

The Paranoid Style of Tea Party Politics

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the Tea Party movement from the context of Richard Hofstadter's writings on the paranoid style in American politics. The findings in this study suggest that the Tea Party is something of a paranoid movement, and it suggests that factors for individual paranoid political behavior within this movement are a result of Evangelical fundamentalism, the uses of social media and algorithmic targeting, anxiety towards "outgroups," and the machinations of the modern media. An exploration of the origins of the Tea Party and its impacts on the American political system is conducted in order to define and observe the movement as a modern political phenomenon. This grassroots movement is to a large degree responsible for the Republican Party's continued move towards the far right, and it has caused infighting amongst Congressional Tea Partiers and moderate Republicans for influence within the party. These findings reinforce observations of Republican retrenchment and further leanings to the far right of the American political spectrum. This theory is of value since it offers an understanding of the political phenomena occurring within the Republican Party in the form of the Tea Party and allows the field of Political Science to examine and apply the effects of new forms of communication. Social media and the algorithms applied to individual online activity has grave impacts with regards to

predicting political behavior and factors that contribute to the formation of an individual's political beliefs. Concluding theoretical assumptions depict the new forms of mass media as one key factor responsible for altering the way individuals consume and process information thus resulting in the continued rise of far right conservative ideology within the Tea Party.

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Preface: The Paranoid Style of Tea Party Politics

One of the most fascinating U.S. political movements at the state and local levels in the 21st Century has been the Tea Party movement. This movement is particularly interesting because of its perceived spontaneous manifestation within the American political framework in 2009. An example of its impact can be seen during the 2010-midterm elections. During the 2010 midterm elections Republicans took control of the House of Representatives by winning sixty-three seats, won six seats in the U.S. Senate, and saw major victories at the state level to include 700 seats in state legislatures and six governorships. No other modern American political movement has been able to affect such dramatic change within the span of a mere six-year period. Due to the relatively recent history of the Tea Party, researchers have attempted to define and analyze what catalysts have caused the movement to gain such a steadfast place in American politics. What is lacking, though, is an understanding of deep-rooted assumptions that ground conservative movements in the United States and the study of these assumptions theoretically, contributing to an explanation of why the Tea Party emerged and an understanding of how it functions.

The work of Richard Hofstadter will be used as a bedrock foundation for an exploration into the Tea Party as a conservative movement within the American political context. By first examining Hofstadter's theories and those who expound upon his ideas, we can then delve into the recent history of the Tea Party and apply these theories to determine whether or not they help to explain this new political phenomenon. Hofstadter's work and theories are especially important since the Tea Party has been

described by some as a paranoid political movement.¹ The Tea Party utilizes misinformation and preys upon the latent paranoia of individuals in order to gain political capital and strength within the American political system. Political Scientists write that paranoid rhetoric can be observed during Tea Party gatherings such as “decrying the president as a threat to American democracy, in ways that seem far out of proportion to any actual political or policy happenings” (Skocpol, Williamson, and Cagin 35) or that President Obama is a “Marxist...communist...and just does not like America” (Skocpol, Williamson, and Cagin 35). Hofstadter’s theory describes paranoia as “the feeling of persecution...systemized in grandiose theories of conspiracy” (Hofstadter 4) and the paranoid style as “the way in which ideas are believed and advocated rather than with the truth or falsity of their content” (Hofstadter 5). Individuals who subscribe to the paranoid style are referred to as “paranoids” or collectively as “the paranoid.” This thesis does not utilize the term “paranoid” as a clinical diagnosis, but rather as a way of identifying someone who obsesses with conspiracy theories, grandiose rhetoric, and lacks trust in governing institutions. For example, a paranoid would be defined as someone who believes President Eisenhower was a secret communist who intended to subvert American democracy. Another example of a paranoid is someone who believes that President Obama, contrary to public records, is a non-US citizen and a secret Muslim working to destroy America and its values.

There is much at stake in developing an understanding of the political behavior of the Tea Party, the catalysts and factors that contributed to its inception, and its recent

¹ Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto write extensively on the connection between the Tea Party and paranoia in their book, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*.

impact on the American political system. The rise of the Tea Party has accompanied a rise in rigid partisanship, the use of the paranoid style by conservative political movements, and increased political polarization. By developing a theory that examines why the Tea Party utilizes paranoia, political scientists can then further examine how and why conservative movements utilize this style to realize political influence in America. Without a deeper understanding of the root causes of political behavior by right-wing conservative movements such as the Tea Party, the field of political science would be unable to accurately determine or predict political behavior based off variables or factors concerning the political alignment of individuals and elites within American politics. After the political behavior of the Tea Party is understood, factors and variables such as social media use, religious affiliation, and media consumption can be examined so that political scientists can understand how and why this movement came about. Without a complete understanding of both aspects of the Tea Party, political scientists will be unable to predict future behaviors or identify trends associated with the popularization of political ideals and action.

In order to study the Tea Party in conjunction with the application of Hofstadter's theories, I will examine Hofstadter's theory of paranoia within conservative movements as outlined in *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*. Hofstadter's theory will be applied to contextualize the origins of the Tea Party, the circumstances surrounding its inception, and an examination of paranoid-style elements within the Tea Party. Other political literature that lays the foundation of the analysis for this study will be the works of Professors Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson in their work *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, which is one of the earliest examinations of

the Tea Party by social scientists, and provides an academic explanation for who comprises the Tea Party and what political motivations and behaviors they exhibit. The last major piece political literature utilized is *The Stronghold: How Republicans Captured Congress but Surrendered the White House*, by Thomas F. Schaller, and claims the Republican Party has become a Congress-centered political party primarily concerned with winning congressional races at the expense of being nationally viable in Presidential elections.

While these political works are utilized to observe, examine, and develop a theory that can be applied to the Tea Party, further analysis is needed to determine the root causes of political behavior observed within the Tea Party. These academics did not focus heavily on the influences of modern mass media communication techniques, specifically social media and the implications these organizations have on the political behavior of individuals coupled with psychological effects like confirmation bias.² It is critical that political scientists and academics incorporate the use of social media into their observations of individual political behavior, otherwise crucial variables will be left unobserved during analysis. An example of this would be the impact of links to websites or news stories displayed prominently to users on their social media accounts. These links are determined using algorithms on the internet searches and consumed information most appealing to these users. When this is done with news, political information, or political messaging, it is likely that social media users are exposed to an exorbitantly high number of media sources they are likely to consume. The impacts of framing, agenda

² In January 2015, Wu Youyou, Michal Kosinski, and David Stillwell conducted the study, *Computer-Based Personality Judgments are More Accurate Than Those Made by Humans*, which determined that computers could utilize social media of individuals to accurately predict political identification. They also stated that the data obtained online could be used by outside entities to manipulate individual behavior (Youyou, Kosinski, and Stillwell).

setting, and effects of confirmation bias would therefore influence individual political behavior to an extent that traditional media sources, news stories, or political messaging was unable to ever achieve. This study further examines phenomena as a means to explain the recent heightening of partisanship and extremism seen in the Tea Party.

To go even further in areas the field of political science has left unexplored requires a critical examination of Christianity, specifically Protestantism and its implications on individual political behavior. This theory includes probable links between a fundamentalist view of the Bible and an inherent paranoia of big government. Within Protestant Christianity, deeply held views of the Anti-Christ and the end of times can be seen within Tea Party rhetoric. This linkage exposes natural affinities to small or anti-government beliefs. There was scarce work within the field of political science that depicts direct links between fundamental Protestant beliefs and the Tea Party even though Tea Partiers use Biblical scriptures in their rhetoric to justify their far-right views. By taking this into account, the use of Hofstadter and his examination of paranoia that briefly mentions the links to Christianity is further enhanced and studied allowing for the expansion of any such linkages to be explored and used as factors in explaining political behavior.

Throughout the study, the Tea Party will be examined to determine the cause for its inception and the implications this has on the American political system. While Tea Party policy gains at the federal level are non-existent, their influence since 2009 has had ever increasing impacts within the Republican Party. Some of these impacts include the ouster of establishment Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner in 2015, the installation of Congressman Paul Ryan as Speaker of the House (initially a Tea Party

favorite), the dominance of Tea Party favorites in the 2016 Republican Presidential Primary at the expense of Republican establishment candidates, and a government shutdown. The Tea Party's political influence in the GOP is increasing and can be argued that their ideals are becoming mainstream. Some examples include mainstream appeal within the GOP towards anti-immigrant policies, or advocating the closure of federal agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service. Specifically this research studies and defines Tea Party elites as Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), former Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN), business tycoon Donald Trump, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), and others who have openly stated they are Tea Party or align with the Tea Party and its values. In the case of Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI), he is a political elite considered to have at one time been favored and aligned with Tea Party values and beliefs up until 2014 when he favored a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants. He is significant to this research specifically in relating to Tea Party influence within the GOP as observed during his rise as Speaker of the House although he is now at odds with Tea Party elites. In 2012 when Congressman Ryan was selected as the GOP's Vice-Presidential candidate, Tea Party groups celebrated his choice as evidence that the GOP was including Tea Party values and beliefs into their platform and possible future Presidential administration.³ With regards to non-political elites, this research defines Tea Partiers who self-identify themselves as members of the Tea Party and also those who agree with the majority of Tea Party positions even if they do not identify as Tea Partiers. This is key, as there appears to be an adoption of Tea Party

³ The Tea Party Express and other Tea Party affiliates openly endorsed Rep. Ryan's choice as the Vice Presidential pick as proof that Tea Party values were being accepted in the GOP mainstream (Tea Party Express, *Congressman Paul Ryan – Strong Tea Party Choice for Vice-President*) (Shear, *Ryan Brings the Tea Party to the Ticket*).

values and beliefs by those who do not self-identify as Tea Partiers, which is perhaps an indication that their influence is having a large effect within the GOP. Lastly, this thesis examines developments of Tea Party ideals being injected into mainstream GOP policy proposals.

These factors and observations will be used to develop a theory which explains why the Tea Party utilizes the paranoid style and why it has been successful in doing so. The goal of this thesis is to put forward a new theory on how and why the Tea Party came to be, and how it utilizes paranoia to garner support. This study adds to the field of political science by expanding and linking existing theories to explain phenomena that academics struggle to explain or predict. In addition to the use of past theorizing done by Hofstadter, this study finds that his initial work perhaps discovered the paranoid style, but it did not fully explore many its implications. The theory put forward here is that the Tea Party uses a paranoid style to influence individual political behavior by exploiting those susceptible to believe in governmental inefficiency, waste, and preference for small government overall. The Tea Party focuses on Protestant Christians through rhetoric that aligns itself with fundamentalist views of the anti-Christ and “end of times” whereby government is the vessel used to persecute Christians. Also, the abundance of social media use that develop algorithms on individual behavior through web browsing history or social media interaction. This online interaction populates reinforcing messaging and frames for those individuals through advertisements or links to similar websites and news stories. This combination creates an atmosphere where a paranoid messaging system can survive unchecked due to the internet’s ability to constantly reinforce specific messaging appealing to users. Consequently the internet can create a virtual wall or cage that

segregates alternate messages or political beliefs from being easily seen or absorbed by users. These theoretical focus points will be further expounded upon and developed through new analysis of the work of Richard Hofstadter in conjunction with new and original theorization of the paranoid style and key sources of its origins. The areas of social media use, the impact of religion, and influence on the susceptibility of individuals to fall prey to the paranoid style will be examined thoroughly in this study. These findings should alert the field of political science that more is at work within the Tea Party than just populist angst and anger towards the political establishment.

Chapter I: The Paranoid Style of American Politics

What is the paranoid style of American politics?

Richard Hofstadter contributed much to the field of American political theory with his work *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, which was written in 1963 and billed itself as discovering links between the paranoid style of politics and right-wing conservative political movements. Hofstadter chose to examine the paranoid style that was being used within the American political system by the conservative right during the Cold War period of fear and anxiety towards communism. It is important to note that his theory is not concerned with the nature of the ideas that are portrayed, but the manner in which such ideas are framed and articulated to the masses. Hofstadter establishes several key elements that are used in establishing the paranoid style. These three main elements that encompass the paranoid style are: (1) history as a conspiracy, (2) the unseen enemy, and (3) an obsession with evidence to prove a conspiracy. Lastly, in order to deliver these elements to the masses, an apocalyptic spokesman is required to spread and plant these paranoid ideals within the American political system.

