Joining the Tea Party Caucus: A Survival Strategy

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Abstract

We explain why some Republicans in Congress join the Tea Party Caucus, while others do not. We argue that members of Congress strategically become members of the Tea Party Caucus because of career incentives generated by the structure of campaign finance networks. While well-connected members of Congress enjoy substantial success at pursuing political careers because they receive continued material support from their political parties, members of Congress with poor campaign finance networks cannot rely on that same support to advance their political careers. Thus, we argue that Republicans with poor campaign finance networks are more likely join the Tea Party Caucus as a strategy of political survival. By joining the Tea Party Caucus, these members can demonstrate to potential supporters that they have not been coopted by political elites, thereby potentially opening new avenues of support. We provide evidence of these dynamics by analyzing data on members' campaign finance networks.

We thank John Aldrich, Larry Evans, and Kelly Patterson for helpful suggestions and comments. We also thank Adam Bonica and Benjamin Kantack for generously sharing their data on campaign finance and Tea Party membership. We thank Christopher Grady for outstanding research assistance.

In July 2010, Representative Michelle Bachman (R-MN) organized the Tea Party Caucus in the House, arguing that it would be a "group of members dedicated to promote Americans' call for fiscal responsibility, adherence to the Constitution and limited government." While Republican Conference Chairman Mike Pence (R-IN) immediately declared his adherence to the group, there was much speculation among pundits and journalists alike about whether other members of the Republican leadership team and the party in general would join the newly founded caucus. For example, The Hill's Congress blog posed the following question to academics, bloggers and public figures: "Would it be a good political move for House Republicans to join the new Tea Party Caucus?" (7/20/10). The most common answer, by far, was "no." For instance, John F. McManus, president of The John Birch Society, reasoned that Republicans did not need the caucus because they already had the support of the Tea Party. Questions about joining the Tea Party Caucus also concerned Republican candidates who were competing in the November election. Ryan Rudominer, spokesman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said "The question now is, whether House Republican candidates who have raced to the far right and outside the mainstream will agree to join Michele Bachmann's Tea Party caucus if elected" (cited in Hooper and Fabian, The Hill, 7/19/10: "Tea Party gets official caucus").

Indeed, about 70 House members have joined the caucus at different times since its founding.¹ Why did these representatives join the Tea Party Caucus? Was it because

http://bachmann.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=199440 and

¹ The data on House Tea Party Caucus membership for the 111th and 112th Congresses were obtained from Bachmann's web site:

of ideological preferences? Were the majority of legislators joining the caucus freshman elected with Tea Party endorsement in 2010?

We posit that the key to understanding House members' decisions to join the caucus is not ideology, endorsements, or constituency preferences, but instead the party campaign finance network. We argue that the positions of legislators within this network, i.e., their centrality, create incentives with respect to the decision of whether to join the Tea Party Caucus. Because House members' centrality within the Republican Party's campaign finance network is an important element in shaping their career opportunities, legislators who are on the periphery have greater incentives to look for alternative resources to finance their campaigns. By joining the caucus, these legislators can send a credible signal to Tea Party activists and donors regarding their commitment to the cause.

We analyze the network of financial contributions among Republican members of the House, and find that even though ideology is a necessary condition for becoming part of the Tea Party Caucus, it is not sufficient. Interestingly, House Republicans who do not join the Tea Party Caucus are on average more conservative than legislators who join the group. Most important, we find that the centrality of House Republicans within their party's campaign finance network becomes an increasingly important predictor of joining the Tea Party Caucus as time moves forward. Specifically, when we examine Republican House members over the decade or so leading up to the formation of the Tea Party Caucus in 2010, we find that centrality within the finance network becomes significant, statistically and substantively, as we get closer to the time of formation of the caucus.

Why do we care about the reasons behind joining the Tea Party Caucus? Because http://bachmann.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=226594.

joining the Tea Party Caucus has had an impact on voting behavior in Congress. Bailey, Mummolo and Noel (2011) find that belonging to the Tea Party Caucus increases the probability of voting according to the Tea Party position, as opposed to the "Republican" one by an average of 20 percentage points. As they claim, "On some Tea Party priorities [caucus members] voted in ways markedly different than otherwise similarly situated Republicans."

The paper proceeds as follows. In the following section, we review the literature on the Tea Party and present the puzzle of the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus in the House of Representatives. In the subsequent section, we develop our theory and conduct an empirical analysis of legislators' campaign finance networks. Finally, we offer concluding remarks.

What Do We Know about the Tea Party?

Many scholars have turned their attention to the rapid emergence of the Tea Party movement.² While the majority of studies have concentrated on the birth and development of the movement, a few have focused on the effect of the Tea Party ² Most authors agree on marking the "Anti-porkulus Protest" (against pork and spending), organized by Keli Carender on February 16th, 2009 in Seattle, as the first ever Tea Party protest. They also generally agree that the first electoral victory obtained due to the mobilization efforts of tea party activists was Scott Brown's successful bid for US Senator from Massachusetts in the 2010 special election following the death of Edward Kennedy.

movement on the 2010 congressional elections.

