

**Political Opportunity and the TEA Party – Why and Where
TEA Party Protests Occurred**

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Abstract

The TEA Party initially formed in 2009 to protest excessive government spending and skyrocketing debt. Very quickly their message caught on with many Americans across the country. Local groups sprouted up across America without any hierarchical organization directing their efforts. While some national TEA Party groups provide training and funding to certain local organizations, many of these local groups remain fiercely independent of any national affiliation. By examining their most basic political tool, the protest, this paper explains why the TEA Party movement chose certain congressional districts to hold its protests. It discovers that the TEA Party rationally chose certain moderate to conservative districts in which to hold protests. They represented the greatest opportunity for the TEA Party to successfully accomplish its goals.

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Introduction

Tea parties are a recurring theme in American history. From Boston 1773, to Washington DC 2010, tea parties have shaken the roots of government establishments. The most recent American form of a tea party is a controversial, amorphous group of local organizations devoted to the financial health of the United States. This modern day TEA Party¹ may be one of the most important political stories of 2010, earning a spot as a runner-up in TIME Magazine's prestigious Person of the Year Award("Person of the Year 2010" 2010).

Before 2009, the tea party referred to the events in 1773 when Boston patriots dressed as American Indians and threw tea off the British ships in Boston Harbor – a symbolic beginning to the events of the American Revolution. The colonists were angry over the imposition of a tea tax on British imported tea. They believed they were taxed without their own representation. The modern TEA Party builds off the original colonists' anger against taxes and redefines the term in light of modern problems such high income taxes and enormous deficits. They have achieved great influence in two short years, yet they are a grassroots, unorganized collection of local groups. Did the nature of the TEA Party with no central organization achieve such influence by following the established principles for success as found in the literature of political science? Does the TEA party rationally choose certain districts to effect the most change on the political conversation? The answers are not simple, but a study of the most basic of events – the

¹ TEA stands for Taxed Enough Already. Some news organizations such as *The New York Times* have decided stylistically to only capitalize the first letter. I have decided to capitalize all the letters because it is a acronym (Corbett, "The Public Editor," *The New York Times*, October 9, 2010, 2010.).

local protest- will provide evidence as to the true effect of the modern conservative TEA Party on politics and political literature in the United States.

History of The TEA Party

The economy was collapsing in late 2007 and the banking industry was fighting for its survival. Prior to the presidential election in 2008, Republicans and Democrats joined together to pass the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), which provided a massive infusion of capital into the banking sector. Many Americans were angry at the staggering sum of money given to the banks. Americans believed these banks were the cause of the problems facing the country and were dismayed that the US government was providing them direct funds without requiring meaningful oversight or the equivalent assistance to the rest of the country.

After the Presidential Election in 2008, President Elect Barack Obama called for a stimulus program to provide funding for “shovel ready” projects across the country and to cut taxes to spur growth. The result was the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), whose initial estimated price was \$862 billion dollars. These two massive debt financed spending programs, TARP and ARRA, quickly became unpopular. Rick Santelli, a CNBC reporter, summed up Americans’ frustration with the perceived out of control spending in a rant from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. He called for a Chicago Tea Party to protest the government “bailout” of homeowners’ mortgages. He was upset that he would be forced to pay for other people’s excessive debt ("CNBC's Rick Santelli's Chicago Tea Party" 2009). The idea of a “Tea Party” quickly caught on with conservatives who were tired of excess government spending. Santelli provided a large group of people with the spark necessary to get out on to the streets. In a scene

reminiscent of Howard Beale in *Network* (“I’m mad as hell and not going to take this anymore!”), Santelli found people’s anger and encouraged them to channel it productively through protests against the government (Lumet 1976). From Santelli’s video, an entire movement sprung up around the general ideas of limited government, lower spending and fewer taxes. The first protests were quickly organized in 48 cities across the country on February 27, 2009. In addition, groups sprung up across the country in other small towns and cities to organize and promote their own local protests. Most had their first protest on April 15th 2009, or tax day. Tax day is particularly symbolic to the TEA Party because it is the day every year when federal income taxes are due.

Since the TEA Party’s founding in February 2009, it has grown to consist of hundreds of local organizations loosely connected with each other through national TEA Party groups. Most of these organizations adhere to the same basic principles of fiscal conservatism and tend to ignore social issues. The TEA Party may have received its biggest boost from conservative television personalities that promote the events and protests of the TEA party. Fox News was heavily criticized for encouraging participation in the first round of protests by TEA party groups on April 15, 2009, or income tax day. Several days throughout the year have become designated TEA Party protest days. July 4, September 11/12, and April 15 are days for local groups to hold protests. Usually the local groups invite conservative talk show hosts, politicians, and other local dignitaries to their protests. Speakers at many of these protests talk about restoring government to its original principles from the time of the writing of the Constitution. These speakers advocate for more limited government, lowering of personal and corporate taxes and a

balanced budget. Many advocate rebalancing the federal government against state governments. In addition, they reserve some of their most heated rhetoric for criticism of the policies of the Obama Administration.

Many participants of these TEA Parties like to distinguish themselves from the Republican establishment. They do not want to be a political party, and see themselves as more effective being outside the traditional establishment. Most believe that conservative Republicans during the Bush Administration lost their focus. Tea Partiers saw conservatives in Washington as out of control and questioned the large deficits in recent years. During the 2010 primary cycle, many new candidates claiming to represent the TEA Party challenged numerous incumbents and Republican Party favorites. The Tea Parties continued to use their independent influence throughout the general election cycle by helping many Republican candidates win against their Democratic opponents. On November 3rd, both Republicans and Democrats credited the Tea Party with their respective wins and defeats on Election Day.

It is important to remember that there is no definition of a TEA Party group. In fact, there has been fighting amongst groups on a national level for the right to call themselves the TEA Party. Some candidates are endorsed by certain local and national TEA Parties, while other TEA Parties endorse their opponent. Many of these groups are run from the grassroots level with little guidance from any organization above. Groups can quickly form and dissipate in response to the needs of the community. Some groups are affiliated with national organizations and have gone through the training workshops of FreedomWorks or the TEA Party Express. The Washington Post, in an extensive survey of local TEA party organizations, was able to contact and verify the existence of

647 independent local groups. Many of these organizations were not affiliated with the larger national organizations, and most had little money or organizing experience. Most of the contacted groups (57%) reported that they wanted to remain independent of the larger organizations. They believe remaining independent is the best way to get their message of lower deficit spending and lower taxes across to politicians in their district. The article also found many of these local groups were fairly small and had not held any sort of rallies in the previous year. The article's authors write, "The findings suggest the breadth of the [TEA] party may be inflated" (Gardner 2010).

The first section of this paper will examine the current literature on the theory of social movements including collective action theory, social movement theory and political opportunity theory. I will also examine the efficacy of newspapers to examine social movements. The next section of the paper will detail several specific hypotheses about social movements and the reasons for their formation and lasting success. I will then detail my methodology and its limitations when examining the question of the effect of the TEA party. The third section will be an examination of the number of TEA Party protests in a district versus a number of different factors. I will look at how these results correlate to current theories regarding social movements. It will become clear that political opportunity provides the best framework through which to examine the TEA Party. In addition, the data presented should provide an endorsement of the political opportunity theory. Finally, based on these studies it will be possible to make comments on the future of the TEA party and where it can go from here.

This work differs dramatically from others in the rather large literature examining protest movements. In many previous studies, authors have examined survey data or

examined a movement from the national level. This is one of the first surveys to examine protests that have occurred across the country by looking through local newspapers. In addition, the TEA Party presents a unique opportunity to examine an unorganized group of local organizations bonded together through similar goals and a name, but with little operational interface. This paper will describe many of the current theories, and examine how a grassroots organization with very little centralization still manages to allocate its resources rationally to try and accomplish its goals.

Literature Review

Protests are a pillar of democracy. They provide an avenue to involve oneself in the process of lawmaking between election cycles and without the need to travel distances or pay money for the direct lobbying of lawmakers. Protests tend to signal the desires of their participants. Several theories have been proposed as to why people have an incentive to protest and how individuals end up protesting in the public square. Viewing the TEA Party through the lens of these theories can help to understand the reason the TEA Party held protests in certain districts across the country. In addition, it shows that a grassroots organization like the TEA Party can still act rationally at a macro level.

Collective Action Theory

The literature on protest movements begins in 1965 when Olson first proposed the collective action theory. Olson (1971) noticed that a dominant theory of groups was that, “groups of individuals with common interests are expected to act on behalf of their common interest” (Olson 1971, 2). Yet, this posed a seeming contradiction with rational

individualism. He realized that in large enough groups, a free-rider effect appeared.

Olson writes, “*a lobby organization, or indeed a labor union or any other organization in the interest of a large group of firms or workers in some industry, would get no assistance from the rational, self interested individuals in that industry*” (Olson 1971, 11, italics in original). If a group is organizing a protest, there is little incentive for any one individual member of the group to show up because all members of the group would realize the same gains regardless of their attendance. Despite this paradox, Americans have continued to attend protests. Olson attempts to explain this paradox by providing exceptions for different actors such as labor unions and lobbying groups. He argues that each provides a unique benefit that is not available to nonparticipants. These organizations may be small enough that they can encourage their members to participate in action.

Burstein and Sausner (2005) explain that since Olson revolutionized group theory, two groups of scholars have explored the consequences of his theory. The first group disagrees with Olson’s premise and does not believe in the theory of collective action. They believe the free rider effect does not exist in a large social movement. The second group uses the theory of collective action to explain why certain groups are immune from the theory’s underpinning. Several examples such as, “if some potential participants have incentives not available to everyone; if the cost of participation can be reduced; and if people may win nonmaterial benefits whether or not they achieve their political goals” may make collective action more likely (Burstein and Sausner 2005, 406). This group believes that it is possible for a rational human to decide to attend a protest event if the actual costs outweigh the benefits. They believe it is possible to lower the perceived costs

of attendance or increase the benefit so that the rational individual will attend because the benefits outweigh the costs. However, they still hold to the theory of collective action. If the benefits are not increased or if the costs are not lowered, a rational human being will probably not take part in a protest.

