

FEAR, ITSELF

*The Threat Constructions of Tea Party
Candidates in the 2010 Republican Primaries*

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Abstract

This study explores the role that a faith-driven discourse has played in the electoral success of the Tea Party movement. The popularity of the Tea Party movement among conservative Protestant populations has led researchers to depict an emerging theological political ideology. Few have considered the historical and religious influences on the Tea Party brand, despite the fact that it has garnered support from a segment of the conservative American population which have traditionally used religious rationalisation as the basis for their political opinions. This thesis examines these historical and religious influences by means of a discourse analysis. This allows for the success of Tea Party candidates to be understood in the context of the mobilisation of a “nation at threat” narrative, cast ostensibly in religious language. I find that the linking of political opponents to the concepts of socialism, unconstitutional practices and immoralism allowed for a consistent narrative to emerge, whereby certain conceptions of the American identity were prioritised and deemed “acceptable”. I conclude that the electoral success of the Tea Party can be explained by the mobilisation of a primarily faith-driven discourse that gains traction through the mobilisation of threat to American society. The need for further research to account for the religious and economics aspect of the Tea Party movement is clear.

“The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who would attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee.”

- Jules Winnfield, *Pulp Fiction*

Introduction

Making Sense of the Tea Party Movement

On February 19th 2009, following the announcement of a federal government plan to refinance toxic mortgages, a new political brand in American politics was born. CNBC business news editor Rick Santelli, whilst on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, implored his viewers to hold a “tea party” in Chicago, and symbolically dump their derivatives in the Chicago River, much like the Sons of Liberty had dumped crates of tea into Boston Harbor in December of 1773. The following day, “Tea Party” websites sprang up, protests were organized around the country, and a new movement was capturing the attention of the nation. Within a year, Tea Party-affiliated candidates were not only defeating well established incumbent Republicans in primary elections, but were riding a wave of popularity that brought them to Capitol Hill.

The Tea Party movement not only fundamentally changed the make-up and policy agenda of the Republican Party in the lead up to the 2010 midterms, but has had a major voice in the 112th session of Congress (Babington, 2010). The electoral success of Tea Party backed candidates has been viewed as a sign that the movement has gained considerable support from the Republican base (Bond et al., 2011, Courser, 2010). From its beginnings as a grassroots protest movement in early 2009, to becoming a major faction of the Republican Party, the Tea Party has become a modern political phenomenon.

The rapid growth in popularity of the Tea Party in America has captured the attention of many scholars, but there has been little consensus on how to characterize the political ideology of the movement. Given the swiftness with which the Tea Party has developed a sustained political voice, it has been a challenge to adequately explain why the movement has enjoyed such a meteoric rise, how it has been able to capture the attention of a significant portion of the conservative population in America, and what the movement itself represents in terms of the

nation's psyche. What this study seeks to explore here is the underlying factors behind the Tea Party's electoral success - how have they managed to energize and mobilize a significant portion of the American population in such a short space of time? Why have they been so successful in defeating establishment Republican candidates in primary elections? And where do they fit into the broader evolution of the Republican Party?

Accounts of the Tea Party Movement

Research on the Tea Party to date has characterized the movement as primarily economic in nature, promoting free market economics and campaigning for a reduced role for the federal government. Analysis by academics has not necessarily found it to be a cohesive group, but rather a “number of different national organizations with overlapping purposes” (Berg, 2011, p.11). Bearing that in mind, it nonetheless has succeeded as a decentralized political coalition that has capitalised on a receptive and politically active segment of the population (Abramowitz, 2011).

Some have found the Tea Party to be a force that has revitalized conservatism in America. Williamson et al. argue, following surveys of select Massachusetts populations, that the Tea Party “allowed for the rebranding of conservative Republicanism and gave activists an unsullied standard to mobilize behind” after the big Democrat victories of 2006 and 2008 (Williamson et al., 2011, p.32). It is asserted that the Tea Party movement has created a shared symbolism that allows free-market advocates to rally grassroots support and oppose a progressive policy agenda. By establishing a narrative of “perceived deservingness” and a tendency to scapegoat the poor, the movement has rebranded Republican conservatism with few ties to the more institutional elements of the GOP (Berg, 2011, Williamson et al., 2011). Whilst studies such as this accurately conceptualize the movement on a symbolic level, they do not analytically engage with

the embedded meanings inherent in the rhetoric of the Tea Party, nor do they dissect the roots of its political ideology.

Meanwhile, there has been a tendency for authors to conceptualize the movement as the embodiment of nationalistic sentiment, or characterize it as representing racist attitudes. A 2010 study asserted that the Tea Party label often gives a platform to racist, anti-immigrant rhetoric, which has created an effective fundraising platform for conservatives (Burghart and Zeskind, 2010). Others have ascribed the anti-Obama nature of Tea Party protests as an example of “pseudo-conservatism”, where there is out-group anxiety¹ over the dissemination of state resources to the poor and minority groups (Barreto et al., 2011). Various other studies have found evidence of high levels of racial resentment among the rank and file of the Tea Party (Abramowitz, 2011).

However, such accounts have been criticized for being too superficial (Thompson, 2012, Courser, 2010), as a developed political ideology such as the Tea Party’s is not necessarily due to a merely ascriptive element such as racism. More nuanced studies have focused on the ideational aspects of the Tea Party. Michael Thompson (2012) argues that the proliferation of Tea Party attitudes is due to “forms of moral cognition”, which comes about due to socialization as a result in living in certain areas. Rosen (2012) points out that there is significant evidence for “Evangelical Feminism” in the Tea Party, something not seen since the days of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in the 1930s. These studies highlight the important role that ideational components and wider social construction elements have played in the growth of the Tea Party.

Analysis of religious elements of the Tea Party have recently begun to emerge, with a consensus that Christian rhetoric plays a large role in the Tea Party movement’s popular appeal.

¹ Barreto et al. argue that “out-group anxiety” refers to a distrust and wariness towards other social, racial and economic classes. In the case of the Tea Party, it is the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant population that holds anxiety towards racial minority groups, poorer socio-economic groups and immigrants.

Some view the movement as the latest iteration of conservative American populism, which has been characterised as utilising Evangelic rhetoric to advance a “confusing array of public policy positions” (Fishman, 2012). Meanwhile, Goldstein argues that the Tea Party brand represents a fusion of populism and “Christian patriotism”, asserting that the movement is an unconventional mix of Constitutional originalism (which demands a strict, uninterpretive reading of the US Constitution) and popular constitutionalism. Added to this mix is a faith-driven discourse which advances ideals of devotion to God, limited government and free market principles (Goldstein, 2011b, Goldstein, 2011a).

Quantitative studies on the Tea Party have similarly established a strong association between the conservative Protestant population in America and the Tea Party. There is evidence that its supporters are more likely to be Evangelicals (Abramowitz, 2011), and that members of the Tea Party Caucus in Congress are more likely to be Evangelicals than other members of the House of Representatives (McNitt, 2012). Furthermore, a Pew Research Center study in 2011 found that the vast majority of Tea Party supporters hold consistently conservative views on social issues, and that they are more likely than registered voters to say that their faith is the most important factor in determining their views on social issues (Clement and Green, 2011a). Interestingly, while this same study found that the Tea Party enjoyed considerably strong support from Evangelical voters, it also revealed that the movement had developed broader support than the “Religious Right”. This trend is also reflected in a Public Religion Research Institute poll from 2010, where roughly half of self-identified Tea Party supporters said they were also part of the “Christian conservative movement” (Khan, 2010).

Meanwhile, qualitative research has similarly found a link between the Tea Party and the conservative Protestant population. Dochuk (2012) argues that the movement is merely the current iteration of “Born-Again Politics” that has evolved through the Republican Party since the 1970s. He demonstrates that the movement is driven by a coalition of politically motivated

churches, corporations and political action committees, and that conservative denominations, such as Baptists and Pentecostals, have found a national vehicle for their theology-inspired form of politics.

With the Tea Party obtaining broad levels of support from conservative Protestants, many of whom use their religion as the basis for their political choices (Clement and Green, 2011a), it would prove useful to analyse how the Tea Party appeals to this conservative Protestant population. Given the current direction of research concerning the Tea Party, an examination of the Evangelical/fundamentalist elements in Tea Party rhetoric could illuminate the reasons behind the movement's quick growth, broad appeal among conservative populations of America and ability for effective mobilisation.