In their book The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism, Skocpol and Williams emphasize that there is no single "Tea Party organization," or even a well-connected network of groups. Instead, they find that the Tea Party is an assortment of local and national organizations with no hierarchical structure and no central authority. Most are local, small groups with no affiliation to other local groups or regional-national federations. In addition, they find that there are three types of elements within the Tea Party: grassroots activists, billionaire advocates and right-wing media purveyors. Tea Party activists tend to be older (average age 67), white, social conservatives (libertarians are only a minority), middle class, and churchgoers (mostly evangelical). They revere the Constitution, believing that their interpretation of the document is unimpeachable (Zernicke 2010). These ideologically conservative individuals vehemently oppose "unearned" public spending and blame the great recession on freeloaders, liberals, and big government. Zernike (2011) found that the Tea Party appealed to many people who felt disenfranchised. The 2008 recession was the catalysts for these individuals to become active and to form local groups that would eventually evolve into what we now refer to as "the Tea Party." Simultaneously, established conservative national groups recognized the opportunity that these local groups represented.

Regarding Tea Party influence in elections, the view is mixed. While Skocpol and Williams argue that the Tea Party boosted GOP candidates' probabilities of winning, Ansolabehere and Snyder (2011) counter that Tea Party candidates were no more successful than other GOP candidates in the 2010 elections. In agreement with the latter, Karpowitz et. al. (2011) claim that Tea Party endorsements mattered little in the general

elections of 2010, except for those candidates endorsed by FreedomWorks. However, they attribute this higher vote share to FreedomWorks' strategic endorsements of candidates competing in heavily Republican districts (only 10% of FreedomWorks endorsements were in districts where Obama won 60% or more of the vote share in 2008).

One of the most comprehensive accounts of the impact of the Tea Party on elections is that of Bailey et al. (2011). They bring in the complexity of the movement, analyzing the impact of Tea Party activists, sympathizers, national organizations, and congressmen on the 2010 congressional election and roll call voting in Congress. They find that it is the local Tea Party activists who have the deepest and broadest impact on election results.³ At the same time, they find that the number of Tea Party sympathizers (as opposed to activists) in a district has no effect on the election results.⁴ This same

³ Bailey et al. (2011) measure party activism by "the registration numbers of six national Tea Party organizations, provided in a study by Burghart and Zeskind (2010). The groups are: the Tea Party Nation, the Tea Party Patriots, 1776 Tea Party (also known as TeaParty.org), FreedomWorks, ResistNet and the Tea Party Express (Burghart and Zeskind 2010). These membership figures represent district residents who indicated their support for the movement by signing up with a Tea Party-affiliated web site, or, in the case of the Tea Party Express, by donating to its PAC. These residents are ground-level activists, distinct from the elite politicians and organizations that endorsed candidates in 2010" (Bailey et al. 2011).

⁴ Bailey et al. (2011) characterize individuals as Tea Party sympathizers using a question from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. "The question wording is as

result holds for national groups, concurring with Karpowitz et.al. (2011) that only FreedomWorks had an effect on elections (Bailey et al. 2011). With respect to the Tea Party Caucus, they find that membership in it did not have a significant effect on election results.

In all, the literature agrees that the Tea Party is an amorphous collection of groups with no hierarchical structure. Although there is disagreement on the net effect of the Tea Party on the 2010 elections, none of the scholarly works reviewed provide any insights into why particular legislators decided to join the Tea Party Caucus in the House.

The Tea Party Caucus Puzzle

What drives Republican legislators to join the Tea Party Caucus in the House? What appears to be a simple question is actually an enigma. Belonging to the Tea Party Caucus does not correlate with any other indicator of Tea Party affiliation, (e.g., being a signatory to the Contract From America or receiving Tea Party electoral support].

First, out of the 53 House Republicans who have signed the Contract from America, only nineteen have joined the Tea Party Caucus (Kantack 2012). This low number is significant because the Contract From America is identified as the Tea Party

follows: "What is your view of the Tea Party movement – would you say it is very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative, or don't you know enough about the Tea Party movement to say?" After excluding "don't know" responses and non-responses, answers were coded on a 1 to 5 scale and the mean response was taken for each congressional district (Bailey et al. 2011).

platform, a document produced through an online voting process that enumerates the 10 most popular proposals Tea Party activists want their Representatives to follow.

