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Matthew W. O'Neil

University at Albany, State University of New York

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Defining a Movement

Ann Marie Buerkle, the 112th Congress, and the
Meaning of the Tea Party

Matthew W. O'Neil
University at Albany, SUNY



Senior thesis for graduation with honors from the Political Science Department. Written under the advisement of Professor José Cruz. Spring 2012.

Introduction

Four years after the Democrats took control of Congress and two years after the heavily symbolic victory of Barack Obama, the Republican Party came storming back, picking up 63 new seats in the House of Representatives and six new seats in the Senate. The election was a significant boost to the Republican Party and conservatism, but there was also a new ideological label on the minds of political spectators. The Tea Party movement emerged in early 2009 in reaction to the economic downturn and policies of the federal government. Throughout 2009 and 2010, the Tea Partiers acted as standard bearers for strong conservatism. This was received as a mixed-blessing for some Republicans. The Tea Party was successful in mobilizing conservative voters in both primaries and general elections. However, the strong rhetoric and striking visual symbols employed by Tea Partiers alienated moderate voters. Some Tea Party candidates, who had displaced more moderate Republicans in primaries, were delivered highly publicized defeats, such as Sharron Angle in Nevada and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware.

One of the newly claimed congressional seats was taken by Ann Marie Buerkle, a lawyer and former nurse from Onondaga, New York. She defeated the Democratic incumbent, Dan Maffei, in an exceptionally close race in a district that been marked by some of the fiercest campaign battles in the country in recent history. The New York 25th District, situated in Central New York, has tended to elect moderate candidates from both parties. However, Buerkle gained the Republican nomination by identifying herself as the conservative candidate. Buerkle's opponent, incumbent Dan Maffei, attempted to use her conservative identity against her and associated her with the Tea Party movement. The New York Times, in its identification of 129 "Tea Party" House candidates listed Buerkle among them (NYTimes.com, 2010). Once in office, Rep. Buerkle established a strongly conservative voting record and co-sponsored many

controversial bills associated with 112th House of Representatives. Her legislative record is consistent with members of the Tea Party Caucus. However, she is not a member of that caucus and has never embraced the Tea Party title. This forces us to consider what makes a conservative policy maker, or any citizen, a member of the Tea Party movement. The facts that there exist a national social movement and prominent politicians with ideologies indistinguishable from the movement, yet not a part of it, must be reconciled.

In this thesis, I will examine the Tea Party movement using three lenses: ideology, organization, and identity. I argue that without all three of these lenses, our view of the political movement is incomplete. This will first entail a discussion of the movement generally, informed by several of the most significant academic works on the movement so far and the writings of various Tea Party figures. Second, I will discuss the presence of the Tea Party in the 112th Congress up to this point. In particular I explore the primary Tea Party organizational structure in the House of Representatives, the Tea Party Caucus. Attention will also be paid to the group of first term representatives for the Republican Party, those who have gained much media attention for disruptive role in the House (Politico, 2/17/11). In particular, I will examine voting behavior in these groups to evaluate the extent they behave as unified blocs to push conservative policies.

These discussions serve as context for my primary case study, that of Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle. At first glance, it appears counterintuitive to examine a political movement through a case study of an individual who claims not to be a part of the movement. My explanation as to why this approach to studying the Tea Party is appropriate is somewhat anecdotal. Several times, I have been speaking to one of my classmates and I mention that I had been studying the campaign and policies Rep. Buerkle. Immediately, my classmate will remark that Buerkle is “a crazy Tea Partyer.” I would then comment that she is not a member of the congressional Tea

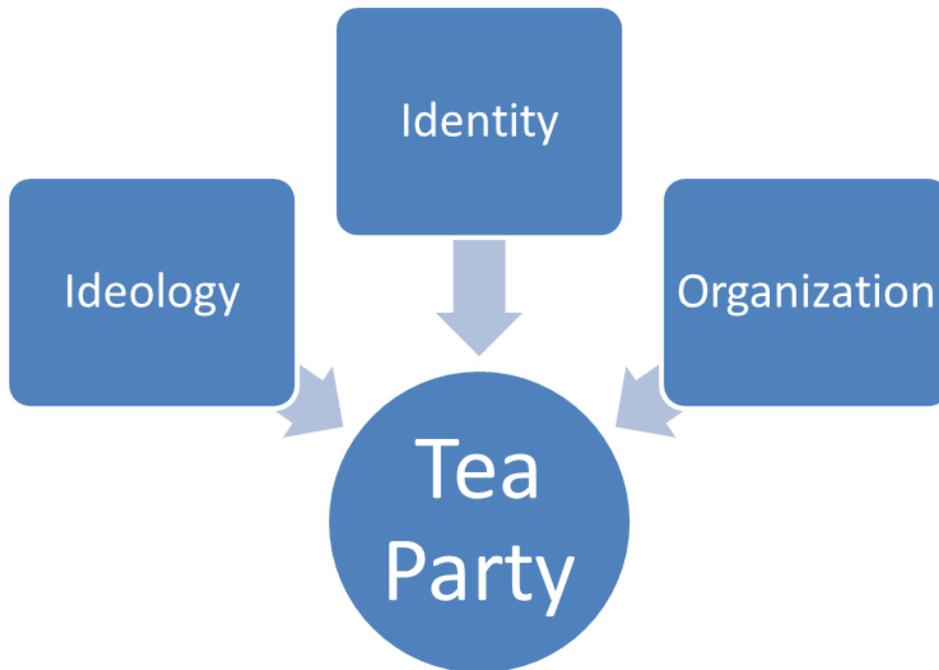
Party Caucus and does not associate with Tea Party. My acquaintance, without spending much time considering my counter-argument would respond “So what? She is still Tea Party.”

What this exchange points to, in my thinking, is a lingering uncertainty of the meaning of the Tea Party in terms of its relationship to American conservatism and the Republican Party. Therefore, the example of Buerkle acts as a counterfactual, forcing us to consider more carefully who and what we associate with the Tea Party. My narrative tracks her political career from the beginning of the 2010 election cycle to April 2012. Much of the qualitative detail I have pulled from the largest newspaper serving her congressional district, *The Post Standard*, based in Syracuse, New York. The data on her legislative record, as well as the data on voting behavior of the entire House Republican delegation, was obtained through OpenCongress.org. Informed by this narrative, I argue that the Tea Party is an expression of American conservatism, instead of an ideological movement separate from mainstream conservatism. Further, I hold that the Tea Party exists both within the umbrella of the Republican Party and independent of the party, providing a vehicle for strong conservatism within the party for those who choose to use it.

3 Looks at the Tea Party Movement

My discussion of the Tea Party will be from three perspectives, the movement's ideology, organization, and the role of self-identification. I argue that without all three of these components, we cannot have a complete understanding of what it means to be part of the Tea Party movement. The movement has ideological goals, but these goals are not exclusive to members of the Tea Party. The organization of the movement is central to events that have occurred in the movement as well as understanding the role of any particular actor. Self-identification, I argue, is a necessary condition for involvement in the Tea Party. Using these

three components, we can meaningfully discuss any particular person's relationship with the Tea Party, as well as the movement's relationship with American conservatism and the Republican Party.



Picture 1: My model of the Tea Party movement is built on three components: ideology, organization and identity.

Ideology

Many writers (Abramowitz, 2011; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin, 2011) argue that the Tea Party has grown out of increased conservatism in the Republican Party. The focus of this conservatism, especially among the elite organizations, is expressed in terms of political and economic libertarianism. The expressed core values of the Tea Party Patriots, according to their website is fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free market economics. The expansion on these ideas reveals that the principles are all variations on the ideal of small government. Fiscal responsibility “means not overspending, and not burdening our children and grandchildren with our bills... A more fiscally responsible government will take fewer taxes from our paychecks” (Tea Party Patriots, 2012). To be fiscally responsible according to the Tea

Party Patriots is not simply to balance the budget, but to make the budget smaller. A constitutionally limited government would devolve policy making powers to the state and local governments. Government regulations are the causes of economic stagnations and job loss; therefore, government regulation of the economy should be minimized.

