

We Are Patriots:
National Identity Discourse in the Tea Party Movement and an Echoing Press

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Abstract

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This dissertation explored the communicative means through which a social movement might connect its identity and goals with the national identity. It focused on invocations of the nation by Tea Party activists and in news depictions of the movement. I analyzed (1) how individual Tea Party members thought about the movement, (2) how the discourse of the Tea Party was presented to the public via high-profile events, and (3) how news media depicted foundational Tea Party events. Methodologically, the project combined in-depth qualitative interviews, participant observations, and a quantitative content analysis. Taken together, the findings suggest that the discourse of the Tea Party was shot-through with a variety of nation-invoking messages that constructed the movement as being of, by, and for America and its people, and that such messages were also highlighted in journalistic coverage, sometimes displacing more critical styles. By studying this domain of political communication, I sought to understand a relatively unexplored phenomenon in the field of communication—the discourse of conservative protest—and to shed light on the ways that social movement discourse might be related to news content.

The work presented here has implications for both public activism and the practice of journalism, and thus how future social movements might engage with news media.

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Chapter 1

Conservatives, Protest, and News Media in the United States

Introduction

In April 2010 in a CNN broadcast, liberal-leaning analyst Roland Martin characterized the conservative Tea Party movement this way: “I more than welcome the Tea Party folks. Protesting is America at its finest.... Folks, this isn’t a radical transformation of the nation shaping up. It’s the latest effort by citizens primarily in one party or professing one ideology to rise up and allow their voices to be heard” (Martin, 2010). He said movement members were highly misinformed on some matters, but they were squarely within the tradition of American civic engagement. Such favorable news discussion of protest movements is far from typical. Consider MSNBC reporter Amy Robach’s description of a crowd at a 2005 Independence Day appearance by President George W. Bush: “There were a couple of protestors, we heard, with a few signs, *but for the most part it looks like a pretty patriotic crowd*” (Media Matters, 2005, emphasis added). Such a statement implying that patriotic protestors were generally uncommon was made by a reporter on the news network generally thought to be the most liberal (Steinberg, 2007). Disparagement of protests and protestors is not uncommon: a vast body of scholarship has shown that protestors and protests in America are regularly depicted as unpatriotic, deviant, violent, unpopular, and ineffective spectacles (Chan & Lee, 1984; Dardis, 2006; Di Cicco, 2010; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). News is the outcome of a social process that is shaped by numerous actors, including both news producers and individuals they cover. In this dissertation I explore the possibility that, as compared to other movements in recent history, there is something unusual about the Tea Party and how it has been covered by journalists.

One thing is indisputable, as of this writing: the Tea Party has impacted American politics, arguably far more than another large-scale protest in America, the anti-war movement that began in 2002 and 2003. Over 10 years after the United States invaded Iraq and more than 12 years after the invasion of Afghanistan, the United States continues to be involved to varying degrees in violent conflicts in both nations, despite draw-downs of American troops in the region. The Tea Party, in comparison, has had much greater success. The movement has impacted elections at the local and national level (*The New York Times*, “How the Tea Party Fared,” 2010) and, some would suggest, have successfully set the terms of the debate on how to manage the ongoing economic and financial crises faced by the United States (Brown, 2011; Ward, 2011). While there are many possible explanations for differences in both success and news coverage between the Tea Party and other protest groups, these differences raise important questions about whether features of the Tea Party may have contributed to its comparative effectiveness. The qualities that distinguish the Tea Party from other social movements engaging in protest may be suggestive of broader trends in public engagement and news.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to three underdeveloped areas of research about protest. Specifically, it inquires into the utilization of nation-centric discourse by social movements, the ways in which such protests are covered in news as compared to those that do not forefront such discourse, and the nature of conservative protest and social movement discourse more generally. It is common in American political life for politicians and other figures to invoke or praise the nation. Such invocations signal to citizens that the speaker shares an important group identity with them, a *social identity* that plays a major role in defining who they are as individuals and commands tremendous loyalty (Anderson, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This dissertation explores the relatively unexamined question of what happens when a

social movement infuses its discourse with national identity language and symbols. In doing so, it offers a possible explanation for the rapid success of the Tea Party.

Central to this argument is the role of news media in the fortunes of social movements. Most people experience social movements through news coverage of their public functions. However, research has documented widespread and formulaic ways that journalists cover protests which overwhelmingly depict them a negative light (Di Cicco, 2010; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Dardis, 2006). At the same time, at least a few studies have shown that there may be variation across different types of protest (Kensicki, 2001). It is clear that journalists often echo the national invocations of elected officials, who in turn strategically employ nation-bolstering discourse to influence news coverage (Al-Sumait, Lingle & Domke, 2010; Bennett, 2005; Billeaudeaux, Domke, Hutcheson & Garland 2003; Domke, Graham, Coe, Lockett John & Coopman, 2006). Few if any studies, however, have considered whether the same is true of the dynamic between social movements and news media. If journalists echoed the national-identity themed messages of a social movement, this could influence in important ways how such a movement was perceived by the general public.

Such a dynamic might convey a unique advantage to conservative activists. Although few scholars have considered whether conservative protests are covered differently by news media than liberal protests, the few who have suggest that while most protests are covered in derisive and delegitimizing ways, this may be less so for conservative protests (Boyle, McCluskey, Deyanathan, Stein, & McLeod, 2004; Di Cicco, 2010). The reasons for such a discrepancy are unclear, and the extent and means by which the discourse of conservative protesters themselves might play a role in producing any differences in coverage has not been explored empirically. Perhaps this is because, as I will argue, protests are not a strategy typically employed by

conservatives due to the attitudes they tend to hold about individualism, authority, and the status quo. The paucity of scholarship in this area, along with the successes enjoyed by the Tea Party, highlight the need for more research examining how conservatives might engage in and talk about the strategy of protests and social movement activities more generally. I will argue that it is feasible that conservative activists might be more likely to engage in nation-centric messaging than liberal-minded social movement actors. As the largest conservative protest movement in recent memory, the Tea Party is not only an ideal case study for examining conservative protests and nation-centric discourse, and is also interesting as an example of conservatives breaking with their political routines and engaging in a way that is atypical.

To gain a better understanding of the Tea Party phenomenon, the ways in which Tea Party coverage may differ from that of other protests, and possible explanations for any differences found, this dissertation employs a three-stage research design, with each stage comprising a data chapter. The first data chapter features a body of qualitative interviews with Tea Party members to gain an understanding of how they think about the movement and their roles in it. This is the first of two methods exploring the Tea Party's own words and images. The second data chapter is comprised of a participant observation of key Tea Party events from summer 2010 to gain on-the-ground insights into how the Tea Party movement presented itself to the public at large. Finally, the third data chapter conducts a content analysis comparing coverage of Tea Party rallies, protests, and demonstrations in major newspapers and cable news outlets to coverage of other major protests of the same decade, namely the demonstrations against invasion of Iraq in 2003 and immigration rallies of 2006. This chapter examines whether and in what ways coverage of the Tea Party differs from other protests in recent years.

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation is rooted in three areas of scholarship. The first domain of research is focused on the conservative worldview, specifically attitudes among ideological conservatives about the nation, authority, protests, and patriotism. It will be shown that a conservative philosophy may be responsible for the infrequency of conservative protests and create unique challenges for conservative activists engaging in social movement politics. At the same time, this worldview may also promote a nation-centric approach to social movement discourse. Second, I will turn to research on news media and protests, specifically the notions of the “protest paradigm” (Chan & Lee, 1984) and the “public nuisance paradigm” (Di Cicco, 2010). Both of these document styles of news coverage that critique or distort protests, and both have been found, at least in some cases, to be less common in coverage of conservative demonstrations. Finally, I draw upon scholarship on social identity, national identity, and the patriotic press to suggest a mechanism to explain potential differences that may manifest in an examination of news coverage about the Tea Party, as well as the effectiveness of the movement more generally. After connecting these three bodies of scholarship to the Tea Party, I describe the research that comprises the data chapters and offer several research questions and hypotheses.

Conservatives and Protest

The first body of scholarship in which this dissertation is rooted is research on conservatives and protest. For the purposes of this study, I draw upon work by Defronzo (2011), who defines conservative movements as those which are primarily *change resistant*, as compared to liberal protests which tend to *promote change*. Conservative protests, following this definition, are those which are “organized to resist social change, and reassert or restore traditional institutions, patterns of behavior, norms, or values” (7). When one considers the most memorable

protests, marches, and rallies in the history of the United States, one might think first of the antebellum abolition movement, the late 1800s and early 1900s suffrage movement, 1960s civil rights marches, protests against the Vietnam or Iraq wars, or the 1999 World Trade Organization protests, all of which were driven by change-oriented goals. Fewer conservative uprisings, however, come to mind, making the prominence of the Tea Party an intriguing phenomenon. This may be because conservatives are simply less likely to engage in protest, or even in grass-roots activism in general.¹

There are three possible explanations for this possibility that are rooted in long-standing elements of the conservative philosophy and worldview. First, it is the case that conservatives are more resistant to change and commonly see maintaining the “natural” order of things as crucial (Defronzo, 2011; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). This is perhaps the most deeply embedded aspect of conservatism, which can be traced to Edmund Burke’s condemnation of the French Revolution (Burke & Paine, 1961) and is still seen today as a defining aspect of conservatism. For example, Altemeyer (1981; 1998) sees conservatives more than liberals as being committed to tradition and stability, and uses these commitments as metrics for measuring degree of conservatism. Conover and Feldman (1981) similarly found that those who identified as conservatives tended to have more positive evaluations of political symbols associated with the status quo. If such views correspond to the conservative mindset, it can hardly be seen as

¹ That said, there are some noteworthy examples of conservative grass-roots political participation. Perhaps foremost among these is the activism that surrounded the Barry Goldwater nomination campaign in Orange County, California in the 1960s, detailed in McGirr’s (2001) *Suburban Warriors*. McGirr notes that this activism was an important step in producing the rightward shift in American politics that manifested ultimately in the election of Ronald Reagan, but that such grass-roots activism is not the norm in conservative politics. Another well-known example would be Phyllis Schlafly and the Eagle Forum’s political organizing to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s (Critchlow, 2005). Thus, it is not the assertion of this dissertation that conservatives *never* engage in grass-roots activism, but rather that, because of a number of beliefs and values commonly held by conservatives, such activities are less common than they are among liberals.

surprising that conservatives are not frequently found engaging in protests and other forms of grass-roots activism that are typically employed to bring about change.

A second possible explanation for the lop-sided ideological distribution of protests may be that those with a conservative mindset tend to be more individualist in nature than those who hold a liberal ideology (Feldman & Zaller, 1992), subscribing to values such as self-reliance that underpin American capitalism (McCloskey & Zaller, 1984). Conservatives, in this view, value individual strength and personal responsibility for overcoming life's obstacles more than the power of a group or community. As a result, they may be less likely to seek collective-action solutions to social or political problems than liberals. If this is so then it seems likely that, when confronted with political problems, conservatives are more likely to turn to individual-level solutions such as contributing money, voting, or writing letters, as opposed to coming together with fellow conservatives for rallies, meetings, marches, and the like.

A third possible explanation for the infrequency of conservative protests lies in conservative attitudes towards authority. Conservatives, some research suggests, view both political and cultural authority more positively and deferentially than do liberals. Jost et al. (2003), for example, argue that conservatives are more likely than liberals to idealize authority figures such as political office holders, police officers, and military leaders, and to believe they are usually correct. Conover and Feldman (1981) support this claim, arguing that conservatives are more likely to look favorably upon agents of social control such as police officers. Lakoff (2002) concurs, suggesting that conservatives tend to view authority through a "strict father" lens, as opposed to liberals' "nurturant parent" model. In this view of conservatism, legitimate authority is to be obeyed, respected, and maintained, not to be questioned. To do otherwise is to behave in an immoral fashion because, in this view, conservatives see deference to proper

authority as an ethical responsibility. Whereas liberals tend to see questioning authority as normal and healthy, a strict obedience to authority is seen as the natural and normal order by conservatives. From this perspective, protests, which typically in some way challenge cultural and/or political authority via channels outside those provided by government authority for the expression of opinion (i.e. voting) are likely to be viewed as morally suspect. Taken together, these three aspects of the conservative mindset would seem to make social movements in general and protests specifically less preferred methods of political activity.

The very existence of the conservative Tea Party seems to be something of an anomaly, and raises questions about how conservative activists engaging in a social movement might reconcile these strains of thought with an approach to activism based on challenging authority through collective and non-institutional channels. One answer might be to focus on national identity. If conservatives are more likely to embrace the symbols of authority and the status quo, as argued by Conover and Feldman (1981), and are more likely focus on tradition and traditional values, it stands to reason that conservative activists might be more likely to embrace language and symbols related to the nation and its history, such as the flag, the Constitution, or the national anthem. Such overtly patriotic gestures could be seen as reaffirming conservative activists' loyalty and fidelity to the authority of the nation and the values that otherwise might be perceived as being challenged by protesting. Beinart (2008) argues that conservatives in general tend to practice a more explicitly celebratory style of patriotism than liberals, and thus are more likely to embrace and display national symbols under most circumstances. Further, Defronzo's (2011) definition of conservative movements as oriented toward tradition means that activists involved in such movements are also perhaps more likely to feel a reverence for the nation's history and to invoke the virtues they see as characterizing some past era, which they might see

themselves as working to restore. Thus, the conservative worldview not only seems to explain the relative lack of conservative social movements, but may also suggest how a conservative social movement like the Tea Party might be likely to frame its public messages.

News Media and Protests

The second major component of my conceptual framework focuses on the relationship between protests and news media. Most people experience social movements' messages primarily through news coverage, ensuring that the ways news producers cover public events of movements is an important component in how non-participants perceive the cause. Ultimately, these perceptions may significantly impact a social movement's political fortunes. Journalistic depictions of political happenings such as protests and rallies, however, are not a neutral reflection of reality. Journalists can and do cover political events in ways that can exaggerate or distort reality, creating images that fit news makers' preconceived ideas and formulas. For example, Lang and Lang (1968) compared televised coverage of the parade celebrating General Douglas MacArthur's return from Korea with witness accounts and other empirical indicators. The parade was widely anticipated to be a sizeable and "wild spectacle" (42), but many who attended were disappointed to find the event was smaller and more sedate than they had imagined. Lang and Lang found that television journalists used camera angles and explicit pronouncements to create the appearance of a larger and more enthusiastic crowd than was actually present, preserving preconceived expectations. Similarly, a large body of scholarship has shown that protests are typically covered by mainstream news journalists through a formulaic and critical lens. Beginning with research by Gitlin (1980) on 1960s coverage of the protest group Students for a Democratic Society, scholars have shown that American protests, whether large or small, violent or non-violent, liberal or conservative tend to be depicted using a set of

what Gitlin calls “devices” or “frames” that have since come to be known as the “protest paradigm” (Chan & Lee, 1984). Stemming from the larger field of scholarship on framing, which posits that journalists inevitably make certain features of a story most salient to news consumers (Entman, 1993) and in doing so impact their interpretations of news stories and perceptions of issues (Iyengar, 1991; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Sheufele, 2000), Gitlin (1980) argues that the most common features of protest coverage tend to delegitimize protest groups in the eyes of the public. Generally speaking, these devices serve to cast protests as dangerous and deviant, and have been found across coverage of protest events from the 1960s to well into the 21st century (Dardis, 2006; Jha, 2007). Broadly speaking, this style of news coverage emphasizes four themes: criticism, drama, public opinion, and elite bias.

The first theme is *criticism of protesters and protest groups*, manifesting in an emphasis on protestors’ outward appearance and unusual demonstration strategies (McLeod & Hertog, 1992), sometimes juxtaposing ostensibly irrational protesters with calm, rational opponents. Journalists tend to highlight the presence of any so-called “extremists” at a protest, whether political deviants such as anarchists or communists, or members of fundamentalist religious groups. This approach creates an image of protestors as being on the fringes of the ideological spectrum. An emphasis on visual and ideological deviance among participants has been found in coverage of many types of protest—including demonstrations against globalization (Rauch, Chitrapu, Eastman, Evans, Paine, & Mwesige, 2007), women’s rights demonstrations (Ashley & Olsen, 1998), and protests against the war in Iraq (Dardis, 2006). Gitlin (1980) also argued that groups that organized protests were criticized by suggesting disunity or conflict among their members, by undercounting participants (see also Ashley & Olson, 1998), or by disparaging their effectiveness. Finally, journalists are thought to more subtly express skepticism about the

sincerity of protestors or the validity of their ideas, often by placing quotation marks around non-speech items, such as the term “animal rights” in stories about actions carried out by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Simonson, 2001). In sum, coverage of protests tends to critique and belittle protest participants.

Second, protest paradigm news coverage includes *an emphasis on dramatic events and images*. Attention-grabbing actions like conflict with police or counter-protesters, destruction of property, arrests, and the carrying of the flags of enemy nations have tended to overshadow discussion of the issues driving the protest, from the 1960s (Brasted, 2005; Gitlin, 1980) into the present decade (Smith, McCarty, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001). For example, McLeod and Hertog (1992) found that coverage of anti-gentrifications demonstrations by anarchists focused a great deal of attention on demonstrators who threw rocks and burned flags but virtually excluded discussion of the rationale for the demonstrations. Even in coverage of events where violence is not highlighted, coverage of dramatic or counter-normative acts such as the throwing of eggs, nudity, provocative or controversial chants and slogans, and women who “storm” men’s restrooms is featured prominently, as Ashley and Olson (1998) found to be the case in coverage of protests staged by feminist groups over several decades. Coverage of protests, then, tends to place greater emphasis on dramatic moments than the substance of a protest’s message. Such a focus serves to obscure the impetus of a demonstration, while at the same time highlighting the counter-normative and allegedly frightening, destructive, or dangerous aspects of protests.

A third aspect of the protest news paradigm is *invocation of public opinion against protestors and their causes*. Most commonly, scholarship has suggested that an implication of social consensus is depicted by the use of critical bystander comments about the demonstration or the protestors (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). These bystanders are thought to stand-in for the

supposed opinion of the average American. A notion of public consensus may be suggested in other, more direct ways as well. Occasionally, this occurs directly through poll data that indicate public disapproval (Brasted, 2005), or through explicit statements by reporters that suggest an opposing social consensus (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Dardis, 2006). More commonly, Gitlin (1980) argues that the idea that protestors' views are unpopular may be implied through an emphasis on the presence of counter-demonstrators (see also Dardis, 2006; Smith et al., 2001). Through these various types of coverage, news media create the impression that protestors' views are essentially minority views, and in doing so further promote the perception of protestors as being part of an easily-dismissed fringe.

Finally, protest paradigm coverage, like much of the news, tends to *favor the perspectives of authorities and elites over those of protestors* (Gitlin, 1980; Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue, 1989). This manifests in a greater presence of official sources such as politicians and police officers than participants or leaders of the protests in news coverage. Because protests are typically critical of authority figures and create extra work for police, these individuals, unsurprisingly, tend to be critical of protestors. These official sources tend to be quoted much more frequently than protestors, and in some cases protest participants' voices are completely absent in news content about their demonstrations (Dardis, 2006; Gitlin, 1980). This serves to minimize the voice of actual protest participants in news about demonstrations. For example, Dardis (2006) examined newspaper coverage of protests against the Iraq War in 2003 and found that official sources such as city government officials were dominant, especially in news that framed the protests negatively. Similarly, Jha (2007) found that this reliance on official sources increased over time, with protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 receiving more coverage of this sort than did protests against the Vietnam War. So, the dominance of official

sources as voices in news, while common in many types of coverage, is especially prevalent in coverage of political protests.

My own scholarship has suggested that, alongside the protest paradigm, demonstrations are increasingly being covered using a comparatively new journalistic lens that I call the “public nuisance paradigm” (Di Cicco, 2010). Most centrally, this style of coverage depicts protests as bothersome, annoying, a waste of time, and unpatriotic. Such characterizations may occur either through journalists or their sources making such claims directly, or via depictions of protest as interrupting day-to-day activities such as shopping or commuting. Coverage of this style serves to dismiss protests by making the supposed interruptions that they cause—which might be tolerated if protests were thought to make a positive contribution to society—appear to be of no worth by suggesting that they have negligible impact, people simply ignore them, or they are in some way anti-patriotic or bad for America. Such coverage contributes to the idea that protests are predominantly a nuisance, an unwanted interruption of more important activities. A content analysis found that this style of coverage became increasingly common in news about protests between the late 1960s and the early 2000s (Di Cicco, 2010). This style of coverage, I have argued, serves to demean not only specific demonstrations and demonstrators, but also protest as a form of political participation; that is, whereas protest paradigm coverage depicts demonstrations as violent, destructive, or dangerous, the nuisance paradigm depicts them as without value or merit. Thus, nuisance paradigm coverage may be even more harmful to the public perception of protests than the protest paradigm, as it strips all meaning from a form of political engagement that has been consistently important to those who have lesser political power in American society.

These two paradigms, taken together, are thought to characterize the majority of protest news coverage in the United States. To date, however, little research has examined whether the ideology of protestors is related to the extent to which these styles of journalism are deployed. There is, however, some suggestive research in this area. Protest paradigm research suggests that demonstrations seeking significant social change are more likely to be treated derisively in news coverage than those seeking to uphold the status quo (Boyle et al., 2004; Kensicki, 2001). Given conservatives' general support for the status quo, their protests would seem more likely to fall into this latter category, whereas liberal protests more often fit the former, as liberals are more apt to question authority (Defronzo, 2011; Lakoff, 2002). Further, my own content analysis found that protests driven by a conservative political ideology—for example, against abortion or gay rights—were less likely, by a substantial margin, to be portrayed using the devices of the nuisance paradigm than were liberal protests, a finding that I attributed to the increasing prominence of conservative voices in news in recent decades (Di Cicco, 2010). Thus, while protests in general are likely to be depicted in a negative light in news coverage, there is reason to believe that Tea Party demonstrations may be covered in a manner which is qualitatively different than many other protests in recent years.

National Identity and a Patriotic Press

In examining the success of the Tea Party, as well as differences in coverage from contemporary social movements, this dissertation will argue that the distinctions may in part arise from conservative activists' more effective employment of the symbols, language, and mythology associated with American identity. Just as news coverage frames protests, social movements also frame themselves, drawing upon existing cultural and ideological symbols as they present themselves and their causes and grievances to the public (Snow & Benford, 2005).

This process plays an important role in determining the success or failure of a movement, impacting its ability to build consensus among members, capture attention from the media, and attract support from potential constituents (Gamson, 1988; Tarrow, 1994). Indeed, some scholars have argued that movement framing is at least as important as structural factors such as organization and resources (Snow & Benford, 1998). As compared to institutionally sanctioned political actors, activists are typically at a disadvantage when confronting news makers, but the choices they make in self-presentation can influence the coverage they receive (Ryan 1991). By strategically employing frames that are culturally resonant—that is, those which are congruent with widely recognized and accepted cultural themes and notions—activists may be better able to inject the preferred narratives of their movements into news content and make a positive impression on the public (Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Ryan, 1991). Few if any frames are more likely to resonate in this way than those which draw upon national identity.

To understand the impact of national identity discourse, it is important to ground this research in the context of social identity theory, which posits that an individual's identity—that is, how one conceives of one's self—is based in part upon collective *social identity* (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity can be defined as “that *part* of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, 255, italics original). Group membership, in this view, is part of what allows people to distinguish themselves from others through group comparisons on the basis of similarity or difference from one's self (Turner, 1982) and the perceived status of the group to which they belong (Tajfel, 1981). Through these processes, connections to various groups can in important ways shape people's perceptions of their world.

Many group affiliations—including racial, political, and athletic—contribute to one’s individual self-concept, but a feeling of attachment to one’s nation is perhaps the most important. Anderson (2006) posits that citizens’ identification with modern nation-states creates a sense of a “deep, horizontal comradeship,” an “imagined community” for which many are willing to kill and die. Nations, according to Anderson, can inspire a deep love and, while socially constructed, have an intense weight and purity which, for many, exceed that of any other group identity. This may be because, as Smith (1991) argues, the memories, myths, traditions, and symbols of the nation are passed down through upbringing and education in an all-encompassing way: “The communal past defines to a large extent our identity, which in turn helps to determine collective goals and destinies” (358). Further, a sense of national identity is thought by some to play a vital role in the foundation of individuals’ self-respect and moral sense (Glover, 1997). Indeed, so powerful and pervasive is the attachment to one’s nation that some have come to characterize the era of nations as one of societal “self-worship” in which a strong attachment to a nation is seen as an inevitable part of the human condition (Gellner, 1983). In short, national identity is a phenomenon that is thought to have tremendous psychological impact upon people’s perceptions of themselves, their world, and their fellow citizens.

It only makes sense, therefore, that nation-affirming values are often present in news content. Consider that news media in the United States have a commercial imperative to sell news to audiences, and that journalists are embedded in the same culture as the audiences, both of which lead dominant cultural values to become privileged in news content (Hallin, 1987; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978). Put simply, journalists produce news that upholds cultural trends and values because they are both part of the culture from which these values stem and because they need to produce a product that will sell to other members of that culture,

creating a situation in which news media both influence the public and are influenced by the values the public holds (Entman, 2003; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In the United States, this generally means that news supports a belief in the “capitalist economic system, private ownership, pursuit of profit by self-interested entrepreneurs, and free markets. This system is intertwined with the Protestant ethic and the value of individual achievement.... These values are articulated and reaffirmed through the media” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 213; see also Billings & Tambosi, 2004; Edelman, 1977; McCloskey & Zaller, 1984). Thus, messages that align with such values are likely to be privileged in news media. Further, scholarship shows that U.S. news media commonly weave *overtly* pro-nation themes into news content. According to Calabrese and Burke (1992), the news is consistently nationalistic and at least in part responsible for representing the very concept of the American identity to the citizenry (see also Gans, 1980). They argue that American symbols and myths like the Bill of Rights and the struggle of the nation’s Founders are deployed by media for a variety of purposes, including the advancement of their own business interests.

Such highlighting of pro-nation themes becomes even more common during crisis moments. Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, and Garland (2004) found that, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks of 2001, news media heavily echoed nation-centric themes of strength, unity, and mythology originating from government and military officials (see also Denton, 2004; Domke, 2004; Lule, 2002). Studies have found similar deployment of nationally-oriented themes to support administration goals in other crisis contexts as well. Reese and Buckalew (1995) found that journalists framed coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War in such a way that connected it with patriotism and supporting “the troops,” while simultaneously casting opposition to the war as unpatriotic. Such coverage, they argue, is emblematic of the ways in

which cultural and economic forces work in concert with governmental policy preferences in times of national crisis. This is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to media in the United States either—Brookes (1999), for example, found that in the midst of the “mad cow disease” scare of 1996, British newspapers encouraged unity and identification with the nation. Given the power of national identity, therefore, the reality is that while it becomes more overt in times of crisis, a commercial press is nearly *always* a patriotic press, because neither the audience nor the journalists themselves would have it otherwise.

This is not to suggest that the press intentionally advances a pro-nation agenda, nor that it is never critical of the government or its actions. Indeed, under normal circumstances—that is, in the absence of a national crisis or emergency—it is common for journalists to criticize specific government actions, policies, or leaders. Even during times of war, journalistic independence and objectivity norms may outweigh the tendency to bolster the nation, resulting in the presentation of viewpoints that are critical of the government (Althaus, 2003), especially when views within the government itself are not united around a course of action (Hallin, 1987; Mermin, 1996). However, national values, symbols, and themes almost never come under scrutiny in the press and in fact are typically treated favorably. Even in the face of failures and ethical lapses by the government and its officials, the nation and its values and principles are held up and reaffirmed (Gans, 1980). These values and symbols, I argue, are powerful rhetorical devices that are likely to resonate in news content under most circumstances, to the advantage of those political actors who employ them (Entman, 2003; Gamson & Modigliani, 1995). If, for example, the Tea Party has made consistent use of these devices, then it is reasonable to think this might be reflected in news coverage of the movement.

The Tea Party Movement, National Rhetoric, and News Coverage

I turn now to connecting these scholarly streams with the Tea Party movement, which merits an overview as a starting point. It is pegged with a beginning in February 2009, when CNBC analyst Rick Santelli launched into a now-famous rant on the CNBC program “Squawk Box” (Walker, 2010). In this segment, Santelli criticized taxation, President Barack Obama’s economic plans, and government programs designed to help homeowners who, in the midst of an economic crisis, were unable to pay their mortgages. He called for “a Chicago Tea Party,” urging “capitalists” to show up for an event in July, and suggested that America needed a revolutionary leader because the government’s actions were making the Founders “roll over in their graves” (Quayle, 2009, February 19). Right from the start, the invocation of American mythology that brought to bear the power of the “communal past” (Smith 1991) was a part of the Tea Party narrative. A few anti-tax rallies had already taken place under the moniker “porkulus” (Zernike, 2010), but after this moment these rallies escalated in size and frequency under the banner of a Tea Party movement, exploding onto the U.S. political scene on April 15, 2009 with Tax Day protests across the country that garnered considerable attention from the news media. These rallies promoted lower taxes, smaller government, and a dislike for politicians in general and President Obama in particular, harkening to a bygone era of American politics in which government played a minimal role in the economy that placed the Tea Party squarely within Defronzo’s (2011) definition of a conservative movement.

Within a short time, a number of large and often well-funded organizations emerged. These provided a framework and resources enabling the disparate Tea Party groups—among them Tea Party Nation, Tea Party Patriots, and Tea Party Express—to connect with well-known Republican Party figures such as former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin and former

House Majority Leader Richard “Dick” Armey, further cementing the movement’s conservative credentials (Salant, 2010). Many Tea Partiers claim no allegiance to any political party, but the movement quickly found backers among conservative organizations such as Freedomworks and Americans for Prosperity, supporters among Fox News commentators such as Glenn Beck, and adherents among fiscal conservatives across the United States (Salant, 2010; Stone, 2010). The Tea Party movement grew rapidly, staging protests attended by thousands of people and attracting national media attention.

By 2010, with President Obama’s popularity slipping and mid-term elections approaching, Republican Party candidates for state and national offices began to claim allegiance to the Tea Party.² Among these were Rand Paul in Kentucky, Sharron Angle in Nevada, and Christine O’Donnell in Delaware. At the same time, a Tea Party Caucus emerged in the House of Representatives, led by Minnesota’s Michele Bachmann, who appeared at several Tea Party and Tea Party-affiliated events. The Tea Party was a dominant topic in election coverage, grabbing headlines and attention across the country. When the polls closed on November 2, at least 44 candidates connected to the Tea Party had won public office (*The New York Times*, “How the Tea Party Fared,” 2010). Regardless of how much the actual outcome of the elections was impacted, 2010 was seen as the Tea Party election.

Given the pervasive media narrative about the ineffectiveness of protest (Di Cicco, 2010; Gitlin, 1980), journalistic proclamations declaring the ascendancy and influence of the Tea Party in the 2010 elections point to important questions about why the movement was so successful and how it was covered by news media. The answer may lie in the Tea Party’s employment of American myths and symbols. From its inception in the Santelli rant, the Tea Party relied heavily

² Almost all Tea Party-supported candidates ran as Republicans; a few ran as independents or under the banner of the Constitution Party or some other third party.

on such language and images—indeed, the name itself invokes the Boston Tea Party, a key protest event in the founding of the United States. Such discourse served to closely associate the Tea Party with the nation, and in doing so, send the message that the movement treasures and represents the collective that is both a part of every American’s social identity (Tajfel, 1981) and arguably the most important collective identity for many (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983; Glover, 1997). Whether calculated or spontaneous, few strategies of self-presentation could appeal to as many citizens as this one.

Methodological Approaches and Expectations

Given the political successes of the Tea Party, it is important to closely examine this movement’s public communications. The first two data chapters in this dissertation seek to understand the Tea Party movement and its messages by conducting interviews with Tea Party members from across the United States (Chapter 3) and participant observation at Tea Party events (Chapter 4). Qualitative interviewing, more so than most other methods, allows researchers to develop a sense of how their subjects understand themselves, their experiences, and their world, allowing interviewees to tell their own stories on their own terms (Burns, 2000; Mishler, 1986). These interviews provide a foundation for understanding the movement and are the focus of Chapter 3. It was my expectation that the story that Tea Party members would tell about themselves would be one that positioned them in a close relationship to the nation, its values, and its foundational myths. I expected these conservative activists with a reverence for history and tradition to powerfully espouse and defend the brand of celebratory patriotism discussed by Beinart (2008) and to invoke and defend traditional values, as suggested by

Defronzo (2011). I now explore three important areas of Tea Party movement discourse to examine the ways that national identity themes manifest.

First, I expected that Tea Party members' claim to American identity might have been a primary means through which they construct their *legitimacy*. I use this term here in a manner that differs somewhat from the ways in which it is often conceived by political scientists who study democratic governance. Scholars in this domain have most commonly examined legitimacy in terms of how well political institutions or figures serve the interests of the polity and/or how much faith the people place in said figures' or institutions' abilities and desires to represent their interests (see Almond & Verba, 1963; Rogowski, 1974; Weatherford, 1992). Such research often focuses on perceptions of the fairness, competence, or representativeness of political actors. My use of the term legitimacy is not entirely distinct from this approach, but draws more upon scholarship from the field of organizational theory, which focuses on the notion that an organization authentically and credibly represents the interests of the stakeholders whom they profess to speak for or act on behalf of (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Scholarship in this area often focuses on the ways in which organizations construct their legitimacy and the processes through which it may be conferred upon them. From this perspective, all organizations, including social movements, must struggle to acquire and assert legitimacy; that is, they must take steps to gain the approval or endorsement of at least some segment of the group they claim to represent, often through managing others' perceptions of the organization and its credibility (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In the case of the Tea Party, a group which seems to have constructed itself as speaking on behalf of mainstream America and its traditional values, an important part of invoking a shared American identity might have been representing themselves as the "real" or "authentic" Americans. There

were a variety of ways which this might have been achieved. Most obvious might be suggesting that Tea Party members were patriotic. Similarly, informants might have suggested that the members of the movement were representative of the public at large, the “typical” American, and/or were promoting ideas that represented the will of the people. This theme might also have appeared via emphasis on a lack of ties to either major political party, which could have helped construct the activism of the Tea Party as having been motivated by a love for America rather than partisan loyalties, and in this way have appealed to the large number of Americans disenchanted with both major parties (Jones, 2010). All of these approaches to the issue of legitimacy might have both defined what the concept meant for Tea Party insiders and also projected an image of the movement as legitimate to potential supporters.

Additionally, given conservative proclivities towards respecting *legitimate* authority and sense of duty for defending the traditional order from perceived usurpation (Lakoff, 2002), it seemed likely that Tea Party activists would depict their activism as a struggle against opponents who, via an *illegitimate* use of power, sought to overturn the order and values which are central to their vision of America. Indeed, otherwise their own activism would likely have been viewed, through their own ethical lens, as morally suspect in its challenges to authority (Lakoff, 2002). For example, interviewees might have compared Tea Party opponents to British government of the 1700s, to other historic enemies of America, or to simply see them as unpatriotic, illegitimate, or tyrannical. Such a depiction of Tea Party opponents would have served not only to justify an atypical behavior on the part of conservatives (i.e. challenging authority through protest) but would also further cement the identity of Tea Party members as the true representatives of the American spirit—in short, as legitimate. With this in mind, I offer the following research question:

RQ1: Did Tea Party members employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how?

Related to this construction of legitimacy was the question of how Tea Party members explained their decision to become politically active. As previously discussed, for a variety of reasons, protest is relatively uncommon among conservatives and may in fact be a form of political engagement that is in opposition to conservative credo (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Jost et al., 2003; Lakoff, 2002). Conservatives, more so than liberals, tend to see protest as naïve, wrong-headed, or even unethical (Altemeyer, 1981; 1998). As such, it is important to examine the justifications offered by Tea Party members to explain their engagement with a grassroots political movement, as such justifications may shed light on the circumstances under which conservatives will participate in protest. It seemed likely that concerns about the state of the nation would be identified as the driving force in Tea Party activism. Specifically, Tea Party members might describe intense personal feelings of fear about the future of the nation, and/or a sense that important elements of America's identity have been lost or taken away. I expected Tea Party members might express a wish to return to a way of life of some past era in which those values were thought to have been ascendant. Such a desire would be in concert with scholarship that points to the conservative belief in upholding the status quo or to restoring traditions while at the same time aligning the Tea Party with a set of values that many people consider distinctly American and thus further bolstering an image of the Tea Party as an American movement (Defronzo, 2011; Jost et al., 2003; McCloskey & Zaller, 1984). To explore these motivations, I offer the following research question:

RQ2: Did Tea Party members employ national themes, narratives, and symbols to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how?

Conservative discomfort with protest also raised the question of how Tea Party members define their actions. Tea Party members may have expressed discomfort with their own activism, and/or may have exhibited ambivalence about the concept of protest, making them hesitant to define their movement as a protest movement at all. While their actions fell well within the boundaries of what Tarrow (1994) calls “contentious politics” (including protests as well as a variety of other strategies of grassroots engagement) typically practiced by contemporary social movements of all stripes, the Tea Party movement’s activities have included a number of activities that are distinct from street protests (e.g. fundraising, doorbelling, and candidate vetting). Thus, if Tea Party members were in fact uncomfortable with the idea of protest, they may have chosen to define their movement in other terms that again emphasized the nation. For example, I thought Tea Party members might offer alternative narratives about or definitions of the Tea Party movement to eliminate potential cognitive dissonance provoked by engaging in a type of politics more commonly employed by liberals (Festinger 1957). Tea Party participants might have defined their behavior, for example, as the dissemination of information or as education. Alternatively, Tea Party members might have sought to redefine the tradition of protest in such a way that it was in keeping with conservative values or patriotism, suggesting that it was an American thing to do or that it was in some other way not in conflict with a conservative worldview. To explore this matter, I offer the following research question:

RQ3: Did Tea Party members employ national themes, symbols, and narratives to describe and define their own behavior and actions of the movement as a whole? If so, how?

To better understand how the key themes in Tea Party discourse manifested publicly, a second method was employed to analyze the public activism of the Tea Party movement. In Chapter 4, I present a participant observation analysis of key events connected with the Tea Party

movement. Participant observation is an immersive approach that, through participation in the lives of others, allows researchers to gain a perspective on the world inhabited by their subjects which might otherwise remain undiscovered (Jorgenson, 1989; Kidder & Judd, 1986). This approach allowed me to delve into the ways in which the key themes of Tea Party discourse manifested at key Tea Party events, which were covered extensively by the news media and were arguably the primary means through which the Tea Party expressed its message to the public. I expected to see a variety of discursive tendencies in my analysis of these events that conveyed the same key national identity values that I anticipated in the interviews. Indeed, journalistic accounts suggest that the Tea Party rallies of 2009 and 2010 were steeped in national identity discourse. They were frequently populated by people wearing tricorne hats, a style popular during the American Revolution, and sometimes even appearing fully dressed as founding figures in the nation's history. The Tea Party took as its symbol the Gadsden "Don't Tread on Me" flag used by the colonists at the time of the Revolutionary War, and it stood side by side with the U.S. flag at their rallies (Stone 2010). Thus, it was my expectation to see most or all of these stylistic choices, as well as aligned ones, among the participants at Tea Party gatherings.

Events provided many other possibilities for the Tea Party's brand of nation-centric discourse as well. Perhaps most obviously, I expected speakers to invoke many similar themes to those that might have appeared in the interviews. Journalistic accounts of the events suggest that, in their rhetoric, Tea Party members have placed themselves in the tradition of the Founders, often invoking them by name, and even more often suggesting that the Tea Party's conservative interpretation of the U.S. Constitution is the "correct" one, or the one that those who wrote it would agree with (Chernow, 2010). Thus, I also expected such discussion to appear on the stage at Tea Party events. Likewise, there were other aspects of the presentations occurring at these

events that I thought likely to cue the Tea Party's national identity narrative. These included stage decorations featuring national images or colors, and musical selections drawing from patriotic anthems or lyrically cued national themes. Many of these events also involved video presentations, which had the potential to include any number of national identity themes, including images and video of American landmarks and historical figures, patriotic music, and dialogue that invoked themes of the Tea Party discourse. In short, it was my expectation that discourse that invoked national identity would be prevalent in nearly every aspect of the Tea Party events I analyze in Chapter 4

It was less apparent how these components would come together to convey Tea Party conceptions of legitimacy, motivations for activism, or self-definition of movement activities. I expected that speakers, signs, music, and videos at these events would in some ways echo the ideas I expected to find in my interview data, and likewise that printed materials distributed at these events would provide a means by which these aspects of the Tea Party worldview would come forward. However, I was uncertain at the outset how legitimacy, motivations, and definitions of behavior would be communicated. Further, it also seemed likely that there would have been variation between the events in terms of how these concepts would manifest. For example, in the run-up to Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally on the national mall,³ Beck signaled to potential participants that this event was *not* a protest by asking them to leave signs at home, thus offering an alternative narrative for what amounted to a major conservative political rally. In doing so, he defined this highly politicized event as not politically aligned—a theme that fell within my initial expectations about how Tea Party members would construct themselves as legitimate. Thus, the very definition of this event by organizers could be seen as invoking

³ Strictly speaking, this event was not explicitly a Tea Party event, but this research will show that Glenn Beck is an important figure in the shaping of Tea Party discourse, and that a large number of those in attendance at this event were Tea Party members.

notions of legitimacy. I expected that this event and others like it would also have included other cues related to the Tea Party movement's self-definition and construction of legitimacy, which this research sought to uncover. To this end, I offer the following research questions:

RQ4: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how?