At its very basic level, the theory of collective action cannot explain the TEA Party. Hundreds of thousands of supporters from across the country attend TEA Party protest to rally against government expansion. Much of what they were protesting was ideological: calling for lower taxes and less regulation. Many of the people protesting probably would never see direct political results from their protests. However, hundreds of groups sprung up across the country to organize hundreds of protests with hundreds of thousands of attendees. In addition, there were clear goals to the movement. For instance, in both primary and general elections, the TEA party challenged politicians, whom they did not consider to be fiscally responsible. One indicator of a lack of fiscal responsibility was a vote for either the Stimulus bill (ARRA) or the TARP Act. As Frome, who analyzed several polls of TEA Party opinion in 2009 and early 2010, states, “the TEA Party expresses unified opposition to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act... and the ‘bailouts’ of floundering banks” (Frome 2010, 19). The TEA Party attempted to influence the results of elections. Therefore, the TEA Party did have clear benefits in a context of collective action. However, at an individual level, it is not clear if an individual participant would be aware of these benefits or if these benefits would provide enough incentive for the participant.

There has been some pushback to arguments advanced against the collective action problem. One area of pushback is to the weight given to the free-rider effect.

Lohmann (1993) provides a framework to counter the problem of the free-rider effect in the literature. She argues that in democratic theory, a leader will change the status quo based on the majority position. If a majority wishes to challenge the status quo, such as high corporate tax rates, they will try to signal to the leader that the rates are too high by some sort of political action, an example of which is mobilizing for protests. This signaling, according to Lohmann, can be done through simply counting the size of a protest movement and comparing that number to a fluctuating critical threshold set by society at large. This threshold is a variable number that society believes constitutes a large number. The number can vary if the protest is held in downtown Manhattan versus a small town in the Mississippi delta region. Once a protest hits this threshold, the leaders must take notice of the large protest.

She argues that leaders also sift through activist protest movements and moderate protest movements. An impartial counting of a moderate protest can provide a signal to the leader to change his or her ways on a particular issue. This eliminates much of the free-rider problem because simply showing up is the most important aspect to a protest. Individual and collective gain is provided by being a statistic, and by not showing up, an individual is harming the chances of success. Therefore, an individual has a higher individual benefit as well as collective benefit if he decides to attend because he will not receive much of an individual benefit if he does not attend the rally. This information about quantity is a useful tool for the individual to determine whether the potential benefits outweigh the costs of political action. A leader then uses the information realized by the number of those that attend a political action to make up his mind on the keeping the status quo or changing policy. Showing up improves the chances of a rallies success

by signaling to the leadership the size of those who wish for change. Lohmann believes persuasion through signaling is the key effect of a protest.

One of the biggest controversies surrounding the TEA Party movement, setting aside any differences over policy, is the counting of participants that attend their rallies. These numbers are usually estimated by the police or newspapers, and are often used as a measure of success. Many of the articles read for this study included crowd estimates compared to a pre-protest estimate. These pre-event estimates could be found in official documents such as an application to rally or in interviews with journalists. These numbers were then compared in the articles written after each rally to assess the success of the rally. Clearly, the number of participants in the rallies were related in judging the success of the TEA Party. This provides a huge opening in eliminating the problem of collective action for the TEA Party. While attending a protest might have had costs and benefits, the problem of collective action might not exist for TEA Party rallies. The individual cost and individual benefit seems to drive participation as opposed to the group cost and group benefit.

Burstein and Sausner also question whether collective action to change policy even exists for American society. They examined a study by McAdam and Su (2002) of Vietnam protests to look for the number of protests that occurred. McAdam and Su originally had examined these protests to study the influence of protests on policy achievements. Burstein and Sausner, using McAdam and Su's data, looked at the raw numbers of protests to see if collective action to change policy really exists in the United States. While there are some limitations to McAdam and Su's survey as they only used the New York Times to examine protests, Burstein and Sausner believed that in fact

protest is an overblown phenomenon. They argue that at most in McAdam and Su's data 90 events occurred in a single month. The average for a month was 4. They compared this with the population of 200 million at the time. This lack of action made them question whether collective action is even a problem. (Burstein and Sausner 2005, 409). People might simply not protest enough for collective action to present a problem in ascertaining individual motivation for protest. Instead, people may protest for different reasons than policy change. If people participate in a rally once in awhile, they may find more benefit through social benefits than in the actual outcome of the rally. It might be a good way to meet new like-minded friends or simply to trade gossip with old friends. Burstein and Sausner also compare the number of protests with other events such as baseball games and concerts that routinely draw thousands. They try to argue that in society, protests form a small part of everyday life. This is another reason why collective action may not apply to the TEA Party. While the number of rallies may be higher than discovered in McAdams and Su's work, they still played a very small part in society. The problem that individuals may not be motivated because benefits are spread across a wide group of participants may be simply theoretical. Instead, individuals must protest because there are simply not enough participants to make a difference in the first place.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory developed as a way to explain why certain social movements gain traction over others. This is slightly different than collective action, because collective action theory attempts to explain why participants are driven to action in a wide variety of contexts. Social movement theory builds on collective action theory, but only for social movements such as peace marches or environmental movements.

Collective action covers more groups such as labor unions or business organizations that have a larger monetary goal in mind for their protests.

Klandermans and Oegema (1987) write that there are four key aspects to a social movement. The first, they argue, is forming mobilization potential. Each social movement must find the potential members who would be willing to protest. They write that this differs slightly from those who might benefit from the gains of the protest. Sometimes the potential members willing to protest will be smaller than those who may benefit from the protest. This may be due an inability to protest for geographic or monetary reasons. The potential members of the TEA Party, by tapping into deficit fears, were conservatives and libertarians from across the country. The second step is “forming and motivating recruitment networks” (Klandermans and Oegema 1987, 519). Once a group knows its target audience, it must reach out to potential members. This step can be extremely difficult for grassroots organizations, but has gotten significantly with the use of modern technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. After an organization reaches out through any number of steps, it must convince and then motivate its potential member to action. A potential member may be willing to participate if they understand the perceived costs and benefits of such an action. It is important to note that it is the perceived costs and benefits and not the actual costs and benefits. Based on the perceived incentives, one may be willing to act in a situation. Klandermans and Oegema define the incentives as either “soft (nonmaterial) or social, and hard (material) or nonsocial” (Klandermans and Oegema 1987, 520). They write that soft incentives are extremely important to motivating humans to act, while hard incentives have not had a truly demonstrable effect.

The final piece of a social movement is eliminating or minimizing the barriers to act. A rational person will act when the benefits outweigh the costs. A social movement attempts to increase benefits while decreasing the costs of participating. The costs of participating can include other activities that the person gives up as well as the physical costs of getting to the rally. These can all be lowered with the help of the social movement. The TEA Party helped lower much of the costs associated with participating in a protest by keeping the rallies local and holding rallies in hundreds of towns across the country. This made attending a rally far easier than had most of the rallies occurred in Washington D.C.

Social movement theory incorporates these four aspects of protest to examine how social movements gain traction in society. The TEA Party, as most social movements, very much fit into these guidelines. They performed all these steps to become an extremely successful social movement. There is mobilization potential in at least a few of the Congressional districts in the United States. Conservative voters felt that they needed a new movement to reinvigorate the Republican Party. The TEA Party provided a public forum to organize disaffected conservative voters. The second aspect of forming the networks to reach these potential members has been made extremely easy in light of the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and Fox News. The first three provide individuals the ability to communicate to and organize large groups of people with the single push of a button. Fox News, the conservative 24-hour news station, promoted the TEA Parties during their television as both news stories and necessary commentary. Finally, right-wing talk radio is particularly strong and was able to reach out to millions of listeners across the country. The third aspect of social movements is to convince and

motivate members to action. The TEA Party was able to describe the perspective benefits of defeating opponents, lowering taxes, and decreasing the deficit. This message combined with the feeling among many TEA Partiers that they were helping to “save” America may have been enough to persuade them to action. Social movement theory provides a fairly general theory about why a social movement gets started and eventually able to sustain itself.

Political Opportunity Theory

Building on both collective action theory and social movement theory, political opportunity theory has emerged as a controversial alternative. Political opportunity theory incorporates politics into the possible motivations of political movements such as the TEA Party. Meyer (2004) examines the two decades of literature on political opportunity and attempts to create a framework from which to examine the interactions between political movements and the world. Social movements do not operate in a bubble, but usually form in response to external factors. Meyer writes that “the key recognition in the political opportunity perspective is that activists’ prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent” (Meyer 2004, 126). Political opportunity can be used to explain why a social movement becomes successful. Meyer outlines his theory of political opportunity, which he believes requires several underlying conditions. Meyer argues that “the presumption underneath a political opportunity approach is that the development of movements reflects, responds to, and sometimes alters the realities of politics and policy” (Meyer 2004, 139). It is based on the opportunity of a movement to gain traction in a society because of a number of different factors. However, these factors are not defined and in

many cases, issue specific. They do follow a general pattern of indicating a societal openness to the particular issue motivated by a group. Meyer writes that it is these factors which determine the “grievances around which activists mobilize, advantaging some claims and disadvantaging other claims” (Meyer 2004, 128). These factors which support action under political opportunity theory can be a closing off of traditional avenues for grievance such as petition or lobbying capacity, which can lead activists to protest. Or the factor could be the opening of institutions to new participants such as that which occurred after the government protected African Americans following *Brown v. Board of Education*. Another factor could be a change in government policy or a change in the composition of the governing party. Once a factor is present, a group will decide it may be necessary to protest. This aspect of political opportunity theory assumes that some activists react rationally to societal cues. There is another group of political opportunity theorists that believe activists are always attempting to mobilize. Once in awhile, their motivation aligns with something in society that allows them to succeed. However, for the most part these activists seem to fail the majority of the time. Mayer attempts to reconcile both points of view by arguing “committed activists may always be trying to mobilize on behalf of their causes, savvy ones adjust rhetoric, focus, and tactics to respond to political circumstances” (Meyer 2004, 139).

The TEA Party probably consists of groups of savvy and committed activists who were responding to problems with the two political parties. As partisanship increased in Washington along with the deficit, the TEA party saw an opening for a social movement. The environment in the United States, with the proliferation of Twitter and Facebook allowed for groups to mobilize and organize more quickly than ever. Below, I will

examine whether the TEA Party in fact operated as a rational actor according to the theory of political opportunity. In the TEA party's case, a grassroots organization of hundreds of different groups was able to mobilize at a national level and protest with relative uniformity against policies that it opposed.

Finally, once a protest succeeds, the activists can influence the environment that allowed for the protest in the first place. If the group is given an opening into the policy making process, future protests lose much of their energy. They succeed at their goal so further protest becomes unnecessary. As protests are institutionalized and brought within the political process, they become less necessary and occur less often. Once the TEA Parties began to run their own candidates, they held less protests and these protests were less popular than the first round in 2009.