History as a conspiracy

Hofstadter states that the paranoid believes history itself is a conspiracy, stating, “History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give-and-take, but an all-out crusade” (Hofstadter 29). The paranoid believes that historical events are themselves part of a conspiratorial plot towards some apocalyptic end that the masses are unaware of. It is therefore the duty of the paranoid to rise up as a revolutionary vanguard to help defend humanity against this plot doing whatever it takes to stem the

immediate fruition of the conspiracy. Historical events themselves are not seen as singular events, but as a connected series of actions that were enacted towards some nefarious end.

An example used to describe this element is the establishment of the conservative group The John Birch Society, which in the 1950's and 1960's saw the threat of communism everywhere, even within the institution of the Presidency itself.⁴ The John Birch society is a conservative rightwing group with modern-day connections to the Tea Party. During the 1950's and 1960's, the John Birch Society saw historical events as overarching attempts by a communist threat to overthrow the United States. Such paranoia gives rise to apocalyptic scenarios in which immediate action must be taken lest the United States meet its demise at the hands of its existential enemy.⁵ The belief that that all events are collective steps towards an apocalyptic end shares similar overtones with ideals in Protestant Christianity, which itself utilizes history as a conspiracy. Hofstadter hints that Christianity might be a factor in understanding why the paranoid style is prevalent within right-wing conservative movements, and this paper will examine this claim in detail.⁶

A key concept that political scientists can use from Hofstadter's work is his exposure of the paranoid individuals' beliefs that history is a means to some political end

⁴ Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society, is accused of having called then President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy" in his book *The Politician* (Hofstadter 28).

⁵ For example, in 1964, Republican Senator Thomas H. Kuchel wrote that he received paranoid letters from constituents that believed The United Nations was an organization instituted as a means of taking over the United States, its role in History was that of defeating the United States. The letters stated, "Fifteen thousand United Nations troops already here. Oriental troops in Mexico, waiting to occupy California. Sixteen thousand African troops, already in Georgia, with rings in their noses and ears. A war to invade America. A U.N. take over. Let's get out of the U. N. Investigate NATO" (Kuchel 5).

⁶ Hofstadter writes that, "Apocalyptic warnings arouse passion and militancy, and strike susceptibility to similar themes in Christianity" (Hofstadter 30).

utilized by elites. An individual can contextualize almost any historical event and make associations that perhaps do not exist creating an elaborate conspiracy that only reinforces the idea that an enemy would go to any lengths in order to enact their plan to weaken or destroy the United States. As discussed later, this aspect of paranoia could play an even larger role than ever due to the amount of information made available via mass media and the Internet. Almost anyone with very little technical knowledge can start a blog, publish YouTube videos, and articulate easily-accessible political messages on Reddit, Twitter, and Tumblr, or gain followers over social media to spread conspiracies and historical narratives that depict political elites working towards some unknown goal. The spread of these narratives may not be done on purpose, but perhaps in error due to improper analysis or full knowledge of events that have occurred. The framing of historical events could therefore have real impacts on the political behavior of individuals who might be impressionable to this form of paranoia. Therefore, Hofstadter's view of history understood within the paranoid style is perhaps even more relevant today than ever before.

The unseen enemy

Unlike the paranoid, the enemy whose every action brings the nation closer to demise is presented as an omniscient power that can only be defeated through utter destruction. Hofstadter claims that the paranoid sees his enemy as:

[The enemy] is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving. Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanisms of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He is a free, active, demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself, or deflects the normal course of history in an evil way. He makes crises, starts runs on banks, causes depressions,

manufactures disasters, and then enjoys and profits from the misery he has produced (Hofstadter 31-32).

This enemy is not bound by the same rules governing the paranoid; the enemy does not falter, he does not make mistakes, and he is relentless in his pursuit of subverting the nation. The paranoid believes the enemy's secret plan is to destroy the nation; his enemy does not suffer from leaks and can only be ousted after critical examination of evidence and historical events that continually point to the master plan the enemy has in store for the nation.

Hofstadter asserts that the paranoid takes on the attributes of his enemy, which creates a paradox and an imagined reality. If the enemy is an intellectual elite, the paranoid will try to outdo his enemy in terms of accumulating academic or factual evidence to destroy his foes. If the media is a tool for the enemy to brainwash the masses, then the paranoid himself will have to counter with his own media and propaganda. David Brion Davis' essay on pre-Civil War movements is used as an example to highlight how paranoid nativist movements took on the form of their enemy. "The nativist moved even farther in the direction of his enemies...which subordinated the individual to the single purpose of the entire group" (Davis 223). This paradox causes the paranoid to become even more obsessed with defeating his infinitely more powerful and devious adversary. This results in the paranoid's search for confirming that his enemy exists and plans to enact insidious conspiracies upon the nation.

This aspect of the paranoid style presents obstacles for political scientists when identifying sources of anger or angst within individuals that might be using an unseen enemy to drive their political behavior. As seen in many cases within the Tea Party, there is much anger at those who have "taken over the country," or individuals who are "not

paying their fair share.” Many journalists and academics today, such as Matt Baretto, Betsy Cooper, Benjamin Gonzalez, Jill Lepore, Christopher Parker, and Christopher Towler, would attribute racial undertones as a motivating factor in Tea Party political behavior and rhetoric, but as Hofstadter states, an unseen enemy is only known by the paranoid individual themselves.⁷ Perhaps the reason so many are confused and unable to fully explain the anger seen within the Tea Party is because each individual has their own belief of who “they” are, whether it be establishment politicians, illegal immigrants, homosexuals, liberal elites, mainstream media, etc. The point is, an unseen enemy creates an infinite source of anger since no one group or person can be singled out as the main antagonist or source of frustration. The unseen enemy can be everything and nothing at the same time depending on which individual is describing their source of anger. Political rhetoric can thus resonate with a large audience when vague terms and definitions of who “they” are is utilized while describing *who* has taken their country from them, and whom they must fight to save it from. This can be a main factor in the inability of the field of political science to fully have attributed the sources of Tea Party anger that currently seem to be varied and inconsistent from Tea Partier to Tea Partier.

Obsession with evidence to confirm a conspiracy

The final main element of Hofstadter’s theory is the paranoid’s intense obsession with finding evidence and facts to prove that a conspiracy exists against the nation. This process is done with a meticulous attention to detail and is described by Hofstadter as “a careful accumulation of facts, or at least what appear to be facts and to marshal these

⁷ Political scientists Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto conclude in their work, *Change They Can’t Believe in: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*, that there are similarities between the Tea Party’s rhetoric and the Klu Klux Klan of the 1920’s. Specifically their alluding to racial undertones and scapegoating of minorities and immigrants for issues the nation faces.

facts toward an overwhelming “proof” of the particular conspiracy that is to be established” (Hofstadter 36). The rationalistic approach taken by the paranoid is essential in building credibility for the party’s concerned. Each action or event is examined within the context of the unseen enemy and his motives. From here, the paranoid derives the reasons or end goals these actions might have on the nation in building towards the fulfillment of the unseen enemy’s ultimate political plan. The paranoid differentiates himself from others when he develops fantastical conclusions from the evidence he has collected, as Hofstadter states “What distinguishes the paranoid style is not, then, the absences of verifiable facts...but rather the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events” (Hofstadter 37). This results in the inability of paranoid individuals to impartially contextualize events or facts within the political arena.

Once the paranoid has collected his evidence, the spokesman engages the masses with their findings to prove a conspiratorial plot against the nation by this unseen enemy. At this point the spokesman names the enemy, whether it is the “communists,” “Illuminati,” or “socialists,” the spokesman does not seek to intellectually engage others about the realistic threat their enemy poses. The paranoid is a one-way transmitter that does not receive or evaluate new information that contradicts his beliefs; this presents a scenario where every new piece of evidence that contradicts his own becomes another piece of his enemy’s grand conspiracy to keep the truth concealed. Only the spokesman has revealed the enemy’s plot and he alone must do all he can to save the nation from complete and utter destruction caused by the fulfillment of the unseen enemy’s master plan.

These main elements together comprise the theory of the paranoid style as developed by Hofstadter. His theory paved the way for scholars and academics to view conservative movements within the United States and establish root causes to their political behavior. This theory is vital to understanding the Tea Party for without it the Tea Party only appears as a far right-wing conservative resurgence that is concerned about the downfall of conservatism in the United States. Once the catalysts surrounding its inception are examined through the context of paranoia, then this political phenomena is seen not as a unique movement, but rather it is a modern case of a paranoid conservative movement analogous to those that have been studied by academics over the past two centuries.

Relevance of Hofstadter's work

At the time of his writing, Hofstadter's work was seen as ground breaking for giving an insight into the working of extreme conservative movements. This book was able to explain the paranoid behavior of conservative groups in the 1960s and before and allowed academics to understand how some individuals would come to have extreme views regarding political figures and policies. The example of how prominent and educated individuals could believe President Eisenhower was a closet communist seeking to weaken the United States is one such example to depict the great impact paranoid style politics could have on political behavior. Hofstadter is one of the first in his field to openly connect the links between a paranoid style that exists within the conservative movement and Christianity. The doctrinal basis of Christianity, especially in the Book of Revelations and Daniel, exposes an inherent susceptibility Christians might have to the paranoid style. Fundamental Christians believe the end of times will be attributed to big

government, one world leader, and their persecution. These beliefs naturally find a home in the limited government ideology of conservatism which argues that big government is inefficient and the means to tyranny and oppression. Also, the aspect of persecution could reinforce frames if these individuals are called “paranoid” or if they are challenged in their beliefs since that would ultimately occur at the “end of times.”

In recent years, the use of Hofstadter seems to be making a resurgence due to the rise of the Tea Party allowing academics to once again examine his work to see what role the paranoid style plays in the modern political movements. One such case of the resurgence of Hofstadter’s ideas is found in *Change They Can’t Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*, a book by political scientists Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto which examines the Tea Party and the similarities to past populist movements. The extremism and paranoid exhibited by the Tea Party is not unique in itself, and fulfills much of the criteria Hofstadter lays out in his book. It can be argued that Hofstadter’s initial work discovered a style prevalent within conservative movements, however his work remained undeveloped for some time and has not been expounded upon. The work of Hofstadter has stood the test of time and remains relevant today in answering some of the fields’ most important questions concerning the Tea Party, its rise, and its impacts within the American political framework.

Chapter 2: The Tea Party and the use of the Paranoid Style

Origins of the Tea Party Movement

By examining the circumstances leading up to the inception of the Tea Party movement, we can begin to understand how and why it came to be. The Tea Party's birth can be traced back to a live on-air rant delivered by CNBC financial reporter Rick Santelli on February 19, 2009.⁸ Mr. Santelli blames the 2008 financial crisis and bank bailout on the newly elected President Barack H. Obama and his administration, even though they had been in office less than one month. On October 3, 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Troubled Asset Release Program (TARP), also known as the "bailout". Presidential candidates Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain were both in favor of its passage at the time of its signing.⁹ Mr. Santelli disingenuously (1) blames President Obama for TARP, (2) explains that TARP will cause middle class Americans to pay for the mortgages of those who can't afford them, and (3) claims that he represents the silent majority in their frustration over the passage of TARP going on to say that the room he occupies currently shows the silent majority (all individuals seen in the video with Mr. Santelli are white middle-aged males). In an attempt to cause anxiety, Mr. Santelli compares the passage of TARP as a similar step taken by Cuba prior to its communist revolution. To conclude his speech, Mr. Santelli says there will be a "Tea Party" in Chicago in July and that all the capitalists can join him, portraying those not wanting part in the Tea Party as non-capitalists. From this moment on, the Tea Party

⁸ A video of the rant is available on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEZB4taSEoA

⁹ TARP was a \$700 billion bailout to large banks in order to mortgage related securities (Johnson).

would begin to surface as a new powerhouse in American politics and appeal largely to steadfast conservatives.¹⁰

The passage of TARP and financial crises of 2008 do not explain the rhetoric of the Tea Party. Just one month prior to his speech, the first ever African American was inaugurated President of the United States while the Democratic Party had been able to maintain control of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate during the 2008 Presidential election. Also of note is that the 111th Congress had seen a record number of females elected to Congress, 93 or 17.2% of the Congress were females.¹¹ For the first time since 1994, the Democratic Party controlled the Presidency and both chambers of Congress, dramatically changing the face of American politics in a period of just two years (from 2006-2008). The Tea Party would begin to grow due to the perceived changes of the political landscape in America where it would gain its first major success in the 2010 midterm elections.