RQ5: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how?

RQ6: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to define the behavior and actions of the movement? If so, how?

The discourses of national identity and legitimacy that I expected to see at these events and in interviews with Tea Party are culturally potent, and I argue that these forces may have driven news coverage of the Tea Party to differ from coverage of other political protest movements of the last decade which are not known for employing such discourse. Journalists tend to criticize protests, but the Tea Party made heavy use of pro-nation themes, symbols, and images which are likely to resonate with journalists and audiences alike. As Smith (1991) argues, national imagery is crucial in the creation of a national consciousness, and thus is a potentially powerful tool when used by citizens engaged in political activism. Indeed, recent research has found some evidence for this proposition, as Wright and Citrin (2010) found that immigration rallies in which immigrants waved American flags were perceived more positively by news viewers than those in which they waved Mexican flags. It was my expectation that content analysis would show that the Tea Party movement received more positive (and less negative) coverage in news media than other recent protest groups. I expected this because of the movement's likely frequent invocation of the nation and its most potent symbols, which served to link the Tea Party movement to the national character, thus making it difficult for journalists to critique the movement without critiquing the nation, usually *their* nation.

I expected, then, that journalists covering the Tea Party found themselves in a challenging position: if they followed usual routines and covered the Tea Party in a derisive way, they may in some sense have felt or have been perceived to be critiquing the nation itself. That is, if the Tea Party could successfully equate itself with the founding fathers, the Boston Tea Party, the flag, and the many other powerful myths and symbols it wrapped itself in, critiquing the movement could have become a critique of America and of U.S. citizens exercising legitimate rights. Journalists are likely to find it difficult to deride Americans standing up against perceived injustice who claim to be doing so in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson rather than Malcolm X, in the spirit of the constitutional framers rather than the Weather Underground. As members of the culture from which these symbols derive, journalists are likely to avoid such critiques for both ideological and economic reasons (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978). Thus, I predicted that coverage of the Tea Party would include various aspects of the protest and nuisance paradigms, but that such coverage would be proportionately less common than in coverage of other recent protests. Further, it seemed probable that, more so than other protest events, Tea Party coverage would also include pro-nation themes that cast the movement in a favorable light. These references to the nation might have included descriptions of Tea Party members as patriotic, an emphasis on pro-nation imagery or content at their events, favorable comparison of the movement to key historical moments of figures, or the showcasing of quotes or other content from the movement or its members that served the same purposes.

Further, I believe that such a pattern may account, at least in part, for the differences in coverage between liberal and conservative (or at least pro- and anti- status quo) protests that other scholars have uncovered in previous research (e.g. Boyle et al., 2004; Di Cicco, 2010; Kensicki, 2001). If successful invocation of national symbols results in less negative coverage of

protest movements, it may be that conservative protests have received less dismissive coverage in general because, like the Tea Party, these events are more likely than protests by liberals to invoke the nation and its symbols, thus leading these themes to appear more commonly in news coverage. Conservatives, more so than liberals, tend to engage in a “patriotism of affirmation” that celebrates, embraces, and puts on display the symbols and mythological past of America (Beinart 2008). Such a style of patriotism overtly cues national identity and, if indeed it is common to conservatives and their approach to activism, could at least partially explain both the political success of the Tea Party movement and the more positive media coverage that conservative protests may have received.

The Tea Party provided a unique opportunity for testing these propositions. As a large conservative protest movement that made frequent use of national identity discourse and garnered a great deal of attention in news media, this movement was as an effective case study for exploring the ways in which nation-centric discourse might impact media coverage. Thus, in order to examine news coverage of the Tea Party, I offer several hypotheses which were tested via a content analysis in the third and final data chapter of this dissertation, comparing Tea Party event coverage to coverage of other protest movements from the last decade:

H1: News coverage of Tea Party events will be more likely to include favorable references to patriotism and American traditions, symbols, and mythology than will news coverage of other protest events.

H2: News coverage of Tea Party events will be less likely to feature the themes of the protest paradigm than news coverage of other protest events.

H3: News coverage of Tea Party events will be less likely to feature the themes of the nuisance paradigm than news coverage of other protest events.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation employs a multi-methodological approach to examine the relations among conservative attitudes, protest discourse, and news coverage of protests. Specifically, I examine the ways in which Tea Party members discussed their own activism in terms of self-definition, motivations, and concepts of legitimacy, using interviews. I examine the ways in which these conceptions emerged in public events using participant observation, and I examine the ways in which such events were covered using content analysis. I theorize that conservative tendencies towards highlighting national identity will emerge in all three arenas, resulting in coverage that focuses on this important social identity while downplaying the common critical paradigms that pervade in coverage of other protests.

The combination of these methods and research questions provides a means to assess the discourse of the Tea Party movement in both interpersonal and public settings, and the ways in which coverage of the Tea Party presented this group and its messages in comparison to other protest groups. The combination of qualitative interviews, participant observation, and content analysis also provides an opportunity to explore possible explanations for the rapid success that characterized the Tea Party in its first few years of existence. In Chapter 2, I describe each of these methodological approaches in greater detail, and I also discuss the ways in which this multi-method approach contributes to a fuller picture of the Tea Party movement than any one method alone would allow.

In Chapter 3, I present results from a body of qualitative interviews with Tea Party members. Specifically, I inquire into how Tea Party member discourses highlighted national identity to define their movement, describe their motivations, and construct legitimacy. I also examined the ways in which the legitimacy of political opponents was challenged. In doing so, I

provide a basis for understanding how Tea Party members understood the process of engaging in a protest movement.

In Chapter 4, I present results from participant observations conducted at several high-profile Tea Party events in summer 2010. I again focus on communication of national identity, definitions of activism, descriptions of motivations, and conceptions of legitimacy within the Tea Party movement, providing an understanding of how the Tea Party movement constructed itself in a public forum.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings of a content analysis focusing on coverage on three cable news networks and in two newspapers, comparing coverage of major Tea Party protest events to two other large protest events from the same decade. In doing so, I empirically test propositions about the extent to which Tea Party discourse may have been related to coverage of the movement by comparing to the other two protests, in terms of the protest and nuisance paradigms and the presence of nation-centric discussion.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I summarize and interpret the findings. I discuss the implications for news, politics, and activism in America, offering my insights into the role of national identity in protest discourse and news coverage of social and political protests.

Chapter 2

Research Design

This dissertation employed a multi-method approach in three stages to explore Tea Party discourse. The value of multi-method research is that, by approaching a topic or question from multiple perspectives with differing strengths and weaknesses, researchers are able to see a fuller picture of the object of study than any single method allows (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). This approach employs both quantitative and qualitative methods with the understanding that together they provide a better understanding than either would alone. Data from the differing approaches are combined, allowing for, among other things, richer and more valid explanations of observed phenomena (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). For example, quantitative methods are considered useful for identifying patterns and relationships, while qualitative methods are often seen as superior for explaining the mechanisms of these relationships, i.e. theory building (Ragin, 1994). In the context of this dissertation, qualitative interviews and participant observation were employed to examine the discourse of the Tea Party movement in different settings, and content analysis examined news coverage of Tea Party protests as compared to other major protests of the same decade. Using these three methods, this research sought to uncover important dimensions of the Tea Party movement, its discourse, and news coverage of the movement.

Interviews

Chapter 3 of this dissertation is an analysis of a body of qualitative interviews, collected using an approach that Burns (2000) calls “semi-structured” interviewing. This approach uses a predetermined list of questions, as a standard social-science survey interview would, but does not specify response choices, or, for that matter, the order of the questions or even which questions

are or are not used from one interview to the next. This flexible approach allows the interviewer to probe for more information when appropriate, discard questions that seem irrelevant, and engage in a constructionist approach through which subjects can express their own understandings of their worlds and the themes and topics which the researcher is interested in exploring (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Warren, 2002). This method provides greater validity than survey interview methods, in part by allowing respondents to tell their stories as they understand them rather than imposing a framework created by the researcher. Semi-structured interviewing, as a result, was ideal for exploring the discourse of the Tea Party, as it allowed individuals to express their thoughts in a natural way that generated texts for qualitative analysis.

The Corpus

In qualitative interviewing, because the goal is not to make statistically generalizable claims but rather to explore discourse for emergent themes, there usually is not a target number of informants at the outset, nor is there a “correct” sample size (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The appropriate number of interview subjects is based on a) the researcher’s judgments about the necessary number of subjects needed to capture the range of different voices in the group being studied and b) the number of interviews at which *saturation* occurs. Saturation, in this method, is the point at which the addition of new informants ceases to provide new revelations or uncover new themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mason, 2010; Morse, 1994; Morse, 1995). Essentially, this is the point at which the researcher finds that responses are predominantly similar to those already received in previous interviews. Responses to questions become predictable, and themes that the researcher has already uncovered are repeated in combinations which the researcher has heard before. Although there is no agreed upon standard as to how scholars determine whether the point of saturation has been reached (Morse, 1995), some studies suggest it can occur in as

few as 6 to 10 interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2005), and that the typical sample size for research aiming to achieve saturation tends to hover around 30 (Mason, 2010). Saturation, then, can be achieved using a relatively small number of interviews, depending on the homogeneity of the population under study.

I and a colleague purposively recruited subjects for these interviews from Tea Party groups around the country using face-to-face recruiting at Tea Party events on the West Coast, across the Southwest, and in the nation's capitol, in combination with targeted internet searches. Snowball sampling, an approach in which subjects who participate in the study refer researchers to other potential subjects (Singleton & Straits, 2005), was also employed. After a particularly informative interview, or in cases in which we were hoping to expand our coverage of a particular geographic region, for example, we sometimes asked our informants whether they could provide names and contact information of other Tea Party members who they felt might be valuable for us to interview. This non-probability approach to sampling is common in qualitative interview research, because it does not seek to draw statistically generalizable conclusions from a statistically representative sample—indeed such an approach would be very difficult, since there is no list of all Tea Party members from which to draw subjects (Singleton & Straits, 2005; Warren, 2002). Even so, the makeup of the informant pool did allow me to make an argument for the representativeness of this sample, albeit not in the statistical sense of the term.

To gain as comprehensive a picture of the Tea Party as possible, the sample employed in this study included both organizers and rank-and-file Tea Party members in different regions of the country—the West Coast, Southwest, Midwest, South, and the Northeast. The resulting pool

of informants contained 35 individuals in 15 states,⁴ providing wide geographical range. An effort was made to draw a sample of Tea Party members that was as illustrative of the movement as possible, including a diverse sample of participants in terms of gender, race, age, career, and socio-economic status, to the extent that the demographic makeup of the movement allowed. In total, 15 of our subjects were female (43%) and 20 were male (57%). The majority were over the age of 55 (many of whom were retirees), and all were Caucasian.⁵ These sample demographics reflected the features of the movement with a fair degree of accuracy, as polls in 2009 and 2010 showed Tea Party members to be overwhelmingly older Caucasians, a slight majority of them male (New York Times/CBS News Poll, 2010). The majority (74%, $n=27$) of informants were organizers of their local groups, including the chief of staff for the campaign of a Tea Party-aligned presidential candidate, with the remaining 26 percent ($n=9$) being classified as group members. Thus, while organizers were dominant in our sample, it did provide data on participants engaged in a non-leadership capacity as well.

The Instrument

Interviews were conducted using a battery of items derived from the theoretical questions driving this research, and developed carefully through several iterations. Revisions to the questionnaire were made based on the relevance of the items to informants and themes that arose in an initial round of interviews. All iterations of the interview instrument were approved by the internal review board at the University of Washington and all subjects gave verbal consent for their participation based on full disclosure of the researchers' identities and the purposes for

⁴ The Tea Party informants with whom we spoke resided in the following states: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Utah, Arizona, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Kentucky.

⁵ Efforts were made to interview non-white Tea Party members, but were hindered by the fact that we were only able to identify a small number of potential informants who were not Caucasian. Multiple attempts were made to interview those who we were able to identify and contact, but our interview requests were not answered.

which the data would be used. The careful construction and revision of the instrument, based on both theoretical interests and informants' understandings of the topics and interview questions, is one means of ensuring the validity of this method of inquiry (Kvale, 1996). Two versions of the instrument were produced for use based on the time available for interviews—a long form and a short form. Both asked informants to talk about the same broad set of topics: the *process* through which the subject became involved in the Tea Party movement, the subject's perceptions of *participation* in the movement, beliefs about the *effectiveness* of the Tea Party movement and its place in American history, the subject's views on the relationship between the Tea Party and *media*, and finally, a set of *demographic* questions. Notably, the main line of questioning did not inquire specifically about patriotism, national symbols, national mythology, or definitions of legitimacy. The intent here was to let these topics come up organically in the conversation, and, if they were indeed central to Tea Party discourse, they were expected to come up repeatedly using the line of questioning described above. This approach allowed me to make a stronger argument about the role of nation-invoking discourse in the Tea Party than if I were to ask about it directly. The complete interview instrument can be found in Appendix A.

The Process

Interviews were conducted by two researchers, with one asking questions and the other taking notes, and ranged from about 20 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes. Most informants were interviewed individually, but some were interviewed in pairs, and in one case, a small group. Interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone. All interviews were recorded, save for two cases in which informants did not consent to this. In these cases, the most extensive notes possible were taken, with the note taker seeking to capture numerous direct quotes, along with more general notes about the interview. All recordings and notes were then transcribed with

the help of an undergraduate assistant and checked for accuracy by one of the two primary investigators. Chapter 3 describes the results of this analysis.

In qualitative interviewing, the transcripts are treated as texts and are analyzed via an inductive, interpretive style of coding akin to grounded theory that allows themes to emerge through a focus on the meanings and functions of the various features in the text (Charmaz, 2002; Mishler, 1986). There are numerous approaches to qualitative coding, but this research employed a method of analysis similar to what Kvale (1996) calls “meaning categorization.” In this approach, categories and subcategories of discourse can emerge through an open coding process. These themes are then sought in other texts while other categories continued to emerge. After an initial pass through all the texts, a final list of codes is created by combining some and eliminating others, and a second round of coding takes place using the finalized list. In this approach, the researcher lets the texts guide the inquiry rather than a pre-established set of coding categories as in quantitative content analysis.

More so than statistical notions of reliability, this type of research is assessed based on its validity, which can be assessed in multiple ways. As previously discussed, one source of validity derives from the careful process of instrument construction and analysis. The craftsmanship that goes into research design is an important means of ensuring that findings are valid (Kvale 1996). Secondly, in some cases, since the goal of this approach is to capture subjects’ understanding of phenomena on their own terms, researchers may ask informants to assess whether the conclusions drawn from analysis accord with their own understanding of the topics discussed, a process known as member validation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Morse, 1994). In this case, a small number of the informants interviewed were contacted for this purpose.

A third means of assessing validity is through the findings' congruence with observations of some phenomena outside of the data itself, a test of validity which, in quantitative research, is called concurrent validity (Reinard, 2008). In quantitative data, a test of concurrent validity typically involves statistical comparison, but a similar logic can be applied to qualitative research. In this domain, validation can be drawn from the use of a second method exploring similar questions, specifically, in the case of this dissertation, a participant observation analysis. Congruence of findings may, in this way, demonstrate validity through the triangulation of findings from multiple methods, a common approach to establishing validity in qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Mathison, 1988). For example, themes about Tea Party legitimacy derived from interviews in Chapter 3 in some cases appeared manifestly, using similar language, in speeches at events described in Chapter 4. Additionally, themes pertaining to the importance of American history uncovered in an examination of Tea Party members' garb (e.g. the presence of tricorne hats, or t-shirts featuring pictures of important historical figures) appeared in an entirely different fashion in responses to questions about education during interviews (e.g. through remarks about how important it is to teach people about the founding of the nation). In this way, the findings of these two methods served to validate one another.

The Analysis

Analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted using the web-based qualitative analysis program Dedoose. Dedoose, like other qualitative analysis tools, allows for the iterative creation and revision of codes to capture themes and subthemes during the process of coding.⁶ To develop an initial list of codes I read each transcript closely, looking for and coding excerpts containing ideas, words, and phrases that were potentially indicative of important themes or

⁶ It is important to note here that in qualitative analyses, coding is seen as part of the analytical process, rather than a distinct preparatory step toward analysis, as in quantitative content analysis (Flick 1998; Lindlof & Taylor 2002).

subthemes in Tea Party member discourse. This initial round of coding was inductive and open—that is, there was no pre-established list of themes or codes. Instead, any excerpt that appeared to be related to the theoretical focus of this study (i.e. national identity, political legitimacy/illegitimacy, and definitions of or motivations for Tea Party activism) was coded, either by creating a new code or applying one that had been created earlier in the coding process. Likewise, any themes that appeared to be important because they manifested repeatedly in an interview (or across several interviews) were assigned codes, as were ideas that were emphasized by informants as being of particular importance. Through this process, I named, defined, and revised codes as they appeared. For example, when an informant claimed that political opponents of the Tea Party were disloyal to America, I created a “Traitors” code, defining this theme as present any time political opponents were claimed to be betraying America. Later appearances of the theme provided more examples of how this code could manifest and allowed me to further specify its definition.

Another important part of analysis in qualitative interviewing is *memoing*, the creation of small notes that the researcher makes to record thoughts about the texts during the coding process. Dedoose, like other similar qualitative analysis tools, allows for the creation of memos that can be linked either to specific excerpts or entire documents. As I coded, I created memos regarding some of the various excerpts I identified as thematically important. These memos had many uses, such as making notes to myself about the important features of specific excerpts (e.g. “this would be a great example of the ‘Traitors’ theme to quote directly in the manuscript” or “interesting how historical enemies of America are invoked to suggest disloyalty in this instance of the ‘Traitors’ theme”). I also used memos to note possible relationships between the various codes, as well as instances where it appeared that one of my codes might have been a

subcategory of another code already identified. Such notes were useful in all stages of the analytical process.

After this initial pass through the texts, I went through the codes and memos to create a finalized coding scheme. This was done by examining the broad collection of codes and memos that emerged from the initial reading of the texts, and in doing so, condensing this list to create a more theoretically focused and parsimonious codebook. Redundant or highly similar codes were combined into single codes, extraneous codes or those which only appeared very infrequently were often eliminated altogether, and very specific codes that captured aspects of broader ideas became sub-categories of those broader codes. Through this process, my memos provided considerable guidance as to which codes were related, which ones were distinct, and how to effectively combine and condense the broad list to create a more manageable one. Once the final list was created, a second round of coding took place in which the finalized code scheme was applied to the full text of each transcript. This second pass through the texts was similar to the process of quantitative content analysis coding—the finalized coding scheme was applied to the texts in a methodical and consistent way, using the specified operational definitions. New codes were not created during this phase, and memoing was less frequent.

Once the second round of coding was completed, I drew my conclusions about the texts using the coded excerpts and memos. In chapter 3, I discuss the themes relevant to my research questions that permeated the discourse of the interviewed Tea Party members, highlighting the themes that appeared most important in the context of my research questions and discussing the relationships between themes and the discursive patterns these connections revealed. Dedoose allows for some informal quantitative analysis (e.g. frequencies, cross tabs, basic graphs and tables), and as a first step in identifying which themes were most important, I examined which

codes appeared most often in my transcripts. I also looked at which themes were most likely to appear alongside each other to examine possible connections between the discursive themes these codes captured. Additionally, I considered which ideas the informants indicated were most important, as noted in my memos. Finally, I looked for contrasting ideas and contradictions between and within the interview transcripts, as such contradictions sometimes suggested interesting tensions within the discourse, revealing points of contention and negotiation within the movement. While some basic frequencies were included in my presentation of the findings (e.g. what percentage of interviews the various themes were present in), the bulk of this analysis is presented using illustrative quotes that exemplify and explain the themes I uncovered in Tea Party members' discourse. This process allowed me to uncover and explain the various ways in which the interviewed Tea Party members employed national identity themes to bolster their movement's legitimacy and cast political opponents as illegitimate, as well as to explore how Tea Party members defined, justified, and contextualized their activism.

Participant Observation

Chapter 4 of this dissertation is a participant observation analysis of four major Tea Party events that took place over three days in late August 2010 in Washington, D.C. Participant observation can be used as a form of case study that seeks to comprehensively and exhaustively describe a single case or phenomenon by immersing one's self in an experience and offering a perspective that may only be visible from the inside (Jorgenson, 1989). Like interviewing, this approach to research draws its validity from both the naturalistic approach to making observations and, when possible, an effort to be unobtrusive while making those observations (Lonner & Berry, 1986). Rather than a single method, participant observation represents an

unstructured and “very complex tactical blend of a number of data-collection techniques” driven by the specific context and research questions of any given study (McCall & Simmons, 1969). The field researcher doing this style of research seeks to make inferences about cultural phenomena on the basis of people’s behavior, the cultural artifacts they produce and use, and the things they say, often in a variety of situations or contexts (Spradley, 1980). Field notes are collected during each immersion into the phenomenon or culture being studied, and then are coded in an inductive manner similar to that which was employed in the interview chapter, in which the coding is a part of the analysis itself as the researcher builds theory while examining data (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Such analysis has the potential to reveal multiple layers of meaning that would otherwise likely remain invisible to outside observers, or even to the subjects of analysis (Jorgenson, 1989). In short, this methodological approach entails making observations from within a cultural context or group of people, and then making inferences on the basis of those observations.

Fieldwork such as this is often paired with qualitative interviewing, as the two methods both seek to gain a naturalistic understanding of their subjects, and thus complement each other well (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Warren, 2002). In this case, themes that arose during interviews were of interest at Tea Party related events, and vice versa. Many of the same or similar themes and codes were thus used in the analysis of both bodies of data. For example, I created a “Retroism” code to capture expressions of a desire to return to a way of life that informants equated with some bygone era of American history, whether it was a wish for life to be more like the 1920s, the 1950s, or a more general nostalgia for an idealized past. In interviews, many informants professed a desire to “go back” to some previous era of American life, or to “restore” to prominence the values of a past age. This code was prevalent in the interview data, and it also

provided the basis for a “Retroism” code used in the participant observation analysis. For example, rally signs expressing a similar desire to return an ostensibly better era of history (e.g., “I want an America that my dad remembers”) were captured using this code which derived thematically from my interview analysis. Thus, in addition to being used as a means to validate findings, each method also provided conceptual material that could be used in the analysis of data from the other. Finally, discussion of the events was sometimes used to establish rapport with interview informants. The two methods, then, were complimentary.

In the case of this research, inferences were drawn both from notes made in the field and from a large body of audio, video and photographic materials collected at the events under study by myself and a colleague. These multi-media texts allowed me to revisit various aspects of these sites throughout the analysis, and include complete or near complete audio and/or video recordings of speeches and presentations taking place on stage at each event, as well as photographic documentation of the setting and event participants. Such documentation was especially helpful in the analysis of visual materials such as signs, decorations, and clothing, all of which, as cultural artifacts of this movement, were important to the overall picture of the phenomenon under study (Spradley, 1980). Alongside this video and photographic data, a substantial collection of physical artifacts made up primarily of pamphlets, flyers, programs and other printed materials gathered at the events were included in this stage of the research, allowing for yet another layer of analysis. Thus, several forms of data were used to create a comprehensive picture of activities, speeches, people, and artifacts present at each research site that together composed the discourse of Tea Party events.

The Events

The four events of focus surrounded Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally that occurred on the National Mall on Saturday, August 28, 2010. On Friday the 27th, the day before Beck's rally, a conference titled "Defending the American Dream" was held at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington D.C. This event was hosted by Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a conservative group that overlaps with the Tea Party in both membership and goals. The summit featured sessions about and for Tea Party activists and a speech by congressional Tea Party Caucus leader Michele Bachmann. So, this was event #1. AFP offered shuttle service to Beck's rally the following day. This event (#2 in my analysis) featured Beck and other Tea Party icons such as Sarah Palin, and drew approximately 87,000 people to the Lincoln Memorial and reflecting pool (Sundby, 2010). The rally was not officially connected to the Tea Party but drew many Tea Party members, featured important figures in the movement, and was immediately followed by two Tea Party events that were attended by many of the same people. The first (event #3), hosted by Bachmann, took place on the other side of the mall immediately after Beck's event concluded. This much smaller event was geared toward Tea Party activists, and featured the costumes, flags, and protest signs commonly associated with Tea Party rallies. The final event of the weekend occurred the following day, in a park overlooking the U.S. Capitol Building. This event (#4 in my analysis) was organized by Tea Party Patriots, one of the largest of the national organizations that sought to unite disparate Tea Party groups around the country. This event also featured the costumes and signs that symbolized the movement for many people, as well as speeches by leaders of this national Tea Party group and affiliated local organizations.

Taken together, these four events represent what was arguably the apotheosis of Tea Party activism to date. These events featured more of the Tea Party's heroes, organizers, and

possibly rank-and-file members than any other event or series of events within the same time period. Thus, one could argue that the verbal and visual communications at the rallies and summits in Washington D.C. in August 2010 probably captured the movement as a whole in a highly concentrated and potent form, even while findings about the events cannot be said to be generalizable in a statistical sense. Further, these events represented a spectrum of different types of gatherings relevant to the Tea Party movement and this study. The last two of these events were protest rallies organized by the Tea Party, the AFP summit was more of a training and networking forum with close connections to the movement, and the Glenn Beck event was billed as explicitly *not* a protest and *not* a Tea Party event, yet shared many features of both.⁷

In this type of research, selecting events on the basis of theoretical criteria such as these is common. Probability sampling, in field work, is typically seen as neither feasible nor desirable, leaving the researcher to make informed choices about events or behaviors to include for analysis (Flick, 1998; Lonner & Berry, 1986). When these decisions are made on the basis of sound theoretical reasons, the researcher can make an argument that the corpus is illustrative of the phenomenon being examined, albeit not representative in a statistical sense. Thus, an analysis of these events allowed me to gain insight into the public face of the Tea Party movement in a variety of contexts, including two protests. As such, these events were ideal to explore the public discourse of the Tea Party and how it might be tied to media content of its protest events.

⁷ The claim that the Restoring Honor rally was not a protest is debatable. Participants were asked not to bring political signs, but the event featured a number of speakers associated with the media and various conservative political groups making speeches that, while not overtly partisan, were highly political in nature and had partisan undertones. All of this occurred on National Mall, a location famous for hosting protests including the 1963 March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom, at which Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech, and which took place on the same date as Beck’s rally, August 28th. Possible reasons for and implications of labeling this event as not a protest and not political are discussed in Chapter 4.

The Analysis

The analytical process for the participant observation was highly similar to the one for the interview analysis, though the limitations of Dedoose made it ineffective as a tool at this stage. Dedoose does not easily accommodate visual materials such as photographs, videos, or scans of printed materials. Thus, I used a two-pronged approach to coding of the events. Transcripts and field notes were coded using the comment feature in Microsoft Word. I added comments to my documents, in which I wrote the names of codes I was assigning to the highlighted excerpts. I also used comments to write memos, which served the same purpose as the memos in the interview data. The printed and photographic materials required a slightly different approach. For these materials, I assigned each one a unique identifying number and recorded them in an Excel spreadsheet. In the second column of the spreadsheet, I wrote a brief description of the photograph or text (e.g. “Protestor with sign: ‘Freedom Not Socialism,’” or “American Majority Activist Manual”). In subsequent columns I recorded the names of my codes (e.g. “Retroism” or “Gadsden Flag”). I continued adding additional columns as necessary so as to allow space for as many codes as were present in a given document. An additional column was used for memos. These approaches allowed me to record my codes and insights in a way which was searchable using the “find” function in Word and Excel. While it was slightly more cumbersome than Dedoose, it allowed me to analyze the data through a roughly analogous process.

Similar to my approach to the interview transcripts, the first round of coding of the data was inductive and open, but somewhat more structured. In this case, the finalized list of codes from the interviews had been mostly completed and was used as a starting point for creating a coding scheme to be used in analyzing the participant observation data. While the themes captured by these codes often manifested in different ways in the event data than in the interview

analysis (e.g., through images or music rather than or in addition to verbal expressions), the interview analysis nonetheless provided a valuable basis for creating a list of codes to be used in examining the Tea Party events. In the initial stage of coding, then, the themes uncovered in Chapter 3 were sought, built upon, and expanded, while additional codes were also added based on new themes that emerged inductively in the context of the events. As in the interview analysis, once an initial pass through all the data was completed, a condensed, finalized list of codes and sub-categories was created on the basis of an examination of the codes and memos that emerged in the first round of coding. Redundant codes were combined and sub-categories of codes established. Then, a final round of coding occurred using the finalized code list.

The presentation of results in the case of this analysis differed somewhat from the interview data. In this case, given the small number of events of focus, any meaningful quantitative analysis was precluded. Instead, I sought to create a broad picture of each event, describing the prominent features, as well as differences and similarities to other events, as they applied to the theoretical focus of this dissertation. I focused on how the various themes manifested, as well as similarities and differences between the discourse at these events and the content of the interviews. So, while it would have been neither practical nor useful to count the number of American flags at a specific event, or how many people wore colonial garb or chanted “USA, USA,” a discussion of the symbolic meanings conveyed by each of these, the common themes that were evident, and the ways in which they together created an overarching atmosphere and message at these events revealed a great deal about the public face of Tea Party discourse. As in the interview data, contradictions within and between the various events also shed light on points of contention and inconsistency in movement discourse. Chapter 4 shows the ways that the national identity rhetoric of the Tea Party that appeared in the interviews also

appeared in the public events examined in this dissertation. The findings shed further light on how the Tea Party characterized its own activism, its legitimacy, and its political adversaries while presenting the movement's message to the public.

Content Analysis

Chapter 5 of this dissertation is a content analysis comparing news coverage of Tea Party protests with coverage of other major protest events from the last decade, to determine whether and how Tea Party coverage may have differed from that of other movements. In Chapter 1, I argued that the national identity discourse of the Tea Party would be related to news coverage of the movement, and specifically that coverage of Tea Party protests would echo and amplify the national themes while downplaying the more critical paradigms typically employed to cover protests. In this sense, both the interview and participant observation data informed the content analysis by providing an understanding of the ways in which Tea Party members invoked the nation, which may in turn have affected news content. In particular, the experience of attending Tea Party events helped me to operationalize national identity concepts for the content analysis by giving me a first-hand sense of a Tea Party rally. The inclusion of a content analysis in this research design also informed the other two methods. For example, in part because I planned to examine news coverage of the Tea Party, questions about perceptions of media were included in the interviews with Tea Party members. Likewise, my interest in the relationship between movement discourse and news coverage also affected my observations at Tea Party events, as I often found myself examining these events with an eye toward how various aspects might be covered in news content. Thus, the content analysis research informed—and was informed by—the other two methods.

Content analysis is well-suited for the discovery of trends across large bodies of texts by uncovering their symbolic meanings in a replicable, quantifiable way (Krippendorff, 1980; Neuendorf, 2002). When paired with other methods, as it was in this dissertation, content analysis can be very useful in determining how media content is related to external conditions (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). Thus, this method was an ideal one for empirically testing my hypotheses about Tea Party coverage across a large number of texts, providing consistent metrics for evaluating this coverage in comparison to other major protest events, and in so doing served as an initial test of my theoretical argument that pro-nation themes in Tea Party discourse are in fact related to substantially different coverage of this movement than the scholarship about protest coverage might anticipate. The content analysis measured the frequency of major themes from the protest and nuisance paradigms, as well as invocations of the nation or national symbols and narratives in coverage. It examined manifest differences in news coverage between the Tea Party and other protest groups.

News Content

The content analysis focused on protest coverage from five major news outlets—three cable news networks and two newspapers. Cable news networks have become an increasingly popular and important source of news for Americans in the 21st century (Pew Research Center, 2010), and are particularly noteworthy in the context of this project. Fox News is the most popular and most conservative of the cable news networks (Bennett, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2010), and has been accused by critics of actively promoting the Tea Party and its events. Further, this network was, at the time encompassed by the analytical frame of this dissertation, the home of Glenn Beck, an important figure to the Tea Party movement who, according to contemporary polls, was a news source for over 75% of Tea Party members (Pew Research

Center, 2010). Because of the success of Fox News, other networks have begun to imitate it in terms of both content and style (McPherson, 2008), making this network essential to any research that seeks to understand media discourse about the Tea Party.

Alongside Fox News, this dissertation examined content on MSNBC, which is seen as the more liberal of the cable news networks, and thus was likely to be more critical of the Tea Party movement. If more typical protest content (i.e. protest or nuisance paradigm coverage) about the Tea Party was to be found anywhere, it was more likely to appear here than on any of the other cable news networks. Finally, the sample also included CNN, which is seen as the most neutral of the major cable news networks, and thus was useful as a point of comparison (Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Bradley, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008). Analysis included both news programs and opinion content from these three networks, thus allowing me to capture a wide spectrum of discourse in this increasingly important news venue.

Analyzing cable news alone, however, would have provided only a limited view of news content about the Tea Party. As important as cable news has become, print journalism continues to be a staple of the U.S. news environment, and is still an important influence on other news media, including television and the internet (Atwater, Fico & Pizante, 1987; Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2009). Further, even in the face of declining circulation figures, newspapers continue to outperform network television news as a daily source for American news consumers (Pew Research Center, 2010). As such, to gain a more complete picture of Tea Party news coverage, this dissertation examined content from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. These papers were selected for several reasons. First, they are large circulation papers—the third and fifth highest circulation papers in the United States, following the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and, in the case of the *Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* (Shea, 2010). Second,

both papers are considered leaders in the news business. The *New York Times*, widely considered the newspaper of record in the United States, is one of the most prestigious and influential newspapers in the world (Golan, 2006). The *Post* is the largest newspaper in the nation's capital, thus giving it a unique position in American politics. Both attract some of the best journalists in the country, as well as widely known opinion writers from across the political spectrum. Third, both provide content to other papers throughout the nation, making them a good proxy for gaining an understanding of newspaper content more broadly. These facts made the *Post* and the *Times* ideal choices for expanding the scope of this content analysis beyond the realm of cable news. As with the cable news programming, the analysis of these newspapers included both news reporting and staff-generated opinion content.⁸

Two cases were used to compare Tea Party coverage to that of other protest events. These were the 2003 protests against the war in Iraq and the immigration rallies of 2006. These events represent some of the largest protest movements in the decade during which the Tea Party began and both garnered considerable media coverage, making them good cases to assess how large protests other than the Tea Party have been covered in 21st century news. Additionally, there are several commonalities among the three. For example, each protest was a significant, nationally publicized and reported event that arose from intense political debate and had real policy implications. Each was part of a broader protest movement, and each was a moment when protest participation, news coverage, and public attention were all peaking. To make comparisons between events as analogous as possible, this dissertation examined the universe of relevant coverage in the selected news outlets surrounding three specific events from these

⁸ Content not generated by journalists, such as letters to the editor, were not included in analysis. Such content is qualitatively different, in that it derives from sources outside the news organization and does not follow the conventions of journalistic writing. As such, it cannot necessarily be seen as representative of the news organization's depiction of a protest, and may be perceived differently by readers.

movements: the first Tea Party events held on “Tax Day,” April 15, 2009; the national day of protest for immigration rights that took place on April 10, 2006; and the global day of protest⁹ against the potential U.S. invasion of Iraq on February 15, 2003. This allowed me to speak with confidence about the news discourse surrounding these events in the five selected outlets.

Content from a month-long period surrounding each key event was drawn from the Nexis database using the search terms Tea Party/Immigration/Iraq AND (Protest OR Protestors OR Rally OR Rallies).¹⁰ All content about the selected protests was included in the body of texts that were content analyzed, with any coverage appearing as soon as two weeks before the demonstrations and continuing up to two weeks after their conclusion. All content was screened for relevance, with programs or articles not dealing substantively with one of the three major protests eliminated from the sample.¹¹ Notably, Nexis did not provide the same amount of content for each network. MSNBC and Fox News programming were available only between 5 p.m. and 11 p.m., a part of their schedules characterized primarily by analysis and opinion, whereas CNN content was available between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. and included both news reporting and analysis. It should further be noted that some programs in the database were divided into segments, while others (especially panel discussion style shows on MSNBC and FOX) had no substantive segment differentiation, with the same collection of speakers

⁹ To make the analytical frames for each event as comparable as possible, only coverage discussing protests in the United States was included in this analysis.

¹⁰ During the research, a concern arose that this search string might not satisfactorily capture news discourse about the Tea Party Tax Day protests. To assess the effectiveness of my initial search, I searched Nexis again, substituting the terms “Tax Day,” “tax OR taxes” and “April 15” for the term “Tea Party.” The search yielded only five news stories not already in my data set that had any substantive discussion of the Tax Day protests. Of these, only one story had the demonstrations as its central focus. Thus, while these few articles were not included in my analysis, I am confident that my approach to collecting news texts was highly effective overall.

¹¹ For print content, any article that mentioned one of the protests in the headline or first four paragraphs was retained. Any article not mentioning the protest in one of these places was read in its entirety, and kept or discarded on the basis of whether or not it included anything more than a passing mention of one of the protests, a judgment I made for each article. For broadcast content, any news programming containing at least three sentences about one of the protest events was retained. This screening was done by a coding assistant. Afterwards, I examined a randomly selected 20 percent of the content that the assistant eliminated from the sample, and found the work to be within the aforementioned parameters in 95 percent of cases.

discussing the same topic for the duration of the program. This required recombining some segments into single programs to allow units of analysis to be as analogous as possible. As such, inferences about inter-network differences must be undertaken carefully, especially when comparing the content of CNN to the other networks.¹² All together, 451 programs or articles were included. The numbers per protest are summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Number of Programs or Articles Analyzed from Each News Source

	Iraq	Immigration	Tea Party
CNN	51	71	22
MSNBC	11	16	17
Fox News	22	37	35
<i>New York Times</i>	31	31	6
<i>Washington Post</i>	20	70	11
<i>Total</i>	135	225	91

The Codebook

The variables of focus for the content analysis were drawn from three thematic categories: the protest paradigm, the nuisance paradigm, and national identity discourse. Data were collected at the level of the statement, defined as an uninterrupted period of speech or writing by a single speaker. Only statements pertaining to one or more of the three major categories of variables were coded, but any article or program which contained no relevant statement was also recorded in the data.

¹² In addition to the difference in hours available between CNN and the other two networks, it should also be mentioned that the programs on CNN varied much more length—whereas most programs on FOX and MSNBC were an hour long, CNN programming ranged from 30 minutes to up to four hours. However, because these longer programs often dealt with a greater variety of subjects, it is not necessarily the case that the longer CNN programs contained any more content about the protests under study here. This does, however, further complicate comparisons across networks.

The first group of variables was derived from scholarship on the protest paradigm of news coverage. These variables focused on journalistic depictions of protest as deviant or out of the mainstream in various ways. Separate variables coded for depictions of protestors as younger or older than average, as racially divergent from the general population, as unusual looking, or as ideologically radical (e.g. anarchists, communists, or racists) by coding for specific descriptions of protestors' appearance or political positions (Dardis, 2006; Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1992). Variables in this domain also captured mentions of deviant behavior, both legal and illegal. Specifically, one variable coded for discussion of violence, another for destruction of property and other crimes, and a third for counter-normative or unusual (but legal) protest tactics (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Brasted, 2005). Finally, these variables captured claims that the ideas driving protests were unpopular. One coded for statements suggesting there was a social consensus that opposes protestors' beliefs. Another captured statements suggesting that the protests were somehow inauthentic or fabricated (e.g., suggestions a protest is "Astroturf," or artificially staged grassroots), and a third captured journalistic expressions of skepticism about protestors' beliefs through the use of quotation marks around non-speech items, e.g. "animal rights," in print content (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Simonson, 2001). In sum, these variables served to capture depictions of protestors as outside of mainstream culture or social and ideological consensus in America.

