

A Suicidal Republican Civil War



Christopher S. Parker, University of Washington

The Republican Party is at war with itself – and has been since 2010 when several self-styled "insurgents" identified with the Tea Party challenged established Republicans in the primaries. Not all challengers win, but to date upsets by Tea Party challengers have cost the GOP at least seven seats in general elections for the U.S. Senate. This is a source of continuing friction between the officially entrenched and Tea Party factions of the Republican Party, and key policy disputes between the two camps further fuel discord. Policy cracks in the Republican Congressional conferences emerged during the debt ceiling disputes of 2011, when top House and Senate GOP leaders sought compromise with Democrats but Tea Party types refused to go along. Similar disagreements have emerged over a series of issues including immigration reform, renewal of federal highway funding, tactics for opposing the Affordable Care Act, and now the issue of the renewal of the federal Export-Import Bank.

In fact, the rift is now so wide that Senator John S. McCain of Arizona, a pillar of the GOP establishment, has taken to calling Tea Partiers "wacko birds." Continuing unresolved fratricide could threaten the survival of the Republican Party.

Clashes within the GOP aren't new, of course. The recent friction between the GOP establishment and Tea Party forces is similar to clashes that rocked the Republican Party in the 1960s – yet with a crucial difference. Instead of bowing to the more right-wing elements of the party, as today's Republicans have, the administration of Republican President Dwight David Eisenhower took a moderate tack best explained by Eisenhower's Under Secretary of Labor, Arthur Larson. He described what he called "true conservatism" as a belief system focused on the preservation and promotion of American ideals and values, even if government had to take active steps to secure such preservation. Larson contrasted such genuine conservatism to a "false conservatism." For him, this belief system was willing to reject new and innovative ways to preserve the American way and insist on older ways, even if stubborn adherence to them would ultimately undermine values Americans cherish.

Such sentiments are alien to many members of today's Republican Party. In fact, the GOP has now shifted so far to the right that former Republican Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole of Kansas recently observed that neither he nor the late President Ronald Reagan would be able to make it in today's party.

The contemporary shift to the far-right, most observers would agree, was launched back in the 1960s under the leadership of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, who directly rejected

Larson's "true conservatism," where government has a positive role to play by undertaking tasks too large for individuals on their own. Goldwater was aghast at what he viewed as Larson's "unqualified repudiation of the principle of limited government" and he believed an activist state would ultimately result in "totalitarianism." Goldwater counseled a steadfast belief in established ways of doing things, "not because they are old, but because they are true."

Reasonable people can disagree on whether fractures in the GOP today resonate with the disputes of the 1960s. Nevertheless, resistance to social change, and the refusal of the insurgent wing of the GOP to adapt to changing times, is implicated in the fundamentalist views of both periods. For instance, in the 1960s, Goldwater's campaign was fueled by steadfast refusals to yield to civil rights movements sweeping the country; tellingly, in the 1964 presidential contest, Goldwater carried five states in addition to his own – Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, all of them in the heart of the Black Belt in the Deep South. In the current Tea Party movement, reactionary elements of the GOP also resist the speed with which America is changing socially and culturally. With a black man in the White House, with new immigrants gaining ground in American society, and changes such as gay rights gaining currency, Tea Party supporters are pushing back by opposing and blocking legislative efforts favored by Democrats.

Parallels between the GOP of the early 1960s and the present moment end here, however; and this is why. Even though the Goldwater-led GOP registered victories in only six states in 1964, that presidential campaign laid the groundwork for a burgeoning grassroots conservative movement in the years that followed. Before long, Republicans adopted a different strategy, including appeals to working-class, ethnic whites in the "North" along with white southerners. With that approach, Richard M. Nixon won the White House twice, and conservatism all but dominated the American political landscape for the better part of 30 years. But with the rapidly changing demographics in America, the reactionary wing of the current Republican Party won't come close to replicating the success of its predecessor.

