please. This is here presented as the antithesis of control. While this is the statement of one person, it represents the belief system of much of the opposition and shows how fears over control and changes in the governance structure of the United States are also connected to a preference for individualism.

5.6.2 Explicit Individualism

The previous examples show the message of individualism is found in a lot of the rhetoric, even if it is explicitly about something else. However, the messages are not always hidden. Often the preference for individualism is explicitly present. It can come across both as a preference for individualism and as an opposition for collectivism. Either way, these messages come through often and in many different places.

Interview Subject A was perfectly happy to agree that a preference for individualism is a big part of their opposition to sustainable development. They would go on to say that “collectivism is when your individual needs need to be subverted... That's really why there is such a conflict in politics today... It comes down to this argument. There is a real yearning on the part of a lot of the people to have individual liberty and then people want the government to fix everything. Well, you can't have individual liberty and [have] the government fix everything. It comes down to that.”

Virginia Green Menace applies this specifically to the conflict at hand, saying “Agenda 21's OBJECTIVE is communally and collectively owned and managed land. This is communism.”

The use of the term “communism” is a way to shut down conversations. It is clear to these

opponents that anything that can be tied to such a weighted term should just be dismissed. It is not much of a stretch to see how this ultimately comes back to collectivism. At its core, communism is a form of collectivism.

Virginia Green Menace keeps banging away at this by quoting The Post Sustainability Institute saying “Communitarianism. Balancing your individual rights with the 'rights' of the community. This is being pitched to you as the new enlightened form of political discourse. You are 'selfish' if you insist on your individual rights and freedoms. This is the justification for Agenda 21-Sustainable Development.” Such a conversation has no merit in the minds of these opponents. Those individual rights or freedoms cannot ever be sacrificed. In their minds, communitarianism, or collectivism, is a completely inappropriate sacrifice of individualism.

This is made explicitly local when Virginia Green Menace speaks about the Plan for a Livable Roanoke Valley saying, “[v]isions are being created by this PLRV exercise that will be used to create a Livability Plan that we believe will likely be filled with all sorts of collectivist/communitarianist action items.” It is clear this is unacceptable. No government or collective group should be able to coerce anyone into acting any particular way. This can be seen when Virginia Green Menace speaks about how “your county wants to encourage some choices and discourage others.” No group should be seeking to impact individual decision-making, but particularly not the government.

Interview subject B touches a bit on why this is so important. They claim that “strong, healthy, prosperous individuals are the building blocks of the best communities. If you have downtrodden, weak, poor, helpless, disgruntled individuals, you don't have the building blocks for a strong group.” For these kinds of individuals to be created, B argues that you need to

empower people. Leave individuals alone and they will figure things and create powerful societies.

How this preference for individualism presents itself varies depending on the situation. Often, particularly in this conflict, it comes down property rights. A claims “this is my land and I paid for it and I should be able to do what I want to it as long as I'm not hurting any people around me.” This interview subject strongly believes in the right of the individual to do as they please. Instead of the burden being on the individual to prove that their actions should be done, the burden is shifted to the community to show when it is being harmful. Until this point is reached, anything is acceptable.

Even when the actions of an individual infringe on another, there is not any room for the collective to take action. Instead these opponents are strongly in favor of individualized punishments for transgressions. They think that decisions that affect the collective are dangerous. When asked how environmental transgressions should be dealt with, Interview Subject B states that “you have the ability to coerce them through the civil court system regardless. That existed from day one and it still continues.” In other words, you should sue them. Interview Subject A makes it even clearer. They say “I think the first thing would be...if company A uses a pollutant and they got caught doing it and I am hurt by it, I should sue them. I sue them into oblivion and then anybody else [who] uses [is] going to get sued.”

All of this is about how individualism is really the only acceptable way to set things up. The collective should not be involved in anything other than protecting the rights of the individuals. There are very few cases in which government intervention in the lives of individuals is permitted and it is hard to nail down what these might be. Even when individuals interfere with

the rights of others, this is to be dealt with in a case by case manner. It is hard to imagine something that would require action that affects the whole community.

