

Economic Hardship, Racial Threat, and Support for the Tea Party Movement

Abstract

In 2009, a new conservative social movement emerged in the United States. With an emphasis on limited government, the Tea Party Movement mobilized thousands of supporters to participate in protest events, and it was particularly influential in Republican electoral politics. We explore the extent to which support for the movement was a function of racial threat and economic adversity. In our analysis of national survey data, we find that support for the movement was greatest among political conservatives, and while state-level racial composition had no impact on movement support, both high levels of unemployment and a conservative state political environment increased support for the movement. Similarly, in our analysis of state-level Tea Party membership, we find that unemployment rates and conservative political environments are positively correlated with membership rates.

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During the Great Recession of the late 2000s, a new protest movement mobilized many Americans in favor of a limited federal government and in opposition to several proposed economic and social policies, such as the bailout of the U.S. financial system under President George W. Bush and the Obama Administration's healthcare reform efforts. In the movement's first large-scale event, more than 250,000 people were reported to have attended "Tea Party" protests at over 300 locations on April 15, 2009 (Silver 2009). The Tea Party Movement (TPM) gained additional prominence in 2010 when movement-affiliated U.S. Senate candidates defeated establishment Republicans in Alaska, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Nevada, and Utah. Many observers also credited the movement with the Republican takeover of the U.S. House of Representatives in that year.

We explore the extent to which state-level racial composition and economic conditions are associated with support for the TPM. The influence of a racial threat—as the movement's supporters are primarily white and the TPM's rise was contemporaneous with the election of the country's first African American President—and of economic hardship—as the movement occurred during a prolonged recession and was first associated with Congressional economic policies—have been a part of contemporary accounts of the movement's emergence. We test these hypotheses using two sets of data. First, using data from 5,582 respondents from seven national surveys, we model attitudes towards the TPM as a function of individual demographic and political beliefs and state-

level measures. We find that unfavorable state-level economic conditions, as measured by the unemployment rate, increase the likelihood of having a favorable opinion of the TPM, net of individual controls. In contrast, we find that the state's proportion African American is not correlated with attitudes about the TPM. In addition, a conservative state political atmosphere, as measured by the proportion of state voters for McCain, was also correlated with support for the movement, net of individual controls. Second, we model state-level TPM membership count as a function of the same state-level predictors. Here, we also find that unemployment rates and Republican vote share, but not proportion African American, are positively correlated with membership levels. Combined, our findings suggest that the influence of economic adversity and local political environments remain salient in understanding conservative social movement support.

Tea Party Movement History

On February 19, 2009, after the election and shortly after President Barack Obama's inauguration, Rick Santelli, a television financial analyst, gave an on-air speech against the Obama Administration's plans for assistance to homeowners facing foreclosure, calling for a "Chicago Tea Party." Video of Santelli became an instant YouTube hit, and various web sites, including Facebook, networked supporters throughout the United States (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010). On April 15, 2009, hundreds of Tax Day protests were held across the country, the largest in Atlanta, Georgia, where an estimated 15,000 people gathered (Silver 2009). Additional protests were organized at Town Hall meetings sponsored by members of Congress in the summer of 2009 (Bunch 2010). Thousands of state and local TPM membership

organizations were formed during this period¹ (Burghart and Zeskind 2010). A September 12, 2009 “Taxpayer March on Washington” drew tens of thousands to the U.S. capitol. During 2010, protests were held in cities across the country almost every week, and a “Restoring Honor” rally sponsored by conservative media personality Glenn Beck and many Tea Party organizations drew approximately 80,000 people to Washington, DC on August 28, 2010 (Burghart and Zeskind 2010).

In addition to relatively autonomous local Tea Party organizations, which organized most of the local events, national organizations such as the FreedomWorks Tea Party, 1776 Tea Party, ResistNet Tea Party, Tea Party Nation, Tea Party Patriots, and the Tea Party Express attempted to create links among local activist organizations and between local activists and national Republican leaders (Burghart and Zeskin). Former House Majority Leader and FreedomWorks founder Dick Armey and former Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin were among the most prominent Republican politicians linked to the movement. Palin was active during the 2010 Republican primary season, endorsing “outsider” Tea Party- approved candidates in many states, and media accounts of the 2010 Congressional elections often emphasized the importance of Tea Party support (Burghart and Zeskin).

Tea Party advocates frame their demands in terms of limiting the federal government’s size and influence, with an emphasis on restricting government actions to that which is specifically listed in the U.S. Constitution. In addition to their support for a repeal of the Obama Administration’s healthcare reform, Tea Party demands often include a balanced federal budget, a simplified tax code, and a reduction in the scope of

¹ Burghart and Zeskind’s (2010) data set (described below) lists more than 42,000 membership organizations. Of these, roughly half list only one member in their online directories; 6,585 list more than five members; and 305 list more than fifty members.

government services and regulations. Traditional conservative social issues, such as abortion and homosexuality, are not prominent (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010; Zernike 2010).

Several competing explanations have been given for the rise of the TPM. These explanations range from accounts that emphasize moral outrage at government expansion to those that emphasize racist responses at the election of the first African American President. Largely sympathetic accounts, such as Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen's *Mad as Hell* (2010), link the movement to an American populist tradition and explain the TPM's emergence as a function of economic uncertainty, an out-of-touch political elite, and anger over expansionist government programs. Similarly, Hawyard (2010) argues that TPM followers are an "angry middle," consisting of "moderates who are simply shocked by Obama's great leap forward in the size of government." Observers also emphasize the role of right-wing media (e.g., Bunch 2010); an American tendency to embrace paranoid narratives (e.g., Perlstein 2010); and the role of right-wing financiers (e.g., Bunch 2010). Although we find many of these accounts plausible, testing them is beyond the scope of this project. Here, we focus on two potential causal factors: economic conditions and racial threat.