Project Overview

The question this study wishes to ask is whether the Tea Party's electoral success derives from the espousal of a faith-based political ideology, and whether the movement is the latest stage in the evolution of the "Christian Right". Specifically, we will examine the extent to which Tea Party rhetoric, as a monolithic and consistent discourse, has gained traction through the articulation of a "nation at threat" narrative; much like the New Christian Right had done in the 20th Century. Just as the Evangelists of the 1970s and 1980s crusaded against the perceived moral deficit that threatened the American identity and character, the Tea Party has achieved electoral success by presenting a discourse of "America in danger", which has featured specific articulations of theological conceptions of the American character. This study will explore the extent to which the Tea Party is the spiritual successor to the faith-driven political actors of the 20th century, and why Tea Party electoral candidates have appealed to a conservative Protestant voter base.

The purpose of this project is not to analyse the “mass” aspect of the Tea Party, rather, the “elite” – the movement standard bearers whom Tea Party supporters elect. By analysing the discursive practices of Tea Party election candidates, and the inherent constructions, articulations and meanings created by the “elite” Tea Party discourse, we can examine the structures within which social agents, such as voters, make decisions and reproduce discursive formations (Howarth, 2000). By way of a discourse analysis, we can pinpoint the central concepts and themes that Tea Party candidates employ, and are responsible for their electoral success. This method also allows us to draw on modern history to identify from where these concepts and themes emerge, to pinpoint the predecessors and antecedents of this movement, and locate the Tea Party in the broader context of the flow of history.

The 2010 Republican primaries provides an opportunity to dissect the discourse of the Tea Party. When Tea Party-backed candidates started upsetting established incumbent Republican candidates in the primaries of 2010, there was a veritable announcement that the Tea Party had ascended to the national stage. An examination of select Tea Party candidates from those primaries allows us to understand how the movement in general has presented itself to the conservative Protestant population of America. The discourse of four candidates from the 2010 Republican primaries will be analysed- Marco Rubio in Florida, Rand Paul in Kentucky, Joe Miller in Alaska, and Clint Didier in Washington State. Not all were successful campaigns, and so from these four varied case studies, we can identify what elements of the Tea Party discourse have been successful, and those that haven't. We will be examining selected speeches, debates, media interviews and material from the candidates' official websites.

Ultimately, we are undertaking an analysis of the Tea Party political brand. Specifically, we are asking what themes, concepts and ideas are given meaning by the Tea Party individuals who are running for office, and how this might explain their electoral success. In the first chapter, we will explore how the methodology of discourse analysis can assist with this task. A

Foucauldian approach will be used, and we will provide a clear delineation for why discourse analysis is well suited for our case study. Specifically, the important concepts of how certain discourses are created, articulated and constituted will be discussed, as well as how a study involving “Self/Other” distinctions can help explain what drives Tea Party discourse.

The following chapter will involve a comprehensive review of the modern history of the Republican Party, and the rise of religious rhetoric in the 20th Century. It will explore the role that conservative Protestantism has played in the national political discourse, and chart the success of faith-driven political actors from the 1950s onwards. Particular attention will be paid to the “nation at threat” rhetoric deployed by certain actors, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Our third chapter will bring the two threads together and analyse Tea Party discourse in relation to how candidates in 2010 articulated a threat to the American identity, and created an “Other” in the form of the Obama administration.

The final two chapters will in turn analyse the discourse surrounding economic and social policies, respectively. It will become clear in these two chapters that, having constituted a reality of an American nation and identity under siege, Tea Party policies were designed to respond to answer to the danger of a socialist, overbearing and unconstitutional federal government. Primarily, the Tea Party candidates articulated a discourse which denigrated those in power as not respecting, or even being aware, of the Christian underpinnings of American society. Many of the subsequent discursive explanations and justifications of economic and social policies were presented as a way of fighting the perceived onslaught of socialism and immoralism in American society.

Chapter One - Discourse Analysis

The Power of the Post-Structuralist Approach

As mass protests bearing the Tea Party label were organised in 2009 and the movement gained momentum, candidates associating themselves with this emerging political brand began running for office. The electoral success of many of these candidates signified that the Tea Party had come to represent a significant portion of the American population. Electoral politics is built around communication - political actors create discursive fields which are either accepted or rejected by citizens, who then use that as a basis for the construction of their own opinions and beliefs concerning political candidates. A study of the language and discourse utilised by the Tea Party has the ability to provide insight into why certain demographics and constituencies have supported Tea Party candidates.

Quantitative research on the Tea Party has found a link between Tea Party candidates and conservative Protestant (notably Evangelical) voters. However, literature to date has not been able to identify an explanation for why conservative and religious voters have flocked to the Tea Party. Authors such as Susan Harding and George Shulman have previously pointed out that the combination of political and religious language is a highly useful discursive tool in American politics, and linguistic analysis of this relationship holds great explanatory power (Shulman, 2008, Harding, 2000, Williams, 2010b). A discourse analysis focusing on this meld can have the power to offer an insightful portrait of the Tea Party, as we can examine how the discourse espoused by Tea Party candidates connected with the voters who elected them.

The study of discourse is concerned with meaning. Discourse establishes, confers and constitutes meanings in relation to social realities, unites individuals together, and allows them to “engage, interact and function socially” (Epstein, 2008, p.2). Social realities are produced, constructed and reified through the practice of talking and writing, which form social relations, identities and subjects (Foucault, 1970). Put simply, discourses are an organised collection of

ideas, concepts and categorizations about certain objects, actors and events that frame them in a certain reality (Epstein, 2008). The chief aim of discourse analysis is to examine the production of meaning through discursive and non-discursive practices, and how certain social and political realities are constructed and constituted.

Discourse refers to specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects (Foucault, 1972, Howarth, 2000). Specifically, we can view discourse as an “interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p.3). Through the analysis of discourse and discursive practices, we can understand and interpret socially produced meanings. This mode of analysis is concerned with the ways in which political forces construct meanings, and seeks to examine the structures within which actors and subjects make decisions, articulate hegemonic projects and employ discursive formations (Howarth, 2000).

The Genealogical Approach

A genealogist generates a form of history which accounts for the systematic constitution of knowledge, discourses and domains of objects involving the interaction of discursive practices. The genealogical approach to discourse analysis places emphasis on the eruption of clashing political forces as the driving element of history, with a view to examining the historical emergence and formation of these forces and their discourses (Howarth, 2000, Macdonell, 1986). The goal is to offer explanations for these eruptions by examining their historical emergence and formation, specifically the discursive constructions which proliferate around the time of their creation (Howarth, 2000, Foucault, 1981). This mode of analysis is well suited to an investigation of the Tea Party, as we are ostensibly examining the emergence of a new political movement - specifically, its moment of genesis on the national electoral stage. In other words, by using a genealogical approach to analyse the first moment at which Tea Party candidates

achieved electoral success, we can deconstruct what themes and concepts in the Tea Party's discursive field led to their emergence as a political force in Washington.

To pursue a genealogical approach, needless to say, is to grant language a primacy in our investigation. Specifically, we will adopt Lene Hansen's contention that language is "ontologically significant", meaning that it is only through construction and formation in language that subjects and objects are imbued with specific identities (Hansen, 2006, Shapiro, 1988). Language is the medium through which political practice is carried out - it is a series of "collective codes and conventions that each person needs to employ to make oneself comprehensible" (Hansen, 2006, p.16). Language is thus the means through which political actors produce and reproduce identities and subjectivities.

However, language also excludes certain identities, and precludes certain subjectivities from being articulated (Shapiro, 1988, Hansen, 2006, Campbell, 1998). Language is a "system of dispersion" *between* objects, statements and concepts, and is thus a relational entity (Howarth, 2000, Foucault, 1972, Foucault, 1981, Foucault, 1991). It is a system of communication where meaning is established through juxtaposition, with one element being valued over another (Hansen, 2006, Howarth, 2000).

The purpose of analysing language, or *discursive formulations*, is to examine how ideas, concepts and themes are given a material meaning through construction and formation of a discourse. We seek to show how facts, presented in discourse, are dependent upon a particular discursive framing of issues or policies (Howarth, 2000), and what political effects are associated with this. If we look at the analysis of discourse in this way, the point is not to marginalise or overlook material facts, but to study how they are produced and prioritised (Howarth, 2000). It then becomes possible to see how certain *a priori* influences can impact how "truths" and facts are framed and presented in a discourse. For example, how does an Evangelical Christian ontology influence the discursive formation, and subsequent constructions of reality of Tea Party

candidates? Adopting such an approach allows for an assessment of the roles that influences such as these have on a political group such as the Tea Party, and what part they play in their success.