Like the GOP in the past, the current Republican Party needs to pursue a new constituency – if it wishes to survive and gain ground in national politics. But this time the constituency it needs to win over to ensure its survival is not the older whites that the Tea Party regards as "real Americans." Instead, to be viable over the long run, the party must win support from many in the growing ranks of Latino citizens and voters. Yet recent public opinion suggests that Latinos reject House Republicans' harsh, purely "law and order" approach to immigration. Only 13 percent of Latinos agree with the priority House Republicans place on securing the border prior to any legalization for millions of newcomers already living and working across the United States. Likewise, less than a quarter of Latinos agree with the proposition so popular among Republicans, especially Tea Partiers, that more and more undocumented immigrants should be hunted down and sent to jail or detention centers.

Policy differences within the Republican Party today matter as much as win and loss tallies in primary and general elections. If Congressional Republicans continue to let the Tea Party's nativist preferences control the legislative agenda on immigration reform, they will lose an opportunity to help deliver comprehensive immigration reforms that most Americans, including

most non-Tea Party Republicans and GOP-aligned business interests, consider vital for America and the future viability of the Republican Party at the national level. Remaining hostage to Tea Party forces resisting social change in America could cost Republicans the White House again in 2016, and set the stage for future significant losses in Congress. In short, if the Tea Party really retains its leverage – if it truly wins the party's heart and soul for keeps – then the Republican Party will ultimately lose, big time.

Cantor's Defeat is No Big Deal – Unless Republicans Choose to Make It So



Robert G. Boatright, Clark University

A reporter emailed me a question shortly after upstart David Brat defeated House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in the recent Republican primary election for Virginia's seventh district: When, he asked, was the last time someone like Cantor had lost a primary? Possible answers to this question indicate three very different ways of thinking about the significance of the Cantor defeat for the Republican Party and its likely future.

One answer presumes that the Cantor loss was completely unprecedented, a sign that the Republican Party as we know it is collapsing. This is certainly the most dramatic answer. For much of the 2014 primary season, observers have pointed to an ongoing "Republican Civil War" pitting the party establishment against its more populist, Tea Party-inspired right flank. The establishment looked to be triumphing in this war until Brat's surprise victory. Tea Party supported primary challengers to incumbents or officially supported GOP candidates had fizzled in Texas, Kentucky, and Idaho, and failed to emerge at all in several other states. In the wake of Brat's ouster of Cantor, the big story shifted – at least until the Mississippi primary saw incumbent Senator Thad Cochran beat back a Tea Party challenger. In any event, obscure challengers in a variety of late-primary states are still vying to repeat Brat's upset; and Cantor himself was such a big fish, that many continue to want to see his surprise defeat by an obscure Tea Partier as the end of the GOP establishment as usual.

Another approach to answering the reporter's query was taken by the *Weekly Standard*, which compared Cantor's loss to liberal New Jersey Republican Clifford Case's loss to conservative activist Jeff Bell in 1978. Many conservatives of that era saw Bell's victory as a blow against the liberal wing of the party – one that would be followed by the retirement or defeat of other liberal Republicans in years to come. In this framing of events, there is nothing new about Cantor's loss; primary electorates are more ideologically extreme than the general electorate, and thus incumbents must always remember first to cater to the party faithful and to the most dedicated activists within their party. Brat's victory is part of a normal process of reinforcing orthodoxy within each major U.S. political party – or, at most, a symptom of the parties' accelerating movement toward the ideological extremes.

But I offered an answer to the reporter rather different from both of the previous takes – an answer that he did not use in his subsequent filings. I compared the deposed Eric Cantor to the primary defeat two decades ago of Congressman Guy Vander Jagt. That defeat is long forgotten and a refresher may be needed. Vander Jagt was the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee – the man in charge of plotting election strategy for the party. He lost his primary in 1992 to Peter Hoekstra, who argued that Vander Jagt wasn't paying enough attention to his Michigan constituents. Hoekstra was no anti-government crusader; rather, he was a smart politician who exploited his opponent's biggest weakness in a particular House district. Vander Jagt's defeat was a surprise, but even at the time it was taken by observers to be a sign that he had forgotten the old adage that all politics is local.