5.6.3 Freedom

“Freedom” is another term that is often used in defense of individualism. Opponents to sustainable development believe that individuals should be free to do as they please. Freedom is at its core a belief in individualism. It is about how the burden is on others to show that an action is harmful before it should be stopped. For the most part, people should be allowed to act as they wish. This reverence for freedom is part and parcel of the American narrative. We broke away from England because we were not free. We proclaim that “freedom isn’t free.” It is a crucial component of American culture and it is at the crux of opposition rhetoric.

In response to sustainable development, the Roanoke Tea Party claims “if you value your freedom, this is something you have to get off the couch and start fighting.” So they clearly believe this conflict to be about freedom. It is perceived to be under threat from sustainable development legislation. Sustainable development is viewed as a sneaky way to coerce people into acting in a particular way. These opponents believe that there is almost no reason to put any limits on individual actions.

The Roanoke Tea Party reiterates the need to protect freedom when they ask, “Is there any doubt that Agenda 21 is antithetical to America’s concept of freedom and property rights?” These opponents clearly do not see any doubt in the conversation. This new plan for sustainability is perceived as a direct assault on individual’s freedom to act as they please.

Interview Subject B lays out just one instance of what this freedom means when they say, “it’s the freedom to open up a restaurant and do business with people without someone involving

themselves and telling them how they are going to do it.” So no individual or government should get involved in the running of a business. How an individual chooses to run their business is up to them. They really do not see any reason for anyone else to become involved in this. If these opponents do not see a reason to regulate the food industry, they are not likely to see any need to regulate environmental impacts.

Clearly these opponents prize their freedom to do as they please. They offer almost no exceptions to this. Individuals are presumed to be able to do whatever they want until they affect someone else. But even this is not all of the argument. The bar for what this impact must be on another is quite high. Not just any impact is deemed to important enough to limit individual freedom. Only egregious impacts on others might warrant a change.

5.6.4 Rights

“Rights” emerged as another common theme in arguments about sustainable development. Both interview subjects made it clear that rights only apply to individuals, not collectives. Subject B makes this very clear when they say “first of all, we don’t have collective rights. We have individual rights that are recognized by the government, but not granted by the government.” This is quite important to understand in the opposition to sustainable development. These opponents believe that individual rights are so vital that any government limitations on rights should be considered illegitimate.

If you are starting from this point of absolute individual rights, it is really difficult to fathom what kind of collective action can be justifiable because collectivist efforts will always impinge upon the rights of some individuals. Interview Subject A helps then articulate where the problem is. They say, “if you really look into it, the agenda isn’t about saving the planet. The agenda is

about property rights and power.” Well, if that is what sustainable development about, it is always going to be problematic. Anything that interferes with individual property rights is unacceptable, not matter the collective good that might come from it.

Property rights are one of the most common threads through this entire conflict. These opponents view property rights as one of the unalienable rights that government cannot interfere with. They believe there may be some room for eminent domain, but this is very limited. A couple editorials in the Roanoke Times put property rights at the head of the conversation. In the May 13th issue of 2013, one editorial read “if you don’t know what U.N. Agenda 21 is and are concerned about property rights, personal liberty...and future transportation choices, you should probably research it” (Gregory 2013). This was a reiteration of a point made by the same author in an editorial from December 12th, 2012 (Gregory 2012). At that point, the author claimed that “localities across the country that have voluntarily implemented Agenda 21 plans have seen an erosion of private property rights.”