Power/Knowledge Relations

Discourse analysis can tell us much about the processes that are inherent within a discourse. We can seek to identify what tools and methods are employed in specific discourses that result in various constructions of reality. We can further examine how identities and subjectivities are conveyed and reproduced by Tea Party candidates, how boundaries of a discourse become fixed, and how internal logics are formed. The task then becomes overturning these internal logics, and identifying the relationships inherent in discursive constructions.

Michel Foucault, a leading proponent of the theory of discourse analysis, conceived of discourse as particular systems of “power/knowledge relations”. Foucault argued that there are no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, and vice versa, establishing a relational conceptualisation (Howarth, 2000, Foucault, 1977). In adopting this position, there is an aim to demarcate the way in which complexes of the power/knowledge relationship are condensed, transmitted and resisted through historically constituted discourses (Foucault, 1977, Young, 1981). We can thus view discourse as an enmeshment of “power, truth and practices”, and this ultimately involves the positioning of human beings within the realm of these historical configurations (Howarth, 2000, Foucault, 1982).

By analysing a discourse in the context of the history that preceded it, we can identify how knowledge and power have been traditionally deployed in a discourse (Howarth, 2000, Hook, 2001). Similarly, by relating a discourse to its historical antecedents, that is, those influences which inform the construction of that very discourse, we can illustrate the full extent of the

reality that is created by certain discursive constructions (Howarth, 2000). In the case of the Tea Party, we can examine those antecedents which presaged the rise of the movement and thus better explain how power and knowledge are utilised to promulgate specific subjectivities and identities.

Ultimately, the aim is to understand the role that certain discourses play in the creation and constitution of power and knowledge relations in the political sphere. Power is intertwined to the social body, and permeates through the functioning of the social order (Epstein, 2008, Foucault, 1977, Foucault, 1982). Power produces aspects of the social order through discursive methods, but is exerted rather than owned. This leads to the examination of what power does and what it produces, rather than trying to deconstruct what it is. As social relations are enmeshed with the exertion of power, they can be viewed as both “the locus of power and the site for the production of meaning” (Epstein, 2008, p.4).

On the other hand, discourse analysis seeks to identify under what conditions knowledge is produced, implemented and utilised in the social sphere. Foucault sought to identify how institutions and their practices have a *primacy* over forms of knowledge (Macdonell, 1986, Foucault, 1967, Foucault, 1973). The production of knowledge is ultimately governed by codified procedures, systems and rules, which are constituted by our “will to knowledge” (Foucault, 1981). In this respect, what we seek to investigate is all the discursive rules and categories that are *a priori* - “assumed as a constituent part of knowledge, and so fundamental that they remained unvoiced and unthought” (Foucault, 1981, p.48).

Adopting this approach means that we can engage in an analysis of some of the social processes involved in discourse dissemination. Firstly, we can locate social procedures for exclusion. That is, what is deemed acceptable “knowledge” in a discourse, and the means by which certain statements or “truths” are systematically excluded (Foucault, 1981, Epstein, 2008). Furthermore, it allows us to identify the boundary points of a discourse - what the internal

processes, rules and formulations are that limit or “fix” a discourse (Foucault, 1981, Hook, 2001). Finally, examination of power/knowledge relations informs us of the conditions under which someone may be permitted to engage in a particular discourse, the restrictions of access of a discourse, and the imposition of roles on speaking subjects (Foucault, 1981, Kendall and Wickham, 1999).

Identifying these social processes allows us to properly deconstruct a discursive field. By pulling apart the inherent logics of a discourse, its boundary points, and conditions for speaking, we examine how the ideational and the conceptual is rendered material (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). This can inform us of the competing influences, aims and motivations behind the production of a discourse (Milliken, 1999). In the case of the Tea Party, we can begin to investigate what the ideational drive is behind their discursive constructions. Specifically, we can ask what types of knowledge are disseminated, and what the inherent forms of logic that are behind these types of knowledge. Identifying the “rules” of a discourse can explain the rhetorical power behind the statements it produces.

Identity and the Self/Other Distinction

Another important aspect of discourse analysis is that of identity. Identities are constructed by a process of differentiation, in which political actors constitute a “Self” identity, situated against an “Other”, or an enemy (Campbell, 1998, Nabers, 2009, Doty, 1993). Identities require articulation in order for the associated discourse to have political and analytical presence, and the task of the discourse analyst is to identify how these identities are articulated and constituted (Hansen, 2006).

Consequently, a major challenge is to discern whether an actor’s identity has a causal effect on their policy formulation (Hansen, 2006). To what extent a constituted identity influences

policy thinking becomes an important by-product of an articulated discourse. Pursuing the logics involved in policy formation and presentation is an important step for analysing the popular appeal of a discourse (Doty, 1993, Hansen, 2006). The question of identity thus has notable implications for our case study - what is the identity that Tea Party candidates constitute for themselves, what is the “Other” it is constituted against, and what is the causal effect on policy?

Iver Neumann argues that we can study the constructions of identity “in terms of the different scripts by which selves and others are constituted” (Neumann, 1996, p.146). The task is therefore to analyse the terms in which a threat or Other is constituted in a discourse, and how this relates to the subsequent creation of the Self identity (Campbell, 1998, Howard, 2004). We can then examine internal and external stability, that is, to what extent these identity constructions are being accepted or contested within the political domain (Hansen, 2006).

Various post-structuralists have pointed to diverse examples whereby policies or ideologies are legitimized by a threat construction. This may come in the form of an ideology, such as Communism; a physical construction, such as illegal immigrants; or the construction of power of a foreign state (Campbell, 1998, Doty, 1993, Howard, 2004, Jackson, 2007). Identities tend to be re-articulated and reproduced in reaction to perceived threats - whether they exist in reality or not (Nabers, 2009). It is important to deduce to what extent these threats, and the subsequent identity constructions, are being accepted in the public domain.

The Tea Party in 2010 was an emerging political brand that sought definition as it entered electoral politics. It is important to deduce, through their discursive formulations, if threats or enemies were constituted in the political arena, and what the subsequent identity constitutions were. This will allow us to identify the extent to which identity had a causal role in policy formulation in the Tea Party platform in 2010, and whether these had internal and external stability. The operative question, then, becomes: what role did religion play in threat articulation, identity formulation and policy generation?

Methodological Techniques

Using certain linguistic tools, we can pull apart a discourse, and pin down the underlying logics, rules and formations that permeate throughout. It is with these tools that we can identify the role power and knowledge play in discursive formations, and how “others” are constituted by a discourse (Milliken, 1999, Neumann, 1996, Howard, 2004). The specific criteria we seek in discourse analysis relates to the production of meaning. This means that the signifiers involve “any practice that functions as a site for the production of meaning” (Epstein, 2008, p.7). These signifiers generally take the form of semiotic structures, of statements, and of communication exchange between social actors.

Predicate analysis is useful for the study of language practices in texts, such as speeches and policy documents (Milliken, 1999). This method examines what the practice of predication – that is, how adjectives, verbs and adverbs are attached to nouns - reveals about a subject. In other words, this involves analysing the ways in which predicates link certain qualities to particular subjects and objects by modifying attributes about a certain actor or thing (Milliken, 1999, Doty, 1993). Predicates will often affirm a quality, attribute or property about a subject or object.

Through the process of predication, subjects will constitute a reality by situating themselves in relation to the objects of discourse. Relationships are established through specific forms of language construction in the process of situating a subject in relation to an object (Doty, 1993). *Subject positioning* involves the construction of identity as it relates to the establishment of relationships between a subject and object. Specific types of relationship emerge, as they relate to opposition or similarity, identity and complementarity (Doty, 1993). From this, we can identify the relational effects (between subjects and objects) of the employment and production of a discourse.

A final mode of analysis is to search for truth effects in a text. When an actor or a subject makes a statement that is presented as a “true statement”, it is important to assert the relativity of

such claims (Epstein, 2008). They should be considered in relation to the “configuration of power relations” within which they belong, and how they relate to the production of knowledge in a discourse (Epstein, 2008). In other words, how are certain “truths” mobilized, utilized and produced? Furthermore, what meanings do they constitute on the social order? This is a way of going beyond what discourses merely say, and analyse what they *do*.