Second, only 16 out of a class of 80 Republican freshmen elected in 2010 joined the Tea Party Caucus. This is even more significant when we consider that, according to the *New York Times*, 41 of these 80 freshmen received substantial support from the Tea Party (October 14 2010). Because the Tea Party emerged in 2009, and its influence may have been important in the 2010 election, we would assume that a majority of the caucus membership would be freshmen, elected in part thanks to Tea Party support. However, an examination of the seniority of caucus members reveals that legislators who have claimed the Tea Party label are in fact not freshmen upstarts. Rather, most of them are Bush-era or earlier Republicans; by the 2012 general election, the average tenure among Tea Party Caucus members was about 10 years. Indeed, in their book-length study of the Tea Party, Skocpol and Williams (2012) remark that the Tea Party Caucus was composed of many self-appointed Tea Party leaders who had nothing to do with the "real" Tea Party.

Why do we see this disconnect between the membership of the Tea Party Caucus and Contract from America signatories or Tea Party supported candidates? Why have legislators who do not seem to resemble the Tea Party image in the minds of most journalists and members of the public co-opted the Tea Party brand in the House? What explains this puzzle? In the end, why do some Republicans join the Tea Party Caucus while others do not?

Constituency Representation

Existing work on caucuses agrees that the key to explaining caucus membership is constituency representation. Although the specifics differ, most of the work argues that legislators choose which caucus to join based on their constituencies' interests and demands.⁵

One of the most comprehensive studies of caucuses is Hammond's *Congressional Caucuses in National Policy Making* (1998). She argues that caucuses developed because formal institutions of Congress, i.e., party and committee systems, are not able to accommodate increased constituent demands in certain areas. She finds that this is particularly true for junior Congressmen who are left out of committees because of seniority norms. Thus, caucuses are designed to gather and disseminate reliable information, coordinate legislative strategy, and serve as a forum that allows members to pursue policy interests that cut across the committee system (Hammond 1998; Wolfensberger 1998; Victor and Ringe 2009). Following the same argument, Miler argues that "caucuses are well suited to help legislators represent their constituencies on Capitol Hill, and there is strong evidence that legislators' decisions about caucus membership reflect their constituents' interests...." (Miler 2011: 886).

Based on existing studies on caucuses, we would anticipate that House Republicans decide to join the Tea Party Caucus to meet their constituencies' demands. However, the evidence has not borne this out. Although Bachmann has continuously

⁵ Miler (2011) reports that in 2011 there were about 400 caucuses in the House and each legislator belonged to almost 10 caucuses on average. Legislators are free to choose which caucus they join, and more than 80% of caucuses are policy oriented.

mentioned that the Caucus is "the ear-piece of the Tea Party" (*The Hill*, 2/28/11), scholars have found that the relationship between caucus members and Tea Party activists and sympathizers is extremely weak. Bailey et al. (2011), for instance, find that the correlations between membership in the Tea Party Caucus on the one hand, and district-level Tea Party activism and district-level Tea Party sympathy (as measured through survey responses) on the other, are only .26 and .24, respectively. Overall, their results suggest that neither activism nor sympathy for the Tea Party cause are driving members to associate with the Tea Party Caucus. Indeed, consideration of constituency demands seems to be far from significant drivers of legislators' decisions.⁶

With respect to the Tea Party Caucus, therefore, the limited evidence on the subject indicates that a simple constituency representation story, as the general caucus literature would suggest, does not explain why some Republicans decided to join the caucus while others did not. But if not constituency demands, what is actually driving legislators' decisions to join the Tea Party Caucus?

Campaign Networks, Career Incentives, and Ideology

We propose an alternative theory to explain why some House members join the Tea Party Caucus while others do not. The simplest outline of our argument is as follows: legislators strategically join the Tea Party Caucus because of career incentives generated by the structure of the campaign finance network.

Legislators need financial resources to get reelected. We know that a fair amount

⁶ Bailey et. al. (2011) also find that the relationship between Tea Party National organizations' support and caucus membership is negative.

of money is spent on campaigns, and an extensive literature has shown that the amount of money spent matters for both incumbents and challengers. Money increases vote shares for challengers and incumbents alike, especially in models that control for challenger quality (e.g., Erikson and Palfrey 2000; Gerber 2004; Green and Krasno 1988; Jacobson 1978, 1985; Levitt 1994).

We argue that legislators who become marginalized in the campaign finance network cannot rely on existing connections to finance their campaigns. In this paper, we focus on the network of campaign contributions among Republican members of Congress, both personal and via leadership PACs, as the structure that identifies marginalization (or lack thereof) within the party. Since campaign resources are limited, we assume that members who give to other members through leadership PACs or through personal contributions do so strategically. In making such contributions, a member's objective is to signal to other legislators and donors her preference for the future makeup of the party.