Many accounts identify the Great Recession as a necessary, but not sufficient, precursor of the movement. Lilla (2010) sees it as a "public reaction to the [economic] crash of 2008" (p. 8), as Zernike (2010) finds its roots in "the panic set off by the Great Recession" (p. 6). Cassidy (2010) finds the movement's origins in an "economic dislocation swell[ing] the ranks of the permanently alienated with the legions of people who are temporarily disadvantaged." Sides (2010) ties the rise in TPM to the more

general trend that trust in government declines when the economy declines. More generally, state officials are often held accountable for economic performance, and economic setbacks may lead to a decline in state legitimacy and confidence in the state's effectiveness (Coleman 1990: 501). One of the more common measures of economic hardship is the level of unemployment. Kerbo and Shaffer (1986) find that the count of U.S. protest events reported in the *New York Times* from 1890 to 1940 is correlated with the national unemployment rate, with years of high unemployment matching years of high protest activity. Jenkins et al. (2003) report that unemployment positively correlates with black activism in the United States, although when economic hardship was very high, protest was more limited, which they theoretically link to a paucity of resources or organizations that may be available in times of extreme hardship. Similarly, Snow et al. (2005) find that unemployment levels were positively associated with the count of protests by the homeless in the 1980s in a sample of U.S. cities. Opp (2000) also finds that resource deficits, measured by unemployment and low income, are correlated with experiencing a discontent with one's personal situation, which was positively associated with political action, although those that were not unhappy with their low socio-economic status (SES) were less likely to protest. Unemployment and poverty were both associated with the likelihood that a U.S. city experienced a riot in the late 1960s, according to Myers and Caniglia (2004), who also determined that these effects were not consistently found when the riot-count measure was collected from newspaper accounts, which points to a possible cause for the variation in the effect's size and significance.

In contrast to these positive associations between economic hardship and collective action, Isaac and Christensen (2002) and Isaac, McDonald, and Lukasik (2006)

find that unemployment is negatively associated with labor-strike militancy in the United States. Piven and Cloward (1992) argue, however, that these links between highly routinized forms of protest, such as strikes, and economic grievances are unlikely, because institutionalized forms of protest are likely to be dependent on organizational resources and not grievances. In addition, Koopmans and Olzak's (2004) study yields no relation between radical-right violence and local unemployment rates in Germany. Although Van Dyke and Soule (2002) find no link at the county or state level between unemployment and the count of U.S. far-right organizations, their results do indicate that a decline in manufacturing jobs is positively associated with the organizational count.

Hypothesis 1: States with higher levels of unemployment will have higher levels of support for the TPM, controlling for individual-level SES and political beliefs.

Those less sympathetic to the movement have portrayed it as being fueled by racism (Burghart and Zeskind). Wolfe (2010), for example, argues that the movement is a direct result of an "unease with the steps toward great racial equality their country has taken in recent years." That TPMers believe that President Obama does not share the values of many Americans leads Butler (2010) to hold that the TPM talks in "code words" signaling white anger at having an African American president. Others, such as Shales (2010), discount the role of racism in the rise of TPM, noting that few state that their opposition to Obama is based on his "Muslim" religion and that TPMers (11%) are more likely than non-TPMers (6%) to say that what they like best about President Obama is his intelligence.

The TPM as a whole has come under fire for alleged racial undercurrents at rallies and on websites. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), only 1% of Tea

Party supporters are Black, while Blacks make up 12% of the population overall (www.splcenter.org). Much of the movement media's non-electoral coverage has focused on public allegations of racism by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congressional Black Caucus (Rassmusen and Schoen 2010). At least two leaders of Tea Party organizations have come under scrutiny for publicly using racist and offensive rhetoric, and others have close ties with the Militia movement (Burghart and Zeskind 2010). Some black Tea Party supporters are also worried about the racist undertones. Lenny McAllister, a black conservative commentator and frequent speaker at Tea Party rallies, claimed in a National Public Radio (NPR) interview that he had seen enough racist signs at events to recognize a racist element in the movement (Tucker 2010).

More generally, most racial conflict theories of political participation are rooted in the work of Key (1949) and Blalock (1967). In his now classic examination of Southern politics, Key noted a positive relation between the size of a county's black population and white efforts to limit black political participation. He linked this to whites' efforts to maintain both economic and political control over blacks. Blalock theorized a similar relation between population size and discrimination and argued that whites were reacting to a "power threat." Perceived black threat has been linked to support for capital punishment (Baumer, Messner, and Rosenfeld 2003), increasing imprisonment rates (Greenberg and West 2001), spending on jails and prisons (Jacobs and Helms 1999), interracial homicides (Jacobs and Wood 1999), police brutality (Holmes 2000), and felon disenfranchisement (Behrens, Uggen, and Manza 2003).