Using these techniques, we can begin to answer the embedded aspects of a discourse, such as what identities and realities are constituted, and how power and knowledge are exercised. However, before we can begin analysing Tea Party discourse, it is first important to consider the historical antecedents to the movement itself. In the next chapter, we will explore the evolution of Evangelical activism and rhetoric, with an eye to how threats and identities have been constituted in the past, and what the ideological forebears for the Tea Party have represented.

Chapter Two – Roll Right

The Rise and Rise of Religion in American Politics

“Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The second half of the 20th Century can be viewed as the period in which conservative Protestant voters, and Evangelicals² in particular, came to form a strong voter bloc and develop a strong faith-driven discourse which carried through to the new millennium. This came about largely because of a variety of perceived threats to the fabric of the American nation - from the growing menace of Communism in the 1950s and 1960s, to the general “moral disillusionment” of the 1970s. In response, faith-driven actors actively articulated a religiously inspired discourse to deal with these threats. The result was a presentation of the American identity as a re-iteration of the Puritan exceptionalism narrative, whereby America was a nation chosen by God, built entirely on Christian principles. In turn, this spawned a political doctrine of “Jefferson and Jesus”, which held that government should be heavily restricted, the Constitution should be strictly adhered to, and Christian values should be at the forefront of governance.

In this chapter, this chapter explores the growth of this discourse, beginning with its emergence in the 1950s. We will demonstrate that at specific junctures faith-driven actors constituted threats to the fabric of American society and the American identity, which subsequently spawned an articulation of what they thought America should represent. This involved a presentation of American history that was more in line with Puritan exceptionalism, and the importance of Christianity in public life.

² “Evangelicals” refers to the Protestant movement which centres on the belief that the Bible represents inerrant truth, emphasises the need for personal salvation, places a scriptural focus on Jesus’ crucifixion as the path to God, and encourages the act of expressing and sharing the gospel.

The End of the Solid South and the Rise of Evangelical Activism

In 1948, the balance of political power in the US began to change. Whilst Harry Truman held on to the Presidency, the solid Democrat states in the South went to third party candidate Strom Thurmond, who ran on a states' rights platform, in light of Truman's pro-civil rights stance (Lowndes, 2008). The "Solid South" was broken up for the first time, and at this point the Republicans began to take it for their own, as the party was slowly re-invented, and began to drift rightward (Williams, 2010a). Concurrently, the establishment of the conservative magazine *National Review*, and the intellectual energy it projected, similarly heralded the dawn of a new conservatism in America. *National Review* railed extensively against communism and New Deal policies which had been fervently opposed by many Southern Democrats (Lowndes, 2008, Himmelstein, 1990). Communism was not only a foreign policy threat, it claimed, but an ideological threat to the American way of life.

The rising spectre of communism was not just being felt in the South. Evangelical Protestants began to warn of the perils American society faced if communism spread. With the arrival of two Evangelical ministers, Billy Graham and Bob Shuler, to California, there were repeated warnings that "America's Soul" was in danger should socialism be allowed to take hold (Aiello, 2005). Accompanying a rhetoric that New Deal policies were dressed up communist programs, the McCarthy hearings and the House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC) put in motion a discourse that the Soviets were in the business of infiltrating America and spreading communism throughout the land of the free (Noakes, 2000, Woods, 2004). The HUAC guilty verdict for Alger Hiss, a New Deal-era government official who was imprisoned for spying for the Soviets, allowed this discourse of "America under threat" to become believable.

Meanwhile, Evangelical radio ministers like Vernon McGee and Edgar C. Bundy railed extensively against communist sympathizers and an apparent socialist doctrine. McGee, for example, campaigned heavily against the establishment of the United Nations, which he viewed

as a blasphemous institution, and whose principles directly ignored scripture (Dochuk, 2011). The Evangelical activists in California managed to create a seamless fusion of scripture and political doctrine that appealed to a conservative Christian population. To them, communism, and by association, liberalism, wasn't just a threat because of its ideological underpinnings, but because it was "Godless" and secularist, and antithetical to the Christian bedrock principles of the American nation (Williams, 2010a, McKenna, 2007).

The subsequent result was the promulgation of a "Gospel of Wealth" discourse. Put concisely, this stood for "less government, more money, more ministry". In complete opposition to both communism and New Deal policies, preachers of the Gospel of Wealth were advocates for "pristine capitalism and Jeffersonian economics" (Dochuk, 2011). In the words of McGee, Keynesian economic and social policies were robbing citizens of the full promise of the American experience, as promised by Jefferson and the Constitution. What was needed instead was restricted government control and pure free market economics, but guided by the moral values of Christianity. This message was heard loud and clear throughout California's burgeoning private industry, at a time when communities were being built at lightning speed, and Evangelical ministries were the centrepiece of such developments (Goff, 1999). It was here that the conservative Protestant penchant for precinct level activism and mobilization was established.

California in the 1950s formed the basis for the modern "Religious Right", where Evangelicalism was growing fast (Watt, 1991). As the perceived threat of Communism grew, conservative Protestants, and Evangelicals in particular, began to migrate to the right, not only away from the Democratic Party, but also President Eisenhower (Kabaservice, 2012). Their ministers, who gradually adopted a position on the political pulpit, opposed any kind of social welfare and business regulation. Furthermore, a "Puritan jeremiad" detailing American

exceptionalism emerged, which recalled the spirit of the Puritan narrative - as God's chosen people, with strict moralistic values (McKenna, 2007).

Consequently, Billy Graham led the campaign for "America's Soul", to put it back on the Puritan exceptional mission. Part of this campaign was the argument that Jefferson's wisdom and the Constitution were a "product of Christian history", not 18th Century philosophy (McKenna, 2007, Dochuk, 2011). Evangelical Christian values were thereafter combined with American principles. With a "Gospel of Wealth" as their main discursive tool, Evangelical ministers embarked on a political mission to fight the threat that Communism and liberalism posed to the fabric of American society, by reinforcing the Christian foundations of America.

Barry Goldwater and the Mobilisation of the "Evangelical Wing"

While the 1950s marked the genesis for grassroots and precinct level Christian activism, the 1960s was the point at which conservative Protestants truly became involved in the political process. It was also a landmark period in the transition of the Southern states to Republican control. 1964 saw Barry Goldwater challenging Lyndon Johnson for the White House on a platform of states' rights and limited government, in an effort to woo the Southern states (Lowndes, 2008). The result was a mirror image of the then-traditional electoral map: Goldwater won the Solid South, save for Texas and Florida. The electoral balance of power had shifted irrevocably rightward, into the hands of a transformed Republican party (Kabaservice, 2012).

But 1964 was important for another reason. In the years leading up to the election, conservative Protestants had steadily become more adept at affecting the political process. Inspired by the Evangelical radio ministers, many Californians saw a perceived danger to America in the education system, where it was thought communists were bombarding youths with subversive socialist material (McKenna, 2007, Goff, 1999). As a result, Christian tertiary

institutions reinforced not only the Christian foundations of society, but also capitalism, the free market and limited government. Furthermore, concerned parents thought that schools were too soft on communism, and that children were being taught to turn away from Christ towards socialism (Turner, 2008). This perceived danger to America resulted in a galvanised coalition of Christian activists who campaigned against state control of schools and fought for increased levels of private education.

As an adjunct to this, many Christian universities became linked to Goldwater Republicanism, as they identified with the new Republican mantra of small government. Goldwater embraced these newfound allies, and began giving addresses to select Christian campuses (Dochuk, 2011, Turner, 2008). The Evangelical activism that began in California had grown to such an extent that there was now an entire network of faith-driven political actors eager to participate in the election (Lowndes, 2008). The same Evangelicals that had advocated for Jeffersonian democracy in the 1950s identified strongly with Goldwater's platform for strict constitutional principles, fierce defence of states' rights and fervent opposition to socialism (McKenna, 2007, Williams, 2010a). Goldwater's election manifesto, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, bore striking similarities to the Evangelical political pamphlets handed out in California in the 1950s (Dochuk, 2011). Utilising the same networks that had launched the successful anti-communism education campaigns, the Goldwater campaign mobilised the Southern Evangelicals that had been preaching his campaign tenets for a generation. The result was the creation of an Evangelical bloc, which produced consistent voter cohesion over the next few decades.