The second group of variables was derived from my research on the public nuisance paradigm (Di Cicco, 2010). These variables captured claims or implications that people found the protests annoying or bothersome. This included a variable for direct statements claiming irritation resulted from a protest, as well as specific variables capturing statements claiming that a protest disrupted traffic, was harmful to business, resulted in public expense, or was

excessively noisy or party-like. This class of variables also included a code to capture any statements in news that described protests as unpatriotic or anti-American and a variable coding for statements claiming a protest to be harmful to the nation (e.g. statements suggesting they were bad for troop morale or gave aid and comfort to America's enemies). Finally, a variable captured statements implying that protests had no effect or were simply ignored. This included any remarks suggesting a lack of impact on policy or public opinion, or any statements explicitly suggesting that protestors were ignored. In short, these variables served to capture depictions of protest as a valueless irritation.

The final class of theoretically driven variables captured invocations of national identity, American mythology and symbols, and descriptions of protestors as patriotic—all claims which would be directly in opposition to the lack of patriotism suggested by the nuisance paradigm, and as such would cast protests as more valuable or worthwhile than one which was covered primarily using nuisance paradigm themes. This included a variable capturing statements directly suggesting patriotism or love of America on the part of the protestors. It also includes a variable coding for any references to American mythology or historical figures in the context of a protest, such as references to the Founding Fathers, the framing of the Constitution, the Revolutionary War, or war heroes from other American wars. This class of variables also included a code for any statements that mentioned symbolic acts of patriotism not explicitly linked to historical narratives or figures, such as protestors reading the Constitution, displaying the flag, or singing patriotic songs at a demonstration. Another variable captured descriptions of protests or protestors as “American.” This included claims that protesting is an American thing to do (e.g., “This is just what Americans do when the country goes to war”) or simply the use of the term

“Americans” to describe protestors. In other words, these variables captured depictions of protest as an American or patriotic act.

In addition to these three thematic groups of variables, a few other variables coded for identifying information about each statement and the program or article in which it appeared. These variables included the news source, date, protest, and information about the speaker making the coded statement. Speakers were classified on the basis of their role (e.g. journalist, protest participant, political decision maker), as well as their partisanship (if mentioned) and whether they were opposed to the goals sought by protestors. The complete conceptual and operational definitions for each variable used in this study are provided in Appendix B.

The complexity of this analysis required that a hand-coding approach, rather than consideration of a computer coding approach, be employed to ensure all variables were captured in a valid fashion (see Shapiro, 2009). After several iterations, two people conducted an intercoder reliability test, coding an overlapping 10 percent of the content. The subset of content used for this reliability test was selected using a systematic random sample, collecting every k th case, with k being determined by the number of programs or articles each news source had published or broadcast about each protest, thus ensuring that every protest and network was represented proportionately. Coders identified a total of 337 codeable statements and agreed on 84 percent of those statements ($n=283$). Within agreed-upon statements, all variables achieved a high level of reliability, with Scott's π scores ranging from 1, indicating perfect reliability, to .89 (the “speaker” variable). None of the protest paradigm, nuisance paradigm, or national discourse variables achieved a reliability score below .93. The reliability for these variables, then, was well within the acceptable range (Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005).

The Analysis

After coding all content, the results were entered into SPSS, a statistical analysis program that enabled examination of differences between the three protests in terms of the three styles of protest coverage. Then, two datasets were created. The first was comprised of the original coding at the statement level. For the second, the data were aggregated using the program or article as a collective variable, providing a total number of each type of statement appearing within each individual news show or article. This allowed for the transformation of nominal-level data into ratio level data, and the comparison of mean occurrences of each type of statement per program or article, across the three different domains of protest. Creating two separate datasets allowed me to make inferences on two levels: the first, using statements as the unit of analysis, allowed me to delve into who the speakers were that made coded statements in different contexts, while the second allowed for comparing programs and articles as the unit of analysis both within and across networks or across protests to examine overall patterns of discourse. This coding scheme allowed me to draw solid conclusions about the coverage of the Tea Party movement as compared to the other two protest events.

Concluding Thoughts

Taken together, these three methods provided an in-depth picture of Tea Party discourse. Interviews provided a first-person look at the Tea Party. Participant analysis allowed me to examine how the themes of Tea Party discourse emerged in major public events. Finally, the content analysis provided insight into how and to what extent these themes appeared in news content, and whether this content differed from other major protests in the same decade. These three methodological approaches informed one another at each stage of the process, and also

served to validate findings across methods. This approach did not allow me to empirically test a causal connection between the national identity discourse of the Tea Party and news coverage of the movement, but it provided a strong basis for gaining insight regarding whether such a connection may exist. In doing so, it also shed light on the phenomenon of conservative protest more generally, and the means by which some protest groups might be able to influence media content of their movements.

Chapter 3

National Themes and Legitimacy in Tea Party Discourse

The Tea Party movement was permeated with the language of national identity from its inception. Leaders and spokespeople depicted it as a movement of, by, and for the American people, aligned with national values, and a direct descendent of important moments in U.S. history. For example at one of the first “Tax Day” events in 2009, Mark Meckler, co-founder of Tea Party Patriots, one of the largest national Tea Party organizations with chapters in all 50 states, brought his daughter to the stage to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and led the crowd in a chant of “USA” (Harrington Report, 2009). Later that year, in a fundraising message to supporters, Congresswoman—and current Tea Party Caucus Leader—Michele Bachman said the Washington D.C. Tea Party protest consisted of “thousands of American people—moms, dads, grandparents all united by a love of what makes America great” and declared “It was about the American people and what mainstream America believes and supports and wants from their Congress” (Kleefeld, 2009, November 5). Sarah Palin, a regular speaker on the Tea Party Express bus tours that crisscrossed the country in 2009 and 2010, said: “The soul of this movement is the people—everyday Americans who grow our food and run our small businesses, and teach our kids, and fight our wars” (Falcone, 2010, September 21). Pronouncements such as these depicted the Tea Party as one made up of true Americans—people from all walks of life, getting involved in politics for the sake of their beloved nation.

The message resonated: By the end of the following year, the movement was a political force. This diffuse movement made up largely of first time activists (see Sorock & Stolte, 2010) helped propel numerous political candidates, many of whom were equally inexperienced, into congressional office and also influenced many local races (*The New York Times*, “How the Tea

Party Fared,” 2010). Public discourses are key to understanding why movements succeed or fail, and the communications of successful movements merit close inspection by scholars interested in participatory politics. How leaders frame their messages and the cultural symbols upon which they draw are essential components in creating consensus among movement members, capturing attention from the media, and attracting support from potential constituents (Gamson, 1988; Tarrow, 1994). The success of the Tea Party movement, then, raised potentially important questions about the ways in which national identity themes and narratives functioned in Tea Party discourse during its rise.

Additionally, given the tendency among conservatives to eschew protest as a strategy of political engagement, the Tea Party provided an opportunity to explore both the nature and origins of an unusual phenomenon—a conservative social movement. Doing so may elucidate the circumstances under which conservatives become active in this milieu and shed light on how they might reconcile suspicion about the idea of protest with taking part in activities that some might describe as protest. As the largest conservative social movement in recent memory, the Tea Party is an ideal case for an examination of how conservatives describe, define, and justify a form of political action to which they are not accustomed, and the ways in which national identity relates to their participation. This chapter is the first of two focusing on the discourse of the Tea Party movement, and explores the use of national narratives, symbols, and themes in a conservative social movement.

Research Questions and Procedures

I expected the narratives, themes, and symbols of America and its history to feature prominently in the discourse of Tea Party members. To examine this supposition, I conducted

qualitative interviews with people engaged in the Tea Party movement. An emphasis on national identity in their words would serve to link their activities to a cherished identity shared by virtually every citizen of the nation. There are a variety of ways which I thought this might manifest. For example, I expected participants might link the Tea Party to important figures and events in the nation's history and to depict the Tea Party as the defender of America's traditions and values. Claims such as these were likely to be present across the movement's discourse, but I was particularly interested in understanding how national identity themes were employed in three broad and crucial areas, each of which corresponds to a section of this chapter. The ideas explored in each section are interconnected by the overarching focus on national identity language, and I discuss each in turn.

The first section explores the ways that Tea Party members defined and constructed the membership of the movement, or put simply, how they described who they are. All institutions, including social movements, must convince those they seek to represent of their *legitimacy*—that is to say, they must convince their potential constituents that they authentically represent them and their interests (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). In the case of the Tea Party, it seemed likely that members would have sought to represent themselves as ordinary, average, or “real” Americans, thus employing national identity to appeal to the widest swath of people possible. Many social movements have sought to represent the interests of specific sectors of the population (e.g. labor, women's rights, civil rights), and in doing so potentially circumscribed the types of people to whom the movement might appeal, but a movement that claimed to represent Americans in general could have the potential to appeal to nearly any citizen of the nation, a fact which could go far in explaining the rapid success of the Tea Party movement. In addition, I expected to see opponents of the Tea Party cast as illegitimate through suggestions that they are not “true”

Americans in some sense. My first research question (RQ1), then, asked: Did Tea Party members employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how?

The second section explored the ways in which Tea Party members explained the *motivations* driving their action and the movement more broadly. In simple terms, this part of the chapter examined why Tea Party members said they were involved with the movement. I argued in Chapter 1 that conservatives, because of traits that are deeply embedded in the conservative mindset, may be less likely to become involved in collective political actions in general and protests in particular. If this is so, it raises questions as to the circumstances under which they do become involved, or, put differently, what motivates conservatives to join a social movement. It was my expectation that central to these motivations would be the idea that Tea Party members became politically engaged for what they see as the good of the nation. In keeping with conservative proclivities toward the status quo (Defronzo, 2011; Jost et al., 2003), I anticipated seeing motivations described in terms of a desire to return to some better time in America's history, or otherwise restore traditional qualities from America's past. My second research question (RQ2) asked: Did Tea Party members employ national themes, narratives, and symbols to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how?

Similarly, because of conservative disapproval of the notion of protest, I expected that Tea Party members would be uncomfortable with the idea of participating in a protest movement and thus would be likely to describe and define the movement in differing terms. The third section of this chapter examined the way Tea Party members defined the *behaviors* of the Tea Party movement, or in more simple terms, how they described what they were doing. My expectation was that interviewees would describe the movement as something that, unlike protest

in their eyes, was helpful or beneficial to America. Since conservatives tend to see protest as detrimental and perhaps even dangerous to society, it would make sense for Tea Party activists to describe their actions in terms that they see as more appealing. In line with these expectations, I expected Tea Party behaviors might be defined as providing important information to voters or spreading “real” American values. My third research question (RQ3) therefore asked: Did Tea Party members employ national themes, symbols, and narratives to describe and define the behavior and actions of the movement? If so, how?

To address these research questions, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 35 Tea Party participants in 15 states, including ordinary members, leaders of local groups, a coordinator from one of the largest national Tea Party organizations, and two individuals who worked on campaigns for Tea Party-affiliated candidates seeking national office. These individuals were recruited purposively, either through face-to-face interactions at Tea Party events or using targeted internet searches, to build a corpus that provided insight into many facets of the movement. As discussed in Chapter 2, the interviewees roughly aligned with the demographic characteristics of the Tea Party movement. All individuals were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and anonymity.

Notably, the interviews did not include questions that inquired directly into ideas of national identity or patriotism. When these topics arose, they did so because the individuals raised them of their own volition. Interviewees were asked questions from a battery of open-ended items that inquired into several general topics. For example, they were asked about how and why they became involved in the Tea Party movement (e.g., “Tell me about your first experience with the Tea Party”) and what activities they were involved with (e.g., “Since you got involved with the Tea Party, what have been some of the ways you’ve participated in it?”). Other

items inquired about perceptions of the effectiveness of Tea Party movement and its place in history (e.g., “Is the Tea Party being effective?” and “Is the Tea Party like things that have happened before, or is it something new?”) and their views on the relationship between the Tea Party and media (e.g., “Can the Tea Party get its message out in the media?”). These questions were constructed to provide interview participants the opportunity to describe the movement in their terms and to talk about the aspects of the Tea Party and its engagement that were most important to them, thus providing a high level of validity to the findings discussed here.

This chapter analyzes the 27 transcripts that resulted from these interviews, seeking to identify major themes among Tea Party participants.¹³ In approaching these transcripts, thematic categories were developed inductively through an open-coding approach to the texts. Codes were defined and focused iteratively over the course of this process. After an initial reading of all the transcripts, the emergent codes were refined and in some cases combined on the basis of theoretical overlap, so as to eliminate redundancy and maximize clarity. The final list of codes was then used consistently across all texts in a second round of coding.¹⁴ I turn now to the findings derived from this process.

The Construction of Legitimacy

All organizations and leaders must prove their legitimacy to would-be constituents—that is, they must convince stakeholders that they authentically and credibly represent them. In other words, organizations and leaders must show constituents that they a) understand and seek to promote their interests and values, and b) are similar to their intended constituents. Just as

¹³ Because a few interviews were conducted in pairs or small groups, the number of transcripts analyzed is smaller than the total number of people interviewed.

¹⁴ More details on the methodology can be found in Chapter 2, and the questionnaires used in these interviews are found in Appendix A.

political parties and politicians go to great lengths to make themselves relatable to voters, so must social movements demonstrate that they are of the people for whom they claim to speak. The Tea Party claimed to speak for America generically, and thus was tasked with convincing the public that they were made up of “real” Americans. National identity discourse is an important part of achieving this purpose, casting Tea Party members as ordinary citizens and loyal patriots. The following section shows that interviewees emphasized national imagery in constructing the legitimacy of their movement. This analysis was guided by my first research question (RQ1): Did Tea Party members employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how?

Three primary themes about legitimacy emerged in the interviews, some of which had multiple variants. All three themes cast the Tea Party as representative of the American people. The first of these was the argument that the Tea Party was made up of people who are *patriotic*—that is to say, members of the Tea Party were described as having a deep love and enthusiasm for their nation. Second, Tea Party members frequently suggested that they or participants in the movement were *everyday Americans*. That is to say, they described the Tea Party as reflecting the “average” American in terms of beliefs or demographics. This theme also included claims that the movement was non-political, somehow above or disconnected from partisan politics. Finally, interviewees *delegitimized opponents* of the Tea Party by describing political adversaries as unrepresentative of the American people, by frequently suggesting their beliefs or actions ran counter to the norms and values cherished by Americans, or by comparing opponents to historical enemies of the nation. I discuss each of these in subsections.

Patriotism

Tea Party members whom I interviewed frequently said explicitly that they or the movement in general were patriotic. They also made frequent patriotic declarations, expressing their love for the United States. Given the strong attachment that many Americans feel for their nation, such statements are a first step in establishing an image of the Tea Party as a mainstream American phenomenon. Statements indicating a love for America were found in over a third of all transcripts, making them quite common. For example, Archie, a Tea Party member from rural Oregon, said: “These people are just like myself. . . . *They’re patriots, they love their country*, they love our constitution, and they don’t like the current regime.” Similarly, Janel, a 40-year old Tea Party activist from Massachusetts, described an event hosted by her group as follows: “We did another event on July 4th of 2009 that had. . . kind of a more positive spin to it in terms of speakers talking about, obviously, Independence Day and *there was a lot of patriotism involved*.” Dorris, an activist in California who authored a book about the movement and travels around the state giving presentations on the Tea Party, describes Tea Party members thusly: “I based the book upon telling the stories of about 25 patriots that I met through the Internet and over the phone from across the country.” For Dorris, “patriots” appears to be a term which was interchangeable with “Tea Party members,” and the use of the word “patriot” in this manner was not exclusive to her. Such usage suggests that the idea of patriotism was deeply infused in the Tea Party identity.

The notion of Tea Party members as patriots wasn’t just a label, either. Interviewees frequently emphasized the depth of their love for America. Andrew, a Wall Street businessman who lives in Manhattan, described the sacrifices of Tea Party members for their country:

There is a lot of passion, a lot of people care. . . I mean, I admire. . . I actually have a major thing for these people. *They give everything that they can give. They’re passionate.*

They love their county. They're all working like me, long, long hours. And they give everything up.

Matt expressed a deep sense of patriotism in describing his excitement at the beginning of the Tea Party movement, after the famous "Santelli rant" in February 2009:

There was a groundswell, you know it was almost like the feeling for a Super Bowl, but this time everybody was involved, it wasn't just the local city where the home team was involved, *the home team was America*, and there was just a feeling that was pervasive.

There are many more examples of this theme, but perhaps the most succinct comes from Dorothy, a self-described former "Goldwater girl" who ran a small river-rafting business in Arizona. She expressed her personal love of country by calling America "the jewel of the world," and said: "There's no place like America. There's just no place like us." Patriotism, then, was a common theme in Tea Party discourse, as interviewees frequently characterized themselves as patriots, expressed love for their nation, and described the sacrifices that movement participants make because of that love. Such statements were foundational to Tea Party notions of legitimacy.

Everyday Americans

The second theme in movement discourse that cast the Tea Party as representative of the American people was the idea that Tea Party members are normal, everyday Americans, not on-the-fringe protestors. This occurred through three primary means: characterization of the Tea Party as mainstream, rejection of radicalism, and descriptions of the Tea Party as non-political. Across the body of transcripts, every interview included one of these kinds of claims in some form. Many participants said so explicitly, describing Tea Party members as "normal," "average" or "regular" people. Sarah, a Washington state-based Tea Party activist who works full time for one of the large national Tea Party organizations, put it thusly: "I think we're just doing what we can, you know, *just regular people doing what they can* in their free time." Dorris said: "*These*

are just average Americans that were sick and tired of both parties spending money like it was water,” and Martha, an activist I met at anti-immigration protest in Arizona, told me: “I think the Tea Party is *mainstream America*.” Mack, who serves on the Republican Party executive board for the state of Michigan, describes being at a Tea Party event with his family, further cementing this image by showing him to be a family man: “There *were just everyday normal people that were speaking*. We all showed up with signs and I had my grandkids and my son with me.” Others also pointed to family roles in describing Tea Party members, and three others specifically described people as grandparents, thus situating Tea Party members within families, one of the most respected and cherished institutions in America. Numerous Tea Party members, then, explicitly claimed that the movement was made up of everyday, mainstream people.

This theme also manifested in more subtle ways, such as claims that Tea Party members were not radicals or extremists. Several interviewees mentioned that their beliefs were not unusual, often rejecting specific deviant belief systems such as racism that some critics had attributed to the Tea Party, or discounting claims that the Tea Party was made up of radicals more generally. Mack, for example, said: “*I am not an extremist*. People know that. I’m *not some right-wing radical* that’s going to go shoot a bunch of people, that’s not me.” Dorothy echoed these sentiments, saying: “I don’t think you’ll perceive me as being a *radical* or a *racist*.” Statements like this appeared even alongside other statements which could be seen as quite radical. Take for example an excerpt from an interview with Archie, a Tea Party member from rural Oregon who characterized the movement in this way: “We’re at war. That’s what the Tea Party is about. *We don’t want to get radical*.” Thus, even when making fairly radical claims, several Tea Party members insisted upon being within the mainstream.

More specifically, over half of the people with whom I spoke disavowed racism. Thea, who I met at the same Independence Day Tea Party event as Archie, described her feelings in this way: “The race thing, oh my God.... *Racism kills me. I’m not a racist.*” Similarly, Barb, a Port Commissioner in a small town on the Oregon coast, responded to charges of racism in this way: “That’s bunk.... *This is not about race*, that’s been our stand from the beginning.” Jack, a campaign manager for a Tea Party candidate for national office, was similarly forceful in his rejection of the notion that the Tea Party was motivated by racism:

Racism in the Tea Party is fabricated bullshit. As evidenced by [the speakers at a Tea Party event he organized]. I wish I had the list of speakers, but there were probably more African-American/Hispanics speaking than white guys. There were 15,000 people on the lakefront; if the Tea Party movement was a racist organization, I would suggest that the ones that are making those statements are in and of themselves racist.

Jack was one of three interviewees who claimed that opponents of the Tea Party were the racists. Such a discourse suggests that these interviewees saw themselves as mainstream.

A third means through which Tea Party members cast themselves as everyday Americans was by suggesting that the Tea Party was not a political entity. Many of my interviewees distanced themselves and their movement from politics. Sometimes, this was done explicitly, as in the case of the excerpts below:

Geoff: It’s not political.

Dorris: So, at the base, this is really deeper than a political fight.

Cameron: Well, here again you’re talking to a guy who’s not political.

Bonnie: You know, other Tea Party groups, as well as ours, felt that it wasn’t our job to be another political organization.

Often, the Tea Party members with whom I spoke sought to de-emphasize the politics inherent in their activism by distinguishing themselves from the major US political parties. Given the low-levels of approval that Americans of all political stripes feel toward the Republican and

Democratic parties (Pew Research Center, 2011), distancing the Tea Party from both of them could contribute much to the Tea Party's legitimacy.

The vast majority of interviews included such claims, even in several cases in which the interviewee was actively involved with their local Republican Party. Gary, an insurance agent and former Marine Corps member from California, described his first Tea Party event as follows: "It was held at the local Republican Party headquarters. But, it was made clear from the very beginning that *this was a non-partisan issue* and that they were using the space but *it wasn't an official party event.*" Another example came from Bob:

We're not partisan, we're not saying you have to be a Democrat or a Republican or Libertarian or anything, *it's a community movement, not a movement of parties*, and we really fight that title and we, and I personally take a lot of time to make sure we don't get co-opted.

Over the course of our conversation, Bob mentioned the non-partisan nature of the Tea Party 10 times, suggesting that this was very important to him.

Along similar lines, about half of the transcripts featured at least one instance in which the interviewee brought up the idea that the Tea Party was not involved with social issues. Issues like abortion and gay rights have been divisive in recent years in American politics, often dominating debates between liberals and social conservatives. In emphasizing the absence of such issues from their agenda, Tea Party members further suggested that they were above "politics." Sarah and Jack both said the absence of social issues made the Tea Party a unifying force rather than a dividing one.

Sarah: [T]he thing is there are issues that divide us which are a lot of the social issues.... So we sort of came to a consensus that we should focus on the things that unite us, instead of divide us, and because there's already groups out there that tackle the social issues.¹⁵

¹⁵ Sarah was one interviewee who I contacted for member validation of these analyses. She mentioned that she herself had never seen the Tea Party as "above politics" so much as simply choosing not to engage in certain

Jack: [T]he single thread that I saw throughout the last year-and-a half, two years, was the emphasis on fiscal issues, and social issues not being part of the Tea Party movement agenda at all.

For some, social issues remained very important. Yet even they asserted that these issues were, at least officially, not part of the Tea Party movement. Angela said:

Now the reason why we don't include the social issues in the Tea Party group is because, you know, they are plenty of groups out there that are tackling the social issues and *we just decided to focus on those things that we could all agree on* and have the largest number, largest group in agreement on, around a certain issue. And me, I'm staunchly pro-life and I mean, adamantly, out protesting and picketing and all that kind of stuff for years on that.

Avoiding these issues, then, appeared to be a way to transcend intractable political debates and view the Tea Party as unifying, rather than dividing, Americans. Even though many Tea Party members were concerned with these issues, emphasizing those issues they “could all agree on” was seen as more important for the movement.

Finally, Tea Party members cast themselves as non-political by emphasizing a lack of political experience on the part of their members. Since most Americans are not very involved in politics, such assertions bolstered the image of Tea Party members as average Americans. Examples of this abounded in the transcripts, again appearing in the majority of interviews. Interviewees described their previous participation in politics as follows:

Rex: Absolutely zero. Only thing I ever did was went to the voting booth and voted.

Roy: Not at all, I had no, I had done absolutely nothing. I had zero involvement in politics until this all started and now my Congressman's office knows me by first name.

Bob: Never. Other than being a voter and yelling at the TV. [...] Right, no, I have never been actively involved with any political organizations in the past.

“political battles.” Even so, her remarks contributed to an overall impression that Tea Party members see themselves as outside of or different from “politics” as the term is typically conceived in American culture.

Those with political experience pointed out that they were the exceptions to the rule among Tea Partiers. Jack, a seasoned political organizer, described his events thusly:

Every event that I did, whether it was the 300 people that showed up in Balsam Lake or the 16,000 that were at the tax-payer tea party on the lakefront of Milwaukee in September of 2009, I always ask the question, *raise your hand if this is the first time that you've done, that you've participated in the political process. Seventy to eighty percent of the hands always went up.* Always. Every single event.

Angela, another experienced activist, made the link between a lack of political experience and being an everyday American most explicit: “That is what’s so neat about this group of people, it’s that these are just average, ordinary people who had absolutely no interest in politics in the past.” This emphasis on a lack of political experience did much to create an impression of the movement as “average, ordinary people.”

Opponents

The flip-side to Tea Party claims of representing patriotic, everyday Americans was the explicit claim, made by many interviewees, that those who opposed the Tea Party did *not* represent America, and were in fact opposed to the values that Americans cherish. Such claims served to position the Tea Party as the guardian of national values and thus to further align them with national identity. About half of the interviews contained at least one instance in which Tea Party opponents were de-legitimized. Most commonly, this occurred through claims that the political adversaries of the movement were ideological deviants of some kind, typically socialists, communists, or just “radicals.” Dorris, for example, said this:

The Obama administration and the progressive Left are committed Socialists and Marxists by ideology and because of that commitment they are out to destroy free market capitalism and our American constitutional republic and literally to transform this country, this culture into a socialist utopia where they will be in charge and tell the rest of the little people what to do, what to think, and what to eat.... Anybody that is standing up for the truth, for common sense, for traditional American values based upon the Constitution, we are the enemy to the Left.

Dorris was the most likely to make such claims, doing so a dozen times over the course of our conversation.

But she was certainly not the only one. Ed drew this distinction between the Tea Party and union activists protesting in Wisconsin:

At a Tea Party rally, you never see any racist signs or any Hitler signs or any of that sort of stuff. What you always see [at liberal protests], like what's happening back in Wisconsin right now, is *people running around with signs saying that the governor is Hitler and having a swastika and all that*, even though it's garbage. The Democrat senator from Massachusetts, in a speech yesterday, *he told the union organizers to go out in the street and draw blood*. You would never hear that from a Tea Party person.

Stephanie, a human resources consultant from Utah, described how environmental concerns were being exploited by radicals: "I feel like the Communists have gone from being Communist to now moving under the Green movement." Similarly, Ellen, an activist whom I met at an anti-immigration protest in Arizona, described what she saw as a radical takeover of the government: "The longhaired hippies have put on suits and ties and they're now running Washington." Archie went one step further, cueing national identity explicitly by suggesting that the Obama administration was "like the British before the Revolutionary War." In addition to constructing themselves as everyday patriotic Americans, then, the Tea Party members whom I interviewed sought to cast their opponents as the opposite.

In toto, the findings in this section suggest that national identity discourse was important in how Tea Party members constructed their legitimacy. The people with whom I spoke frequently declared their enthusiastic embrace of patriotism, positioning themselves as true Americans. Further, the Tea Party members depicted themselves as everyday citizens of the nation, emphasizing their mainstream beliefs, lack of connection to political parties and divisive social issues, and lack of experience with activism. In doing so, they cast themselves as ordinary Americans, and therefore capable of representing other ordinary Americans. Finally, these

individuals sought to delegitimize their political opponents, casting them as disloyal to or unrepresentative of the nation. The message was clear: to support the Tea Party was to love America and to be American. In the next section, I turn to the ways in which Tea Party members employed national identity discourse to describe their motivations.

Motivations for Engagement

If Tea Party members were indeed made up primarily of first-time activists, average Americans who had never been involved in politics, as some polls suggested (see Sorock & Stolte, 2010), it raises the question of what motivated these individuals to become active. This is especially important in light of the tendency among conservatives to eschew this style of political participation. This section explores this question, showing that Tea Party members described their turn to activism as driven by concern for a nation that they saw as threatened. Specifically, my findings suggest that the motivations driving participation in the Tea Party could be classified into two, sometimes co-occurring, categories. The first was a *fear* that the nation was headed toward a bleak future from which it must be saved. Tea Party members demonstrated this perspective by describing an impending doom that they saw falling upon their beloved nation should the Tea Party fail to achieve its goals, providing an urgent rationale for action. Secondly, many interviewees described feelings of *loss* stemming from nostalgia for some bygone era of American history. This perspective was evinced by people's descriptions of a desire to return to a past that they saw as being characterized by greater freedom and better and more authentically American values. These two ideas were often expressed side-by-side, but I discuss each individually. I turn, then, to my second research question (RQ2): Did Tea Party members employ

national themes, narratives, and symbols to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how?

Fear for America

The majority of the Tea Party members with whom I spoke described an impending cataclysm or crisis that motivated their actions. For some, this scenario was so severe as to constitute an existential threat to the nation itself. Dorris was one such person:

I think it is driven by average Americans that have finally awoken and realized *the danger to our republic, the clear and present danger to our republic being presented to us by the progressive agenda. And we have to stop it.... This is a fight for the soul of America....* So, that is why this is such a foundational umm, the conversations that the nation is moving into now is as foundational as the debate for slavery and the debate about revolution.

Dorris explicitly compared the present moment to other times in the nation's history when its existence hung in the balance. Many others also saw the situation in this light. Cameron, a retired businessman from Arkansas who co-founded his local Tea Party group in 2009, described his motivations to become politically active in this way: "Cameron woke up and realized if he didn't do what he's doing right now and take on the accountability and responsibility for making changes, it ain't going to happen, and we're going to just see this country be lost." Similarly, Mack said of the 2012 presidential election: "Should Barack Obama get four more years, America will not be America. It's already becoming something that I never thought I'd see in my lifetime." A similar sentiment was expressed by Stephanie, who said: "They're looking the other way away from the Constitution, and that's going to lead us down a path that will destroy this country and everything that it stands for." Thus, for several of the interviewees, nothing less than the survival of the nation animated their involvement in the Tea Party.

Others expressed more specific concerns about the future, most of which could be classified as about finance or freedom, or both. Andrew, for example, described his state of mind about the national economic environment prior to getting involved with the Tea Party movement:

And then at one point... I was getting so depressed, I was reading news story after news story. And I was like, "Oh, my god..." *It was getting worse and worse.* And I was drinking almost every night... because I was like, I know what is going to happen. *Greece, what happened in Greece is going to happen here if not worse.....* I felt like Charlton Heston in *Soylent Green*, if you know the story. You know? I'm like, "Do you know what's happening?" And people were looking at me like, "What?" I'm like, *"The ship is sinking. This isn't the way to go."*

Andrew was not alone in seeing an economic collapse threatening the future of America.

Cameron described his motivations thusly:

We're headed into destruction, I mean it's, we stay on the same path we're on right now, *you can bet your bottom dollar that you may not have your bottom dollar 'cause it'll be wasted away and we'll be a debtor country,* and we'll have lost what, uh, what so many people have enjoyed for well over 200 years.

Ellen expressed similar concerns, saying: "So I'm very concerned about the country. I'm concerned about our children. I'm concerned about where I might be in 10 or 15 years. I may not have food to eat. And it appears the government is deliberately making an effort to make beggars of all of us." To these individuals, a seemingly likely economic collapse would destroy the American way of life, unless they intervened.

Other Tea Party members expressed fears about a future in which America ceased to be a free country. Ed was one such person. He said: "I can see the freedom of speech going. If we let things continue, we'll lose freedom of speech, we'll lose the right to keep and bear arms, we'll lose the right to peaceably assembly [sic]." Another was Angela, who expressed concerns about a United Nations program known as Agenda 21 which she feared would eliminate property rights:

Basically what Agenda 21 is all about is trying get people herded into high—high-density areas rather than, you know, what we have enjoyed here in America, especially with the Midwest having farms and all that kind of stuff. It's actually, they want us to be in these compact areas where we're using mass transit and, you know, *there's not a lot of opportunity for land ownership and uh, autonomy.... the government wants to have a little more control.*

Roy also expressed concerns about a dystopian future that he saw resulting from Agenda 21:

“It's a green movement, basically what they want to do is take away all your property rights, they want to take away, you know, it's like putting everybody into little boxes.... It's limiting your freedoms, its taking away all that stuff.” Several others were less specific, expressing concerns about an impending state of tyranny or just loss of liberties in general. For example, Andrew asked: “When does it stop? It's about lawlessness. And that leads to tyranny.” Thus, while dire economic predictions occurred more often, predictions about the loss of liberties contributed to Tea Party members' fears about the future. Whatever the specific concerns of any given interviewee, fear of the future often was a driving factor in motivating their involvement with the movement.

Loss of an Ideal Past

In keeping with conservative tendencies towards idealizing the past (Defronzo, 2011), Tea Party members frequently expressed nostalgia for a past in which they perceived liberty and true American values to have been ascendant. To them, a sense of loss related to this historic America and the accompanying way of life was a central factor in motivating their behaviors. Most of the Tea Party members with whom I spoke wanted to return to a version of America that they believed existed in the early days of the nation's history, or during some time to which they had a personal attachment, typically their childhood. What they felt had been lost could generally be characterized in terms of either values or freedoms. These individuals did not see eye-to-eye on what was lost or when things were better, but they shared a motivation to return to the lost

America they believed had existed in a previous era. Such a view appeared in roughly three-quarters of all transcripts.

The majority of Tea Party members who expressed a sense of loss as a motivating factor mentioned the American Revolutionary era as the period which inspired them most and from which they wished they could restore characteristics. These individuals described their goals and the goals of the movement broadly in terms of the Constitution and what they believed were the intentions of the Founding Fathers. Indeed, such references occurred more often than any other codes in this analysis, with invocations of the Constitution appearing in more than three-quarters of the transcripts, and often multiple times. What follows are just a few of these instances:

Martha: We want to restore our country, *we want to bring the Constitution back to the forefront*. We want our elected officials accountable to the Constitution.

Lettie: *Go back to the Founders, go back to the Constitution*. That's what the Tea Party is about.

Gary: We've gotten to the point in this country where so few people know what the Constitution says, they don't know if their politicians are living within it or not, and the reality is that they're not. And so, that's what got me involved in it....[T]he reality is now is that the government is unlimited, *we lived in a representative republic bound by a Constitution and under the rule of law, and that's not the case anymore*. We created, our Founders created a federal system where sovereignty was retained by the state and they joined a union without giving up their sovereignty, but today we have a national government. *And so the system isn't the system we were founded under and because of that, we are not, we do not have the liberties we had when the system was created, when the country was founded*.

Bob: In the long-term our goal should be *getting back our constitutional foundation* and the Bill of Rights.

Barb: Am I a part of the Republican Party? I'd say yes, but I want them to get back to their roots. They're way off. It's time to get back. *Let's get back to our constitutional roots*.

Dorris: *We want a return to our Constitution*, we want limited government, we want lower taxes and less regulation.

Some of the Tea Party members I interviewed drew direct connections between the Founders or the Revolution and the Tea Party movement. Gary, for example, said this:

If you go back to 1774 and 1775, they created the Committees of Correspondents, they being the patriots of the day. And different, um, different colonies, they had a Committee of Correspondents and they kept everybody up to date by writing letters back and forth. *And we do that today with the internet....* Samuel Adams was the leader of the Sons of Liberty. That was one group in Boston but one of many groups in Massachusetts, in Connecticut, in many other states there were other groups that had other names *but they were all fighting the same thing, and we're doing that today.*

Similarly, Archie asked us to consider these questions: “Who are our Founding Fathers and why did they establish a Constitution? Are we not in a similar boat?” Jack said “If I was more of a history person and I had the time, I would see what the comparisons are between what you’ve seen in the last year and a half to what happened in 1776.”

Not everyone I interviewed went back to the founding of the nation to locate an idealized America. Others had a more personal frame of reference. Dorothy, for example, expressed fears about the disappearance of what she called “The American spirit,” and described it thusly:

Freedom, liberty, the American West, the cowboy. Um, as a matter of fact, in some sort of interesting way, the cowboy really personifies the American experience to me. Maybe it’s because I’m a Westerner. I was born in California, I’ve lived in Arizona for over 30 years. *But the freedom of kind of living off the land, helping your neighbor, working to build something where there was nothing; that to me is the American spirit.*

For several others, the period they idealized was the America of their childhoods. Cameron, for example, contrasted the past with the present in this way: “For me when I grew up, I knew that there was all kinds of opportunities, and I, there wasn’t somebody always telling me what I couldn’t do. Really, it was ‘Cameron you can do anything you want to do.’ And that was true.”

Similarly, Roy looked back toward his memories of school, saying:

You used to be taught what it takes to be a good citizen and that’s exactly what citizenship is, you ask any of these people that have fought to become citizens in the United States, they’ll tell you. They’ll tell you just what it means to be a citizen and what a good civic-minded person should be like. *And that’s gone.*

Dorothy similarly recalled a time when education focused on what she saw as valuable:

That's why there's so many of us over 50. *It's because we, we're comparing what we remember when we grew up with what we see now. And I think we knew our history a little bit better. I think that schools... teachers taught the basics better in those days, we didn't have sex education in school, you know, we had American History. We had geology, geography. We came out of school knowing how to read and write and spell, and do the basic math. Um, our educational system has become so liberal now, that kids are being told what to think rather than taught how to think.*

Regardless of the era being idealized, then, there often was a belief that something important from America's history had been lost or was disappearing.

Interviewees, notably, were usually neither specific nor unified in their descriptions of what had been lost. Generally speaking, most responses could be described in terms of values, such as personal responsibility or civic-mindedness, and freedoms such as civil liberties, property rights, or just "liberties" generically that they felt needed to be restored. Often, these ideas were mentioned side-by-side. Here are three examples of Tea Party members describing freedoms they believe have been lost.

Gary: *One of the liberties that we've lost is capitalism. Since the turn of the century, the government has spread into business, and through regulations, and of the buying and purchasing of land, the owning of land, and more recently, the purchasing of industries we now compete with the government in several areas, and the government dictates how those businesses will operate. And so one of the liberties that we've lost is our economic liberty.*

Dorris: Liberty means to me the right to make my own decisions about my life; the right to decide where I want to live; the right to decide how much water I want to have in my toilet, what kind of light bulbs I want to have in my house; the right to read what I want to read; my right to get on the internet unimpeded, my right to assemble with whoever I want to, my right to say whatever it is I want to.

Martha: I saw that we were losing more of our liberties. That government was expanding at phenomenal rate, that government was taking over industries and everything and... So, I'm, I'm just very aware of what, of the corruption that is going on in Washington.... And I hope that um that the majority of us who are in America can take back the country.

All of these people expressed a sense that freedoms they once enjoyed, whether economic or civil, had been curtailed by the government.

Other interviewees were more concerned with value systems they saw as having been pushed aside. Stephanie, for example, was upset about decline of a religious outlook in America, which she believed was central to the early days of the nation:

But we need to recognize the fact that we were founded as a Judeo-Christian nation, and we gave credit to God and that is what gave our greatness to this country and recognizing that our rights come from God.... It is more and more about moving away from how this country was founded, and that's appalling. Because that's how we have the greatest country in the world, that's why we live in the greatest country in the world, is because in [the Founders'] wisdom, as they were guided by God, they created the document that we know as the Constitution.

Roy bemoaned the decline of individualism and civic-mindedness, describing a value system he said was “gone” in this way:

Be your own keeper. Don't depend on other people to get you to where you want to go.... You know, civics. You know, we didn't have welfare at one point in time; you know who filled the role of welfare before welfare existed? Your next-door neighbor and your churches. Those were the people that gave people that were down on their luck a meal, some money, or a part-time job.

Andrew also described a decline in what Roy might call civics, as he discussed a desire to return to a time in which the voting public was informed and engaged:

I would love to see America get back to what it is where, the people, the true people are running the country, and they care, and they take the time. And they care, and they see who their leaders are, and they understand that they are the boss and the politicians report up to them, not vice versa.

So, while interviewees did not all agree in their statements about what had been lost, there was a pervasive sense that something important about America had disappeared.

To sum, my interviews indicated that concerns about the state of the nation were central to the motivations of Tea Party members. The people with whom I spoke expressed either fears about a bleak future which faced the nation if changes weren't made, or a sense of loss stemming

from a belief that something important from America's past (usually either freedoms or values) had disappeared. Many individuals expressed both fear and loss, and every interview save one, a very short follow-up conversation with someone I had already interviewed, featured at least one of the two. For some, the level of distress they indicated resulted from perceptions that the very existence of the nation was threatened. Some even made direct comparisons between the Tea Party and those who fought for the nation's independence in the Revolutionary War. It is not difficult to see how someone holding such beliefs would feel motivated to get involved with a movement of some kind.