Most attitudinal and behavioral tests of this relation have involved comparing

white racial attitudes with the percent black in the city, county, or metropolitan area. At the metropolitan level, there is some support for this theory, with whites expressing more negative racial beliefs in areas with a high concentration of blacks (Taylor 1998, 2000). Quillian (1995, 1996) finds a significant group threat effect at both regional and national levels. At the state level, Fox (2004) identifies a complex interaction between white Latino stereotypes and white attitudes towards welfare, which depends on the size of the Latino population. Others emphasize that in smaller geographic units, racial diversity is negatively correlated with anti-black feelings. At the neighborhood level, racial diversity does not necessarily lead to racial hostilities. Whites, blacks, and Latinos who live in interracial communities are less likely to report hostile feelings about other racial groups than those who live in segregated communities (Oliver and Wong 2003). In Louisiana, David Duke received his support in largely white parishes (Voss 1996), and whites that voted for David Dinkins in New York's 1989 mayoral contest were more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods than in all-white ones (Carsey 1995).

Several researchers report evidence supporting racial threat theory in studies of far-right movements. For example, the percentage of White males in Indiana who became members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was associated with the increase of the percentage of Black people in the county between 1910 and 1920 (McVeigh 1999). In addition, the percentage Black in a county had a positive effect on their recruitment efforts (McVeigh et al. 2004). Racial heterogeneity in counties was also associated with racist organizing in 1997 and 2000 (McVeigh 2004). A percentage increase in the county-level non-white population was associated with an increase in the number of Patriot/Militia groups that emerged in the 1990s (Van Dyke and Soule 2002).

Hypothesis 2: States with a higher proportion of African Americans will see high levels of support for the TPM, controlling for individual-level SES and political beliefs.

Methods

We analyzed two sets of data to test these hypotheses, using individual survey data and state-level organization membership counts. The survey data measure expressions of approval or disapproval of the movement, while the membership data measure a more active level of participation. Research on participation suggests that having a favorable attitude towards a social movement can increase the likelihood of participation, but it is not sufficient for determining it (e.g., McAdam 1986; Munson 2008). We are thus able to capture two different ways of expressing support for the movement.

Outcome Variables: Our survey data come from seven national polls conducted by NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll in January, March, May, June, early August, late August, and September of 2010. Data are from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. In each survey, respondents were told, “Now I’m going to read you the names of several public figures and groups, and I’d like you to rate your feelings toward each one as very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative. If you don’t know the name, please just say so.” Across all surveys, the TPM was viewed somewhat or very positively by 30% of respondents, unfavorably by 31%, and neutrally by 39%. Although the support figures are relatively consistent across the seven surveys,

ranging from 29% in January to a peak of 33% in June, there is considerable variation in the other categories of responses, with negative opinions increasing from 20% in January to 36% in September and neutral opinions decreasing from 51% in January to 34% in September. Presumably, this is a function of those who are most at risk for supporting the movement finding out about it through media sources such as Fox News, earlier than those who were less inclined to support the TPM.

The survey question used to construct the dependent variable has six possible responses (two favorable, two unfavorable, and two neutral), and we reduce it to three (favorable, unfavorable, and neutral) in order to simplify our discussion. An analysis of all six categories as distinct outcomes produces substantially similar results, and is available from the first author.

As the dependent variable has three categories that we treat as unordered, we employ a multinomial logistic regression with standard errors adjusted for within-state error correlation. We select having an unfavorable opinion of the movement as the base or comparison category. Although the base-category decision impacts the coefficients reported in Table 1, it does not affect the predicted probabilities presented in Table 2 or the figures. The base-category choice also does not impact the reported coefficient significance tests, which are joint Wald tests of whether all the coefficients associated with each variable are significantly different from zero. Likelihood-ratio tests from binary models suggest that adding a state-random effect did not improve the fit of the model (and produced state effects that were near zero), so we exclude them.

Membership counts were compiled by the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights (IREHR) from May 1 to May 5, 2010 for the five national Tea Party

membership organizations—1776 Tea Party, FreedomWorks Tea Party, ResistNet, Tea Party Nation, and Tea Party Patriots (Burghart and Zeskind 2010). Membership data are based on online records. For each of these five organizations, individuals can list themselves on the respective websites as a member of a local Tea Party organization, or if their local chapter is not listed, they can add their own organization to the directory. As membership is based entirely on public self-reports, it likely includes many people who have not been active members of the movement and excludes many who have been. Thus although it not an excellent measure of the degree of activity, it does capture a higher level of commitment than our survey measures. We aggregate the geographic information provided by IREHR to the state level to provide state-level membership estimates. This results in a total 177,963 individuals, ranging from 16,326 in California to 261 in North Dakota. On a per-capita basis, Kansas has the most registered members, at 108 per 100,000, followed by Tennessee (106), Montana (102), Wyoming (91), and Nevada (88). Hawaii (29) is the least dense state in terms of membership. As this outcome is a count measure, we use negative binomial models and include a measure of population size, logged, as the normalizing exposure.