Ultimately, 1964 and the period preceding it heralded the maturation of the faith-driven political activism of conservative Protestants. It became entirely representative of the discursive tools that were at their disposal. Its greatest success was managing to mesh tales about the proud Puritanical origins of America and its Christian foundations with a very real threat to the fabric

of not only American society, but also the American identity (McKenna, 2007, Lipset, 1996). Evangelicals in this period “amassed complaints about watered-down curricula and communist insurrection and connected them to a wider protest against state infringement on the private sphere” (Dochuk, 2011, p.201). Although Goldwater didn’t win the White House, the Evangelicals had nevertheless established a formidable network that facilitated mass mobilisation, and a fire was lit in their belly.

However, there was a cost from the 1964 election. Goldwater-era conservatism was humbled for the time being, and it was up to Richard Nixon to pick up the pieces. The Evangelicals had established an institutional link with the Republican Party, however, and a great number still canvassed for Nixon in 1968. Californian Protestants were treated to the start of Ronald Reagan’s career, who gained popularity through a spiritual narrative that resonated with Evangelicals (Williams, 2010a). His distinct “born again” language was typified by a simple motto: “get socialism and secularism out, and God back in” (Dochuk, 2011). Meanwhile, the growing counterculture in the late 1960s did not go unnoticed, as Evangelicals began to campaign against moral threats to America’s fabric.

The Beginnings of the New Christian Right

At the start of the 1970s, conservative Protestants had begun to integrate themselves into the institutional aspects of the political process. They were a crucial part of Nixon’s re-election strategy, and together with an energised Catholic contingent, were a valuable voting bloc for the Republicans (McKenna, 2007). Nixon had developed a close relationship to Billy Graham, who was viewed as a conduit to the Evangelical population. Furthermore, the Evangelical influence on Reagan’s tenure as Californian Governor meant that Evangelicals were no longer part of the “mass” aspect of the political process, but the Republican “elite” (Putnam and Campbell, 2010,

Kabaservice, 2012). Partly due to the vast funds that Evangelical activists mustered as a by-product of the Gospel of Wealth, there were a vast array of political action committees (PACs) established, and faith-driven political actors were throwing money at a variety of political causes (Williams, 2010b).

Evangelicals and Catholics were a key aspect of Nixon's 1972 re-election, and naturally, many were disillusioned by the corruption and loss of values represented by the Watergate scandal (McKenna, 2007, Williams, 2010a). But this was not the only, or even primary, cause of concern at the time. The effective legalisation of abortion by the Supreme Court in the *Roe v. Wade* decision led to the start of the "pro-life" discourse, as there was an extensive protest movement created in the wake of the decision (McKenna, 2007, Putnam and Campbell, 2010). The attempted passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would guarantee equal rights for women, and the general "moral disillusionment" brought on by the sexual revolution and various homosexual civil rights events saw Evangelicals flexing their activist muscles in response to a perceived moral threat from government (Kabaservice, 2012, Williams, 2010a).

This all represented a veritable challenge to the Puritan narrative of American identity, as there was a perceived loss of religiosity across the country. Pro-life protests were organised, homosexuality was openly condemned as a danger to society, and the burgeoning industry of pornography was litigated (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). Each of these instances of activism was punctuated by the fact that there was significant institutional support behind the faith-driven actors that were pursuing such causes (Dochuk, 2011). Californian Evangelicals used their institutional links to establish crucial planks in the GOP platform at the 1976 convention: school prayer, rights for the unborn, and a hard line on Soviet Russia (Watt, 1991, Turner, 2008). The guiding star in the establishment of the Evangelical political discourse was the family, and defending the bedrock foundations of "Christian society".

This perceived loss of religiosity subsequently paved the way for Jimmy Carter to win the White House, as *Newsweek* labelled 1976 “The Year of the Evangelical” (Lindsay, 2007). But while Carter carried the Southern States (the last Democrat to do so) and garnered support from Southern Baptists, a Carter *Playboy* interview stopped Evangelicals from wholeheartedly supporting him (Dochuk, 2011). Californian conservative Protestants were more energised by Reagan’s evangelical rhetoric at the time than Carter’s in 1976, and were remarkably distrustful of the liberal Democratic platform Carter ran on. By 1978, there was more Evangelical fervour to elect Reagan than there was attention paid to Carter’s Presidency (Flint and Porter, 2005). And, in 1979, as a touchstone to the integration of conservative Protestantism to the political conservative movement, Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority was formed, and was key in keeping conservative Protestants (and Catholics) informed on social concerns facing America (Williams, 2010b, Harding, 2000).

Reagan’s America

Ronald Reagan’s ascension to the White House in 1980 brought the “Jefferson and Jesus” principles to American governance, a hybrid of the anti-Government and pristine capitalist principles of the 60s and the conservative Protestant “moral crusade” values of the 70s. Both had evolved in response to perceived threats to the American nation and identity, and they now formed a dominant political ideology. The “Country Club Republicans” (wealthy conservatives) and “Sunday School Republicans” (moral and values driven conservatives) effectively became one and the same after this point (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). Conservative Protestants had now become the party’s elite, able to shape the political discourse. Reagan’s political network of Southern Evangelical supporters rallied around him, whilst preaching strict constitutionality and Evangelical values. Reagan was congratulated by Evangelical leaders for a message of “small

government and strong national defence, fiscal responsibility and family values” (Dochuk, 2011).

During this period, conservative Protestant activists, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, continued to engage in activism. There was a promulgation of “Christian economics”, which resembled the “Gospel of Wealth” discourse in many respects (Dochuk, 2011). Jerry Falwell, for example, campaigned extensively against growth of government and the welfare state (Harding, 2000, Williams, 2010b). There was consistent citing of scripture in support of “trickle-down economics” from Evangelist PACs, lobby groups and ministerial associations (Iannaccone, 1996). Conservative Protestantism became associated with conservative economics as a result, and this relationship has stayed relatively consistent since then (Smith, 2012).

In many ways, the Evangelical political actors produced a response to the ideological and moral threats facing conservative America. Reagan’s key contribution was the idea that the challenge for America was to restore God and religion in place of the secular, man-centred religion of Communism (McKenna, 2007). Moral issues became just as important, and indeed, tended to supersede devotion to the free market whenever they arose (Smith, 2012). And though, over the course of the 80s, many of the Evangelical political actors began to fade away, Jerry Falwell managed to turn the South into “a vanguard of the ‘Religious Right’ he helped shape” (Dochuk, 2011, p.406). This turned the South into a region that is now very Republican, and whose inhabitants’ political views are generally influenced by their faith (Williams, 2010b, Jelen, 1991, Wilcox and Robinson, 2007, Schmidt, 2007).

When Reagan left the White House, American politics had become infused with religion. Jerry Falwell and Evangelical networks continued to lobby and campaign through the 1990s, becoming very vocal when President Bill Clinton faced charges of adultery (McKenna, 2007, Harding, 2000). When America was physically attacked by Islamic terrorists in 2001, Evangelicals sprang up and engaged actively in foreign policy discussion (McAlister, 2007).

Discourses of Puritan American exceptionalism emerged again, as a “War on Terror” was characterised as a mission for God, and Islamic terrorism was constructed as the new public enemy number one (Jackson, 2007). The Presidency of George W. Bush became a synecdoche for the influential presence of conservative Protestantism in American politics.

A Growing Discursive Field

The rise of Evangelical politics to national prominence was symbolised by several discursive characteristics. Each phase of its development was marked by an identity that was constituted against various perceived threats to America. Whether it was communism, liberalism or the loss of family values, the Evangelical discourse tended to be characterised by portraying themselves as a “nation at threat”. This was ultimately done by combining political discourse, summarised as adherence to the Constitution, with faith-driven language. The discursive act of intertwining biblical narratives with the articulation of a “nation at threat” proved to be a successful one (Shulman, 2008, Harding, 2000).

In turn, this produced several rhetorical elements that stayed consistent over time. The constitution of their identity, and the reality they created as a result of their discourse, was a Puritan model of American exceptionalism. This typically entailed a belief that God had made a covenant with the American people, and had chosen them to lead the Earth (Lipset, 1996). The most poignant manifestation of this discourse was Reagan’s “City on a Hill” speech, which symbolised the exceptionalist narrative (McKenna, 2007, Lipset, 1996).