To the extent that some members become marginal within the finance network of Republican members, it is reasonable to expect that they use the institutional features at their disposal to signal their adherence to a set of principles that might attract new sources of financial support, in this case the Tea Party. We claim that joining the Tea Party Caucus sends a credible signal to potential supporters about a member's position and commitment to Tea Party objectives. It allows legislators to differentiate themselves from the many other representatives who use Tea Party rhetoric to court this constituency, but are unwilling, for various reasons, to formally join the caucus.

We posit that members on the margins of the party campaign financial support

network join the caucus in order to gain financial support and advance their careers. The decision to join the Tea Party Caucus is not necessarily because Tea Party ideology is particularly popular with these legislators; it may very well not be. Rather, they feel pressure to join the Tea Party Caucus to gain a positive reputation with a particular constituency that can potentially offer financial support.

If this line of reasoning is correct, then joining the Tea Party Caucus will be traceable to the position of the members in the campaign finance network of member-tomember contributions and receipts. Members' career trajectories are often determined by who they know, and the endorsement of other prominent Republican legislators in the form of financial contributions can be extremely valuable. Thus, individuals who do not have these connections have a lower expected career trajectory within the party. As a result, they recognized the potential tangible payoff of making an appeal to the Tea Party.

No previous research has fully outlined this career-based theory of Tea Party Caucus membership, and as we show in the next section, our arguments are supported by a series of analyses of the network of financial contributions between Republican members of the House of Representatives. Our results strongly support the idea that low member centrality within the network of member-to-member campaign contributions became an increasingly strong predictor of the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus as time moved closer to 2010, when the caucus was formed. In the next section, we describe our data and provide our analyses.

Data and Analyses

To measure marginalization within the party campaign finance network, we focus on contributions among House Republican legislators. Doing so involved bringing together several different sources of data.

Since member-to-member contributions are often made under the auspices of leadership PACs, we considered financial contributions both to and from Republican leadership PACs or individual Republican House members to comprise the network of Republican Party member-to-member contributions. First, we had to identify the member of Congress affiliated with each Republican leadership PAC. To do so, we relied on the Center for Responsive Politics (opensecrets.org), which provides leadership PAC affiliation information for elections dating back to the 1998 cycle. After identifying affiliate members, we associated all leadership PACs with identifiers for those members. This allowed us to identify financial transactions between leadership PACs and individuals as member-to-member transactions.

To identify financial contributions, we relied on data compiled by Bonica (2013), which merges a variety of data sources, including the Federal Election Commission's financial transaction files. Using the list of leadership PACs from the Center for Responsive Politics, we extracted all transactions from the 1998 to 2012 election cycles that were identified by the Federal Election Commission as (1) a transaction from a Republican leadership PAC to a Republican leadership PAC, (2) from a Republican leadership PAC to a Republican member of the House, (3) from a Republican member of the House to a Republican leadership PAC, or (4) from a Republican member of the House to a Republican member of the House.

Key Theoretical Variable

Social network data are characterized by a set of actors (nodes) and the relationships among them (edges). Furthermore, relationships can be defined as either directed or undirected, indicating whether asymmetries are allowed. For the analyses that follow, we consider the undirected network in which Republican members are nodes, and two Republican members form an edge if there is any financial transaction between them. Using this network, we constructed our measure of centralization/marginalization using individual Republican members' eigenvector centrality scores. Stated most simply, eigenvector centrality measures the importance of a node within a network. It does so by assigning relative scores to all nodes in a network such that connections to higher scoring nodes. Higher values on this score indicate that an actor is more important, or more central, in a given network of connections. Lower values indicate that an actor is less central, or more marginal.

In addition, we use measures of the ideologies of members and members' districts. For the former, we rely on DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 2007); for the latter, we rely on the Republican presidential vote returns aggregated at the congressional district level (estimates obtained from the Swing State Project).

To identify members of the Tea Party Caucus, we rely on the membership list obtained from the website of Representative Michelle Bachmann.

Findings

In what follows we provide several pieces of statistical evidence demonstrating that legislators are more likely to join the Tea Party Caucus when they face diminished campaign money from other Republican members, and thus diminished career opportunities within the Republican Party.

Table 1 offers a first look at the relationship between contribution network centrality and the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus. It provides summary statistics for the eigenvector centrality scores over time for those members who would eventually join the Tea Party Caucus and those who would not. Specifically, for each incumbent up for election in the cycle ending in a given year, we identified those members who joined the caucus after its inception in 2010. We then summarized the centrality measure for 'future' Tea Party Caucus members and for the rest of the Republican Party. The final column provides the difference in means between the two groups and the significance level for its associated unpaired t-test. The test results are consistent with our hypothesis that the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus was associated with increasing marginalization within the network of campaign finances. Specifically, whereas there appears to be no difference between the average centrality of future Tea Party Caucus members and non-caucus members in the early years, by 2006 a pattern begins to emerge in which members who will eventually join the caucus are becoming significantly more marginalized in the network than members who will not join. After 2006, this relationship persists into the 112th Congress, the first full Congress in which the Tea Party Caucus existed.