State Level Measures: We include four state-level measures. First, we measure economic hardship with the state unemployment rate. For the survey data, we use the state unemployment rate from the month in which the survey was conducted, and for the membership data, where we do not know when individuals first listed their membership, we use the average state level of unemployment for 2009. Unemployment rates are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor 2010). This measure shows a considerable amount of variation, although most of it is across states rather than within

states during this time period, with North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska boasting unemployment rates below 5% for most of 2010, while Nevada and Michigan both had monthly unemployment rates of 14% or more. We control for racial threat by including the state-level proportion African American and the proportion Latino in 2008, the most recent year available (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). We use two additional state-level controls. First, we control for state-level political climate by including the proportion of individuals who voted for the Republican Presidential candidate in 2008 (Leip 2008). In the state membership analysis, this variable controls for both the political context and the aggregate of individual attitudes, as we lack individual data. A conservative political context is likely to increase support for the movement, because individuals are more likely to encounter sympathetic arguments, organizations, individuals, elites, and events, which makes the TPM identity more accessible and legitimizes its activities (Tilly 2000). We also control for state median income, as prior research has suggested that political attitudes may vary based on state wealth (e.g. Gelman 2008). Data are from the American Community Survey, and we include the natural log of the median family income from 2008 in our models.

Individual Controls: In the survey data, we include measures of respondent sex (dichotomous), race (white non-Hispanic, African American non-Hispanic, Hispanic and Asian/Native American), and age (18-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and older) based on self-reports. We also include self-reported measures of SES with a four-value income variable (family income under \$30,000 a year, between \$30,000 and \$50,000, between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and greater than \$100,000), and a five-value education variable (no high-

school degree, high-school degree, some college, four-year college degree, and postgraduate work or degree).

We include three measures to capture an individual's political attitudes. The first measure is placement on a liberal-conservative political scale (liberal, moderate, conservative, and very conservative). We also include a measure of party identification (Democrat, Independent, and Republican). Finally, we include a measure of whether or not the respondent voted for the Republican Presidential candidate John McCain in the 2008 election. In our regression analysis, the least conservative option is the reference category. Cases with missing data are excluded, for a total of 5,595 cases for the survey analysis and 50 cases in the membership analysis.

Findings

Survey Analysis: Table 1 presents the results of our survey analysis. All models present two sets of coefficients: one comparing the odds of a favorable opinion of the TPM to a neutral one and another comparing the odds of an unfavorable opinion to a neutral one. Model 1 presents a model with individual demographics, Model 2 adds political beliefs, and Model 3 adds state-level measures. For each variable, we report significance based Wald tests of whether the two estimated parameters for each variable (the difference between favorable and neutral and the difference between unfavorable and neutral) are jointly zero (Long and Freese 2006: 237).

Table 1 about here

Model 1 shows that net of other demographic variables, women are less likely to have an opinion about the Tea Party than men, and when they do have an opinion, they are less likely to support it than men. This finding is robust to including political views in Model 2 and state-level variables in Model 3. According to Table 2, which presents the predicted probabilities holding all other variables constant based on Model 3, a woman would have a 37% chance of viewing the movement neutrally while men would have only a 28% chance.

Table 2 about here

Older individuals are more likely to have an opinion about the movement than younger individuals. Without controlling for political beliefs, respondents who are age 65 and older are more likely to support the movement than oppose it, but controlling for political beliefs, this relationship is reversed, with seniors the most likely to view the movement unfavorably. Controlling for other factors, seniors are still the most likely to hold an opinion about the movement.

African Americans have the greatest likelihood of expressing disapproval of the TPM in all three models. While Latinos are significantly less likely to support the movement than Whites controlling for other demographics, this effect is not significant after controlling for political beliefs.

Net of other demographics, people with higher incomes are more likely to express an opinion about the movement, but are not significantly more likely to approve or disapprove of it. Controlling for political beliefs, however, those with greater incomes are

more likely to view the movement unfavorably. While those with incomes less than \$30,000 a year are predicted to be equally likely to approve (31%) as disapprove (32%) of the movement based on Model 3, those with incomes greater than \$100,000 a year are much more likely to disapprove (43%) than approve of the movement (29%). Note that this shift toward unfavorability comes almost entirely from the reduction in people who express no opinion about the movement.

There is no significant difference among those without a high-school degree, with just a high school degree, and with some college in either the likelihood of having the opinion or of supporting the movement in any of the models. Those with a college education or a post-graduate degree are more likely to have an opinion about the movement, and there is a large increase in TPM unfavorability among those with a post-secondary education. Those with less than a high-school education have a 31% chance of viewing the movement unfavorably, while those with a graduate degree have a 48% chance of viewing the movement unfavorably, net of other factors. In contrast, like income, the likelihood of having a favorable view of the movement is comparable across all education groups, net of other factors.

Between the first survey in January and the last in September, individuals were more likely to express an opinion about the movement. Net of other factors, individuals were more likely to express disapproval, which increased from a predicted 22% in January to 37% in September, while approval rates remained flat.

Political views, as shown in Model 2, have a strong correlation with the likelihood that an individual supports the TPM. For each of three measures, party affiliation, 2008 vote, and liberal-conservative beliefs, those who identified with the conservative side

were more likely to express a favorable opinion of the movement, and liberals were more likely to express an unfavorable view of the movement. Net of other factors, a very conservative Republican who voted for McCain had a 76% chance of supporting the movement; a moderate independent who voted for McCain had a 35% chance; a moderate independent who voted for Obama had a 16% chance, and a liberal who voted for Obama had only a 7% chance.

In sum, looking at the individual factors, the TPM movement is viewed most favorably among political conservatives. Those with the greatest propensity to support the movement did so early. Among others, those high in the SES variables associated with political interest were more likely to express disapproval, while those low in these attributes were more likely to have no opinion about the movement.