Definitions of Behavior

If conservatives find the notion of protest distasteful, yet are compelled to engage in social movement activities that sometimes closely resemble protesting, it would make sense that they would define their new actions in the civic arena as something other than protest. The Tea Party is involved in a variety of political strategies. Some of these are clearly distinct from protesting, such as fundraising, doorbelling, candidate-vetting, and participating in voter-turnout drives. Others, such as rallies and marches, are not. Thus, Tea Party members could define their movement in terms of protest if they wished to do so, but could also put forth other definitions. I expected that interviewees would reject the idea of protest entirely, and indeed, most of the Tea Party members I interviewed seemed uncomfortable with the concept of protest. When asked whether the Tea Party was a protest movement, many interviewees took long pauses, often punctuated with sighs, "ums" or other utterances that suggested consternation or discomfort. When they did answer, many spoke hesitantly, pausing between words as if struggling with the

idea of protest. Few other questions prompted such halting and awkward responses. Something intriguing was spurred by invoking the idea of protests.

Most interviewees ultimately rejected the concept of protest, and a few directly described feelings of discomfort with the notion, such as Dorris, who described her and her husband's trepidation about protesting:

We made some signs on our kitchen table the night before, and really weren't sure what to expect. My husband said at the time, *he was a Vietnam War veteran, who returned to protests and people in the streets with signs, and never thought in his life he would be one. So he really was a little bit nervous and not sure what to expect.*

Martha also expressed discomfort with the idea of being part of a movement:

Conservatives and Republicans... are not used to doing that. We're... we trust people. We don't throw the dirt. And we have to become more activist, you know, *and it's uncomfortable... it's uncomfortable for me and certainly my friends*, but, um, we've got to keep together and keep on top of the issues and discuss and watch.

Very few interviewees described the movement unequivocally as a protest, often seeking to define the concept of a protest in terms that would exclude their actions, and those who accepted the label usually did so with caveats.

In turn, given their proclivity toward an emphasis on national identity, it was my expectation that Tea Party members would likely define their behaviors in terms congruent with their strong attachment to America. The Tea Party members with whom I spoke defined their actions and those of the movement more broadly as aiding or improving the nation that they claimed to love so vigorously. The interviewees described a variety of activities in which they were involved as members of the Tea Party movement, but in general terms, they overwhelmingly described their behavior either as *education*, intended to inform Americans and help them make better political decisions, or as a *restoration*, aimed at returning America's true values to prominence. These ideas did not preclude one another—some described the Tea Party

as both education and restoration. Both characterize the movement as a force that seeks to better the nation for the benefit of all its citizens.

Education

By far the most common definition of Tea Party behaviors was education. Appearing in all but four interviews—and usually doing so multiple times—the interviewees’ applications of this definition suggested that Tea Party’s purpose was to raise awareness about issues and provide citizens with full and correct information so as to encourage them to make good political decisions. Taken at face value, few would view such behavior as anything but good for the nation: an informed electorate capable of engaging in a rational debate about the issues of the day is central to a democratic form of government (Calhoun, 1992). Thus, a social movement aiming to educate the citizenry was seen by many as helping Americans and bolstering the nation itself. In the discourse of Tea Party members, the definition of their behaviors as education thus was employed to frame their activities as something seen almost universally as positive. As the data will show, it also provided an alternative definition to protest and an opportunity to employ overt national identity symbols. It also provided opportunities to further suggest that the Tea Party was unifying Americans rather than dividing them.

It is noteworthy that the question that most often compelled interviewees to talk about the movement as educational was when they were asked whether the Tea Party was a protest movement. Some rejected the idea of protest outright, while others said the movement started as a protest, but later transitioned to another approach that was either more effective or morally upright. Here are some examples of such views:

Jim: I don’t think it’s protest as much as it is an educational effort.

Lettie: Number one, we’re educating people.

Geoff: It's more education [than a protest].

Bonnie: It started that way. Now we are for more like information.

Cameron: [W]e realized that this country was broke and broken, and one way we could really seriously contribute to it was to educate people. So, uh, we took the approach of trying to grow membership, as quickly as we possibly could and bring them into, uh, a full understanding through education and communication what the Constitution is about.

Whatever one might think of protest, education and spreading information are typically seen as leading to beneficial outcomes. Jack perhaps summarized this idea best: "The common goal is to educate the citizens on the fiscal issues, 'cause I think it was Thomas Jefferson who said that when people have the right information, they make the right decisions." Given conservative tendencies to disfavor and distrust protest, it made sense that Tea Party members would seek to redefine their actions as spreading awareness or information.

In addition, defining the Tea Party as an educational movement provided opportunities to connect to the idea of the nation and its treasured symbols and myths. Lettie, for example, described the purpose of her group's activities as "to educate people on the message of the Founders." Stephanie was another interviewee who rejected the notion of protest in favor of the Tea Party being involved in education, to correct what she perceived as shortcomings in contemporary curricula:

[W]e want our students to study the Constitution. We want them to understand what their rights are, and that's not happening. There's not enough focus on education, and I'm very wary of the curriculum that's being taught in this nation. I don't think that our students are accurately growing up understanding how this country was truly founded.

Malcom, a community college teacher, also invoked the founding of the nation: "What our Founders fought for was our right to govern ourselves, and you cannot do that if you're not educated, in the sense of understanding what our country is all about, understanding how the Constitution personally affects you." Grant, who worked in a leadership role for a Tea Party

aligned candidate for national office, described the movement in this way: “My impressions have been that there are Tea Party people that all they want to talk about is getting back to the Founding Fathers’ principles and the Constitution and how: ‘let’s educate until we’re educated to the super-saturation levels.’” Interestingly, Grant was critical of what he saw as an excessive emphasis on education within the movement, which he saw as distracting from engagement with electoral campaigns. Even in critiquing the movement, however, he drew a connection between national identity symbols and education.

Defining the movement as an educational effort also de-emphasized some of the divisive elements that typically are part and parcel of social movements. Social movements are often characterized by what Tarrow (1994) calls “contentious politics” and usually involve one group of people expressing grievances about or making demands of another group or institution, or collection of such. Conflict is inherent. Education, however, is not so laden with controversy; in America the notion is that anyone can benefit from learning, regardless of how they feel about the views of the teacher or the students. As such, defining the Tea Party as an educational effort reinforced the view of it as non-partisan and non-political. Several interviewees made this connection explicit. Bonnie, an Arizona Tea Party activist whom I met at a class about the Constitution organized by her local Tea Party group, described the educational aims of her group in this way:

[W]e want to see it continue to go towards the direction of encouraging citizens to, uh, to get out and do their civic duty. *Democrats, know who you’re voting for and why. Republicans, same thing. Know who you’re voting for and why.* And that’s what we’re about, is to get people involved, and constituents to be active, and that is about it.

Bob expressed a similar sentiment, saying: “To me it’s more important that people just are aware of what’s going on and then vote their consciousness. If they want higher taxes, good by me.”

Stephanie echoed this idea, saying: “[W]hat I like to consider what I’m doing is... trying to educate people to engage in the process. Trying to create a better, higher dialogue and find common ground with more people outside of typical parties.” All of these individuals claimed that it was more important for people to learn what was going on than to specifically support the Tea Party, an idea that created the impression of the Tea Party as less divisive than a protest and working toward the common good of their nation.

Restoration

Another way Tea Party members defined their behaviors was to describe the movement as restoration. This definition was not as common, and few used the term “restoration” specifically, but several Tea Party members described the movement’s behaviors as spreading or reinvigorating the true values of America. Interviewees who described the Tea Party in this manner suggested the function of the movement was to either restore or preserve important aspects of the national culture, rooted most typically in its founding. Consider these claims:

Rex: Personally to me, the Tea Party movement’s a restoration movement, it’s not a protest movement, the protest is going on in our government, the protest against our founding documents and the foundation of our country. I think the Tea Party movement’s a restoration movement. We want to go back to our founding documents and back to the foundation of our country and restore America the way our Founding Fathers intended to be.... in doing so, we will be restoring America, not protesting America.

Dorris: This reaction again is more of a great awakening. This is much bigger than a mere protest. This is really an existential, foundational debate that the country is going to have, again just as it had before the Revolution and just as it had before the Civil War. And I pray that this revolution can be successful without bloodshed. But umm, that’s pretty much going to be up to the Left. Because the Right and the Tea Party movement is committed to a non-violent restoration of our constitutional republic.

Ellen: Maybe in a certain respect but not generally speaking. I think the Tea Party movement is here to help us make people aware and preserve the founding principles, and to keep our rights and liberties at a level that we grew up with and where they should be.

Mack: Now we've got to restore this country to its roots. That's where the Tea Party is. We're saying let's stop. Restore. Renew. We can do that.

These excerpts exhibited an impulse to restore or preserve what these individuals saw as the authentic values of the nation, a notion that is in keeping with conservative proclivities to idealize the past and the traditional order (Defronzo, 2011; Jost et al., 2003; Lakoff, 2002). Further, as in the case of education, most of them also invoked the national myths of America—the Founders and their principles, the formation of the nation.

Notably, these two definitions, education and restoration, seem to correspond roughly with the motivations identified in the previous section, fear and loss. Those who defined the movement as an educational effort often said they hoped to help people make better political decisions in the future so as to stave off disaster, especially at the voting booth. Cameron, for example, hoped that people would learn through his group's educational efforts "what fiscal responsibility means, and how, if we don't get things under control, the devastating effect it's going to have on our country and our children." Andrew, who described the economic situation of America as akin to the Titanic, explained his call for education in this way: "And I believe if we could educate and see how what happens in D.C. has a real impact on everybody here, then they'll make the decisions better." For Cameron and Andrew explicitly, and for several others more implicitly, it seemed that the goal of education was to avoid the impending cataclysm that many of the Tea Party members I interviewed said was on the horizon. The connection between restoration and loss was even tighter: for individuals who believed that the values or freedoms that define America were lost, defining their actions as an attempt to restore them was a logical step. Angela, for example, described the Tea Party this way:

That's not so much a protest as all these people saying 'hey, I got to say something, the America, *the United States that I grew up with is not going to be here for my kids* and my

grandkids, and if I don't—if I don't, *if I as a person don't stand up to try and roll the clock back*, I'm not going to leave less for my family.' It's just a great awakening.

For interviewees like Angela, the only way to recoup what had been lost was to resurrect those ideals of a bygone era. Either definition is congruent with conservative proclivities to eschew protest and idealize the past.

Discussion

This chapter presented the findings of semi-structured interviews with Tea Party members from across the United States. Scholarship on conservative attitudes suggests that they tend to see as improper and even dangerous to social order forms of protest and other political strategies that challenge authority and seek to bring about change (Altemeyer, 1981; 1998; Jost et al., 2003; Lakoff, 2002). My goal in this chapter was to explore how a social movement might draw upon national identity to legitimize, explain, and define itself and its behaviors, as well as the circumstances under which conservatives might engage in a social movement activism. I was especially interested in how Tea Party members would respond to the question of whether or not the Tea Party was a protest movement. Given conservative tendencies toward suspicion of protests, alongside the propensity to idealize the past and celebrate the symbols and cultural myths of America, I expected interviewees to downplay the idea of protest while using the language of national identity to define their movement.

Several important patterns emerged. First, I found that the Tea Party members with whom I spoke legitimized the movement by describing themselves as patriotic, everyday Americans and distancing the movement from partisan politics. I also found that they described their political opponents as illegitimate and anti-American. Second, I found that the individuals with whom I spoke described their motivations in terms of a desire to protect or preserve the nation, typically discussing either fears about an impending cataclysm they believed threatened

the American way of life, or a sense of loss that important aspects of American culture had slipped away. Third, I found that Tea Party members defined their behaviors in the movement as efforts to help or improve the nation. The individuals with whom I spoke described the movement's activities broadly as either an educational effort, aimed at helping Americans make better political choices, or as a restoration movement, aimed at reviving the values and freedoms they felt had been lost. Both definitions provided a framework for interviewees to discuss the movement's behavior in terms of an idealized past that they sought either to restore or inform citizens about, and thus were in keeping with the conservative worldview. Further, both of these definitions allowed members to depict the Tea Party as bettering the nation and unifying Americans while avoiding the idea of protest, a contentious and frequently indecorous style of politics typically aimed at challenging authority and affecting change. Together, these patterns indicate that invocations of national identity were at the core of how Tea Party members defined the movement generally and suggest that the nation could be a unifying force capable of bringing conservatives together to participate in a form of activism to which they were not accustomed.

Three points merit exploring with regard to how Tea Party members employed national identity. The first is that such discourse has the potential to convey a powerful advantage upon political actors who use it. As noted, the messages of social movements play a crucial role in their success or failure, especially in terms of garnering support from the broader public. Tea Party members' deployment of national identity discourse may have made their movement more appealing to many Americans. Identification with one's nation is a powerful affiliation that is shared by most people and has the potential to outweigh most other loyalties (Anderson 2006). Research has shown that an emphasis on national identity can make political actors more appealing, and highlighting national identity in conjunction with policy ideas can increase

support even for contentious propositions (Sheets, Domke, & Greenwald, 2011; Sullivan, Fried, & Dietz, 1992; Transue, 2007). Such tendencies have been found for both conservatives and liberals. As a result, it is likely that a movement which positioned itself in close relation to the idea of the nation by drawing consistently upon national identity themes and symbols could predispose most Americans to view it in a positive light, and even those who opposed the goals sought by the Tea Party might have been less critical of the movement than they would have been, absent this discourse.

A second, related point is that while Tea Party members' framing of the movement and its goals in terms of national identity may have provided a strategic advantage for the movement, the centrality of this discourse is not necessarily solely tactical, at least at the individual level. All indications from my interviews would suggest that the interviewees were genuine in their expressions of national fervor. While politicians may typically go to great lengths to project an image of patriotism to sway votes, the interviewees quoted in this chapter did not appear to be at all strategic in their deployment of national identity discourse. Rather, the intense feelings of loss and fear that they described experiencing seems to have provided the impetus for them to become involved in what some individuals saw as a struggle for the soul of the nation and to discuss their activism in such terms. While their information and ideas may have been drawn from common sources that may themselves have had strategic intent, for the local activists with whom I spoke, the discussion of national identity appeared to be spontaneous and driven solely by individual feelings and concerns.

Finally, strategic or otherwise, most of the national identity symbols that manifested in Tea Party discourse seemed to function in one-dimensional ways, regardless of the specific symbol or figure being invoked. The Founding Fathers, for example were typically treated as a

monolithic collective who could be invoked to legitimize the movement or its goals. Seldom were any but the most superficial distinctions drawn among the individuals who founded the nation, despite the conflicting beliefs and ideals these men held. Further, the Founding Fathers seemed in many cases to be discursively interchangeable with the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, or even America itself—in many statements replacing any one of these symbols with any other would have made no difference in terms of the meaning. So, while Tea Party members described engaging in politics for the sake of these powerful ideas, and brought them up frequently, very little distinction was made between any of them. More nuanced approaches, though not entirely absent, were rare, and it often seemed as though the Constitution and the Founding Fathers were more important as emotionally evocative and inspirational symbols than as sources of insight, ideas, or policy proposals.

These findings raise questions about how national identity was employed at public Tea Party events. Events coordinated by Tea Party groups represented the public face of the movement during the period of its ascendance. Large rallies around the nation were prominent in news coverage of the Tea Party and served as a visible face through which it constructed itself to the public at large. Rallies, protests, and other public occurrences provide a means through which a movement can communicate a message that is different from the more personal and introspective setting inherent in qualitative interviews. Therefore, an appropriate next step is to examine what happened at several major Tea Party events, including explicit protests, to explore the ways in which movement ideas about legitimacy, motivations, and behavioral definitions manifested in more public settings. With these questions in mind, I turn to my next chapter.

Chapter 4

National Identity Symbols and Legitimacy at Tea Party Events

An advertisement that circulated prior to the Tea Party “Tax Day” rallies of April 15, 2009, included an image to promote these demonstrations. Figure 1 shows that the national-identity appeal was front and center in the advertisement.

Figure 4.1: TeaPartyTaxDay.com Advertisement



Colors were red, white, and blue in a motif that included white stars on a background of red and blue stripes. There were images of George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson—four men who played a central role in founding of the nation and who are revered figures in U.S. political culture. Along the edges were the words “taxation without representation,” a rallying cry for American colonists as they fomented a revolution against the British government. In the center of the poster, in the biggest font on the page, was “What would the Founding Fathers do?” Underneath, in smaller print: “National Tax Day Tea Party: Revolution is Brewing.” The implication was clear: the Founding Fathers would participate in and endorse this event. The use of the “taxation without representation” slogan further suggested that the conditions faced by Americans in 2009 were similar to the ones encountered by the colonists who coined the phrase in the 1700s.

Materials promoting gatherings in local communities were similarly steeped in American identity markers. Figure 2 is a flyer promoting a Tax Day rally in Hutchinson, Kansas. Featuring a bald eagle and the U.S. flag, this poster urged supporters to bring their “tea, signs, flags and love of country” to the rally.

Figure 4.2: Kansas Tax Day Rally Flyer, 2009



This phenomenon was not limited to the 2009 rallies. An advertisement promoting a 2010 Tax Day rally in Santa Ana, California, displayed in Figure 3, was equally evocative of the nation. It also included a flag motif and depicted, in the background, the Gadsden “Don’t Tread On Me” flag carried by rebelling colonists during the American Revolution. There were three words immediately below it: “Liberty,” “Constitution,” and “Restoration.”

Figure 4.3: California Tax Day Rally Advertisement, 2010



This chapter will show that important events associated with the Tea Party movement were infused with the language and symbols of national identity, and that such discourse served to legitimize, explain, and define the movement as a whole. I will argue that public employment of American symbols by members of a social movement may play an important role in crafting media images of that cause. Because rallies, protests, and other similar public activities are often the focus of news coverage, crafting such happenings in a way that is appealing to both journalists and the public may be of great importance to a social movement's success. I will make this case, and then will outline my methodological approach for this chapter's analysis, participant observation. I will then present findings regarding four major Tea Party gatherings in Washington, D.C. over the dates of August 27 and August 29, 2010. This analysis will show that nation-bolstering themes were prevalent in all aspects of these events.

Research Questions and Procedures

I expected the narratives, themes, and symbols of the United States and its history to feature prominently in the discourse of Tea Party events. Anecdotal excerpts from news

coverage suggest that from the speeches to the signs to the garb worn by participants to the promotional materials, national identity was front and center. This chapter focuses on how such national symbols coalesced to help construct the Tea Party movement as legitimate, explain the motivations driving the movement, and define its actions. There are two important reasons why public events connected with the Tea Party merit close examination.

The first is that they are characterized by inclusion of a diverse array of discursive forms through which messages are conveyed. Rallies and other public events feature words, in the form of speeches, chants, songs, and the like, and visuals in the form of posters, clothing, and stage dressing. They also often include a number of other media formats such as video, music, and printed literature. Examining such materials can add much to the understanding of any social phenomenon (Jorgenson, 1989) and serve as a complement to the interviews of Chapter 3. Further, public events feature both the strategically crafted discourse of organizations and important public figures connected with the Tea Party movement and that of ordinary movement participants. They are a venue, for example, for the ideas and expressions of activists who bring signs to a protest to express their personal views, as well as influential leaders who may speak from the podium. Thus, protests and other gatherings provide a means for examining several diverse elements of the Tea Party movement's communication and self-presentation. Patterns found across such a scope of communicative forms allow me to speak more confidently about the messaging of the Tea Party than the words or participants alone could.

Secondly, public events play an important role in how any social movement is covered in news media. News in the United States is driven largely by events rather than issues, resulting in "episodic" content that focuses on individual stories without much background information, rather than "thematic" content that places stories in a broader context and relates them to

ongoing issues (Bennett, 2005; Iyengar, 1991). For example, in a political campaign, what a candidate says or does at a campaign rally is more likely to appear prominently in a story about the election than where the candidate stands on the issues (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1980). Such coverage is not limited to elections, but manifests in news about a range of social and political issues and phenomena, such as poverty and public policy legislation (Iyengar, 1991; Lawrence, 2000). This style of reporting has a tendency to obscure larger social patterns while privileging stories about individuals and dramatic moments, as well as the images that often accompany them.

Scholars have found that the tendency toward episodic news means that social movements typically appear in news coverage as if they were made up of numerous discrete events rather than an organized and continuous response to larger, ongoing issues (Boyle et al., 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Gitlin (1980), for example, described coverage of the New Left in the 1960s as a “bombardment of incomprehensible events” resulting in “an experience of discontinuity and a loss of political reality, a loss of context” as the media emphasized novel occurrences in constructing coverage. Public functions of social movements are themselves covered in a way that emphasizes images and protest tactics over more substantive content. For example, scholars have found that protestors’ unusual garments and chants or signs featuring controversial messages are often a dominant feature in coverage of protests (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). The behaviors of protestors at demonstrations, especially when they involve counternormative actions (e.g. throwing eggs or clashing with police) are also often prominent in news coverage, to the extent that the discussion of protest tactics frequently overshadows in-depth examination of a movement’s goals or ideas (Ashley & Olson, 1998;

Brasted, 2005; Smith et al., 2001). The actions and images that take place at public events, then, often are central to how movements appear in coverage generally

Given journalists' proclivity toward covering events rather than issues, it is likely that, if major events staged by the Tea Party prominently featured national identity themes, such content would be manifested in news media. News content will be the focus of Chapter 5, and if this dynamic is indeed present the coverage could potentially give the movement a strategic advantage over political opponents or other social movements not making use of such themes. We know that citizens place great importance on their nation's image (Anderson 2006), so many people would likely be disposed to respond favorably to a movement that put love of country at the center of the messages embedded in their public functions (Transue, 2007). An emphasis on patriotism in news coverage, the source of most people's knowledge about political phenomena with which they have no first-hand experience, could have a substantive effect on how a movement is viewed by many Americans. The deployment of national symbols and messages in Tea Party events, then, could have important implications for both news coverage and public opinion about the Tea Party movement.

In attending and analyzing public Tea Party events, I was particularly interested in three broad areas of discourse which are central to how any social movement defines itself and is viewed by the public. Specifically, I was interested in how the movement's definitions of their *legitimacy* manifested in public events (i.e. how the words and images defined who they are), how the movement's notions of their *motivations* were apparent (i.e. how features of Tea Party gatherings suggested the rationale for the movement's actions) and finally how the features of prominent Tea Party events represented the ways in which the movement defined its *behaviors*. To explore these facets of the movement, I constructed the following research questions:

RQ4: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how?

RQ5: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how?

RQ6: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to define the behavior and actions of the movement? If so, how?

This focus was informed, in part, by the findings of Chapter 3, which outlined several broad ways in which Tea Party members described and defined their legitimacy, motivations, and behaviors in personal terms. This chapter will show that similar themes emerged at public Tea Party functions, rallies, summits and other occurrences, but that these happenings were also characterized by a distinct type of discourse that communicated the movement through a more diverse range of channels that manifested in specific ways.

To capture this complex and varied discourse, I conducted a participant observation analysis of four major events that were staged by or closely connected with the Tea Party. All of the gatherings took place over the same weekend in the same city and were organized around one central happening, Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally, but the four sites of inquiry displayed substantially different communicative features. The first event was a summit titled "Defending the American Dream," and took place August 26 and 27, 2010, at the Marriot Wardman Park Hotel in Washington D.C. It was organized by Americans for Prosperity, a group with close ties to the Tea Party movement (Good, 2009; Mayer, 2010), and featured film screenings and breakout sessions on political activism, some of which were about the Tea Party movement and featured movement participants, as well as speaker sessions that featured major political candidates associated with the Tea Party movement. On the morning of August 28, AFP offered shuttle service to the second event I analyzed, Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally. This rally featured Beck and fellow Tea Party icon Sarah Palin, and drew approximately 90,000 people to

the Lincoln Memorial and reflecting pool (Sundby, 2010). The rally was not officially connected to the Tea Party but drew many Tea Party members, featured important figures in the movement, and was followed by two Tea Party events that were attended by many of the same people. The third event was another, much smaller rally, hosted by congressional Tea Party Caucus leader Michele Bachmann, which took place on the other side of the national mall immediately after Beck's event. The final analyzed event occurred the following day, in a park overlooking the U.S. Capitol Building. This was a rally organized by Tea Party Patriots, one of the largest of the national organizations that sought to unite disparate Tea Party groups around the country.

I attended all four of these gatherings to collect a broad and robust body of data. Specifically, I took field notes during and shortly after each of the events, as well as during debriefing sessions with a research colleague. My data also included approximately 100 photographs I took over the course of the weekend, audio recordings of several speeches, a large collection of printed materials collected primarily at the "Defending the American Dream" summit, and several hours of video footage shot by either myself or a research colleague. For the "Restoring Honor" rally, I supplemented my own video with a DVD of C-SPAN's live broadcast, which was both higher quality than my own video and offered additional visual perspectives. Taken together, these data provided a broad view of each of my four sites of inquiry, capturing the discourse of each along with my own observations on the ground.

In my analysis of each event, I focused on two broad types of communication. The first is what I characterize as *atmospheric* discourse. Atmospheric discourse refers to the environment in which the program of each rally, speech, or panel discussion took place, including a variety of auxiliary communications that helped me to understand these events. Examples of atmospheric discourse included the clothing worn by participants, signs they carried, stage dressing, music,

literature that was distributed, and even the structure of the events themselves—such as description of an event as either a protest or rally, and the inclusion of panel discussions, individual speakers, or “open mike” segments in which participants not involved with organizing the event could speak. Atmospheric discourse emphasized themes in more latent ways, but was nonetheless important to the overall experience of each. For example, at some of the events I analyzed, several participants wore tricorne hats. The donning of such hats, popular during America’s colonial and revolutionary periods, communicates an affinity for that historical era that is in keeping with tendencies among Tea Party members to evoke the nation’s founding mythology and historical figures.

My second body of analysis focused on what I call the *programmatic* discourse of each event. Programmatic discourse was part of the official presentation at each event. Most typically, this involved the content of speeches and panel discussions, and also included other aspects of the presentations, such as videos that were shown between speakers or as part of Beck’s rally. Mostly verbal in nature, this area of discourse presented the most explicit and manifest communication of the central themes of each event. Operationally, I classified any words spoken by planned speakers on a stage, from a panel, or through a microphone as programmatic content, as well as videos shown on stage between speakers, or pre-recorded verbal messages played through the sound system. For example, at the “Restoring Honor” event, the rally began with a pre-recorded message by Glenn Beck. Afterwards, another speaker introduced Beck, and he came onto stage and spoke. Throughout the rally, between presenters, several videos were shown on large screens around the National Mall. All of this was considered programmatic content.

I began the process of analysis by sorting and organizing all my data by event, which included field notes, transcripts, digital photographs, and physical artifacts. After organizing all the materials, I began the process of coding them. For programmatic content, the coding process was similar to that employed in the previous chapter. Working with transcripts of the manifest, verbal content at each event, I used the final list of codes from Chapter 3 as a starting point, and proceeded to build on this list in an inductive, open-coding fashion that allowed the definitions of the existing codes to change as necessary, and for new codes to be added as new themes emerged. Throughout this process I wrote memos, attached to specific passages in the transcripts that highlighted particularly interesting examples and made tentative connections between themes. After reading through the transcripts in their entirety, a final list of codes based on the common themes in the discourse was compiled by combining theoretically overlapping codes and eliminating extraneous ones, and the documents were coded a second time. In the second round, the final codes list was applied consistently across the texts and no new codes were added.

Photographs and artifacts required a somewhat different approach. Photographs and literature distributed at each event were given unique identification numbers and entered into two spreadsheets, which featured short descriptions of each item and several columns that I used to enter codes. Some of this content, like the text of signs or on t-shirts, was coded using similar definitions to those used in the transcripts, but other non-verbal materials were not. For example, a “Radicals” code, which was used to identify passages in the programmatic content in which speakers described political opponents as radicals or suggested they subscribed to some radical philosophy, could be applied easily to a photograph of someone holding a sign that claimed President Obama was a socialist. Purely non-verbal content, however, required code definitions to expand, as their visual (rather than text-based) nature allowed themes to manifest in differing

ways. For example, a photograph of a Tea Party participant displaying a picture of President Obama with a Soviet-style hammer and sickle was also coded with the “Radicals” code. However, the definition of this code had to be adjusted to capture an image suggesting radicalism on the part of a political opponent rather than a verbal claim. In some cases, entirely new codes were created, such as a “flags” code to indicate the presence of the U.S. flag on a protest sign, garment, or piece of literature.¹⁶ As with programmatic content, after codes for these data were entered into spreadsheets in an initial round of coding, the code list was finalized and all the materials were examined a second time to ensure that codes were applied consistently throughout all the atmospheric content I captured. Each of the four events had a distinct format, and thus each contained distinct atmospheric content. Some events featured literature, while others did not. Some featured protest signs, while one explicitly disallowed them. These differing forms of atmospheric content allowed themes to manifest in distinct ways. Nonetheless, the presence of national identity themes to bolster movement legitimacy, to justify Tea Party activism, and to define movement behaviors were prominent features of the four events. I turn now to an analysis of these discourses, examining each event in turn within each thematic section.

Constructions of Legitimacy

In RQ4, I asked: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes, and narratives in constructing the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement? If so, how? I found that across the four events, national identity themes were indeed used to construct movement legitimacy in several ways. The general categories of discourse used to bolster legitimacy proved to be similar to the interview data of the previous chapter—at Tea Party events, the movement was depicted as

¹⁶ Descriptions of video images, music, and other non-verbal content that were described in my field notes and transcripts but not captured in a visual format were treated similarly. However, codes for this content were applied within the transcripts and field notes themselves, alongside the codes for programmatic content.

being representative of *patriots* and *everyday Americans*, struggling against *illegitimate opponents*. These three themes were common, to varying degrees, across all the events in both atmospheric and programmatic content.

Americans for Prosperity's Defending the American Dream Summit

Of the three themes, perhaps most common across all the events was the display of patriotism. At the Americans for Prosperity summit, a patriotic atmosphere was apparent in the stage dressings in the Marriot ballroom where the most popular portions of the event took place and in much of the literature being distributed at the event. In the ballroom, the stage featured U.S. flags on both sides. Additionally, the curtain behind the stage was blue, while above the stage hung a red and white banner, with white stars. Red, white, and blue lighting also illuminated the walls. The flag is one of the most powerful symbols of national identity and patriotism in U.S. culture (Kemmelmeyer & Winter, 2008), and this was the first of many, many, many times I would see it invoked over the course of the four events. An Americans for Prosperity brochure and Defending the American Dream sponsor sheet which were, along with the program, handed to attendees of the event, featured waving red and white stripes across the bottom of the page, which served as a background for field of white stars. The American flag was also featured prominently in other materials, such as a fact sheet handed out by the American Family Business Institute, a brochure from ProEnglish about making English the national language, and an activist manual provided by American Majority. The flag, then, was a frequently invoked symbol at this event, but it was not by any means the only invocation of patriotism found in the copious literature provided at the summit. Indeed, some of the materials made explicit, verbal claims of patriotism. For example, the Heritage Foundation provided a booklet with suggestions for activism and further reading titled *The Patriot's Guide: What You*

Can Do to Restore Liberty in America. Another table featured “truth cards,” small cards that provided information on a variety of topics, and almost without exception included the statement “Be a patriot! Vote!” Another brochure, which also featured the U.S. flag, promoted a book titled *Refounding America: A Field Manual for Patriot Activists*. Both visually and textually, then, the artifacts communicated a strong patriotic bent for the Tea Party.

The notion that the movement was representative of ordinary Americans was also present in these artifacts. One particularly powerful example of this was a flyer about the estate tax that was distributed by the American Family Business Institute. The front of the flyer featured a middle aged man in a U.S. flag cap, standing in front of a field of wheat. The text surrounding him read: “66% of Americans believe that the Death Tax is unjust. Success depends on citizen involvement. Will you join the fight?” Juxtaposing claims of majority support and call for “citizen” involvement with an ordinary looking American (presumably a farmer) suggests that not only were the producers of this flyer representing the views of a majority of Americans, but also that “regular” Americans like the presumed farmer were seeking protection. Inside the flyer were claims about protecting “family farms,” while the back of the brochure featured a collection of professional-looking individuals of diverse ethnicities and ages, possibly suggesting that Americans from all walks of life supported the organization and its aims. Similar claims of representing the majority were found elsewhere, such as in the ProEnglish brochure, which made the claim that “87% of Americans believe that English should be the official language of the United States.” Many other materials also made claims about being mainstream Americans. For example, the welcome letter given to every attendee on behalf of AFP described the event as a gathering of “thousands of freedom-loving Americans.” Another potent example was provided by one of the “truth cards,” which featured the words “Democrat,” “Republican,” “Sect,”

“Race,” and “Tea Party,” all of which were crossed out. Next to these words in larger print and all capital letters was “American,” and beneath it: “This is a Label Free Zone.” This suggested, as many of the interviewees of the previous chapter did, that the Tea Party was a movement that transcended affiliations with unpopular political parties or indeed any dividing social categories. All of these materials contributed to an atmosphere that suggested the event was for ordinary Americans from many different backgrounds, i.e. for the mainstream.

The delegitimization of political opponents was also present in the atmospheric discourse of this event. Opponents were cast as dishonest and anti-American. Americans for Tax Reform, for example, distributed an “Obama Tax Hike Exemption Card,” along with an accompanying press release, which suggested that President Obama had been dishonest about his tax pledges. The card featured instructions urging people to present the card whenever they were charged a tax of any kind and to ask the “merchants, employers and tax authorities” collecting the tax: “Excuse me, but are you calling President Obama a liar?” A brochure provided by the Council for Citizens Against Government Waste not only delegitimized but dehumanized political opponents, featuring an image of pigs in suits carrying large bags of money away from the U.S. Capitol Building. Other literature made explicit claims that political opponents sought to do harm to America. The Heritage Foundation’s *Patriot’s Guide*, for example, claimed that “The Left has been engaged in a century long attack on the first principles of America, the Constitution, and the culture that necessarily undergirds freedom.” This sentiment was echoed in another Heritage Foundation publication, a flyer entitled “Solutions for America: Changing America’s Course,” which discussed the “fact” of “Liberalism’s Rejection of America’s Principles.” Thus, all three legitimacy themes were present in the atmospheric discourse.

These legitimacy themes were likewise apparent in programmatic content. To begin, patriotism was a common theme in the words of many of the speakers at the Defending the American Dream Summit. For example, during the opening session, Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell addressed the audience as “all you *great patriots* for Americans for Prosperity,” and expressed his own patriotic sentiments as well, saying: “Let me just say that all of you are here because *you care about our nation*. You and I have the privilege of living in *the greatest country that the world has ever known*.” The next speaker on the stage, radio talk-show host (and, later, presidential candidate) Herman Cain echoed these sentiments, saying: “No matter what the conditions are, *we are still the greatest country in the world*, and that’s what my parents taught me. And for those who have bought into this malarkey that America is not an exceptional country, I’ve got a news flash for you: *America is an exceptional country, and it’s going to stay that way!*” Later in the day, Congresswoman and Tea Party Caucus leader Michele Bachmann gave a speech in which she explicitly connected patriotism with the Tea Party, saying: “No one individual, I want you to know, represents the Tea Party. Just like all of you here tonight, it is composed of *patriotic Americans who are concerned with the direction of our country*.”

The notion that the movement was composed of ordinary, mainstream Americans who broadly reflected the citizenry of the nation was even more prevalent. The first speaker at the opening session was Tim Phillips, president of American for Prosperity, who emphasized the representativeness of the attendees. He described the audience thusly: “over 2400 people *from all states, from all walks of life*, united by a desire to protect our freedoms by turning our great nation in a different direction.” During a panel on the Tea Party and 9-12 (a Tea Party related group organized by Glenn Beck), all three of the speakers invoked this theme, either by describing the participants of the movement as everyday people, by refuting charges of racism

and radicalism, or by describing the movement as being grassroots or otherwise directed by ordinary citizens. During the question and answer session, for example, one participant said: “By and large, they [the media] want to say that we are a fringe group, or something even more controversial than that. And all of the people that I talk to and *all of the wonderful Americans that I have met don’t fit those types of categories.*” Pennsylvania 9-12 activist Katy Abrams responded: “By calling us all these names and all this silly stuff, I am so over that right now. It’s ridiculous. I know I am not a racist, are you a racist? *We’re good people, we’re hardworking people.*”

Mark Block and Dan Lee, two Tea Party activists who also appeared on the panel, emphasized the organic nature of the movement and in doing so constructed it as the product of ordinary Americans.

Block: *The day the Tea Party movement has a leader is the day that it dies...* as I look out across this crowd here today, there’s a lot of Wisconsin people who have been part of the Tea Party movement across our state, and I don’t tell them what to do, all right? We provide, as an organization, statewide support... but we don’t tell them what to do... that’s the strength of the Tea Party movement.

Lee: If you take nothing else away from here this afternoon, take away that you, *each one of you, is in charge.* If you take that away from this day, we will indeed succeed.... *You people are in charge, every one of you.* You didn’t become in charge today, you were in charge a long time ago.

Bachmann, in her speech, invoked all of these ideas, casting participants in the movement as diverse, as real Americans, and as members of an organic movement, saying:

It’s truly grassroots, and we have never seen anything like this on this large of a scale. Because it takes up disaffected Democrats, Independents, Republicans, Libertarians, Constitution Party people, non-political people, no wonder the Left is running screaming for the exits. They can’t believe what is happening in our country; real Americans are taking the country back, and you’re in the tip of the spear!

These remarks also cast the Tea Party as disconnected from the major political parties and institutional politics in general, in keeping with the findings of the previous chapter, which showed this distinction to be a component of Tea Party constructions of legitimacy.

The delegitimization of opponents as dishonest, corrupt, radical, unpatriotic, and intent on doing harm to America was also prevalent at this event. As in the atmospheric communications, Obama in particular was a central focus in this discourse. Bachmann was especially critical of Obama, describing him as a “one term president” and criticizing his patriotism as follows:

This president has made history... *with his obsession with apologizing to the rest of the world for the United States of America* [audience: Boo! Boo!], which by the way is an exceptional nation.... Thank our forbearers for what they have given us. It’s nothing short of astounding. What a difference. *Think of our president as who spent most of his first term apologizing for this nation.* Think of President Reagan as he stood before that wall in Berlin. What a difference in presidencies, with all due respect.

By no means, however, was Obama the only target of criticism. Congress, liberals, “big spenders” and other political opponents were also delegitimized. AFP President Tim Phillips, for example, described the “freedom crushing” agenda of the movement’s opponents in his opening remarks, saying: “We’ve seen this president and this Congress under Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, *they’ve ignored us while pursuing a radical big government, big spending, Washington bureaucrats know best agenda.*” He went on to criticize the vice president and also spoke disdainfully about people “at their cocktail parties in Manhattan” who he claimed ignored the concerns of ordinary people. Political consultant and media commentator Dick Morris leveled criticism at unions, claiming that they opposed the “sovereignty of the states and of the people.” Like the congressional ratings brochure available at this event, discussed in the previous section, AFP’s state director for North Carolina Dallas Woodhouse not only criticized but dehumanized his opponents, saying:

Fire ants are very much like liberals. You see, fire ants bury themselves in the sand, they don't produce anything, they provide nothing worthwhile, and simply come out and sting those of us who do! [Applause] Now, I'm an old North Carolina boy, but I don't think I'm different than a lot of Americans; you ain't gonna sting me but once.... I have the weapon to wipe out the economic liberal fire ants, and I'm starrng right at them. We are going to do it with you.

Cain and Bachmann were explicit about casting opponents as anti-American. Cain said: "The American dream is under attack by the liberals in Washington D.C..... We are America, not the people in Washington D.C. We the people!" Later in the day, Bachmann made the same distinction between "the people" of the Tea Party and her political adversaries, saying:

I came here tonight to remind us one thing, and it is this: this is our country, and we own it. It is our country. It doesn't belong to *a half dozen people, a cabal of radicals who are determined to reshape this country into an image that none of us would even begin to recognize*, much less the Founders of this country, would even recognize. They forget something: we're a free people!

All three legitimacy themes, then, were common at the Defending the American Dream Summit.

Glenn Beck's Restoring Honor Rally

At Glenn Beck's rally the following morning, at least two of these three notions of legitimacy were even more apparent in the atmospheric discourse. Patriotism was perhaps most prominent. With a backdrop of the Lincoln Memorial, a monument to one of America's most beloved presidents, thousands of people gathered on the national mall, waving U.S. flags and in some cases wearing Uncle Sam and Statue of Liberty hats. Some individuals literally wrapped themselves in the flag. All of these displays clearly communicated a strong love of country. Perhaps most interesting though, was the myriad patriotic t-shirts that could be seen on nearly every participant in the rally. There were many shirts in the crowd featuring flags, eagles, and other patriotic imagery, along with slogans like "Duty, Honor, Country." Additionally, small fans were distributed at the rally that advertised for the 1776 Clothing Co., which specializes in

patriotic t-shirts and similar garments. Other individuals came dressed in military garb or as Founding Fathers, also communicating an alliance with America and its military.