The infringement on these crucial individual rights is completely unacceptable. The preservation of these rights is more important than any benefit to the common good that could be created by infringing upon them. They came from the divine and should be protected at all costs. The Roanoke Tea Party echoes this message saying that “Roanoke County should now sever ties with ICLEI to ensure our rights aren’t usurped by a UN sponsored non-governmental organization.” This statement makes it sound rather stale. In reality they feel a great deal of anger about it. The Tea Party says in a different place that “it’s difficult to remain composed while reading this, as the abject disregard for private property rights that are central to our way of life is quite startling.” There is clearly deep feeling there.

So if you have a problem as a community, how should it be solved? The Roanoke Tea Party lays out the correct path, saying “there is only one right approach for a community to come together to discuss and solve common problem: open discussion, honest debates and votes, and above all, a full concentration on the protection of private property rights as the ultimate decider.” This really lays down the fact that property rights are the most important things to consider. Collective action can only be appropriate if it protects these rights.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Individualism is a theme that runs through the opposition to sustainable development in the Roanoke County. We conclude this essay with thoughts about moving forward with local sustainable development conflicts such as those described here.

5.7.1 Room for agreement

There are several points where advocates for SD might find common ground with opponents. First and foremost, throughout this opposition there was a distinction between the opposition to the government actions and the desire to protect the environment. The opponents constantly refrain that they too want to protect the environment. This would imply that there is common ground to be found somewhere. Opponents did not object to the outcome of protecting the environment; they mostly objected to the means by which the protection was to be implemented. There should be some kind of action that benefits the environment that is considered beneficial on both sides.

What exactly this common ground might look like is unclear. However, it would seem that this common cause would be much easier to find if the focus were on local environmental quality issues that do not tie into the broader conflicts, such as climate change. Since environmental

initiatives are so often based on broader trends and need to be based on the current scientific consensus, it is unclear what kind of purely local project could occur. Local stream and park cleanups might be doable. However, we have seen in this conflict that even strictly local projects, like the Greenway, can be tied back to other sinister plots. Even the most tenuous of connections is enough for the opponents to condemn. Further, the value of purely local efforts in the face of global threats, such as climate change, is debatable.

The place where real collaboration seems possible is with regards to holding major companies accountable. Both environmentalists and the grassroots opponents to sustainable development seem to have a desire to hold corporations more accountable. The opponents may tend to be more pro-business, but this does not translate into pro-corporatism. Rather, these opponents seem to fear the kind of power that corporations have in the same way they fear the power that governments possess. Time and time again their concern about public-private partnerships came up. This desire to keep the power from being too centralized in corporations seems to be something that everyone can agree with.

Just how a project that focuses on these common threads would come about is very unclear. It probably could not come from traditional channels on either side and it seems likely that corporate interests would strike it down. However, there remains some hope because common ground does exist.

5.7.2 Intractable problems

Intractable problems are those that have become sustained over many years and where the issues have become seemingly unresolvable (Burton, 1987, Bar-Tal, 2007). There do seem to be some of these types of problems at play in this conflict too. The primary one of these is that no

universal environmental initiatives seem plausible. A project is going to be deemed to be unacceptable if it is not completely local. Even a heavily contextualized project that comes from an outside perspective is going to be counter to the individualism the opponents love. By very definition, anything universal is going to be a collective effort to change the behavior of a lot of individuals that all come from different backgrounds.

According to the individualism perspective, there should be few, or even no, bounds on what individuals can do. Any limits put on individual behavior must be placed there voluntarily or at least with a very high threshold of proof of need. Well, no one knows how to get this proof. So it really has to be voluntary for the opposition to be ok with it. In the case of Agenda 21, even though it is voluntary, it is still deemed unacceptable. So there really cannot be incentives or disincentives. Any environmental action has to be an individual choice made without interference.

When someone does overstep their bounds, the opponents believe it should be dealt with on an individual case-by-case basis. Any laws that seek to do more are necessarily going to infringe on individuals who were not part of the original case. This, like so much else, is unacceptable. If someone interferes with the rights of another, then that person should be taken to court. So, if you poison your neighbor's water, that neighbor has to take you to court and there is still no place for a universal law against chemical pollution. If you were to try to institute such a law you would be shouted down as interfering in the rights of other individuals.