The Use of Newspapers in Examining Protests

One of the problems with learning about protest is the difficult nature in studying different social movements. Sociologists and political scientists have had trouble gathering either survey or protest data that allows them to answer questions posed by the theories above. Many studies of protests in the last few decades, including some of those already mentioned, have used newspapers to examine the protest movements. There have been several studies on the efficacy of using newspapers to study social movements and social protests. Earl et al. (2004) writes about the potential pitfalls of using newspaper articles to learn more about a social movement. They conclude that bias can be introduced when newspapers are the source of information. They label two types of bias, selection bias and description bias. Selection bias occurs because newspapers choose which stories to print. Some of these stories may not be the most newsworthy, or may be

selected only because a large number of people attended an event. This may prevent a scholar from learning about smaller or less important events. In addition, they believe that newspapers may incorrectly report on an event, which leads to description bias. Newspapers may mislead readers on the size of an event, where it was held, how influential it seemed to be, and the overall message of an event. These authors provide a framework to eliminate or mitigate these biases.

For selection bias, Earl et al. believes that institutionalized protests receive less coverage than less institutionalized protests. Institutionalized protests are protests that occur within a mainstream organization such as a political rally, a rally for the environment sanctioned by major environmental groups, or a peace rally endorsed by hundreds of politicians. The TEA Party probably falls into the less institutionalized protest category simply based on the level of sustained news coverage over the year and half study. In addition, they write that the best results occur by using national and local newspapers to look at protests. Simply using more than one data source allows for the best data. In my evaluation of TEA Party protests, I use one database online, which searches thousands of local and national newspapers for my search terms. I used the database in an attempt to eliminate as much selection bias as possible, because Earl et al. write that local newspapers tend to have less of a selection bias of events. There are still problems with using electronic sources. They write that “electronic searches may miss events that are framed in unusual ways” (Earl et al. 2004, 75) This will be further discussed below. The data collected; however, will show that a large database can be assembled using an electronic search of 21 different states and their newspapers makes the database statistically significant.

Hypothesis

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution declares, “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech... or the right of the people peaceably to assemble.” Americans at the time of the Revolution fought for their right to protest. Today, many groups continue the tradition of holding protests to exercise their right to criticize the government. Protests occur almost daily, even about the most trivial of matters. Local and national TEA party groups are no exception. They hold protests frequently. These protests serve as an effective method for organizations to get their message to a broad group of interested individuals. Not only do passersby see the organization protesting, but people can also join in with little cost to themselves. Protests can be covered by news organization by both traditional and new media as a way to disseminate the message far behind the local public square.

Examining these protests can give insight into why these certain protests occurred where they did. The simple logistics of organizing protests have gotten easier due to the Internet. On the other hand, actually getting people to give up a Saturday afternoon is much tougher as there are many other avenues of entertainment that compete for that person’s time. In today’s multimedia world, gathering people for a protest usually involves people who are dedicated to the cause. These individuals must be motivated to action to attend a protest. Observing TEA Party rallies across the United States can give a unique insight into grassroots social movements.

The difficulty becomes trying to discover when and where a rally occurs and how many people attended the rally. Many organizations tend to over exaggerate the number of rallies they hold or the number of participants that attend each rally. By exaggerating, the organization is trying to establish its legitimacy to new members and decision makers.

This legitimacy is important because it determines if an organization will be taken seriously. On the other hand, a third party source may not be available to verify protests or rallies. However, news reports of rallies provide a good estimate of the number of rallies in a Congressional district. They allow for a reasonably unbiased account of where and when a rally occurred. While there may be selection bias or description bias, looking at a large number of newspapers from local to statewide should help capture accurate data on the number of events and their levels of participation in a district. There is simply no way to ascertain every TEA Party rally in the country. Nonetheless, a search of multiple newspapers seems to be the most effective method for discovering most, if not all, of the rallies held across the country.

I must make several assumptions regarding my decision to only look at TEA Party rallies that are reported in newspapers. The first assumption is that when a newspaper reports on a rally, the rally was newsworthy. I am assuming this means the rally had a large attendance or was fairly influential in the surrounding area. If the local media does not cover a rally, I am assuming that the rally was not widely known in the Congressional district. This helps to track the influence of the protests in the district. If a rally is reported then people who were unable to attend may still learn about the rally. This should increase the influence of the rally. Unfortunately, this also invites media bias. Besides for selection bias and description bias, the recent trend in newspapers to consolidate and close due to sagging readership has led to less reliable local newspapers. In many rural districts, it may be harder to find records of TEA party rallies if there are no newspapers in the area. In areas where liberal newspapers predominate, a TEA Party protest may be less likely to be reported. While in conservative districts, newspapers may

even cover the smallest rallies. In addition, some congressional districts may be covered by newspapers that are too large to report on a small gathering of a few hundred people, i.e. *The New York Times* in Manhattan.

With these concerns in mind, I will make several hypotheses:

At a macro level, the TEA Party acted rationally by investing its resources into districts where it would receive the most gain.

Political opportunity theory would say that the TEA Party would invest its resources in the congressional districts that present the most opportunity for it. This becomes more complicated because there is no centralized organization to direct resources into encouraging protests in a certain district or area of the country. Instead the TEA Party is a grassroots organization that holds protests based on where local organizers decide they want to hold a protest.

The TEA party consists of conservative minded people who can be found in almost every congressional district in the United States. In 2008, Barack Obama swept several Republican leaning districts, and moderate Democrats were able to ride the enthusiasm of several key Democratic constituencies. In many of these swing districts, Democrats voted at higher levels than Republicans. In the 2006 midterm Congressional election, many Republican voters were dissatisfied with the policies of the Bush Administration. For two consecutive congressional elections, therefore, Democrats held a competitive edge based on enthusiasm. Democrats had won back the House of Representatives by winning districts that had previously been represented by a Republican. Many of these districts were center or center right districts. I predict that the TEA party focused on these swing districts in addition to extremely conservative

districts. The TEA party, according to political opportunity theory, should target areas that are open to their protests, and where they have a chance to connect with the population on a particular issue. From there, they need to have the possibility of some success. One TEA Party priority was to win back the House of Representatives for conservative Republican congress members. They felt these conservative congress members would be more willing to advance their legislative priorities of cutting spending and lowering taxes. Therefore, the biggest opportunity for the TEA Party would be to select moderate districts with a representative that was more liberal than the voters of the district.

I will use six variables to test the openness of particular districts to TEA Party protests. These variables will be tested against the number of TEA Party events in districts across 21 states. The most TEA Party protests should be held in the moderate to conservative districts that are the most open to TEA Party protests.

a) The TEA Party held the most rallies in moderate to conservative districts based on a PVI index.

One-way to measure a moderate district is to look at the Cook Partisan Voter Index or (PVI)("Partisan Voting Index Districts of the 111th Congress"). The PVI is compiled by examining the Presidential election results of the last several elections. According to Cook, the PVI allows, "an objective measurement of each congressional district that allows comparisons between states and districts, thereby making it relevant in both mid-term and presidential election years" ("Introducing the Cook Political Reports Partisan Voter Index (PVI) for the 111th Congress" 2009). The purpose is to accurately measure how Democratic leaning or Republican leaning a district is compared to the rest

of the country. Therefore, the moderate districts or districts with a low D(emocrat)+ or R(Republican)+ rating should be the focus of the TEA Party. These are the swing districts. These districts should be open to TEA Party protests for two reasons. The first is that many were upset with the incumbents, and the TEA Party presented an independent message. They were different from the two major parties and presented a new message to moderates. The other reason is that in order for the TEA Party to create a more sympathetic environment for their deficit message, they needed to appeal to moderate districts that had voted for moderate to liberal members of Congress. The TEA Party wanted to change the political balance in Washington and ensure their conservative message would be taken seriously.

In addition, the TEA Party was formed by conservatives to protest for conservative policies (Frome 2010). Therefore, I believe the TEA Party will also hold protests in extremely conservative districts. However, these protests may have a different goal in mind. They probably were to show support for their congress member. Even congress members in fairly safe seats need to reflect the opinions of their constituents. One way constituents can signal to their congressman their desires is through protest. Either way, I believe the TEA Party will mainly focus on these two district types – moderate districts to try to alter an election or policy vote, and conservative districts to try to voice support for the elected officials. By studying the number of events in a district by the PVI, I propose that there will be noticeably more protest events in the moderate and extremely conservative districts or those between D+10 and R+10 and those over R+20.

b) The TEA Party held the most rallies in districts where the Representative was ranked moderate to conservative by the National Journal Rankings.

The TEA Party was not only examining the district, but also the representative of the district. While there should be a correlation between the representative of a district and the PVI of a district, both can be studied. I predict very similar results when the events in the district are examined by the National Journal Rankings. The National Journal compiles these rankings every year. For the 2009 rankings, the last available before the writing of this paper, the National Journal used 92 votes from the House of Representatives. They then rate each vote as a more liberal or conservative vote and weight each vote based on how likely a predictor that vote can be on a related subject area (Cohen and Friel 2010). By looking at this data, the same conclusions should appear. First, moderate Representatives, those that were ranked in the middle of the 435-sitting congressman, should have their districts targeted by the TEA Party. Second, the extreme conservatives, those ranked last on the liberal version of the rating system, should also have seen many TEA Party events in their districts. Once again, the districts with moderate to conservative members should be the most open to political protest from the TEA Party.

c) TEA party groups were strongest in areas where their Representative voted for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The TEA Parties were founded as a nonpartisan group specifically in reaction to the Stimulus Act and the TARP votes. Each of these pieces of legislation increased government spending to levels that the TEA Party members believed were unacceptable. Rick Santelli's rant was over the TARP Act, and most people who strongly believe in the

TEA Party saw the Stimulus Act as another example of wasteful spending. It is likely that there is a strong correlation between TEA party activities in districts where the Representative voted for the Stimulus Act. TEA Parties in specific districts may have started as a direct reaction to their Representative's vote for the Stimulus Act. The TEA Party groups wanted to make it known to their Representative that they were unwilling to tolerate more government spending. However, the TEA Party, according to the previous hypothesis should be heavily interested in conservative districts and not in liberal districts. Representatives from liberal districts would be more likely to have voted for the stimulus bill than conservatives. The bill passed with all Democratic votes (*Making Supplemental Appropriations For Fiscal Year Ending 2009: Roll Call Vote 70*).