Why should we care that there are three possible answers to the significance of Cantor's defeat? It matters, because each implies different things for the future of the Republican Party. Is it being torn apart from within? Is it steadily moving to the right? Or is it simply the usual collection of politicians who use the best campaign strategies to win office? In support of my sense that number three is the best take, I offer the following evidence from the past forty years' worth of Congressional primaries:

- Except in election years when redistricting has happened following the decennial Census, only three or four incumbents typically lose their primaries. The number of serious challenges has risen slightly over the past three elections since 2008, but there are still fewer serious primary challenges on average than there were during the 1970s.
- More challengers are, of late, running explicitly ideological campaigns – from the left in Democratic primaries, from the right in Republican primaries. Why this is happening is debatable. Maybe it is due to ideological polarization; or perhaps ambitious challengers are just adopting campaign themes likely to draw more media attention.
- Heightened scrutiny of primaries by the media, combined with the increased ease some candidates can have in raising money from a national donor base on the Internet, has created national, ideologically oriented constituencies for some primary candidates. Idaho primary challenger Bryan Smith, for instance, raised nearly \$750,000 from donors who do not live in Idaho. Every year for the past decade, there have been one or two challengers like Smith. Independent expenditures by groups seeking to use primaries to make a point have also skyrocketed – and such groups really do not care too much whether the challenger finally wins, as long as he or she gets a lot of attention.
- Surprisingly small slivers of the electorate vote in Congressional primaries. Voters who do turn out are not necessarily ideological “extremists.” They are often drawn to the polls not by the Congressional primary itself, but by some other, higher profile race on the ballot. States also vary in ballot access rules. Both special rules and low turnout mean that national groups

aiming to use primaries to show their clout can take advantage of low-turnout races or odd procedures in states such as Utah or Idaho.

Primaries, in short, are weird elections, and there are a lot of them, making it easy for groups to score points here or there in every election year. That doesn't mean that big generalizations about the direction of entire political parties or American politics overall should be read into scattered primary outcomes.

My sense is that Eric Cantor's loss was not really out of the ordinary; it was one of a smattering of defeats that happen each cycle. This view is not as exciting as the other two versions of what this instance tells us about the Republican Party today and tomorrow. But my version better fits the facts, and if my answer is true, then the moral for Republican Party leaders is simple. Ignore or debunk the dramatic stories and do not read too much into what happened with Eric Cantor. Some incumbents are always going to lose. Beyond the district or state involved, it doesn't mean anything much – unless everyone thinks it does.

Republicans are Deferring to Tea Party Funders and Activists



Vanessa Williamson, Harvard University

That Eric Cantor, leader of many ultraconservative House GOP maneuvers to block compromises with President Barack Obama, ended up losing his recent Virginia primary contest to an even more hardline political newcomer, David Brat, shows just how completely the ideological Tea has infused the Republican Party. By now, in fact, any discussion of which Republicans are “Tea Party” and which are not is a purely semantic game. But regardless of how the DC-focused political media characterize the latest outcomes, we need to keep the bigger picture in mind – a picture in which elite and grassroots Tea Party forces have pushed an already extremely conservative Republican Party further to the right since 2008.

The Republicans' swerve to the far right is a recipe for local victories but national defeats. Eventually, this version of the Republican Party will discover it cannot attract majorities in national or many state-wide general elections. But much harm can happen in the meantime. Wins in conservative strongholds have been enough for ultra-right Republicans to prevent or delay action on many of the major issues facing our country. For the foreseeable future, we can expect more of the same – pressures for the GOP to move right from above and below.