Looking at the state-level measures included in Model 3, only state unemployment rate and the percent voting for McCain in 2008 had a significant effect on attitudes toward the TPM. There is little evidence of a state-level racial threat, as neither proportion Latino nor proportion African American was significant in the models. Other modeling strategies, such as restricting the sample to whites, modeling the proportions as interactions with race or other variables, or including a different set of state-level controls produced similar results. State median income also had no significant impact, with support for the TPM being consistent across rich and poor states alike.

In contrast, measures of economic hardship and conservative political environment were both significant in predicting attitudes toward the movement. Net of other factors, residents of states with high levels of unemployment were more likely to view the movement favorably and less likely to view the movement unfavorably than in

states with low levels of unemployment. As shown in Figure 1, in a state with low unemployment, like North Dakota in March with a 4% unemployment rate, we would expect 44% of residents to view the movement favorable, with only 25% viewing it favorably, controlling for other factors. In contrast, in a state with a high level of unemployment, like Michigan, with 14% unemployment rate in January of 2010, individuals would be equally likely to be favorable as unfavorable. This represents a 20-point swing, larger than any of the individual-level demographic predictors. If the unemployment rate in each state was 6% in September of 2010 (as opposed to the actual national average of 9.2%), we estimate that the TPM support would drop from 30% to 26%.

Figure 1 about here

Individuals living in conservative states are also more likely to support the movement than those living in more liberal states, although the size of this effect is less than that of state unemployment rates. As shown in Figure 2, in a state with little support for the Republican presidential candidate in 2008, like Vermont, where only 30% of voters supported the John McCain, we would expect 41% of residents to view the movement favorably, with only 26% viewing it favorably, controlling for other factors. In contrast, a state with a high level of Republican support, like Alabama with 60% support for the Republican candidate, individuals would be equally likely to be favorable as unfavorable. This impact is controlling for individual political beliefs, so it measures the impact of the political environment rather than the sum of individual beliefs. That is, people with the same set of individual political beliefs are more likely to support the TPM in conservative states than they are in more liberal states.

We note that in additional models interacting this state-level measure with various individual demographics or political beliefs, we found no significant interaction effects. That is, the effect of state-level political atmosphere impacts all residents equally.

Membership Analysis: Table 3 presents our analysis of state-level membership counts. Neither the state's proportion African American nor the state's proportion Latino has a significant effect on the TPM membership count. We also find no regional effect, as none of the indicator variables are significantly different from our East Coast reference category. The proportion of voters who voted for John McCain in 2008 and the unemployment rate in 2009 are both significant predictors of membership counts. All else equal, a state where 35% of voters supported John McCain (at the 5th percentile) would have 3,020 members (SE=198), while a state where 63% of voters supported John McCain (at the 95th percentile) would have 4,717 members (SE=423). All else equal, a state with a 2009 unemployment rate of 4.8% (at the 5th percentile) would have 3,049 members (SE=288), while a state with a 2009 unemployment rate of 11.7% (at the 95th percentile) would have 3,989 members (SE=256).

Discussion

This paper has examined the relative influence of the state-level racial threat and economic hardship on support for the TPM. For both outcome measures, support and membership, we find that while state-level employment had a significant effect, state-level racial composition did not. Areas that were hit hardest by the Great Recession were also those where support was greatest for the TPM, controlling for other factors. We also

found that support was strongest for the TPM in more politically conservative states, even in the survey data, after controlling for individual-level political beliefs.

Although much of the literature on social movement mobilization has emphasized the ways that movements construct problems through framing (Snow et al. 1986) or by developing an oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge 2001), our findings suggest that material conditions also play an important role in mobilization. This is in contrast to the dominant trends in social movement theory, such as resource mobilization (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1973), political process (e.g., Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982), and new social movement theory (e.g., Melucci 1980; Kreisi et al. 1995), which view adversity as either irrelevant or important only to the extent that social movements can construct or frame them as salient. Our findings suggest that scholars need to start bringing back in objective measures of adversity as important “fundamental causes” (Link and Phelan 2003) of social movement mobilization.

We also document how the geographic sorting of individuals based on political beliefs has an impact on social movement participation. As Bishop (2008) details, this level of political and SES clustering is relatively recent in American history. Like Sunstein (2009), Bishop argues that groups that are relatively homogenous are more likely to adopt extreme and polarizing political views. Here, we found that areas that where individuals were living in a conservative environment, they were more likely to embrace the TPM, even after controlling for their own political beliefs. While social movement scholars have critically explored the extent to which things like “free spaces” (Polletta 1999) enable social movement activism, the larger role of public opinion on individual mobilization is less fully

explored in the literature. Our findings suggest measuring political attitudes at both the individual and collective level may help explain variation in levels of mobilization.

Although we are confident in our findings on the relation of economic hardship and political climate with TPM support, we are hesitant to say that our null-finding regarding the racial-threat hypothesis means that TPM supporters are not at all motivated by racism. First, our measure could be at the wrong level. It could be that local racial conditions, such as those at the county or metropolitan area, are more relevant for developing a sense of racial threat. It could also be that the phenomenon exists at a national level. That is, the election of the first African American President in 2008 might be perceived as a threat to some whites regardless of local racial composition. In this case, the relevant comparison would not be between different areas of the country during the Obama era, but comparing the level and type of opposition to the Obama administration with opposition to the Clinton or Carter administrations. A third possibility is that racial attitudes may be too closely entangled with political beliefs to be able to analyze them separately in this analysis. As Republican Party candidates have repeatedly tapped white racial fears since the Nixon administration (Perlstein 2008), it may difficult to disentangle race-based opposition to the Obama administration from conservative-based opposition to Obama without a more detailed content analysis.