[Table 1 about here]

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the centrality of Tea Party Caucus members. In the figures, future and present Tea Party Caucus members are represented by red circles and non-Tea Party members are represented by transparent circles. The sizes of the circles are proportional to an actor's eigenvector centrality score, while the sizes of the edges between nodes are proportional to the amount of money contributed over the course of the respective elections cycles. What comes out of these graphical representations is that the Tea Party Caucus members have become less central, on average, over time. There is a general pattern in which Tea Party members are relatively more central during the Presidential election years of 2000, 2004, and 2008, and this pattern greatly diminishes during the 2012 cycle. Though future caucus members do not ever seem particularly central during the midterm election cycles, there is a general pattern in which they seem to become less influential, on average, as time moves forward. The loss in importance is particularly vivid during 2006, the year that Democrats took control of the House. Tea Party members begin to make a slight comeback in ensuing years, but remain relatively unimportant when compared to their non-Tea Party counterparts. Once the Tea Party Caucus was formed in the House, increasing marginalization within the party finance network likely provided a strong incentive to join.⁷

[Figure 1 about here]

⁷ In this paper we limit our analysis to the question of why Representatives decide to join the Tea Party Caucus. The causal mechanisms underlying the increase in marginality over time, while interesting and substantively important, are not the current focus here.

A counterargument to our theory could be that this marginalization phenomenon is attributable to the high number of freshmen brought into office because of Tea Party support. Many popular accounts would support this counterargument. Thus, if newcomers dominated the Tea Party Caucus, then perhaps the centrality story that has thus far emerged is driven by the presence of new faces within the Republican Party, who have not yet had the opportunity to develop relationships that would lead to importance within the network of member-to-member financial support.

Figure 2 shows that this is not the case. During the Congress that convened following the 2010 elections in which the Tea Party showed its influence (112th Congress), there was actually substantial variation in the number of years that Tea Party Caucus members had served in Congress. The figure presents a snapshot of years in service taken at the end of the 112th Congress, such that members who are indicated as having served two years are freshmen. Though freshmen do make up the modal category of both Tea Party Caucus members and non-Tea Party Caucus members, it is clear that the majority of members in the caucus were either from the Bush or Clinton eras. In other words, the bulk of those who decided to join the Tea Party Caucus were Representatives who had been in office for some time. This is significant because these congressmen already had substantial opportunities to build up importance within the network of campaign finance. Additionally, though Tea Party fervor in the electorate did play an important role in bringing many new Republicans into the House in 2010, most of these newcomers ultimately decided not to join the caucus. This is yet another piece of evidence supporting our idea that the decision to join was a strategic calculation associated with considerable expected payoffs.

[Figure 2 about here]

An additional potential counterargument is that those who decided to join the Tea Party Caucus are simply the more conservative Republicans. Popular accounts also support this claim, arguing that the emergence of the Tea Party movement is emblematic of a split within the Republican Party in which the most conservative members of the party have associated themselves with an outside movement in order to stage an eventual takeover of the party leadership. A great deal of anecdotal evidence supports this claim, and if membership in the Tea Party Caucus was simply a signal of solidarity with the movement's principles, then this would be reflected in the ideological makeup of the caucus compared to the party as a whole.

However, Figure 3 indicates that the story is not so simple. The figure shows a boxplot of Tea Party Caucus and non-Tea Party Caucus members' ideologies, as captured by DW-NOMINATE scores for the 112th Congress. While the Tea Party Caucus members exhibit slightly more ideological variation than their non-Tea Party Republican counterparts, and while the few most conservative members did join the caucus, this does not seem to be a general pattern. In fact, the median ideology of the group of Republican members who decided not to join the caucus is closer to the conservative pole of the scale was more conservative than the median ideology for the Tea Party Caucus members. And the other respective quartile comparisons present the same picture.

[Figure 3 about here]

So far, the evidence indicates that Tea Party Caucus membership was not simply driven by the influx of freshmen members, or simply by the most conservative Republicans attempting to differentiate themselves from the mainstream of the party. But

could these factors be interacting in some way? Figure 4 indicates that this is not likely. Similar to Figure 3, Figure 4 presents boxplots of the ideological distributions of groupings of Republican members. The first two panels indicate that there is little reason to believe that the freshman Republican class in the 112th Congress was any more conservative than the Republican upper classmen. In fact, some of the most extreme members were not in the freshmen class. The right two panels of Figure 4 indicate that the freshmen who ultimately decided to join the Tea Party Caucus were in fact slightly more conservative than those freshmen who decided not to join. But, again, the median difference is only slight, and the extremes of the ideological distributions are very similar.