The notion that this event was composed of everyday Americans was most prominently conveyed through the event's emphasis on diversity. Many critics of the Tea Party have argued that the movement is inherently opposed to people of color (Campo-Flores, 2010; Lieb, 2010), which, if true, would place the Tea Party outside the ideological mainstream in America. These accusations were rebutted repeatedly and directly in the programmatic discourse I will examine momentarily. Atmospherically, an emphasis on the diverse range of Americans participating in the event seemed to be another way of combating these charges and constructing the event as mainstream. Most obviously, the event itself was held on the 47th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, and at the same location. Suggesting a kinship with this iconic moment in U.S. history, this choice made a rhetorical connection between Beck's rally and the civil rights movement, and in doing so suggested that this event was for all people. Other aspects of the event reinforced this connection. The audience was predominantly Caucasian, but many who appeared on stage were not. The rally began with a multi-ethnic choir singing the national anthem, and featured several other non-white singers over the course of the event. Two of the three recipients of awards handed out by Beck over the course of the rally were racial minorities. The third recipient was not present and had an African American woman collect the award on his behalf. Several of the speakers also reinforced this atmosphere of diversity. A Native American who was said to have descended from the people who met the Mayflower when it landed on the continent appeared on stage with a white pastor who was said to be descended from one of the families on the ship. Perhaps even more notably, the rally featured C.L. Jackson, a black preacher who had been at the Lincoln Memorial for King's speech 47 years prior, as well

as Alveda King, King's niece. The participation of these individuals reinforced the connection between Beck's rally and the civil rights movement in a way that no words could, and the crowd received them with enthusiasm.

The delegitimizing of political opponents was also present in the atmosphere of this event, though perhaps less so than at any of the others. One young man, for example, wore a t-shirt bearing the words "Had Enough Hope and Change." Mostly, though, in part probably due to Beck's request that people not bring protest signs to the rally, critiques of political opponents were less common.

A similar pattern was apparent in the programmatic communication of the rally. To begin with, the expression of patriotic sentiment was pervasive. Before Beck even appeared on the stage, a recorded segment of his voice began by glorifying the United States, saying:

America is the land of opportunity, a place where dreams and imagination are brought to life. Americans were the first in flight. Americans first built buildings as high as the clouds. We first called buildings skyscrapers here. It was an American who made that giant leap for mankind. It's Americans who will solve the world's problems yet again.

This patriotism was affirmed by the way John Carny, President of the Special Operations Warrior Fund (SOWF), described the crowd of people gathered on the mall:

It's certainly humble to be here this morning, in front of all you *patriots and great Americans*, people that we couldn't do our mission if it wasn't for your generosity and your caring.... This truly could not be done without great *caring Americans like Glenn Beck and you folks here today*.

This description was echoed by former Alaska Governor and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who said: "Are you not so proud to be an American?... It is so humbling to get to be here with you today, patriots; you who are motivated and engaged and concerned, knowing to never retreat." Over the course of the day, Beck and many others would similarly praise the audience for their patriotism and express their own love of country. The sentiment was also common in

videos projected on large screens over the course of the day, which extolled the American ethos as characterized by faith, hope, and charity and included numerous images of the flag, the statue of liberty, and other American symbols. The video about hope, for example, described the nation as follows: “America the beautiful, the land of the free, the home of the brave, the shining beacon city on the hill for the whole world to see.” The event ended with country music singer Jo Dee Messina singing “America the Beautiful.” Patriotic sentiments, then, were woven throughout the programmatic discourse of this event.

Beck and the other presenters also characterized the event as representative of everyday Americans. One of the ways this was most apparent was through the depoliticization of the event and various speakers. By distancing the event, which featured prominent political figures and messages, from political parties or explicitly stated ideologies, the event could be cast as being about America rather than about politics. In introducing Palin, a polarizing figure in U.S. politics, Beck tried to cast her as something other than political, saying:

When I knew I wanted to honor our military, *I didn't want to have a military person. I didn't want to have a member of Congress or someone running for something. I wanted to have a dad or a mom, and that's why I picked up the phone and I called a mom.* And she's speaking to you today as a mother of someone in the military. Ladies and gentlemen, Sarah Palin.

Palin echoed this framing of her participation, saying: “Now I've been asked to speak today not as a politician, no, something more, something much more. I've been asked to speak as the mother of a soldier, and I am proud of that distinction.” Later, Beck recounted the story of how he first came to conceive of the rally itself, saying “I thought it was supposed to be political.” When he had to announce the event publically, however, he concluded “I don't know how, but we're wrong,” and went on to create this event based on faith, hope and charity rather than politics. “It has nothing to do with politics,” he said later. “Republicans, Democrats,

independents, Americans, we are all Americans.” In short, de-emphasizing politics served to rhetorically cast this event as representing all Americans.

The emphasis on diversity and connections to the Civil Rights movement was also apparent in the programmatic discourse, serving to cast the event as representative of a diverse society. This was most prominent in a video projected on the jumbotrons about King and his “I Have a Dream Speech.” The video featured images of civil rights marchers which faded into an image of Tea Party protestors, as well as an image of the gathering at the Lincoln Memorial 47 years prior which morphed into an image of Beck’s rally from earlier in the day. The verbal content of the video cemented this linking of Beck’s event and the Civil Rights movement. Beck depoliticized King (who, in addition to his civil rights work, was a socialist who also organized against the Viet Nam War), saying of King’s appearance at the Lincoln Memorial: “this was the day the American people would rise above politics.” Beck went on to connect his goals with King and the Civil Rights movement by saying:

We as citizens must all carry Martin Luther King’s dream in all of our hearts today. The dream is not completed. It is an ongoing struggle, one that all Americans should always be willing to undertake. Like Martin Luther King, we’re all born knowing the truth, that the truth will set us free. On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King awoke our nation’s collective consciousness. His message: look at the content of a man’s character, not the color of his skin. His dream is the American dream. Today, August 28, 2010, we stand here on this same hallowed ground with our heads held high and our hearts open. We all have the inalienable right to live in a country with liberty and justice for all.

This idea was cemented by King’s niece Alveda King, who said: “If Uncle Martin could be here today, he would surely commend us for giving honor where it is due.” Such explicit connection of the Restoring Honor rally with King’s legacy served to implicitly refute accusations of racism and cast the event and the Tea Party as open to a diverse range of Americans.

As was the case in the atmospheric discourse, delegitimizing opponents was a less common theme in this event’s programmatic content, probably in part because explicit attacks on

political opponents would have undercut the notion that the event was non-political. Nonetheless, some delegitimization did occur, albeit in a much more subtle form than the previous day's gathering. Palin, for example, said this during her speech: "I must assume that you, too, know that we must not fundamentally transform America as some would want, we must restore America and restore her honor." Her remark referred, almost certainly, to a speech that Obama gave while campaigning for president, in which he said: "We are five days from fundamentally transforming the United States of America" (Weigel, 2011). Juxtaposing this remark in opposition to America's honor suggested that "America and her honor" were harmed by Obama and his plans. Similarly, during the "hope" video, Beck remarked: "for hope to be real it must be based in truth and honor. Without it, hope is nothing more than an empty wish." The word "hope" played a central role in Obama's campaign, featuring prominently on the now famous poster by artist Shepard Fairey upon which Beck's faith, hope, and charity images, discussed in detail in the next section, seemed to be based. In the above remark, Beck seemed to imply that the hope offered by Obama was "an empty wish." On the whole, however, delegitimizing opponents was not common at this event.

Michele Bachmann's Tea Party Rally

At Michele Bachmann's rally immediately after Beck's gathering concluded, legitimacy themes also were prominent in the atmosphere, especially invocations of patriotism and national symbols, which were on display both on and off stage. Bachmann and the other speakers spoke surrounded by flags. T-shirts displayed evocative slogans like "Unapologetically American" that put national identity front and center. One man wore a shirt featuring an eagle and the words "Freedom Isn't Free, But It's Worth Fighting For." Another wore an oversized Uncle Sam hat featuring stars and stripes. Perhaps most striking was a woman who wore a jacket on which the

U.S. flag was printed, carried a flag, and wore a cowboy hat with several flags printed on it, along with two U.S. flag pins and a third pin featuring the flag and a scroll reading “We the People.” A patriotic identity was front and center in the atmosphere of this event.

The other two legitimacy themes were less apparent in the atmospheric discourse of this event. Bachmann’s event also featured ethnically diverse speakers, including a Hispanic man who had recently become a citizen, he said, so he could fight for freedom in America, but in general diversity was less apparently a communicative goal of the event. Likewise, one man carried a sign that strongly delegitimized opponents of the movement, claiming “Global elite who control our puppet leaders are finalizing their world dictatorship,” but this sign appeared to be more an aberration than part of a pattern. Thus, only one of the three legitimacy themes was prominent in this event’s atmosphere.

All three themes, however, were prominent in the programmatic discourse. Across the many speakers who participated, most of whom were Tea Party organizers in their local communities, all three legitimacy themes manifested. Patriotism was apparent in the words of many speakers. The following are some examples.

Danielle Powers, veteran: As I look out among you today, this is the highest form of patriotism.

Aaron Kerry, Maryland Tea Party member: I’m doing this for my country and I’m doing this for you all....This is about us as patriots and as citizens of the United States.

Tito Muñoz, Colombian immigrant: This is, by no means, make no mistake, this is the greatest country ever. I am an American and I want to keep it that way.

Jennifer Hulsey, Tea Party Express: First of all I’d like to say I’m proud to be American, how ‘bout you guys?

Jean Epstein, North Carolina Tea Party member: I love this country more than anything.

Several other speakers also emphasized their love of the country. Patriotism, then, was front and center at this event.

Likewise, the idea that this event and the movement in general were comprised of everyday Americans was a common theme in the discourse, sometimes emphasizing the diversity of the movement and the organic nature of the Tea Party. Bachmann described the speakers at the rally as “the voices of America.” Jennifer Hulse of Tea Party Express, speaking about recent electoral victories, equated the Tea Party Express with the American people, saying:

Did the Tea Party Express do this? No. *The American people did it because the Tea Party Express listens to the American people.* And when you say go help somebody, that’s what we do.... we will stand shoulder to shoulder with you. You help us, we’ll help you because guess what *it’s not about a party it’s about being an American.*

Louie Gohmert, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Texas, described the Tea Party as representing the majority of tax payers, saying:

So when I hear people today saying let’s, all those guys, they’re only out to help the rich, no we want to help what we’re told may be only 53% of the American adults that are going to pay income tax this year, those are people that need to have the tax help. And when I hear people saying that the Tea Parties are only marginal groups and then they see a poll saying that 28% of American adults say that they identify with the Tea Party. Do the math, 28% say they’re associated with the Tea Parties, 53% are paying all the taxes, uh, *do you think more than half of all the people paying taxes are Tea Party folks? Yeah.*

North Carolina Tea Partier Jean Epstein described herself as follows: “I just wanna let you know I’m just a regular person, just a regular person, I’m not a racist, I love everybody,” and Mitchell Marginson, a Tea Party member from Virginia, described the event thusly: “I think it’s a really great event, I think it’s a great opportunity to get all these Americans together, and people from all walks of life, to get together and let this government know that we’ve had enough.” The idea that this event and the Tea Party movement more broadly were made of ordinary Americans was widespread at this event.

Delegitimizing opponents was also common at this rally, with Obama and other political opponents characterized not only as opponents of the Tea Party movement, but enemies of America and American values. The most dramatic example came from Tito Muñoz, who said of Obama and Congress:

So, what they're trying to do is they put us very low, in our knees [sic].... Every policy is calculated, they don't do this because it's stupid, *they do this because they're socialists*.... When I became an American citizen, September 27, 2008, I swore to defend the Constitution of this country, and defend this nation, against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and *we know who are the domestic enemies!*

Danielle Powers used similar language, saying: "As a mother, as an American, as a veteran I will continue to fight like I did when I picked up my M-16 and say I will defend this country against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Powers did not specify who the domestic enemies were, but nonetheless depicted herself as being in conflict with anti-American enemies. Others cast their political opponents as dishonest. Dorothy Lee Withers, a reverend from Tennessee, remarked: "I'm so sick and tired of politicians, they'll say anything you want them to say for money in their pocket to run their campaign, Michele [Bachmann] ain't one of them, baby." Bachmann herself suggested her opponents were untrustworthy, saying "'In God We Trust,' that by the way remains our national motto, despite what the ACLU will tell you, it is 'In God We Trust.' If not God, then who? Nancy Pelosi? President Obama, with all due respect? Harry Reid? I don't think so." All three legitimacy themes, then, were apparent at Bachmann's rally, though only one appeared in the atmospheric discourse.

Tea Party Patriots Rally

In contrast to the middle two events, the final event of the weekend, the Tea Party Patriots rally, strongly highlighted all three legitimacy themes in both the atmosphere and the programmatic communication. As in the other three events, U.S. flags were on prominent

display, including a gigantic flag and a smaller U.S. Marines flag borne aloft by a man dressed as Captain America, a Marvel Comics superhero whose fictional escapades included fighting the Nazis alongside the U.S. Army in World War II. Another participant carried a sign that simply said “Freedom,” surrounded by red, white, and blue stars. Yet another sign made the Tea Party claims of patriotism manifest, stating: “We are patriots.” One participant wore a t-shirt that said “I [heart] America,” with a U.S. flag inside the heart. Another wore a shirt featuring a U.S. flag and a bald eagle, along with the words “Freedom Isn’t Free.” Yet another man wore a shirt that read “Tea Party Patriot: To protect and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” The word “patriot” was made up of large letters with the U.S. flag printed within them. These are only a few of the many examples of atmospheric communication invoking a patriotic identity.

Claims of being representative of ordinary Americans were also common in the atmospheric discourse of this event. Most commonly, such claims were apparent in the phrase “We the People,” which equated Tea Party participants with the American public and served the double purpose of invoking a treasured American symbol, the U.S. Constitution, which evidence in the previous chapter indicated was central to Tea Party members constructions of legitimacy. For example, one participant wore a shirt that said “I am We the People.” Another carried a sign reading “Remember the Constitution! We are the People!” These sentiments were echoed by another sign which said: “Listen to the People!!! No more taxes! Respect the Constitution!” Another carried a sign saying: “Obama & Co: Quit lying to We the People.” Clearly, many of the participants of this rally saw themselves as representative of the American populace. As in the previous chapter, this notion of being everyday Americans was also communicated by disavowing both major political parties, which were supposedly alienated from ordinary citizens.

One man, for example, carried a sign featuring Uncle Sam with the caption “I Want YOU To Kick Them All Out! In GOD We Trust, NOT POLITICIANS.” Another sign said “We’re sick of [image of three donkeys] who don’t care and [image of three elephants] that don’t dare!” Such declarations served to align the Tea Party with everyday Americans dissatisfied with the two major parties and institutional politics in general.

Delegitimizing opponents was also common at this event, with attacks on President Obama much more prevalent than at the other happenings of weekend. Many of these suggested that Obama specifically or the Tea Party’s opponents generally sought to overturn American values or replace the nation’s system with a socialist one. One young man, for example, carried a sign featuring the Obama “O” logo with a bite mark in it. The text read: “TASTES LIKE SOCIALISM.” Another man wore a shirt featuring an image of a smiling President Obama tearing the Constitution in half. Another participant carried a sign featuring an image of Barack Obama carrying a book titled *Tool for Radicals* (a reference to claims that the President’s political thought was influenced by Saul Alinsky’s controversial book *Rules for Radicals*), with a hammer and sickle printed on the palm of his hand. Other claims of radicalism were less explicitly directed at the president. Many participants carried small yellow octagonal signs that read: “STOP Socialism,” while others had hand-made signs bearing slogans such as “STOP SOCIALIST AGENDA,” “SOCIALISM DOESN’T WORK IN AMERICA” and “Freedom Not Socialism.” The clear implication of such signs was that their opponents intended to install an economic system which many would view as distinctly Un-American.

The programmatic content of this event likewise showcased all three legitimacy themes. Patriotism was again a central theme of the event, which was mostly comprised of an “open mike” session during which members of the audience could offer their thoughts. The rally began

with a prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and singing of the national anthem, two shared symbolic acts of patriotism. One of the speakers at this event was C.L. Bryant, a conservative activist from Louisiana. He began his remarks by saying: “Hello Patriots! It’s a great day in the USA. Here we are, in the greatest land on the face of the Earth, and we need to thank that privilege to the American soldier, let’s give them a great round of applause.” An elderly woman from Washington D.C. who was only identified as “Scout” read an open letter to the Tea Party, which began: “Dear Tea Party Patriots, thank you for being America’s 21st century patriot class.... Thank you for serving as citizen soldiers, for fighting outlaws and for protecting our beloved country, on American soil.” Former Congressman and Heritage Foundation member Earnest Istook led the crowd in singing “God Bless America.” Marilyn Murray, a Tea Party member from Texas, began her speech by saying: “I am a proud American from the great state of Texas, but American first and foremost.” These and other moments during the event highlighted the importance of patriotism to the message of this rally.

The idea that the Tea Party represented everyday Americans was also prominent, both through explicit claims and through emphases on the diversity and the supposed non-political nature of the movement. Stephanie Acres, a Tea Party member from Washington, described her experience with the movement in this way: “I’ve gone to numerous Tea Parties around the states and you know, just got on fire watching normal working American citizens doing their part.” Scout described Tea Party members thusly:

Most clear-headed independent thinkers understand that Tea Party Patriots are the pillars of America, solid citizens who make our nation work well and are not afraid to speak their minds. We come in all stripes and with due respect to Sarah Palin, when fighting for America, we can and will act like tigers, regardless of background and color of course.

Marilyn Murray was another rally participant who rejected charges of racism and emphasized that this was a movement for all Americans, saying: “Each and every day we face the charge of racists, and in honor of Martin Luther King, one of the phrases he would always say is, ‘the only colors that I see are red, white, and blue.’ And that’s what we need in this country is red, white, and blue only.” Murray echoed the claims on King’s legacy that were so prominent the previous day, even as she misattributed a patriotic slogan to him. Others highlighted the movement’s lack of ties to the political establishment, like Tea Party Patriots co-founder Mark Meckler, who said: “it’s a value based movement, it’s a principle based movement, it’s not about politics per se.” Charles Bybee of Nevada in his speech made the link between being non-political and being an everyday person explicit, saying: “None of us really like politics, we didn’t want to get involved in this, we were busy raising our families and volunteering in our communities and paying our taxes and going to church, and doing what we should be doing.” By juxtaposing politics with these ordinary activities that people “should be doing,” the connection between being an ostensibly non-political movement and representing ordinary Americans was made manifest.

Finally, delegitimizing opponents was another common theme at the Tea Party Patriots rally. Perhaps most dramatic in this regard were the remarks made by Scout. She described liberals as a “cancer,” as “radically different thinkers” aiming to “plunder and transform our country according to their twisted visions” and to “melt America down.” Like other events that weekend, her remarks also targeted Obama specifically, saying: “our current President is a compulsive liar, a dangerous, dishonest tyrant, who should be impeached for failing to protect and preserve America.” She also described political opponents as animals, saying: “Obama and others like him are wolves in American clothing: clear, present, and existential threats to our house.” Scout was not the only speaker to suggest that political opponents were un-American, or

at least unrepresentative of Americans. Mark Meckler, in his opening remarks, gestured back toward the Capitol Building and said:

You got the folks over there; *they've totally lost touch with America*. You've got organizations that seemed like they used to maybe stand for Americans but they're now based here in D.C., they're top down, they're trying to tell people what to do, *they don't like the fact that the people want to speak for themselves*.

Henry Moynihan, a Tea Party member from Florida, also referred to Capitol Building, saying:

“This House back here belongs to you. There are intruders in that House and if someone came to your home and they were an intruder you would throw ‘em out.” He also critiqued the Obama administration, as did so many others had that weekend, saying: “Every day that we wake up, this administration has an agenda to take away more of our freedoms.” Descriptions of opponents as outside of the American mainstream, along with the other constructions of Tea Party legitimacy, were prominent in the programmatic discourse of this event.

Descriptions of Motivations

In RQ5, I asked: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to explain the motivations of the movement? If so, how? I found that across the analyzed four gatherings, national identity themes were indeed used to describe and define the motivations of the Tea Party and its participants in several ways. In the previous chapter, I found that most Tea Party members described their motivations broadly in terms of *fear* about the future or current state of their beloved nation, specifically involving anxieties about existential threats to America and the American way of life, and *loss*, i.e. a belief that some crucial aspect of America's life, values, or character located in some idealized past era had already ceased to be. Fear and loss were apparent in both the atmospheric and programmatic discourse of the events, though they were not equally prominent across all four.

Defending the Dream

Fear was a common theme in the atmosphere at the Americans for Prosperity summit. Fear was, for example, present in some of the literature distributed at Defending the Dream Summit. A brochure promoting a book about strategies for conservative activists described the state of the nation as a “mortal crisis,” saying: “our country is on fire and the Republic is collapsing.” The Heritage Foundation *Patriot’s Guide* described a possible future governed by political Left as “casting a bleak shadow on our future, that of our children, and that of future generations,” while one of the “truth cards” suggested that liberals were planning a “orchestrated crisis” to “rock the nation” and justify “authoritarian socialism.” The language of catastrophe also appeared in several of the anti-tax documents. Fact sheets provided by the American Family Business Institute suggested that a return of the “death tax” would result in “killing the American dream,” and that “time is running out.” A fact sheet from Americans for Tax Reform entitled “Six Months to Go Until The Largest Tax Hikes in History” spoke of American families being “hit” and “ensnared” by “great waves” and “explosions,” thus implicitly comparing potential tax increases to life-threatening disasters.

The notion of the loss of an idealized past was also present in the atmospheric discourse of the AFP Summit. Often, the idealization of the past was conveyed through imagery of important events from America’s founding. A number of fact sheets provided by Americans for Tax Reform featured images of the Boston Tea Party, as did a flyer promoting “Resources for the Movement” (i.e. suggested books to read) from American Majority. The American Majority activist manual featured Revolutionary War soldiers, cannons and swords accompanied by the flag, and other images from that era. Several items featured the Gadsden Flag flown by American colonists during the Revolutionary War, which was ubiquitous at Tea Party events,

while other materials such as a card advertising a piece of art featured images of U.S. servicemen from conflicts throughout the nation's past to celebrate the nation's military history. All of these images served to glorify the past and place it at the center of a vision of a better America. More explicit suggestions of a nostalgia for the idealized past were also apparent in the atmospheric communications. For example, the *America Majority Activist Manual* described the aims of the movement as follows: "Imagine a new national network of informed citizens working to see our country *returned to her foundation* of small government." Literature provided by the Heritage Foundation was most explicit about the wish to return to a lost era. The *Patriot's Guide*, for example, stated: "We must dedicate ourselves to putting our country firmly *back on track*. We must *recall the nation to its first principles, reinvigorate constitutionalism, and revive the sturdy virtues* required for self-government." These sentiments were echoed in a flyer entitled "Solutions for America: Changing America's Course," which stated: "We must look to the *principles and practices of the American founding*, not as a historical curiosity, but as a source of assurance and direction for our times." The concept of the loss of an idealized past, then, was evident in the atmosphere of this event.

Turning now to programmatic content, fear for the country's future was a prominent motivation apparent at the Americans for Prosperity Summit. Tim Phillips, in his opening remarks to the summit, said his aim was to let people know that "their prosperity, their jobs, their way of life are threatened by this out of control spending" in D.C. Herman Cain echoed these sentiments, saying: "The American dream is under attack by the liberals in Washington D.C." Bachmann also described dire circumstances for the nation, saying: "These are stunning, stunning scenarios. I think you would agree with me, none of us could believe that we would

have been witnesses to this level of degradation in the United States of America.” Fear of an imminent cataclysm for the nation and its way of life was evident in all these comments.

The sense that an idealized past had been lost and needed to be reclaimed was also apparent. An entire session was devoted to “America’s Revolutionary Founding,” and references to the Founders and their time were peppered throughout the speeches that day. There was also a dinner that evening to commemorate Ronald Reagan, which featured numerous videos that celebrated his life and presidency. Explicit suggestions that something had been lost were also part of the programmatic communication at this event. Perhaps most dramatic in this respect was the speech by Dallas Woodhouse. He concluded the speech, literally shouting until his voice became hoarse and weak, saying:

Ladies and gentlemen, I am ready to go back. I am ready to go back to the time when the health care decisions were made by me and my doctor, not by a bureaucrat in Washington. I am ready to go back to the time when elected officials worked for me, not worked me over. I am ready to go back to the time when I did not have members of Congress trying on purpose to raise my gasoline and raise my electricity prices. Please take me back! Please help me go back! Put me on the express train! Buy me a direct flight! I don’t even have to pass “go” because I know Obama already took the \$200! Please help me go back! Will you help me sign up on Novemberiscoming.com so we can go back to a more prosperous future?

Interestingly, as Woodhouse channeled his fervent nostalgia for the past into a call for political action, the past became the future, as he asked the audience to help him “go back to a more prosperous future.” “Going back” or “taking back our country” were common themes. Below are a few more examples:

Phillip Kerpen, AFP Vice President for Policy: Isn’t this an exciting time for our country? *Isn’t this an exciting time to turn things around and get back on the right track?*

Herman Cain: *We’re gonna take back our government*, because we the people, not the politicians, are still in charge of this country.

Katy Abrams, Pennsylvania 9-12 activist: United we stand, divided we fall. *We have to work together right now to get this country back on track.*

Both fear and loss, then, were apparent in the discourse at this event.

Restoring Honor

Fear and loss were also both apparent at the Beck rally, with loss the more prominent of the two themes, a fact which is congruent with the findings of the previous chapter for reasons I will discuss later. Fear was, however, still occasionally evident in the atmospheric communication. One man, for example, wore a t-shirt which bore the words “Wake Up America Before It’s Too Late!” The first three words were in an ordinary bold-type font, but “Before It’s Too Late” was written in a jagged scrawl reminiscent of horror film logos. For the most part, however, the atmospheric communication at this event did not seem to focus on fear as a motivation. Loss, by contrast, was readily apparent. Invocation of an idealized past was evident in the many Revolutionary War Gadsden flag banners and shirts, people dressed as Founding Fathers, as well as several shirts featuring images of Founding Fathers. Most common among the many patriotic shirts was one that was directly related to the event. This shirt featured images in red, white, and blue of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin, three of the nation’s leading Founding Fathers, with the words “faith,” “hope,” and “charity” beneath their names. These three biblical virtues were explicitly connected with important figures from the nation’s history. Further, Beck gave out an award for each of these three virtues, and in doing so connected the event and himself with the same qualities from Christian and national history. Interestingly, the style of the three images and the typeface used on this shirt invoked the popular red, white, and blue image of President Obama used on the iconic “Hope” poster created by Shepard Fairey for his 2008 campaign, suggesting that Obama had failed to live out these ideals.

Both themes were clearly apparent in the programmatic content of Beck’s event, but the loss of and desire to return to an idealized past was by far the more common. Still, there was a

noteworthy example of the fear theme near the end of the event, as Beck speculated on the possibility of the end of the “American experiment” of self-government, saying:

It’s not just a country, it’s an idea, that man can rule himself. That’s the American experiment. *We have a choice to make today: do we, Americans that live today, surrounded by giants who gave it all, do we today say “the experiment cannot work, man must be ruled by someone?” Do we advance, or perish?*

Beck went on to speak of a “global storm” that was coming, and to compare his message to someone on the Titanic pointing out an iceberg. Thus, fears about the future were apparent in the programmatic discourse of this event.

As in the atmospheric discourse, the idea of loss dominated, presenting itself in two tendencies. The first was a repeated, frequent, and reverential discussion of and references to the past, in particular the Founding Fathers, who were invoked dozens of times over the course of the event. At the same time, though, Beck and some of the other speakers urged the audience NOT to look back at the nation’s “scars” (i.e. instances in which the U.S. did something wrong or unethical) but rather to look forward to a better future. Thus, the past was both idealized in cases where it served to anchor the ideas Beck and the other speakers sought to promote, and also rejected whenever it might serve to undercut patriotic themes. Consider, for example these invocations of America’s mythological past:

Glenn Beck: Where are the heroes of today? Where are the Washingtons, the Jeffersons, the Lincolns of this generation?

Sarah Palin: You are Americans! You have the same steel spine and the moral courage of Washington and Lincoln and Martin Luther King. It is in you, it will sustain you as it sustained them.

Glenn Beck (“Hope” video voiceover): Our history is chock full of brilliant men and women whose integrity and courage gave birth to this glorious republic, men and women whose actions radiated hope throughout this entire land of ours. But where have they gone? What happened to truth? What happened to honor? What happened to individuals who just do the right thing, the hard thing, even when no one is watching?

Alveda King: Our honored heroes, here today, bear witness that there is yet hope for the human heart. Oh that the fountain can be *refilled*, that heaven's unlimited bank account can *flow back* to our lives here on earth.

Glenn Beck: What is it that these men had that you don't? What is it? Abraham Lincoln, the American Indian, Frederick Douglas, the Moon Shot, the pioneers, what is it they had that you don't have? The answer is nothing. They are exactly like you, they just did the hard thing.

All of these excerpts expressed a desire to restore the values of the past in the present day.

America's history was a central point of reference for the moral vision.

However, this view of the past was selective. Beck and many other speakers also urged the attendees of the rally to ignore the more unsavory elements of the nation's past, thus both drawing on the ideals they associated with America's history and rejecting aspects of the past that did not fit this idealized view. Below are a couple of examples.

Glenn Beck: This country has spent far too long worried about scars.... Today we are going to concentrate on the good things in America, the things that we have accomplished and the things we can do tomorrow. ... Do we choose to just look at the scars, do we choose to look back, or do we do what every great generation has done in America in times of trouble, look ahead, dream about what we're going to become, not worried about what we are. Look forward.

Chief Nigel Bigpond: Always go forward, never look back. And we shall never look back at the past. From this day on we should be looking forward to the great things, the great awakening, the great revival that we've prayed for.

While these urgings to look forward and not back may seem out of place in an event where so much time was spent talking about history, this apparent contradiction actually served to shore up the idealization of a bygone era, by suggesting that the "terribly bad" aspects of U.S. history (to use Beck's own words) could be, and should be, overlooked.

Bachmann's Rally

Fear and loss were also apparent in the atmosphere of the Bachmann rally, though again, loss was more common. Nonetheless, fear was apparent in some of the signs and garments at this

event. One man carried a sign which suggested the possibility of a truly bleak future. It read: “We know you’re behind all the TERROR and the POLICE STATE and plan to MURDER 80% to 90% of the world’s population.” Another participant carried a flag that read: “Don’t Go Down With The Ship,” seeming to equate America with a sinking sea vessel. Loss was more apparent, though. The Gadsden Flag was prominently on display, appearing on banners and t-shirts and even on people’s bodies. One man had the iconic image tattooed on his back, signaling an intense and permanent commitment to America’s revolutionary legacy. Another had painted his face in yellow and black, wore a Gadsden flag t-shirt, and carried an enormous Gadsden flag. Others called to mind America’s mythology with words like “Time to Party Like It’s 1773,” a slogan which seems to call for a return to the ideals that motivated the original Boston Tea Party. Tricorne hats of the Revolutionary Era were also present, making the idealized past and a desire to return to it highly visible at this rally.

In the programmatic discourse, the loss of an idealized past was also the more prominent of the two themes. While there were some warnings about future danger, looking back was more common. The most notable example of fears about the future came from Tito Muñoz, who compared America’s possible future to non-capitalist nations of South America. He said:

Many of you do not know how they play the game. Fortunately, I got a lot of teaching with Fidel Castro in Cuba and with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, so I know their game.... And what they’re going to say is that the economy is not working, but *they’re the ones who’s going to destroy it, and they’re going to destroy it for them to later gonna take over*, the independent economy of us, the economy of the industry. So *we have to be very careful of what these guys want to do in Congress*.

Muñoz was also strident in his rhetoric about the need to revive the past. Later in his speech, he described his view of the purpose of the movement: “We are here to destroy those people, to destroy their philosophy and to put back the philosophy of the Founding Fathers, that is the philosophy that made this country stronger, that made it the most powerful nation in the whole

world.” For Muñoz, it was not enough to stop the impending threat of socialism, America also needed to be returned to a previous and ostensible better state of being.

Others expressed a similar desire to go back to a past era. For example, Bachmann expressed her wish to return to the ethic of the founding of the nation, saying: “So, liberty, that’s why we’re here today... it’s part of the spirit of 1776 that we are here renewing today in the year 2010.” Tony Shrive, a Tea Party member from Tennessee, was less specific about what he wanted to go back to, expressing his view of the movement’s goals in this way: “we’re gonna get this country back and we’re going to get the Constitution back and we’re gonna do it together.” Finally, Congressman Louie Gohmert expressed his nostalgia for an era in which he thought the government was more accountable, saying:

That’s what was meant to happen, but we’ve gotten away from that. It was not supposed to be we the people hire somebody on Election Day that goes out and appoints czars to run everything and they’re unaccountable, unassailable to anybody else. It is supposed to be we the people govern, if we the people do not go out and hire good people, then we the people are supposed to go out and run for those jobs, or help others to run. That’s what the government was supposed to be and we’ve let that drop.

The loss of an idealized past, and the desire to restore it, then, were the most common description of motivations at this event.

Tea Party Patriots Rally

The Tea Party Patriots Rally the following day featured far more signs and banners than the other events and thus provided many opportunities for these themes to manifest; and indeed, both fear and loss were readily apparent in the atmospheric communication. Fear was evident in many of the signs carried by participants. One sign, for example, featured the words “Liberty! Not Tyranny.” The word “Tyranny” was in red, in a scrawling font with red blotches giving the appearance of blood and, as in the case of the “Before It’s Too Late” t-shirt at Beck’s rally, suggestive of horror films and indicating the possibility of a dark future in which tyranny was

ascendant. This view of a dystopian future was echoed in other signs as well, such as one which read “MARXISM is the Way to SLAVERY, CAPITALISM is FREEDOM,” suggesting that Marxism was an imminent threat to America.

Loss was also readily apparent in the atmospheric discourse. Gadsden flags were common, and the “Don’t Tread On Me” motto of this flag appeared in large print on a banner over the stage. There were many other symbols of an idealized past as well, on the many signs, banners, and politically themed t-shirts displayed by participants. One rally participant, for example, carried a flag bearing a pine tree and the words “An Appeal to Heaven.” This flag, like the Gadsden flag, was carried by American soldiers in the Revolutionary War and suggested a kinship between Tea Party members and revolutionary Founders. Another variation was a U.S. flag that featured the Gadsden flag in the place of the stars, with the central issues of the Tea Party printed along each red and white stripe. A sign carried by one participant featured a picture of George Washington addressing, according to the text, today’s Congress and saying “WTF?” (what the fuck?)—suggesting that if Washington were alive today, he would share the complaints of the Tea Party movement, again locating America’s values in virtues in heroic figures from a bygone era. Perhaps the most explicit indicator of loss was a sign which read: “I WANT AN AMERICA THAT MY DAD REMEMBERS.” For this particular participant, America’s “lost” past was a better time than the present. The atmospheric communication at this event, then, conveyed the ideas of fear for America’s future and a sense that something important from its past had been lost.

Both motivations were likewise apparent in the programmatic discourse of this event. Fear for the future of the nation was apparent in many of the speeches. Mike Barnhard, the President of Sunshine Review, said that if people didn’t take action “self-government will fail.”

Scout expressed concerns of dire consequences she believed would produce the ascendancy of liberalism, including liberals “voting the Constitution into oblivion.” She suggested that these “la-dee-dah thinkers” could “get the rest of us killed” if left unchecked. Ray Meyers, a Texas Tea Party member, saw an existential threat hovering over the nation, describing the movement thusly: “We are not in a political battle, we’re in a war to save our country.” Joe LeMaine, a Tea Party organizer from Connecticut, described fears of a totalitarian state rising up in America, saying: “This is what we’re here for, because this is what Hitler did, and socialism leads to these things.” A dark future awaited the nation, according to these participants.

The loss of an idealized past was also a common theme at the event. The words of many rally participants suggested that the true spirit and moral foundation of the nation derives from its history. One speaker, for example, recited a long poem about the Founding Fathers and his desire to return to an era in which he believed the country had a religious foundation. Indeed references to historical figures were almost ubiquitous in the speeches at this rally, with speakers frequently invoking George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglas, Thomas Jefferson, and many others. Others simply pointed to history in general as the source of moral rectitude and American values. Scout, for example, said: “We can never forget the history that teaches us why and how America matters.... we know we’re right, because besides the Bible, history tells us so.” Another speaker, Ray Gazardi of Texas, described the motivation of the Tea Party thusly: “It is common-sense, Tea Party, constitutional patriots that will return America to its founding principles.” Thus, a belief in the need to restore qualities that speakers associated with a bygone era was a central component of the programmatic discourse of this rally. Writ large throughout all of these events were fear and loss as justifications for the movement.

Definitions of Behavior

In RQ6, I asked: Did Tea Party events employ national symbols, themes and narratives to define the behavior and actions of the movement? If so, how? In this section I demonstrate that both atmospheric and programmatic aspects of these events helped to reinforce two definitions of activism put forth by the movement—*education*, i.e. the spread of information to the American people in hopes of securing a better future for the nation, and *restoration*, i.e. a revival aimed at restoring America's supposed true values. Education was the prominent definition conveyed through the discourse of the first event, while restoration was more apparent in the other three. Additionally, these data show a third definition—that of a battle or fight—appearing most strongly at Bachmann's rally.

Defending the Dream

The very structure of the Defending the American Dream Summit was suggestive of education. Over the course of the day, participants moved from session to session in the manner that students move from class to class. At each session, an instructor or instructors provided skills-based training or an informational lecture to participants who sat quietly and listened, often taking notes, until designated periods of question and answer. In short, the entire event had the feeling of school day. Additionally, copious amounts of reading material were available to participants, much of it in the form of "fact sheets" laden with footnoted information presented in an academic style, flyers suggesting books to read for more information, and manuals providing instruction on how to be active in the movement. Aside from the form of the event, much of the material within the literature also suggested an educational purpose. The aforementioned "truth cards" featured slogans like "Be informed!" and "The truth will make you free." In a brochure provided to participants, the purpose of Americans for Prosperity was described as follows:

“AFP *educates* citizens about where their elected officials stand on our issues....Through its Grassroots *Training Schools*, AFP foundation has recruited and *educated* tens of thousands of citizens on how to promote greater economic prosperity.” American Majority’s *Activist Manual* stated in its introduction: “This guidebook will *educate* you on the resources available to you, provide tips, how-to’s and resources....” Education, then, was apparent as a definition in both the structure of the event and many of the materials.

As was the case in the atmospheric discourse, education was the primary definition that pervaded in the programmatic discourse of the Defending the American Dream summit. Many speakers described an educational purpose for the movement. In his opening remarks, Tim Phillips described the purpose of Americans for Prosperity, saying: “we’re certainly working to educate the people.” Art Pope, an AFP board member, described AFP’s function in this way: “Americans for Prosperity does educate the public, the people of this great nation, on the policies that succeed in defending the American dream, that will ensure prosperity for future generations.” Herman Cain explained the importance of this educational focus, saying:

Stay informed. The uninformed people of this country are destroying the country. Now they’re not all stupid, just uninformed.... *So one of our responsibilities in this fight, in this journey, on this road to November, on this road to take back our government, one of our responsibilities is not only for us to be informed and know the facts, but to share the facts with those that will listen.*

This definition was also present at the Tea Party panel, where Arkansas Tea Party organizer David Crow talked about his group offering “education classes.” This focus on education was congruent with the format of the event itself, which, as previously discussed, was primarily made up of informational sessions and panel discussions.