Demographics of the Tea Party

Tea Party members (Tea Partiers) are to a large degree comprised of a very distinct homogenous group. The Tea Party is mainly comprised of older, white males, who have a higher than average income and education. Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, two academics from Harvard University, conducted a study into the demographic makeup of the Tea Party. In their study, which was later published into a book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, they state:

¹⁰ A 2010 joint CBS and New York Times poll found that 73% of Tea Partiers self-identified as “conservatives” (Montopoli).

¹¹ A complete breakdown of the 111th Congress can be found in the Congressional Research Services’, *Membership of the 111th Congress: A Profile*, by Jennifer E. Manning.

[A joint CBS and New York Times survey found that] 18 percent of Americans who identify themselves as Tea Party supporters tend to be Republican, white, male, married, and older than 45...given their age, Tea Party supporters and activists are better-off economically and better-educated than most Americans. Many are regular church-goers. And compared to all other Americans, Tea Partiers are more likely to be evangelical Protestants than mainline Protestants, Catholics, Jews, or nonbelievers (Skocpol & Williamson 22).

Skocpol and Williamson found that 55% - 60% of Tea Partiers are male and more likely than others to support the Republican Party.¹²

Other studies have discovered the same link between Tea Partiers and favorability of the Republican Party and the Christian Right. For example, the Pew Research Center found that, “white evangelical Protestants are roughly five times as likely to agree with the movement as to disagree with it (44% vs. 8%),”.¹³ Also, 86% of individuals who affiliate themselves with the Christian Right agree with the Tea Party on political issues.¹⁴ From the preponderance of data on Tea Party demographics, it can be determined that Tea Partiers do in fact align with Christian Conservatism, are more likely to be Republicans rather than Democrats or Independents, and are predominately white males over the age of 45 with higher than average income and education.

Race and the Tea Party

It is important to include observations and trends associated with racial tensions found in the Tea Party. Academics such as Dr. Jill Lepore, Dr. Christopher Parker, Dr. Theda Skocpol, and Dr. Vanessa Williamson have all found some underlying racial undertones within the Tea Party movement as a whole. These observations include their

¹² Skocpol and Williamson propose that males are more likely to identify as Republicans which therefore may lead to their preponderance in the Tea Party Movement.

¹³ This data was collected by the Pew Research Center and analysis conducted by Scott Clement and John Green.

¹⁴ Ibid.

experiences at rallies where they observed overt racist signs displaying President Obama in a deeming manner due to his African heritage, and the anti-immigrant policies advocated by Tea Party elites such as Donald Trump. Although this overall thesis is not concerned with racism or racial tensions within the Tea Party, it is hard to ignore and not contribute this perception to be linked to the paranoid style. To sum up this tension, Dr. Jill Lepore states in her book *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History*:

Whatever else had drawn people into the movement – the bailout, healthcare, taxes, Fox News, and, above all, the economy – some of it, for some people, was probably discomfort with the United States' first black president, because he was black. But it wasn't the whiteness of the Tea Party that I found most striking. It was the whiteness of their Revolution. The Founding Fathers were the whites of their eyes, a fantasy of an America before race, without race (Lepore 95).

Dr. Lepore's conclusions depict Tea Partiers nostalgic of a period before racial issues were openly discussed and debated as they are today and anxiety due to the election of America's first black president. Perhaps this similar trend noted by academics can be attributed to an outgroup anxiety that is created to pin their fears and troubles on, the "they" or "them" as the ones to blame for the changes that are occurring in society both politically and demographically. This connects with Hofstadter's idea of an unseen enemy, whether it is blacks or immigrants, this group is hard to define yet is central to the Tea Party's anger and frustration. Overt racism is an outlier within the Tea Party and is not openly accepted by Tea Party elites, but de facto racism and symbolic racism is used to garner support and drum up anxiety towards outgroups to coalesce political support against Democrats, moderate Republicans, and minority groups.

The Tea Party also introduces conspiracies to legitimize their policies regarding issues such as immigration and welfare spending. In the case of immigration, the unseen enemy is attempting to bring in more illegals and grant them amnesty so that they can vote in elections for Democrats.¹⁵ When it comes to welfare, this is seen as a form of wealth redistribution that falls in line with President Obama's attempt to weaken America and create a socialist/communist state.¹⁶ Minorities and outgroups are therefore means in the conspiracy to achieving the end, perhaps the Tea Party is not overtly racist towards these groups when it comes to an individual level, but as a whole these groups are perceived as pawns in an attempt to weaken America, resulting in the observed tensions or racial issues within the Tea Party.

The 2010 mid-term elections

The Tea Party Movement was able to amass its political power in the 2010 mid-term elections. In 2010 the Tea Party garnered tremendous political gains throughout the United States. The Tea Party played a significant role in conservative Republicans seizing control of the House of Representatives and multiple governorships and state legislatures. The Tea Party played a role in increasing voter enthusiasm among Republican voters throughout the country during the 2010 mid-term elections. In 2010, Republican enthusiasm rose from 41% in 2006 to 62% in 2010, this can be attributed to

¹⁵ Tea Party pundit Phyliss Schlafly has written, "The Obama Democrats have an audacious scheme for winning future elections. They plan just to import 5 million non-citizens and credential them as voters who will, in gratitude, vote Democratic" (Schlafly, *Democrats Plan to Win Elections with Illegal Alien Votes*).

¹⁶ Tea Partier Dr. Robert Owens writes about the welfare socialist conspiracy stating, to accomplish this, the coercive power of the State is used to ensure that particular people get particular things which in turn require discrimination between people and unequal treatment. Some are forced to give while others receive. This is incompatible with a free society. Thus the welfare State which aims at social justice inevitably leads back to Socialism with its coercive power and arbitrary methods" (Owens, *Why the Welfare State Isn't Well and Isn't Fair*).

the sense of choice given to Republicans through the new Tea Party alternative candidates choices available during the mid-term election primaries (Jones, *Voter Enthusiasm Sharply Down from 2010*). Their contributions to Republican success in 2010 can be attributed to their framing of the mid-term election to be largely about the Affordable Care Act and socialization of medicine in the United States. Data suggests that in the 2010 mid-term election 63% of voters thought the economy was the most important issue (Winston 3). With the framing of the Tea Party as a grassroots movement concerned with the state of the economy they were able to galvanize voters to vote in the mid-term election at rates higher than in 2006 (Winston 6). A total of 4 out of 10 voters during the 2010 election self-identified as a Tea Partier and impacted the retention and election of Republicans to Congress (Daly 18). This feat was considerable given that the Tea Party at this time was less than two years old from its spontaneous inception in the spring of 2009. The Tea Party during this time began to evolve into a loose confederacy of organizations that promoted the ideals and goals of the overarching Tea Party. These goals which can be found outlined by major national Tea Party organizations include, the (1) reduction of government expenditures, (2) restoration of the Constitution (expressed as limited government), and (3) the promotion of free market principles and practices.¹⁷

After the 2010 mid-term elections, the Tea Party was in a position of considerable political strength. The Tea Party assumed responsibility for ousting Democrats from their majority in the House of Representatives and defeated many Democratic and Republican establishment incumbents throughout the nation. New leaders began to rise

¹⁷ These specific goals can be found in the mission statements of both the Tea Party Express and Tea Party Patriots. Both are the top two leading national Tea Party affiliated organizations.

and take on the mantle of Tea Party leadership; one such example was Congresswoman Michele Bachmann who founded the Congressional Tea Party Caucus following the 2010 mid-term elections. From 2010 thru present day, the Tea Party continues to serve as a formidable force within the Republican establishment and continually seeks to push the Republican Party towards the extremes of rightwing conservatism.¹⁸ While mean polarization scores for Republicans has been on a steady rise since 1994, the 112th Congress saw a significant increase in mean polarization amongst incoming Tea Party Congressmen versus incumbents (See figure 1 below).

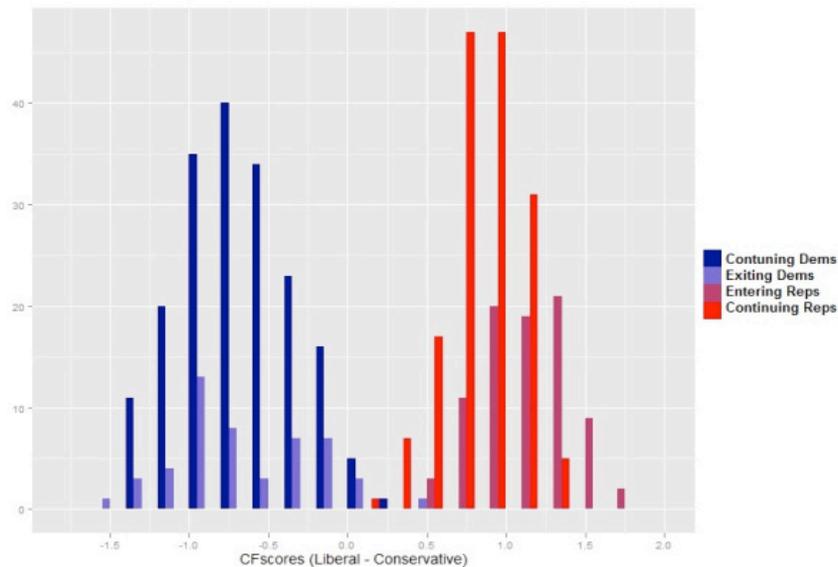


Figure 1. Mean polarization scores for continuing and exiting Congressmen¹⁹

The mean polarization score for incumbent Republicans in the 112th Congress is 0.82 whereas as Republicans newly elected as Tea Partiers have a mean score of 1.09,

¹⁸ Skocpol & Williamson conclude that the newly elected Tea Party members from the 2010 mid-term elections were far more conservative than their non-Tea Party Republican counterparts. They concluded that, “77% of the newly arriving Republicans, including dozens of Tea Party - backed Republicans, are to the right of the typical Republican in the previous [111th] Congress - and many are to the right of almost all continuing Republicans” (Skocpol & Williamson 170).

¹⁹ Source: Adam Bonica, *Introducing the 112th Congress*.

therefore the upwards trend has been significantly increased from 2010 onward (Bonica, *Introducing the 112th Congress*).

History as a conspiracy within the Tea Party

Shortly after the Tea Party movement began, its members and leaders started to claim that the government was acting against the interests of the nation. When it comes to the President, the Tea Party sees him as an enemy that is trying to destroy America itself.²⁰ These claims fall into the paranoid style as described by Hofstadter. Just as the John Birch Society made claims that President Eisenhower was a communist agent, Tea Party leaders claim that President Obama's goal is to destroy America. Some Tea Party members utilize history as a reason for President Obama's hatred of the United States and claim that his heritage plays a role in this conspiracy.

President Obama was born to Ann Dunham and Barack Obama Sr. on August 4, 1961. His father, Barack Obama Sr. was a Kenyan citizen and causing the Tea Party to promote conspiracies that President Obama was ineligible to hold the office of the President, that he is a closet Muslim, and secretly desires to implement socialism within the United States. Prior to the 2012 Presidential Election this conspiracy (known as the Birther movement) gained traction within the Tea Party and became a rallying cry for national Tea Party organizations. One of the largest Tea Party groups, Tea Party Nation, began to spread and validate this conspiracy on their website. The group's founder, Judson Phillip writes:

Because if we prove that Barack Obama was not eligible to be President, all of his acts would be void. It would be as if they never happened...Who

²⁰ In 2014, Ted Nugent, a well-known Tea Party advocate, claimed President Obama wanted to destroy America. On Dennis Miller's radio show he said, "I think [President Obama] really wants to destroy America. I think he wants to follow the Saul Alinsky 'Rules for Radicals' book, destroy our economy, have a ... war between the haves and the have-nots," (Tea Party).

knows what the odds are of proving that Barack Obama was ineligible to be President. One thing is certain. The rewards for proving him ineligible are huge and could be what it takes to save the nation. We should all be birthers (Tea Party Nation).²¹

This paranoid style was successful in turning the President into an enemy of the state in the eyes of Tea Party members. Not only was the President ineligible to hold his office, but he was also part of a sinister plot to destroy America. Joint polling conducted by CBS and the New York Times detail the paranoid beliefs of Tea Party members compared to others. This poll found that 30% of self-described Tea Partiers versus 20% of non-Tea Partiers, believed that President Obama was not born in the United States which would have made him ineligible to hold the office of President of the United States.²² Even after the release of President Obama's official long form birth certificate Tea Partiers still remain skeptical at its legitimacy.²³ In 2012, Tea Party leaders and birthers accused the government in playing a role in the death of Loretta Fuddy, the Director of Hawaii's Department of Health who released President Obama's official long form birth certificate. They believed that this was done to cover up evidence that could be used to prove President Obama was not a natural born U.S. citizen.²⁴

²¹ A full transcript can be found here: <http://www.teapartynation.com/forum/topics/the-birther-manifesto>. Those who believed in this theory are referred to as "Birthers".