[Figure 4 about here]

Overall, the evidence points to the idea that the specific decision to join the Tea Party Caucus was more complicated than the popular press accounts of the Tea Party movement more generally would suggest. But none of the analyses thus far demonstrate the impact of network centrality on the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus in a multivariate setting. For that, we now turn to a set of logistic regressions. In short, the logistic regressions provide further evidence in support of our hypothesis that the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus was associated with increasing marginalization within the campaign finance network.

Examining Table 2, one relationship that becomes immediately apparent is that, across years and across specifications, ideology is always significantly related to the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus. In short, moderates do not join the caucus, on average. Relatively high levels of conservatism seem to be a necessary condition for the

decision to join. However, though necessary, ideology is not sufficient for explaining Tea Party Caucus membership, as the previous analyses indicated, and particularly as we move closer to the time of the caucus's inception. Beginning in 2006, if we look only at the bivariate models that include centrality scores on the right hand side, centrality begins to emerge as a statistically significant predictor of membership in the Tea Party Caucus, and in the expected direction. Higher centrality scores are associated with a lower probability of joining the Tea Party Caucus. In 2006 and 2008 centrality remains insignificant in the full model with member and district ideological controls. However, this changes in the election cycle ending in 2010, the year that Michelle Bachmann organized the caucus. Though district and member ideology remain as important predictors in the expected direction, centrality emerges as an important predictor itself.

[Table 2 about here.]

To put this finding in more concrete terms, let us examine the estimates from the full model for the election cycle ending in 2010. This is the cycle during which the Tea Party Caucus was formed. The maximum centrality score for a Republican member during this Congress was about 0.25. For a member with this maximum eigenvector centrality score, the probability of joining the Tea Party Caucus was about 0.07, holding all other variables constant at their mean values. However, if we decrease the centrality score by two standard deviations, this probability more than doubles to about 0.15. If we move down to a centrality score of zero, meaning that the member did not engage in any financial transactions with other Republican members (not uncommon in these data),⁸ the

⁸ Specifically, the percentages of Republican members who have no record of a financial transaction with another Republican members are as follows: 24% for the electoral cycle

probability of joining the Tea Party Caucus again more than doubles to 0.32. The estimates for the following Congress are similarly strong.

Overall, the results suggest substantial support for the idea that increasing marginalization within the member-to-member campaign contribution network is the significant predictor of the individual Republican member's decision to join the Tea Party Caucus. This is consistent with a story in which members who are becoming more marginal feel compelled to signal to an outside network of potential supporters that they adhere to a set of strict conservative limited government principles.

Conclusion

The Tea Party movement emerged after the 2008 financial crisis as a combination of grassroots activism and large-money donors acting in concert to put forward policy agenda items and candidates for public office. Popular press and journalistic accounts have discussed the rise of the Tea Party movement and its successes and failures in the context of an ideological split within the Republican Party, and an influx of newcomers intent on taking over the Party leadership.

While some of these observations may have merit in the broader story of the Tea Party movement, when it comes to the formal manifestation of the Tea Party within the halls of Congress, they do not explain why some Representatives who seemed like a perfect match for the Tea Party on ideological grounds did not join the caucus, while some unlikely matches ended up joining. We have argued in this paper that the decision

ending in 1998; 20% for 2000; 17% for 2002; 10% for 2004; 8% for 2006; 12% for 2008; 17% for 2010; and 6% for 2012.

to join the Tea Party Caucus in the House of Representatives was a matter of mere survival. Specifically, we have argued that members decided to join the Tea Party Caucus because of career incentives generated by the structure of the campaign finance network of member-to-member contributions within the House of Representatives. Well connected and marginal members alike within this network are receiving signals about their own political career potential. Those who are not well connected come to realize that they will not be able to count on this source of financial support for career advancement, and therefore seek other means of financial support by signaling their solidarity with the principles advanced by potential Tea Party affiliated donors outside the member-to-member network.

The evidence that we presented provides initial support for our argument. While the Tea Party Caucus is made up of a relatively conservative subset of the Republican Party, ideology alone is not sufficient to explain the decision to join the Tea Party Caucus. Specifically, as members became less central to the network of member-tomember financial contributions over time, they became far more likely to join the Tea Party Caucus. Further, this effect was highly meaningful substantively.

Our results speak to the growing body of research on the importance of the Tea Party movement, and also provide a new line of inquiry for researchers interested in the question of why members of Congress join caucuses. Most previous research and commentary on the Tea Party suggests that Tea Party membership is a function of ideology. With respect to membership in the Tea Party Caucus, however, we have shown that ideology is, at best, only part of the story. Further, while most previous work on caucuses suggests that membership is largely a function of constituency demands, we

have shown that membership in the Tea Party Caucus does not fit this mold. Focusing on the centrality of members within campaign finance networks provides important insight into member behavior that is as yet underexplored.