This identity carried several ontological ramifications, and was seen in the debate on modes of governance. There was an insistence that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights was built on Christian principles and theology, and most significantly, that rights are “creator given”, rather than granted by government. It has been argued consistently by Evangelical actors that this

was the original intention of the founders (Kabaservice, 2012, Schmidt, 2007). The biggest manifestation of this trope can be found in the combination of “Jeffersonian democracy” and Christian principles.

Naturally, this produced strong discourse on the need to strengthen morals and values in American society. The importance of faith and biblical doctrine reverberated in the years following Watergate, and became a mainstay in far-right political discourse. Smith (2012) notes that whilst there has traditionally been a link between conservative Protestantism and conservative economics, this tends to take a back seat to moral issues or concerns. Social issues evidently carry a larger existential threat to faith-driven actors. The finding that economic matters were of secondary importance “when pressing moral issues [arose]” (Smith, 2012, p.26) suggests that faith-driven actors respond primarily to threats, and react accordingly.

That is not to say that the concept of Christian economics is not itself a stable field. The promulgation of the “Gospel of Wealth”, the advocacy of free market as divinely inspired, and the bias towards “trickle-down economics” in Christian schools and universities suggests that there is an established field around religiously inspired economics (Iannaccone, 1996). There is been significant debate over how consistent or homogeneous this field is, and to what extent it exists today (Smith, 2012, Iannaccone, 1996). However, it has been noted that Tea Party economics bears a striking similarity to accounts of “Christian economics”, with the suggestion that it is an approach now espoused by party elites, and not just by the masses (Smith, 2012, Dochuk, 2012).

Over the next few chapters, we will explore the extent to which this account of history helps to explain the electoral success of the Tea Party movement, and has influenced the formation of its ideology. Firstly, we will analyse the extent to which threats against America have been constituted by the Tea Party, and the similarities between the identity they have subsequently articulated, and the iterations of American identity that came from the Evangelical

activists of last century. This allows us to dissect the true roots of the Tea Party political ideology and approaches to governance that have seemingly resonated with a sizable portion of the conservative population in America. This will assist us in answering our operative question: to what extent is the Tea Party the most recent iteration of this Evangelical political entity?

Chapter Three - Know Thy Enemy

The Tea Party Constructions of American Identity

“The Americans combine the notions of religion and liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive of one without the other”

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* Vol. 1, 1835

American political rhetoric has traditionally revolved around discussion of the American identity, and is the vehicle with which policies are presented, justified and implemented. Americans are engaged in a continual quest for self-discovery (Smith, 1950), and this leads to constant re-definitions of what it really means to “be American”. Americans tend to be preoccupied with the question of their identity, and as a result, spend a large amount of energy “explaining themselves to themselves”(Hartshorne, 1968).

Consequently, much of the discussion of the nature of American identity hinges around the historical foundations of the United States. Interpretations of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the intentions of the Founding Fathers tend to drive the way in which people define what “being American” is, and as such, there is extensive discussion about the specific concepts that each of those historical factors represent (Spiro, 2008, Hackney, 1997, Jasinski, 2000, Lipset, 1996). It is in reference to these historical documents and figures that the debate over American identity is generally conducted. This tendency for historical reference is most obvious in the Tea Party movement - its name evokes the very event which sowed the seeds for the American Revolution.

The other “plank” in the discussion of the American identity is religion. Various studies have demonstrated that religious affiliation can often impact heavily on political participation, and regular church service attendance has been found to be predictive of conservative political values (Jelen, 1991, Wilcox and Robinson, 2007). References to God and Christian values abound in American political discourse. Biblical quotations and references to God proliferate in

political speeches, debates and policy documents (Setzer and Shefferman, 2011, Lipset, 1996). Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in 1835 that the pilgrims brought to America “a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion...from the start politics and religion were in agreement and have continued to be so ever since” (de Tocqueville, 1835, p. 301). Tocqueville’s assessment of the integration of religion and politics in the US has been affirmed by scholars who have pointed to the power of the mingling of religious and political language (Harding, 2000, Shulman, 2008). Religion is fused to conceptions of the American identity, such that it pervades through every level of its political discourse (Smith, 2011).

In the previous chapter, it became evident that there has been a rise in prominence of religious discourse in America over the past fifty years, specifically in relation to how the country should be governed. Evangelical political actors have created a discursive field in which Christian principles and the founding of the nation are irrevocably linked. That America is a religious nation goes without saying. What is of interest is the extent to which religion is used to advance specific conceptualizations of what the American identity is, and what it means to “be American”. In other words, we seek to answer the following question: how are religious discourses mobilized to construct realities, forward agendas, or justify policies?

This chapter explores how Tea Party discourse conceptualizes the American identity, and the discursive links to concepts of religion that have been established. A picture will emerge of an American identity created in response to policies which produced a perceived “nation at threat”. We will examine the extent to which a religious ontology not only plays a part in the constitution of threat in the Tea Party discursive field, but also frames the subsequent construction of their own political identity. It will become clear that the subsequent articulation of power/knowledge relations by Tea Party candidates evolve from this faith-driven concept of American identity.

The Constitution of Threat

The key threat construction established by Tea Party discourse in the 2010 primaries was linking the economic threats facing America at the time with “socialist” and “unconstitutional” policies. Many of the proposed laws from the Obama administration were framed as collectivist and state-centric, concepts constructed as incongruent with American principles. Furthermore, the material issues of unemployment and national debt were characterised as a direct result of “out of control” government practices, such as spending beyond their means, over-regulation and over-expansion of the state. The problem, according to the candidates, came from government action that violated the Constitution and therefore disregarded the founding principles of the country. The result of these discursive acts was the constitution of an Other, in the form of a threatening government ruled by the Democratic Party.

One of the key rhetorical tools used by the Tea Party candidates was discussion of “fixing” vs. “redefining” America. Marco Rubio made this a campaign slogan, and cast the Democrats as attempting to “change America to fundamentally redefine the role of government” , to the extent where they were trying to implement “statist policies” (Rubio, 2010a). The “statist” predication infers the concept of total government control, or at least a state-centric view of governance. Rubio links this concept to not being congruent with America “as it is now”, insofar as such policies “change America” to the extent where the role of government itself is transformed (Rubio, 2010a). This leads to the establishment of a strong dichotomy; creating a contrast between the concepts of “fixing America”, implying correcting errors and solving a problem, and “redefinition”, which suggests changing the structural tenets of the system itself.

In this discursive act, a threat was constructed in the sense that the transcendental and foundational concepts of American governance were being challenged. By arguing that the Other - the Democrats - were attempting to implement greater government control, Rubio constitutes a threat on the individual level, insofar as “statist” policies represent infringement on the private

sphere. This localised the threat in an effort to appeal to voters who placed individual liberty as a premium priority.

Joe Miller, meanwhile, makes an explicit connection between socialism and the Democrat platform, and links them to the economic crisis:

“...will we continue our head-long plunge into socialism and more government control? We already know what is at the end of that road: the decline of the dollar, further constriction of our economy, sustained high unemployment, crippling government regulations...” (Miller, 2010b)

Whereas Rubio argues that an economic crisis is being used as an “excuse to implement statist policies” (Rubio, 2010a), Miller more clearly creates a causal link between socialism, statism and the decline of America. For Miller, it is not so much that government *could* be redefined, but it *has* been already, in the direction of collectivism. He places urgency in his rhetoric by arguing for the abolishment of these socialist policies in order to “rescue” America. This ultimately locates the crisis, or the threat, in the present, which increases the saliency of the threatening Other in the discursive field.

Clint Didier created an even more expansive constitution of this threat. In an article for the Seattle Times, Didier is reported to have:

“warn[ed] in a booming baritone that the America of ‘rugged individualism, self-reliance and personal responsibility’ [was] on the verge of vanishing — to be replaced by a “Marxist utopia” where everyone is dependent on the federal government” (Brunner, 2010)

According to Didier, the makeup of America was being replaced with a form of Marxism that is inexorably tied to a society of dependency. Marxism can be seen to represent the most extreme iteration of socialist and statist policy, which entirely restricts individualism. The chief discursive act here is tying the immediate threat (“*on the verge* of vanishing”) with the looming Other of socialism. This completes a logic of equivalence³ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), whereby the identity of a “socialist”/“Marxist” Other develops into a direct threat to the fabric of America.