Restoring Honor, Bachmann's Rally, and Tea Party Patriots

The other three events, by contrast, did not privilege the conveyance of information or training to nearly the same degree. Atmospherically, they were more like religious revivals. Beck's Restoring Honor Rally in particular was structured in this way. Made up primarily of prayers, songs, and inspirational speeches, this event was not about information so much as it was about values and emotion. Participants sang, prayed, and waved their arms during patriotic and/or religious songs. Garments worn by some participants reinforced this notion. In addition to the "Faith, Hope, Charity" shirts that emphasized values with a religious connotation rather than a specific political position, one man's shirt simply said "American Revival." This event also reflected the discomfort I have argued conservatives have with the idea of protest. Beck specifically asked that people not bring protest signs to this event, thus removing it from the domain of "protest" by overtly depoliticizing the rally. While the other two gatherings of the weekend were much more explicitly political, the revival feeling was still apparent. At both Bachmann's rally and the Tea Party Patriots gathering, there was an "open mike" component to the proceedings, in which ordinary participants could come up and speak. Limited to 90 seconds at the Tea Party Patriot's rally, these speeches were too brief to deal substantively with issues, but instead gave the impression of people testifying as political, like religious, witnesses. Many signs featured slogans like "Pursue Truth! Defend Liberty!" "Freedom," and "Defend the Constitution" had more to do with values than information or even specific political positions.

The restoration definition was also more apparent in the programmatic content of these events, although a more a diverse array of definitions manifested in this domain. Beginning with Beck's rally, the name of the event itself, "Restoring Honor," indicated this event's restorative purpose. Throughout, discussion of the restoration of America was common. The event began

with a voiceover of Beck, which concluded with him saying: “we begin today with the pledge to restore honor and the promise of America.” After Beck, a pastor said a prayer, which included the words: “we come to You [God], once again asking for healing, for *restoration*, for recovery, and for reconciliation.” Sarah Palin likewise concluded her speech by saying: “So with pride in the red, white and blue, with gratitude to our men and women in uniform, let’s stand together, let’s stand with honor and let’s restore America.” Beck, in discussing the purpose of his awards, said: “To restore America, we must not only restore honor, but in doing so, we’ll restore heroes.” Throughout the event, this restoration was often described in terms of spiritual or moral uplift. In a “hope” video, for example, Beck said:

We need leaders to give our children something to hope for, to hope in. *We must restore, not transform, those values, those principles, the freedom that defines who we are, who we have always been*, America the beautiful, the land of the free, the home of the brave, the shining beacon city on the hill for the whole world to see.

So, while the AFP summit, and especially Cain’s remarks, focused on a need to give people information to make good political decisions for the country’s future, this event was dominated by an effort toward restoring what Beck perceived to be America’s true character.

Interestingly, neither of these two definitions manifested explicitly at Bachmann’s rally. Perhaps because it was hosted by a politician who was both running for re-election and urging support for other Tea Party candidates around the nation, the programmatic discourse at this event was dominated instead by definitions that involved war and conflict—language which is common in the discourse of U.S. political campaigns (Howe, 1988). Below are a few examples:

Danielle Powers: And as a mother, as an American, as a veteran *I will continue to fight like I did when I picked up my M-16* and say I will defend this country against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Tony Shrive: I personally stood up here at the healthcare rally and I felt defeated at 12:30 at night, but like Michele said *that was just one battle and we are going to win the war*.

Nancy Rumsfeld, Colorado Tea Party activist: November is coming, *there are many battles to come.*

Tito Muñoz: I'm joining the *fight to fight* against socialist policies, big government. And what most of the people in Congress and especially Obama, wants to make us is dependent of the government, so I'm *fighting* against all that stuff....*We are here to destroy those people, to destroy their philosophy.*

So, neither of the definitions I have found to be common in other was prominent in the programmatic content at this event, probably due to the electoral focus of this rally.

At the Tea Party Patriots rally, however, both education and restoration were apparent.

Scout, for example, described an explicitly educational focus for the movement, which she said was necessary for preventing the rise of the movement's political enemies:

Like thousands of Johnny Appleseeds, *Tea Party Patriots should plant educational seeds across America. We must ensure that every American citizen knows history and free market fundamentals cold.* Otherwise, the know-little and care-less portion of our nation will continue to metastasize.

Tea Party Patriots co-founder and national coordinator Jenny-Beth Martin echoed this idea:

When you leave here today you need to go home and every single person that you talk to, *you've got to keep spreading our message*, the message of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets.... So go and do that work, *teach everyone you know*, remind them to think of those things when they vote.

Others echoed Beck's calls for restoration from the previous day. C.L. Bryant, for example, described the moment in this way: "Friends, we're in the midst of a political revolution, a revolution that will restore integrity and also restore moral revival to this great country. This country needs moral revival and it also needs a revolution." Ernest Istook referred explicitly to Beck's rally, saying: "We were reminded yesterday that what America needs is not a transformation, what it really needs is a restoration." Marilyn Murray described the movement as being a "fight to restore our traditional and fundamental principles to get this country back on

track.” Thus, restoration and education were common themes across these events, but were not equally apparent at all four.

In sum, all four of these events showcased national identity symbols in both atmospheric and programmatic content. Patriotism and the “everyday American” identification appeared at all four events, reinforcing the notion that the Tea Party movement legitimately represented the American people. Political opponents were delegitimized and sometimes even dehumanized, with suggestions that they were dishonest, corrupt, and most importantly, bent on destroying those aspects of the nation that “real” Americans hold dear. The motivations of fear for the nation’s future were explicit, especially at the AFP summit, and the notion that an idealized past had been lost and ought to be restored was also readily apparent, especially at Beck’s “Restoring Honor” rally. Finally, the structure and atmospheric content of these events conveyed the purposes of education (particularly at the AFP summit) and restoration (particularly at the Restoring Honor rally). In short, over the course of these four events, the Tea Party was constructed as a group of concerned Americans, motivated by love of country, seeking to save or bolster their beloved nation.

Discussion

This chapter presented the results of participant observations of four high-profile events associated with the Tea Party movement. For social movements specifically, and in U.S. politics generally, events such as these frequently take center stage in news media (Boyle et al., 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Iyengar, 1991; Lawrence, 2000). This makes the content of major events such as those covered in this chapter a potentially critical factor in the formation of public perceptions of any social movement. My goal in this chapter was to examine the ways in which the Tea Party

movement marshaled powerful national identity themes and symbols in their public events. I was specifically interested in how these discursive features were employed to construct the movement's legitimacy, to describe the motivations driving it, and to define its behaviors. I was also interested in whether these themes manifested in public events similarly to the ways in which they appeared in the interpersonal setting explored in the previous chapter.

Several interesting patterns emerged. First, the central themes that arose in the previous chapter were present, in varying degrees, across all four events. Both through the atmosphere and programs of these four happenings, the prominent messages were that the Tea Party was made up of patriotic everyday Americans, was struggling against illegitimate opponents, was motivated by fear for the nation or a sense of the loss of national values, and sought to save or better the nation through education or restoration. The convergence of results across the chapters, obtained through multiple methods, serves to bolster the validity of any research endeavor, especially in the qualitative domain (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Mathison, 1988). The fact that similar themes appeared across two very different types of discourse (interviews and events), one of which was co-constructed with an interviewer and the other of which was entirely subject-driven, suggests that these themes were central to the Tea Party more broadly. Thus, the overall argument of this research, that the Tea Party leaned heavily on national identity themes to define itself for the media and the public, is strongly supported.

Second, I found that while all of the identified national identity themes appeared in some capacity at all four events, they were not equally apparent at each. In the previous chapter, I concluded tentatively that fear for the future seemed to coincide with an emphasis on education, whereas a perceived loss of an idealized past seemed to occur with an emphasis on restoration; that is, interviewees who feared a bleak future for America defined the movement's activities in

terms of education, aimed at preventing national cataclysm, whereas those who believed that a loss of national character had already occurred defined the movement's behaviors as an attempt at restoring that character. These connections were confirmed in this chapter. At an event at which education was a prominent theme, the AFP summit, fear was more apparent as a motivation than was loss. In contrast, at the event in which restoration was most prominent, Glenn Beck's Restoring Honor rally, loss was by far the more commonly apparent motivation. Thus, the links between these themes were cemented by these results. It is also interesting to note that while these nationally-driven definitions were the most prevalent, under some contexts, other definitions of the movement emerged. At Michele Bachmann's rally, neither education nor restoration were dominant definitions, at least in the programmatic discourse. This may suggest the possibility that when Tea Party events have an electoral focus, other definitions more common to the rhetoric of elections may trump the movement's own preferred discourse.

Third, it is notable that this chapter explored both messages created by individual members of the Tea Party movement (i.e. protest signs and "open mike" speeches) as well as content constructed by professional political and media operatives and organizations. Thus, while some of this content does not necessarily reflect strategic intent, some it was designed for a specific and calculated impact. These events featured numerous full-time political organizers, two individuals who would later make bids for the presidency, several professional media figures, and one former vice-presidential candidate. None of these individuals would make a public presentation in which their discursive choices were not carefully considered to appeal to supporters and the broader public they knew would be watching. Rank-and-file Tea Party members at these events may not have had the intent to emphasize national identity to rally support, and may have been "simply" expressing their beliefs and sentiments. Americans for

Prosperity, Glenn Beck, and Michele Bachmann, by contrast, almost certainly at least in part had strategic considerations in mind when projecting an image of everyday patriotic Americans with the country's best interests at heart.

The ultimate success or failure of any social movement is, at least in part, driven by the movement's ability to inject preferred narratives of the movement into news media discourse (Gamson, 1988; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Most people have no firsthand experience with most social movements, especially when a movement has not been around for very long. Those that succeed, then, are typically those that are able to influence media to promote their collective vision of reality, to depict themselves as rightfully upset by significant issues, to construct themselves as legitimately representing a broad constituency. Put simply, while news tends to undercut social movements by disparaging them in a variety of ways, movements that are covered in ways that make them relatable to news consumers are more likely to succeed in gaining public support than those who are not. If, as it appears, the Tea Party sought to construct itself for the public and the media using national identity themes, the next logical question is whether or not they were successful in getting those themes conveyed in news media. With this in mind, I turn now to my next chapter.

Chapter 5

Tea Party Protests and News

When the Tea Party movement burst noisily into political visibility with the “Tax Day” rallies of 2009 in cities across America, journalists and media commentators buzzed with discussion of the movement. A few days before the rally, CNN’s Don Lemon described the movement as “catching on like fire” and asked “What’s going on here?” (in Frank, 2009). As the rallies unfolded, journalists and pundits offered a variety of answers to this query. Members of the Tea Party were described as everything from a great revival of the American spirit to racist fanatics, from a grassroots revolution to a puppet of the Republican Party, with news outlets sometimes dividing sharply on the significance of the movement. On Tax Day, CNN hosted panels in which commentators, party strategists, and academics characterized the movement and prognosticated about its potential impact, Fox sent many of its most popular figures—such as Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity—to cover rallies live in cities across the nation, and MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow and other commentators explored the possibility of a racial element to the Tea Party and made off-color jokes about protest participants. One thing was certain: what these conservative activists were doing had captured the attention of many Americans across the political spectrum.

For a large, national protest to attract a spotlight and create controversy in news discourse is not unusual—such events are frequently a topic of discussion and debate among media figures, and indeed are intended to be so by protest organizers. What was unusual about coverage of the Tea Party was that national-identity imagery and discussion seemed to infuse the coverage, potentially casting the movement as squarely within American traditions of political participation and patriotism. For example, even as he criticized the Tea Party, CNN contributor and

Democratic Party strategist Paul Begala remarked: “There’s something very healthy, very good—even if I don’t like it or Barack might not like it—very patriotic, to protest your government. I love that” (Sherling, 2009, April 15). Fox News’s Beck defended the movement against what he perceived as a hostile media by comparing Tea Party protestors to the Founders of the nation, saying: “The media understands that the Founders dressed up as Indians and threw some tea in the Boston Harbor to protest taxes. But for the life of them, they cannot figure out why these people are in the streets all across America today. I will explain” (Striegel, 2009, April 15). Nor was such discussion limited to cable news commentators—an Associated Press (2009) account of one of the first Tea Party demonstrations described it in this way: “Despite the rain and cold Wednesday, the crowd waving American flags came out for the local version of a national day of protests that cite the Boston Tea Party as inspiration.” Even on their public launch day, Tea Party activists had some success framing themselves as patriotic Americans.

Such coverage of political protest and protestors is uncommon. In contrast, a vast body of scholarship has shown that protests and protestors in America are often depicted as *unpatriotic*, deviant, violent, unpopular, ineffective spectacles (Chan & Lee, 1984; Dardis, 2006; Di Cicco, 2010; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). An emphasis on national identity in coverage of protests would suggest just the opposite: that a protest is a mainstream phenomenon aligned with American traditions, values, and culture. Because of the potentially significant cultural resonance of the Tea Party’s nation-bolstering focus, it seems probable that this emphasis could have echoed through news media—and, crucially important, may have mitigated or displaced some of the critical characterizations of protests that scholars have come to expect in news. National identity discourse has been shown to have powerful impacts on news coverage in other contexts, and this raises the question of whether the Tea Party’s deployment of American themes and

symbols examined in the last two chapters might have had an effect upon, or at least been reflected in, news coverage of the movement. Such a finding could have important implications both for the Tea Party and for other social movements hoping to influence news coverage.

This chapter, then, examines news coverage of the Tea Party to determine whether the movement's nation-affirming message resonated in news coverage and, if so, how it may have been related to other characterizations of the Tea Party and their events. I employed content analysis to compare coverage of the first Tea Party rallies in five major news sources with coverage of similarly foundational demonstrations organized by two other major protest movements from the same decade which were not known for overt invocations of the nation—the Iraq War protests of 2003 and the immigration reform demonstrations of 2006. This analysis shows that the national identity themes found in the previous two chapters echoed substantially in news, infusing characterizations of the Tea Party with nation-bolstering content that was largely absent from coverage of the other two movements. Further, this content appeared in some instances to have had a mitigating effect on the more common and negative styles of coverage that are typically employed in protest news.

Hypotheses and Procedures

My central proposition in this analysis was that national identity themes in Tea Party discourse would be amplified in news coverage. An embrace of the nation is an important component of most people's individual identities, and the symbols that represent it are a central part of American culture (Anderson, 2006; Glover, 1997; Smith, 1991). Previous scholarship has found that culturally resonant messages in general, and nationally inflected messages specifically, are more likely than other types of messages to be echoed in news (Calabrese &

Burke, 1992; Entman, 2003; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hutcheson et al, 2004). Put simply, messages that bolster the nation are broadly appealing to journalists and the public alike, and thus are likely to be emphasized by news media when deployed by social actors. Chapters 3 and 4 established that such themes were central to the discourse of the Tea Party in its founding, and thus it is likely that journalistic depictions would have featured such ideas, depicting participants as highly patriotic and deeply American, and emphasizing the presence of national symbols and myths in Tea Party messages. With this in mind, I offer my first hypothesis (H1): News coverage of Tea Party events was more likely to include favorable references to patriotism and American traditions, symbols, and mythology than news coverage of other protest events.

Part of what would make such a pattern noteworthy is that it would be comparatively unusual in coverage of protests. Whereas a focus on national identity would cast the Tea Party as within the American mainstream, previous scholarship has found that the bulk of protest coverage does just the opposite, depicting protests and protestors as dangerous and deviant. Since the publication of Gitlin's (1980) groundbreaking book *The Whole World Is Watching*, scholars have consistently found that news coverage tends to focus on aspects of protests that position them as outside the mainstream. Protestors and their views are represented as unpopular, and journalistic attention is consistently given to demonstrators who subscribe to radical ideologies, who engage in counter-normative behavior (e.g. destruction of property or clashes with police), who have an unusual appearance (e.g. hairstyles and clothing), or who are demographically unrepresentative of the U.S. population (e.g. focus on protestors' age or ethnicity) (see Ashley & Olson, 1998; Boyle et al, 2004; Dardis, 2006; McLeod & Hertog, 1992, among many others). Such coverage has come to be known as the protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984). Because such coverage would seem likely to clash with mainstreaming themes of

nationally inflected coverage, these two styles of coverage seem unlikely to co-occur. Thus, I offer my second hypothesis (H2): News coverage of Tea Party events was less likely to feature the themes of the protest paradigm than news coverage of other protest events.

In addition to the established protest paradigm, my own research has identified a parallel style of news coverage that emphasizes nuisance or irritation caused by protests, and serves to depict them generally as being without value. First and foremost, such coverage emphasizes the interruptions in day-to-day activities that result from protests, as well as non-participants' negative reactions to such interruptions. Such coverage implies that activities like shopping or commuting are more important or valuable than protesting. While many individuals might be willing to tolerate such inconveniences if protests were seen as contributing something valuable, this style of coverage reinforces the negative aspects of protest by casting them as impotent—incapable of bringing about any real change. The worthlessness of protests is further cemented by the depiction of protestors as unpatriotic or as harmful to America, thus suggesting that they contribute nothing of value to the nation. My research found that such depictions of protest have become increasingly common since the heyday of political protest in the 1960s (Di Cicco, 2010). It seems unlikely that a protest would be depicted in the same news content as both a patriotic act and an unpatriotic nuisance, and thus it may be that an emphasis on national identity could mitigate the presence of the nuisance paradigm. With this in mind, I offer my third and final hypothesis (H3): News coverage of Tea Party events was less likely to feature the themes of the nuisance paradigm than news coverage of other protest events.

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a content analysis of cable news and newspaper coverage of the first major demonstrations of three larger movements—the Tea Party, the anti-Iraq War movement, and immigration reform. The specific demonstrations of focus were the Tea

Party “Tax Day” rallies on April 15, 2009, the national day of protest for immigrant rights on April 10, 2006, and the global day of protest against the impending war in Iraq¹⁷ on February 15, 2003. Taken together, these three events arguably represent the most noteworthy U.S. protests in the first decade of the 21st century. I collected content from Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from the Nexis database. I retrieved every available article and program from a period beginning two weeks before and ending two weeks after the specific events of focus, thus allowing me to capture content about preparations for each demonstration, the aftermath of each, and also news about any related smaller events occurring within the sampling frame. The resulting corpus of data consisted of 451 articles and programs.

Next, I compiled a codebook featuring several variables that captured national identity discourse, the protest paradigm, and the nuisance paradigm (hereafter referred to as “discourse variables”), as well as several other pieces of identifying information about each text and speaker.¹⁸ For the bulk of the analyses in this chapter, the unit of analysis is the news article or TV program. To capture a more nuanced and detailed picture of the content, however, data were collected initially at the level of the statement, defined as an uninterrupted period of speech or writing by a single speaker. Thus, each discourse variable could be coded as present any number of times in each article or program, depending on the number of statements in which it appeared. So, for example, if a protestor claimed that his or her actions were patriotic, a journalist then agreed with that claim, and that protestor made another similar claim of patriotism later in the program, this was recorded as three separate statements in which the “patriotic” variable was present. Each statement was coded for the presence or absence of every discourse variable, and

¹⁷ This was a global day of action, but to maintain comparability I only analyzed content on U.S. protests.

¹⁸ This included a statement number, the date of publication/broadcast, the source, article or program number, and the type of speaker. More details can be found in chapter 2, and the full codebook is provided in Appendix B.

there was no limit on how many variables could be present in a single statement.¹⁹ Statements containing no instances of any discourse variable were not recorded, but each article or program was allotted at least one line in the dataset, regardless of whether or not any topic variables appeared. For stories in which no discourse variables appeared, I captured the news source and date of the article or program but coded all other entries as 99, thus providing a record of both how often the discourse variables appeared in each article they were present in and the number of programs or articles in which none of them appeared at all. I conducted an intercoder reliability test using a second coder who coded an overlapping 10 percent of the content, selected using a systematic random sampling approach. All variables achieved acceptable levels of reliability with Scott's *pi* scores ranging from .89 ("Speaker") to 1.0 ("Annoy," "Unpatriotic," "NationalHarm," "Elderly," and "Extremist").²⁰

After coding all content, the results were entered into SPSS, a statistical analysis program that allowed me to examine coverage patterns across the three protests. Then, two datasets were created. The first was comprised of the original coding of the statements. For the second, data were aggregated using the TV program or newspaper article as a collective variable, providing a total number of each type of statement appearing within each individual news text. This allowed for the transformation of nominal data into ratio data, and the calculation of mean occurrences of each type of statement per program or article, across the three different domains of protest. Creating separate datasets enabled inferences to be made on two levels: the first, using statements as the unit of analysis, allowed me to delve into which kinds of speakers made coded statements in different contexts, while the second enabled comparison of programs and articles

¹⁹ For example, if a bystander at an event said "these protestors seem very patriotic, but I wish they wouldn't block the street and cause these traffic problems," both the "patriotic" and "traffic" variables would have been coded as present within this statement, which would then comprise one line in the dataset. All other variables would have been coded as absent from the statement.

²⁰ More details on this process are provided in Chapter 2.

as the unit of analysis across networks or across protests to examine overall patterns of discourse. This coding scheme allowed me to draw solid conclusions about the coverage of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies as compared to the other two protest events.

Findings

In this section I present data which show that news coverage of the Tea Party differed in several important ways from coverage of the Iraq War and immigration reform demonstrations. As a first step, it is important to look at the overall contours of the data; then I turn to tests of the hypotheses. To that end, I begin by examining the amount of total coverage of the three selected protests across the five news outlets. I then turn to an analysis of the concentration of coverage across the time frame from which my data were drawn. Afterwards, I explore each hypothesis, and then delve yet deeper into the data comparing news discourse between news outlets and across different types of speakers. Finally, I focus on distinct types of national invocations within Tea Party discourse, comparing across news outlets.

Contours of the Data

As a starting point, I examined some basic characteristics of the data, specifically (a) the amount of coverage of each protest by each news outlet and (b) how that coverage was spread out over the timeframe under examination here. In combination, these two approaches provided insight into how coverage of the protests was similar and different, in the most general terms. Table 5.1 summarizes the number of news programs or articles present in the sample, distinguished by news source. As a reminder, the length of my analysis was identical for each protest: two weeks before and two weeks afterward.

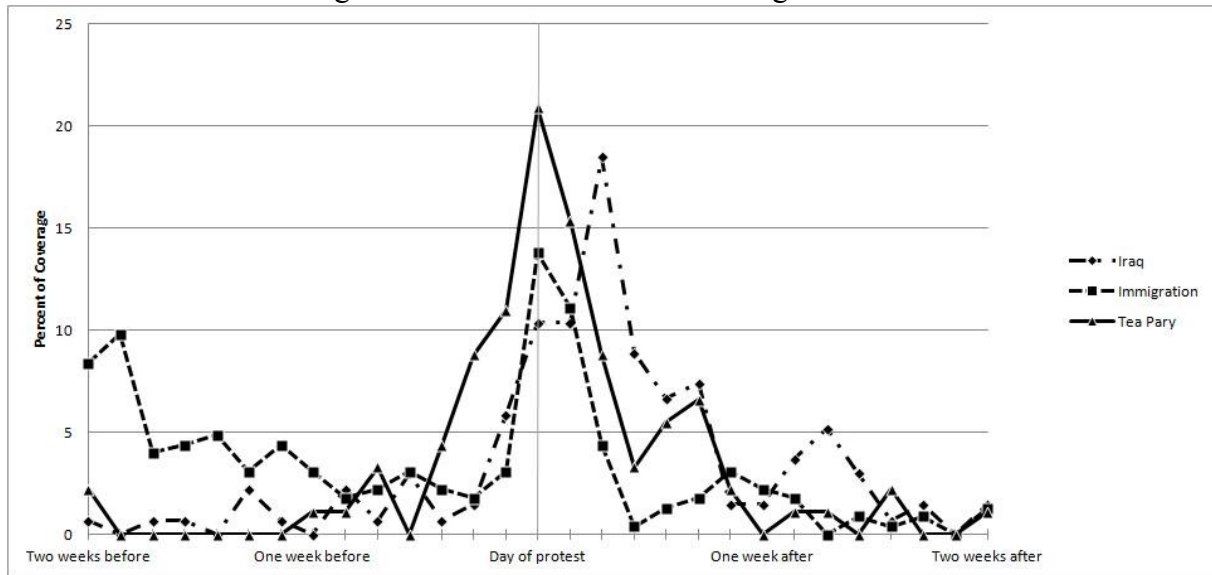
Table 5.1: News programs and articles, by source

	NYT	WaPo	CNN	MSNBC	Fox	Total
Iraq	31	20	51	11	22	135
Immigration	31	70	71	16	37	225
Tea Party	6	11	22	17	35	91
Total	68	101	144	44	94	451

Two patterns are apparent. First, the Tea Party protests of 2009 were a major story, but even so, did not garner as much media attention as the other two demonstrations examined in this chapter. Indeed, the Tea Party launching protest received less than half the coverage of the immigration rallies. Several of the interviewees in Chapter 3 claimed that news media largely ignored their events, and while these data certainly do not support such a claim, they do suggest that journalists did not pay as much attention to the foundational Tea Party protests as the other happenings. A second notable feature in these data is that the Tea Party demonstrations were a major story at partisan-leaning news outlets, but were much less featured at “objective” news organizations. Note that at Fox News and MSNBC, the three protests received proportionally similar amounts of coverage, with the Iraq War protests garnering slightly less than the other two, whereas at CNN, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*, the Tea Party were in a distant third place in total amount of coverage.

The concentration of stories about the three protests across time also yields some valuable insights. Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of articles or programs about each protest that were published or broadcast on each day of the one-month period I analyzed for each protest. The trend lines look similar in many ways, but some interesting differences are also apparent.

Figure 5.1: Concentration of Coverage over Time



All three protests displayed a similar trend: coverage of the events was relatively scant for most days before the events, increased rapidly a few days just before the date of the protest, then within a few days dropped back to almost nothing. In short, these events were covered in a relatively episodic fashion, with the bulk of discussion occurring within a few days of each demonstration and not enduring long afterward. Still, some differences were apparent across the three protests. First, coverage of the immigration rallies started at a much higher level than the other two, which necessitates explanation. This feature of the data probably arises from the fact that several immigration demonstrations had occurred just prior to the start of the sample frame: April 10 was the national day of protest arising from this movement and was the central data of analysis for this research, but the largest single demonstration occurred in Los Angeles on March 25, just a few days prior to the start of the sample used in this study.

Two other noteworthy findings appear, relative to the concentration of coverage on the day of the event itself. First, of the three protests, coverage of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies was most concentrated on the day of the primary events. Over 20 percent of coverage appeared on that date, with another 15 percent occurring the following day. Thus, over a third of all coverage

of this event occurred in a 48-hour period, and as such, it would be reasonable to describe coverage of the Tea Party protests as being the most episodic of the three. Second, it is interesting to note that coverage of the Iraq War protests, unlike the other two movements, did not reach its peak on the day of the events themselves. Indeed, only about 10 percent of the coverage of these demonstrations occurred on the day of the event, with the highest concentration of coverage, almost 19 percent, occurring a full two days afterward. Thus, coverage of these demonstrations could also be described as episodic but somewhat “delayed,” possibly suggesting a proportionately greater amount of analysis of the event as compared to straight reporting.

To sum up, the Tea Party Tax Day rallies of 2009 were a major story, but received less coverage overall than did the Iraq and immigration demonstrations. This was especially true at the more traditional news outlets (CNN, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*). In some instances, this made comparison of coverage across the news outlets a challenge, especially in the cases of the print sources where stories about the Tea Party Tax Day rallies were so few. Only Fox News and MSNBC covered the Tea Party rallies to an extent that was similar to the Iraq and immigration protests. Also noteworthy is that Tea Party coverage was more episodic than coverage of the other two protests, with the greatest concentration of coverage appearing on or within a day of the date of the Tea Party demonstrations. These preliminary results suggest that, in terms of quantity and concentration of coverage, the news outlets I focused on in this study treated the Tea Party rallies differently than the Iraq and immigration protests. I turn now to a deeper level of analysis.

National Identity Coverage

My first hypothesis (H1) suggested that the Tea Party's launching protests would receive more national identity coverage than the foundational protests of the other two movements of focus here. The first step in testing this hypothesis was to aggregate all the national identity variables in the codebook to create a single measure of the presence of national identity coverage. At this aggregate level, H1 was strongly supported. Table 5.2 shows these results.

Table 5.2: National Identity Coverage, by Protest

	Iraq <i>N</i> =135	Immigration <i>N</i> =225	Tea Party <i>N</i> =91
National ID mean	0.19	.95	2.53
National ID %	21.9	34.2	65.9

Table 5.2 compares the three protests in two ways. The first is the mean number of statements, per article or news program, that invoked national identity. The first line of the table shows that statements of this nature were much, much more common in Tea Party coverage, with the mean for these events being more than double that of the immigration protests and more than *ten times* that of the Iraq War protest coverage. On average, newspaper stories and TV programs about the Tea Party rallies featured about 2.5 invocations of national identity ($M=2.53$), whereas such invocations occurred less than once in every five newspaper stories or TV programs about the Iraq War protests ($M=0.19$).

Next, I compared the protests in terms of the percent of stories that featured at least one occurrence of a national identity statement. These data, presented in the second line of the table, cement the trend discovered in examining the means: nearly two-thirds of the articles or programs about the Tea Party contained statements highlighting the American identity of the participants or the patriotic nature of the movement (65.9 percent), compared to only about one-third of stories about the immigration rallies (34.2 percent) and only about one-fifth of stories

about Iraq War protests (21.9 percent). Thus, stories about the Tea Party were both much more likely to feature such statements (the percentages) and when these statements appeared in a story they were likely to be present a greater number of times (the means). In short, as compared to the other two protests, coverage of the Tea Party was saturated with nation-bolstering messages.²¹

These findings raise questions about the specifics of Tea Party coverage. For example, it is possible that journalists were more likely to describe Tea Party participants as patriotic, but might have described all three sets of demonstrators as “Americans” at a similar rate. To examine this relationship in greater detail, my next step was to disaggregate the national identity variables and examine each one individually. The results of this analysis are in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: National Identity Variables, by Protest

	Iraq <i>N</i> =135	Immigration <i>N</i> =225	Tea Party <i>N</i> =91
Patriotic mean	0.05	0.12	0.23
%	4.4	10.7	17.6
American mean	0.07	0.20	1.05
%	6.7	15.1	49.5
Symbols mean	0.04	0.51	0.26
%	3.0	26.2	11.0
Mythology mean	0.02	0.12	0.98
%	0.7	9.3	45.1

Results in Table 5.3 show that the Tea Party dominated in three of the four types of national identity statements, and did so by wide margins. This holds true in both comparison of means and comparison of percent of stories featuring each type of statement. The difference is most stark when Tea Party coverage is compared with coverage of the Iraq War. Tea Party protestors were much more likely to be described as patriotic and as Americans, and coverage of

²¹ No inferential statistics are presented in this chapter, because the data do not constitute a probability sample. Rather, they represent every available text in the Nexis database concerning these three events, from two weeks before through two weeks after the dates of each event. Because the purpose of inferential statistics is to generalize from a probability sample to a larger population, such tests are not appropriate here (see Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

their events was much more likely to contain references and comparisons to prominent events and figures that are part of the nation's mythology. The one exception to this overall trend is the "symbols" variable, which captured statements about symbolic acts of patriotism at demonstrations, such as singing the national anthem, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and carrying the U.S. flag. Sustained controversy among media and political figures about whether immigration reform protestors should carry Mexican flags or U.S. flags, along with concerted efforts on the part of immigration protest organizers to emphasize the presence of U.S. flags, made this an ongoing focus of news coverage. Thus, while coverage of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies ($M=0.26$) featured a mean of more than six times as many as these kinds of statements than the Iraq War protests ($M=0.04$), coverage of the immigration rallies featured about twice as many as Tea Party coverage ($M=0.51$). This finding suggests that the power of national identity markers to influence news coverage may not be limited to the Tea Party or conservative movements more generally—other movements have also made use of these powerful symbols and it appears to have influenced their depictions by journalists.

To further flesh out this analysis, it was important to compare the different news outlets in their national identity discourse. If the vast majority of these statements were coming from one news outlet, such as Fox News, this could have important implications for the understanding of how partisan-oriented news media cover social movements. By contrast, if the predominance of the Tea Party in nation-bolstering coverage were consistent across all news outlets, that would further speak to the power of national identity discourse to influence news content across media of different types and political orientations. I explore this question in detail in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: National Identity Discourse by News Outlet

	NYT N=68	WaPo N=101	CNN N=144	MSNBC N=44	Fox N=94
Iraq mean	0.29	0.05	0.24	0.18	0.05
%	16.1	5.0	15.7	9.1	4.5
Immigration mean	1.16	0.96	1.06	1.06	0.51
%	41.9	38.6	35.2	31.2	18.9
Tea Party mean	2.17	1.45	3.27	1.71	2.86
%	50.0	36.4	86.4	58.8	68.6

Comparison across news outlets must be undertaken carefully. This is always the case when comparing content from different media forms, and as noted in Chapter 2, even among the cable news outlets, Nexis did not allow for collecting completely analogous data, since the transcripts from MSNBC and Fox were not available for the same number of hours per day as CNN. Even so, some conclusions can be drawn, since availability of transcripts from each news source was consistent across the three protests—that is, the limitations on availability for each news outlet remained consistent over time. Table 5.4 shows that, in terms of mean occurrences, national identity statements were more common for the Tea Party than the other two protests at all five news outlets. Comparing percentages, the Tea Party was far ahead in all five outlets. Further, the most conservative of the five outlets, Fox News, was not the dominant source of nationally inflected coverage of the Tea Party. Rather, the ostensibly more objective CNN trumped Fox, both in mean number of statements per program (a difference of about 0.4 statements per program) and percent of programs (a difference of nearly 20 percent). Perhaps even more noteworthy is that MSNBC, which Tea Party participants criticized for being hostile toward the Tea Party, employed this style of coverage for the Tea Party nearly ten times as often in covering the Tax Day rallies ($M=1.71$) than they did for the Iraq War demonstrations ($M=0.18$). Thus, it appears that the Tea Party's use of national identity language and symbols resonated across all five news outlets.

Finally, I examined whether there were differences in the coverage of these protests in terms of what types of speakers were most likely to make statements that invoked or bolstered national identity. News consumers often use source credibility cues to assess issues, so the types of individuals making these statements could have an important impact on audience perceptions of the protests (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Miller & Kurpius, 2010). Table 5.5 explores this topic in detail.

Table 5.5: American Identity Statements Makers, by Protest^a

	Iraq N=22	Immigration N=185	Tea Party N=211
Journalist	63.6%	58.4%	67.3%
Protestor	31.8%	34.1%	21.8%
Counter-protestor	0%	0%	0%
Political figure	0%	7.0%	7.1%
Safety official	0%	0%	0%
Bystander	0%	0%	0%
Expert	4.5%	0%	0.5%
Other non-participant	0%	0.5%	2.8%
Unsure/uncodeable	0%	0%	0.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a Note: Ns in this table refer to statements, rather than to articles or programs.

Table 5.5 does not suggest any dramatic differences between protests in terms of the types of speakers given opportunities in news coverage to speak about the protest. Two findings, though, are worth noting. First, in the case of the Iraq war protests, there were only 22 instances of *anyone* in these news stories characterizing protestors in national identity terms (as compared to roughly 200 for each of the others), and no instances of a political figure doing so. This was in spite of the fact that there were nearly 50 percent more articles and programs about the Iraq War

protests ($N=135$) than the Tea Party rallies ($N=91$). Whether this is product of intentional communications by the movement or the political climate surrounding the decision to go to war is impossible to address with these data, but it may be that this was simply not a style of news coverage available to anti-war activists. A second interesting point is with regards to the percent of national identity statements made by protestors themselves—in the case of the Tea Party, about 10 percent fewer national identity statements came from demonstrators themselves. This may suggest that while Iraq War and immigration rights protestors had to make the case for their own national allegiance, in the case of the Tea Party, this was less necessary, since others were apt to make the case for them.

To summarize, this section showed that the Tea Party Tax Day rallies of 2009 were much more likely to be depicted using national-bolstering themes than were the Iraq War or immigration reform demonstrations. In three of the four categories of nationally inflected discourse for which I coded, the Tea Party led the other two protests by wide margins. The Tea Party protestors were more likely to be described as American, as patriotic, and in terms referencing America's mythological past than the other two protests. The sole exception was discussion of symbolic acts of patriotism, which was more common in coverage of the immigration rallies. Further, the overall trend held across the five news outlets. No definitive differences were found between the protests with respect to the type of speakers who invoked the nation, although in the case of the Tea Party, proportionally fewer of these comments were made by the protestors themselves. Overall, H1 was strongly supported by the data.

Protest Paradigm Coverage

My second hypothesis (H2) proposed that the national identity coverage, with its embrace of national ideals, would moderate the critical themes of the protest paradigm, resulting in less

protest paradigm news coverage for the Tea Party than for the other two protests. The logic here was that it seemed improbable that news coverage would depict protestors as both patriots and deviants. Table 5.6 shows that this hypothesis was not supported.

Table 5.6: Protest Paradigm Coverage, by Protest

	Iraq <i>N</i> =135	Immigration <i>N</i> =225	Tea Party <i>N</i> =91
Protest Paradigm mean	1.11	1.32	1.77
Protest Paradigm %	41.5	61.3	62.6

Table 5.6 compares the entire body of coverage of each protest in terms of an aggregate variable that combined all the coded indicators of the protest paradigm. The results show that, both in terms of mean statements per story and percent of stories containing any such coverage, the Tea Party protests received the *most* protest paradigm coverage ($M=1.77$), followed by the immigration rallies ($M=1.32$) and finally the Iraq War protests ($M=1.11$). Thus, the data do not support my hypothesis.

These surprising results raise the question of how it is that the Tea Party was treated as both part of the national mainstream and deviant. To explore this pattern, I first disaggregated the protest paradigm variables to examine what types of protest paradigm statements were being made about the Tea Party. Results are in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Protest Paradigm Variables, by Protest^a

	Iraq	Immigration	Tea Party
Appearance mean	0.07	0.02	0.10
%	4.4	1.8	5.5
Oddities mean	0.20	0.10	0.48
%	11.9	8.4	25.3
Violence mean	0.18	0.06	0.01
%	10.4	4.9	1.1
Crime mean	0.19	0.06	0
%	13.3	4.4	0
<i>Behaviors mean</i>	<i>0.64</i>	<i>0.24</i>	<i>0.59</i>
%	<i>24.4</i>	<i>15.6</i>	<i>27.5</i>
Young mean	0.10	0.43	0.01
%	5.2	27.6	1.1
Elderly mean	0.04	0	0.01
%	2.2	0	1.1
Race mean	0	0.23	0.04
%	0	19.6	4.4
<i>Demographics mean</i>	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.66</i>	<i>0.07</i>
%	<i>7.4</i>	<i>41.8</i>	<i>6.6</i>
Quotemarks mean	0.01	0.01	0.10
%	0.7	0.9	8.8
Inauthentic mean	0.01	0.11	0.43
%	1.5	8.4	31.9
<i>Fake movement mean</i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>0.53</i>
%	<i>2.2</i>	<i>8.9</i>	<i>38.5</i>
Counter-protestors mean	0.05	0.14	0.03
%	3.7	11.1	2.2
Unpopular mean	0.12	0.09	0.25
%	8.9	7.1	15.4
Extremist mean	0.14	0.08	0.30
%	9.6	5.8	19.8
<i>Ideological deviants mean</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.59</i>
%	<i>20</i>	<i>21.3</i>	<i>31.9</i>

^aShaded variables aggregate the unshaded variables above them.

Table 5.7 provides a more nuanced picture of how coverage of the Tea Party protests differed from the other two events, in terms of the protest paradigm. Most research examining this style of coverage has found that news tends to marginalize protests by focusing on strange behaviors of protestors, unusual demographics (e.g. age, ethnicity), or fringe beliefs, or by suggesting a movement is inauthentic. Table 5.7 shows all the protest paradigm variables, as well as four summary variables (in gray) that combine results into four thematic clusters. All of the

features of the protest paradigm were present in coverage of all three protest events, but a focus on “deviant” beliefs ($M=0.59$) and a supposed lack of authenticity ($M=0.53$) were what most differentiated coverage of the Tea Party from the other two demonstrations. In news discussion of unusual behavior, coverage of the Tea Party featured about as much as the Iraq War protests. In terms of demographic descriptions, even though the Tea Party groups were comprised largely of groups that are unusual at protests (i.e. older whites, see *New York Times*/CBS Poll, 2010), this was not a major factor in coverage, especially as compared to the immigration protests, which featured frequent mentions of the ethnicity and youth of protestors. Instead, relative to the Iraq and immigration demonstrations, protest paradigm coverage of the Tea Party was more likely to emphasize claims that the movements’ views were extreme or unpopular (mentioned in about 32 percent of stories), and, even more so, discussion suggesting the movement was not genuine, a common claim among left-leaning activists who described the movement as “astroturf” (mentioned in about 39 percent of stories).