At the elite level of the Tea Party field of forces pushing on the GOP, the investments made by wealthy conservative ideologues are continuing to pay dividends. Since the 1970s, conservative elites have invested heavily in strengthening right-wing ideology via think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, and also by reshaping parts of academia. Observers have stressed that Brat's challenge to Cantor did not have immediate election funding from Tea Party political action committees. But despite his campaign rhetoric excoriating Cantor's ties to

investments bankers, Professor David Brat's career has been furthered by the corporate ideological right. His research and pedagogical efforts have been supported by the Branch Banking and Trust Corporation, one of the largest financial holding companies in the United States, which has spent millions to advance libertarianism in many universities. This corporation's money comes to professors and campuses with strict stipulations, like the requirement that faculty not only teach Ayn Rand but have "a positive attitude" toward that philosophy, as their agreement with Western Carolina University insisted.

Brat's funder is a lesser-known member of a small club of ultra-conservative donors – a club whose most prominent members include the Scaife and Olin families and, of course, the Koch brothers. Such sources of largesse for far-right advocates, policymakers, and academics are not waning, and as money flows from the wealthy ideological extremists there is no true countervailing force within the Republican Party donor class. Moderation is not fashionable in high-roller GOP circles these days.

Nor is there reason to expect any tide of moderation from below, even as the Obama presidency draws to an end. At the local level, grassroots Tea Partiers and other conservatives are impressive organizers, and will likely continue to wield leverage against complacent incumbents. Finally, the conservative media – including Laura Ingraham, the conservative radio star who played a major role in Brat's primary victory – will still be working to inflame and frighten the older white GOP conservative voters who turn out faithfully to vote and lobby.

The conservative base is especially likely to maintain its fervor if Democrats manage to win the White House again in 2016. Grassroots conservatives, so angered by the Obama presidency, will not calm down under a different Democratic president. One need only look at the level of anger stoked against Hillary Clinton in the 1990s to predict the Republican playbook should she run for president and be elected.

Yet the GOP's current strategy will make general-election victories difficult in constituencies where conservatives are not already the majority of voters. Polls have repeatedly shown that the Tea Party-style of Republicanism is unappealing to the average American – and according to the latest *New York Times/CBS* poll, the general unpopularity of the Tea Party now stands at about 80%, with many non-Tea Party identified Republican voters joining independents and Democrats in expressing displeasure. Even so, rising unpopularity for the Tea Party does not ensure the Republican Party will move to the middle. In the American political system, power is very imperfectly proportional to votes, particularly when the top policy goals of parties or major factions can be achieved through inaction. On issues from immigration to climate change to economic inequality, gridlock suits the most active interests in and around the contemporary Republican Party just fine.

In the longer term, the Republican electoral calculus may change. Parties have been known to alter and even completely switch their positions in remarkably short periods of time. That may take a while for the Republican Party of the early 21st century, but it is worth remembering that the Grand Old Party was once the home of progressives on race and on women's rights. Looking

forward, there may come a time for GOP realignment again, as the unevenly distributed costs of economic inequality and climate change are ever more strongly felt. In coming years, for example, drought-stricken farmers and flooded coastal communities will require government assistance to deal with the consequences of global warming, as well as its causes. Americans will be looking for leaders from both parties who can do better than argue amongst themselves while the water is rising.

What the War within the GOP Means in Maine



Amy Fried, University of Maine

Given how often it has been left for dead, the Tea Party has had a pretty heady few months. Just when it seemed that long-serving solid Republican incumbents would avoid losing primary fights to Tea Party identified candidates, Mississippi Senator Thad Cochran was forced into a run-off he barely won, and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor surprisingly lost his primary by a large margin to a poorly funded college professor backed by grassroots Virginia Tea Partiers.

Similar dynamics are playing out in Maine, a state known not only for lobster but also, at least traditionally, for moderate Republicans. Moderate Republican Maine Senators Margaret Chase Smith, Bill Cohen, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins have established a long tradition of working with Democrats in their state and in Washington D.C.