The Tea Party Express displays its goals in the form of six simple principals, instead of the Tea Party Patriots abstract values. The principles include “No more bailouts, Reduce the size and intrusiveness of government, Stop raising our taxes, Repeal Obamacare, Cease out-of-control spending, Bring back American prosperity” (Tea Party Express, 2012). The catchphrase of former representative Dick Arme’s organization FreedomWorks is “lower taxes, less government, more freedom” (FreedomWorks, 2012). It is clear that, at least rhetorically, these organizations are most interested in making government smaller in terms of money that it deals with and less regulation of the private sector.

Developing other values commonly espoused, by the Tea Party, the political action committee (PAC) affiliated with Tea Party leader Sarah Palin, SarahPAC, states that it

believes energy independence is a cornerstone of the economic security and progress that every American family wants and deserves. We believe in American Exceptionalism, and that US foreign policy should, first and foremost, be based on the pursuit of our national interest, not the interests of others. SarahPAC believes the Republican Party is at the threshold of an historic renaissance that will build a better future for all. Health care, education, and reform of government are among our key goals.

This excerpt is distinct from those by the other organizations in that it more tightly embraces the Republican Party, an unsurprising feature from a former vice-presidential candidate for that party. Also, the passage alludes to a wider range of policy goals, including a notably realist take on foreign policy.

A commonality between these various organizations in and around the Tea Party movement is that social issues are not on the radar. Abramowitz (2011) found that individuals who identified with the Tea Party movement were more likely to oppose gay marriage and abortion, but these beliefs appear to take a subordinate position within the movement's policy goals.

Historical Symbolism

A feature of Tea Party ideology that differentiates it from other elements of American conservatism is the treatment of American history, particularly the founding and the writing of the United States Constitution. Many social and political movements in the United States have cited the values of the nation's founding to lend legitimacy to their cause. However, in the case of the Tea Party, the historic allusions have taken on a new quality. Tea Party events are strewn with people wearing tricorne hats, and often men in full 1770's military uniforms and answering to George Washington or the names of other founding figures. The name of the movement itself is an allusion to a revolutionary act by American colonists. The struggle against government control of healthcare was conducted with the pageantry of the struggle against the English crown (Lepore, 2010).

However, the Tea Party's historic symbolism is different than past usages of the American founding because it is literal symbolism. The American Revolution is interpreted to have been about the rejection of government encroachment against the citizenry. Therefore, the protests and political struggles against the current federal government are part of *the same* continuous historical movement by the American people against encroaching political regimes. The American Revolution has never ended, only the enemy has changed.

Consequently, the source of legitimacy for policy and constitutional readings is adherence to those values that Tea Partyers attribute the founding fathers. The relationship between history and Tea Party ideology is symbiotic. When they are invoked by the Tea Party, the founders represent the conservative values that members bring to the table. The relatively small size of the federal government in the era before the American Civil War is taken to be the intended form of government by the founders. Evidence to the contrary, such as Alexander Hamilton's (1791) writings on political economy is not acknowledged. Further, the rapid growth of the American economy in the late-19th to mid-20th century is seen as occurring despite the increase in the size and regulatory authority of the federal government that occurred during the same period.

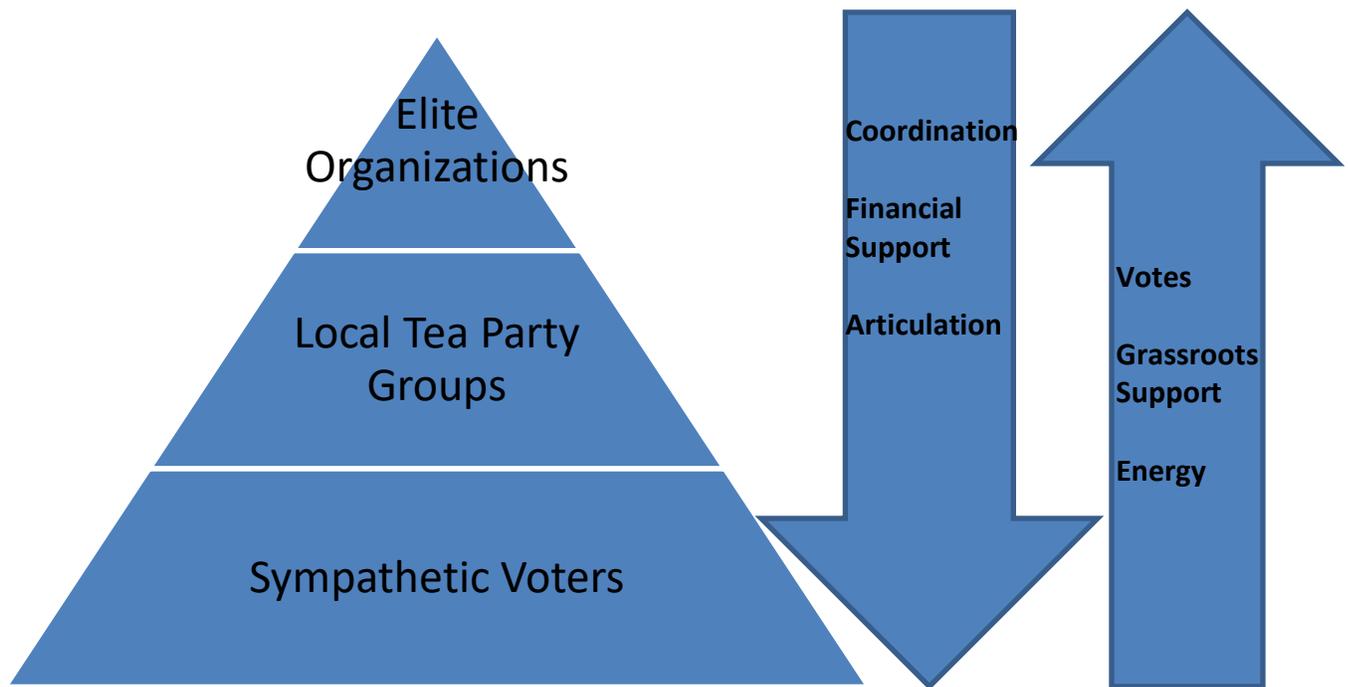
A parallel of this relationship with history can be drawn from the conservative legal movement of the last four decades. Some conservative jurists have pushed beyond strict constructionism to embrace originalism as a method of interpreting the constitution. Originalists advocate that the Constitutional text should be read to mean the same as it did at the time of its writing. Instead of allowing the legal concepts to develop over time with changing norms and *stare decisis* (legal precedent), concepts cannot develop past the original intentions of the constitutional writers (Scalia, 1997). The similarity that can be drawn between originalist doctrine (which is, admittedly, more sophisticated and nuanced than what I have described) and the Tea Party's historical construction is that that conservatives who adhere to originalism tend to interpret the original intent of the framers to support modern conservative policies. The relationship with the past and those who interpret it is symbiotic; by drawing legitimacy from past principles, it is often the case that modern preferences are confirmed.

The ideological construction of history that is used to lend legitimacy to the very ideology that informs the historical construction has been widely practiced by leading figures in the Tea Party movement. Radio and Fox News personality Glenn Beck commonly contrasted founding figures with members of the current liberal establishment. On the set of his television show, produced by Fox News, hung three posters mimicking Barack Obama's campaign image featuring his own face in red and blue with the caption "HOPE" in large letters. Beck's three posters feature Samuel Adams with the caption "Faith," George Washington with the caption "Hope," and Benjamin Franklin, with the caption "Charity." Two of the three core values of the Tea Party Patriots discussed above reference the intentions of the American founders. The website of the Tea Party Express states that the organization is "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.'" This invocation of history forms continuous narrative of individual liberty against big government. Those who support the modern federal government are not only wrong, they are un-American, as they adhere to values in opposition to those of the American Revolution.

Organization

The composition of the Tea Party movement and its organizational structure have been sources of criticism from opponents of the movement (Abramowitz, 2011). Specifically, pundits on the left have accused the Tea Party of being a top-down organization with little legitimacy to portray itself as a grassroots movement. Abramowitz argues that although elite organizations played a critical role in facilitating development through logistical and material support, the movement could not have developed to such a large scale had there not existed significant support at the ground level. I argue that the movement can best be understood as having three

tiers: elite organizations, local groups, and sympathetic voters. The higher tiers coordinate Tea Party functions and articulate the values of the movement, while lower tiers provide votes, support, and grass roots energy.



