

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government
At Mississippi State University

Policy Matters: TEA [Already Taxed Enough] Party 101

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What's new in politics in 2010? Many pundits would say that it is The Tea Party, which could become a game changing political movement in 2010. The movement is based upon the belief that today's federal government incorrectly handles many important economic and social issues.

What does the Tea Party stand for? [besides "already taxed enough"]

While it touts the fact that it is not a political party and thus does not have a "platform", The Tea Party movement is based upon four core values:

- Constitutional Government:
The Tea Party believes that the federal government has too much power, and that this power is in conflict with the original intention of the Constitution. They also believe strongly in the separation of powers and decry the extension of executive branch power.
- Free Markets:
Tea Party followers believe in free enterprise and equal opportunity, and they believe the government is intervening too much in private business. In addition, they also propose significant Social Security reform as a means to achieve financial independence and as a recognition of the validity of the free market economy and conclude that federally funded, universal health care, rather than reliance on the free market system, is

anathema. [Interestingly, Tea Party associations are planning a Health Care Freedom Tea Party Protest on July 17.]

Fiscal Responsibility:

The movement basically asserts that the current government is spending far too much money and that the national debt is out of control.

Traditional Values:

The Tea Party espouses “traditional values” and views these values to include a belief that family is the basic building block of society and religious freedoms should be a part of everyday life.

Within the context of these core values, the Tea Party has focused on key issues including: border security, energy, healthcare, insurance, Medicare, death tax, global warming, and privacy. The bent on these issues trends toward the libertarian, although clearly Democrats and Republicans are drawn to the issues that the Tea Party espouses. Members also want to see the government handle the issues that have to do with Social Security more efficiently, but some political analysts believe that a few of the Tea Party’s professed ideals are contradictory. Susan Estrich, a Professor of political science and law at the University of Southern California, was quoted as saying “They want their Social Security and smaller government, want major cuts but not in Medicare, which is a little like having your cake and eating it too.”

Where did the Tea Party come from?

The Tea Party began as many small groups of individuals who disagreed with the way the country is being run. Most organizers give credit to Mary Rakovich, who was the organizer of a February 10, 2009 protest in “Fort Myers, Florida. She called it the “first protest of President Obama’s administration” and it became the first protest of what became the tea party movement. Others credit Seattle blogger Keli Carender with the first conclave – which also occurred in February of 2009.

Slowly over the past year, these groups have come together to form large organizations such as the National Tea Party Federation (NTPF), the Tea Party Patriots, and many others. The movement gains most of its support through rallies that it holds in cities throughout the country. Some rallies have attracted upwards of a few thousand people in cities like Dallas, Denver, Oklahoma City, Cincinnati, Boston, and Baton Rouge. Although the support of the movement has been steadily growing, it has yet to become a full-fledged political party, but it has many characteristics that could help it eventually develop into one. In fact, in some states it has registered the candidates it supports as Tea Party candidates.

Third party: yea or nay?

The movement is being compared to that led by former Presidential candidate, Ross Perot, who ran under the banner of the Reform Party. The ideals that Perot espoused are similar to the issues the Tea Party is espousing today. Perot was asked about the movement at a conference in Missouri where he was receiving an award, and he spoke highly of the movement saying that “ the party has potential to become very influential in the government but only time will tell if the party can become a real player in the political field.”

The majority of the Tea Party’s followers are of the same demographic as those of Perot’s Reform party: middle aged white males who are unhappy with the way that the government is spending money and who believe the tax system is unfair. Members come mostly from the West and South.. The actual numbers according to the New York Times/CBS News Poll suggests that 89% of Tea Party members are white and 59% of those members are males. Sixty-eight percent of Tea Party members live in households with an income of \$50,000 a year or more. Seventy-three percent of members describe themselves as either very conservative or somewhat conservative.

The Tea Party: who are they really?

Interestingly, the poll also revealed that almost 70% of the respondents consider their own economic situation as good and only 14% claim to have experienced the bad side of the recent economic downturn. This demonstrates that Tea Party members are more concerned with the United States economy and fiscal policy as a whole rather than their own fiscal condition.