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Table 1: Eigenvector Centrality, Summary Statistics

	Fut	ure Tea	Party	Membe	r	Ne	on-Tea	Party I	Member	•	Mean
Year	Mean	Med.	Min.	Max.	N	Mean	Med.	Min.	Max.	N	Difference
1998	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.13	16	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.28	216	0.01
2000	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.09	17	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.27	210	0.01
2002	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.13	23	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.21	205	0.01
2004	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.19	33	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.22	200	0.00
2006	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.10	39	0.05	0.04	0.00	0.18	201	0.02^{*}
2008	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.13	45	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.19	164	0.01^{*}
2010	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.14	53	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.25	130	0.02^{*}
2012	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.12	66	0.05	0.04	0.00	0.24	179	0.01^{*}

Note: Cells are summary statistics for the eigenvector centrality scores of nodes on the undirected network of member-to-member financial contributions among Republican House incumbents. *p < .1, two-sided, unpaired t-test.

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$ \begin{array}{ c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c$			1998			2000			2002			2004	
Eigenvector Centrality -5.73 -2.36 -1.58 -4.72 -1.13 -1.08 (321) DW-NOMINATE (6.21) (6.38) (5.66) (5.36) (5.74) (4.96) (5.33) (3.95) (4.21) DW-NOMINATE (6.21) (5.36) (5.36) (5.36) (5.74) (4.96) (5.39) (3.95) (4.21) Rep. Pres. Vote Margin 1.77 (1.88) (1.71) (1.82) (1.71) (1.33) (1.43) Rep. Pres. Vote Margin $-2.12*$ $6.15*$ $-5.24*$ $-5.86*$ $-6.04*$ $-5.84*$ -1.76 $4.38*$ $4.51*$ Mep. Pres. Vote Margin $2.212*$ $6.15*$ $-2.24*$ $-5.24*$ $-5.86*$ $-1.01*$ $-1.76*$ $-8.0*$ $-5.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-5.04*$ $-1.80*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$ $-1.40*$		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(9)	(2)	(8)	(6)	(10)	(11)	(12)
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	Eigenvector Centrality	-5.30		-5.73	-2.36		-1.58	-4.72		-1.13	-1.08		1.81
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$		(6.21)		(6.66)	(5.36)		(5.74)	(4.96)		(5.33)	(3.95)		(4.21)
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	DW-NOMINATE		6.38^{*}	6.56^{*}		5.87^{*}	6.03^{*}		5.67^{*}	5.88^{*}		4.88^{*}	4.37^{*}
Kep. Pres. vote Margin 1.34 1.01 1.39 1.39 4.17 Intercept -2.42^* -6.15^* -2.42^* -5.86^* (0.4^*) -1.76^* -4.80^* -5.10^* Intercept -2.42^* -6.15^* -2.42^* -5.86^* (0.4^*) -1.76^* -4.80^* -5.10^* Observations 232 211 212 223 227 219 233 231 223 Observations 232 231 223 227 219 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 233 231 234 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^* 7.24^*	t 		(1.77)	(1.88)		(1.71)	(1.82)		(1.55)	(1.71)		(1.33)	(1.43)
$ \begin{array}{ c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c$	Kep. Pres. Vote Margm			1.34			1.07 (1.53)			(1.59)			4.51°
$ \begin{array}{ c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c$	Intercept	-2.42*	-6.15^{*}	-6.25^{*}	-2.42^{*}	-5.86^{*}	-6.04^{*}	-2.01^{*}	-5.54^{*}	-5.88*	-1.76^{*}	-4.80^{*}	-5.40^{*}
$ \begin{array}{ c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c$	4	(0.32)	(1.12)	(1.25)	(0.32)	(1.10)	(1.24)	(0.28)	(1.01)	(1.22)	(0.25)	(0.88)	(1.02)
$ \begin{array}{c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c $	Observations	232	231	223	227	224	216	228	227	219	233	231	231