²² These results also show that there is a +10% difference between Tea Partiers and Non-Tea Partiers and their belief that President Obama was not born in the United States (Montopoli, *Tea Party Supporters: Who They Are and What They Believe*).

²³ A link to his official birth certificate can be found on the official website of the White House at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/birth-certificate-long-form.pdf.

²⁴ Donald Trump tweeted "How amazing, the State Health Director who verified copies of Obama's "birth certificate" died in plane crash today. All others lived" (Fox). Loretta Fuddy died of arrhythmia following while waiting for rescuers after she was involved in a plane crash (Fox).

The Tea Party appears to believe that President Obama has set out to manipulate history in order to become President. History itself is a tool used by President Obama to hide details of his true birth, his upbringing, and his intentions once he became President. As Hofstadter writes, the paranoid believes he is alone in seeing the true intentions of an enemy, in this case, the Tea Party alone sees President Obama's rise as a historical journey that culminated in his election as President. Once elected, President Obama could begin to implement socialism in America and destroy the nation. This paranoia would create paranoid spokesmen to begin rallying others to join in on an all-out crusade against anything opposed to the Tea Party and its goals.

When history is viewed as a tool used by evil forces to implement conspiracies the paranoid spokesman then views the world in apocalyptic terms. In Hofstadter's book, he writes that the paranoid spokesman, "traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values" (Hofstadter 29). In the Tea Party these spokesman can be found in their leaders such as Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, Donald Trump, Ted Nugent, and others. The Tea Party and its leaders see no other reality outside of an apocalypse if President Obama remains in office as President, which was seen in Tea Party propaganda leading up to the 2012 Presidential election.

In the months before the 2012 Presidential election, conservative movie director Dinesh D'Souza released a documentary titled, *2016: Obama's America*, which explores President Obama's past and upbringing. D'Souza frames President Obama's upbringing as having been heavily influenced by his father and his anti-colonial attitudes towards Western nations. The premise goes on to explain that the President and his policies are

purposefully attempting to degrade America’s global influence, which in turn will cause economic and social calamities within the U.S. In his book *Obama’s America:*

Unmaking the American Dream, D’Souza claims:

America as we know it—wealthy, powerful, assertive—is not what Obama wants. He wants a smaller America, a poorer America, an America unable to exert its will, an America happy to be one power among many, an America in decline so that other nations might rise—all in the name of global fairness. To Obama, the hated “one percent” isn’t just wealthy Americans; it is America itself. In Obama’s view, America needs to be taken down a notch (D’Souza).

The Tea Party immediately began promoting this documentary and the work of D’Souza as proof of President Obama’s malicious objectives. Movie reviews conducted by national Tea Party organizations urged Tea Partiers that they must view this movie in order to prepare themselves for the 2012 Presidential election to ensure President Obama would not be reelected.²⁵ The Tea Party utilized this documentary as a way of using history to portray President Obama as an anti-colonialist whose goal was to become elected President in order to destroy America, as they know it.

The Tea Party’s use of history to develop paranoid style conspiracies can be better understood by applying Hofstadter’s theory of the paranoid style of American politics. Since the Tea Party’s beginning, they have attempted to frame political issues as part of a larger conspiracy that has been the work of some unseen enemy taking place over many years. This unseen enemy is all around and infallible in its ability to exact a malevolent plan that threatens the wellbeing and existence of the nation. Most notably, the Tea Party

²⁵ Movie reviews can be found at: <http://www.teapartynation.com/profiles/blogs/movie-review-2016-obama-s-america-by-dinesh-d-souza-1>, <http://teapartyforchristians.com/2012/08/28/film-review-2016-obamas-america/>, and <http://www.teapartynation.com/profiles/blogs/obama-s-america-2016-love-him-hate-him-you-haven-t-a-clue>.

focuses its paranoia on President Obama and the liberal establishment, which points us towards a second essential element of the paranoid style that can be found within the Tea Party.

The Tea Party's unseen enemy

The Tea Party appears to be built around the idea that America has been taken over by individuals who do not represent traditional American ideals, causing America to now be a nation with which they can no longer identify. National Tea Party organizations rally around ideas of “Taking Back America”²⁶ or “Restoring America” to some former set of values and ideals. The unseen enemy has taken America away from them, has molded America to become something they fear and loathe, yet love and cherish at the same time. The Tea Party is similar to the conservative group, the John Birch Society, which has blamed past Presidents of seeking to destroy the very nation they lead. Many Tea Party leaders accuse President Obama of turning the United States into a communist or socialist country, while he seeks to act unilaterally in order to achieve his agenda. Former Libertarian Vice-Presidential candidate and Tea Party leader Wayne Allen Root claims that President Obama is a direct threat to the nation. Mr. Root has been a featured guest on national news networks and is a favorite speaker among Tea Party groups where he lays out his findings regarding President Obama's plan to destroy America. In one of his online editorials featured on the conservative website, www.theblaze.com, Mr. Root wrote:

²⁶ This is the slogan used by the national TeaPAC organization. The Tea Party Express have the following in their mission statement: “We are committed to identifying and supporting conservative candidates and causes that will champion tea party values and return our country to the Constitutional principles that have made America the shining city on a hill” (Tea Party Express).

The cloak is off. Obama is no longer hiding his plans to destroy America...[Obama is] no longer hiding the fact that he is a tyrant, dictator, communist, and hater of America, capitalism and Judeo Christian values...Obama no longer cares to hide his radical Marxist ideology. It's now clear it's "pedal to the metal" towards the destruction of America (Root).

This accords quite well with Hofstadter's paranoid style theory and can be used as an example of how a paranoid spokesman attempts to wake up others to the presence of this enemy. Other leaders, including Former Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, have made even bolder claims to include that President Obama is responsible for enacting policies that will bring about the end of times and the second coming of Jesus Christ (Tashman).²⁷ The Tea Party has become determined to stop their enemy, but President Obama is not the sole threat they face.

The role of paranoid spokesperson is a central theme in Hofstadter's theory of the paranoid style and plays a major role in the Tea Party. The leaders of the Tea Party can be seen as examples of modern day paranoid spokespeople who link the unseen enemy's actions to an eminent apocalypse. The paranoid rhetoric of Tea Party leader Congresswoman Michele Bachmann revolves around apocalyptic themes found in Christianity, which as Hofstadter stated is found within the paranoid style, "Apocalyptic warnings arouse passion and militancy, and strike susceptibility to similar themes in Christianity" (Hofstadter 30).²⁸ Additionally, other actors are identified as part of a greater conspiracy to include the media, educational institutions, and the entertainment

²⁷ Segments of Michele Bachmann's interview with Jan Markell on the show "End Times" can be found here: <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/bachmann-rapture-imminent-thanks-gay-marriage-obama>.

²⁸ Reverend Graham, a Tea Party favorite, stated in an interview, "There is an anti-Christian bias that is now in our government, has permeated our government, that's also permeated Washington but [also] at the state and local level" (TeaParty.org). This builds on the theory that there is a connection between the paranoid style and themes in Christianity.

industry. The Tea Party Express organization writes that the media and entertainment industry show overt bias towards liberal politicians while setting a double standard for conservatives.²⁹ The Tea Party believes these institutions are a part of the conspiracy to help foster and implement policies that are detrimental to the nation.

What is fascinating is the fact that the Tea Party sees President Obama as a member in some larger conspiracy. The true enemy is unknown, and the President acts as an agent setting about to enact their agenda to abolish the United States while at the same time benefitting from its demise. This belief creates a paradox that an evil political elite within the nation benefits from the destruction of the nation they themselves benefit from. However, in order to develop their theories, the Tea Party obsesses over facts and evidence fulfilling the third critical element of the paranoid style. This matches the final element of Hofstadter's theory and the use of the paranoid style by the Tea Party.

Many academics and journalists try to define the Tea Party's source of anger and most conclude that this is the result of racial undertones towards minorities or "others," while some believe it is big government and the changing demographics within the United States. This is true to an extent, but it is only true for those individuals who define the "unseen enemy" as such. Tea Party rhetoric is extremely powerful for the fact that it does not directly define who "they" or "them" is, it leaves this vague and to the imagination of the audience. The impact of this is powerful because it allows the individual to manifest perceived threats that they have subconsciously identified, but never blamed for their sources of anger. For example one Tea Partier could identify

²⁹ <http://www.teapartyexpress.org/7066/liberals-identity-politics-still-trumps-americas-best-interest>.

illegal immigrants as the unseen enemy, whereas another Tea Partier would believe it is the mass media, or establishment politicians. This style of rhetoric can identify everything and nothing at the same time because the defining of this enemy occurs not by the distributor of rhetoric, but by the receiver of Tea Party rhetoric. Sources of Tea Party anger have no absolute or easily identifiable unseen enemy identified by a majority of Tea Partiers and national Tea Party organizations. This is why Hofstadter's insight into the use of an unseen enemy is key to unlocking the political behavior of individuals within the Tea Party and gives us an understanding of why decentralized and vague assertions as to whom they are angry with is commonplace when examining the Tea Party as a whole.

The Tea Party's obsession with evidence to confirm a conspiracy

The Tea Party has become obsessed with the collection of facts, evidence, and leads to confirm that a conspiracy has been enacted against the United States. Within the birther movement, individuals and the Tea Party have sought to seek evidence that supports the claim that President Obama is an illegitimate President. In 2010 the Tea Party continually sought to associate weak evidence to some overarching conspiracy that involved links between the Affordable Care Act, socialism, and absurdities such as death panels. Lastly, the Tea Party goes on to present evidence in the form of mass media to depict a vast conspiracy against the nation. Mass media is a modern innovation and catalyst that fosters the paranoid style within the American politic.

The Tea Party has been devoted to claiming that President Obama is not able to hold the office of President and has attempted to collect evidence to prove his non-natural born citizenship. Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the Sheriff for Maricopa County, Arizona, is a well-

known Tea Partier who established a posse designed to collect evidence and prove that President Obama's long form birth certificate was fraudulent. Prior to the 2012 Presidential election, Sheriff Arpaio released his findings and declared that the long form birth certificate for President Obama, which was released to the public, was a computer-generated forgery (Reilly, *Joe Arpaio Birther Probe Reveals Findings On Obama's 'Fraudulent' Birth Certificate*). The "Cold Case Posse," a group of volunteers that Sheriff Arpaio established to work on cold cases, was charged with investigating the birther claims regarding President Obama. Courts have since rebuffed the posse's findings, however, the Tea Party only sees this action as proof that the government itself is a co-conspirator by refusing to challenge the validity of President Obama's verified birth certificate.³⁰ In this case, the Tea Party and birthers both refuse to accept evidence from official sources that prove the legitimacy of this document.

In attempting to confirm the existence of the unseen enemy, the Tea Party has claimed that the U.S. military and the United Nations are attempting to subdue the American populace. Tea Party pundit Dick Morris has compiled evidence he uses in his work, *Here Come the Black Helicopters: the UN Global Governance and the Loss of Freedom*, to make the case that the U.S. government is planning to tax Americans in order to funnel money through the United Nations to third world countries. Mr. Morris claims the UN and the U.S. government will attempt to force wealth redistribution on the

³⁰ Department of Health officials from Hawaii have certified the validity of the released birth certificate. In addition, the State of Arizona was provided documentation to prove the validity of the birth certificate which led to Arizona putting President Obama on their statewide ballot for the 2012 Presidential election (Garcia).

world and the United States.³¹ As a pundit, Mr. Morris expressed his views while working at Fox News and continually promoted conspiracy theories about plans the United Nations and Democrats had in order to implement socialist policies within the U.S. This paranoid style was used in mass media forums in conjunction with promotion of the Tea Party and limited government ideals. The collection of evidence compiled by modern day Tea Partiers seem in line with the types of evidence collected by the John Birch Society and other far-right conservative groups studied by Hofstadter. Interestingly, the United Nations is a reoccurring institution that appears in paranoid movements plotting to bring about the degradation of the United States.