But in the Obama era, things have changed even in Maine. Four years ago, in 2010, the far-right of the Maine Republican Party scored big when Paul LePage won the GOP gubernatorial nomination and then, as Republicans took both houses of the Maine Legislature, went on to win a plurality of votes in a multi-candidate race. Suddenly, Maine ended up with a very conservative, all-Republican state government, even as Maine Republicans fell into deep schisms between an older GOP establishment and libertarian and Tea Party factions. Indeed, the Maine Republican Party has been repeatedly roiled.

- In February 2012, moderate Republican Senator Olympia Snowe was booed at a Republican county gathering. Later that month, Snowe announced that she was fed up dealing with excessive partisanship and gridlock in Washington and would not run for another term.
- In Maine's 2012 presidential nominations process, supporters of libertarian Ron Paul called foul after conservative towns had their caucuses cancelled due to snow and establishment favorite Mitt Romney tallied the most support statewide. The result was a raucous state party convention in May at which Ron Paul's supporters prevailed by winning the largest number

of delegates to represent Maine. When the credentials committee at the Republican National Convention stripped many of Paul's delegates of their seats, nearly all Paul delegates walked out.

- In November 2012, Republicans faced big defeats, as Mainers installed Democratic majorities in both the Maine House and Senate, endorsed same-sex marriage, elected moderate Independent Angus King to the U.S. Senate, and voted to re-elect President Barack Obama. Democrats held onto both of Maine's two U.S. House seats and Senator King soon announced that he would caucus with the Democrats in the U.S. Senate.

Governor LePage has remained in office since 2012, going on to issue a record number of vetoes, most of which have been upheld, because there are just enough like-minded conservative Republicans in the legislature to uphold them. Among the bills LePage vetoed were repeated efforts to expand Medicaid, including a proposal crafted by two moderate Republican legislators.

Moderate Republicans continue to face difficulties in Maine as of 2014. The same night that Eric Cantor lost in Virginia, Maine's Tea Party candidate won the marquee primary race for the Republican nomination in the open U.S. House seat to represent Maine's second Congressional district. Ultra-conservative nominee Bruce Poliquin signed Grover Norquist's no-tax pledge, calls for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, supports raising the retirement age for Social Security, and holds very conservative views on abortion, immigration, and gay rights. Aligned with the LePage wing of the Maine GOP, Poliquin is a wealthy investor who lost the Republican primary for governor in 2010 and served two years as Maine's Treasurer. He also ran for and lost the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate in 2012.

Tellingly, Poliquin's vanquished opponent, Kevin Raye, is a pro-choice Republican who was Olympia Snowe's Chief of Staff and, more recently, the President of the Maine Senate. Raye runs a small business and won the Republican nomination for the second Congressional district House races in 2002 and 2012.

Although Gov. LePage did not have to face any primary opponent for his re-election bid, the Poliquin-Raye fight has divided the Maine Republican Party. Rather than coming together after the nomination was decided, Kevin Raye did not attend the Republican unity rally and has not endorsed Bruce Poliquin for the November 2014 general election, where the opponent is a relatively centrist Democrat. After the bitter 2014 Republican primary fight, one of Raye's supporters declared that a number of state Republicans see harsh personal slams by Poliquin as "unforgivable." And some younger Maine Republicans won't vote for Poliquin because of his anti-gay stance.

Across the United States in the last few election cycles, some Tea Party candidates in other states turned out to be so extreme they lost general election contests other, more mainstream conservative Republican candidates would have likely won. It is perfectly possible that this will happen again in Maine in November 2014. As vanquished moderate primary candidate Kevin

Raye put it on primary election day, Poliquin "certainly has sought to position himself to the far right. If he wins today, I expect he'd have a hard time in the general election."

