



Written by [Steven Yates](#) on February 17, 2010

The Tea Party Movement

The Tea Party movement is rapidly becoming the most widely discussed political movement of our time. When you are written about in the New York Times, in however backhanded a fashion (with all the obligatory references to militia groups, right-wing extremists, racist wingnuts who hate the first black president, etc., ad nauseam), you know you have the mainstream media establishment's attention.



The Tea Party movement did not begin with the election of Barack Obama, however. There isn't a date we can pinpoint. Perhaps the movement began in incipient form back in late 2007 with supporters of libertarian-leaning Republican Ron Paul (R-Texas) in his bid for his party's nomination for President. The treatment of Ron Paul by the GOP leadership supported the idea that the Republican Party was in the hands of an "establishment" hostile to anyone who hadn't been properly vetted. Not only that, Republicans nominated a Senator whom many at the grassroots level considered a RINO (Republican In Name Only), one who had co-sponsored major legislation just one year earlier that would have created a path to amnesty and eventual citizenship to uncounted millions of illegal aliens.

Or perhaps the Tea Party movement has its roots further back in the Bush years, with worries coming from both sides of the aisle about the direction the country had taken following the 9/11 attacks. Instead of efforts to secure our national borders, we had draconian legislation that allowed the suspension of habeas corpus rights for those accused of being "enemy combatants." Evidence had emerged that U.S. citizens ([José Padilla](#)'s is the best known case) who had been held in conditions amounting to torturous sensory deprivation for years at a stretch, deprived of their Constitutionally guaranteed right to legal representation and to confront their accusers. There were voices on both sides of the aisle pointing out what was going on, but since the mainstream media by and large paid no attention to them, it left the impression that the TMP started on January 29, 2009.

In fact, many were awakened by the Panic of '08, we might call it (George W. Bush, obviously, was still in office) — the bailouts of Wall Street banks and insurance firms such as AIG (at taxpayer expense) deemed "too big to fail," which stood in stark contrast to what was happening to Main Street: tens of



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thousands of job losses, home foreclosures at record highs, and retirement funds jeopardized in what had become the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The newly awakened turned their eyes on the federal government and out-of-control spending, as well as the greed that seemed to dominate Wall Street.

Arousing public ire was the realization that the newly elected Barack Obama was going to be a bigger spender than George W. Bush had ever thought of being. By spring of 2009 we began hearing about Tea Parties. They seemed to appear almost out of nowhere — everywhere at once, helped by social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook that made communication by groups in opposite parts of the country almost instantaneous. Some were public protest-type events; others were more structured meetings. A few attendees obviously were disgruntled Republicans who resented the losses of 2006 and 2008. Many, however, were independents who wanted nothing to do with either major party. There was a wide range of emphases on what to do. Some speakers and attendees just wanted to chart strategies that would put Republicans back in control. Others advocated somewhat sterner measures, such as launching campaigns to replace every incumbent in Congress. Still others advocated buying precious metals, stockpiling water and nonperishables, or obtaining firearms and ammunition in preparation for what they see as impending economic Armageddon.

What was clear was that this was largely a spontaneous uprising of civic unrest — born of fear for the future of this country on the part of a lot of ordinary people large numbers of whom had never been involved in politics before. What they had in common was a distrust of Washington, D.C. matched only by a loathing of Wall Street insiders who were paid six-figure bonuses while Main Street Americans were losing their jobs and homes. Thousands had awakened in a country they no longer recognized. “I had no clue that my country was being taken from me,” states small businessman Darin Stevens of Spokane, Wash., who came to lead a chapter of Glenn Beck’s [9/12 Project](#) — created to unite ordinary Americans as they were united right after the 9/11 attacks.

The unity, though, is at the grassroots level. Those at the top were not invited to the party. The Tea Party movement’s overall distrust of an “establishment” including insiders in Washington, Wall Street, and the Federal Reserve — which many Tea Partiers follow Ron Paul in wanting to abolish — opens them to what many observers, including many mainstream Republicans, contemptuously dismiss as “conspiracy theories.”

Here you will find a variety of worries, which doubtless have varying degrees of validity. A few Tea Party attendees are so-called “birthers,” the mainstream term for those who don’t think Obama is really a natural-born citizen and so doesn’t meet constitutional requirements for the Presidency. Some look at supposed healthcare reform efforts led by Congressional Democrats and see efforts to deprive them of health choices, and possibly even eventually to create “death panels.” Others have counted the number of “czars” Obama has appointed since taking office. A few have set their sights on the Climate-gate emails from the research centers at East Anglia University and Penn State to pronounce global warming a hoax, and have further argued that the ultimate purpose of this hoax is to control/shackle the planet, not save it, under a United Nations world government. Many see both major political parties as taking the country closer to socialism and tyranny. They are sympathetic to the idea that shadowy organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group have a long-established globalist agenda for the country that is working against the best interests of average Americans like them. (The John Birch Society, of course, has been documenting these groups’ activities for decades.)