One of the other big intractable problems is the disagreement over climate change. Many environmentalists would argue this is the chief threat that needs to be dealt with. However, the opponents do not think it is a problem at all. Many go even farther and want to discredit any

project that seeks to deal with climate change at all. At this point, they not only oppose anything that has to do with climate change because they don't believe there is a problem, they also oppose it because they view it as a ploy to give the government more power and weaken individual liberties.

These seemingly intractable problems close the door on most of the hope for collaboration. The work of environmentalists seems almost unfathomably difficult if they have to have something these opponents can agree with. Any environmental plans that require action are unacceptable. Any plans that encourage one type of behavior over another are unacceptable. Any plans that are part of broader science or based on a theory of environmentalism would also be unacceptable. Any plans that deal with climate change are completely unacceptable. There is just not much left.

5.7.3 Final Thoughts

Every planning conflict is a learning opportunity for stakeholders (Norton 2005). Conflicts inevitably result in the uncovering of perspectives that often remain hidden. As the conflict rises, both sides are required to explain their positions and the reasoning behind both sides is made clear. This particular conflict is a lens into just why some people oppose environmental initiatives. As time goes on, just what this conflict means will become more clear. One thing is clear now though. The conflict between individualism and collectivism is crucial to the specific struggle of environmentalism.

Environmental issues almost universally require collective responses. Climate change cannot be solved by the actions of a few towns. The same is true of chemical pollution, water and air quality and deforestation. All of these require broad collaborations or legislation that is targeted at the issue broadly. These problems necessarily require behavior modification of at least a few

people. Environmental reform requires change and these opponents are not ok with anything that mandates change. Further, it is hard to imagine that voluntary action is really the way to solve these massive, complex problems.

Individuals acting alone just do not have the capacity to make substantial changes that will impact the environment. Yes, some voluntary measures have shown degrees of success. However, the problems continue to mount and there does not seem to be much hope of these things just turning themselves around. Instead, intentional, mandated action is necessary. What this action is remains in flux, but it is not going to be simply asking people to change their light bulbs.

Even when things are completely voluntary, as was the case with much of the RCCLEAR material, the fear that it might become mandatory someday is enough to put people off of it before then. Just the smallest inkling of an ill connection is enough for an idea or project to be discarded. Each project has to be absolutely untarnished to be above reproach and even then perceived connections can be the death of it.

This opposition is not new to the fight over Agenda 21 and ICLEI. However, it was reenergized and become more vociferous through new communication channels. These conflicts grow and fade and the reasons are unclear. However, there should be some expectation of these kinds of conflicts around sustainable development and environmentalism moving forward. There are now, and will be for the foreseeable future, a number of individuals who believe that any environmental action will interfere with their rights and freedom and must be prevented.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The media and search trends earlier combined with the Roanoke County case study go some way to showing that this conflict has dissipated to some degree. However, the question remains about what it means for sustainable development and the environmental movement going forward. It is tempting to think that because the conflict has come to a close we can close the book on this issue. However, we would be wiser to see what can be learned from this roadblock. This research has been an attempt to come to grips with what is driving the opposition in this conflict in order to see how it can inform other contexts.

6.1 WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED

6.1.1 Individualism

First and foremost, we have focused on the importance that individualism played in the opposition. It is clear at this point that the divide between those that prefer individualism and those that think in collective terms is a central theme in American politics. It is not surprising that it would come up in the discussion of sustainable development as well.

Going back to Hayek's definition of Individualism from the beginning can help confirm the connection. Hayek (2007) claimed "the individualist tradition [has] created Western civilization" (p. 73). It should also be noted that he, much like the Tea Party, holds up Western civilization as the best possible society. Further, he defined individualism in much the same way as the Tea Party has in this conflict. For starters, the Tea Party has focused their rhetoric on how sustainable development challenges the right of individuals to private property. Hayek (2007) noted that there were dangers to interfering with "private ownership of the means of productions" (p. 83).