³¹ In a Fox News column, Dick Morris states, “But here’s the shocker: [Obama] will invite the United Nations to tax Americans directly. And the proceeds would go directly to the Third World. In this way, Barack Obama will, indeed, realize the dreams of his father” (Morris).

Chapter 3: Theorizing the Tea Party's use of the Paranoid Style

If the Tea Party utilizes the paranoid style, why does it do so? There are several factors that directly contribute to the paranoid style and its use within the Tea Party. These factors include: (1) the similarities between Protestant Christian beliefs and the paranoid style, (2) the innovation of the modern mass media and its use of anxiety driven stories to increase viewership and profits, (3) the homogenous demographic makeup of the Tea Party and known political predictive behaviors associated with these cohorts, (4) the use of anxiety driven rhetoric towards outgroups, the advent of modern media outlets to include social media, and (5) the attempt by political elites to use the Tea Party to retain long term Congressional political power. These factors can be used to explain why the Tea Party utilizes the paranoid style and may be used in future research to explain why conservative movements utilize the paranoid style in politics.

Protestant Christianity and the paranoid style

A 2013 study conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 54% of all Tea Partiers self-identified as Protestant Christians. More specifically, 35% of all Tea Partiers self-identified as Evangelical Christians making this the largest religious denomination Tea Partiers self-identified as (Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, 2013).³² Studies have found that 88% of evangelicals believe the Bible is the word of God, and 59% believe the Bible is the literal word of God (Pond, Smith, and Clement, 2015).³³ Disregarding the validity of doctrinal beliefs held by evangelicals, there is an underlying

³² Overall, 69% of Republicans identify as Evangelicals (Pew Research Center, *Trends in Party Identification of Religious Groups*).

³³ 61% of Mainline Protestants believe the Bible is the word of God, and 22% believe the Bible is the literal word of God (Pond, et al., 2015).

similarity that exists within the literal beliefs held by evangelicals and the paranoid style. Evangelicals have a literalist interpretation regarding the books of Daniel and Revelation; these books describe the second coming of Christ, the end of times, and Armageddon. The Israel-Palestinian conflict is one such political example in which 63% of evangelicals believe is part of the prophesy fulfilling the requirements for the second coming of Christ (Baumgartner, Francia, and Morris, 174).

It is critical to understand the underlying beliefs of evangelicals to build a connection to the paranoid style. Evangelicals and paranoids both share a similar belief in an unseen enemy attempting to subvert the nation, while in the eyes of evangelicals this unseen enemy would be Satan or evil forces. A literal interpretation of the Bible places history as part of God's divine plan that culminates in the second coming of Christ which meets the "history as a conspiracy" criteria found in Hofstadter's book. The field of political science should not ignore the similarities between evangelicals and paranoids; perhaps paranoids exist because they share the same beliefs as evangelicals? With deep held religious beliefs that a One-World government is a sign of the Antichrist, one must wonder then if this influences the anti-big government beliefs held by the Tea Party. In its most fundamental form, evangelicals believe big government is a tool that will be used by the unseen enemy as described in the book of Revelations to persecute Christians for their beliefs. Evangelicals cannot fully trust big government since this vessel is the means to fulfilling their enemy's end. How then can evangelicals not contribute to the adherence of the paranoid style that does not trust those at the highest level of American government?

Evangelicals have seen policies enacted or proposed that directly go against their fundamental interpretation of the Bible. Recently with repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the legalization of marijuana in several states it is easy for evangelicals to see a threat to their way of life. The recent rulings by the Supreme Court to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act and guarantee same-sex marriage in all 50 states has also contributed to the defeat of evangelical views of what legal marriage should be in the United States. With evangelicals committed to the Tea Party also having deeply held beliefs that the end of times will bring about immorality as they define it, then it is simple to connect recent policy changes to the Tea Party's confirmation that some conspiracy is at work. This appeals to the evangelicals since it gives them a reason for why these changes are occurring, rather than by popular opinion and beliefs they believe these changes are results of an inevitable plan that will play out until the Second Coming of Christ. Within the Tea Party the enemy, big government, is the vessel that is being used to promote immorality and sin, therefore it is natural that evangelicals would accept the appealing framing of issues portrayed by the Tea Party.

This aspect of the Tea Party's demographic can be used to explain the paranoid style that is laced throughout Tea Party rhetoric. The leaders of the Tea Party allude to the Biblical end of times and prophecy fulfillment and even persecution of Christians within America. Congresswoman Michelle Bachman (R-MN) gave a radio interview where she expressed, "how close this clock is to getting towards the midnight hour (end of times)" and that "this is one of the most exciting times" since "we could potentially see

Jesus Christ returning to Earth, the rapture of the Church...”.³⁴ This appeals greatly to evangelicals since it is their belief that these apocalyptic events will occur. The field of political science has not fully explored this connection that would be useful in explaining not only Tea Party behavior, but also the paranoid style itself. Hofstadter does claim there are strong similarities between the paranoid style and Christianity, but he shies away from revealing these similarities in his book. The beliefs and similarities between evangelicals and paranoids cannot be used exclusively to explain Tea Party political behavior, but must be observed in conjunction with the innovation of modern mass media outlets and its effect on political behavior.

Capitalism and Christianity

The Tea Party rhetoric promotes the fear of spreading socialism while promoting policies that would deregulate the US economy and fall in line with neoliberal economic theories. John Hopkins Professor William E. Connolly details a link between Christianity and capitalism in his work, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, where he concludes that there is an alliance of ideology between the conservative right and neoliberal capitalism. While the work of Connolly does not make direct assertions to conservative paranoia, he does exploit the links between capitalism and Protestant Christianity while making assertions of paranoia similar to Hofstadter. Connolly believes that capitalists and their economic message resonates with evangelical Christians and fosters the unification of these two groups in promoting conservative policies pushed by the Republican party in the United States. He coins the term “resonance machine” to explain this phenomenon and defines it as:

³⁴ Segments of Michele Bachmann’s interview with Jan Markell on the show “End Times” can be found here: <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/bachmann-rapture-imminent-thanks-gay-marriage-obama>.

The cowboy and evangelical spiritualities are not the same. Rather they resonate together. The bellicosity and corresponding sense of extreme entitlement of those consumed by economic greed reverberates with the transcendental resentment of those visualizing the righteous violence of Christ... These electrical charges resonate back and forth, generating a political machine much more potent than the aggregation of its parts. (Connolly 48-49)

Therefore the effectiveness of both the neoliberal capitalist and the evangelical when combined in a political alliance is able to accomplish much more than either party would be able to on their own. This appears to be the case when examining the Tea Party and its own effectiveness within the American political framework.

Connolly believes that a central element of this movement is identity and argues that elites within the movement continually construe themselves to be in a constant state of persecution. He suggests that, “[the movements] leaders [insist] that they are being persecuted unless they are in power” (Connolly 44). This suggestion is evidenced in the rhetoric and propaganda within the Tea Party and has overtones of a paranoid belief that the government is out to persecute Tea Partiers such as during the IRS Tea Party scandal. Within Christianity, this belief of persecution is taken to be a sign of the end of times in which Christians would be oppressed until the second coming of Christ. This ideology is able to be exploited and foster a paranoid style that is extremely potent when issues and policies are framed in this context. The Tea Party continuously espouses views that the government is out to persecute them due to their beliefs and that unless they achieve every gain they seek; they will continue to be mistreated. Current examples of such beliefs are the recent legalization of gay marriage, executive orders seen as favorable to illegal immigrants within the United States, and the Affordable Care Act.

The unification of neoliberal economic policies and Christianity exists and can exploit a paranoid style that is found with the Tea Party. In fact Connolly may have

found these links because the paranoia held by conservatives allows capitalism to be an appealing explanation for why they feel persecuted and threatened by government regulations. While these two competing ideologies share an alliance of sorts it would be interesting to see if capitalism would continue to benefit Christianity. While fears that America is becoming more immoral in the eyes of social conservatives and the media being a culprit in their eyes, one has to wonder if this is not due to capitalism itself. For example, studies have found that news media gains higher viewership when controversial stories are discussed rather than non-controversial stories (Dyer). Capitalism would therefore promote the supply of controversial stories that would come into conflict with Christian morality since these stories would increase viewership and thus increase profits. As Hofstadter was able to find links between the paranoid style and its similarities with Christianity, Connolly is able to expose another link between Christianity and capitalism. However, both scholars denote there are paranoid beliefs held by protestant Christians which causes them to feel threatened by others, whether real or perceived.

Mass media and paranoia

The news media is a factor that can be contributing to use of the paranoid style by the Tea Party. News media consumption is a likely predictor of an individual's likelihood to agree or disagree with the ideals of the Tea Party. A connection between the news media and the Tea Party exists with individuals who are considered regular Fox News viewers. A total of 52% of Fox News viewers identify themselves as supporters of the Tea Party and 62% identify themselves as Conservative Christians.³⁵ This reinforces the connection between Tea Partiers and Christians and can be used in identifying Fox

³⁵ Pew Research Center, "*Americans Spending More Time Following the News*". By contrast, 23% and 21% of Tea Party supporters respectively consider themselves CNN and MSNBC viewers.

News as a variable in predicting Tea Party support. Out of all other viewer groups, Fox News viewers are the least likely to consume news from other sources. Secondary news source consumption for Fox News viewers dropped from 30% in 2004 to just 2% by 2009 (DiMaggio, 183). This trend can be attributed to the framing of issues presented during Fox News programming which consistently refers to Fox News as outside of the “Mainstream Media”; a “them versus us” frame is consistently established when issues or news stories are discussed. A Pew Research Center poll found that since 2000 the credibility gap of Fox News and other news sources began taking shape between Republicans and Democrats. For instance, in 2000 26% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats believed, “all or most of what Fox News said” (Pew Research Center); since 2000 this gap has increased to 40% and 21% respectively.³⁶ Fox News appears to frame other news sources as being mainstream and liberal leaning. Fox News has larger daily viewership ratings than the next three largest cable news networks (CNN, MSNBC, and HLN) combined, but continues to portray themselves as the lone new organization fighting against the “main stream” media which they ironically outperform by a three to one margin.³⁷ These trends with Fox News can contribute directly to the paranoia exhibited by the Tea Party.

A news network that consistently frames and sets agendas favorable to Tea Party beliefs would further solidify the beliefs and conspiracies of the paranoid. Facts and clear understanding of issues can be distorted and false realities can be established in the mind of the paranoid; this type of false reality is found in studies on the media and its

³⁶ Pew Research Center, “*Americans Spending More Time Following the News*”.

³⁷ Fox News average daily viewership is 1.058 million and the daily viewership of CNN, MSNBC and HLN combined is 1.011 million (Kissell).

effect on viewers. During the 1990's, news networks began to increasingly run stories related to violent crimes. Due to the increased coverage of violent crimes polling data with regards to the public's concern of crime began to exponentially grow as media coverage of these crimes increased (Dyer). The reality has been that violent crimes have been on the decline, but viewers of these news networks believe violent crime was in fact on the rise. A current example of this effect is with Fox News and their framing of illegal immigration as a major problem within the U.S.³⁸ With regards to immigration, 82% of Tea Partiers now believe illegal immigration is a serious threat to the U.S. (Montopoli) whereas in reality net migration by illegal immigrants into the U.S. has been on the decline since 2007 (Passel and Cohn). This relationship between the paranoid and major news networks can then take on the form of the paranoid spokesman. The spokesman is saying there is a grave threat to the nation that only he can see and reveal. Fox News fulfills the role of the paranoid spokesman by discrediting other news sources and framing issues that do not line up with verifiable facts. The continuous agenda setting and the reliance of a singular news source would reinforce perceptions of the paranoid, which validates their belief of a grand conspiracy.