According to Tea Party members, many in the media depict them as bigots who look down on minorities. However, only 1% of the members polled said that President Obama’s race or religion were reasons for their dislike of the current government. Interestingly, 11% of the members are minorities, who often come under criticism as “traitors” by other minorities. According to the Associated Press, this is especially true for African American Tea Party members who say that they are being criticized by members of their own race for having the audacity to oppose the nation’s first African American President.

One in five Americans claim to be supporters of the Tea Party movement, which is pushing forward and slowly garnering support from politicians and analysts such as former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin; talk radio show host and political

analyst Lou Dobbs; and Jim Demint, a Republican Senator from South Carolina. When asked about the movement, Demint said “It shows that Americans want strong leaders who will stand up to the massive spending, bailouts, and debt in Washington that are bankrupting our country.” Lou Dobbs has spoken at Tea Party functions in New Orleans and New York and is highly supportive of the Tea Party; evidence of this abounds on his weekday television show.

Palin is a strong supporter of the movement, speaking at rallies and standing up as a leader of the rapidly growing group of women that are involved in the Tea Party movement. According to an article from FOXNews.com, nearly 45% of Tea Party activists are women, who say that they are rising up to defend their way of life. The article also states that the nation’s economic and fiscal health directly impacts women who now comprise a majority of the workforce because the recession has negatively affected the job market for men and left women with the economic burden of supporting their families financially.

Does the Tea Party have a future?

Does the Tea Party have a future in America, or will it go the way of the Bull Moose Party and, more recently, the supporters of Ross Perot? It is hard to tell. While the Tea Party in 2010 is becoming a mainstay in elections and is gaining support from many politicians who are challenging incumbents for seats in Congress in this year’s primaries, giving the Tea Party some legs. But are these legs those of a sprinter or a marathon runner?

Granted, there is a great deal of disgust of the process in D.C. right now – from citizens who have traditionally associated with the Democratic or Republican parties. Many of these citizens, frustrated by activity within the Beltway, are viewing the Tea Party in a favorable light. According to a poll by NBC/Wall Street Journal, the Tea Party movement is being viewed favorably when compared with our traditional major parties. The poll reflects that 20% of respondents viewed the Tea Party “very positively” while only 10% of the respondents viewed the Democratic party “very positively” and only 5% felt that way about the GOP.

Results of the poll (positive to negative) are reflected on page 5.

Party	Very Positive	Somewhat Positive	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Very Negative	Don't Know
Tea Party	20%	21%	21%	10%	13%	15%
Democratic Party	10%	25%	19%	19%	26%	1%
Republican Party	5%	23%	27%	24%	19%	2%

Many of those who associate themselves with the Tea Party movement consider themselves Republicans, but according to the House Majority leader Steny Hoyer, they could actually harm the Republican Party. This comment is supported by recent primaries in Utah and Pennsylvania where incumbent Republicans lost their seats. In Utah Sen. Robert Bennett, who was seeking a fourth term, was beaten out when many complained that he was not conservative enough to represent Utah, a state with a large number of Tea Party supporters. In Pennsylvania, longtime incumbent Senator Arlen Specter lost his spot on the ballot to Representative Joe Sestak. Specter was criticized for crossing party lines last year to cast a deciding vote on President Obama's stimulus plan.

Although some politicians and analysts view the Tea Party's involvement in the recent elections as detrimental to conservatism, the movement gained a very important win in Kentucky's Republican primary, where Rand Paul, son of 2008 presidential candidate Ron Paul, took the Republican nomination for one of its senate seats by over 60% of the vote. Paul had the backing of many Tea Party groups and was endorsed by Sarah Palin. In his victory speech, Paul said "We've come to take our government back, this Tea Party movement is a message to Washington that we're unhappy and that we want things done differently."