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Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression analysis of support for the Tea Party Movement.

	(1)			(2)			(3)		
	Unfavorable vs Neutral	Favorable vs Neutral		Unfavorable vs Neutral	Favorable vs Neutral		Unfavorable vs Neutral	Favorable vs Neutral	
Female	-0.266 (0.0582)	-0.550 (0.0826)	**	-0.363 (0.0662)	-0.501 (0.0883)	**	-0.365 (0.0662)	-0.503 (0.0887)	**
Age (18-34 omitted)									
35-49	0.212 (0.0896)	0.484 (0.0810)	**	0.352 (0.0941)	0.306 (0.0981)	**	0.344 (0.0953)	0.307 (0.0978)	**
50-64	0.805 (0.110)	0.893 (0.0912)	**	0.895 (0.107)	0.728 (0.110)	**	0.891 (0.106)	0.731 (0.110)	**
65+	0.844 (0.137)	1.138 (0.142)	**	1.053 (0.139)	0.741 (0.144)	**	1.056 (0.138)	0.749 (0.145)	**
Race (White omitted)									
African American	0.739 (0.0862)	-0.800 (0.130)	**	0.251 (0.0918)	-0.0493 (0.146)	*	0.266 (0.0965)	-0.0486 (0.147)	*
Latino	0.136 (0.106)	-0.298 (0.134)	*	-0.241 (0.117)	0.158 (0.167)		-0.204 (0.119)	0.179 (0.171)	
Asian/Other	0.110 (0.138)	-0.0924 (0.179)		-0.103 (0.140)	0.276 (0.188)		-0.103 (0.137)	0.297 (0.190)	
Income (<30K omitted)									
30K-49K	0.211 (0.105)	0.267 (0.0941)	*	0.316 (0.114)	0.118 (0.0962)	*	0.321 (0.114)	0.114 (0.0965)	*
50K-99K	0.311 (0.0955)	0.407 (0.0929)	**	0.380 (0.0980)	0.125 (0.102)	**	0.387 (0.0986)	0.126 (0.0999)	**
Over 100K	0.501 (0.115)	0.519 (0.110)	**	0.670 (0.106)	0.156 (0.113)	**	0.686 (0.106)	0.159 (0.113)	**
Education (No HS degree omitted)									
HS Degree	-0.0324 (0.137)	0.133 (0.130)		-0.00980 (0.184)	-0.00526 (0.152)		-0.00273 (0.184)	-0.00438 (0.151)	
Some College	0.118 (0.143)	0.233 (0.128)		0.0893 (0.183)	0.0232 (0.156)		0.0988 (0.185)	0.0237 (0.155)	
College Degree	0.857 (0.164)	0.561 (0.137)	**	0.884 (0.214)	0.309 (0.161)	**	0.893 (0.216)	0.315 (0.162)	**
Post College	1.229 (0.183)	0.440 (0.161)	**	1.113 (0.233)	0.329 (0.174)	**	1.120 (0.235)	0.336 (0.174)	**
Political attitudes (Liberals omitted)									
Independent				-0.388 (0.0894)	-0.0810 (0.140)	**	-0.386 (0.0887)	-0.0823 (0.140)	**
Conservative				-0.793 (0.121)	0.380 (0.154)	**	-0.794 (0.120)	0.376 (0.155)	**
Very Conservative				-0.868 (0.151)	1.153 (0.187)	**	-0.870 (0.152)	1.154 (0.189)	**
Independent				-0.539 (0.114)	0.486 (0.100)	**	-0.541 (0.115)	0.489 (0.0999)	**

McCain Voter				-0.935	0.666	**	-0.937	0.663	**
				(0.136)	(0.119)		(0.136)	(0.118)	
Republican				-0.799	0.852	**	-0.798	0.854	**
				(0.0892)	(0.0853)		(0.0918)	(0.0856)	
State level measures									
State Unemployment							-6.046	4.085	**
							(2.143)	(2.613)	
Median Income (logged)							-0.285	0.183	
							(0.343)	(0.352)	
Proportion African American							-0.00279	0.0671	
							(0.647)	(0.885)	
Proportion Latino							-0.439	-0.00168	
							(0.313)	(0.371)	
McCain Vote %							-1.245	1.609	*
							(0.601)	(0.851)	
Region (East omitted)									
Midwest	-0.0320	0.128		0.118	-0.110		0.204	-0.208	**
	(0.100)	(0.0795)		(0.091)	(0.087)		(0.0843)	(0.111)	
South	-0.236	0.434	**	0.016	0.155		0.208	-0.0675	
	(0.103)	(0.0750)		(0.104)	(0.094)		(0.121)	(0.158)	
West	0.0268	0.0887		0.184	-0.132	*	0.423	-0.263	**
	(0.104)	(0.0997)		(0.107)	(0.094)		(0.138)	(0.177)	
Date (All 2010, January omitted)									
March	0.579	0.213	**	0.587	0.138	**	0.566	0.153	**
	(0.126)	(0.127)		(0.152)	(0.130)		(0.154)	(0.130)	
May	0.689	0.341	**	0.786	0.239	**	0.712	0.286	**
	(0.123)	(0.156)		(0.123)	(0.165)		(0.125)	(0.167)	
June	0.835	0.507	**	0.869	0.446	**	0.804	0.484	**
	(0.160)	(0.167)		(0.190)	(0.173)		(0.193)	(0.183)	
Early August	0.879	0.424	**	0.938	0.334	**	0.880	0.368	**
	(0.144)	(0.136)		(0.160)	(0.144)		(0.161)	(0.146)	
Late August	1.030	0.397	**	1.185	0.240	**	1.126	0.277	**
	(0.139)	(0.103)		(0.161)	(0.120)		(0.165)	(0.122)	
September	1.111	0.518	**	1.216	0.386	**	1.160	0.424	**
	(0.137)	(0.153)		(0.146)	(0.164)		(0.149)	(0.168)	
Constant	-1.974	-1.594		-1.323	-2.070		2.895	-5.117	
	(0.227)	(0.201)		(0.280)	(0.288)		(3.854)	(4.229)	
Log pseudolikelihood	-5692.6			-4727.3			-4718.4		
N	5717			5595			5595		

Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 2. Predicted probabilities based on Model 3 of Table 1. Standard errors in parentheses.

Variable	Value	Unfavorable	Neutral/No Opinion	Favorable
Sex	Male	0.389 (0.013)	0.282 (0.015)	0.329 (0.012)
	Female	0.358 (0.014)	0.366 (0.016)	0.276 (0.014)
Age	18-34	0.309 (0.014)	0.425 (0.018)	0.266 (0.015)
	35-49	0.352 (0.014)	0.353 (0.019)	0.295 (0.015)
	50-64	0.417 (0.018)	0.258 (0.016)	0.325 (0.016)
	65+	0.443 (0.018)	0.241 (0.022)	0.316 (0.012)
	Income	Under 30K	0.324 (0.017)	0.369 (0.016)
	30K-49K	0.37 (0.017)	0.323 (0.020)	0.307 (0.015)
	50K-99K	0.38 (0.014)	0.316 (0.017)	0.304 (0.012)
	Over 100K	0.428 (0.017)	0.281 (0.019)	0.291 (0.013)
Education	No HS Degree	0.306 (0.032)	0.386 (0.031)	0.308 (0.020)
	HS Degree	0.307 (0.018)	0.386 (0.022)	0.307 (0.016)
	Some College	0.321 (0.014)	0.372 (0.019)	0.307 (0.015)
	College Degree	0.442 (0.014)	0.257 (0.013)	0.302 (0.015)
	Post College	0.479 (0.019)	0.233 (0.019)	0.288 (0.016)
Race	White	0.373 (0.014)	0.328 (0.015)	0.298 (0.012)
	African American	0.42 (0.018)	0.305 (0.019)	0.276 (0.018)
	Latino	0.324 (0.024)	0.337 (0.024)	0.339 (0.031)
	Asian/Other	0.337 (0.020)	0.313 (0.030)	0.35 (0.030)
Political Attitudes	Liberal	0.47 (0.019)	0.315 (0.023)	0.215 (0.015)
	Independent	0.4 (0.014)	0.371 (0.017)	0.229 (0.013)
	Conservative	0.298 (0.021)	0.371 (0.020)	0.331 (0.020)
	Very Conservative	0.228 (0.020)	0.285 (0.020)	0.487 (0.025)
Party	Democrat	0.466 (0.019)	0.338 (0.017)	0.196 (0.014)
	Independent	0.33 (0.015)	0.364 (0.020)	0.306 (0.017)
	Republican	0.26 (0.016)	0.348 (0.018)	0.392 (0.016)

Vote 2008	Non-McCain Voter	0.433 (0.016)	0.337 (0.016)	0.23 (0.015)
	McCain Voter	0.224 (0.018)	0.365 (0.022)	0.41 (0.018)
Region	East	0.332 (0.016)	0.334 (0.020)	0.334 (0.020)
	Midwest	0.383 (0.011)	0.328 (0.014)	0.289 (0.013)
	South	0.364 (0.019)	0.324 (0.022)	0.313 (0.016)
	West	0.414 (0.020)	0.313 (0.020)	0.273 (0.016)
Date	January	0.211 (0.015)	0.494 (0.021)	0.295 (0.017)
	March	0.29 (0.014)	0.417 (0.014)	0.293 (0.013)
	May	0.314 (0.012)	0.386 (0.015)	0.3 (0.013)
	June	0.312 (0.013)	0.357 (0.023)	0.331 (0.016)
	Early August	0.331 (0.014)	0.36 (0.016)	0.309 (0.011)
	Late August	0.376 (0.014)	0.342 (0.017)	0.282 (0.013)
	September	0.372 (0.013)	0.326 (0.014)	0.302 (0.012)