A possible contributing factor to the polarization of conservative viewers who consume Fox News might be in the way Fox News frames issues to elicit emotions from its viewers. Political scientists have examined the impacts of emotions on political reasoning and found that happiness and strong emotions such as anger lead individuals to process information heuristically (Isbell, Ottati, and Burns). Heuristic processing relies

³⁸ An example is Fox News contributor Malia Zimmerman's piece, *Elusive Crime Wave Data Shows Frightening Toll of Illegal Immigrant Criminals*, which states the purposefully U.S. does not keep crime statistics for illegal immigrants in order to avoid showing the over abundance of crime that illegal immigrants commit when compared to other non-illegal immigrant groups.

on the individual's generally held beliefs or stereotypes when processing information, thus leading to individuals processing news stories that result in a simplification of a certain group or policy. Political Scientists Linda Isbell, Victor Ottati, and Kathleen Burns have extensively examined the effects of moods and information processing and found that, "the news media select[s] the order to present their stories, [therefore] they have significant power to influence the impressions and attributes that viewers form of different political events and issues" (Isbell, Ottati, and Burns 64). Their findings might suggest that news organizations such as Fox News cause individuals to heuristically process information if issues are framed from a negative context eliciting anger. The overtures to patriotism, conservatism, and the slew of prominent conservative Fox News contributors found on Fox News networks could be a factor in the Tea Party using Fox News as a single source for television news consumption. Through heuristic information processing, individuals might develop paranoid conclusions about outgroups such as Democrats, illegal immigrants, or big government. These frames and emotions that are triggered in individuals allow us to develop a theory as to why so many Tea Partiers utilize Fox News when consuming television news media. Perhaps this explains why generally stereotypical beliefs are held without regards for quantitative data with regards to issues such as illegal immigration and the recent decrease of illegal migrants entering the U.S.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Fox News frames or sets an agenda for a particular purpose other than perhaps increasing viewership and therefore profits via subscriptions and advertisement fees. It would appear natural for a media organization to sell a product that increases consumption; the high anxiety driven news stories from Fox

News would create a profitable enterprise with the side effect of further reinforcing the views and conspiracies believed by the paranoid. With anxiety driven news it could be possible that individuals exhibit political behavior in line with established theories that show correlations between anxiety and the search for information on specific policies or issues (Marcus and Mackuen). Anxious voters in their search for information would likely access Tea Party run websites, blogs, or other Tea Party friendly media programming that provide information on particular issues with a favorable Tea Party viewpoint.

A connection that must be further explored is the one made between Connolly's resonance machine and what is observed within the media today. An echo chamber can be created within the world of accessible 24 hours news media whereby consumers are exposed to reinforcing messages continually that further ingrain ideas, values, and opinions on the consumer of such products. As with Christianity and capitalism, a resonance machine might exist between capitalism and the media since capitalism desires profits, and anxiety driven news media generates profit. Taken together, these two forces would be natural beneficiaries of overdramatized news which increase viewership. This cycle is a possible factor contributing to the behavior of the modern media. With the inclusion of online media, these news agencies can develop metadata that is used to guide consumer to additionally reinforcing messaging whereby consumers enter into an affirm the affirmation cycle due to news linking itself to other reaffirming news sources. This is especially true given the single source of news consumption we find among Tea Partiers. These variables have not been heavily explored by political scientists and could explain the paranoid style adopted by the Tea Party and its effectiveness in our modern era.

Tea Party demographics as variables in predicting political behavior

Demographics within the Tea Party allow political scientists to observe behavior that could be directly attributed to the conservatism and prevalence of individuals over the age of 50 within the Tea Party. Gallop polling data from late 2014 displays constant trends with regards to Tea Party demographics; 55% of Tea Partiers are aged 50 or older, and 28% self-identify as very conservative while 49% self-identify as conservative compared to 42% of Republicans who identify as conservative (Newport). These demographic trends mirror those found by Skocpol and Williamson just three years earlier. The demographic indicators also portray Tea Partiers as consistently far more conservative when compared to other Republicans and non-Republicans. Age can therefore be used as factors in discovering the appeal of paranoia to Tea Partiers.

Recent Tea Party rhetoric establishes frames regarding certain federal government expansions. The three major national Tea Party organization, Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Nation, and Tea Party.org state passage of the Affordable Care Act as one of the focal points for their political opposition.³⁹ In their rhetoric the Tea Party frames the Affordable Care Act as a step towards socialism and communism. TeaParty.org has stated that, “The hideous abomination from hell must be eradicated. We The People must send a clear message to all future generations that we shall not stand for socialism of any kind. Obama Socialism is a political cancer which is terminal to our beloved nation,” (TeaParty.org).⁴⁰ An example of framing the Affordable Care Act as a move toward communism can be found in a television ad aired by the South Dakota Tea Party on local

³⁹ This claim can be found on the three major national Tea Party websites, www.TeaPartyPatriots.com, www.TeaPartyNation.com, and www.TeaParty.Org.

⁴⁰ This statement is made on TeaParty.org at, <http://www.teaparty.org/no-obamacare/>.

television channels that features a male speaking with a Russian accent and pictures of President Obama and the communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin in the background. Dr. Allen Unruh of the South Dakota Tea Party stated, "We wanted to create an ad that's edgy, that gets people's attention, and true. We're headed toward a Soviet-style, one-size-fits-all program" (Dunsmoor, *SD Tea Party Compares 'Obamacare' To Communism*).

Focusing on these frames utilized by the Tea Party to depict the Affordable Care Act as a socialist or communist piece of legislation is very effective given the age demographics of Tea Partiers. The Pew Research Center conducted a study in 2011 to determine political attitudes toward socialism and found that 68% of individuals aged 50-64 and 72% of individuals aged 65 and older held negative views towards socialism.⁴¹ Compared to younger aged cohorts, 49% of individuals aged 18-29 and 34% of individuals aged 30-49 held positive views of socialism. Age can be used to determine an individual's political behavior towards real or perceived socialist policies.⁴² Perhaps this stark difference in the views of those aged 50 and older contribute to the Tea Party's consistent allusions that the Affordable Care Act is a ploy to implement socialist policies within the United States. While age is a factor in determining individual attitudes towards socialism, political ideological identity can also be used to predict negative views of socialism. A total of 77%⁴³ of self-identified Republicans and 85%⁴⁴ of self-identified Tea Partiers hold negative views of socialism. Predictively political identification and age are indicators toward determining individual political attitudes with

⁴¹ See Pew Research Center: *Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See Pew Research Center: *"Socialism" Not So Negative, "Capitalism" Not So Positive*".

⁴⁴ See Pew Research Center: *Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism*.

regards to socialism and can be attributed to the prevalence of anti-socialist framing seen throughout Tea Party rhetoric.

The Tea Party has utilized anti-socialist and anti-communist rhetoric since its inception in 2009 and alludes that President Obama himself is a socialist and communist. The perceived threat of socialism and communism is real to those aged 50 and older which constitutes a majority of Tea Partiers. Furthermore, this threat is perceived at the highest level amongst self-identified Tea Partiers. Perhaps the Tea Party has become such an energetic and active political movement because of the cues and frames established by elites within the media and Republican Party that drives voter turnout through anxiety ridden rhetoric playing on fears of socialism and communism within the aging Republican Party voter base.

Another example of age cohort differences is found when examining individual generations and their views on the size of government. Millennials (ages 18-33), the Baby Boomer Generation (ages 50-68), and the Silent Generation (ages 69-86) each have differing views with regards to the role and size of government.⁴⁵ The Pew Research Center found that 48% of Millennials self-identify as liberal whereas only 35% of Baby Boomers and 24% of the silent Generation self-identify as liberal.⁴⁶ As expected, Millennials favor a large government that provides more services whereas Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation favor small government with limited services. These views reflect earlier findings with regards to younger age cohorts who hold higher favorable opinions of socialism when compared to older age groups. It seems there could be some

⁴⁵ See Pew Research Center: *Millennials in Adulthood* for breakdown of cohort groups and demographics.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

connection between the past experiences of older individuals, their views on socialism and communism, and their fear of such policies or perceived threats to the American form of government. The Tea Party appeals to these older groups due to their life experiences over many decades including the periods of McCarthyism and anti-communism/socialism during the Cold War. These individuals have deep-rooted fears and beliefs that communists and socialists are still out to destroy the United States. This pattern connects conservatism with an increase in age and a belief that a conspiracy is unfolding to destroy the nation.

These cues and frames are consistently reiterated within conservative media outlets and television/radio shows. Older cohorts have their fears continually reinforced and magnified by claims from Tea Party elites such as Glenn Beck who illustrates plans of a communist takeover of America or Dinesh D'Souza who portrays President Obama as an outsider who will take down America from within. The Tea Party therefore serves as an outlet for these frustrations and fears while manifesting itself in the form of very conservative voters. These voters actively participate in primary elections to vote Republicans into office that are consistently more conservative than their non-Tea Party counterparts. The anxiety driven media and claims made by Tea Party groups can be used to promote activism and belief that without voting for conservatives, liberals would be elected and institute anti-American policies that could destroy the nation and security for older generations.

An additional aspect of security that older generations fear is their need to rely on the government for services such as Social Security or Medicare; without these programs the elderly would be without a large portion of their social safety net. Studies have

shown that the Baby Boomer and Silent generations are far more likely to believe they currently do not earn enough money and are likely to not earn enough in the future. Only 14% of Millennials believe they do not earn enough now and will not in the future compared to 38% and 40% of Baby Boomers and the Silent generation respectively. There is a contradiction within the Tea Party that claims the government wants to take away income from individuals and redistribute it to others while at the same time advocating for keeping their social safety net programs.⁴⁷ For those who already experience a high level of income insecurity these claims would have a large impact on their political behavior. The issue then is not about the benefits a program provides for society or a subset group within our society, but rather the decrease in available income or benefits from an aging population that feels they already do not earn enough and will not earn enough in the future. The attention to government fiscal policy within the Tea Party can be attributed to appealing to these fears held by aging voters. They utilize frames which portray that the elderly will have to financially support each new government program or expense.

The final area regarding age as a factor to predict Tea Party behavior or appeal to the elderly might be found in our new technological advances in social media specifically. The rise in the use of social media impacts the way individuals obtain information that impacts their political behavior. The increase in using social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, among individuals aged 65+ has exponentially

⁴⁷ “A [2011] poll conducted jointly by prominent Republican and Democratic polltakers, 34 percent of self-identified Tea Party supporters said that Social Security and Medicare should not be cut, no matter what. Another 30 percent of Tea Partiers said that if cuts to Social Security and Medicare were to be considered, lawmakers must also look for other ways to help people better plan for retirement,” (Vernon, *Do Tea Partiers Support Social Security and Medicare?*).

increased from 2% in 2006 to 46% in 2013.⁴⁸ Recent data suggest that upwards of 30% of the American general population receives their news from Facebook timelines alone followed by 10% receiving their news from YouTube (Anderson and Caumont). This new development in social media and its role in informing the public may influence the amount or type of news an individual is exposed to on a daily basis. For example social media and internet search providers use algorithms and past internet search history to display personalized advertisements, stories, or links on websites visited by users (Lukerson). An elderly individual who uses Facebook daily as a way to receive news could then unknowingly establish an online history used by search engines or websites to display news stories that appeal to that individual. If they visit Tea Party websites then Tea Party links and news stories will begin to appear throughout their social media outlets. This could inadvertently cause over exposure and establish permanent frames and agendas unbeknownst to the internet user. Their beliefs in radical government spending will be reinforced continually the more they search for answers or news while using social media. The source material for links, advertisements, and news stories on social media also do not receive any type of credibility or fact checks and could be portrayed as official news media outlets. The field of political science has yet to examine what impacts this has on the electorate when individuals have built up online histories of past searches that are then used by algorithms to display links that will appeal to the user who then accesses them. This mechanism would strongly support the entrenchment of a paranoid into his already held beliefs and further affirm that their ideology or conspiracies are true due to the abundance of impressions they receive while online. A completely tailored online experience would undoubtedly reinforce views and could

⁴⁸ See Pew Research Center: *Older Adults and Technology Use*.

create situations where negative anxiety driven stories is all that an individual is exposed to, thus causing them to believe America is truly in danger and must be taken back. The Tea Party is unique in that it has many websites, blogs, and a strong online presence, but yet since there is no official “Tea Party” governing body there is no way to classify one Tea Party outlet as official verses unofficial. This also creates a conflict since there is no way to differentiate between opinion, news, or entertainment driven Tea Party media.