That prospect did not seem to matter to a majority of Maine Republicans who went to the polls in the primary. Bruce Poliquin's win came after public polls showed him doing much worse than Kevin Raye in putative general election match-ups against the Democratic primary candidates than Kevin Raye. The first post-election poll showed Poliquin trailing Democratic nominee Emily Cain. Whatever actually happens some months from now, Maine's GOP will probably continue to face schisms between compromise-minded center-right Republicans, the traditional Maine "establishment," and libertarians and Tea Partiers positioned further to the right and much less open to governing across party lines. In Kevin Raye's words, Poliquin's win "says something about the direction of the Republican party" – not just across the United States, but also in Maine.

Did the Magnolia State's Primary Battles Signal New Leverage for African Americans?



Daniel Paul Franklin, Georgia State University

The narrow re-nomination victory of six-term Republican Senator Thad Cochran in the Mississippi primary run-off may well mark a watershed moment in politics in the South. In his desperation to overtake Tea Party favorite Chris McDaniel, who beat him in the first round of the primary, Cochran hit upon a novel idea: to invite the black community into the final stage of the Republican Party nomination battle. On the campaign trail, Cochran said he had never been averse to helping out the African American community. By bringing home the bacon – federal spending and grants – to one of the most pork-laden states, Cochran bragged that he had helped buoy the interests of the poor in general and the state's large black community in particular.

Can Democratic African American voters participate in a GOP primary? In Mississippi, election rules excluded only those voters who had already voted in the Democratic primary from voting in the Republican Party run-off. Since the Democratic candidate, Travis Childers, was uncontroversial but has almost no chance of winning statewide in the November 2014 general election, turnout in the Democratic primary was even lighter than normal. Thus, the vast majority of Mississippi's black residents, roughly 40 percent of the population of the state, remained eligible to vote in the Republican primary run-off.

Although the complete story remains to be told, it appears that Mississippi's black leaders recognized and took advantage of this historic opportunity, by urging their compatriots to vote in the GOP contest to gain a measure of meaningful clout in Mississippi politics. Since winning the right to vote in the 1960s, Mississippi blacks have voted as a bloc for Democratic candidates, while Mississippi white voters since the introduction of Nixon's southern strategy have lined up

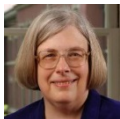
as a bloc for Republicans. The whites outnumber the blacks, so blacks have always been marginalized in Mississippi politics. But by voting in this year's contentious and evenly divided Republican primary, they have found a way to gain influence.

With the emergence of the Tea Party movement, somewhat more moderate Mississippi Republicans have found it increasingly challenging to win primaries. Yet now it is apparent that they have a new path to victory – one that runs through the African American community. Cochran's re-nomination sets an example that other Republicans of his ilk may follow.

Will this moment bring policy changes to benefit Mississippi's blacks and their communities? Here is the key point: African American voters don't have to change their politics to participate in Republican Party primaries, but the GOP candidates may need to adjust to attract black votes. Tellingly, Cochran spoke in favor of full voting rights and participation in the course of his last-minute appeal for votes in African American areas. At the very least, Cochran will now have to be cognizant of who kept him in office – and if he keeps the pivotal support of African American constituents in mind, he may well moderate his politics to inoculate himself against pressure from the far right. Possibly, some of his allies in the Mississippi Republican establishment that worked so hard to defeat McDaniel will also be more willing to make policy concessions to African American citizens in their state.

Where else could less extreme Republican candidates successfully adopt Cochran's strategy? Most likely, in states like Texas and South Carolina that combine a highly conservative general electorate with a large minority population. Should moderate Republicans succeed in using minority support to defeat Tea Party extremists in those states, the Cochran reelection in Mississippi could represent quite a watershed. It would not only be a remarkable sea change in what has become the sclerotic racial politics of the South, but the beginning of the end of the outsized influence of Tea Party forces on national Republican Party politics.

Tea Party Forces Still Control the Republican Agenda



Theda Skocpol, Harvard University

Is the Tea Party on its last legs or still a powerful force in the Republican Party? Preoccupied with this question, the Beltway political media has for months cycled through dizzying gyrations, all along managing to miss the big picture.

After Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell trounced his Kentucky Tea Party opponent, the "establishment" was declared by *Politico* to be back in charge of a Republican Party now ready to govern. Then, in mid-June, the Tea Party was pronounced suddenly resurgent after opulently funded House honcho Eric Cantor was defenestrated by an obscure Ayn Rand-touting professor in a Virginia GOP primary Cantor had been deemed certain to win. Yet again, just two weeks later, the adults were again said to be back in control after Mississippi's ultimate GOP insider

Senator, Thad Cochran, eked out a run-off victory against a surging absolutist ultra-conservative. Now, at last, the Tea Party may be facing its "Alamo," suggested a June 25 headline in *The Hill*.

This is what I call the basketball finals approach to scoring a supposedly all out "war" between the Republican Party and the Tea Party. The focus is relentlessly on election outcomes and public popularity polls. Each big-deal primary is treated as a playoff game. If any evidence is considered about the larger political meaning of wins and losses, it comes from the latest ruminations of Hill staffers worried about jobs after next November's midterms or perhaps from staffers at the Republican and Democratic National Committees. They are the ones talking each day to the reporters from *Politico* and *The Hill*. Meanwhile, no attention is paid to public policy agendas, to what is happening, or not, in U.S. government as the country faces major challenges at home and abroad – challenges such as the need to reform the immigration system and cope with climate change, Congressional consideration of renewals for such mega-legislation as the agriculture/food security bill, the transportation bill, and No Child Left Behind. Sure, there are separate reports on the daily maneuverings about such legislation, but connections are almost never made to persistent ultra-right gains within the GOP and pressures upon it.

An obsession with toting up wins and losses in primaries completely misreads how Tea Party forces work, how they have moved the governing agendas of the Republican Party ever further right and maintained a stranglehold on federal government action. As Vanessa Williamson and I first laid out in our 2012 book, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, there is no unified center of control in charge of the Tea Party. Rather, it amounts to conjoined pressures from, on the one hand, hundreds of remarkably autonomous local groups run by volunteer activists and, on the other hand, top-down, professionally run policy advocacy groups and funders. Tea Party clout in and upon Republican officials, officeholders, and candidates is actually maximized by the dynamic interplay of top-down and bottom-up forces, both pushing for absolute opposition to President Barack Obama and obstruction of Congressional action involving compromises with Democrats. Tea Party forces are neither inside nor outside, neither for nor against the Republican Party in any simple sense, because they are sets of organizations and activists seeking leverage over the choices and actions of Republican leaders and candidates.

And Tea Party forces have done and are still doing remarkably well in pushing the GOP even further to the hard right than it was before Barack Obama moved into the White House. After years of moving rightward in what political scientists recognize as "asymmetric polarization" after 1980, the Republican Party as of the middle of the 2000s was *already* an extremely conservative operation – devoted primarily to pursuing tax cuts and weakening any and all regulations on business. Christian right groups, who made up much of the popular base of the party heard a lot of the anti-abortion rhetoric but got little in the way of desired legislative changes when GOPers took office, turned to pursuing their real pro-business agendas. Much of this changed after 2007. With the rise of Barack Obama, newly aroused grassroots conservatives organized themselves into hundreds of Tea Parties that place a priority on opposition to immigration reform and cuts in spending on any social programs that benefit low-income, younger, and minority groups. Christian conservatives continued to be involved, but grassroots

conservatism has taken on a more nativist and anti-redistributive edge – and these newly fired-up GOP ultra-conservative voters, about half of all Republican identifiers in national surveys, are by far the most attentive GOP citizens. They vote, including in primaries and off-year elections; they attend town halls and debates; they track bills and legislators' votes and let their representatives know their displeasure at any signs of compromise governing.

At the same time, ultra-right professionally run groups backed by billionaires not simply beholden to the Chamber of Commerce have jumped on the Tea Party bandwagon. Older groups like FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity and the Club for Growth have now been augmented by the Senate Conservatives Fund and Heritage Action. All of these see popular Tea Party arousal as an excellent way to augment their own pressures on Republican officials and candidates to a harder-right policy agenda.