Picture 2: Tea Party organizational structure

Elite Organizations

Elite organizations, such as FreedomWorks, Tea Party Patriots, the Tea Party Express, and Fox News, facilitated nationwide development of the Tea Party. FreedomWorks, founded by former Republican congressman Dick Armey, is an organization that existed before the Tea Party movement, but the Tea Party provided the audience to receive the organization's message. The Tea Party Patriots is an organization that functions as a social media site and directory of local Tea Party organizations, providing these groups with increased networking capabilities. In addition, the Tea Party Patriots provides support for local groups to put on their own events. The Tea Party Express is a PAC that has spent money on Republican primaries and Republican

candidates, such as Scott Brown in Massachusetts and Sharron Angle in Nevada. Other conservative organizations have played a role in supporting the Tea Party movement. Many, as with the case of Fox News are not strictly Tea Party organizations, but have supported the movement out of sympathy for the movement's goals. These groups include the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, and the Koch brothers.

These organizations have an incentive to downplay the extent to which they control the political movement. Tea Party ideology is predicated on the idea of citizens standing up themselves against government control. The narrative is more effective if the Tea Party is seen as a grassroots movement that ignited at the base level from people's frustration with the political system. For this reason, the relationships between these elite organizations tend to be obscured to lessen the top-down appearance of the Tea Party. For example, the role played by FreedomWorks to form the Tea Party Patriots is heavily downplayed in order to give the spinoff group a greater grassroots appearance (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggan, 2011).

Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggan (2011) argue that Fox News played a special role in developing the movement. Conservative media sources "played a crucial role in forging the shared beliefs and the collective identity around which Tea Partiers have united." The majority of people exposed to information about the Tea Party had never attended a rally or a local Tea Party meeting. A significant number of voters sympathetic to the Tea Party cause had very little exposure to actual functions of the social movement. Therefore, the information distributed about the Tea Party was filtered through the media, and Fox News reported on the Tea Party more than other major media sources. This asymmetry in information allowed Fox News significant control over the message. Even if a good faith effort to accurately express the message was taken up by reporters, which was probably the case, the message had to have been refined and simplified for

mass consumption. Asymmetries in information invariably result in bias simply because the collector of information has to choose which sources of information to report (Downs, 1958). In boiling down the speeches and chants from the Tea Party events into a form that could be reported, Fox News produced a unified message for Tea Partiers to unify around. The message is then taken up by the movement itself as it spread throughout the nation.

Fox News maintained coverage on the Tea Party throughout 2009 and 2010. While other major news sources reported on Tea Party events as they were occurring, Fox News' coverage anticipated the events, essentially providing advertising to encourage viewers to attend (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggan, 2011). Social movements require continuous sympathy and attention to survive; when people stop paying attention a social movement, the movement is dead. In this way, the continuous coverage acted as life support to the Tea Party. Further, this type of media coverage amplified the impact of localized demonstrations. Tea Party events occurring independently and in a single region became national events by virtue of receiving a high level of attention from a nationwide media source.

Local Tea Party Groups

Tea Party organizations tend to be local groups with little affiliation with each other but that buy into a common brand. As of April 2012, there were 2884 in the nation groups registered with the Tea Party Patriots website. It is very likely that many of these groups have irregular amounts of activity. These organizations tend to be small and have a high reliance on social media tools which allow group coordination and communication, such as MeetUp, Facebook, and Twitter (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggan, 2011). The Tea Party Patriots website, functioning as a social media site and directory of Tea Party organizations, also sought to serve this purpose.

Local Tea Party organizations can function as ways by which people who were not previously involved with politics can learn about issues (from the Tea Party perspective) and how to mobilize voters, be involved in protest politics, and communicate with lawmakers. The members of these groups participated heavily in campaigns, flooded town hall meetings with jeers against congressmen and woman in the summer of 2009, and made a vocal stand against issues such as healthcare reform. In addition to these direct political actions, groups such as these held Tea Party rallies all across the country, with the most active day being April 15 (Tax Day), 2009, where many events were held, including one sponsored by Fox News. In many ways, the local organizations are where the rubber hits the road for the Tea Party movement. This was the level ordinary individuals could become involved with movement activities.

Sympathetic Voters

The relatively small number of individuals who actively participate in Tea Party organizations compared to the substantial electoral support received by candidates who embraced the Tea Party identity suggests that there exists a substantial number of voters who may or may not identify themselves as members of the movement, but who are sympathetic to the Tea Party's message. Most critically about these voters has been their willingness to vote in Republican primaries and vote against moderate candidates who often have a better chance of winning in a general election.

An early example of this was in New York's 23rd Congressional District, where Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman eclipsed Republican Deirdre Scazzofava in a 2009 special election. Scazzofava ultimately dropped out of the race and endorsed her Democratic opponent Bill Owens who went on to defeat Hoffman (*The Daily Times*, 11/4/2009). In 2010, Tea Party candidate Christine O'Donnell defeated Michael Castle in the Delaware Republican

senatorial primary and Sharron Angle defeated Sue Lowden. Both were defeated in the general election. In contrast, Tea Party activist Rand Paul was elected senator of Kentucky and a number of Tea Party candidate were elected to the House of Representatives (NYTimes.com, 2010). These results indicate that an audience exists for the articulation of the elite organizations and the mobilization of the local groups. Also, the existence of this body of sympathetic voters provides the Tea Party with the electoral success that allows it to keep going.

Identity

The Tea Party's organization, though loosely hierarchical, is highly decentralized, with prominent flag bearers rather than institutionalized leadership. Therefore, there exists no infrastructure to adequately assess membership for an organizational prospective. Certainly, the members of the various Tea Party groups count among the membership, but their relative small size compared to the strong support received by Tea Party candidates suggests a population of more loosely affiliated members, the sympathetic voters. Some of the sympathetic voters likely would not consider themselves members of the Tea Party, but have found the Tea Party candidates preferable to others. The decentralized nature of the movement and lack membership based benefits, such as the ability to vote in primaries, means that these sympathetic voters are not counted. Unlike a political party, to which an organizational test exists to whether someone is a member or not (a person is either a registered Republican, or the person is not), Tea Party membership is not institutional or dichotomous.

If membership to the movement cannot be determined from the view of the organization, then we must base it on the individual. Further, membership need not be limited to those who partake in visible participation, such as attending a rally or displaying a Tea Party message from a t-shirt or car. Voting is an act tied to the goals of the movement and can be an expression of

Tea Party identity. However, since the movement is decentralized with no person or organization with the ability to definitively endorse a candidate as the only legitimate Tea Party choice in a particular race, voting for practically anyone can be an expression of Tea Party action for a particular person (although voting for certain candidates would certainly be confused Tea Party action). Therefore, it becomes clear that the threshold for membership to the movement is self-identification with the movement, rather than any organizational or ideological test.

At first glance, this conclusion appears banal; of course the Tea Partiers are the people who call themselves Tea Partiers. However, there are important implications for the role of identity in the Tea Party movement. Self-identification empowers elite organizations to perform their role of articulation. Fox News' coverage of the Tea Party, which I have argued must necessarily simplify and clarify the positions of the highly-decentralized movement in order to report the positions, would not be important had they not have been reporting to individuals identified with the movement. The same process of clarification and simplification occurs when the media reports on a protest movement in a far off country. In this case, the simplified message merely acts as fact for viewers to associate with those particular protestors. When the message is articulating the values of a movement which the viewers associate themselves with, the values are assumed by many of the viewers. Amongst politicians Tea Party identification represents a commitment to conservatism. When a politician refers to herself as a Tea Partier, she invokes all of the rhetoric and ideological connotations associated with the movement. This is particularly important given the alienating effect the movement has had on moderates and liberals.

Visible Identification

A common way by which Tea Party members communicate their affiliation with the movement is through visible symbols. A symbol that became popular, perhaps as a result of its

low cost, was placing a tea bag on a hat. Photographs taken at Tea Party rallies show attendees wearing hats with a large number of tea bags hanging off them. Some highly enthusiastic members of the movement attended rallies and other events wearing intricate costumes, often of early American figures or participants of the Boston Tea Party. Other common Tea Party symbols include a coiled sake with the message "Don't tread on me." The image became popular after the September 11th attacks, where the warning was to those who seek to do the nation harm. The meaning of the image expanded to include a warning against government intrusion. The eccentric outfits and other visual symbols became closely associated with the movement and became a target of ridicule for its opponents. This visibility and striking appearance of the movement contributes to the alienation of those who are not affiliated (the people simply look eccentric) but also communicates their commitment to their policy preferences.