Hayek (2007) was also opposed to "all types of 'planned economy,' whatever the end of planning" (p. 84). At its heart, sustainable development is an attempt to plan out a new system in

order to answer the needs of our society and planet moving forward. This is completely unacceptable to Hayek, who holds up the free market as the only way forward. The modern-day opponents of sustainable development make the same connection between the free market and individual freedom. They do not want anyone else planning what is acceptable for them.

He goes on to claim that “individuals should be allowed, within defined limits, to follow their own values and preferences” (Hayek, 2007, p. 102). This is about the clearest expression of the importance of individual freedom you could find. It resonates precisely with the Tea Party’s emphasis on rights and freedom in their opposition. The opponents claim again and again that the only legitimate purpose of government is to protect individual rights. Hayek echoes this by saying that guaranteeing individual freedom is “the state’s legitimate function, outside of defense and protection of its citizens” (Jones, 2012, p. 63).

Just as the opponents claim, Hayek (2007) worries that, if government becomes too big, “in the end somebody’s views will have to decide whose interests are more important” (p. 113). We see again and again how Hayek’s vision of individualism and fear of collectivism are found to be present in the Tea Party’s opposition to sustainable development. There are places where differences can be found, but the connections are clear. Individualism is at the core of this opposition. It continues to be a refrain that resonates strongly in a certain part of American society.

Even as this particular conflict has ended, this individualism can be seen in the increasing growth in libertarianism. A larger and larger portion of the American populace finds the idea of severely limited government attractive. This can be seen as it is manifested in the early parts of the 2016 Presidential campaign. The Right seems to be moving farther to the right. There is increasing distrust of anything associated with the government among a certain population. Hayek’s

thoughts on limiting the government's role in the economy, and life in general, remain as relevant as ever. Individualism and, conversely, Collectivism are at the core of much of the modern political landscape.

6.1.2 Other Things Learned

Similar to, and indeed connected with, individualism in this discussion is the strict

Constitutionalism of the opposition. They consistently believed in a strictly literal reading of the Constitution that severely limits the power of the federal government. This interpretation was often presented as necessary in order to protect individual rights and liberties.

However they came to feel this way about the Constitution, the opposition's interpretation makes national-level environmental initiatives hard to push ahead. Several times references were made to the belief that if we, as a country, want an Environmental Protection Agency, we should do it lawfully by amending the Constitution. With this requirement for national action, it is hard to imagine any kind of comprehensive environmental policy that would not run into the same issues.

Further, Climate Change Denial also played a significant role in this and likely will for the foreseeable future. At the bottom line, many of the opponents do not see any reason for action to combat climate change. They seem to view it as a ploy to enact legislation that enables more government control. Such a big disagreement on where the problem lies is obviously going to be a problem until it is resolved. Without agreement on a destination, it is hard to imagine we can pick a route everyone will agree on. Additionally, there is even a question of whether this dismissal of climate change is based in an understanding that it will require a collective response. Knowing that such a response will be required may be driving some opponents to refuse to acknowledge that a problem exists.

This question of climate change denial has been an issue for a while now. However, this particular conflict really saw that disagreement take on a different tone. There was a significant amount of anger in the response of opponents here. It was at least in part an emotional response. This anger had not been a particularly big part of the conversation before and it is hard to know how much of that anger remains. But, the emotional nature of the conflict is something that needs to be noted.

The fact that this was a conflict that was heavy on emotion as a whole may be part of why it was as powerful as it turned out to be. It captivated the imagination of quite a few people when it was at its peak. However, this peak did not last very long. The research into search and media trends suggests that after 3 years the opposition had kind of faded away. Those individuals that were involved are not likely to have changed their minds about the issues. But these issues are not being trumpeted on nearly the same level they were before. Is this brief, almost violent opposition based in emotion something that more environmental actions can expect to face in the future? It is hard to know, but it seems likely.