Therefore, these two hypotheses may seem to be in direct opposition to each other. However, both would provide an opening for protests in their district. The TEA Parties developed in response to the stimulus vote. It could be predicted that they would want to protest against those that voted for the bill. It is also possible that the opening might be there, but that there are simply not enough interested activists in the districts to take advantage of the opening. Two conditions are necessary to fulfill the political theory, an interested party and an opening in society. An affirmative vote on the stimulus bill may provide one opening, but not enough to attract interested parties.

d) TEA Party groups were strongest in districts that voted for George Bush in 2004 and then voted for Barack Obama in 2008.

Another predictor of a swing district is the presidential vote. This is especially true of the 2004 and 2008 elections. During the 2004 election, President Bush won 51% of the popular vote and 286 electoral votes ("CNN.com Election Results" 2004), and

during the 2008 election, President Obama won 53% of the popular vote and 365 electoral votes ("CNN Election Center 2008" 2008). The TEA Party should be expected to target the districts that changed their vote between 2004 and 2008. This could be considered the definition of swing districts. While this data is included in the PVI index, it looks specifically at the difference between these two elections rather than all five presidential elections since 1992. The TEA Party therefore should be strongest and hold the most rallies in these districts that voted for George Bush in 2004 and then voted for Barack Obama in 2008. These districts provide the best chance to change the outcome of future votes on important pieces of legislation. These swing districts are not heavily gerrymandered towards one party or the other. In fact, they are probably some of the most competitive districts in the country. These districts present the largest opening for the TEA Party to be successful.

e) The TEA Party targeted districts where the margin of victory in the 2008

Congressional election was very low.

This is yet another way to examine the claim that the TEA Party would target the most competitive districts. Another way to examine this is to look at the past results of the congressional election. In 2008, Democrats may have won a seat by only a very small margin due to the enthusiasm of liberal voters. These districts would be the perfect swing districts for the Congressional elections. Occasionally, congressional elections and presidential election results differ as to the party. The purpose of this hypothesis and the next one is to ensure that the TEA Party acted to target congressional elections. Political opportunity would assume that the TEA Party would look at the margin of victory to determine where the country may be the most open towards organizing around a fairly

conservative ideology. If the margin of victory is extremely large, than it means the district is not very competitive. This could be accounted for by a variety of different factors including a lack of political action in the district. Additionally, there would not be a significant chance of the TEA Party changing the outcome of the election or a congressional vote.

f) The number of TEA Party groups increased in a direct relationship with the Republican share of the vote in the 2008 Congressional Election.

The TEA Party, because it is focusing on moderate to conservative districts, should have held the most protests in the districts where the Republican earned a high vote share (over 45%). In the liberal districts, as has been stated, the shares of the vote given to the Republican candidate and the number of TEA Party protests should be low. This is primarily due to the idea that a Republican candidate will probably not have a high vote share in a district that is liberal. However, the opposite should hold true where the Republican candidate should have a higher vote share in conservative districts. This number correlates to the possible base of support for the TEA Party as it looks beyond simple binaries like winning. Instead, it provides a measure of total support in a district. This will help to examine whether there was a strong base of support for the TEA Party prior to the movement's founding.

g) TEA Party groups were strongest in districts that Cook Reports rated as competitive in the 2010 election.

Every Congressional district is rated by Cook Reports to determine which seats are the most competitive. They determine the most competitive seats and place them in three levels of competitiveness for seats that are held by Democrats and three levels for

seats that are held by Republicans. The three levels are Likely Democrat, Lean Democrat, Toss Up Democrat, with similar categories for Republicans. Like the previous hypothesis, the TEA Party should target these districts because they are the most competitive. Therefore, more events should be found within these six levels of competitiveness than elsewhere. These districts should provide the most opportunity for the TEA Party to affect elections or policies because they are the most competitive districts in the country. Therefore, the TEA Party should have many protests in the most competitive districts.

h) The TEA Party targeted Cook Reports' competitive districts that were Toss Up Democrat, Lean Democrat, and Likely Democrat.

The TEA Party was looking to remove most moderates from power, but they especially disliked moderate Democrats who would vote against many of their top priorities. These moderate Democrats should be centered in these extremely competitive districts. In addition, if the TEA Party were to behave in a rational manner, they would place their resources where they could promote their interests. These districts provide the most opportunity for the TEA Party to eliminate moderate Democrats who may have backed the health care law or the stimulus bill. Based on an assumption that they were trying to effect the most change, the TEA Party should place most of their resources in districts where they have a very real chance of electing a congress member that will become reliable elected supporters of the TEA Party.

Research Design

All the hypotheses will be tested based on evidence gathered from newspapers from around the country including local newspapers from many of the districts. I use the database search engine Newsbank to examine newspapers by state. Newsbank is an

enormous database over 3200 distinct sources across the United States. The Boolean search term I use are TEA Party AND Rally, Rallies, Protest AND Date. These terms are entered in the exact same order and spelled the exact same way for each search. Each search is narrowed down based on the search engine's list of newspapers in a particular state. The purpose of the first term is to ensure the newspaper reporter or editor believed he or she was covering a TEA Party event. They were eyewitnesses to the protest and their description of the protest is important. The use of Rally, Rallies, and Protest hoped to find the largest number of articles that reported on any sort of TEA Party event along the definition below. These are the types of events that satisfied the conditions for being a protest. There are hundreds of articles that fit these descriptions that could not be considered TEA Party rallies. Unfortunately, there is simply no way to eliminate all search error without going through every day of every newspaper, but using these search terms and looking through newspapers from each state, I have attempted to eliminate most of the potential errors. I chose the start date of April 1, 2009 and finished on Election Day 2010 (November 2nd, 2010). I counted only rallies that began on April 10th, 2009, and ended with rallies that occurred on November 3rd, 2010. I choose April 10th as the start date because the first round of TEA Parties in February 2009 occurred before the stimulus bill was made law. I wanted to ensure I captured April 15th, 2009 and any in the proceeding few days. April 15th, 2009 had the largest number of individual local TEA Party rallies. In addition, I ended my search for protests at the election because much of the efforts of the TEA party were aimed at affecting the results of the election. I found TEA party rallies in 21 randomly picked states, which includes 148 Congressional seats. I scanned every article that appeared for instances of a confirmed TEA Party rally by the

newspaper. For the purposes of this paper, I defined a rally or protest as an event with more than one person that occurred in a visible public space. I do not include meetings in this definition of rally. A public meeting is a place for a discussion, while a rally is meant to inform those around about the purpose of a group. In addition, I do not include campaign events for a particular candidate unless the newspaper defined the rally as a TEA Party rally to which a candidate was invited to attend. Finally, I included protests outside official government events or against a public speaker such as when President Obama speaks at a school. However, I did not include protestors who “crashed” a public meeting such as voicing an opinion at a school board meeting. My attempt was to include only protests that occurred in public from which there was an attempt to influence others. My research includes announcements in the regular articles of the paper, but not letters to the editor about upcoming TEA Parties in a particular location. I did not record events that occurred without a specified location and events that occurred in out of state districts. I included the date of the protests, the physical location, the amount of people recorded in the protest, and the link to the online location of the article. I eventually discovered 1070 protests that occurred over the roughly year and a half studied. The states and number of districts in the state are listed in Table 1.

Table 1- Randomly Selected States with Number of Congressional Districts in State

STATE	# of Districts	STATE	# of Districts
Alabama	7	Michigan	15
Alaska	1	Missouri	9
Arizona	8	Montana	1
Arkansas	4	Nebraska	3
Colorado	7	New Hampshire	2
Connecticut	5	New Mexico	3
Florida	25	New York	29
Idaho	2	Oklahoma	5
Iowa	5	Oregon	5
Maine	2	Rhode island	2
Maryland	8		

After data collection, I will use Microsoft Excel to create scatter plots and histograms to examine the data in visual manner. In addition, I plan to use STATA to examine correlations of the number of events in a district between affirmative stimulus votes and negative stimulus votes, presidential winners, and competitive and noncompetitive races.

Data

Across the different states there were 1070 distinct events recorded. A summary of the data is recorded in Table 2 on a state-by-state basis. A further break down by district can be located in Appendix I.

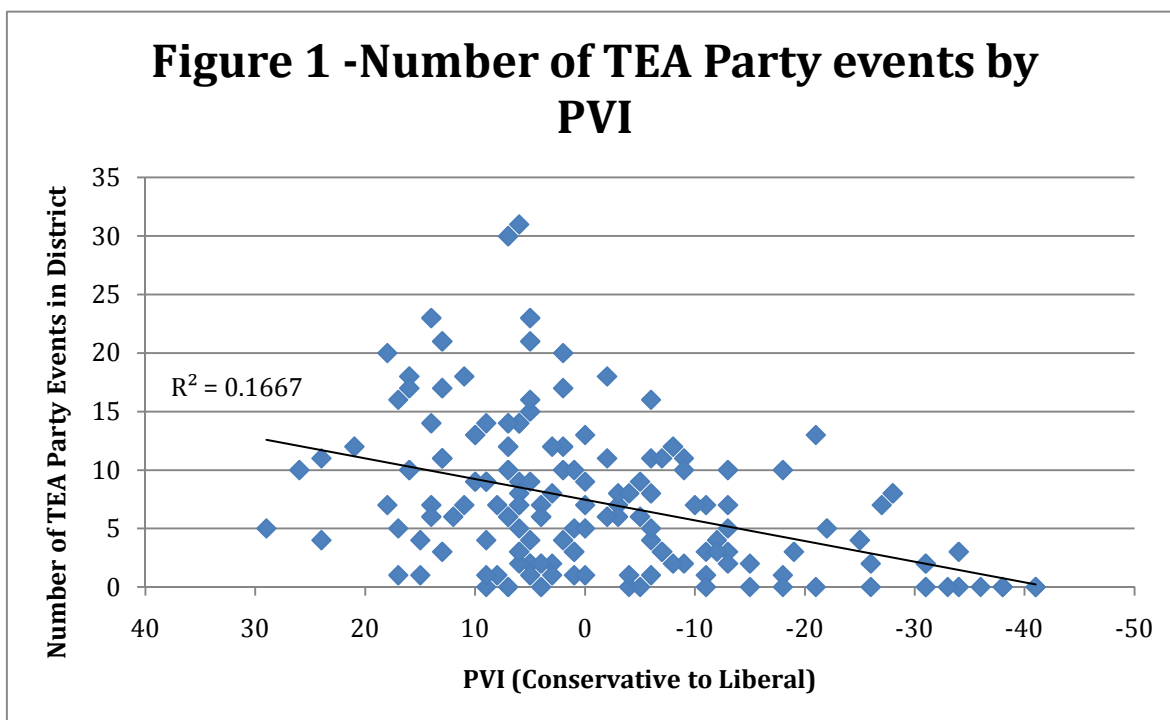
Table 2 – Number of Protest Events in Each State

