

It is already extremely hard for any U.S. President, especially a Democrat, to make deals with presumed devils. Richard Nixon may have established a new working relationship with China and Ronald Reagan negotiated far-reaching arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. But neither accomplishment would have happened without the active support of both Republican and Democratic internationalists. If the Tea Party continues to extend its sway over congressional Republicans—and it remains to be seen if a plausible countertrend can succeed—the ability of Barack Obama to embrace the essential compromises of diplomacy could face an insurmountable wall. ▀

Will the Tea Party Outlast Obama?

Christopher S. Parker

For three years now, the Tea Party faction in the House of Representatives has roiled American politics. From the outset, the reactionaries of the right have refused to cooperate with the Obama Administration. Whether on health-care reform, financial reform, immigration reform, same-sex rights, or violence against women, the Tea Party has continued to resist legislative initiatives promulgated by the White House. Among many liberals, it has become accepted wisdom that such resistance to the President's agenda is driven by the fear and racial anxiety evoked by his mere presence in the White House. This suggests that once the President's term expires, the Tea Party will disappear. It may—but the forces behind its rise will almost certainly linger.

The presumption that Tea Partiers will vanish after Obama rests on at least two premises: First, the movement is *sui generis*; and second, the Tea Party is driven primarily by racism toward Obama. Neither is true.

In the recent book *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*, my colleague Matt Barreto and I make the case that the Tea Party isn't new. In fact, we argue that it is simply the most recent version of what we call reactionary movements, similar to the Know-Nothing Party, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and the John Birch Society. These right-wing movements have at least two things in common. First, all four share the same demographic profile: white, (mainly) male, middle class, middle aged, Protes-

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tant, and heterosexual. Second, each sought to protect its ethno-cultural view of American identity, one that maps onto its demographic profile.

Each group believed its “way of life” to be threatened by rapid social change of some kind. The Know-Nothings were anxious about the increasing number of Irish Catholic immigrants; the Klan of the 1920s was concerned with the “New Negro” returning from World War I, perceived Jewish dominance over capital, and Catholic immigrants; the Birchers feared the civil rights movement was a Trojan horse for communism. Likewise, the rise of the Tea Party, we believe, is associated with the rapid social change the Obama presidency symbolizes. As it turns out, the more change people believe Obama represents, the more likely they are to support the Tea Party and its agenda.

But this isn’t all about race, as many believe. People who think that Tea Partiers’ anti-Obama sentiment is driven solely by racial resentment are mistaken. Tea Partiers are driven by a more general perception of social change. Race may be a big part of that, but Tea Partiers also remain wary of the improving status of *all* historically marginalized groups. Consider their hostility to reproductive rights and gender parity. Or their wrath over the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage and adoption, and the open inclusion of gays and lesbians in the armed forces. Or their continuing opposition to immigration reform. (Indeed, Tea Partiers refuse to distinguish between legal and “illegal” immigrants, especially if the immigrants’ origins lay south of the border. Immigration from south of the border, of course, is also about race in *addition* to nativism.)

While the Tea Party might fade away after Obama, reactionary conservatism—the belief system that powers the Tea Party—will never go away.

If the rise of Obama helped mobilize the Tea Party, does it then follow that his departure from office will lead to the movement’s hibernation? While hibernation is probably too much to hope for, the movement’s intensity will almost certainly diminish.

In 2016, the most likely scenario seems to be one in which a President Hillary Clinton takes office. Just as the far right rejected the rise of feminism in the 1960s and ’70s, people who identify with the Tea Party harbor anti-feminist tendencies. For this reason, we will likely witness continued Tea Party activity.

But compared to their reaction to Obama’s presidency, the Tea Party’s reaction to the first female in the Oval Office will likely be less rabid. Obama was—and continues to be—seen as a vessel for the hitherto ignored claims for equality

from marginalized groups. While not new, the push for equality by these groups appears to have gained urgency on Obama's watch. The simultaneity, suddenness, and force with which marginalized groups have pressed their claims during the Obama presidency no doubt contributed to the fear, anxiety, and anger the reactionary right feels.