The modern era and paranoia

A final major contributing factor in the Tea Party use of the paranoid style could be a result of the recent culmination of all aspects discussed above with regards to media, religion, and demographics. Prior to 2009 the environment in which individuals established political attitudes had remained relatively similar for over half a century. In the mid-to-late 1990’s individual political actors had been inundated with new means of information gathering such as the Internet and 24-hour news channels. This magnified exponentially and can be seen culminating in the late 2000’s with the steady increase of social media usage, blogging, news network 24-hour coverage, and the online presence of partisan websites.

Prior to this era, paranoid styles would be limited in terms of geographic and media outlet contexts, such as the limited access to media that paranoid groups experienced during the time of Hofstadter’s writing had. The paranoid spokesman, misinformation, and propaganda were limited to physical means of communicating messages which would require large amounts of capital to spread any particular political attitudes, ideology, or beliefs. In our modern era of electronic communication, little to no capital is required to inundate individuals with a particular set of messaging or beliefs.

The size and scope of messaging and its reachable audience is much greater today than ever before in the history of the United States. This allows the U.S. population to gain higher amounts of exposure to radical messaging which then fosters extreme or partisan positions. No longer are long standing political organizations or media outlets the exclusive means of spreading information to the masses, but rather traditional political elites must now compete with non-traditional elites who have access to spread their messages nationally via online communication with individual voters. Consequently, due to an absence of information regulation there are little means for individuals to determine the validity of claims and information they are exposed to without actively investigating its integrity. Unless individuals become aware of false messaging or have access to legitimate fact-checking agencies or websites, then how can we expect the paranoid style to become anything other than the norm over a long period of time?

The paranoid style elicits strong emotions from individuals exposed to its messaging and emotional cues can greatly affect the way in which individual's process and contextualize information. This style therefore would seem to have a greater impact in our current society than ever before and might be a root cause for the rise of the Tea Party. In the modern information age, exposed voters are able to galvanize behind a nationally broadcasted message that resonates with their beliefs. The age demographic of Tea Partiers might suggest that this is a factor since they might allow social and online media to carry the same weight as traditional news media outlets. The advent of this new media form must be taken into account and considered by political scientists as a cause for the use of the paranoid style and its success within the Tea Party.

Chapter 4: The Impact of the Tea Party in American Politics

The impacts of the Tea Party within the American political framework should not be underestimated. Most might see the Tea Party as a short-term political phenomenon similar to the John Birch Society, however, this is in fact the most recent political faction that has manifested itself within the last six years and achieved electoral success at the Congressional level. Nationally, the Tea Party has yet to achieve major policy gains or have a Tea Partier nominated in a Presidential election primary. This is not to say they have not made national political impacts. Currently, the 2016 Presidential election is appearing to favor Tea Party leaning candidates over traditional or moderate Republicans. This reality is evidence that the Tea Party is far from over and has been able to project political power that is normally reserved for political elites within long standing political organizations. The stakes for political scientists are high in attempting to understand the Tea Party, because the reasons for its inception are not simply linked to policies or political stimuli that have existed for the last century, but rather its inception gives us clues to understanding the future of our political landscape. The Tea Party can be understood by applying the many established findings that explain political behavior of individuals, but we must take this a step further and realize that the means of communication in our modern era greatly contributes to manipulating individual's political ideology and the way they process information.

The 2016 Presidential election and the Tea Party

As of October 2015, the three top polling Republican Presidential candidates are either Tea Partiers, have strong connections to Tea Partiers, or share their ideology and style. Businessman Donald Trump, neurosurgeon Ben Carson, and former Hewlett-

Packard CEO Carly Fiorina are the top three Republican Primary Presidential frontrunners in the 2016 election.⁴⁹ By examining these candidates the influence of the Tea Party can be seen as a major contributing factor to the rightward push in the Republican Presidential primary.

Donald Trump has been associated with the Tea Party and has openly supported the birther movement that has close links with the Tea Party (Gass, *Trump: I'm Still a Birther*). In 2011 Donald Trump accused the President of purposefully withholding his birth certificate because it might prove he is not a U.S. citizen or it might prove he is a Muslim. In a 2011 interview on Fox News Donald Trump stated, "[Obama] doesn't have a birth certificate. He may have one, but there's something on that, maybe religion, maybe it says he is a Muslim," (Moody and Holms, *Trump's History of Suggesting Obama Is a Muslim*). His ability to self-fund his political campaign gives him a unique ability to openly campaign and utilize rhetoric that would otherwise be seen as controversial and averse to garnering political support in the form of financial contributions. Donald Trump entered the 2016 Republican primaries by espousing anti-illegal immigration rhetoric and framing illegal immigration as one of the most threatening issues the United States is facing. During his announcement speech while speaking of immigrants entering the United States illegally he stated, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists, and some, I assume, are good people" (Deggans, *NBC Dumps Donald Trump Over Comments On*

⁴⁹ Average polling numbers for these candidates are: Donald Trump with 23.2%, Ben Carson with 17.2%, and Carly Fiorina with 10.4%. Average polling data comes from Real Clear Politics at http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/us/2016_republican_presidential_nomination-3823.html.

Mexican Immigrants). His claims reverberate with the hardline anti-immigration stances of the Tea Party that favor no immigration reform until after the U.S. border is secured. Both the Tea Party and Donald Trump promote building a wall along the southern U.S. border to halt the flow of illegal immigrants in and out of the United States. What is interesting is that both Donald Trump and the Tea Party continue to believe that illegal immigration is greater today than ever before, however, net illegal immigration into the United States has been in decline.

In line with the Tea Party, Donald Trump suggests that President Barack Obama could be a Muslim, yet the only difference is that Donald Trump is subtle in his approach whereas Tea Partiers at rallies can be seen making connections between President Obama and Islam openly. At a September 2015 town hall meeting Donald Trump made no attempt to correct an individual who alleged that Donald Trump knew President Obama was a Muslim. This individual stated, "We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims... You know our current president is one. You know he's not even an American." (Moody and Holms, *Trump's History of Suggesting Obama Is a Muslim*); since this incident, Donald Trump continues to refuse answering whether or not President Obama is a Muslim or a Christian.

Recent polling data has attempted to determine who supports Donald Trump. A July 2015 Quinnipiac University poll found that 23% of Tea Partiers would vote for Donald Trump over any other candidate in the Republican primary; this was the largest group that favored Donald Trump when political leanings were examined.⁵⁰ The smallest group based off political leanings that would not support Donald Trump regardless of

⁵⁰ See Quinnipiac University poll: *Trump Tops Republican Pack By Wide Margin, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; But Dems Trump Trump In General Election*.

other candidates was again the Tea Party at 19%.⁵¹ Polling data also suggest the majority of his support comes from white male evangelicals over the age of 50 years old.⁵² These demographics closely mirror those individuals who support the Tea Party or who consider themselves Tea Partiers. The reason this is critical is that for the first time since the Tea Party has been formed, a candidate for national office is leading in the polls while establishing Tea Party ideals as a part of his platform. Political scientists must observe the effects of paranoia, the factors that contribute to the Tea Party's recent rise, and apply those theories to the rise of Republican Presidential candidates Donald Trump, Ben Carson, and Carly Fiorina in order to accurately observe individual political behavior in 2016 and beyond.

Six of the top ten current leading Republican Presidential candidates all align with the Tea Party and are considered very conservative.⁵³ It appears that the anger against establishment conservatives and moderate Republicans has coalesced in the current Presidential election. Currently these top six candidates were either elected as part of the 2010 Tea Party wave or individuals with no elected office experience. This links to the paranoia that the Tea Party exhibits against political elites in Washington D.C. and is similar to the reactions of past paranoid groups which viewed those at the highest levels of government to be the enemies of the State itself. The existing anti-establishment views and continued push to the right on the political spectrum are causing major issues

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Top candidates includes: Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Carly Fiorina, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Senator Rand Paul (R-KY).

within the Republican Party resulting in an internal power struggle between moderate and Tea Party Republicans.

The Tea Party's impact in Congress

The successes of the Tea Party with regards to policy at the national level is practically non-existent. They are credited with conducting filibusters on policies dealing with domestic surveillance and the government shutdown in 2013 due to the increase of the debt ceiling, but little legislative success has been accomplished. Political scientists should reflect on the ever-growing impacts the Tea Party is having on leadership within the Republican Party. On September 25, 2015, House Speaker John Boehner announced he was retiring from his position; reasons for his retirement include the pressure and conflicts he faced with Tea Partiers in Congress about government funding and in this case the upcoming political battle that would ensue over the funding of Planned Parenthood (Bash et al., *John Boehner Resigning from Congress*). What if the Tea Party is positioning itself to become commonplace within the Republican Party by pressuring leadership to accept its political leanings and political approach to governance? The House Freedom Caucus is credited with playing a major role in attempting to block the reelection of Speaker John Boehner and is comprised largely of Tea Party Republicans and far right conservatives. Defacto chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, Congressman Jim Jordan (R-OH), has continuously challenged the Republican Congressional leadership due to the moderate approach he perceives the GOP takes with regards to policy reform and action. Currently, the Freedom Caucus has decided to support Congressman Daniel Webster (R-FL) in the election for the new Speaker of the

House.⁵⁴ The House Freedom Caucus, formed at the start of the 114th Congress was invite only, comprised of Tea Party Republicans, to include the Tea Party Caucus Chair, Congressman Tim Huelskamp (R-KS), and sought to push Republican Leadership to the right (Gehrke, *Meet the Freedom Caucus*).

These recent events should serve as evidence that the Tea Party is taking over the Republican Party from within and altering its political alignment by moving the GOP to the very right of the political spectrum in American politics. The Tea Party appears concerned with capturing the leadership positions within the party to effectively convert the GOP into the Tea Party in all but name only. Reasons for this can be attributed to the focus by the Republican Party to coalesce power within the legislative branch, a trend that some political scientists have observed since the 1994 takeover of Congress by Republicans and Newt Gingrich. University of Maryland political science Professor Thomas F. Schaller examines the recent retrenchment of Republicans since the 2010 Congressional elections. Schaller finds that within Congress, the new Tea Party Congressman further moved the Republican caucus to the right instead of attempting to take a recovery approach, thus resulting in further retrenchment by Republicans (Schaller). Schaller points to two distinct events to conclude that the Tea Party is causing the GOP to pursue a retrenchment approach to governance, this is found in the immigration policy debates and in the continued presence of Tea Party Congressmen within the Republican Party. Interestingly, he suggests that the Tea Party's role in recapturing Congress in 2010 is does not matter since the newly elected Tea Partiers believed their electoral success is what allowed the GOP to retake Congress. With this

⁵⁴ Congressman Webster unsuccessfully challenged Speaker John Boehner in 2015, garnering only 12 of 25 non-Boehner votes (Blake).

belief, Tea Partiers whom were elected from swing districts and should have moved the GOP towards the center, ended up doing the reverse and moved the GOP further right. Moderate Republicans had nowhere to go since the evidence was that these newly elected Tea Partiers did in fact win their elections and would pursue moderate Republicans opposed to their agenda. Any moderation or attempt to take a recovery route would impact the perceived future electoral success of these Congressmen.

Several other areas where Schaller uses to illustrate the Republicans retrenchment efforts have focused on the GOP's willingness to conduct electoral college tinkering, support legislation that implements voter or voting restrictions, and filibuster abuse. After the 2012 defeat of Mitt Romney, Republicans have attempted to implement a Maine-Nebraska model for awarding Electoral College delegates, whereby an elector is awarded to the candidate who wins a given state's House districts and two electors are awarded for the overall popular vote winner of that state. If this rule had been in place during the 2012 Presidential election then President Obama would have won only 262 electoral votes. Prior to 2012 though, Republicans from several states blocked Democratic efforts to institute this model of voting, since it was perceived to disadvantage Republicans during Presidential contests. With regards to voting restrictions, the GOP seems to favor the abolishment of early voting, and enactment of voter ID laws in the name of voter fraud, a claim with little evidence to support widespread fraud. These policies would appear to hinder the voter turnout of the young and minorities who a more likely to vote for Democrats. With regards to filibustering, Schaller looks specifically at the increased use of the filibuster by Republicans to impede on President Obama's agenda and gridlock his nominations. For example he finds that

President Obama's appointees were opposed at rates much higher than the previous President George W. Bush and stated that, "78 percent of district court appointees and 42 percent of circuit court appointees waited at least one hundred days for confirmation, compared to 15 and 8 percent, respectively, for George W. Bush's appointees" (Schaller 261). These trends are used to establish the retrenchment strategy the Republican Party has been pursuing versus a recovery strategy.