STATE	Number of Events	Number of Events/ Districts in State
Alabama	67	9.57
Alaska	21	21
Arizona	35	4.38
Arkansas	45	11.25
Colorado	59	8.43
Connecticut	57	11.4
Florida	175	7
Idaho	36	18
Iowa	33	6.6
Maine	19	9.5
Maryland	33	4.13
Michigan	128	8.53
Missouri	47	5.22
Montana	30	30
Nebraska	25	8.33
New Hampshire	15	7.5
New Mexico	48	16
New York	105	3.62
Oklahoma	52	10.4
Oregon	27	5.4
Rhode island	12	6

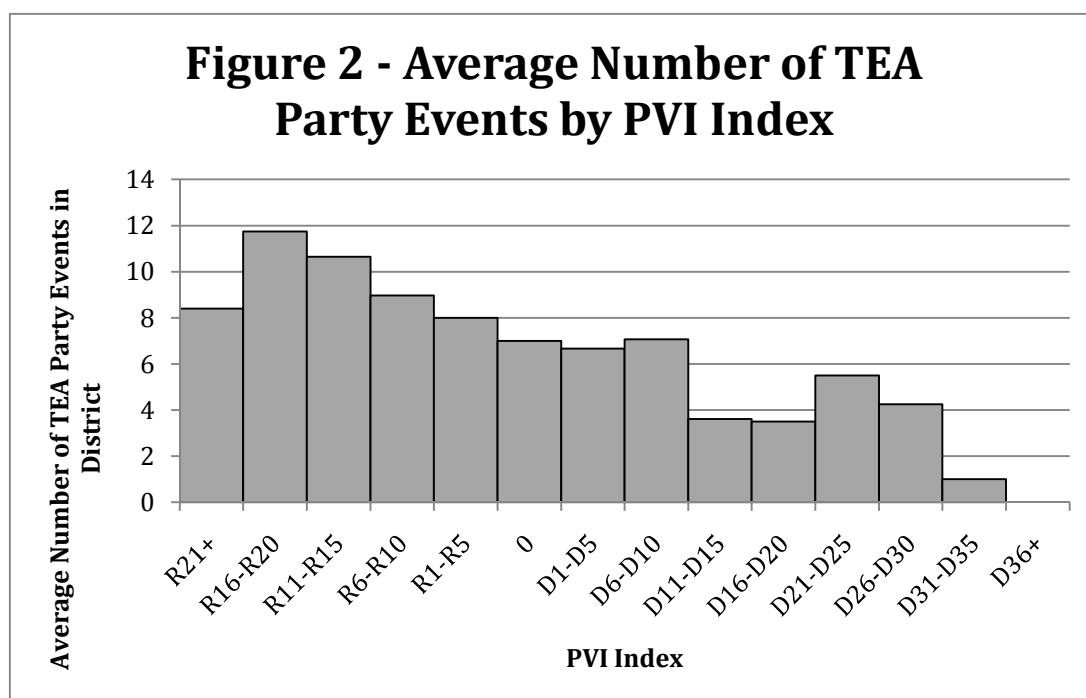
The data was then compared to each of six different measures that would test my hypotheses.

Results

I first examined the relationship between the number of events in a district and the PVI of the district. My hypothesis stated that there should be a larger number of events in moderate to conservative districts. In Figure 1, the number of TEA Party protests is graphed against the PVI. The conservative districts are given a positive PVI number. The more liberal districts are given a negative PVI number. This graph shows a grouping of TEA Party events in districts rated 0 to increasingly more conservative. In Figure 2, the events in a district are grouped by PVI groups of 5. This shows, as well, that TEA Party events occurred in moderate to more conservative districts. In addition, using the



statistics program STATA, there is a correlation of -0.4083 between PVI and events in a district with a p value that is significant at the .01 level. These graphs show that the TEA Party held events in moderate to conservative districts and that PVI is somewhat correlated to an event. This validates my hypothesis.



Next, I examined the events in a district by the National Journal Liberal ratings. In Figure 3, a slightly different pattern emerges. In these graphs, the correlation between Congressional rating and the number of events in their district is less strong. The correlation is $-.2598$ with a p value of $.0015$. There is clear statistical significance, but the correlation is weaker than for the PVI rankings. The histogram shows that most protests occurred in the districts with a conservative member and a moderate member. The histogram in Figure 4 is based on the National Journal Rankings with bins of 25 rankings. Figure 5 provides the raw numbers as the National Journal rates them without comparing them to other members of Congress. The most liberal are ranked 100, while the least liberal are ranked 0. While the evidence is not as clear for this hypothesis, there is still some correlation, albeit weak, that the liberal rating of a congressman was important in where the most TEA party events were held.

Figure 3- Number of TEA Party Events by National Journal Liberal Congressional Rankings

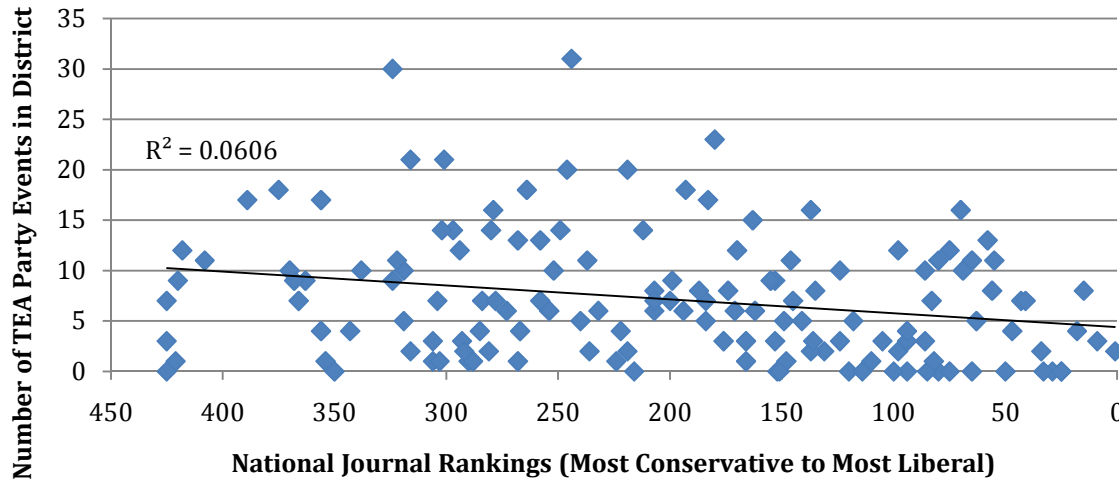
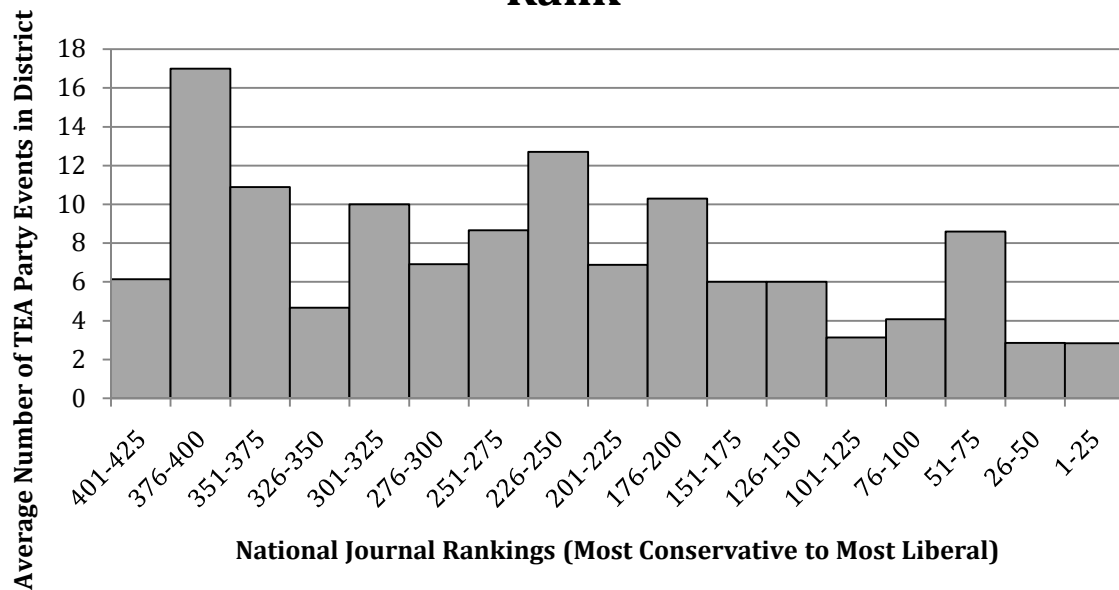
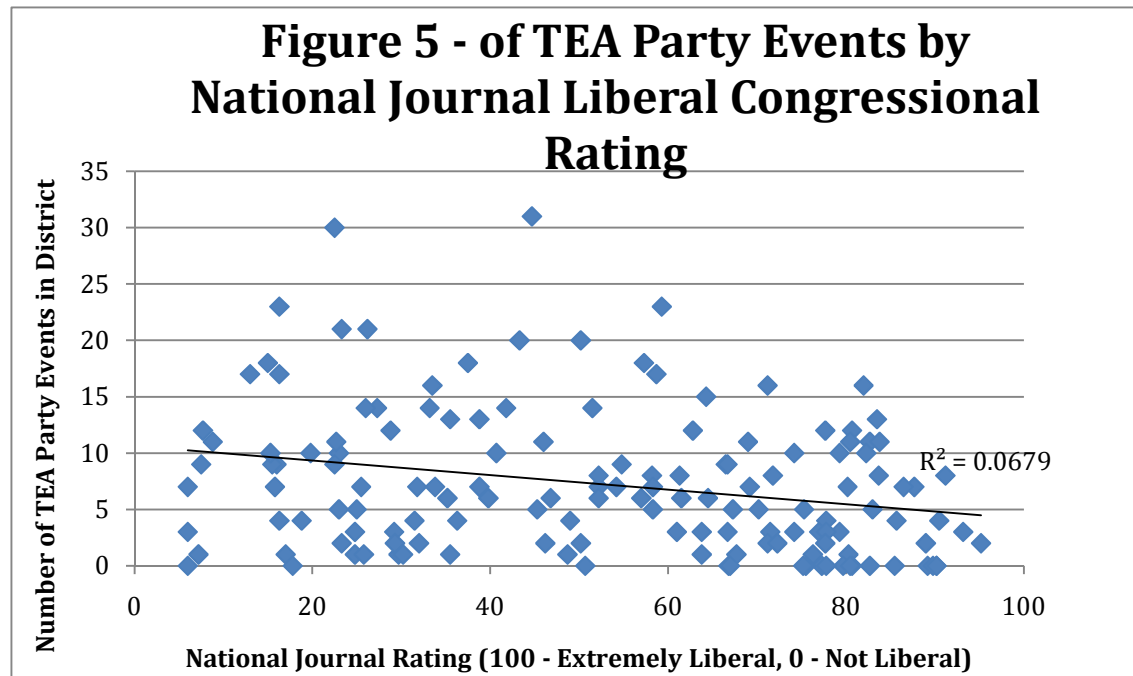


Figure 4 - Average Number of TEA Party Events by National Journal Most Liberal Rank





The third hypothesis was whether a Congressman's vote on the American Recovery and Reinvestment act had any correlation with TEA Party events. The data, as outlined in Table 3, is pretty clear that there is some correlation.