With many elections left in the months to come, politicians are beginning to notice the movement and have realized its potential power. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was quoted as saying "There is no question; there is at this moment an anti-incumbent mood." House Minority leader John Boehner reiterated by saying "This year, its politicians beware."

The movement is also seen as beginning to affect President Obama. Many strategists suggest that a successful Democratic candidate is not aided by an Obama endorsement since it is and that by supporting candidates Obama is indirectly motivating his foes to vote against whoever he supports. President Obama confronted the issue of the Tea Party Movement at a town hall meeting in Arnold, Missouri. He discussed financial

issues and was quoted as saying “I know you’ve been hearing all these arguments about, oh ‘Obama is just spending crazy....Well let me make a point. Number one we inherited a \$1.3 trillion deficit- that wasn’t from my- that wasn’t me.” The President also addressed that the federal government’s biggest long term fiscal challenges will be in regards to Medicare and Medicaid. [The Tea Party supports substantial spending cuts, but not in Medicare.]

Time will tell how the Tea Party will ultimately affect politics in America. However, its core values strike a chord with many Americans who are concerned with “big government”, “big debt” and “ABO” [Anyone But Obama]. If the strength of the association focuses on the issue of America’s fiscal policy, it may survive as the current Tea Party or in any number of configurations, including incursions into the existing major parties. If it is an “ABO” backlash, even its most solid values may become a lost cause.

Is there a Tea Party in Mississippi?

Mississippi has traditionally behaved as a very conservative state, so it is not surprising that Mississippi residents are beginning to develop Tea Party enclaves throughout the state. The Official Tea Party of Mississippi has taken root in Northern Mississippi and begun to develop groups throughout the state to help support the cause. The following groups are the largest Tea Parties in the state at this writing:

- 9-12 Project of Jones County (Laurel, MS)
- 912 Project of Hattiesburg (Hattiesburg, MS)
- Bay Waveland Tea Party Patriots (Bay St. Louis/ Waveland, MS)
- Columbus MS Tea Party (Columbus, MS)
- Joe Tea Party Tegerdine (South Mississippi) [Joe Tegerdine of Petal ran in the GOP primary in the 4th District but was defeated by Steven Palazzo.]
- Meridian Tea Party (Meridian, MS)
- MS Gulf Coast 912 Project (D’Iberville, MS)
- MS Gulf Coast Tea Party (Gulfport, MS)
- MS Tea Party (Jackson, MS)
- MS Tea Party Patriots to Impeach Obama (Ocean Springs, MS)
- MS Tea Party (Greenwood/ Carrollton, MS)
- Northeast MS Tea Party (Iuka, MS)
- Patriots of the South (Sumrall, MS)
- Poplarville Tea Party (Poplarville, MS)
- Starkville Tea Party (Starkville, MS)

- Southwest MS Tea Party (Pike, Amite, Walthall, Lincoln, Franklin, and Lawrence Counties)
- Tea Party of MS (Olive Branch, MS)
- Tea Party Rangers (Terry, MS)
- Tupelo Tea Party (Tupelo, MS)
- Vicksburg Tea Party (Vicksburg, MS)

The first state convention of the Mississippi Tea Party was held on April 30th and May 1st, 2010. Approximately 35 delegates representing Tea Party groups from all over the state met to ratify the Constitution and to transform the Mississippi Tea Party (MSTP) into a unified statewide association to promote the Tea Party movement. These groups consider themselves grassroots organizations that want to see the government change the way it handles decisions, especially those that deal with the economic crisis.

One of the biggest names in the Tea Party movement in the state is Angela McGowan, a FOX news analyst from Oxford who ran in the 1st Congressional district as a Republican and captured 15% of the vote. McGowan is a supporter of the Tea Party movement and continues to fight that the Tea Party movement is not racist. McGowan is an African American woman, who asserts that the movement is not contradictory to her role as a minority leader. Mississippi's Tea Party movement is gaining popularity among state voters, and the state could end up being a vital part of the future of the movement.