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Finally, there are those who have watched with alarm the meteoric rise of the national debt and see ulterior motives. They have begun studying the Federal Reserve system for the first time, and see evidence of financial oligarchy operating not just shadowy organizations but virtually openly in corporations such as Goldman Sachs. This oligarchy, some Tea Partiers believe, is micromanaging the economy to enrich themselves while bringing about an end to the dollar. Those usually labeled the "extreme fringe" of the movement fear the economic anarchy that would come with a dollar crash resulting in hyperinflation and a declaration of martial law followed by dictatorship. With the country in the grip of the Panic of '08, former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson [actually was behind threats](#) that the country's financial system would collapse and make martial law necessary if Congress did not pass the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP).

A growing number even speak of fighting back by nullifying federal laws they see as unconstitutional. Nullification legislation against national healthcare legislation [is about to be put before Arizona voters](#).

Many Tea Partiers are fierce about protecting their independence. They worry about being co-opted and neutralized. The selection of Sarah Palin, McCain's running mate in 2008, as keynote speaker at a Tea Party Convention a couple of weeks ago in Nashville, Tenn., suggests that at least some of these fears are justified. Palin not only defended Bush's foreign wars — which have been severely criticized by Ron Paul and his supporters — but rattled sabers against Iran. Many Tea Party activists do not want to be identified as Republicans, although many Republican organizations (including in my own state, South Carolina) are working to fashion alliances with Tea Party groups. Much of the Tea Party movement tends toward suspicion of all such partnerships, however. Some are Ron Paul-style libertarians; others have joined the Constitution Party, now the third largest political party in the country. Many Tea Partiers will just describe themselves as independents not affiliated with any political party. They would support their distrust of the GOP by noting that Ron Paul now has three GOP opponents in his home district all of whom have past associations with the Tea Party movement, suggesting a co-opting.

Several subgroups are loosely connected to the Tea Party movement. We already mentioned Glenn Beck's 9/12 movement. Ron Paul's supporters had already founded [Campaign for Liberty](#), to keep attention focused on Dr. Paul's activities and on the congressional effort to require the Federal Reserve to submit to a full audit, including of its secretive dealings with foreign banks. Other groups include Friends for Liberty, who keep tabs on efforts to hijack or co-opted the movement; [Oath Keepers](#), who call themselves "guardians of the Republic" and focus on recruiting law enforcement officers and military officials into refusing orders the group deems unconstitutional — such as orders to disarm law-abiding U.S. citizens, employ warrantless searches and wiretaps, arrest and deny the constitutional rights of anyone accused of being an "enemy combatant," or imposing martial law on the civilian population.

Perhaps what many fear is [the kind of scenario](#) in which the economy not only does not recover but rather, the Big One hits: a huge market blowout in which Wall Street really does implode and precipitate an economic meltdown. Can the national debt continue climbing indefinitely, with Congress passing (and the president signing), every couple of years, a new law raising the debt ceiling? The Tea Party movement provides evidence of the gulf between Wall Street and Main Street, a gulf which is more than merely financial; how far can that gulf continue to widen? Are we on the brink of Great Depression II? Some would argue that the U.S. Treasury Dept./Federal Reserve money printing apparatus will bring about the same consequences here as it did in Argentina, as it desperately tries to resuscitate an economy that doesn't make anything any longer but rather outsources jobs to third world



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nations for cheap labor. Is a Second American Revolution on the horizon?

None of us has a crystal ball, of course. Perhaps these visions of the near future will turn out to be too dark and extreme. The economy might recover, and seem to do well for a time. Although [Austrian-based economic theory](#) suggests that any recovery will be credit-based and therefore only postpone the inevitable for a few more years, if businesses begin hiring again and people are able to go back to work, they will relax a bit, and cooler heads may have a chance to prevail in explaining why we need sound economics (and a sound, noninflationary money system). Time will tell. What should be clear is that if the Tea Party movement continues to grow, as seems likely, and if it can keep from being hijacked and neutered by the GOP mainstream, the Western world's financial elites and their minions in both government and in corporations will no longer be able to take it for granted that they are dealing with an uninformed, sleeping sheeple.



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