Table 3 – Average Number of Events, by Stimulus Vote

Stimulus Vote	Average Number of Events
No Vote	8.759 (6.67) $n = 58$
Yes Vote	6.170 (5.94) $n = 88$
Difference of Means	2.588*** [1.055]

Note: Entries are means; standard deviations are in parentheses; standard error in brackets

*** $p < .001$ for difference in average number of events in district (two-tailed t tests).

However, this is not the correlation that was assumed. Instead, more TEA Party events were held in districts where the Congressman voted against the Stimulus Act. The probability that the number of events in districts where the congress member voted

against the Stimulus Act is higher than the number of events in districts where the congress member voted for the Stimulus Act is .9923. A student's t-test run on this data confirms that the difference of the means is statistically significant in the 99th percentile.

It is clear that more TEA Party protests were held in districts where the Congressman voted against the Stimulus Act. Congressmen from liberal districts were more likely to have voted for the Democratic sponsored stimulus plan. As shown above, the TEA Party held fewer events in these liberal districts anyways. Therefore, it is not surprising that there were fewer events in districts where the Congressman voted for the Stimulus Act then against it.

The fourth hypothesis was regarding presidential elections. I predicted that the districts that voted for George W. Bush and then Barack Obama would have the most TEA Party events. Instead, it appears that districts that voted solidly Republican held the most events. The results are displayed in Table 4. There were substantially more events in districts that voted for at least one Republican candidate for President. Districts that voted for Bush in 2004 and McCain in 2008 had statistically significantly more events than districts that voted for John Kerry in 2004 or Barack Obama in 2008. This once again suggests that the TEA Party focused on moderate to conservative districts. They did not hold many events in districts that voted for the Democrat, which holds consistent with the previous data.

Voting for George Bush in the 2004 Presidential election seems to be an excellent indicator of where the TEA Party would hold protests. The results are significant at a 99% confidence interval with the probability that the number of events in Bush districts is

greater than the number of districts in Kerry districts is equal to almost 1.0000. The same strong relationship can be found in the Presidential Election in 2008.

Table 4 – Average Number of Events, by 2004 Presidential Election Vote and 2008 Presidential Election Vote

		Average Number of Events
2004 Presidential Election	Bush	9.083 (6.94) $n = 84$
	Kerry	4.781 (4.40) $n = 64$
	Difference	4.302*** [.993]
2008 Presidential Election	McCain	9.375 (7.27) $n = 64$
	Obama	5.583 (4.96) $n = 84$
	Difference	3.792*** [1.007]

Note: Entries are means; standard deviations are in parentheses; standard error in brackets
 *** $p < .001$ for difference in average number of events in district within presidential election year (two-tailed t tests)

Table 5 – Average Number of Events by Presidential Election Winner in 2004 and 2008

<i>Presidential Winner of District in 2004 and 2008</i>	<i>Average Number of Events</i>	<i>Number of Districts</i>
Both Republican	9.375	64
Both Democrat	4.78125	64
Bush/Obama	8.15	20
Kerry/McCain	N/A	0

In addition, I ran three t-tests examining the possible combinations of Presidential winners from 2004 and 2008. These combinations were Bush/McCain, Bush/Obama, and Kerry/Obama because no districts in the sample voted for Kerry in 2004 and then McCain in 2008. My hypothesis was that the largest number of events would be seen in Bush/Obama districts. The following t-tests show that the difference in the average

number of events in Bush/Obama districts and Bush/McCain was not statistically significant. However, the difference between Bush/McCain districts and Kerry/Obama districts was statistically significant. That means the TEA Party held more protests in districts that voted for the Republican candidate twice over those districts that voted for the Democratic candidate. Finally, the difference in Bush/Obama districts and Kerry/Obama districts was also statistically significant. Once again this confirms the data from above that the TEA Parties were held in moderate to conservative districts. The most important variable seems to be a vote for the Republican candidate once.

Table 6 – Average Number of Events, by Combined Presidential Vote from 2004 and 2008 Presidential Election

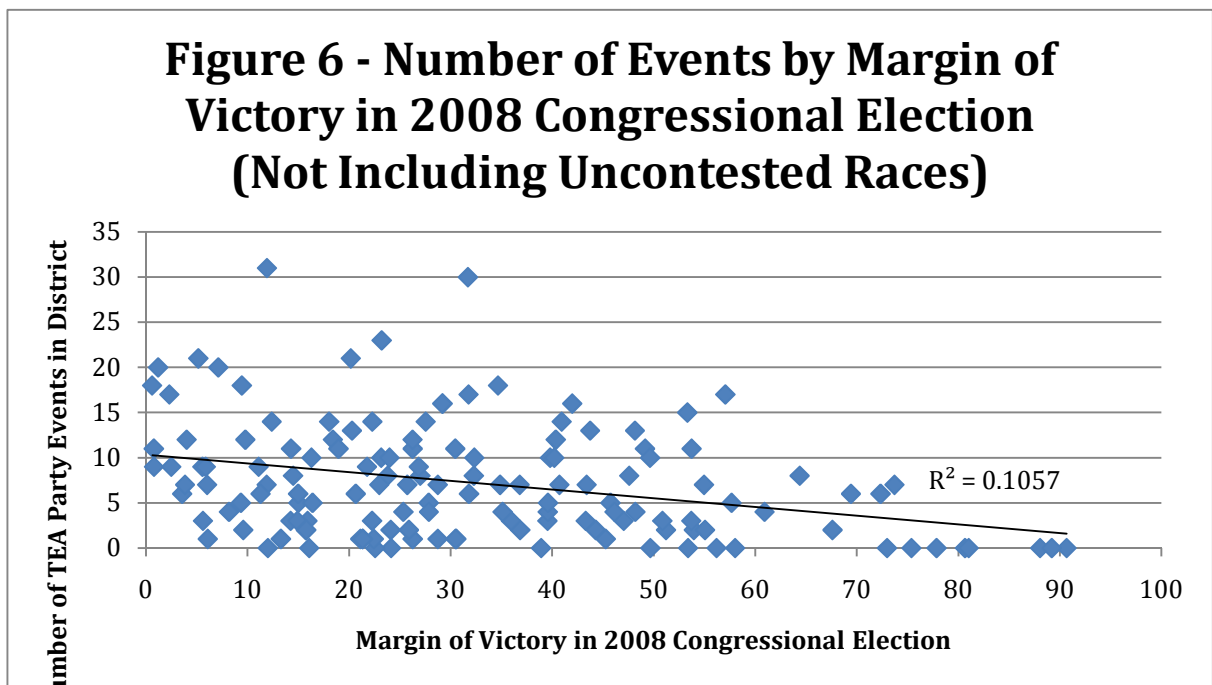
		Average Number of Events
Bush in 2004	Bush/McCain	9.375 (7.274) <i>n</i> = 64
	Bush/Obama	8.15 (5.851) <i>n</i> = 20
	Difference	1.225 [1.785]
Republican in Both 2004 and 2008	Bush/McCain	9.375 (7.274) <i>n</i> = 64
	Kerry/Obama	4.781 (4.309) <i>n</i> = 64
	Difference	4.594*** [1.063]
Obama in 2008	Bush/Obama	8.15 (5.851) <i>n</i> = 20
	Kerry/Obama	4.781 (4.309) <i>n</i> = 64
	Difference	3.369*** [1.223]

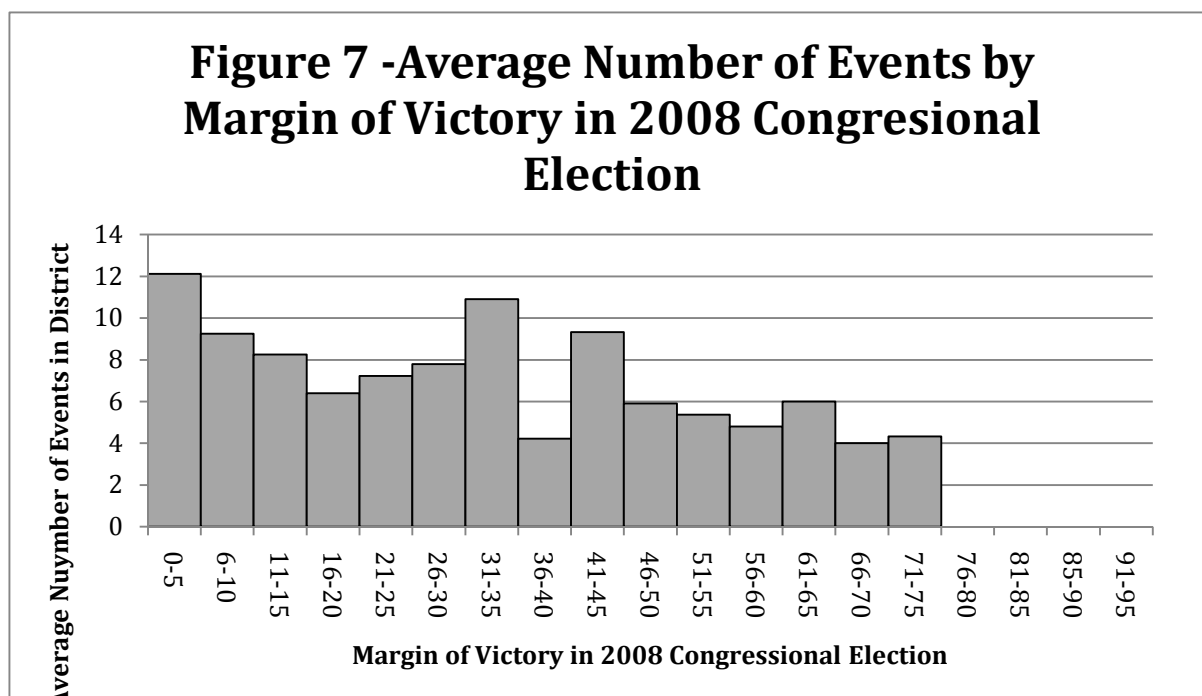
Note: Entries are means; standard deviations are in parentheses; standard error in brackets
 ****p* < .001 for difference in average number of events in district within presidential election year (two-tailed t tests)