Considering the historical context of American history, this threat construction takes on greater weight, as it recalls the socialist aspects of Soviet Communist theory⁴. This link is made clear when Didier accuses the state department of employing “known communists”⁵, who, he argues, are ineligible to serve in such positions because of the irreconcilable differences between communism and the US Constitution (Connelly, 2010). The stern opposition to “socialism” evokes the similar discursive formations of the Evangelical activists of the 1960s, who similarly decried policies that, for them, represented state infringement and interference in the free market. Furthermore, when Didier explicitly linked the Obama administration with communism, he evokes memories of the fight against not only the Soviet Union, but also the internal communist dissidents of the 1960s, further increasing the severity of the constructed threat.

Rand Paul, for his part, consistently argued in stump speeches that the problems America was facing at the time was due to a government who had abandoned the Constitution. In his

³ Laclau and Mouffe refer to a “logic of equivalence” as a process of social antagonism whereby specific identities of subjects are dissolved within a discourse through the creation of a purely *negative* identity that is presented as a threat (see: Howarth, 2000, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

⁴ By referring to government policies as Marxist, there is an implication that they bear similarity to the Marxist-Leninist policies of the Soviet Union. By using the “Marxist” predication, Didier recalls when Ronald Reagan argued: “...the march of freedom and democracy will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history”. The construction implies a link between the Obama Administration and Soviet Communist policies, a claim that has been repeated by other Tea Party politicians, most notable Allen West in 2012.

⁵ In an interview with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Didier is quoted as saying: “I have seen the appointment of ‘czars’ and their communist ties...I have seen the effort to create state health-care”. When pressed on the issue, Didier argued that communists were “questionable people in their belief of the Constitution”, and rhetorically asked “how can you uphold the Constitution if you have communist ties?” (See: Connelly, 2010)

candidacy filing speech, Paul articulates the link between the material problems that faced America and potentially unconstitutional government practices:

“We once had a government that was restrained by the constitution. The constitution limited the functions of government, and we lived with that government. But that government is gone awry, that government is out of control.” (Paul, 2010b)

In a similar way to the “socialism” argument, this discursive act presents a reality of “America in crisis” through the lens of “what is in the bounds of the constitution?” Paul would go on to identify the threatening Other engaging in unconstitutional practices in a very explicit way. For example, he characterized “career politicians” as being ignorant of the nation’s chief structural document:

“...ask them, where is the constitutional authority for what you are doing?...they have no idea, some of them have never ever thought of where is the constitutional justification for what [they] are doing” (Paul, 2010b)

Paul thus constitutes the threat posed by the Other as one that strikes at the foundations of American governance, and in doing so casts current government policies as incompatible with the founding principles of America. Within this frame, the Constitution is viewed as an embodiment of American principles, so should it not grant authority for a particular action, it is likely it was not the founder’s intentions that the government would be allowed to enforce it. In a discussion on the Bill of Rights, Paul expands on this:

“The 9th amendment says that those rights not listed are not to be disparaged, they didn’t list every right, they didn’t list the right to private property, but obviously it was an important right, and they could not conceive of it being taken away, but it wasn’t listed that the government had a right to insurance, or force you to buy insurance...these things are enshrined in the constitution, we were intended to be a constitutional republic.” (Paul, 2010f)

The threat to America, for Paul, lies in the debasement of the principles inherent in the Constitution. Like the “socialist”/“Marxist” threat constitution, it frames the real, material issues facing the country in the reality of an “out of control government” that has created a crisis. In doing so, it confers the identity of the Other on those that were then in government, and indeed, institutes a strong enemy identity around the government. Paul’s articulation of threat ultimately boils down to socialist policies and unconstitutional practices that were ushering in a redefinition of America’s governing principles.

With a view to the historical context of these threat constructions, there are clear similarities to how threats were constituted by the “Jefferson and Jesus” activists of the 20th Century. Opposition to government expansion and perceived socialist policies are a shared characteristic between the Tea Party candidates and the Californian Evangelical movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Dochuk, 2011, Dochuk, 2012). Framing the chief problem as state infringement on the private sphere, these candidates evoke a very similar argument which comes down to the question of the Constitution. They deny the legitimacy of the policies not because of potential failure or theoretical shortcomings, but because the Constitution does not allow it.

Constitution of the Self

The constitution of threat in the Tea Party discursive field directly led to the ways in which they presented their Self identities. This threat is best summarized by two separate statements by Joe Miller:

“The problems we face as a nation all stem from a central government that is completely out of control, and so we have got to get back to our constitutional moorings...” (Miller, 2010f)

“All of the socialistic tendencies of our government arise out of a misconstruction of the constitution” (Miller, 2009)

The material economic crisis that America was facing in 2010 was discursively presented as a result of an “out of control” government that failed to adhere to the Constitution. The second point ties the unconstitutional argument to “socialist” policies, which, as previously emphasised, is framed as a threat to the foundations of American governance. The Self that is subsequently constituted is a strictly Constitutionalist, free market identity that, above all, creates clear discursive links to concepts of Christianity and God. The nature of these links is such that Christianity becomes inextricably attached to Tea Party principles.

Hansen argues that identities are constructed by establishing what they are *not* (Hansen, 2006). That the Tea Party candidates stand for strict adherence to the Constitution should come as no surprise, given their strong stand against “unconstitutional” government policies. The above statements by Miller clearly establish a link with a Constitution-oriented approach. Clint Didier optimised this aspect of the Tea Party identity in the most literal way, brandishing his own

copy of the Constitution during his speeches to punctuate his points. Consider the following statement, given in an interview with conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh:

“All we gotta [sic] get back to is following and honouring the Constitution of the United States of America and we can resolve all our problems” (Limbaugh, 2010)

Didier’s statement here represents the wider identity construction of the Tea Party: a focus and adherence to the Constitution. This widely represents the ideological tenets of the Tea Party identity, which, we can begin to see, have a link to the ideological underpinnings of the “Jefferson and Jesus” movements in the 20th Century. For example, a common trope of Tea Party discourse during this period was the quoting of Thomas Jefferson, and the evocation of many Jeffersonian principles. Rand Paul would often allude to a specific quote from Jefferson, “bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution”, noting that:

“These constitutional chains have been broken, they have been loosed. We are adrift as a society, and as a consequence, our government has run amok and is out of control” (Paul, 2010b)

Like Miller, Paul links the constituted threat with a lack of adherence to the Constitution, and in doing so, makes a call for a return to Constitutional principles. The usage of Jefferson as a representation of the wishes of the founding fathers solidifies the Tea Party identity, insofar as it aligns itself within the context of history and grants it a greater meaning. It allows for a critique of their political enemy to form that has a specific grounding in a particular conception of America’s history, using the image of one of the most reputed American historical figures.

The next discursive act that contributes to the constitution of the Tea Party identity comes in the form of linking this position of Jeffersonian Constitutionality to a faith-driven discourse. This aspect of the Tea Party identity is crucial, as it links one call to authority (Jefferson and the Constitution) to another form of authority (God and the Bible). It is not that the Tea Party candidates are driven primarily by their faith, rather, the Constitution calls on them to look to their faith. Consider the following quotation from Marco Rubio's CPAC keynote speech:

“There's never been a nation like the United States, ever. It begins with the principles of our founding documents, principles that recognize that our rights come from God, not from our government - principles that recognize because all of us are created equal in the eyes of our creator, all life is sacred at every stage of life” (Rubio, 2010a)

In one fell swoop, Rubio creates a subject position for himself whereby he not only affirms the founding documents of America, but constitutes God as the ultimate authority on the issue of individual rights. This construction is situated against the government, whom he argues has no authority to grant or deny rights. Rubio positions himself as a man respectful of faith, and characterises his position as one that is informed by his religion. The final sentence in that quote demonstrates this point - his position on abortion, “all life is sacred at every stage of life”, comes from a definitively faith-driven ontology⁶. Furthermore, Rubio articulates a view of American exceptionalism (“There's never been a nation like the United States, ever”) that descends from the nation's founding documents, whose principal strength is the fact that it submits to the divine providence of God. There is a dual call to authority, which solidifies the Tea Party identity as representative of the foundations American history, as well as Christianity.