But even if Clinton succeeds Obama, these issues will have already been on the agenda for some time. And since Tea Party types will have already been exposed to this new political landscape, I suspect their reaction to Clinton won't be as extreme if she chooses to continue Obama's equal-rights agenda. Of course, this logic suggests that should a white male Democrat win the White House in 2016, the Tea Party movement will vanish. If this comes to pass, the movement will go underground—I guarantee it.

In *Change They Can't Believe In*, we showed that Tea Party conservatives were more politically engaged than non-Tea Party conservatives. For instance, 85 percent of Tea Party conservatives express interest in what's happening in Washington versus 66 percent of non-Tea Party conservatives, and 96 percent of Tea Party conservatives voted Republican in the 2010 midterm versus 74 percent of non-Tea Partiers.

Moreover, we demonstrated that Tea Party and non-Tea Party conservatives take leave from each other on several issues, including civil liberties, attitudes and policies directed at minorities, and whether or not they wish to see the President's policies succeed or fail.

We see how this is currently playing out: The Republican Party is at war with itself.

Soon, Obama will ride off into the sunset, and the intensity of the Tea Party will start to subside. The Republican Party may then unmoor itself from the far right and return to its position as the loyal opposition—if Democrats continue as the dominant party, something that will likely happen should the electorate adjudge Republicans too intemperate to govern. As I write this, it looks like the public is doing just that.

In the long term, however, Republicans have a serious problem. For while the movement we know as the Tea Party might fade away after Obama, reactionary conservatism—the belief system that has powered the Tea Party and movements like it—will never go away. Similar to the way in which members of the John Birch Society are now Tea Partiers, reactionary conservatives will remain—even if the organization to which they attach themselves changes its name. And with each new iteration, reactionary conservatives will continue to divide the Republican Party. As “real” Americans are demographically displaced,

a nonwhite president will no longer be an anomaly. We can, therefore, expect the changing “face” of America to be matched by a shift in mass policy preferences. The American electorate will begin to slide increasingly to the left. But this will only make “real” Americans feel marginalized anew, prompting the re-emergence of another reactionary movement—a Tea Party by another name. ▀

The Tea Party and the 2016 Nomination

Dave Weigel

It was in Iowa last summer, two-and-a-half years before the 2016 presidential caucuses, that conservatives first pitched me on President Ted Cruz. The first-term Texas senator was in the state to rally for the defunding of the Affordable Care Act. His venue was the annual gathering of the FAMIly Leader, a social conservative coalition; its president, Bob Vander Plaats, happened to endorse the winners in the last two Iowa caucuses, Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum. The enthusiasm for a Cruz run filled the room like the sound from a Marshall stack.

“Before, there was never a mixture of the limited-government, fire-breathing prophet with a Christian conservative, moral-based guy,” said Jamie Johnson, a Republican Party activist who’d backed Santorum in 2012. “When the conservative base of the Republican Party has a David, to use a biblical analogy—when they have their David, it’s obvious who their David is—it doesn’t matter where the money is. Ted Cruz is the only guy who fits that bill.”

Johnson’s comment stuck with me because I heard so many versions of it, from so many Iowans. The conservative base of the Republican Party takes no responsibility for the party’s 2012 defeat. It takes no responsibility for the 2008 loss, either. In its telling, the base was too slow to pick its champion. Its vote was split, coalescing too late behind one candidate—Huckabee in 2008, Santorum in 2012. So the Republican establishment force-fed it two “electable” candidates named John McCain and Mitt Romney.

This is the ur-myth of the modern GOP; it will scare the base into organizing more adeptly than it’s ever done before. Since the rise of party primaries and binding caucuses, only twice—1964 and 1980—has the conservative base overcome the party “establishment.” Ronald Reagan was a two-time loser (he ran briefly in 1968 in addition to 1976) before he won; and when Barry Goldwater

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