The above chart also provides evidence that voting for Bush in 2004 may have been the most important presidential variable in deciding where the most votes would occur. This may follow the popular narrative that conservatives were enthusiastic with George Bush, but much less enthusiastic with the candidacies of John McCain and Sarah Palin. These conservatives then rose up to protest after the 2008 election by joining the TEA Party. Conservatives saw an opening in society after they saw excessive government spending and debt. They had previously sat out the 2008 election or did not campaign as they had for George Bush. The TEA Party and the excessive spending gave them an avenue to take out their frustrations with the liberal policies of the Obama Administration.

The fifth hypothesis is that more TEA Parties should be held in districts where the margin of victory in the 2008 congressional election was low. Figure 6 is a scatter plot of the events in a district. There is a clear downward trend that seems to indicate that there are more TEA Party protests in districts where the margin of victory, for either side, was low. This seems to add to the growing evidence that the TEA Party focused on the competitive districts. Figure 7 depicts these results with bins of five. The histogram seems to indicate that the highest average was the most competitive districts. However, there seemed to be two bars that do not fit the trend. These are the 31-35 and 41-45 bars. The large number of events in Montana may explain the 31-35 bar. Montana has only one Congressional district, and it did not see a very competitive election in 2008. There were 31-recorded events in Montana and the margin of victory was 31.72. Montana is a conservative state where it is expected to be a lot of protests. In addition, Representative

Denny Rehberg, a Republican, voted against the Stimulus Act and is ranked 324 in the National Journal Liberal rankings. This one outlier helps to explain the tall bar that doesn't follow the trend. The 41-45 bar is less explainable. The bar has 9 districts from across the country. The districts voted 5-4 Bush over Kerry and the same for Obama. It is likely an outlier cannot explain this high average number of events. Finally, the correlation between the number of events and margin of victory in the 2008 Congressional election is $-.2625$ with a p value of $.0013$. Therefore, once again there is a weak correlation between the number of events and the margin of victory for a Congressman.





The sixth hypothesis or Hypothesis F, states that the number of TEA Party events in a district should increase with the vote share of the Republican candidate during the 2008 election. The data describes a weak to moderate correlation value of .3417 with a p value of 0.0000. This data is displayed below in Figure 8 and Figure 9. While there is no clear statistical evidence, both the graph and chart seem to indicate that there is a possible trend in which the moderate and most conservative districts see the most amount of activity by the TEA Party. One particularly interesting observation is the large amount of activity around in the 41-50% vote share range for Republicans and the drop off for the 51-55% bar. Congressional elections are not always won with an outright majority so having fewer than 50% of the vote does not mean the Republican lost.

Figure 8 - Number of Events by Republican Share of the Vote in 2008 Elections (Not including Uncontested Races)

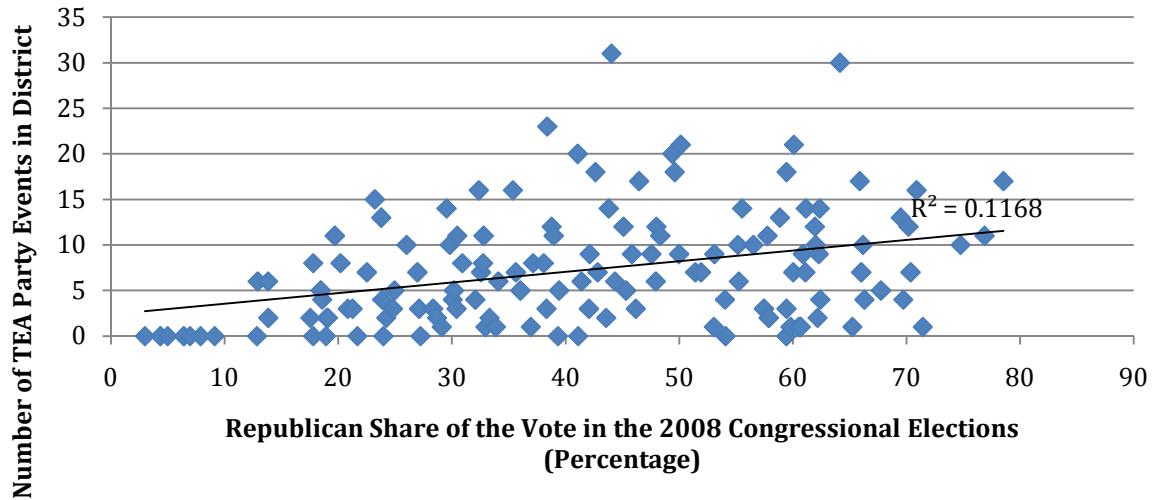
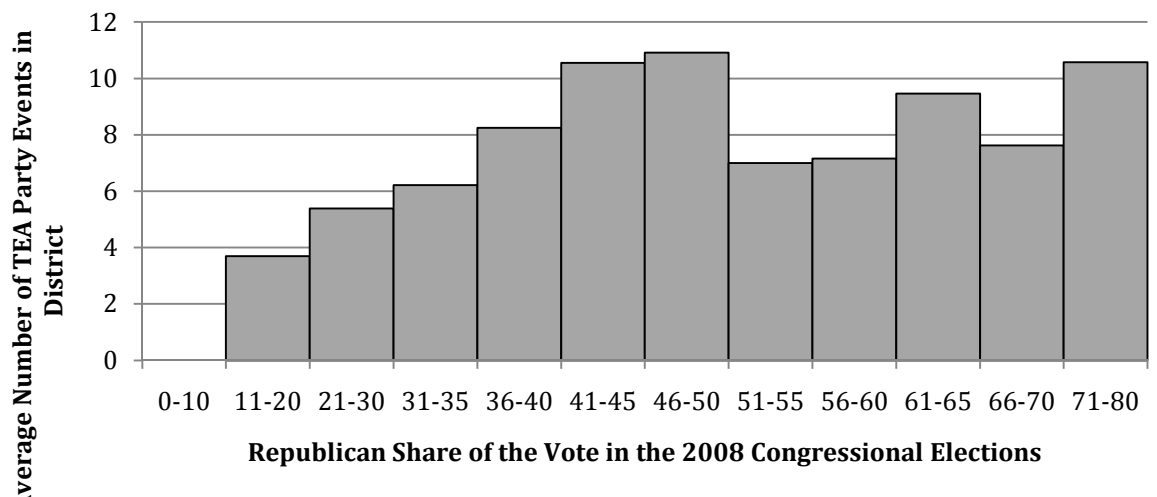


Figure 9- Average Number of TEA Party Events by Republican Share of the Vote in the 2008 Elections



The seventh hypothesis is that the TEA Party was strongest in the competitive districts based on the Cook Ratings of the districts for the 2010 election. Cook Ratings

examines all 435 districts and determines those districts in which it believes the incumbent or if an open seat, the party of the previous incumbent, will lose the seat to the opposite party. In my sample, 52 races were considered competitive and 96 were not considered competitive. The data is displayed in Table 7. The competitive races have more average events per district than the noncompetitive races. The differences in the means is significant at the 90th percentile. Therefore, the TEA Party probably held more protests in the most competitive districts than the least competitive districts.

Table 7 – Average Number of Events, by Cook Ratings of Congressional Races

Cook Rating	Average Number of Events
Competitive Races	8.365 (6.59) <i>n</i> = 52
Non Competitive Races	6.604 (6.13) <i>n</i> = 96
Difference of Means	1.761* [1.085]

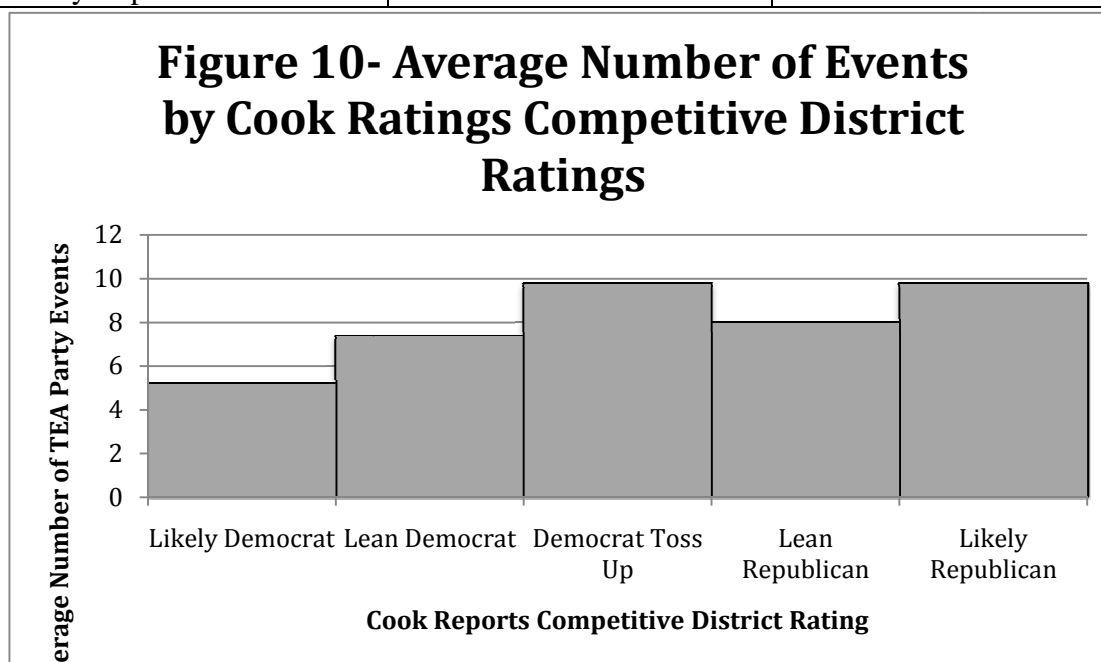
Note: Entries are means; standard deviations are in parentheses; standard error in brackets

**p* < .1 for difference in average number of events in district (two-tailed *t* tests).

The final hypothesis is that the TEA Party held more protests in districts that Cook Reports labeled likely, lean or toss up Democrat for the 2010 Congressional Elections. This looks beyond simply competitive races and examines the previous incumbent to see if the congressional seat will change parties. While the number of districts examined was smaller in this sample size, some interesting observations can be seen in Table 13 and in Figure 10. For instance, there seems to be a There are a total of 52 districts that I examined that Cook Reports considered competitive districts. Because of the nature of the 2010 election, only one district in the United States was considered a Republican Toss Up. However, this district fell outside the survey.