Picture 3: Tea Party member in a tricorne hat and face-paint, a nod to the original Tea Party. Courtesy of POLITICO.

The Tea Party in Congress

The 2010 election produced 84 new representatives for the Republican Party. After the first national election with the participation of the Tea Party and the formation of the Tea Party Caucus, much was made about the strong conservative bloc in the Republican delegation to the House of Representatives, and the problems it posed for John Boehner, the new Speaker of the House, and the more moderate House GOP leadership. Consequently, a brief examination of the 112th Congress in general before delving into the specific case of Rep. Buerkle will be worthwhile.

Tea Party Organization in Congress

The primary identifier of sympathizers to the Tea Party movement in Congress is the Tea Party Caucuses that exist in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. In April 2012, the House Tea Party Caucus, led by Michele Bachmann (R-MN), consisted of 55 representatives. Of the 55 members of the Tea Party Caucus, 18 were members of the Freshman Class. The Freshman Class accounted for 34.6% of the total House Republican delegation (243 representatives) but only 32.7% of the Tea Party Caucus. Therefore, if we consider membership in the Tea Party Caucus a reliable indicator of Tea Party identification, then it is untrue that the Freshman Class is “more Tea Party” than longer serving members. The Freshman Class actually has slightly less Tea Party identification.

It stands to reason that the Freshman Class does not represent a bloc of politicians who are far more ideological than the longer serving members. Congressional districts that flip from one party to another are more likely to moderate, since the voters are willing to elect candidates from both parties. In order to unseat an incumbent, an opposition party must often offer a moderate candidate who can appeal to voters who have previously voted for the incumbent. This

is the root of the paradox that if a party hopes to capture more seats within a legislature, it must often recruit candidates with weaker party loyalties and dilute ideological core of the party's delegation.

Voting Trends for the GOP Delegation

The following chart shows four high-profile bills passed by the House of Representatives in 2011 in which a large portion of the Republican delegation broke with the party and voted against the bill. Two of the bills (H.R.1473 and H.R.2112) are spending bills. The Budget Control Act was an extremely high-profile bill that served as a compromise to raise the debt ceiling and prevent the federal government from defaulting. The America Invents Act is patent reform legislation to end the diversion from the Patent Office to the US Treasury when the office brings in money more quickly than was budgeted, a change that would facilitate the Patent Office to put an expedited patent review track. Therefore, all four bills where Republicans broke ranks from their party were ones involving fiscal matters central to Tea Party interests. The final bill shown on the chart extended sections of the controversial PATRIOT Act for four years. The first percentage column shows the percentage of the entire GOP delegation that broke ranks, the second shows percentage of Tea Party Caucus members who voted against party, and the last column shows the figure among members of the Freshman Class. Votes of "present" and "abstain" are counted as votes against party, consistent with OpenCongress' calculation of for-party voting.

Percent of Representatives Voting Against-Party for Selected Bills

Bill	GOP Delegation	Tea Party Caucus	Freshman Class	Other Representatives
H.R.1473 Department of Defense Appropriation Bill (4/14/11)	25.5%	43.6%	31.0%	17.4%

H.R.2112 Department of Transportation Appropriation Bill (6/16/11)	8.3%	11.0%	8.3%	8.3%
S.365 Budget Control Act (8/1/11)	27.2%	45.5%	32.1%	18.2%
H.R.1249 America Invents Act (6/23/11)	29.2%	36.3%	26.2%	28.9%
S.990 PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011 (5/24/11)	18.1%	18.2%	19.0%	18.0%

The chart shows that in even the most rebellious votes, not even 50% of the Tea Party Caucus votes against the Republican Party. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the decision making of the House Republican leadership. When bringing a bill up for vote, the GOP leadership cannot usually expect widespread support from the Democratic Party. Therefore, if too many Republican representatives indicate that they will vote against the bill, the leadership has no incentive to bring the bill to a vote and be defeated. A minimum amount of conservative support must be met for us to even observe how the representatives vote. This keeps the bills that would demonstrate greater levels of Republican disunity from being voted on. Also, this gives a large conservative organization, such as the Tea Party Caucus the opportunity to influence policies by threatening to rebel.

However, these statistics (the represented votes being among the most rebellious votes on the approval of a bill) demonstrate that the Tea Party Caucus does not operate as a unified bloc. Further, these controversial bills do not form the same coalition of dissident conservative representatives each time. The Department of Defense appropriations bill and the Budget Control Act on the chart above have very similar percentages of representatives breaking ranks.

However, only 64.5% of the Republicans who voted against the appropriations bill voted against the Budget Control Act, and 53.8% of them voted against the America Invents Act. The implication of this is that instead of viewing conservatives within the Republican delegation as a tight group that stands together when rebelling against the more moderate leadership, we should see them as a large loose group of representatives, each of whom will occasionally vote against the Republican Party, forming new coalitions. The Tea Party Caucus is a strong presence in these coalitions but they are far from the only participants. Based on these voting trends, the Tea Party Caucus cannot be viewed as a unified and strong force within the House of Representatives.

The chart also shows two other interesting trends. Even though the Freshman Class does have disproportionately high membership in the Tea Party Caucus, these representatives were much more likely to vote against the Department of Defense Appropriations bill and the Budget Control Act, consistent with the voting behavior of the Tea Party Caucus. The Freshmen did not, however, strongly vote against the America Invents Act with the Tea Party. Also, despite the PATRIOT Act being often viewed as a manifestation of “big government,” neither membership with the Tea Party Caucus nor the Freshman Class corresponded with a greater likelihood to vote against the extension of several of the law’s sections.

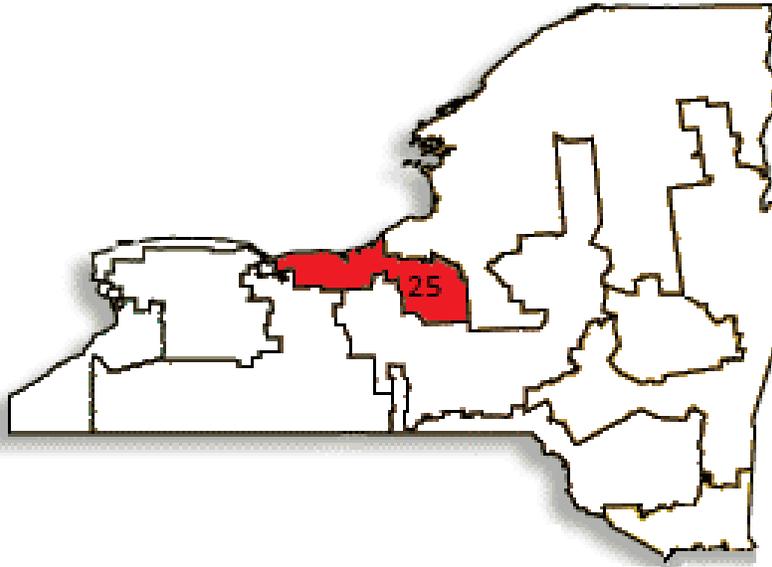
Ann Marie Buerkle

Congresswoman Ann Marie Buerkle is a native of Auburn, New York. After high school, she attended Syracuse’s St. Joseph’s School of Nursing, graduating in 1972. She also received a Bachelor’s Degree from Le Moyne College in 1977. Buerkle worked as a nurse at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital in New York City and St. Joseph’s Hospital in Syracuse. In 1991, she left nursing to attend Syracuse University Law School, graduating in 1994 (Buerkle, 2012). She was

appointed in 1997 to serve as an Assistant New York State Attorney General to represent State of New York on behalf of Upstate Medical University. She took a leave of absence from that position in 2010 in order to run for Congress.

The New York 25th Congressional District

The 25th Congressional District consists of the City of Syracuse, its suburbs, and rural townships in Onondaga, Cayuga, Wayne, and a small portion of Monroe County. Onondaga County, which contains Syracuse tends to elect more Democratic leaders than more western counties which are also more rural.



Picture 4: The NY 25th Congressional District

The 2010 Election

In November 2010, the 25th Congressional district was held by first term Democrat Dan Maffei, who spent \$2.4 million to defeat Dale Sweetland in 2008, a record amount for the district (*The Post Standard*, 10/18/2009). In his first nine months in office, Maffei raised over a million dollars towards his reelection campaign. Despite his tremendous fundraising ability, Republican

leaders in the district believed that Maffei was vulnerable. In November of 2009, the chairman of Onondaga County's Republican committee told the *Post Standard*, "That race is ours. We're looking forward to this one. We look forward to them all. But this one we have a big star on" (*The Post Standard*, 10/18/2009).