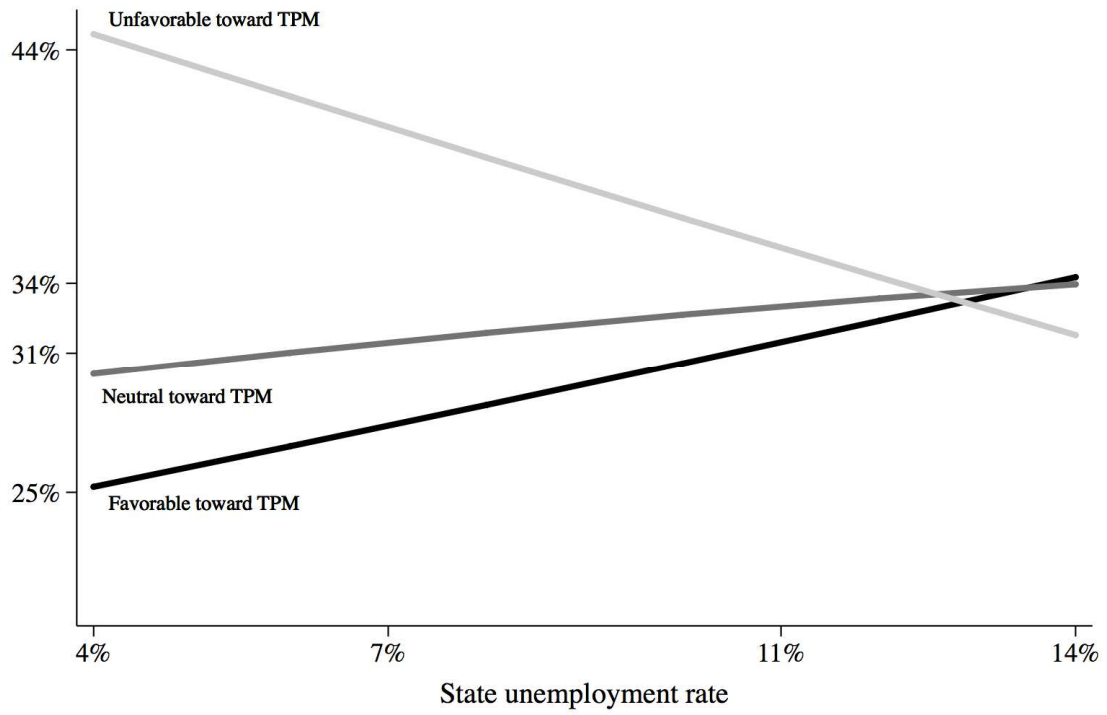
Table 3. Negative binomial modes of the number of Tea Party Movement members by state.

	(1)
	Members
Unemployment rate, 2009	0.0388* (0.0196)
McCain vote share, 2008	1.629** (0.475)
Proportion African American	-0.0338 (0.489)
Proportion Latino	-0.00845 (0.417)
Population size, logged	0.951** (0.0464)
Region (East excluded)	
Midwest	-0.155 (0.0999)
South	-0.0360 (0.133)
West	0.0794 (0.108)
Constant	-7.735** (0.697)
N	50
Pseudo R2	0.1706

Standard errors in parentheses

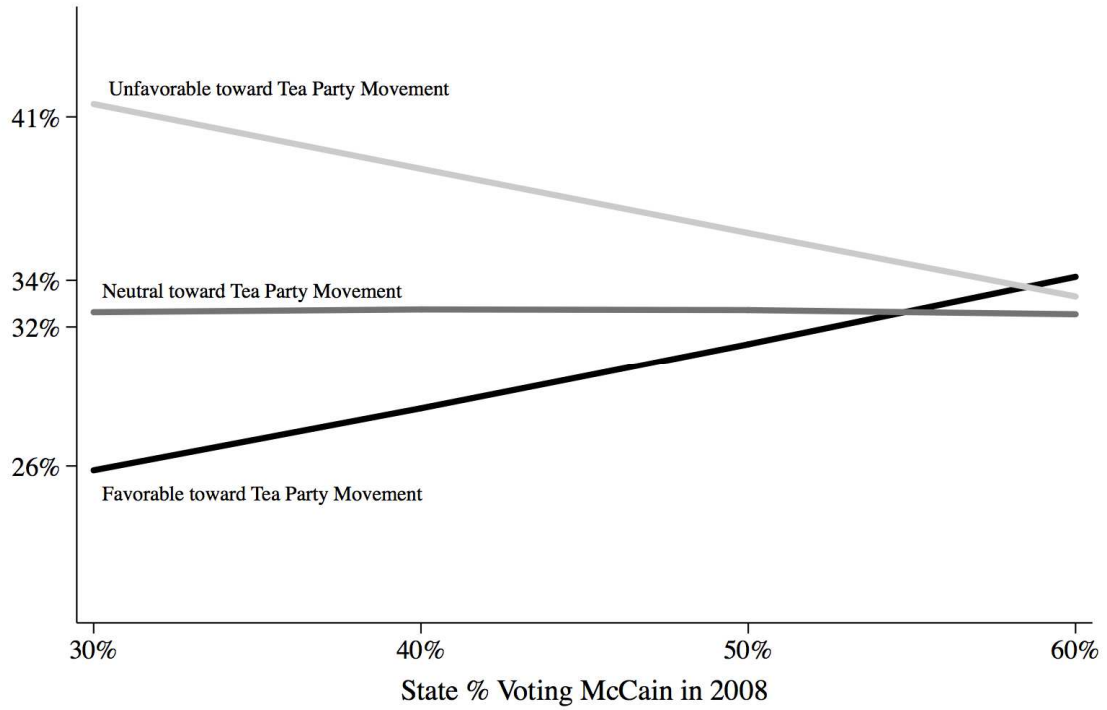
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Figure 1. Predicted probability of having a favorable, neutral, or unfavorable attitude as a function of state's unemployment rate, based on Table 1, model 3.



Review

Figure 2. Predicted probability of having a favorable, neutral, or unfavorable attitude as a function of state's 2008 Presidential vote, based on Table 1, model 3.



Review