To be sure, there are some differences and tensions on issues such as Social Security and immigration reform. Popular Tea Partiers are mainly older whites collecting retirement benefits such as Social Security or slated to do so before long; they do not favor big changes any time soon in such federal expenditures. And even though grassroots Tea Partiers along with Heritage Action hate the idea of any path to citizenship for undocumented Latino immigrants, another elite Tea Party aligned group, the Koch brothers-backed Americans for Prosperity, favors comprehensive immigration reform and is prepared to accept some drawn-out form of legalization. Overall, however, the parts of the Tea Party pincers operation are pushing Republicans in the same "just say no" directions – and they are very successful in that, even when blocking legislative action means saying no to the Chamber of Commerce and other traditional GOP business allies just as much as it means saying no to Democrats. And they succeed even when leaders like John Boehner or Mitch McConnell want the hard right to "cool it" long enough for many of their legislative charges to vote for measures popular with most Americans.

To see that the Tea Party remains supremely effective, just look at what Congressional Republicans are doing, or not doing. Eric Cantor's sudden defeat sealed the GOP House's determination to block immigration reform, but that reform was already effectively dead even before that one primary election happened. Republicans have pulled away from decades-old compromises to fund transportation systems, to support agricultural subsidies along with Food Stamps, to renew the Export-Import Bank that most U.S. business interests want continued. House and Senate Republicans are spending their time mainly on obstruction and media-focused investigations, anything to challenge and humiliate President Obama. In state houses, Tea Party-pushed Republicans are mainly passing anti-abortion restrictions and blocking the expansion of Medicaid favored by hospitals and businesses.

What do primary elections have to do with such effective agenda control? Not nearly as much as the basketball finals approach to tallying total wins and losses implies. In a way, unpredictable and somewhat random victories against fairly safe Republican power-brokers are the most effective outcomes for Tea Party voters and funders. Sure, the big Tea Party funders would like to have gotten a win for Chris McDaniel, their guy in Mississippi, and they are furious that they

did not. But backing up and looking at the big picture, does anyone really imagine that nervous GOP officeholders are reassured that the Tea Party is dead or "under control" following a scenario in which old timer Thad Cochran had to raise millions for what should have been a taken-for-granted primary victory, and his allies had to orchestrate an all-out voter mobilization effort that even reached out to some African American Democrats? Cochran's near-death sends a powerful message that loudly hewing hard-right on policy issues and obstruction is the way to go. Similarly, Eric Cantor's huge defeat is even more frightening to many Republican politicians because it happened without big-money backing from the likes of Heritage Action. Cantor looked golden but, somehow, unpredictable Tea Party and Christian right voters in central Virginia turned out in surprisingly large numbers to hand him a defeat and, in effect, thumb their noses even at professional Tea Party organizations. What surprises from below could lurk for me, Cantor's Republican House colleagues in many apparently safe GOP districts must wonder.

After 2007, in short, top-down and bottom-up Tea Party forces formed an uncontrolled pincers movement to push already very conservative Republicans into obstructionist and non-compromising styles of governance. Primary election challenges matter in this effort, but (like shocks to experimental rats in mazes) outright wins need happen only very sporadically to keep the attention of Republican candidates and officeholders – whose ranks in any event by now include many quite sincere extreme ideologues. The hard truth the Beltway media tries to avoid facing is that the U.S. Republican Party has moved, and remains, far from where "median" American voters stand on virtually all of the major public policy issues of the day. That matters hugely for what the U.S. federal and many state governments can and will do about major public policy challenges, because the Republican Party is one of just two major players in U.S. government. Popularity in national polls and a majority of election wins do not matter as long as Tea Party pincers keep a stranglehold on GOP leaders and legislative agendas. As of the summer of 2014, they are doing just fine at that – and almost certainly will continue to do so for some time to come.