The long-term impacts might result in continued entrenchment by conservatives within the Republican Party who double down on far right conservative ideology and the self-destructive approach to governance that has been observed in examples such as the failed government shutdown in 2013. This internal feud exposes the paranoid style that Tea Partiers use when they portray even the most conservative Republicans of being against their agenda, such as the case with Speaker John Boehner.

Areas deserving additional research

Many aspects of the Tea Party have been observed within the context of this study; however, there are several areas that require additional attention by researchers. Currently the field of political science has little to say about the effects of religion in politics; this is mainly used as a demographic factor in polling data. What is needed is an examination of how religion influences individual political behavior; it appears it does through doctrine and the absolute political stances that individuals hold based off their level of fundamentalism in religion. A specific area of interest would be to determine if evangelicals are attracted to paranoid styles based off scriptures found in the Bible, such as a fear of big government, one world currencies, world peace, etc. If doctrine establishes frames so strong that they alone can be used to explain individual political

behavior, then political scientists must further invest in understanding the effects of religion. By establishing theoretical frameworks for religion and its impact on individual political behavior, political scientists can then examine groups such as the Tea Party through a religious lens and see how or if any impacts are associated with their evangelical similarities to the Christian-Right groups of the 1990's. Religion must be understood in order to fully grasp and calculate the variables of political behavior so that political movements can be better examined and their behavior explained.

Hofstadter does not go far enough in explaining the paranoid style, he simply states what it is and defines it. More research beyond the scope of this paper should examine why far right conservative groups are prone to this style within the mainstream U.S. political framework. This study has exposed underlying connections and explanations for this paranoid-conservative linkage in the areas of religion, media consumption, and the reinforcing of frames and agendas. Social media requires a large amount of attention and additional research since the effects and outcomes based off individual exposure to algorithmic messaging might play a large factor in outcomes of individual political behavior. Media exposure, framing, and agenda setting all have well-established and observable effects on individual political behavior, but what happens when specific messages are continuously and repeatedly displayed for social media users? When anxiety or other emotional cues cause individuals to seek information, how do hyperlinks that result in more exposure to similar hyperlinks affect an individual's information seeking and processing? If individuals "Like" conservative media or stories on social media, then all other links and advertisements begin to feature relative products for consumption. This is the first time in history where messaging is purposefully

tailored to attract individual users on social media. The impacts of this on individual political behavior could be monumental given the known effects of frames, cues, and agenda setting.

Age should also be closely examined by political scientists to determine why those over the age of 50 are drawn to groups such as the Tea Party. Is there some predisposition to the paranoid style at this age, or is it something as simple as the elderly giving validity to non-traditional media news sources online? Tea Party websites are filled with blogs, forums, email chains, and other non-official news stories that might spread misinformation; is this new technology unfamiliar to the elderly and therefore their levels of trust much higher than younger generations when regarding these sources of information? With the advent of many new technologies that can spread information to national audiences, which require little capital to do so, it would be reasonable that this new development would disrupt the normal consumption of information and therefore skew the outcomes of individual political behavior on a national level. Also, messaging can be targeted to the elderly and cause anxiety by framing issues as a threat to their fixed income or retirement savings. If messaging by elites causes anxiety of outside groups, than age groups might be pitted against one another having an in-group versus out-group effect.

The evidence presented in this thesis finds a distinct connection between Hofstadter's writing on the paranoid style and its modern day use within the Tea Party which utilizes the paranoid style to garner support from far right conservatives who can successfully oust moderate Republicans in primary elections. The Tea Party is not unique and past conservative paranoid groups have existed, the only difference is that the

Tea Party was able to manifest political power in the form of newly elected Congressional leaders in the 2010 mid-term elections and beyond. The Tea Party was able to gain electoral victory due to the midterm election benefits for the political party not holding the Presidency. Also, they were able to mobilize voters angry at the passage of the Affordable Care Act, the recent election of the first black president, and the financial crisis. After their victory, the Tea Party continues to frame the President, Democrats, and moderate Republicans as a threat to the United States, causing a “with us, or against us” scenario. Without the use of the paranoid style the Tea Party might never have existed. It is fear and emotion based cues that have caused this irate grassroots movement to stand up to the Washington establishment.

Perhaps the timing of this movement is of no coincidence since online sources were able to begin spreading rumors of President Obama being a Muslim and a non-natural born U.S. citizen unable to hold office. The election of 2008 must certainly have given white-males the perception that their place of power within American society was threatened, as outgroups since 2008 have begun mobilizing and gaining national political victories. The 2008 election resulted in the first African-American being elected, the most women having served in Congress than ever before, and an increase in minority voting. Feelings of anger and fear would lead to information searching and with the modern news media outlets; conservatives were able to latch onto Fox News and other media that portrayed themselves as victims of persecution. Examples such as the perceived “Liberal Mainstream Media,” the “War on Christmas,” and the “War on Christians” were able to mobilize white-male-evangelicals to perceive the government itself as a threat. This made the national mood ripe for a far right conservative group

such as the Tea Party to manifest overnight. The feelings of paranoia must always have existed, it's just that now modern communication has allowed for these messages to saturate thinking at the national level catalyzing paranoid individuals to mobilize and organize.

Established observations on the effects of media, frames, and agenda setting also impact the success of the Tea Party. Modern media outlets utilize dramatic headlines and exaggerated stories to portray the news in an attempt to increase viewership. The fact that the majority of Tea Partiers consume only a single news source could be the tip of the iceberg in what role the media might play in the near future. News has become consumption based, profit focused, and a competition for higher ratings which would theoretically lead to even more anxiety driven stories. Studies show that repeated exposure to media would cause an individual to overestimate the reality of problems such as crime or immigration. While both crime and illegal immigration might be dropping, constant news media coverage creates a false reality in viewers who then believe these to be on the rise.

If the field of political science ignores the root causes of the Tea Party, then it will be unable to accurately predict political behavior in our new era of mass communication. Also, political scientists must not ignore the impacts of religion with regard to political behavior. Religion is a critical variable that is left absent from serious considerations on political behavior in the US political framework. There might also exist underlying racial motivations or fears that drive political behavior that remain unexplored, but perhaps contribute to the rise of conservative fears as witnessed by the Tea Party's rhetoric.

Hofstadter's work on paranoia is key to understanding the appeals inherent in some sections of the population such as evangelicals due to fundamental interpretations of the Bible and conservatives that generally fear the implications of big government. Academics must continue to refine the theories that explain individual behavior and the analysis of information processing by incorporating the development of social media, lack of regulated news coverage, and corporate controlled news outlets, whose ultimate aim is increasing profits and consumption of their products. It will be difficult to develop solutions to the effects of social media and news websites and their impacts on individual information gathering or processing since regulating these outlets would ultimately hinder freedom of speech. A way to validate or confirm the truth or falsehood of claims should be made available for the masses so that in our search for answers we can separate out fact from fiction. Even though this information has been made public, many websites and opinion based news outlets counter these claims by promoting conspiracy theories that result in manipulating the public to fall prey to paranoia. The issue that will remain though is how can agencies build trust with individuals sympathetic to the Tea Party when these very individuals lack trust in their own government? Without trust, facts will remain useless and conspiracies will serve as a continuous reinforcement mechanism to subvert individual trust and faith in other information sources. Perhaps this very strategy is one that the Tea Party uses by building mistrust with the government, mainstream media, and liberal education institutions.

The Tea Party can be explained as a grassroots movement that utilizes the paranoid style to provoke emotional cues from individual actors that cause anger, fear, and anxiety. In their search for information, these individuals fall victim to the multitude

of media outlets that promote exaggerated claims against outgroups, creating the appearance of a grand conspiracy against these individuals. These conspiracies allow individuals to place blame on outside agencies for their fears, failures, or anxiety that is caused by the changes occurring within American society. New technology has fostered the ability for these paranoid individuals to organize and rally to support for far right conservative candidates in primary elections with success at the Congressional level. The internet has allowed individuals to search for others who are likeminded and organize; the need for large political organizations to spread their political ideology and agenda has been undercut as smaller more fringe ideologies now have the ability to conduct mass communication with individuals for relatively little to no cost. The Tea Party's influence within the Republican Party has pushed the GOP further to the right and has created an internal power struggle for leadership. The evidence that supports this is seen in the recent ousting of Speaker John Boehner and the top tier of Republican Presidential candidates all being very conservative and many having no prior political experience. Had traditional Republicans been elected, the likelihood of subversion against the Republican leadership would be minimal since this feud has pitted traditional Republicans versus newly elected Tea Partiers who are more conservative than past elected Republicans. The feelings of persecution and anger are real and displayed by individuals within the Tea Party who seek to reclaim an America that was taken from them as evidenced by their rhetoric. They believe the America they live in is no longer theirs which leaves them with only one option, take back America no matter the cost. This appears to be a reaction of a once demographic majority slowly losing their dominance in American society as other minorities, racial, ethnic, religious, or otherwise

continue to grow, expand, and gain equal footing within the American social and political community.

Conclusion

This study expands on already established theories and incorporates new factors and variables to understand why the paranoid style is used by the Tea Party and why it has been so effective within such a short period of time. It is of vital importance that the field of political science dig deeper into new mass communication technologies to determine their impact on political behavior. The spread of information is occurring at rates never seen before in our history and it is not regulated as it has been in the past. This regulation is not one concerning free speech or content, but the practical ability for individuals or groups to gather the capital that was required in the past to spread their ideas and beliefs. In order to gain capital for printing and distribution much more assets and wealth were required than when compared to today. To know that in our current day a single individual with nothing more than a smart phone and internet connection could instantly reach billions of people globally has massive impacts on the way political scientists have viewed media sources, framing of information, information gathering, and agenda setting. The scope of these issues and their impacts are in dire need of additional research otherwise the increase in technology and its effects will outpace political scientists in their attempts to not only observe, but to predict behavior.

A core role for political scientists is to predict individual political behavior, but it appears that the Tea Party, a relatively new political phenomena has left this field of experts baffled at its continued rise. Not only is the rise of the Tea Party being overlooked by our field, but the spreading of its ideas from the once obscure Tea Partier to the mainstream conservative. Evangelicals, libertarians, fiscal conservatives are all now adopting Tea Party ideals without the “Tea Partier” label, the evidence is in the 2016

Presidential election itself, the ouster of the Speaker of the House, and the backlash against the Republican establishment. While policy gains at the federal level are not substantial, this should not be the only criteria academics use in determining a political movement's influence within society. We are seeing the adoption of Tea Party ideas and beliefs becoming more mainstream within the American political framework, even if the self-identification of Tea Partiers drop, it should be understood that the name one identifies with does not correlate necessarily with beliefs. The Tea Party may fade away, but if their ideals are adopted and become part of the mainstream than the paranoid style utilized by the Tea Party can be said to have been effective at achieving its end goal.

Without the work of Hofstadter, there would be little that connects the paranoid style within the Tea Party and gives context to why and how it is used. It is important that this paranoid style incorporates the new variables within our society that could influence individual political behavior and give political scientists the tools necessary to predict and explain political phenomena. The incorporation of religion needs to be further ingrained into the work of political science as is already done with other fields such as psychology. Without an understanding of the impacts religious doctrine has in predicting individual political behavior than the ability of academics in this field will be hindered in their search for answers and truth.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that theories of individual political behavior can be established and applied many years later to understand a new political phenomenon and why it acts the way it does. Hofstadter's work was specifically useful because it allowed for an understanding of the style that is so prevalent in the Tea Party in our modern day. The reason for explaining a style though, is not enough and

contributes little to the field of political science; political scientists must go one step further and determine why a style is used and why it is effective. When conducting research on the Tea Party, academics should determine and apply the new variables that influence individual behavior to develop an understanding of how phenomena come to be. This movement does not appear to be influenced by traditional political elites, but rather a new form of elites who construct frames and establish agendas reinforced with repeated exposure to targeted messaging. The Tea Party is a fascinating political movement with many yet-to-be-discovered factors that contribute to its rise and will require much more research in the years ahead.

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