As a next step in deciphering this unexpected hypothesis outcome, I compared the five news sources to examine what differences might have been apparent in their coverage of these events. I wanted to know if the tendency to describe the Tea Party via the protest paradigm was equally present across all five news outlets, or if a specific news organization’s coverage drove this perspective. In the latter case, it might have been possible for H2 to be supported in some news outlets and not others. Results are in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Protest Paradigm Discourse, by News Outlet

	NYT <i>N</i> =68	WaPo <i>N</i> =101	CNN <i>N</i> =144	MSNBC <i>N</i> =44	Fox <i>N</i> =94
Iraq mean	1.61	1.10	0.80	1.55	0.91
%	48.4	55.0	35.3	45.5	31.8
Immigration mean	0.87	1.04	2.03	0.94	1.05
%	41.9	58.6	77.5	68.6	48.6
Tea Party mean	1.83	1.55	2.73	2.76	0.74
%	83.3	72.7	68.2	70.6	48.6

Table 5.8 shows some noteworthy differences in how the different outlets covered the Tea Party rallies—the tendency toward covering them using the protest paradigm was apparent at all news outlets, but not equally so. Further, not in every case did the Tea Party receive more of this coverage. The most glaring instance is Fox’s coverage of these protests. Both in terms of mean occurrences of protest paradigm statements ($M=0.74$) and percent of stories containing such statements (48.6 percent), Fox News featured less than the other four news outlets, by a wide margin. In comparing means, Fox included protest paradigm statements less than half as often as the next lowest news source, the *Washington Post* ($M=1.55$) and only about one-fourth as often as the liberal-leaning MSNBC ($M=2.76$). Comparing percents, Fox emphasized the protest paradigm in the same proportion of news programs for the Tea Party as for the immigration protests (48.6 percent) and much less than the other news outlets. Thus, Fox’s conservative ideology and strong tendency to invoke national identity symbols in Tea Party coverage had an inverse relationship to the protest paradigm, as predicted by H2. The same cannot be said of all the news outlets. The tendency toward greater amounts of protest paradigm coverage for the Tea Party protests, then, was not universal, and it appears that at the more sympathetic Fox News Network, the hypothesized relationship did occur as predicted.

As a final step in assessing protest paradigm coverage of these demonstrations, I sought to examine who was most likely to be quoted as making statements invoking this paradigm’s themes. These results appear in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9: Protest Paradigm Statement Makers, by Protest^a

	Iraq N=124	Immigration N=241	Tea Party N=107
Journalist	69.4%	86.3%	73.8%
Protestor	4.8%	1.2%	9.0%
Counter-protestor	0.8%	1.2%	0%
Political figure	2.4%	4.1%	4.1%
Safety official	6.5%	1.2%	0.7%
Bystander	2.4%	0%	0%
Expert	2.4%	0.8%	0.7%
Other non-participant	11.3%	4.6%	10.3%
Unsure/uncodeable	0%	0.4%	1.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a Note: *N*s in this table refer to statements, rather than to articles or programs.

Approaching this data by comparing speakers does not yield a clear pattern with regard to coverage of the Tea Party. Journalists were somewhat more likely to make protest paradigm statements about the Tea Party (73.8 percent of statements) than the Iraq War protests (69.4 percent of statements), but substantially less than for the immigration rallies (86.3 percent of statements). So, while journalists and pundits frequently criticized the Tea Party via a protest paradigm lens, this does not appear to be the cause of the overall differences across protest coverage. News producers did include more protestors among Tea Party participants who invoked the protest paradigm, but the overall share here is still not that great. Thus, this set of findings do not appear to contribute much to the overall picture.

Reviewing this section, my findings did not support H2. Indeed, they showed the opposite of what I had predicted, with Tea Party rallies being most likely to be depicted using the delegitimizing themes of the protest paradigm. This trend stemmed primarily from statements

that made claims about the movement’s supposed lack of authenticity and ideological deviance more so than discussion of the demographic makeup or behavior of Tea Party protestors, both of which were covered in quantities that were similar to the Iraq War demonstrations. This trend toward delegitimizing the Tea Party was not, however, universal. In contrast to the other news outlets, Fox News coverage of the Tea Party protests was consistent with my hypothesis, featuring less protest paradigm coverage than it did for the other two demonstrations. This was not true at any other news outlet. Finally, the bulk of protest paradigm statements came from journalists, and this was true across the three protests.

Nuisance Paradigm Coverage

My final hypothesis (H3) predicted that coverage of the Tea Party protests would feature a lesser amount of nuisance paradigm coverage than either of the other demonstrations. It seemed plausible that the prevalence of nation-affirming coverage in stories about the Tea Party would diminish the amount of negatively inflected nuisance paradigm coverage, especially since one of the major themes of the nuisance paradigm is that protestors are *unpatriotic*. Findings strongly support this hypothesis. The aggregate results of a comparison of coverage of the three protests are in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10: Nuisance Paradigm Coverage, by Protest

	Iraq N=135	Immigration N=225	Tea Party N=91
Nuisance Paradigm mean	0.93	0.58	0.27
Nuisance Paradigm %	49.6	32.0	24.1

Results show that the Tea Party was substantially less likely to receive this style of coverage. This held true regardless of whether the nuisance paradigm was captured in means or percents—the mean amount of this coverage for the Tea Party demonstrations ($M=0.27$) was just over half the next highest, the immigration protests ($M=0.58$), and these statements appeared in 8

percent fewer TV programs or newspaper articles than was the case for the immigration protests. Put another way, stories about the Iraq War protests featured approximately one nuisance paradigm statement each, whereas there was only about one in every four stories about the Tea Party rallies. Thus, the Tea Party received substantially less nuisance paradigm coverage.

These findings may appear somewhat obvious—after all, the Tea Party was overwhelmingly covered emphasizing national identity language and themes, and it seems relatively unlikely that a protest would frequently be characterized both as patriotic and unpatriotic in the same article or program. If coverage of the protests differed only on the patriotic sub-dimension and not the other two themes of this paradigm, protests as bothersome and ineffective, this would weaken the evidence for a real difference vis-à-vis the nuisance paradigm more generally. Thus, my next step was again to disaggregate the variables and look at each component of the nuisance paradigm. These results are summarized in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11: Nuisance Paradigm Variables, by Protest^a

	Iraq	Immigration	Tea Party
<i>Ineffective mean</i>	<i>0.39</i>	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.09</i>
%	31.1	12.9	8.8
Traffic mean	0.07	0.10	0.02
%	5.9	7.6	1.2
Commerce mean	0.01	0.13	0
%	0.7	8.0	0
Cost mean	0.01	0	0.01
%	0.7	0	0.4
Annoy mean	0	0.03	0.03
%	0	2.2	3.3
Party mean	0.04	0.03	0.03
%	2.2	2.7	3.3
<i>Bother mean</i>	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.29</i>	<i>0.10</i>
%	7.4	18.2	9.9
Unpatriotic mean	0.21	0.11	0.09
%	11.1	8.0	5.5
National Harm mean	0.20	0	0
%	13.3	0.4	0
<i>Anti-American mean</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>0.09</i>
%	20.7	8.4	5.5

^a Shaded rows represent the major themes of the nuisance paradigm. In the cases of “Bother” and “Anti-American,” these rows represent composite variables that summarize the unshaded rows directly above them. The notion that a protest was ineffective was measured only by a single variable, and thus stands alone.

Results in Table 5.11 suggest that it was not only characterizations of a protest as anti-American that may have been moderated by national identity discourse in news coverage. The Tea Party was, unsurprisingly, the least likely to be characterized in these terms ($M=0.09$). In addition, though, Tea Party protests were much less likely to be described as bothersome than were the immigration events, and slightly less likely than the Iraq War demonstrations, at least in terms of mean amounts. Tea Party rallies were also considerably less likely to be described as ineffective than were either of the other two demonstrations. Indeed, the mean amount of such statements per article or program for the immigration rallies ($M=0.17$) was roughly double that of the Tea Party ($M=0.09$), and coverage of the Iraq War protests contained roughly four times more such coverage ($M=0.39$). Thus, Tea Party protests were least likely to be covered, among these analyzed sources, using all facets of the nuisance paradigm.

As before, this raises questions about the basis of these differences in coverage. Given the partisan dynamics apparent in some of the findings across news outlets, I compared the five outlets in their deployment of the nuisance paradigm for each of the three protests. The findings, in Table 5.12, show substantial differences between news sources.

Table 5.12: Nuisance Paradigm Discourse, by News Outlet

	NYT <i>N</i> =68	WaPo <i>N</i> =101	CNN <i>N</i> =144	MSNBC <i>N</i> =44	Fox <i>N</i> =94
Iraq mean	0.74	0.80	0.82	1.55	1.27
%	38.7	50.0	54.9	45.5	54.5
Immigration mean	0.58	0.43	0.69	0.12	0.84
%	35.5	27.1	31.0	12.5	48.6
Tea Party mean	0.33	.09	0.32	0.35	0.26
%	16.7	9.1	27.3	29.4	22.9

These findings suggest that national identity discourse in news content may indeed moderate the nuisance paradigm, even in news content from potentially hostile sources. Measured by mean occurrences or percent of programs featuring the nuisance paradigm, the Tea Party received the least of this type of coverage across the board, with only one exception—the liberal-leaning MSNBC depicted the Tea Party via the nuisance paradigm more often than they did for the immigration rallies, which at the other news organizations ranked second. Even in MSNBC content, however, Tea Party protests ($M=0.35$) received less nuisance paradigm coverage than the Iraq War demonstrations ($M=1.55$). Thus, while it appears that the moderating effect of national identity coverage may not have been as strong at a news organization that was perhaps predisposed to criticize the Tea Party, the inverse relationship between nation-bolstering content and the nuisance paradigm appears to hold across the news outlets, with the most dramatic difference in means appearing in the more conservative Fox News content, just as was the case in the protest paradigm section.

As a final step in examining nuisance paradigm coverage, I returned to my dataset composed of statements rather than aggregated newspaper articles or TV programs so as to

ascertain whether there were differences in the types of speakers invoking the nuisance paradigm across the protest events. Results are in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13: Nuisance Paradigm Statement Makers, by Protest^a

	Iraq N=117	Immigration N=117	Tea Party N=24
Journalist	49.6%	55.6%	79.2%
Protestor	2.6%	4.3%	0%
Counter-protestor	0%	0%	0%
Political figure	23.1%	16.2%	16.7%
Safety official	2.6%	0.9%	0%
Bystander	0.9%	0%	0%
Expert	9.4%	2.6%	0%
Other non-participant	11.1%	18.8%	4.2%
Unsure/uncodeable	0.9%	1.7%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a Note: *N*s in this table refer to statements, rather than to articles or programs.

The first feature that stands out in these data is the small number of nuisance paradigm statements about the Tea Party protest ($N=24$). To put this in perspective, there were less than half as many newspaper stories or TV programs about the Tea Party rallies ($N=91$) than the immigration protests ($N=225$), but there were less than one-fourth as many nuisance paradigm *statements*. The difference here is striking. Unfortunately, it also makes it difficult to speak with confidence about trends in who was making these statements. One thing is fairly clear—it appears that journalists were much more likely to make these statements in the case of the Tea Party than for either of the other two demonstrations. To a lesser extent, the same was true of nation-invoking coverage (see Table 5.5). Thus, it may be the case that there was a greater tendency on the part of journalists to editorialize about the Tea Party than the other two

movements, whether their comments were positively or negatively inflected. Again, however, given the small number of nuisance paradigm statements made about the Tea Party protests at all, it is difficult to say.

To sum, these data show that the Tea Party protests of 2009 were far less likely to be depicted via the nuisance paradigm than were the Iraq or immigration rallies, as predicted by H3. This held true in all three thematic areas of the nuisance paradigm: the Tea Party demonstrations were much less likely to be depicted as anti-American, substantially less likely to be cast as ineffective, and somewhat less likely to be described as bothersome. Across the five news outlets considered here, the Tea Party rallies received the least amount of these types of coverage, with the sole exception being left-leaning MSNBC. Coverage at this news outlet featured the nuisance paradigm somewhat more often than the immigration rallies, though still much less than the Iraq War demonstrations. While there were very few statements about the Tea Party that invoked the nuisance paradigm at all, they were proportionally much more likely to be made by journalists than in coverage of the other two protests, which featured a greater variety of speakers criticizing the demonstrations in this way. Overall, these data offer strong support for H3.

Final Analysis

The defining feature in much of the news coverage of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies appears to have been national identity discourse. With this in mind, I wished to gain a more complete picture of news content about the Tea Party by exploring this emphasis in greater to detail. In the previous sections, my analyses were either at the level of the individual news article or program, or by the statement, the latter being the level at which my data were collected. I came to the conclusion, however, that for a more nuanced picture of national identity discourse, I could disaggregate one level further, to the level of the *invocation*. By invocation, I mean the

individual mention of any of the four national identity variables. A statement could contain invocations of numerous different variables in the codebook (and often did), and thus invocations are the most granular level at which the discourse could be analyzed.

I was particularly interested in similarities and differences between the news outlets in their employment of national identity symbols. For example, in my previous analyses, I was surprised to find that CNN rather than Fox News was the most likely news outlet to engage in this type of discussion. During the coding process, I observed what I believed to be a different and more openly supportive tone in the Fox coverage that was not reflected in these findings. Thus, drilling down to the level of the specific invocation provided an opportunity to better understand the differences in coverage between the news outlets in a more nuanced way. The results proved to be instructive. They are summarized in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14: National Identity Invocations in Tea Party Content, by Outlet, by Percentage^a

	NYT	WaPo	CNN	MSNBC	Fox	Category Totals
Patriotic	<i>4.8</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>19.0</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>57.1</i>	<i>100%</i>
	7.7	12.5	5.6	6.9	12.0	N=21
American	<i>1.0</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>27.1</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>51.0</i>	<i>100%</i>
	7.7	18.8	36.1	58.6	49.0	N=96
Mythology	<i>7.9</i>	<i>10.1</i>	<i>46.1</i>	<i>11.2</i>	<i>24.7</i>	<i>100%</i>
	53.8	56.3	56.9	34.6	22.0	N=89
Symbols	<i>16.7</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>4.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>70.8</i>	<i>100%</i>
	30.8	12.5	1.4	0.0	17.0	N=24
Outlet	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Totals	N=13	N=16	N=72	N=29	N=100	N=230

^aNumbers in italics indicate the proportion of each type of invocation accounted for by each news outlet. Numbers in normal indicate the proportion of national identity discourse within a news source made up by each specific type of invocation

The data in Table 5.14 have several interesting features, but two in particular stand out. First, although previous analyses revealed that CNN featured a greater amount of national

identity statements per program than did Fox News, reading across the italicized rows indicates that Fox News accounted for the majority of invocations in three of the four categories (the exception being Mythology) and also featured the greatest number of invocations overall. Thus, while CNN's emphasis on this coverage was *more dense*, Fox's coverage was *broad*: Fox contained more programs about the Tea Party (see Table 5.1) and more total invocations when all national identity discourse was combined.²² More interesting still were differences when comparing the normal-font columns that sum the content within each outlet. This revealed variations between the news outlets that go beyond the amount of nation-bolstering coverage; there were qualitative differences as well. For the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and most notably CNN, the most common type of national identity invocations were those that made references to America's revered historical events and figures and were captured by the "mythology" code. At these outlets, such invocations accounted for over half of their total amounts of nationally inflected discourse. By contrast, at Fox News and MSNBC, the most prevalent emphasis in coverage was the "American" theme, which captured claims that the protestors or their behavior were representative of the nation and its people, or the labeling of protestors as Americans.

These inter-outlet differences provide an interesting window into the ways Tea Party rallies were depicted by sources across the news spectrum, and may even shed light on changing approaches to journalism resultant from the rise of cable news. At the three news outlets most rooted in the tradition of "objective" journalism—the two print sources and CNN, the oldest of the cable news outlets—invocations of national identity might have been primarily descriptive in nature. Tea Party protestors of 2009 presented themselves as following in the footsteps of

²² Indeed, if transcripts of Fox News coverage were available over the same extended hours of the more complete CNN transcripts, this pattern would most likely be even more pronounced, since presumably there would have been even more Fox News programs discussing the Tea Party rallies.

America's Founders: from the locations where they held their rallies to the costumes they wore to the content of their signs and speeches, America's treasured history was on full display. For journalists to discuss this aspect of the movement was, to a certain extent, simply a report on the facts of these events, albeit one which may have privileged some features. Take, for example, this description of a Tea Party protest in Boston that appeared in the *New York Times*:

In Boston, *the birthplace of the original tea party*, the protest was on Boston Common, near the State House. The crowd, initially about 500, grew throughout the day.... *Some participants were dressed in colonial garb*, including Paul Jehle, of the Plymouth Rock Foundation, who is also a professional Boston tour guide. *Mr. Jehle offered his enthusiastic audience a history lesson about the 1773 Boston Tea Party.* (Robbins, 2009, April 16, emphasis not original)

The *Washington Post* described the event similarly, writing:

In Boston, several hundred protesters, *some dressed in colonial costume, assembled on the Boston Common not far from the site of the original Tea Party.* They carried protest signs, one of which read, "D.C.: District of Communism." The events were designed to echo the *Revolutionary War-era protest in which ships' cargoes of tea were dumped overboard by colonists chafing under British rule.* (Ruane, 2009, April 16, emphasis not original)

Similarly, CNN correspondent Mary Snow described the event thusly:

It was billed as a tax revolt but protesters who have been showing up throughout the day here in Boston have been venting their anger about a host of issues from the president's policies to members of Congress, particularly though on spending in the stimulus package they feel that is just too excessive. At this particular event hosted by a conservative radio talk show host, there was even *some dressed in colonial garb, hoisting crates of tea into the water to re-enact the original "Boston Tea Party" at there in 1773.* (McGinnis, 2009, April 15, emphasis not original)

In each of these examples, the mythology of America was invoked by the journalist in a manner that served primarily to describe the events taking place, drawing on a historical vocabulary that would have been intelligible to most U.S. news audiences.

By contrast, descriptions of protestors as American perhaps move beyond description. Such statements may also convey an idea about the identity of the protestors themselves.

Specifically, to a U.S. audience, such an emphasis indicates that the demonstrators are representative of, or at least belong to, the same powerful social identity group as the audience. Such statements were common at both Fox News and MSNBC, which arguably represent a new style of journalism. Both founded in 1996, nearly 16 years after CNN started broadcasting, Fox News and MSNBC engage in a style of journalism that is unencumbered by strict adherence to objectivity, mixing news and commentary in ways that frequently ignore traditional norms of balance and are at times downright partisan. Journalists working in this style might be more willing to engage in powerful claims about identity than traditional journalists, which might account for why Fox News and MSNBC coverage was similar in this respect, in spite of the networks' ideological differences. Consider, by way of demonstration, these examples from Fox News coverage of the Tea Party rallies:

Glenn Beck: People all around the—all around the country today have been called insane, lunatics, extremists—all because they believe in the fundamental principles that our Founding Fathers understood. *But we are not insane or extremists or anything like that. We're just Americans....* (Striegel, 2009, April 15, emphasis not original)

Sean Hannity: *"I am joined by well over 15,000 Americans.* By the end of this night, it may be close to 20,000. They have gathered here on this tax day to make their voices heard." (Finley, 2009, April 15, emphasis not original)

And these two from MSNBC:

Rachel Maddow: "You know, today is the day that taxes are due to the federal government. And in an act of somewhat inchoate, amorphous protest, *Americans in many cities around the country gathered in public around their chosen protest symbol today, the tea bag.*" (Wolf, 2009, April 15, emphasis not original)

Keith Olbermann: The number two story tonight, the sad reality behind the corporate sponsored Tea Parties, visual proof that this is not about spending deficits or taxes, but about *some Americans* getting riled up now about these things, riled up by the people who caused these things, and finally about *some Americans* who just hate the president of the United States (Povich, 2009, April 16, emphasis not original).

The examples from the two networks differed greatly in tone and substance. Indeed, the term “Americans” may have served very different rhetorical purposes in these excerpts. But in all cases, journalist-commentators used the term “American” to describe Tea Party participants.

In sum, this additional analysis showed that differences between news sources in their emphasis on national identity were not limited to variations in quantity. Fox and CNN, the two networks that engaged in the most nation-invoking discussion of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies, appeared to adopt somewhat different approaches to the topic than the other three outlets. Whereas CNN and the print publications focused on what appeared to be primarily descriptive discussion of the movement’s connections with American history, right-leaning Fox News and left-leaning MSNBC appear to have engaged in a more value-laden approach that discussed the identity of the protestors themselves, labeling them as Americans.

Discussion

From its first national public events on April 15, 2009, the Tea Party movement cast itself, above all else, as an American phenomenon. What the data in this chapter show is that, regardless of format or ideological leanings, some the nation’s most popular news outlets bought the argument. Even the most critical of the news outlets examined here still echoed and amplified the Tea Party’s self-constructed identity as patriotic Americans who sought to follow in the footsteps of the nation’s Founders. Journalists did not have to emphasize this component of the Tea Party message. News media could have focused more on the movement’s position on taxation and the role of government in the economy. News media could have more substantially explored and dissected critiques that the movement had undertones of racial prejudice. Indeed, as in any complex social happening, there are many aspects of this story that news producers could

have made salient (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 2000). The decision to highlight American identity, however, was nearly universal across these data and resulted in pronounced differences between coverage of the Tea Party and the two other major protest events of focus. This tendency was present even in cases—at MSNBC—in which the journalists were openly hostile and critical of Tea Party protestors. There were numerous critics of the Tea Party in the news media, but few questioned the movement’s American character.

Interestingly though, this nation-affirming coverage was not sufficient to disrupt a long-standing tendency in coverage of societal protests—the deeply embedded critical journalistic style known as the protest paradigm. Indeed, my results show that the Tea Party protest actually received the *most* of this type of coverage, relative to the other two demonstrations upon which I focused. This raises the question of how a movement could simultaneously be cast as patriotic *and* deviant. To answer this question, it may be useful to think broadly about the term “deviance,” which is at the core of the protest paradigm. Most commonly, this term has been used in protest paradigm literature to describe behaviors or beliefs that violate social norms in some obvious way (e.g. destruction of property, strange clothing, or adherence to belief systems such as socialism that fall outside the ideological mainstream). Shoemaker (1985), however, defines deviance more expansively as encompassing both behaviors that are clearly culturally condemned, and also anything that is novel or unusual. This latter type of deviance, what she calls “statistical deviance,” can be applied to anything from a plane crash to an earthquake to a protest, so long as the event is in some way unusual. Looked at through this lens, the Tea Party may indeed be viewed as more deviant than the other two protests that I examined: as I have argued, it is unusual for older people, wealthier people, and in particular, politically conservative people to engage in political protest. Throughout the history of the United States, protest has

more often been a tactic of the politically or socially disenfranchised, and the political left. This makes the Tea Party an unusual phenomenon indeed. By contrast, whenever the United States has gone to war, especially since the 1960s, protests from the political left have nearly always been a result, making such actions familiar, predictable, and, viewed through Shoemaker's (1985) definition, less deviant. The tendency to focus on unusual stories is deeply engrained in the routines of American journalism, and as such, it is unsurprising that news producers would highlight this aspect of the Tea Party story.

The nuisance paradigm, by contrast, is a relatively newer type of news coverage. My research (Di Cicco, 2010) shows it rising to prominence slowly over the past several decades. Thus, it is perhaps less embedded in the routines of journalism and, if so, may be easier for protestors to deflect. My results show that, as predicted, the Tea Party received far less of this type of coverage than the other two protests, and that this was true across the three primary themes of the nuisance paradigm. Thus, it may be that while the protest paradigm is simply a reality with which all social movements must contend to varying degrees, an event with a carefully crafted message that draws upon familiar and cherished themes and icons may be able to escape from the critical depictions of protest that coincide with the nuisance paradigm. Several studies have shown that protests which are politically conservative or supportive of the status quo, though much less common, have tended to be covered in a less delegitimizing fashion (Di Cicco, 2010; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Boyle et al., 2012). If, as I have argued, conservatives are more likely to employ the discourse of overt patriotism than liberals, this may at least in part explain this discrepancy.

Taken together, these findings raise questions about how news consumers may respond to these various styles of coverage. Despite the high levels of protest paradigm coverage, the Tea

Party's message draws on symbols that suggest a strong connection with an in-group that, for most, is deeply important—i.e. the nation (Anderson, 2006; Glover, 1997; Tajfel, 1981). Indeed, poll data suggest that, at least initially, a large portion of Americans responded favorably to the Tea Party, with some polls showing the movement as more popular than either mainstream political party (Barr, 2009). This suggests the possibility that nation-affirming coverage may have a stronger impact on the general public than the critical style of the protest paradigm—in addition to moderating the presence of the nuisance paradigm in the coverage itself, it may also serve to “inoculate” movements against critical coverage (McGuire, 1961; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). Such a result would predispose citizens to view a movement that employed such discourse in a more favorable light than one which did not, all else being equal. Addressing this question is beyond the capacity of my data, but a media effects experiment in this area could provide potentially important insights into whether and how nationally inflected protest discourse might impact news consumers. I turn now to a broader discussion of the conceptual framework and findings in this dissertation.

Chapter 6

Social Movements, National Identity, and News

Social movements have played an important role in the history and political culture of the United States, influencing policy and social norms. From labor to women's suffrage to civil rights to the Tea Party and Occupy, social movements have provided a venue for ordinary citizens to voice their concerns and hope they are heard by both policy makers and the public at large. It has often been citizens with few resources, either political or economic, who formed social movements and employed their most publicly visible tactic, protests, to engage with and circumvent the limitations of the political establishment (Eisinger, 1974; Tarrow, 1994). If anything, recent events have heightened the importance of this phenomenon. With each election cycle, the cost of participating in major elections grows (Liberto, 2012, November 5). Supreme Court decisions such as 2010's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* have enabled larger-than-ever financial contributions to candidates, campaigns, and political parties. The U.S. political system has never been so awash in money. In such a landscape, it is increasingly difficult for ordinary citizens to have their concerns heard through the workings of government, highlighting the crucial role of citizen engagement in a democracy.

With this in mind, I was interested in how a social movement might employ nation-centric discourse and how such a movement might be treated in news media. The Tea Party, as a movement anecdotally known for its invocations of the nation and its founding myths, provided an excellent case for examining this topic. Specifically, I was interested in three questions. First, I sought to understand how Tea Party members conceived of the movement and their involvement in it. I explored this question via in-depth qualitative interviews with movement participants from across the United States. Second, I sought to understand how Tea Party

members pursued their goals through public events in 2010, a crucial year for the Tea Party. I examined this question through the lens of participant observations conducted at four large, high-profile Tea Party events. Finally, I was interested in how the Tea Party was covered in news in its foundational period, especially as compared to other large social movements that were not known for explicitly nation-centric discourse. I hypothesized that the news would be more likely to highlight national themes in Tea Party coverage, and would be less likely to depict them through the delegitimizing styles described in previous research. I tested these hypotheses using a content analysis of major news outlets' coverage of Tea Party protests. I will now discuss the outcomes of each approach in greater detail.

In Chapter 3, I was interested in the ways that Tea Party members drew upon national identity symbols and language to describe their movement. To examine this topic in depth, I conducted interviews with Tea Party members from every region of the United States, either in person or by phone. I conducted these interviews using a loosely structured approach that allowed individuals to tell their own stories and describe the movement as they saw it. Hours of conversations produced hundreds of pages of transcripts. At the outset, I expected Tea Party members would frequently employ national themes and had some tentative expectations (but not formal hypotheses) about ways in which this might occur. As I had anticipated, I found the discourse of Tea Party participants to be shot through with invocations of national identity. Some of these were quite explicit (i.e. claims such as “we are real Americans” or “I love my country”), while others more subtly cast members as patriotic Americans. In general, I found that invocations of the nation were employed by participants to describe and define three major features of the movement. Tea Party members established their movement's *legitimacy* by describing it as made up of patriotic everyday Americans, representative of and speaking for

mainstream citizens and outside and above the divisiveness of “politics” and political parties. By contrast, they cast their opponents as illegitimate—often suggesting they were out of touch with ordinary people, tyrannical, or sought to undermine what was best about America. Tea Party members most commonly described the *motivations* for their activism as driven either by fears of an impending nation-threatening cataclysm, or a sense that something important about America, most commonly some trait thought to be derived from the nation’s founding and early history, had already been lost, forgotten, or destroyed. Both motivations implicitly conveyed a love for the nation and a desire to see it remain or become more like its “true” self. In response to these feelings, Tea Party members became activists, and described their *actions* either as education, aimed at helping Americans make better political choices, or as restoration, aimed at revivifying the national character. Both definitions, notably, have beneficent connotations and avoid more controversial labels like “protest” or “politics.” Taken together, these discursive tendencies created a picture of a movement of, by, and for the people of the United States, a movement of mainstream Americans, acting out of love for their country to make it a better place and restore the legacy of the Founders.

This method of investigation had limitations and strengths. To begin, the qualitative approach, while appropriate for the research questions I was pursuing, limits the generalizability of my findings. Qualitative approaches in general and interviewing specifically most often entail working with relatively small samples that are typically not selected using probability methods (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002; Mason, 2010). Thus, generalizability in the statistical sense of the word is impossible to achieve. In such instances, scholars may nonetheless make an argument that their analysis is generalizable in a non-statistical sense, and indeed, I made every effort to achieve this. My interviews featured representatives from every geographic region of the United

States and from many walks of life and a variety of positions within the movement. Even so, one could point to the numerous states that my corpus did not cover. The consistency of themes across my interviews suggests it is unlikely, but it is possible that the discourse of the Tea Party might be very different for groups located in Alaska, Maine, South Dakota or any other states not covered in this dissertation. Likewise, while ordinary members were represented in my analysis, I did tend to focus more on leaders of organizations, who were easier to identify and contact. This also might have affected my findings, as these individuals were often connected to one or more national Tea Party groups and thus may have been more consistent in their perspectives than rank-and-file members. Overall, though, I was able to capture Tea Party members' discourse in a naturalistic and open-ended fashion that made it possible for interviewees to guide the conversation toward that which was most important to them, and thus produced a high level of validity. The inductive nature of my approach made it ideal for a first foray into understanding the thinking of Tea Party adherents.

Next, to understand how the movement constructed itself for the public at large, I closely examined several Tea Party public events. I selected four high-profile gatherings in Washington D. C. in summer 2010, including one of the largest gatherings of Tea Party supporters ever, Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally, and three related events. Each had a different structure, tone, and sponsoring organization, but the discourse was similar in many regards. My analysis in Chapter 4 was guided by the framework I discovered in chapter 3: I examined each event in terms of how it defined movement legitimacy, motivations, and behaviors. I found the primary themes that manifested in my interviews were similarly present at these events, albeit often in distinct ways. These events depicted the Tea Party as legitimate through the same notion that it was made up of patriotic Americans. Most commonly, this occurred through the frequent

appearance of American symbols, such as the flag or bald eagle, and symbolic actions like singing the national anthem or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Political opponents were also delegitimized, often through visual media such as signs that depicted President Barack Obama and others alongside communist iconography or explicitly characterized them as tyrants. The motivations of fear and loss were also common at these events. Speakers and printed materials frequently employed the language of crisis or collapse to describe the state of the nation, while participants invoked an idealized past by dressing as Founding Fathers or expressing a desire to return to, as one participant's sign suggested, "the America my father remembers." The themes of education and restoration were similarly prominent in how these events defined Tea Party action—one of the events, for example, mimicked a school day in that it was structured as a set of single-session classes, while another took a form reminiscent of a religious revival. Thus, the themes I found at Tea Party events in Chapter 4 were generally consistent with the interview content of Chapter 3, helping to validate the findings of each.

My participant observations shared limitations and strengths with the interview chapter. For one, I focused on a small number of high-profile events on the East Coast, all occurring within a four-day period. These events were important, but they were few. The size, variety, and prominence of these events meant that they likely both influenced and represented the discourse of the movement to a significant degree, but it is also possible that had I focused on smaller, less-publicized events, elsewhere or at a different time, my findings may have been different. More intimate gatherings of activists might have facilitated different types of conversations in which more or different themes might have risen to prominence. That said, I was able to visit a number of Tea Party functions in smaller communities as I was conducting this research, and even though these were not the focus of Chapter 4's systematic analysis, I did observe a similar set of

themes. Second, the fluid nature of participant observation analysis and the temporally fleeting nature of these events make it impossible to replicate this research or even assess reliability. Thus, while I can argue that my findings are highly valid due to the inductive and non-intrusive nature of the method, it is impossible to empirically demonstrate the generalizability of the findings. Even so, the results of Chapter 4 provide an in-depth look into the discourse of the Tea Party that was probably not possible with a quantitative approach, and given the importance to the movement of the events that I examined, I am confident this approach provided an important window into how the Tea Party movement has constructed itself discursively.

Because most Americans only ever experience social movements through news coverage of public functions such as protests, the next important question to explore was whether the discursive patterns discovered in Chapters 3 and 4 were manifest in news content about the movement. A large body of research has shown that news depictions of protests focus on deviance to depict protests as being outside the mainstream, a nuisance, and otherwise without value (e.g. Brasted, 2005; Dardis, 2006; Di Ciccio, 2010; Gitlin, 1980, Rauch et al., 2007). I predicted, however, that given the resonance of nation-bolstering discourse, Tea Party news coverage would be more likely to feature national identity content and less likely to feature these negative styles. To test these propositions, I compared news coverage of the first major Tea Party protests in 2009 to the first major demonstrations against the Iraq War in 2003 and the largest single day of immigration reform rallies in 2006. My expectations were borne out in some important ways, but not always. Tea Party protestors, more so than Iraq War or immigration reform demonstrators, were described as Americans and as patriots. Coverage also strongly echoed the movement's focus on historical events and figures from America's mythological past, especially the Revolutionary War period and the Founding Fathers. Coverage of the movement

was also less likely to feature the dismissive themes of the nuisance paradigm: Tea Party events were substantially less likely to be described as ineffective, bothersome, or, most notably, unpatriotic or harmful to the nation. These findings suggest the Tea Party's discourse was successful in shaping media coverage of its events and the movement generally, leading both to an emphasis on nation-bolstering themes likely to be viewed favorably by most Americans and diminishing some common negative characterizations. Their success in this regard was not unqualified, however. The news outlets I focused on were also substantially more likely to feature the delegitimizing themes of the long-standing protest paradigm, in particular emphasizing the supposed unpopularity of the movement's ideological positions and claims that the Tea Party was "Astroturf," or otherwise inauthentic. Thus, while the patriotism of the movement was strongly emphasized and seldom questioned in news discourse, coverage may have undercut the movement's claims of representing ordinary, mainstream Americans.

The content analysis in Chapter 5 also came with limitations and strengths. Perhaps foremost among the former is the question of causality—my data and methodological approach do not sustain a causal link between Tea Party discourse and news content, or between different types of coverage. This is a drawback of content analysis research in general: it is effective in describing patterns and features within any given body of texts, but it cannot demonstrate causality (Berg, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). My data allow me to point to strong and coinciding tendencies in movement discourse and news content and to make a theoretically grounded argument that one has influenced the other, but I cannot test that argument empirically. There are other limitations as well. For instance, my content analysis focused only on journalistic depictions of the first major events of each of the three movements I compared. This provided a degree of equivalence between these events, but it doesn't necessarily speak to longer-term

trends. It is possible that as time passed, coverage of events staged by these three movements shifted. Possibly the dominance of national identity themes in Tea Party coverage dissipated as journalists became more familiar with the movement. Even so, however, this approach provided a highly effective means of comparing Tea Party coverage to that of other movements—selecting the first major protest for each movement created parity between the three demonstrations that otherwise would not have existed. This approach enabled consistency across protests and across news sources, drawing all the content about each protest from each source, from across a set and equal period of time. Further, having examined all of this content, this approach allowed me to speak definitively about empirically demonstrable tendencies in the news. These outcomes were significant strengths for this approach.

To sum up, my goal in this dissertation was to examine the ways in which Tea Party participants discursively constructed their movement, both through in-depth interviews with a variety of Tea Party members and through a close examination of prominent public Tea Party events. I also sought to explore whether and how the major themes in Tea Party discourse might have been connected to news coverage of the movement. More specifically, I was interested in the ways Tea Party participants drew on the language and symbols of national identity to construct their movement as legitimate, to explain its motivations, and to define its behaviors. I hypothesized that if indeed national identity discourse was as central to the Tea Party's self-representation as I thought it would be, news media would have followed suit by (a) echoing this nationally inflected discourse, and (b) diminishing the amount of critical coverage that usually characterizes news about protests and social movements. I found this to be substantially correct. Taken together, these three methodological approaches provide considerable insight into how a

social movement can employ the discourse of national identity and how journalists might react. I now turn to the future of this research agenda and the implications of its findings.

Future Research

My theoretical arguments in this dissertation suggest that when deeply held feelings of national loyalty are invoked by political actors, they resonate with other members of the national group and will be echoed by journalists, who are as likely to be as invested in their identities as Americans as any other citizen. My thinking here was derived primarily from Social Identity Theory, and more specifically scholarship on the importance of national identity. That is, the notion that how one conceives of one's self is based in large part upon collective *social identity* (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). From this perspective, group membership is part of what allows people to distinguish themselves from others, as they engage in group comparisons on the basis of similarity or difference from one's self (Turner, 1982). Among the many groups of which people may be members, nations are arguably the most psychologically important. National identity has the power to inspire a deep love and has an intense weight and purity which, for many, exceeds that of any other group identity (Anderson, 2006). The sense of belonging to a particular nation plays an important role in shaping individuals' views of the world, of themselves, of what is right and wrong (Glover, 1997; Smith, 1991). Although socially constructed, attachment to a national group is seen by some to be so deeply engrained in the human psyche as to be inevitable (Gellner, 1983). In short, national identity is integrally important to people's perceptions of themselves, their world, and their fellow citizens.

The fact that the Tea Party, to a substantial degree, was covered by news media in a manner that emphasized this important identity-invoking discourse demonstrates the power of

social identity generally and national identity in particular. Even an ideologically hostile news outlet such as MSNBC appears to have been influenced by the Tea Party's nation-bolstering discourse. Further, these findings take scholarship on the political power of nationally inflected rhetoric into a new domain. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that, especially in times of crisis, journalists tend to echo the national invocations of elected officials, who in turn strategically employ nation-bolstering discourse to influence news coverage (Al-Sumait, Lingle, & Domke, 2010; Bennett, 2005; Billeaudeau, Domke, Hutcheson, & Garland 2003; Domke, Graham, Coe, Lockett John, & Coopman, 2006). Few if any studies, however, have considered whether the same is true of the dynamic between the political activists who lead social movements and news media, and whether such patterns apply outside of crisis periods. My findings suggest that national identity themes may indeed be a powerful means through which activists might influence news coverage and the public.

All else being equal, I posit that most people will respond more favorably to a movement that invokes their national identity than one that does not. Further, it is possible that such messages may "inoculate" movement actors against more critical journalistic depictions, resulting in positive audience impressions even in the face of some delegitimizing coverage. Previous research has found that certain types of messages can increase the likelihood that a person will hold on to an existing belief or preference in the face of contradictory information, strengthening one's resistance to later attacks or counterarguments (McGuire, 1961, McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). This has been shown to occur in a variety of contexts, including political campaigns inoculating against attacks from opponents (Pfau, Kenski, Nitz, & Sorenson, 1991). In this case, an effect similar to the inoculation phenomenon could promote positive assessments of the Tea Party movement based on patriotic sentiment that might endure for some time by

counteracting attacks from detractors that might otherwise lessen support for the movement. Before assuming, however, that any social movement that waves the flag will achieve political success, it is important to consider a key limitation of this research: this dissertation cannot speak directly to how people might respond to the tendencies I identified in Tea Party discourse or news coverage. Poll data about the movement, however, may provide some insight. When the Tea Party first entered the public sphere, support for the movement was generally high, with at least one poll suggesting that a majority of Americans (51 percent) felt favorably about the movement (Rasmussen Reports, 2009, April). Notably, the same Rasmussen poll showed a majority of people were *not* paying close attention to news about the Tea Party.²³ Put differently, it would appear that, in a period in which a majority of people were probably not very knowledgeable about the Tea Party, the movement's first appearance on the scene had left a favorable impression on many. These data, then, would seem to support my argument.