By November 2009, four candidates sought endorsement from the Onondaga County Republican Committee. The two heavyweights among the GOP hopefuls were Mark Bitz and Ann Marie Buerkle (*The Post Standard*, 11/16/2009). Bitz owned several businesses in the Syracuse area and had sold the Plainville Turkey Farm in 2007 for \$26.3 million, making him, potentially, the strongest challenger to Maffei's war chest. Bitz had worked as a political activist, producing a booklet in 2006 entitled "Creating a Prosperous New York State" and urged New Yorkers to vote against Republicans running for the State Senate and Democrats running for State Assembly. He had also written newspaper articles and set up a website in an effort to convince New Yorkers to vote out the incumbents in Albany (*The Post Standard*, 11/16/2009). In the early part of his candidacy, Bitz pushed the issue of healthcare reform. He stressed that he did agree that there needed to be reform, but that the law enacted by Congress was unacceptable.

Buerkle's quotes published in *The Post Standard* in late 2009 tended to challenge Dan Maffei more directly than Bitz's quotes. On November 16th, she was reported to have said, ""There are a lot of people in the 25th District who just don't feel they have a voice in Washington with this administration, and particularly with Dan Maffei" (*The Post Standard*, 11/16/2009). She also stressed her experience as a mother of six, as a nurse, and as an Assistant State Attorney General.

The other two candidates both had strong conservative credentials, but their campaigns never took off. David Gay, was a 28 year old political activist and had been active in the Tea

Party and right-to-life activities in Syracuse (*The Post Standard*, 11/5/2009). Paul Bertran was the longtime leader of the Onondaga County Conservative Party. Gay withdrew from the contest in early 2010 to seek the Republican Nomination for a State Assembly seat (*The Post Standard*, 11/16/2009). Bertran dropped out of the race several days before the GOP county committees were to make their endorsements. Both Bertran and Gay endorsed Buerkle when they discontinued their candidacies (*The Post Standard*, 3/5/2010).

Buerkle gained a considerable advantage over Bitz in early March, receiving an endorsement from all four Conservative Party county committees in the district and subsequently three of the four Republican committees (*The Post Standard*, 3/4/2010). Bitz received support from the Cayuga County GOP; however, that county represents a relatively small portion of the 25th District's population. In reaction to the Republican Committees' endorsement of Buerkle, the Maffei campaign released a statement that they were pleasantly surprised by the selection and that Buerkle was the "most conservative, most obstructionist candidate they could find" (*The Post Standard*, 3/4/2010). Mark Bitz subsequently dropped out of the race, saving Buerkle from having to spend energy and resources to run a primary campaign.

Throughout this period of the campaign, Maffei continued to overwhelm Buerkle in terms of fundraising. By June 30th, Maffei had brought in \$2.2 million, raising money at a clip that left him poised to vastly surpass the \$2.4 million he had spent in 2008. By comparison, Ann Marie Buerkle had raised \$245,000 at that point (*The Post Standard*, 4/16/2009).

In July, Buerkle's campaign received a boost that also raised some eyebrows when she sought and received an endorsement from Tea Party activist Sarah Palin. In her message supporting Buerkle, Palin emphasized Buerkle's identity as a woman candidate and placed her within the historical narrative of female empowerment, stating, "The women's movement in

America has its roots in Seneca Falls, N.Y., and Ann Marie is among today's strong women leaders." Reflecting on the endorsement after the election, Buerkle stated that the Palin endorsement was important in that it lent national attention and legitimacy to the campaign. She stated, "We needed the traditional Republican support, we needed grassroots and we needed national attention on this race. So when Sarah Palin came in, she was the first part of that national attention piece, and it was big for us" (*The Post Standard*, 6/13/2010).

Dan Maffei used the endorsement in an attempt to portray Buerkle as a right-wing extremist with views inconsistent with Central New Yorkers. Speaking for the Maffei Campaign, Dan McNally stated "I think the fact that Ann Marie Buerkle is throwing in her lot with the Sarah Palin Tea Party wing of the Republican Party will tell voters here all they need to know about her" (*The Post Standard*, 6/5/2010). Nonetheless, the Maffei campaign subsequently received its first significant body blow when the Independence Party, which both candidates had been courting, endorsed Buerkle (*The Post Standard*, 6/21/2010). Consistent with campaign rhetoric from both sides, Buerkle placed the victory within the context of representativeness, stating, "These endorsements reflect where we are as a district; people all across the political spectrum are frustrated with fiscal irresponsibility and lack of representation" (*The Post Standard*, 6/21/2010).

Buerkle continued attacking Maffei throughout the summer. On July 27th, Maffei voted against an emergency spending bill to fund sending 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Maffei explained that his vote reflected his concern over the cost of the surge and his opposition to the continued war effort. He said, in a statement, "During a time when communities are laying off police officers and teachers due to the recession, why are we providing funds to train police officers and teachers in Afghanistan?" Buerkle responded that this was the wrong issue

“to become fiscally conservative” on and also framed the vote as being morally questionable, stating, “These troops have just been deployed. To not fund them is a big issue to me. It's like you are turning your back on these men and women who have been deployed” (*The Post Standard*, 6/29/2010).

FEC disclosures of the campaigns' financial standings through August 25th revealed that Maffei had \$1.1 million at his disposal, while Buerkle continued to trail with \$182,000. One bright spot for the Buerkle campaign was that she had outraised Maffei among individual donors from July 1st to August 25th \$92,400 to \$69,700 and received less from political action committees by a margin of \$69,200 to \$1,500 (*The Post Standard*, 9/12/2010). These numbers suggested that the difference in money between the two campaigns did not reflect a similar difference in grassroots support.

Buerkle trailed Maffei in the polls throughout the summer, but continued to receive support from A-list names in the Republican Party. On August 21st, Minority Leader John Boehner traveled to Skaneateles, New York, to attend a fundraiser for Buerkle (incidentally, the same day as Buerkle's daughter's wedding) (*The Post Standard*, 8/22/2010). Governor Mitt Romney endorsed Buerkle during a several Syracuse area engagements on September 20th. Speaking at a dinner honoring several conservative Upstate New York leaders, Romney echoed Buerkle's focus on the inability of the Democratic Party to represent Americans, saying “They just don't understand the values of the country” (*The Post Standard*, 9/21/2010).

The issue of representativeness even became a central topic of the October 4th debate between the two candidates. Maffei portrayed himself as a moderate legislator within a moderate district, meaning that, ideologically, he was more similar to the constituency than the Republican. Buerkle associated her opponent to the Democratic leadership, stating, ““You're a

Washington insider who has lived in Washington, and you reflect the views of Washington. You're not in touch with the people here” (*The Post Standard*, 11/5/2010). This line of argument turned on the common assumption that there is a fundamental difference between the minds of people in Washington, DC and people in Central New York and that these two mindsets are irreconcilable. Once a person thinks as a “Washington insider” that person is significantly separated from the interests of his or her constituency. In that and subsequent debates, Maffei emphasized the extreme nature of Buerkle’s views, stating that she wanted to abolish the federal Department of Education, privatize Social Security, repeal health care reform, and ban abortions (*The Post Standard*, 11/5/2010). The Maffei campaign also aired an attack ad that discussed Buerkle’s past as a right-to-life activist (Toutube, 2010). The Democrat defended his use of attack ads, stating ““I think that [negative advertising] has always been a part of American politics. Jefferson was accused of all these affairs and Adams was criticized as being fat” (*The Post Standard*, 10/17/2010).

In October, one of those most distinctive features of the race hit the airwaves. The 25th District was the target of money from national Conservative organizations, and money flowed in to fund attack ads against Dan Maffei. During the race, a total of \$561,561 from out-of-district groups was spent against Maffei, most of which was used in the last several weeks of the campaign. The *Post Standard* reported that a Washington, DC based group called American Crossroads planned to spend \$407,000 on anti-Maffei advertising. This infusion of support came as a Siena poll put Buerkle 12 points behind Maffei. Jonathan Collegio, a spokesman for American Crossroads stated that the group’s aim was to increase the number of competitive races around the country, so that the Democratic Party would have to use its resources in more areas (*The Post Standard*, 10/17/2010).