What complicates this even further is the interesting mix of grassroots activism and top-down control in the opposition. This occurred during a time when the country was going through a political upheaval due to the popularity of the Tea Party Movement. This movement as a whole, and the part of it that dealt with sustainable development, was somehow very grassroots and driven nationally. There was a fascinating mixture of energy from above and below. It is hard to know when or if we will see another moment that mixes the two energy sources so well.

This situation made the communication networks endlessly intricate. Being an internet driven movement to some degree, the flow of information was massive. It was easier than ever before to share information and attribution remains hard to determine. Each community is taking up the

issue locally and lending their support to the national campaigns against sustainable development. But, it is also possible that the community level actions are being driven from above. Who is coming up with the ideas and driving them is hard to determine and it is thus hard to know what it would take to replicate such an action.

Lastly, the differences in how localities dealt with the conflict should be noted. This was a national movement against sustainable development that manifested itself in many ways. Some localities never saw the conflict at all. Others had it become a significant issue for an extended period of time. Further, the targets of the conflict also varied greatly across localities. This makes it very hard to know exactly what people will take issue to in the future.

It seems that this conflict took place in a fairly unique moment in American history. Right as the climate change issue is reaching a point when activists are seeing some success, the small government activists of the Tea Party seize the national spotlight and use the burgeoning power of the internet to spread their message far and wide to engage the emotions of a group of individuals who see a world changing in ways they think are very problematic to oppose sustainable development initiatives. While this moment may never come to pass again, there is still lots to glean here about the how local opposition can engage with big issues and how individualism remains a significant force in this country moving forward. As the environmental movement moves forward, climate change denial, strict constitutionalists and believers in individualism will likely remain hurdles. It is also likely that the change in communication channels will make these conflicts more complex to understand and foresee.

6.2 GAPS

There are undoubtedly many unanswered questions after this research. First and foremost, while we attempted to look a national perspective as much as possible, more case studies are necessary

to better understand the trends more broadly and the specifics in other places of engagement. The one case study here helps to frame the discussion. However, because each community dug into the issues differently, it would be quite enlightening to know how other communities dealt with the issue in more depth. Just from this one case it is clear that context is really important in understanding the local level issues. For instance, the strong leadership of a few people in the Roanoke Tea Party helped make this case what it was. It is impossible to know what would have happened without this leadership.

With this in mind, our research focused heavily on how the leadership was thinking and acting. We did this because we thought we would find a more comprehensive picture of the opposition's argumentation this way. However, it would be fascinating to be able to delve into the thoughts of the followers as well. To a large extent, these others are why the story became a big deal. If it had been the leaders acting alone, they could have been dismissed as insignificant. Because they were able to mobilize a larger group, suddenly they became a force to be reckoned with.

Discovering just why these supporters took up the cause would be revelatory.

Figuring out how to capture the thoughts of these more passive supporters would be difficult. However, it is clear that more interviews would benefit this research. Having only two key informant interviews is a weakness here. The most vocal leaders were heard, but it is unclear who we missed that has an important perspective to share. Whether these additional interviews are with leaders or followers, there is probably something more to be learned.

Our research also would benefit from a better idea of just how many people are engaged in this issue. We have limited knowledge about just how prevalent concerns about sustainable development are. We know that there were 10-15 people that spoke at the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors meeting about it. We also know that it was an issue in the next election

cycle in both Roanoke and nationally. But it is hard to tell, both locally and nationally, how much support these opponents had.

All that being said, perhaps the biggest gap in this research is the inherent difficulty of determining motivation. We were able to look at a lot of external indicators to try and determine what is going on in people's minds. However, fully grasping even one person's motivations is nearly impossible. Multiply that by thousands and we will never know the full depth and breadth of people's reasons for opposition.