Over time, however, positive feelings about the movement gradually and steadily diminished. A year after the Tea Party's debut, a Rasmussen poll showed public support was fairly steady at 48 percent (Rasmussen Reports, 2010, April), and a year later, support remained similar (Rasmussen Reports, 2011, April). By 2012, however, support for the movement had dropped to 35 percent (Rasmussen Reports, 2012, July), and as of the beginning of 2013, the same polling question that once showed majority support now shows only about 30 percent of Americans supporting the movement and only 8 percent claiming to be members, down from a high of 24 percent in 2010 (Rasmussen Reports, 2013, January). Another 40 percent said the Tea

²³ Notably, some pollsters have criticized Rasmussen Reports for having a politically conservative bias (see Silver, 2010), and indeed, early polls from other organizations did not show support for the Tea Party as being as high as Rasmussen. I employ Rasmussen data here, however, for two reasons. First, Rasmussen measured Tea Party support using consistent measures and on a regular basis starting from the movement's inception, and as of the time of this writing has released the most recent data on support for the Tea Party. Second, while other polls also show a substantial decline in support for the movement, the fact that an ostensibly more supportive polling firm shows such a steep decrease suggests that it is palpable indeed.

Party is “bad for America.” Such a decline in public support might demonstrate that nation-centric discourse is effective under certain circumstances: in a low-information environment in which most people had not yet formed opinions about the Tea Party, the movement’s self-construction as pro-America contributed to a positive first impression. Over time, however, citizens probably learned more about the movement and the extent to which it did or did not align with their political predispositions. For many, the result may have been a reversal of their initial opinions about the Tea Party. Such an interpretation of the data would suggest that nation-bolstering discourse might be most effective when a movement is in its earliest stages and people have not yet crystallized opinions about it.

This suggests a possible next step in this research program to determine whether the inclusion of national identity discourse does influence perceptions of a protest group: an effects experiment in which people are exposed to experimenter-created news content in a controlled environment would provide the necessary evidence to make a causal claim not allowed by my data. Participants could be presented with different news stories about a protest in which the presence of national identity discourse, the protest paradigm, the nuisance paradigm, and the protest group’s ideology were manipulated. Such a study could go far in exploring whether these journalistic styles affect audiences, both individually and in various combinations, and would also contribute to the too-sparse body of scholarship examining the effects of protest coverage more generally. Media effects research in this area is scarce, but those studies which do exist suggest that protest paradigm coverage coincides with news consumers expressing less support for protestors, their views, and their right to protest, and more support for the status quo (McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Detendber, 1999; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Such outcomes can only be deleterious for citizens engaging in social movement politics, and if national-identity

discourse could moderate these effects, even temporarily, it could be invaluable to social movement actors.

The poll data also suggest a second type of study examining news content could be valuable. Specifically, a longitudinal analysis of news content would allow for broader conclusions about coverage of the movement and whether it has changed over time. Such a study might examine a random sample of Tea Party news coverage drawn from over the course of its existence and thus provide a perspective on the potential long-term impact of national identity discourse on news, as well as shed light on the relatively unexamined question of how coverage of protests may change as movements grow or shrink in size and influence. Gitlin (1980) addressed this question in his classic study of *Students for a Democratic Society*, but few other scholars have made this a focus of their research. The Rasmussen Reports data suggest that one might expect to see a decline in nationally-inflected coverage, and perhaps an increase in critical coverage. It would be interesting to find out, however, if the shift in public opinion preceded the shift in coverage or vice-versa. If the shift in coverage occurred first, this might contribute to an explanation of the decline in public support for the Tea Party. By contrast, if the shift in public opinion occurred first, this might have important implications for understanding why movements are covered in distinct ways and the role of public opinion in this dynamic.

There are other possible directions as well. Having now identified what I believe to be the key themes in the movement's discourse, a possible next step might be to attempt a wider quantitative survey with standardized questions and response options. A cluster sampling approach that started with states, then focused on counties, and then sampled any groups that could be identified within those counties, might allow for a statistically representative sample of Tea Party activists to be drawn. Assuming these groups were willing to administer a survey to

their members, a standardized questionnaire would enable a quantitative testing of the important features of Tea Party discourse and to generalize more confidently from the results. Such a study would shed light on the consistency of values and discursive themes, as well as potentially other interesting features such as the importance of national organizations, connections between groups, and media use habits. Still another study might involve conducting participant observation analyses of smaller events in other locales. If the findings were consistent with those presented in Chapter 4, as I would expect, the case for representativeness of these findings would be bolstered. Likewise, if new themes emerged from such a study, it could lead to valuable insights into changes in the discourse over time or across space.

The Big Picture

In considering the broader implications of this dissertation, there are two areas to which I now turn. The first is the implications of this research for social movement actors. Activists engaging in social movement politics may benefit from an understanding of my findings, as they may provide guidance in how such individuals frame their messages so as to make them more appealing to citizens and journalists alike. However, it is possible that such framing might be more beneficial and feasible for some groups than others. Secondly, this dissertation has implications for the domain of journalism. Media scholars may benefit from the findings of this dissertation, as they contribute to a more nuanced and theoretically rich understanding of protest coverage than noted in many past studies. There are also important normative implications that arise from the existence of nation-bolstering protest coverage that should be of interest to scholars and journalists alike. I take up these two domains as the final steps this research.

My findings suggest that social movement actors might benefit greatly from employing widely understood social identity cues, and in particular, by invoking the nation. Strategic use of national symbols and language, already a common practice among political figures (Bennett, 2005; Domke et al., 2006) seems to promote news coverage that likewise emphasizes such content, to which many news consumers are predisposed to respond favorably. Further, this discursive strategy also seems to coincide with a decrease in certain types of critical characterizations, i.e. the nuisance paradigm, which my previous research shows became increasingly common in recent decades (Di Cicco, 2010). Given the longstanding tendency of news media criticism of social movement events and the important role of media in shaping people's perceptions of social happenings generally, shifting news coverage about demonstrations could convey a distinct advantage to movements that are able to effectively harness national identity for this purpose. Social movement participants, then, may learn much about framing their messages and organizing their events by closely examining the discourse of the Tea Party movement. Specifically, making sure to incorporate messages that suggest that they are everyday patriotic Americans with the nation's best interests at heart could benefit many protest groups. Simple gestures like carrying the flag as well as more complex identity moves that promote an image of protestors as "ordinary" people could have palpable effects on how their movements are received.

It is important to note here, however, that the symbols of the nation may not be equally accessible, or desirable, to all peoples or all movements. The demographic makeup of the Tea Party as older, comparatively wealthy, white, and conservative is such that few quickly question their status as "real" Americans. Their race, status, and political proclivities allow them to take advantage of stereotypical conceptions of what an American looks, talks, and sounds like.

Research has shown, however, that other demographic groups, in particular people of color and non-conservatives, are not as easily associated with American identity in the minds of many people (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Ma, 2008; Sheets, Domke, & Greenwald, 2011). Consider, for example, the immigration reform rallies that were included in Chapter 5. Had this movement, with many ethnic Latinos, dressed as and invoked America's Founding Fathers, who were themselves descended from relatively recent immigrants to the North American continent but of different skin colors, it seems unlikely that their claim to this legacy would be viewed with similar credibility to the Tea Party. Indeed, critics of the movement would have been likely to express forceful skepticism to such a discursive approach. In Chapter 5, for example, I found that the coverage of the immigration rallies was most likely to feature discussion of symbolic acts of patriotism, but in reading the texts, it was apparent that much of this discussion focused on controversy as to whether it was appropriate for these demonstrators to be displaying the flags of their ancestral homelands or if they ought to be carrying the American flag. When participants carrying the flag were discussed, it was often suggested that this was a strategic choice on the part of organizers, potentially undercutting the notion that this was a sincere expression of love for the United States. For the Tea Party, such a behavior was treated as simply genuine—which speaks to the ability of the movement participants to pass as real Americans.

Looking beyond ethnic minorities and political liberals, it is possible that groups that are typically perceived as more “deviant”—such as anarchists, lesbian and gay groups, or feminist organizations—may also not be seen as having a legitimate claim on the symbols of the nation as a result of their differences from “mainstream” America. Further, such liberal-minded groups may not themselves feel comfortable in putting such discourse at the forefront of their messages, as conservatives are more likely than others to embrace the celebratory, uncritical style of

patriotism that my data suggest characterizes much of the Tea Party's discourse (Beinart, 2008; Lakoff, 2002). Further, some activists outside the mainstream left-right dichotomy may view the very concept of nation with suspicion. These are more complicated relationships with national identity that may not translate well into commonly understood and accepted symbols like waving the flag or donning a tricorn hat. As such, many activists may decide that to embrace such symbols would be disingenuous for their specific movements, even if it were beneficial to do so in a tactical sense. While there may be other symbolic discourses that might appeal to group identities in a similar way, few if any are likely to appeal to as many Americans or as strongly as national identity. Thus, however troubling it might be for normative ideals about democratic society, it is possible that at least for the present, primarily Caucasian conservative groups engaging in social movement politics have an inherent discursive advantage over other segments of society because of their ability to credibly appeal to national loyalties.

Such an advantage may be particularly troubling in light of other advantages held by this particular sector of the population. My experiences with the Tea Party suggest that the common criticisms that the movement was merely "Astroturf" were off the mark; the activists with whom I spoke seemed sincere and engaged, and very few were making a living from their work with the Tea Party. Even so, these criticisms are not baseless. The Tea Party, from its inception, had structural advantages not enjoyed by most other citizen-energized movements. Indeed, it is likely the Tea Party would not have enjoyed such palpable successes as quickly as it did were it not for these assets. First, established groups such as the billionaire Koch brothers' Americans for Prosperity (AFP) and the long-standing Heritage Foundation provided many of the activists with whom I spoke access to numerous strategic resources (see also Mayer, 2010). Though not interfering directly with the activities of local groups, AFP and the Heritage Foundation did

provide such things as professional looking printed materials and other media, at little or no cost. This included bumper stickers, informational DVDs, brochures of various kinds, and copies of the Constitution that included essays on how to “correctly” understand its meaning. In at least some instances, these groups also provided bus service so that Tea Party activists could attend major rallies in other cities. AFP in particular also provided activism and leadership training to members of local chapters, as well as booking prominent speakers from the domains of politics or the media to appear at local events. All of these resources are costly, and while this financial assistance could not have ensured the success of any given group or event, it certainly made success more likely.

The prominent speakers that appeared at Tea Party groups merit further discussion. The presence of well-known persons such as Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Glenn Beck, Greta Van Susteren, George Will, and Alveda King almost certainly helped to attract more participants to events associated with the Tea Party. In addition to the high costs that are often associated with booking well known speakers, it is also noteworthy that these individuals felt they could appear at these events at all. Their decisions to appear at these events suggests that they did not believe they would pay a political or economic price in choosing to appear, otherwise they would have been likely to decline the invitation to speak. It is difficult to imagine other social movements being able to convince a similarly famous collection of speakers to appear at their events. The protests against the Iraq War, for example, were able to draw a handful of Congressional members, such as Jim McDermott, and some entertainers from the film and music industries, but not vice-presidential candidates or viable presidential candidates, who would have had to fear a backlash for their participation. Indeed, some individuals who did participate in the anti-war movement did face such a backlash, as in the case of country music artists Dixie Chicks,

who were boycotted by some radio stations and many former fans, and even faced death threats as a result of their anti-war comments and activities (see Granderson, 2013). The Tea Party, then, enjoyed the quality of appearing to be “safe” for at least some well-known political figures to participate in.

In addition, Tea Party connections to Freedomworks, a group led by former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey, demonstrated that, in at least some cases, the movement also had ties to the established Republican Party, regardless of non-partisan claims. The demographic make-up of the Tea Party conveyed other advantages as well: a *New York Times*/CBS News poll (2010) showed that self-identified Tea Party members were disproportionately wealthy and more likely to be retired, meaning that their members had more time and more resources to contribute to their activism than most other social movements. Thus, the success of the Tea Party may suggest that the groups that frequently enjoy institutional political advantages also have a head start even in the most democratic domain of American politics. To suggest this is the sole cause of the movement’s success would be reductionist—a group with a message that is not broadly appealing, as I have argued the Tea Party’s message was, is unlikely to succeed in a democratic system regardless of whatever other resources it might have. Indeed, Snow and Benford (1998) argue that the way a movement frames itself is at least as important as the movement’s organization and resources. Even so, it is important to keep these advantages in mind when considering the success of the movement.

There are also two important ideas that arise from this dissertation with respect to the way communication scholars and journalists think about news coverage of protests. The first is specifically with regard to the way protest coverage has heretofore been studied. Most academic examinations of protest coverage have essentially treated protests as more or less monolithic;

with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Boyle et al., 2004; Kensicki, 2001; McLeod, 2005), scholarship examining coverage of demonstrations has concluded that protests as a phenomenon are generally covered using a particular journalistic style, i.e. the protest paradigm, or have used case studies to examine the extent to which that style has been applied to particular events. Over time, protest paradigm research has grown and developed, with new categories of content being specified and old categories refined (see, for example, Dardis, 2006; Jha, 2007; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Rauch et al., 2007). Such studies have done much to advance the discipline's understanding of protest news as a general category, but have also tended to gloss over differences between protests. They have often not adequately considered distinctions between protest movements in terms of discourse, demographics, political circumstances, or outcomes sought or achieved, and have likewise given insufficient attention to the ways these differences might produce varied news content. Even fewer studies have taken up the question of ways that coverage could differ in terms other than the degree to which the protest paradigm is or is not apparent. Indeed, the whole notion of a "paradigm" suggests a relatively inflexible view of the protest phenomenon exists among news producers.

My results, however, suggest that it may be time for scholars to adopt a more nuanced approach and consider the ways in which the qualities of movements and the protests they stage can impact the ways they are covered. In my data, all three protests were covered in ways that were distinct, with coverage of the Tea Party Tax Day rallies in particular standing out from the other two events. It appears that at least some of the differences in coverage arose from the discourse of the protestors themselves, with the Tea Party's strong emphasis on national identity echoing substantially in news coverage of the movement's demonstrations. Future studies of protest coverage, when possible, should consider the values, features, and emphases of the

movements staging the demonstrations, and should look more closely at the relationships that might exist between movement messages and news coverage. I can attest to the fact that this is a challenging undertaking that requires studies which go beyond straightforward content analyses of media texts, but more of such research would move scholarship beyond descriptions of protest news and into a more dynamic and theoretically robust realm.

The second implication with regard to journalism and protests is a normative one. At the start of this chapter I argued for the importance of social movements and pointed to research that shows that they are not treated as valuable by news producers. Later, I argued that social movement actors might benefit from framing their messages in terms of national identity, as such framing is likely to resonate in news. This is not to suggest, however, that nationally-inflected protest coverage is generally “good” in a normative sense. Chapter 5 examined coverage of three protests in terms of three styles of coverage—two critical and one that could be seen as covering demonstrations in a nationally positive light. From a normative perspective, however, all three approaches to protest coverage are undesirable. National identity coverage might result in more favorable impressions of protests and thus might be seen as more positive from the perspective of the activists, at least in the short term. However, it does not necessarily promote the types of critical, rational decision making that democratic theorists believe citizens ought to engage in and news media ought to facilitate (Habermas, 1989; Carey, 1989). From this perspective, for democracy to flourish, citizens must be able to make rational, well informed decisions about important political issues, and to converse about them knowledgeably with their fellow citizens. Nationally-inflected protest coverage does not promote this ideal because, no less so than the protest or nuisance paradigms, it encourages judgment of a protest on the basis of surface level characteristics and rhetorical strategies, rather than arguments or issues. From the perspective of

democratic theory, it makes very little difference whether we judge a protest based on its supposed deviance or on its supposed patriotism, because in neither case do truly weigh the arguments the movement is advancing.

Thus, I conclude this dissertation with the idea that journalists who cover protests in any of the ways that my data suggest are all too common do a disservice to everyone in a democratic society. They do social movements a disservice by not covering them as something substantive or important. None of the three styles of coverage I found to be prevalent communicate the idea that news-consuming citizens ought to pay close attention to protestors' ideas or arguments. Further, journalists do news consumers a disservice by failing to provide the tools to evaluate the arguments put forth by activists and in some cases by failing to expose them to protestors' ideas at all, focusing exclusively on protest tactics, appearance, and other non-substantive elements. Social movements and protest constitute one of the most democratic forms of political engagement available to American citizens, and most people only experience them through the news. When journalists reduce protests to image and rhetoric, they reduce opportunities for democratic engagement and participation and fail to live up the responsibilities that come with their First Amendment freedoms. I humbly suggest it is time for journalists to engage with a new paradigm of protest coverage, an "issue paradigm" that discusses the arguments and desired outcomes of social movements in serious terms. Such a shift would benefit American political discourse and civil society, and would help ordinary citizens express themselves and exercise their rights during an era in which their voices are often drowned out by the noise of political spin and multi-billion dollar campaigns.

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Appendix A

Interview Instrument

Long Form Version

Process

How did you first hear about the Tea Party? What made you want to get involved in it?

What Tea Party groups do you work with? How does your group work with other Tea Party you know about?

- Do you know about any other Tea Party Groups?

Have you done other political work before?

- [This could include protesting, volunteering for a political party, speaking at city council meetings, writing letters to officials, or any other activities that go beyond voting.]

Participation

Since you got involved with the Tea Party, what have been some of the ways you've participated in it?

- [Where appropriate: Can you tell me a bit about the sign/t-shirt/costume you were carrying/wearing at the rally where we met?]

What issues are you concerned about that the Tea Party is working on?

What makes the Tea Party different from other types of political activities you might have done before?

- [If none: How do you think the Tea Party might be different from other political groups?]

Is your Tea Party group being effective? How so?

What has been the greatest success of the Tea Party so far?

What is something that the Tea Party might be able to do better than it is right now?

Thinking in the long term, what do you think the Tea Party's goals should be?

Is the Tea Party a protest movement? How so? Why/why not?

Effectiveness

How does the Tea Party fit into American history?

- Are there other moments in American history that you think are similar to the Tea Party?

Tell me about what you personally have gotten out of working with the Tea Party?

How do you talk to your friends about the tea party?

- What would you tell someone who was interested in getting involved in the Tea Party?
- What would you tell a friend who was skeptical about the Tea Party?

Fifty years from now, what do you think people will say about the Tea Party?

Media

How are people talking about the Tea Party right now?

- How is the Tea Party being talked about in the media?
- Are they getting it right? Is it fair?

Do you think the Tea Party can get its message out in the media?

- How could it do a better job of getting its message out?
What news sources do you trust? Why?

Demographics

How would you describe yourself politically?

What is your profession?

Are you over thirty? ... over fifty?

Does your family make over \$50,000 per year? ... over \$100,000 per year?

What's the highest level of education that you've completed?

Anything you would like to add?

Short Form Version

Process

How did you first hear about the Tea Party? What made you want to get involved in it?

Participation

What makes the Tea Party different from other political groups?

Is the Tea Party a protest movement?

Effectiveness

How do you talk to your friends about the Tea Party?

Media

Do you think the Tea Party can get its message out in the media?

Demographics

How would you describe yourself politically?

Anything you would like to add?

Appendix B

Content Analysis Codebook

Tea Party Codebook

Coding instructions

Each article or news story should be coded in its entirety. The unit of observation is the statement. A statement is defined as an uninterrupted period of speech by a single speaker. Once a second speaker begins speaking, the first statement has ended and a new one has begun. Thus, even if a speaker who has already made coded comments makes another relevant remark, this should be treated as a new statement. Only relevant statements, that is, those that would receive a “1” or a “2” for the discourse variables (variables 9 through 38), should be coded. Statements that do not pertain to these variables need not be recorded, but at least one line containing data for source, date, and protest variables should be included in the data sheet for every article or TV program, including any which do not contain any relevant statements. When coding, if there is any doubt as to whether or not one of the topic variables is present in content, err on the side of coding it as “0,” no mention. All statements should be coded for all variables, and there is no limit as to how many of the discourse variables may be present in any individual statement.

CD=conceptual definition

OD=operational definition

1. Statement

CD: The individual statement coded.

OD:

Coder 1: 1XXXX

Coder 2: 2XXXX

2. Article/Program

CD: The individual article or news program from which the statement was drawn.

OD:

1XXXX for Fox

2XXXX for MSNBC

3XXXX for CNN

4XXXX for Washington Post

5XXXX for New York Times

3. Source

CD: The news source in which the statement appears

OD:

1. Fox News

2. MSNBC

3. CNN

4. The Washington Post

5. The New York Times

4. *Date:*

CD: The date that the article or news segment was broadcast or published.

OD:

MM/DD/YYYY

5. *Protest*

CD: The protest the article or news program was about.

OD:

1. The Iraq war protests
2. The immigration protests
3. Tea Party protests

6. *Speaker*

CD: The role of the person making the statement about a protest.

OD:

1. Journalist: Any journalist or news commentator, including the journalist or journalists who wrote the article in which the statement appears, or who speaks in the news segment transcript. Also includes any other individual who reports news or comments on current events via the media on a regular basis as a paid occupation (e.g. correspondents).
2. Protest participant: Any person identified as a protestor or demonstrator, or otherwise participating in a protest, including any person identified as a protest organizer or a leader or member of a group involved with a protest. Does NOT include people simply identified as “activists” unless they were clearly involved in a protest included in this study.
3. Counter-protester: Any individual who comes to a demonstration for the express purpose of speaking against the primary protest event or who is identified in coverage as a counter-protester or counter-demonstrator.
4. Political figure: Any elected political figure (e.g. mayor, governor, senator) or any individual employed by a governmental body in any policy or decision-making capacity (i.e. bureaucrats, university presidents, etc.). Includes current office-holders as well as candidates for office, and any former office-holders not identifiable as “journalists.” Political figures participating in a protest should be coded as political figures and supporters, not protest participants.
5. Public safety official: Individuals identified as being police officers, firefighters, park rangers, or otherwise employed in the public sector for the purpose of maintaining or enforcing order or safety.
6. Bystander: Anyone identified as a bystander, witness, or onlooker to a protest (i.e. anyone who saw the protest, but was not a participant, political decision maker, public safety official, or the journalist who wrote the story).
7. Expert/spokesperson: Anyone who comments on events in the news that appears as a spokesperson for or on behalf of a think-tank, institute, center, or other organization not involved in sponsoring the protest, or who appears in the capacity of an academic offering expert commentary.

8. Other non-participant: Any individual who is not a participant in a protest, but is also not identified as a bystander, political figure, journalist, or public safety official.
9. Unsure/uncodable.

7. *Oppose*

CD: Whether the speaker opposed the protest.

OD:

0. The speaker supported the protest or did not express either support or opposition.
1. The speaker opposes the protest. The speaker must be **unambiguously against** the aims sought by protesters and/or their ideological positions as relevant to the protest event. Opposition must be mentioned by the speaker or by a journalist within the specific article being coded. Anyone identified as a counter-protestor should be coded as opposing it. Repeated or extremely harsh derogatory remarks about protestors should be considered adequate to code as “oppose,” but if there is any reasonable doubt as to the speaker’s position, code as “0.”

NOTE: This variable does not relate to tactics protesters use or their appearance, but only protesters’ aims.

8. *Partisanship*

CD: The party affiliation of the speaker.

OD:

1. Republican
2. Democrat
3. Other/unclear

Note: Party affiliation must be mentioned explicitly in the article, unless the speaker is a current or former political office holder. Otherwise, code as other/unclear.

DISCOURSE VARIABLES

Cluster A: Nuisance Paradigm Variables

9. *Traffic*

CD: References to delays or alterations in the flow of automobile traffic, pedestrian traffic, or public transit resulting from a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any mention of any kind of alteration to ordinary flow of automobile traffic, pedestrian traffic, or public transportation (e.g. busses, subways, etc.) resulting from a protest, including any mention of traffic being re-routed, slowed, stopped, or delayed, whether by protestors themselves or by local government. Any mention of demonstrators blocking streets or sidewalks, or cars slowing down to observe a protest. Any remarks by commuters or other speakers suggesting they were delayed or expected to arrive late at their intended destination as a result of a protest. Any complaint from drivers or pedestrians about being unable to reach their intended destinations as a result of a protest.

10. Commerce

CD: Statements suggesting that a protest had a negative impact on commerce or business.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement mentioning costs incurred by private businesses or business people as a result of protest. Includes any claim that profits were or could be impacted, that the number of shoppers were or could be fewer than normal, or that shopping or business was or could be in any way hindered or interfered with by protestors. Does not include simple mentions of property damage, unless the resulting costs to businesses are mentioned explicitly (e.g. "Protestors did over \$5,000 dollars worth of damage to a local GAP store as they smashed windows and hurled objects into the store" or "They did so much damage to our store, I'm not sure how we'll be able to pay for it.") Specific numbers need not be mentioned, but discussion of the cost or potential costs of damages to businesses must be overtly present.

11. Cost

CD: Any mention of public cost incurred as a result of a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any discussion of actual or potential public expenditures resulting from protests, including costs resulting from policing, clean up, transit, or repairs resulting from damage to public property. Does NOT include simple mentions of damage to public property unless the cost of repairing such damage is mentioned explicitly (e.g. "Protestors did over \$5,000 of damage in the park where the rally took place," or "The already strained city parks fund will pay for the damage protestors did to the park.")

12. Annoy

CD: Any statement regarding annoyance or frustration caused by a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement suggesting a protest was annoying, frustrating, or bothersome for reasons other than its impact on traffic, commerce, or public expenditures. Includes complaints about loud noise at protests, or terms suggesting unpleasant noise such as "shrill," "piercing," "shrieking," or "screaming." Includes statements using words such as "pest," "nuisance," "annoying," "tired of..." "irritating," "frustrating," "bothersome," "weary," "exhausting," etc. Does not include stronger statements of hate, rage, anger, or disdain for protests of protestors. Does not include frustration arising from ideological disagreement with protestors, but only annoyance or irritation arising from the event itself.

13. Party

CD: Statements describing a protest as being like a party.

OD:

0. No mention.

1. Statements suggesting a protest had a party or festival-like atmosphere. Must include one of the following terms: “celebration,” “rave,” “gala,” “party,” “carnival,” “holiday,” “festive/festivities/festival,” “jamboree,” “jubilee,” “revelry,” “bash,” “fete,” or “merry making/merry makers/merriment,” OR references to loud music, dancing, or the consumption of alcohol or recreational drug use at a protest event. Does NOT include statements that merely suggest that protesters are happy or having a good time.

14. Ineffective

CD: Any statement suggesting the ineffectiveness of a protest as a means of inducing social or policy change or raising awareness about issues.

OD:

0. No mention
1. Any statement disparaging the effectiveness of a protest. Includes statements that policy won’t change, that the powerful will do what they want regardless of protest, that protests are unimportant, that protests are a waste of time, that protests actually strengthen the protesters’ opponents, or that other means of expressing one’s self are superior or more effective (e.g. “why don’t they just write to their congressmen?”) Also includes statements from political decision makers in which they state that protests will not affect their decisions. Also includes statements suggesting that people did not take notice of a protest or intentionally ignored it.

15. Anarchy

CD: Statements dealing with the presence of anarchists at a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Anarchists present: Any statement mentioning the presence of anarchists at a protest event. Includes explicit references to anarchists as well as descriptions of individuals who are otherwise suggested to be anarchists by their description (e.g. wearing garments or carrying banners bearing circle-As, or banners or chants suggesting the overthrow of the state, or specific mentions of the “black bloc”). Includes speculation about the potential presence of anarchists, or any other use of the term “anarchist” in relation to the protestors. Does NOT include statements simply characterizing a protest as chaotic or disorderly, or descriptions of protestors as causing anarchy. Rather, some connection to anarchist ideas or icons must be apparent.

16. Unpatriotic

CD: Statements made about the lack of patriotism of a protest, and/or what it suggests about the gratitude or lack thereof that protestors feel about their rights as Americans.

OD:

0. No mention
1. Any statement suggesting that protestors, a protest, or protests in general are unpatriotic, or that a protest’s existence suggests a lack of gratitude on the part of protestors for the rights they hold as Americans or the sacrifices made by soldiers or other heroic figures in American history. Suggests protestors lack a love of country or that protest itself

demonstrates that lack. Includes terms like “un-American,” “unpatriotic,” “disloyal,” “betrayal/traitors,” “anti-American” etc. Includes any statement suggesting that protestors ought to be more grateful for the rights that they have as Americans. Includes statements that a protest is insulting to or overly critical of America, its political figures, or its military. Includes any statement suggesting that protestors are not “real Americans” or are less patriotic or American than others. Does not include statements that simply characterize protestors as communists, Marxists, anarchists, or ideological or religious extremists unless it is clearly stated that holding these ideologies is contrary to patriotism or love of country, or reflects ingratitude.

17. National Harm

CD: Statements suggesting that protests harm America.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement implicitly suggesting that protest hurts America, its political system, or its military, or that protests are inappropriate in the context of a war or national tragedy and/or give aid or comfort to the enemy, for example “Protesting the war makes the terrorists happy” or “this makes America look bad in the eyes of foreigners.” Does not include general statements about protesters’ lack of patriotism, but only suggestions that protesting will do some harm to America by negatively affecting its political system or culture, helping its enemies, or undermining outsiders’ views about the country. Excludes the specific terms mentioned below.
2. Any statement explicitly stating that protest harms America, its political system, or its military. Must include terms such as “hurt,” “harm,” “undermining,” “weakening,” “damaging,” “destroying,” “injuring,” “wounding,” “spoiling,” “trashing,” “ruining” or “wrecking” America, its political system, its culture, its military, or international views about the country.

Cluster B: Protest Paradigm Variables

18. Appearance

CD: Any statement that describes the unusual appearance of protest participants.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement describing the appearance of protesters as strange, unusual, or otherwise unconventional. This includes adjectives such as “colorful,” “motley,” “bizarre,” or “rag-tag,” as well as any description of the appearance of protesters which emphasizes unusual aesthetic choices, even if no such adjectives are used. Includes any descriptions of colored, long, or unusually styled hair or beards. Also includes subculturally-derived, dirty, extremely colorful, or otherwise unusual apparel, including any mention of costumes or nudity.

19. Oddities

CD: Any statement describing odd, unusual, or counter-normative (but not illegal) actions or images at a protest, not including the appearance of the protestors.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any descriptions of odd, strange, controversial, or unusual behaviors or imagery at a protest, excluding any behaviors which are illegal or which are mentioned below. Behaviors which are socially unacceptable or unusual but are not explicitly mentioned below should be coded as “1,” excluding references to the appearance of protestors. Any controversial slogans are statements that are somewhat controversial but not highly offensive (e.g. “Draft SUV Owners”) should be coded as “1.”
2. Any statement which specifically mentions protestors carrying weapons, carrying the flags of opposing nations, engaging verbal altercations with bystanders, police, or counter protestors, burning of effigies, flags, or other symbols, carrying signs or chanting slogans which express highly controversial, offensive or nonsensical messages (e.g. “Obama/Bush is a Nazi/Terrorist”), or any use of the words “odd,” “strange,” “eccentric,” “unusual,” “abnormal,” “outlandish,” “peculiar,” “out of the ordinary,” “wacky,” “weird,” “deviant,” “unconventional,” or “bizarre” to describe the behavior of protestors.

20. *Young*

CD: Any statement which describes protestors as predominantly young.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that describes the makeup of a protest as predominantly young. Includes descriptions of protestors as young, youthful, immature, or innocent, as well as characterizations of a protest as being predominantly made up of students or other groups that are typically composed of people under the age of 25.

21. *Elderly*

CD: Any statement which describes protestors as predominantly elderly.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that describes the makeup of a protest as predominantly elderly. Includes statements describing protestors as old, elderly, senior, as well as characterizations of a protest being made up of retirees or other groups typically composed of people over the age of 65.

22. *Race*

CD: Any statement which describes protestors as being predominantly of one race.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. The protestors described in racial terms and in a manner that suggests the ethnic makeup of a protest was more or less homogeneous, regardless of which race is ascribed to the protestors. Statements describing a protest as racially heterogeneous should not be coded as race.

23. *Extremist*

CD: Any statement which describes protesters as subscribing to extreme, unusual, or unpopular ideologies, political beliefs, or viewpoints.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that mentions the presence of ideological radicals or extremists in a protest other than anarchists. Includes any mention of socialists, communists, racists, religious extremists, radicals, fascists, or other groups generally considered ideologically deviant in an American context. Does NOT include statements that simply describe protesters as unpatriotic or un-American without mentioning specific fringe ideologies or explicitly characterizing protesters' views as extreme. Does not include anarchists.

24. *Quotemarks*

CD: Use of quotation marks around non-speech items to imply journalistic skepticism.

OD:

0. Not present.
1. Any statement in which the journalist places quotation marks around non-speech items that are terms associated with protesters or their goals or ideology (e.g. "animal rights," "anarchists," "fair trade,").

NOTE: Only use the "quotemarks" variable for coding newspaper sources.

25. *Inauthentic*

CD: Any statement describing a protest as fake, inauthentic, disingenuous, insincere, or staged by/created by outside organizations to pursue selfish interests.

OD:

0. No mention
1. Any statement that questions the authenticity or legitimacy of a protest. Includes terms such as "inauthentic," "false," "fake," "fluffed," "astroturf," "mouthpiece," "illegitimate," "publicity stunt," "artificial," "manufactured," "orchestrated," "fabricated," or "staged." Also includes any claim that protestors do not truly believe in the messages they are advancing, that they were paid to be there, that they were brought in from other locales by some organization, or that a protest is occurring to promote some hidden ideological agenda (e.g. socialism) or to advance the financial interests of some specific organization or narrow segment of the population (e.g. the wealthy).

26. *Violence*

CD: Any statement describing violence against people resulting from or connected with a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement which describes any physical conflict involving protesters, including conflicts between protesters and police, bystanders, counter-protesters, or any other individuals, including physical altercations between protesters themselves. Includes statements suggesting that protesters may become violent or are expected to do so

(including statements such as “I hope this doesn’t become violent”). Code any mention violence using this variable, regardless of who initiated or carried out the violent acts.

27. *Crime*

CD: Any statement describing illegal behavior at a protest which does not result in people being killed or injured.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any description of protestors engaging in illegal behavior of any kind other than violent actions against people or drug use. This would include behavior such as intentionally damaging public or private property associated with a protest, throwing of objects that are not intended to cause death or injury to people, deviating from permitted march routes or marching without a permit or illegally hanging banners from buildings or other structures. Also includes any statement alluding to the arrest or imprisonment of protesters, including such terminology as “protesters were held.” Such instances must be explicit descriptions of arrest or imprisonment (real or anticipated) or descriptions of the conditions of confinement protestors have been subjected to.

28. *Counter*

CD: Statements dealing with the presence of counter-protesters.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Counter-protesters present: Any statement that indicates that there were individuals present at a protest event who demonstrated against the protesters who staged the event or the causes they promoted. Does not include bystanders who are simply opposed to the event or the cause it advocates, nor passersby who heckle protestors, but only individuals who publicly express their opposition via signs, group chants, marches, or physical attempts to hinder or prevent protesters from demonstrating.

29. *Unpopular*

CD: Any statement which describes the goals ideas or ideological positions of a protest as being unpopular or lacking in support from the public at large.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that suggests that people disagree with the outcomes sought by protesters. Includes journalistic implications of a lack of public support for protester’s goals, as well as the appearance of poll data suggesting that a minority of people support the position advocated by demonstrators, or that support is decreasing. Also includes comments from bystanders that suggest that either they themselves or people in general do not agree with the position of the protesters or the outcomes the protesters seek. Also includes any mention of hecklers at a protest. Only includes statements about the supposed unpopularity of protestors’ views or goals, NOT opinions about the protest event itself. Does not include descriptions of the protestors

as ascribing to unpopular or deviant belief systems or as being generally “fringe” but only statements describing the specific outcomes sought by protestors as unpopular.

Cluster C: American Public Variables

30. *Effective*

CD: Any statement describing a protest as effective or potentially effective as a means of influencing policy, raising awareness, or otherwise creating change; specifically related to *outcomes*.

OD:

0. No mention
1. Any statement that suggests that protest will accomplish something. Includes statements suggesting that a protest is important, that politicians or business elites will take note of it, that it will or is likely to result in policy changes, that it is spreading the word or raising awareness about an issue, that people understand the protest or why it is important. Includes descriptions of a protest as “powerful,” “important,” “applying pressure,” or suggestions that a protest changed someone’s opinion, made them aware of an issue etc. Includes statements that suggest that people or the media notice or pay attention to a protest.

31. *Popular*

CD: Any statement which describes the goals, ideas or ideological positions of a protest as being popular or having support from the public at large.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that suggests that the ideas and outcomes sought by protesters have public support in the United States. Includes statements suggesting that most people agree with protesters, as well as the inclusion of any poll data suggesting that a majority of people agree with the aims sought by protesters or that support is increasing. Also includes comments from bystanders suggesting that either they themselves or people in general tend to agree with the protester’s issue positions. Does NOT include statements expressing support for the right to protest or expressing positive feelings about how protesters conducted themselves or the event itself. Rather, the *popular* variable captures support for protesters’ issue positions. Does NOT include statements suggesting that protestors’ views are popular abroad.

33. *Patriotic*

CD: Any statement characterizing protest, protestors, or protesting in general as patriotic.

OD:

0. No mention
1. Any statement explicitly suggesting that a protest, protestors, or protesting in general is in some way patriotic. Includes statements such as “dissent is patriotic” or any statement describing protestors as loving, supporting, or trying to help their country, or as loyal, devoted, or nationalistic. Includes references to a patriotic duty to protest. Does not include the presence of American symbols at a protest, nor the invocation of

figures from American history, nor specific actions carried out by the protestors that might convey patriotism. Rather, this variable includes only specific characterizations of protestors as patriotic.

34. *American*

CD: Any statement overtly characterizing a protest, protestors, protesting in general, or the ideas of protestors, as American.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that explicitly suggests that protest is in some way an “American” thing to do. Any suggestion that protests are honoring America by exercising their rights. Any suggestion that protest is a part of American culture in a contemporary way. Any labeling of protestors themselves as “Americans,” “real Americans,” “the faces of America,” etc. Includes references to country, nation, etc., America need not be mentioned by name. Does NOT include explicit references to historical figures or moments or other American symbols.

35. *Mythology*

CD: Any statement that invokes important historical events or figures from American history.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any comparison of protests and protestors to specific famous events or figures who are revered in American history, or invocation of such events and figures by protestors or other speakers. This would include comparisons or references to the Founders, “the original band of patriots,” the Boston Tea Party, the Constitutional Convention, the Civil Rights movement, The Revolutionary and Civil Wars, World Wars I or II, war heroes in general, or any other events or figures from American history that most US citizens would view in a positive light. This includes references to past presidents preceding George H. W. Bush, excluding Richard Nixon. Social movements in general are not included in mythology, with the exception of the Civil Rights Movement. Do not code if the speaker invokes historical events or figures in a negative way (e.g. “This protest was not in the spirit of the Boston Tea Party,” or “Thomas Jefferson would have thought these people were crazy.”)

36. *Symbols*

CD: Any statement referring to the presence of American symbols or pro-American symbolic actions at a protest.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any reference to American symbols at a protest. This would include journalistic references to the presence of the American flag (unless it is being burned or otherwise damaged or defaced) or other patriotic banners or signs (e.g. references to red, white and blue banners, signs expressing pro-nation sentiments, etc.), any invocations of the constitution or the declaration of independence by protestors, references to protestors saluting the flag or singing patriotic songs (e.g. “God Bless America” or “The Star Spangled Banner”) or engaging in patriotic chants (e.g. “USA! USA!”), or wearing

garments that display pro-American slogans or images (e.g. apparel featuring the flag, the constitution, or generally pro-nation slogans such as “God Bless the USA.”), excluding historical events and figures covered in “mythology” such as the Gadsden flag, dressing up as founding fathers or wearing garments that depict them, etc. This variable captures specific behaviors or symbols that are manifest at protests, not any statements about the protestors themselves or the outcomes they seek.

37. Rights

CD: Any statement suggesting protest participation is a right of citizens in a democratic or American framework.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement that characterizes protest as a citizen’s right in a democracy or in America, something people are allowed or free to do. Includes any defense of protests or any criticism of police or other authorities’ curtailment of protest on the basis of a legal or ethical right to participate in such events. Does NOT include statements suggesting that protests are a patriotic or civic act, but only expressing or defending the right of individuals to participate in protests.

38. Democracy

CD: Any statement characterizing a protest or protests in general as part of the democratic process.

OD:

0. No mention.
1. Any statement which indicates that protests play a role in governing or democracy. Includes any explicit characterizations of protests as democratic, as well as any suggestion that protests play a role in the governing of the nation. Any statement suggesting that protest is part of the system of government or the process of democracy (e.g. “this is just how democracy works,” or “protest is part of the American way of government” or “this is what democracy looks like”). Does NOT include any statements suggesting protests are patriotic or American, statements defending protest as a right, or statements regarding the efficacy of protest. Rather, this variable specifically captures statements that depict protest as part or emblematic of democracy or the American system of government.