After the results began coming in from the election, the race was ruled too close to call. After counting the absentee ballots and several legal challenges from the Maffei campaign, the race ended when Maffei conceded in late November while down by only 648 votes (*The Post Standard*, 12/5/2010). Maffei won Onondaga County by eight percentage points, but lost the more rural areas of Cayuga, Wayne, and Monroe Counties by significant margins.

Buerkle After the Election

Having won the congressional seat by such a close margin, Rep. Buerkle could not have any pretensions that she had been delivered a mandate by the electorate. Given that constraint, she articulated a set of goals for her incumbency to reflect the wishes of her constituents, saying “We may not agree on every issue, but constituents should feel that they can come to me and we can talk and we can find common ground, and that’s really my biggest task, to work hard so that the people in this district feel they have a voice in Washington” (*The Post Standard*, 11/28/2010). The vision of her role as representative which she articulated was one of transparency and maintaining close contact with her constituents. In a letter published in *The Post Standard*, Buerkle wrote “Please come to the town hall meetings I will hold often throughout the district. Visit my congressional offices. Write me about what you want to see accomplished in Congress” (*The Post Standard*, 12/14/2010). She stated that she hoped to hold a town hall meeting at least once a month (*The Post Standard*, 11/28/2010). To that end, constituents have often found her efforts towards openness successful. Sarah Pralle, professor of political science at Syracuse University, called Rep. Buerkle’s office in early 2011 to state her dislike of a position the congresswoman had taken on environmental policy. After expressing her disapproval of Rep. Buerkle’s position, Professor Pralle was surprised to hear the listener introduce herself as Ann Marie Buerkle (Pralle, 2011).

After her election, the conservative congresswoman made the decision on whether to join the Tea Party Caucus. On her decision not to join the organization, she stated “I think the beauty of the Tea Party was that it was this group of people out there, not organized, just with these ideals. And I think it almost flies in the face of the whole tea party mentality to now become organized and have leadership and have somebody tell you what to do.” Regarding her view of Tea Party ideology, she stated that it has “historically been the Republican platform, but because they deviated from it, the tea party came into existence. And I think if the Republican Party steps up and does what they should do, then I think the tea party will just align themselves with the Republican Party” (*The Post Standard*, 11/28/2010).

Rep. Buerkle was assigned to serve on three congressional committees, Foreign Affairs, Veterans Affairs and Oversight Panels. In addition, she was made Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending (*The Post Standard*, 1/19/2011).

When the 112th Congress went to work in January 2011, House Republicans immediately executed its agenda of trying to dismantle the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* and other liberal policy agendas, and Rep. Buerkle actively sought involvement in this process. On January 12th, the *Reclaiming Individual Liberty Act* (H.R.21) was introduced. The bill sought to repeal provisions of *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* that would mandate that individuals purchase health insurance. Ann Marie Buerkle was a co-sponsor of the bill.

Despite the leading role healthcare reform and the economy played in the Republican agenda, Ann Marie Buerkle's position on abortion drew some of the greatest attention and criticism from her constituents in 2011. She had downplayed the importance of her prolife stance during the 2010 election, even though Dan Maffei had attempted to make an issue out of her

history as a local right-to-life leader. *The Post Standard* first spotlighted Buerkle's continued prolife activity in late January, when it reported that she would attend The Syracuse Right to Life Association's annual March for Life to commemorate the 38th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* (*The Post Standard*, 1/22/2011). Several days later, *The Post Standard* reported that Rep. Buerkle signed on as a co-sponsor of the *No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act*, which would ban the use of federal subsidies for abortion services, and had delivered a speech against the practice on the House floor (*The Post Standard*, 1/23/2011). The coverage by *The Post Standard* of her prolife activities exceeded that of her initiatives in healthcare and fiscal policy. After this string of coverage, the letters to the editor regarding Ann Marie Buerkle tended to focus on this issue. Some writers accused her of underemphasizing the importance of her pro-life beliefs in the 2010 campaign and spending her time on social issues instead of the ones she campaigned on. Her legislative record during this time period suggests that although she did give some effort towards the prolife cause, this was a small part of her agenda, which was more focused on repealing the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* and controlling spending. However, media coverage dictated how her office was perceived by constituents.

One glimpse into which policy areas Buerkle is most concerned with in her role as congresswoman is her press releases. The following chart depicts the policy areas addressed in all of Rep. Buerkle's press releases in her time in Congress, excluding those with no policy bearing, such as those memorializing a person or event. The categories used reflect the categorization employed on Rep. Buerkle's congressional website, although I added "Anti Sex-Abuse" to refer to a press release that was without categorization and "Political" to refer press

releases criticizing government officials, such as Attorney General Eric Holder, who has drawn the ire of many Republicans.

Frequency of Policy Issues in Rep. Buerkle's Press Releases

Policy Area	# of Press Releases
Health	10
Energy	3
Defense and National Security	12
Foreign Affairs	13
Economy and Jobs	34
Veterans	8
Agriculture	2
Spending and Taxes	24
Government Operation	2
Political	4
Education	3
Financial Services	1
Anti Sex-Abuse	1

The relatively high level of press releases regarding “foreign affairs,” “defense and national security,” and “veterans,” given the dominance of economic and fiscal issues in the public discourse, can be attributed to Rep. Buerkle’s involvement with the Foreign Affairs and Veterans Affairs congressional committees. The two topics most commonly discussed in press releases were “economy and jobs” and “spending and taxes,” emphasizing the prominence of these issues in the Republican critique of policy making under the Obama Administration and Buerkle’s own policy interests. No press releases were made to discuss socially conservative issues.

Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Bills

As of April 28, 2012, Rep. Buerkle had only sponsored six bills on her own, a relatively low level of productivity. Also, none of the bills she has sponsored have been voted on by the House of Representatives yet. Among these bills is H.R.3633 which would serve “to amend title

XVIII of the Social Security Act to repeal the reduction in Medicare disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments made by section 3133 of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*” (OpenCongress). Despite the opposition to government involvement in healthcare in the form of “Obamacare,” Medicare was supported by many Republicans, including Buerkle (the Republican narrative often placed healthcare reform as being an attack on Medicare). Another bill, the *Just Do Your Job Act of 2011*, which would have reduced “the amount otherwise available for the payment of salaries and expenses of the Budget Committee and the Office of the Majority Leader of a House of Congress if that House does not adopt a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2011 or 2012” (OpenCongress). This bill is interesting in that it would have provided a threat to against her own party’s leadership to ensure that they “just do their job.”

As the table below indicates, Rep. Buerkle was involved in the House GOP’s efforts to dismantle the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. These bills represent different and overlapping strategies to hamper the healthcare reform law. For example, a bill was introduced to repeal the mandate for all individuals to purchase health insurance, the part of the healthcare reform law most targeted by conservatives. Additionally, a bill was introduced to defund the implementation and enforcement of the individual mandate, if it were not appealed. A notable feature of the table below is that only one of the selected bills was brought to a vote. Some of the bills designed to chip away at “Obamacare” had over 100 Republican co-sponsors, spreading around the credit for a policy initiative that was a part of many campaign promises. The majority of these dismantling efforts were taken on by the conservative wing of the House Republican delegation, but were not followed through by the House leadership. Speaking on the floor before a vote on one of these bills, Buerkle stated, ““Last year’s enacted ‘health care reform’ was a

victory for big government and an affront to our Constitution. The law is so fundamentally flawed that it must be repealed.”