Eigenvector Centrality(13)(14)(15)(16)(17)(18)(19)(20)(21)(22)(23)(24)Figenvector Centrality -9.64^{*} -5.21 -6.40^{*} -3.08 -8.80^{*} -7.00^{*} -8.84^{*} -7.24^{*} DW-NOMINATE (4.60) (4.60) (4.73) (3.73) (4.00) (3.60) (3.83) (4.11) DW-NOMINATE (4.60) (4.60) (4.12) (1.25) (1.32) (1.19) (1.24) (1.07) 1.12 (0.89) (0.20) DW-NOMINATE (1.25) (1.32) (1.19) (1.24) (1.07) 1.12 2.09^{*} 1.89^{*} Neb. Note Margin (1.25) (1.32) (1.19) (1.24) (1.07) 1.12 (0.89) (0.29) Rep. Pres. Vote Margin (1.36) (1.32) (1.19) (1.24) (1.07) 1.12 4.05^{*} 4.57^{*} Intercept -1.25^{*} -4.45^{*} -1.02^{*} -3.84^{*} -0.52^{*} -3.03^{*} -2.93^{*} 0.61^{*} -2.85^{*} -2.79^{*} Intercept (0.24) (0.83) (0.21) (0.80) (0.21) (0.21) (0.70) (0.65) (0.71) Observations 2.45 2.35 2.35 2.09 2.05 1.83 1.83 2.45 2.45 2.45 2.45 2.45 2.45 2.45			2006			2008			2010			2012	
Eigenvector Centrality -9.64^{*} -5.21 -6.40^{*} -3.08 -8.80^{*} -7.00^{*} -8.84^{*} -7.24^{*} Bigenvector Centrality (4.60) (4.89) (3.73) (4.00) (3.60) (3.90) (3.83) (4.11) DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 3.96^{*} 3.10^{*} 3.19^{*} 2.21^{*} 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 3.96^{*} 3.10^{*} 3.19^{*} 2.21^{*} 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 3.96^{*} 3.10^{*} 3.19^{*} 2.21^{*} 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 3.96^{*} 3.10^{*} 3.10^{*} 2.21^{*} 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 3.96^{*} 3.10^{*} 3.10^{*} 2.21^{*} 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} DW-NOMINATE 4.48^{*} 3.38^{*} 1.129 (1.07) 1.12 2.69^{*} 1.89^{*} $(4.10)^{*}$ Rep. Pres. Vote Margin (1.36) (1.36) (1.27) (1.32) $(1.21)^{*}$ $(1.32)^{*}$ $(1.32)^{*}$ $(1.32)^{*}$ $(1.32)^{*}$ $(1.36)^{*}$ $(2.9)^{*}$ $(2.9)^{*}$ $(2.9)^{*}$ Rep. Pres. Vote Margin $(1.25^{*}$ -4.37^{*} -1.02^{*} -3.84^{*} -3.05^{*} 2.93^{*} -0.61^{*} $(2.7)^{*}$ Intercept (2.24) (0.83) (0.22) (0.81) $(0$		(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	Eigenvector Centrality	-9.64*		-5.21	-6.40*		-3.08	-8.80*		-7.00*	-8.84*		-7.24*
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$)	(4.60)		(4.89)	(3.73)		(4.00)	(3.60)		(3.90)	(3.83)		(4.11)
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	DW-NOMINATE		4.48^{*}	3.38^{*}		3.96^{*}	3.10^{*}		3.19^{*}	2.21^{*}		2.69^{*}	1.89^{*}
Rep. Pres. Vote Margin 4.38^* 3.84^* 4.05^* 4.05^* 4.57^* (1.36)(1.36)(1.32)(1.32)(1.35)(1.35)Intercept -1.25^* -4.45^* -4.37^* -1.02^* -3.84^* -3.90^* -0.52^* -3.05^* -2.061^* -2.85^* -2.79^* Intercept(0.24)(0.83)(0.94)(0.22)(0.81)(0.88)(0.21)(0.61)(0.65)(0.70)Observations240235235209205205183183183245245245245			(1.25)	(1.32)		(1.19)	(1.24)		(1.07)	1.12		(0.89)	(0.92)
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	Rep. Pres. Vote Margin			4.38^{*}			3.84^{*}			4.05^{*}			4.57^{*}
$ \begin{array}{rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr$				(1.36)			(1.32)			(1.35)			(1.16)
$\begin{array}{c ccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	Intercept	-1.25^{*}	-4.45^{*}	-4.37^{*}	-1.02^{*}	-3.84*	-3.90^{*}	-0.52*	-3.05^{*}	-2.93^{*}	-0.61^{*}	-2.85*	-2.79*
Observations 240 235 235 209 205 183 183 183 245 <t< td=""><td></td><td>(0.24)</td><td>(0.83)</td><td>(0.94)</td><td>(0.22)</td><td>(0.81)</td><td>(0.88)</td><td>(0.21)</td><td>(0.76)</td><td>(0.81)</td><td>(0.21)</td><td>(0.65)</td><td>(0.70)</td></t<>		(0.24)	(0.83)	(0.94)	(0.22)	(0.81)	(0.88)	(0.21)	(0.76)	(0.81)	(0.21)	(0.65)	(0.70)
	Observations	240	235	235	209	205	205	183	183	183	245	245	245
	$p_{\tau} p < .1$, two-talled.												







Note: Years indicate general election cycle years. Nodes represent Republican members of the House of Representatives. Edges represent financial transactions between members. Node sizes are proportional to respective nodes' eigenvector centrality scores. Red nodes are Tea Party Caucus members; transparent nodes are non-Tea Party Caucus members.







Figure 3: Ideology Distribution, Tea Party and Non-Tea Party Members, 112th Congress



Figure 4: Ideology Distribution, Freshmen and Non-Freshmen, 112th Congress