As Mississippians, it's hard to contest many of the Tea Party's core values, as some of them are values shared by many of us. We see the Tea Party's popularity in Mississippi on the rise and predict that the Tea Party will become a force to be reckoned with in elections in the immediate future. Can it stand the test of time? We aren't so sure.

[To keep up with the Mississippi Tea Party, visit <http://msteaparty.ning.com>. Interested in visiting a Tea Party event? You can find the Mississippi events on this website.]

Have I missed something?

If you are not a FOX news devotee, you may not be familiar with the 9-12 Project. While the 9-12 movement is closely associated with the Tea Party, they are two different political elements with similar, but distinct, agendas. The 9-12 movement was launched by Glenn Beck, FOX News host, who covered several early Tea Party events, had his doubts about the viability of the Tea Party and launched his own project in February 2009, Beck's 9-12 Project is based on 9 principles and 12 values.

The 9 Principles

1. America Is Good.

2. I believe in God and He is the Center of my Life.

God "The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." from George Washington's first Inaugural address.

3. I must always try to be a more honest person than I was yesterday.

Honesty "I hope that I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider to be the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man." George Washington

4. The family is sacred. My spouse and I are the ultimate authority, not the government.

Marriage/Family "It is in the love of one's family only that heartfelt happiness is known. By a law of our nature, we cannot be happy without the endearing connections of a family." Thomas Jefferson

5. If you break the law you pay the penalty. Justice is blind and no one is above it.

Justice "I deem one of the essential principles of our government... equal and exact justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political." Thomas Jefferson

6. I have a right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, but there is no guarantee of equal results.

Life, Liberty, & The Pursuit of Happiness "Everyone has a natural right to choose that vocation in life which he thinks most likely to give him comfortable subsistence." Thomas Jefferson

7. I work hard for what I have and I will share it with who I want to. Government cannot force me to be charitable.

Charity "It is not everyone who asketh that deserveth charity; all however, are worth of the inquiry or the deserving may suffer." George Washington

8. It is not un-American for me to disagree with authority or to share my personal opinion.

On your right to disagree "In a free and republican government, you cannot restrain the voice of the multitude; every man will speak as he thinks, or more properly without thinking." George Washington

9. The government works for me. I do not answer to them, they answer to me.

Who works for whom? "I consider the people who constitute a society or a nation as the source of all authority in that nation." Thomas Jefferson

Beck's 12 values are honesty, reverence, hope, thrift, humility, charity, sincerity, moderation, hard work, courage, personal responsibility and gratitude.

[You can follow the Mississippi 9-12 on the web at <http://weare912ers.ning.com/group/mississippi912ers> or <http://912candidates.org/ms/>]

Conclusion

The Tea Party movement has been characterized as many different things: a group of bigots who look down on minorities, a group of rich white Americans who are power hungry, a grass roots organization that believes the people should have more power, and an anti- incumbent group that could be harmful to the conservatives. The group asserts a belief in a core set of values: limited government, fiscal responsibility, free markets, and traditional values. The Tea Party movement [and the 9-12'ers] will without question continue to add excitement and a sense of unexpectedness to the upcoming elections and politics as a whole. We at the Stennis Institute will continue to watch the Tea Party and its impact on Mississippi and national politics. It might be fun!

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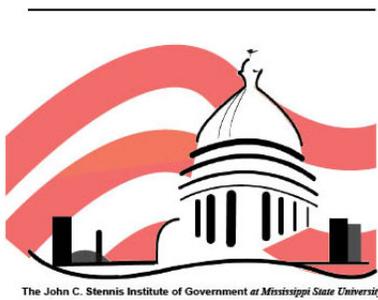
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About the Institute



Elected to the United States Senate in 1947 with the promise to “plow a straight furrow to the end of the row,” John C. Stennis recognized the need for an organization to assist governments with a wide range of issues and to better equip citizens to participate in the political process. In 1976, Senator Stennis set the mission parameters and ushered in the development of a policy research and assistance institute which was to bear his name as an acknowledgment of his service to the people of Mississippi.



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