Selected Bills Co-Sponsored by Rep. Buerkle in her First Two Months in Office

Call Number	Bill Name	Purpose	Brought to Vote
H.R.21	<i>Reclaiming Individual Liberty Act</i>	To repeal individual mandate to purchase health insurance.	No
H.J.Res.1		To propose balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.	No
H.R.361	<i>Abortion Non-Discrimination Act of 2011</i>	To prohibit certain discriminatory abortion related activities.	No
H.R.154	<i>Defund the Individual Mandate Act</i>	To prohibit the use of funds for the implementation and enforcement of the individual mandate to purchase health insurance.	No
H.R.2	<i>Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act</i>	To repeal certain provisions of the <i>Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010</i>	House Passed
H.R.127		To deauthorize appropriation of funds to carry out the <i>Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act</i> and the <i>Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010</i> .	No
H.R.605	<i>Patients' Freedom to Choose Act</i>	To repeal several limitations on benefits in the <i>Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act</i> .	No
H.R.371	<i>Health Care Choice Act of 2011</i>	To repeal title I of the <i>Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act</i> and to amend the <i>Public Health Service Act</i> to provide for cooperative governing of individual health insurance coverage offered in interstate commerce.	No
H.R.920	<i>Zero-Baseline Budget Act of 2011</i>	To eliminate automatic increases for inflation from CBO projections for discretionary	No

		spending.	
H.R.937	<i>Rising Tides Act of 2011</i>	To reduce the corporate tax rate and implement a more territorial method of taxing corporations.	No

The chart demonstrates that Rep. Buerkle's early activity place her squarely with the ideological space of the Tea Party. Six of the bills aim to strike at the healthcare reform effort. Also among the first bills she co-sponsored is the balanced budget amendment to the US Constitution, an enormous constraint on the spending power of the federal government. Another anti-spending measure was a bill that would prevent "automatic increases for inflation from CBO projections for discretionary spending." Lastly, her early legislative record includes an attempt to lower the corporate tax rate. This agenda was clearly in line with a movement to reduce the size of government by reducing its ability to spend money.

These conservative efforts were typically symbolic in nature, given that even if the enough of the Republican delegation rallied around the bill to pass it, there would be no hope of the bill gaining any traction in the Democratic held Senate. Therefore, these bills should be understood as following through on campaign promises to attack the healthcare law (a campaign promise Rep. Buerkle made) and other conservative goals and articulating objections to Democratic agendas, rather than serious attempts to change the existing law. Incidentally, efforts to successfully impact healthcare law would have had to be too moderate for these conservative representatives to support. Therefore, their commitment to dismantling the entire structure committed them to making no progress at all during the 112th Congress.

The following chart shows the frequency of bills co-sponsored by Ann Marie Buerkle (through March 16, 2012) for selected policy areas. Healthcare is strikingly the most frequent topic for her bills to address. Also of note, the next two most common topics is deficit reduction

and tax cuts. This legislative emphasis is in keeping with the Tea Party movement. Bills with socially conservative goals also made a strong appearance. In addition, it is also interesting that Rep. Buerkle co-sponsored five bills and sponsored one bill that addressed sex abuse and sex abuse victim rights and protections. Several of these bills dealt with sex abuse in the military, which consistent with her committee roles.

Frequency of Selected Policy Issues in Rep. Buerkle's Co-Sponsored Bills

Policy Area	# Co-Sponsored bills
Economic Development	4
Tax Cuts	9
Cost Cutting/Deficit	12
Health Care	16
Veteran's Affairs	6
Social Conservative Issues	8
Anti-Sex Abuse Policy	5

Buerkle's Legislative Record in Perspective

Ann Marie Buerkle has, thus far, voted with the Republican Party at the relatively high rate of 95%. Her voting record does place her among the more conservative legislators in the House of Representatives. However, she was not among the group of representatives (many of whom were members of the Tea Party Caucus) who regularly broke party ranks on major votes. She was among the Republican representatives who voted against the Budget Control Act and the America Invents Act, but voted for H.R.1473 (the Defense Appropriations bill) and the

PATRIOT Act extension. The average Republican representative voted with Buerkle 91.27% of the time, the average member of the Tea Party Caucus voted with her 92.68% of the time.

Taken as a whole, Ann Marie Buerkle's first 16 months in office were consistent with the ideological and agenda setting conservative wave of the 2010 election. Her legislative record most emphasizes the goals set forth by the Tea Party and Republican Party: repeal "Obamacare," reduce spending, and reduce taxation. Only breaking with the Republican Party on five percent of the votes, Buerkle was among the more loyal GOP representatives. On the topic of spending and deficit reduction, one of her most significant against-party votes was her "nay" vote for the Budget Control Act, the compromise bill to prevent the United States from defaulting on its debt. More descriptive than her voting record, the bills Rep. Buerkle sponsored and co-sponsored indicate a strong emphasis on fiscal and economic conservatism.

Buerkle's Record and Understanding the Tea Party

Is Buerkle Tea Party?

If we understood the Tea Party movement as being defined ideologically, then saying that a person was not a part of it would be to say that the person opposes some aspect of the movement. If a person is not prochoice, then we can be confident that there is some aspect of the prochoice position that the person does not accept. Often times, being Tea Party is treated as an ideological position or an ideological subset of the Republican Party, in the same way that social conservatives are a subset of the Republican Party. If this were the case, then the legislators that identify with the Tea Party movement should be distinguishable from others in the Republican delegation without simply looking at their movement identification.

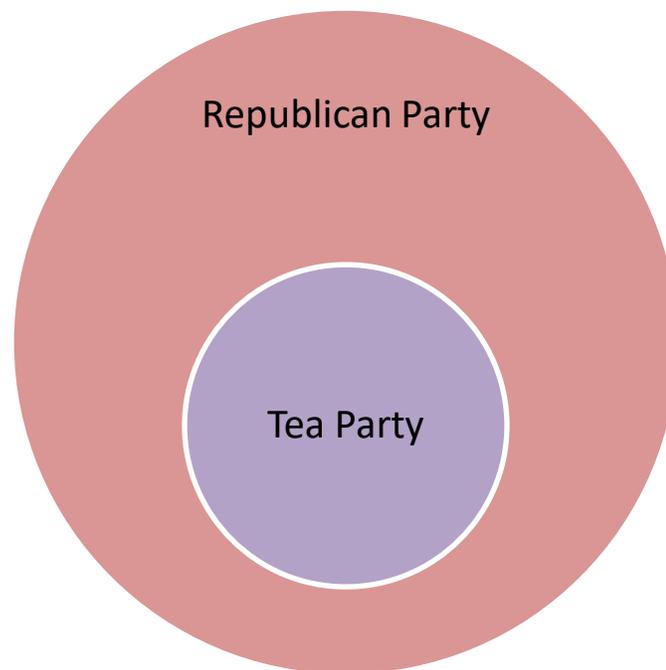
This point is forced on us with the example of Ann Marie Buerkle. Rep. Buerkle identifies with strong conservatism, but not with the Tea Party label. She did not run as a Tea Party candidate in 2010, although the label was used pejoratively by her opponent's campaign and by the *New York Times*, which used identified any Republican candidate with conservative rhetoric or a relationship with Tea Party organizations as being Tea Party. This list even included candidates such as Chris Gibson of New York who, once in office, did not have a track record of strong conservatism.

When asked whether she would join the Tea Party Caucus, Buerkle responded that she would not, and that the idea of the movement manifesting itself as a leadership structure was antithetical to its ideals. The statement did not necessarily imply that she considered herself "too Tea Party" to join Rep. Bachmann's caucus. Given her tendency to not identify with the movement during her campaign, the statement is better seen as giving a reason to not associate with the caucus without giving the impression that she disagreed with their values. Given the Tea Party's ability to organize effective election efforts, it would have been unwise for her to insult the movement. Further, she had no reason to distance herself from the Tea Party because, despite her lack of identification with the movement, she is not ideologically opposed to the Tea Party. Therefore, we should not understand the Tea Party as an ideologically defined subsection of the Republican Party and must look for another way.

An Understanding of the Movement within Conservatism

Organizationally, the Tea Party is a distinct movement that most often operates within the structure of the Republican Party. There are no ties between the party and the movement, official or unofficial; however, the Republican Party is the most effective vehicle for conservatism in American electoral politics, so the Tea Party has no better partner if its goal is electoral success.