Further, our analysis makes the tacit assumption that there is a fairly logical explanation for this opposition. Given the strong emotions that are clearly in play here, the real explanation may be much harder to grasp. It may be that fear of change plays a much bigger role than we understand. Or there could be a religious component that is being downplayed. We did not find these to be particularly evident. However, they may be playing a vital role under the surface in a way that is not entirely rational. All we, as researchers, can do is analyze the reasons they put forward and then try to extrapolate to the reasons they leave out. It is a method that will always be incomplete.

6.3 NEXT STEPS

There are myriad different directions that future research can go. Perhaps the most interesting of these routes would be to tie this outbreak of conflict and opposition into previous outbreaks. This kind of opposition would seem to be part of a long tradition of small, or even anti, government activism. The John Birch Society played a small role in this conflict, but it would seem to be directly in line with their historical tradition. To go further back, it would be interesting to see if you can tie this into the Know-Nothing movement and other small government, anti-elitist movements from the past. Even recently, the preference for individualism may be tied back to

Cold War tendencies. Much of the opposition seems to be of an age that the Cold War was an ever-present force in their formative days. Is this important?

This also leads to the question of why people prefer individualism. Research suggests there are significant differences in individualistic and collective thought patterns in different cultures (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2012). There are all sorts of research to be done in terms of how individualism has changed in the United States over time. Further, attempting to determine what might lead people to prefer individualism could be a very fruitful vein of research. There would be all kinds of ramifications if we could know what in our formative processes or situational differences is responsible for such beliefs.

It should be clear at this point that the internet had a significant role in creating such a dynamic conflict. Much of the conversation occurred online and the internet allowed for information to be shared incredibly quickly. Further, social media seemed to play a significant role in organizing the opposition. However, just how the internet changed this conflict could use some more study. This has the obvious connection to learning more about how the internet is going to play into future conflicts, both environmental and otherwise.

There are other more tangible questions to be answered. One of the biggest of these is just how many other environmental conflicts can be broken down to the question of individualism vs. collectivism. Given the seemingly collective nature of so much environmental legislation, it would be shocking to find that this kind of conflict has not taken place before and will not occur again. The more we dig into these motivations, the more we can learn to accommodate, or at least anticipate, these concerns.

There are further practical questions about just what impact the victories over the sustainable development have had. Have we seen significant increases in emissions from counties that have had significant opposition? Are there other indicators that could be measured to determine not only the political toll, but also the physical ramifications of these actions? This would be a fascinating round of research and could also answer a lot of questions about the effectiveness of a lot of local environmental efforts. Further, it would help determine just what kind of lasting significance this opposition will have.

Those that work in sustainable development adoption are likely to perceive significant negative ramifications to this opposition whether it is there or not. They have been fighting in the trenches to ensure that action is taken to combat the significant threat of climate change. It would be another fascinating research topic to look into how different sustainable development supporters dealt with the opposition. Did they close off conversation or engage in increased dialogue? Did they reframe their work or simply push through with the old tactics? There are innumerable ways that supporters could have responded. It would be very informative to see what responses had success and which did not work as well. There could be immediate practical solutions that could come from this work.

All in all, there are numerous directions that future research could go. It could become much more focused on promoting sustainable development and focus on practical solutions or it could stay more neutral and dig into how individualism affects environmental policy more broadly. Each path forward offers its own fruits and difficulties. However, it is clear there is much left to be learned about what this batch of sustainable development opposition means for the environmental movement as a whole and our society more broadly.

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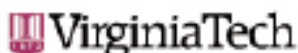
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APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 9, 2015
TO: R. Bruce Hull IV, Kimberly Hodge Cowgill, Bradley Alan Stephens
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires July 29, 2020)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Tea Party Engagement with Sustainable Development Projects in the Roanoke and New River Valleys
IRB NUMBER: 11-982

Effective November 9, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Continuing Review request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
 Protocol Approval Date: **November 30, 2015**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **November 29, 2016**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **November 15, 2016**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.