Table 8 – Average Number of Events by Cook Ratings of Competitive Congressional Districts

Cook Ratings of Congressional Races	Average Number of Events	Number of Districts
Likely Democrat	5.2	5
Lean Democrat	7.384615385	13
Democrat Toss Up	9.777777778	18
Republican Toss Up	N/A	0
Lean Republican	8	11
Likely Republican	9.8	5



This disproves my original hypothesis. Instead the TEA Party held rallies in the Democrat Toss Up, Lean Republican and Likely Republican categories. The focus for the TEA Party seemed to be on districts that Republicans needed to ensure did not switch sides. In addition, the TEA Party did hold more races in the most competitive “Democrat Toss Up” districts. The average number of TEA Party rallies in the Democrat Toss Up, Lean Republican and Likely Republican were all much higher than the average number of rallies across all districts at 7.22. This indicates that the TEA Party held the many rallies in moderate to conservative competitive districts. Interestingly, there were more rallies in Democratic districts, but the data is not statistically significant (Table 8). There

simply may not be enough districts to evaluate the validity that there were more rallies in either Democratic or Republican competitive districts.

Table 8 – Average Number of Events, by Democratic Competitive Races vs. Republican Competitive Races, Toss Up Races vs. Less Competitive Races, and 4 Most Competitive Districts vs. Likely Democratic and Likely Republican Districts

		Average Number of Events
Competitive Races	Democratic	8.563 (7.536) <i>n</i> = 16
	Republican	8.278 (6.246) <i>n</i> = 36
	Difference	2.847 [2.001]
2 Most Competitive	Toss Up	9.278 (6.958) <i>n</i> = 18
	Less Competitive	7.618 (6.37) <i>n</i> = 34
	Difference	2.160 [1.917]
4 Most Competitive	4 Most Competitive	8.571 (1.09) <i>n</i> = 42
	“Likely” Races	7.5 (4.35) <i>n</i> = 10
	Difference	1.071 [2.339]

Note: Entries are means; standard deviations are in parentheses; standard error in brackets
Two –tailed t tests show no confidence levels

I next examined the Democrat Toss Up category versus the other categories. There were very few Republican Toss Up districts because the Republicans were expected to do extremely strong in 2010. The only one district that fit this description was not included in the initial data collected. I wanted to see if the TEA Party focused the most strongly on the most competitive districts. The data, while not statistically

significant at any confidence level, may show that the TEA Party held more protests in the most competitive districts. However, the sample size may simply be too small to prove anything. The results of the test can also be seen in Table 8.

The last test I ran with these Cook Competitive Ratings was to look at the middle four categories versus the two least competitive categories. The middle categories were toss up and lean districts while the least competitive were likely districts. This figure once again is not statistically significant. The results can be seen in Table 8. However, the raw numbers seem to indicate that the TEA Party held the most rallies in the most competitive districts. Once again, this lack of statistical significance may be caused by the small sample size.

Conclusion

The results of these six variables provide a more general view of the TEA Party protests. They also confirm the overall hypothesis that the TEA Party was strongest in places that were the most open to their protests. These were in districts that were moderate to conservative based on PVI and had a moderate to conservative Representative. The TEA Party did not target districts where the Representative voted for the Stimulus Act. However, districts that were competitive based on ratings from Cook Ratings, the margin of victory and the percentage of the Republican vote were all targets of the TEA Party. Finally, districts that voted for a Republican candidate for President once in the past two election cycles had more TEA Party events than other districts. These all seem to confirm that the TEA Party was strongest in the districts that were most politically open to these conservative protests. Politically open means the districts provided the most opportunity for the TEA Party to organize protests and the most opportunity to accomplish its goals. Both competitive districts and extremely

conservative districts were particularly open to the TEA Party. The competitive districts provided the TEA Party with the best opportunity to effect change through challenging the incumbent congressman or placing pressure on a policy vote. The most conservative districts provided the TEA Party with the ability to rally its most ardent supporters. Since the message of the TEA Party already resonated with many in the most conservative districts, organizing protests would be significantly easier. The first possible reason was that they wanted to support their congress member for supporting policies that fit within the goals of the TEA Party. A second reason is that the TEA Party members could have been trying to signal to their conservative congress members that they wanted to ensure he or she continued to support conservative policies. Many of the most conservative congress members took part in providing earmarks to their districts. This was a hated policy of the TEA Party so they protested and tried to prevent conservative members from continuing to secure earmarks. The other reason the TEA Party protested in the most conservative districts was to make the national presence more widespread. It allowed some of its most hardcore supporters to take part in TEA Party rallies without having to travel far. This minimizes the cost to participate and increases the number of participants. The signal to national leaders becomes amplified by holding rallies in both moderate and conservative districts. The TEA Party acted rationally by using its resources to target these politically open districts. Yet, because the TEA Party is a decentralized organization of local groups that they acted rationally is truly remarkable. Even at the local level, TEA Party organizations only formed where there was local interest as would be expected by political opportunity theory. The TEA Party was fairly

efficient and did not waste its resources in districts where it may not have had much chance for success.

As the TEA Party grew, they gained influence in the political process. Politicians began to listen to their concerns and meet with leaders of the TEA Party. Republicans from across the country wanted to speak at their events. As this occurred, candidates from various TEA Party groups announced their candidacy for local positions such as mayor and sheriff and national positions as well. They became more and more institutionalized. The TEA Party, while remaining independent of the traditional Republican Party, was brought into the national political conversation. As this institutionalization occurred, TEA Party protests decreased in attendance and size. The number of protests, according to my data, held in 2009 from April 10 to December 31st, a total of eight months, was 618 protests or 77.25 protests a month. The number of protests held in 2010 from January 1st to November 2nd, a total of 10 months, was 452 protests or 45.2 protests per month. The TEA Party slowed down in intensity and the media began to provide them less coverage. Political opportunity theory, according to Meyer (2004), predicted this decrease in activity as the protests became institutionalized. The TEA Party earned a seat in the policy making process and no longer needed protests to garner attention. They won their protest battle to take part in the conversation. Deficit reeducated has become a major issue in the United States possibly due to the efforts of the TEA Party. More research needs to be performed on the influence of the TEA Party. However, this paper answered the question of where the TEA Party mobilized and why they mobilized in those districts. It also provides further evidence that political opportunity theory can help to explain why and where protest movements are successful.

Appendix I

List of Districts and Number Events in Each District

District	Number of Events
Alabama	
AL 1	23
AL 2	18
AL 3	4
AL 4	10
AL 5	6
AL 6	5
AL 7	1
Alaska	
AK 1	21
Arizona	
AZ 1	5
AZ 2	3
AZ 3	0
AZ 4	3
AZ 5	2
AZ 6	4
AZ 7	11
AZ 8	7
Arkansas	
AR 1	7
AR 2	15
AR 3	17
AR 4	6
Colorado	
CO 1	13
CO 2	1
CO 3	23
CO 4	14
CO 5	7
CO 6	1
CO 7	0
Connecticut	
CT 1	10
CT 2	16
CT 3	11
CT 4	9
CT 5	11
Florida	
FL 1	12
FL 2	8
FL 3	10
FL 4	1
FL 5	14

District	Number of Events
FL 6	9
FL 7	10
FL 8	12
FL 9	2
FL 10	1
FL 11	3
FL 12	3
FL 13	14
FL 14	18
FL 15	9
FL 16	21
FL 17	3
FL 18	2
FL 19	0
FL 20	7
FL 21	2
FL 22	5
FL 23	8
FL 24	0
FL 25	1
Idaho	
ID 1	20
ID 2	16
Iowa	
IA 1	16
IA 2	12
IA 3	3
IA 4	1
IA 5	1
Maine	
ME 1	12
ME 2	7
Maryland	
MD 1	11
MD 2	3
MD 3	4
MD 4	0
MD 5	0
MD 6	11
MD 7	4
MD 8	0
Michigan	
MI 1	8
MI 2	14
MI 3	7
MI 4	12
MI 5	7

District	Number of Events
MI 6	13
MI 7	17
MI 8	10
MI 9	18
MI 10	4
MI 11	7
MI 12	4
MI 13	2
MI 14	0
MI 15	5
Missouri	
MO 1	7
MO 2	9
MO 3	3
MO 4	6
MO 5	7
MO 6	0
MO 7	5
MO 8	1
MO 9	9
Montana	
MT 1	30
Nebraska	
NE 1	7
NE 2	7
NE 3	11
New Hampshire	
NH 1	9
NH 2	6
New Mexico	
NM 1	6
NM 2	31
NM 3	11
New York	
NY 1	5
NY 2	1
NY 3	6
NY 4	1
NY 5	3
NY 6	0
NY 7	2
NY 8	5
NY 9	0
NY 10	0
NY 11	0
NY 12	0
NY 13	2

District	Number of Events
NY 14	0
NY 15	0
NY 16	0
NY 17	0
NY 18	2
NY 19	1
NY 20	4
NY 21	8
NY 22	5
NY 23	10
NY 24	20
NY 25	8
NY 26	3
NY 27	8
NY 28	2
NY 29	9
Oklahoma	
OK 1	10
OK 2	14
OK 3	4
OK 4	7
OK 5	17
Oregon	
OR 1	2
OR 2	13
OR 3	3
OR 4	6
OR 5	3
Rhode Island	
RI 1	2
RI 2	10

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