In an electoral system with winner-takes-all elections, third party success is limited in the short-term and impossible in the long-term (Downs, 1957). The least distinct aspect of the Tea Party organization is the sympathetic voters, some of whom are Tea Party identifiers, some are strong conservatives that support the movement's policy preferences, and most are Republicans. A visual representation of the Tea Party as it relates to the Republican Party within the electoral system would look like thus:

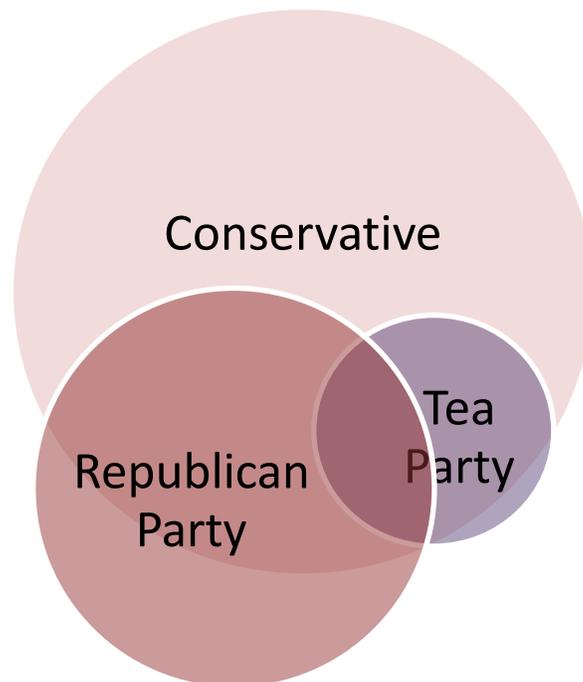


Picture 5: Organizational view of the relationship between the Tea Party and the GOP within the electoral system.

If we consider the organizational relationship of the two groups outside of the electoral system, there would be very little overlap. The overlap that does exist would be in the form of Tea Party leaders who also function as leaders within the Republican Party, such as Michele Bachmann.

When we consider the relationship between the Republican Party and the Tea Party in terms of identity, the picture is different. Individuals will often identify themselves in multiple ways. Ann Marie Buerkle identifies herself as both a Republican and a conservative. Michele

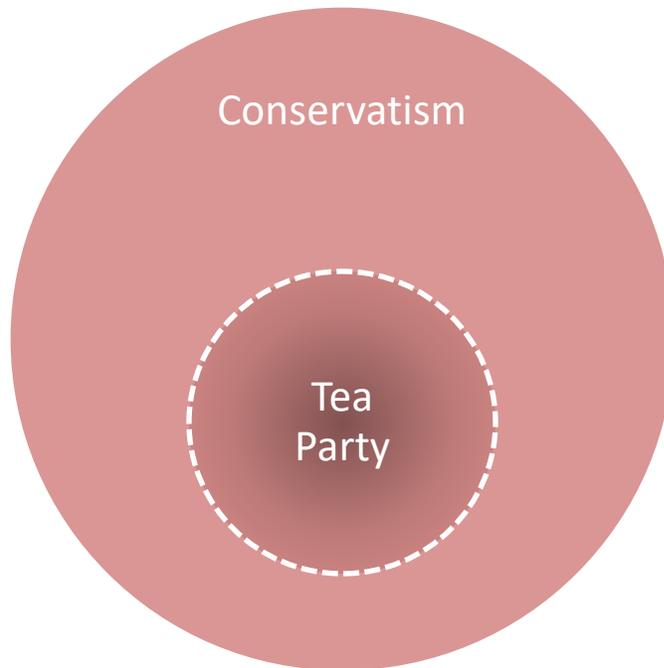
Bachmann identifies herself as a Republican, a conservative, and as a member of the Tea Party. There also exist Republicans who identify themselves as moderates or even liberals on certain policy areas, but these individuals have gradually lost power with the Republican leadership and have become increasingly alienated in the electorate. Identifying oneself as Tea Party almost always entails conservative identity (90% of Tea Party identifiers called themselves conservative in Abramowitz's analysis). Another interesting facet of Tea Party identity among politicians is the opportunistic fashion in which it sometimes occurs. Scott Brown embraced the Tea Party when it helped him become Senator of Massachusetts. However, from an ideological standpoint, his moderate conservatism does not match the ideologies of many of those from the Tea Party who helped him get elected. The cynical observer would argue that Brown wanted the energy and funds that the movement provided more than the ideological content the Tea Party sought.



The ideological relationship between the conservatism and the Tea Party is the most abstract but the most important conclusion that should be drawn from my analysis. Tea Party

ideology is strongly conservative. Specifically, it is conservatism with a antipathy for large government in the form of regulation, spending, and taxation. The most distinctly Tea Party feature of this conservatism is the use of a conservative construction of American history to legitimize their policy preferences. Individuals who identify themselves as Tea Party often hold other conservative beliefs, but the Tea Party movement is not the vehicle that these beliefs tend to be expressed.

However, the lines are not drawn distinctly. People joined the Tea Party movement for different reasons and values towards the far right of the conservative spectrum are not prerequisite for Tea Party membership. The opposite is more important, conservatism of the type advocated by the Tea Party does not make a voter or a politician a member of the Tea Party. If we were to determine whether Rep. Buerkle was a Tea Party member purely through analyzing her stated policy positions, voting record, and sponsored bills, we would find her emphasis on spending, taxation, and "Obamacare" entirely in line with the Tea Party movement. However, this ideological similarity does not correlate into participation with the Tea Party organizational structure or any expressed Tea Party identity. Therefore, we must visualize the relationship in such a way that two individuals could have identical conservative ideologies and have one be Tea Party and the other not. Seen in this way, the Tea Party movement is an expression of American conservatism rather than ideological sub-group within conservatism.



Conclusion

In this thesis, I have aimed to clarify the important elements determining what we consider part of the Tea Party movement as well as discuss the behavior of the right-wing of the Republican delegation of the House of Representatives. There is a significant ideological component to the Tea Party. The movement is unquestionably conservative and focuses on opposing “big government” in terms of spending, taxation, and regulation. The anti-government narrative is partially confused by the relative lack of Tea Party opposition to renewing the PATRIOT Act. The movement embraces a conservative ideal of American society and values, but the Tea Party has not been a significant vehicle for social conservatism. However, this ideological profile I have described is not the exclusive domain of the Tea Party. The example of Ann Marie Buerkle demonstrates how a congresswoman can have a legislative record that falls within the professed values of the Tea Party without embracing the Tea Party identity or being involved with the organizational structure of the Tea Party.

Therefore, a more meaningful discussion of the Tea Party movement must focus on organization and identity in order to define what or who “is Tea Party.” I argue that the organization of the movement can best be understood as comprised of three tiers. Elite organizations perform logistical support and articulate values at the national level. Local Tea Party groups perform grassroots organizing and mobilization with a great deal of independence from each other and from elite organizations. Sympathetic voters have provided the electoral support that made the Tea Party not simply a highly visible movement, but also a politically effective one. Within Congress, the primary Tea Party organization is the Tea Party Caucus; however, the caucus does not behave as a tightly unified bloc. In contentious votes on bills that alienate conservatives, a larger percentage of Tea Party Caucus members will vote against the Republican Party. Nonetheless, the percentage of defectors from the caucus is less than fifty percent. Further, the composition of the conservative blocs that defects from the GOP House leadership is not stable. Rather than a small group of constant defectors, there is a large group of occasionally defecting conservative members.

Given the brand of conservatism articulated by the Tea Party is not exclusive to the movement and that Tea Party organization is highly decentralized and no barrier to entry, self-identification with the movement is a necessary component of defining who is Tea Party. This statement brings me back to the question posed by my classmates, “So what?” If a congresswoman thinks like a Tea Partier, votes like a Tea Partier, and sponsors bills like a Tea Partier, then how is she different than those in the Tea Party movement? My first response is that the question illustrates what I mean that the Tea Party movement is an expression of conservatism rather than a movement separate from conservatism. Ann Marie Buerkle’s legislative record does not move her *into* the Tea Party camp, the Tea Party and her *share* similar

ideological space. Also, this controversial stance in many parts of American political dialogue and the movement's alienation of moderates and liberals keeps some politicians from embracing the title for fear of being associated with the alienating connotation.

The Tea Party, if it is successful in continuing to organize and impact the political dialogue will act as a vehicle for the right-wing of the Republican Party to contend with the institutional advantages of the more moderate GOP leadership. The Tea Party is political force both within the Republican Party and independent from it. This explains the movement's active role in displacing moderate Republican incumbents in primary elections. The success that the Tea Party has had in contributing to the GOP's drift towards the right and disproportionately empowering the ideological extremes suggests to me that this would be a viable model on the other end of the spectrum. The American left has long been frustrated with the relatively moderate leadership of the Democratic Party and the course of triangulation often employed by the most elite Democratic politicians. A movement working within the Democratic Party structure to empower the far left is a plausible occurrence if the far left can become as frustrated with the political situation as the far right was after the election of Barack Obama. The development of such a movement would be in keeping with the trend of the two parties continuing to drift apart, polarizing the American political system.

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