⁶ This position ultimately descends from the teachings of the Catholic Church that assert that from the moment of conception, a human embryo or foetus represents a life form. Derived from scripture and the teachings of various religious figures, the arguments in favour of this position generally represent a faith-driven opposition to abortion.

Rand Paul pursued a similar rhetorical line, asserting at a Tea Party rally that rights “were given to us by our creator, not by government, but government was instituted above men to protect those rights” (Paul, 2010f). As a way of emphasising this position, at a candidates’ debate Paul, when asked about how he formulates his policy positions, said that he would decide on issues in terms of whether they adhere to the Constitution, followed by deciding if they were moral (Paul, 2010e). In Paul’s discursive field, this is used as a segue to put forward ostensibly Christian positions - such as when he relays the story that, in his youth, he stood up in his church to take a stand against abortion (Paul, 2010a, Paul, 2010e).

The discursive act of connecting the Constitution to religious principles allows for general articulations of faith by the Tea Party candidates. In rather florid language, Clint Didier’s solution to the country’s problems, which he says are sending America “straight to Hell” (Didier, 2010b), is summarised as follows:

“How are we going to take this country back?...fighting our way back to the light, to the truth, the constitution, and to the Lord God Almighty.” (Didier, 2010b)

Not only does Didier discursively link the Constitution to the “Lord God Almighty”, but the predication of taking his country “back” insinuates that America is becoming an increasingly secular society. As Didier frames it, returning to the Constitution necessitates a *return* to God, implying a loss of faith. This discursive act is further reinforced in Didier’s opinion on the Department of Education, asserting that “a constitution has to be re-implemented into our school system and a belief in God” (Didier, 2010e). For Didier, religion evidently has a place in public policy, and the “reimplementation” of a belief in God highlights his belief that faith in American society is waning, and that something should be done to reverse this. Not only does Didier

perpetuate the ideal that the Constitution is a bulwark of Christian principles, but it positions him as an advocate for integrating faith into government policy and institutions.

The Tea Party discursive field ultimately constitutes a Self identity which revolves around the concept of strict Constitutionality and a healthy respect for God. This echoes many of the discursive positions established by the “Jefferson and Jesus” advocates. The difference here, however, is that these articulations of faith follow on from their positions of Jeffersonian democracy, but to the extent where their faith nevertheless becomes a focal part of their political identities.

Subject Positioning

The underlying tenets of the Tea Party identity recalls the rhetoric employed by the Evangelical actors of the 1960s. Billy Graham’s assertion that the Constitution was a product of Christian history and principles (Dochuk, 2011) is a claim that is reasserted by the Tea Party candidates in 2010. This discursive construction, where religion and God are tied to the foundations of the American identity, results in a very specific process of subject positioning, where political opponents are depicted as having deficits in values and principles, with the implication that they pursue irreligious policies. Given the way in which the Tea Party has already linked conceptions of the American identity to God and Christian principles, any policies portrayed as secular or anti-religious are positioned as antithetical to American ideals, and are thus denied validity.

Joe Miller, for example, positions the government in his discursive field as a threat to individual rights:

“I believe in American exceptionalism. I believe that our individual rights come from God, and the way to protect those is to limit the federal government” (Miller, 2010f)

This statement ultimately draws religion into his discursive field, because Miller argues the only way to protect God-given rights is to shrink the impact of the government. Miller thus frames the concept of government expansion as having an inverse relationship with the maintenance of one's rights. The chief characteristic of this relationship of "rights from one's creator" ultimately positions those who would use the government to grant rights - say, a right to healthcare - as essentially disrespectful and ignorant of the relationship of rights and man (Miller, 2010f). In other words, they position their opponents as diametrically opposed to their faith.

Additionally, the Tea Party candidates position themselves as bastions of morality and values. Marco Rubio, regarding his pro-life convictions, stated that:

"A society that does not respect the sanctity of life cannot make sense of anything else, and it leads to absurd and dangerous policies...the entire society is endangered, and social justice cannot be the outcome of such an unjust system." (Hudson, 2010)

Rubio adopts here the "sanctity of life" argument, which asserts that life begins at conception, and aborting a foetus after conception is tantamount to murder. This is a religious idea that began with the "pro-life" movement (a term which carries its own discursive implications, inferring that the opposing position is *anti-life*), and is a pure moralistic viewpoint. Rubio positions those who do not adopt this judgement as indecent in the sense that "they cannot make sense of anything else", insinuating that there is a distinct lack of morality in such reasoning. We will return to the discursive implications of the abortion issue in a later chapter, but it bears re-iterating that such discourse is a powerful rhetorical tool that positions Rubio as a moral figure, and separates him from unprincipled and unethical opponents.

These acts of subject positioning hold a clear religious underpinning. Having articulated a faith aspect in the process of identity constitution, there is a certain element of moral proselytizing in the Tea Party discourse that is pinned to conceptions of the American identity. When asked at a debate which candidates he would consider endorsing, Clint Didier responded that he would base his decision on whether someone is a “true American”, implying that there are candidates who are *not* “true” Americans. Didier elaborates on this by saying: “...people who have been blessed, who have lived their life, successes” (Didier, 2010b), which establishes a link between being *blessed* (broadly defined as the act of being holy, sacred or sanctified; so the term has clear religious connotations) and being a “true” American. In other words, Didier positions his political opponents as being somewhat irreligious at the least, and further equates the status of “being American” to essentially being Christian.

The end result of this subject positioning is a presentation of the Self in unequivocally religious terms. The threat, or Other, presented is an attack on the Constitutional foundations of the country and the religious aspects of the American identity. The threat articulated, and the associated reality presented, is one that does not appreciate or recognize the nature of the relationship between the government, the Constitution, and God. The iteration of the Other thus becomes an immoral entity that poses as much of a threat to the moral character of the country as it does to its Constitutional structure.

The invocation of religion to the discursive field, and the subsequent constitution of an assault on religious values, goes a long way to explaining Tea Party electoral success, at least in a primarily conservative environment. Consider that, in the last century, religious activists forcefully injected religion into the debate on public policy. Additionally, recall that activists such as Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham made cases for policy initiatives which were representative of the Christian principles that, they asserted, America was founded on (Lipset, 1996, Wilcox and Robinson, 2004). By tying their religiosity to their political identity, Tea Party

candidates fill the void left by faith-driven political actors who called for religious rationalization in policy formation. What is unique about the Tea Party is the way in which these candidates derive justification for advancing religious rationalization from a very particular conceptualization of the Constitution. That is, Constitutional adherence is just as important as adherence to faith and scripture, a discursive link which establishes specific ways of producing knowledge.

Production of Knowledge

Tea Party rhetoric created a dense intertextuality between the foundations of American governance and the country's religious identity. The Tea Party discourse from the 2010 primaries established meaning around the concept that Christianity and the Constitution are extensively interwoven concepts, and framed issues within the context of this ontology. This appealed to a very specific voter bloc in the United States, which had previously supported political movements that emphasised this link between the Constitution and religious doctrine in the past century. The discursive foundations established by Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Ronald Reagan allowed the Tea Party to connect with the portion of the American population receptive to this political ideology.

As a result, there has been several rules and procedures implemented within the discourse that produce certain forms of knowledge. Primarily, the ways in individuals consider the context and directives of the Constitution governs how knowledge of the principles America was founded on is discussed, as it casts a very specific reading on how the document itself should be used. In closely associating themselves with Thomas Jefferson and the Constitution (and even inferring a link with the original Boston Tea Party), the candidates establish a discursive system which directs knowledge of American politics towards the concept of strict constitutionality. In evoking these documents, they frame their own policies through the prism of this knowledge.

Additionally, they establish discursive rules that affirm the role of religion in American politics. That the Constitution was constructed from a Christian perspective is a categorisation that the Tea Party projects as if it were a constituent part of knowledge, and to subvert this is considered a slight against the system itself. Similarly, there is a discursive rule established whereby religion should play a role in the formation of policy, and where it is of secondary importance only to considerations of the Constitution. This produces a form of knowledge which dictates that public policy should reflect Christian values, morals and principles.

Within this discursive field, the implementation of these conditions of knowledge leads to an exertion of power in the social realm. These instituted forms of knowledge establish power relations between the voter and the candidate insofar as they impel the mobilisation of voters in order to prevent the downfall of the American identity. Power is, in turn, produced by a receptive population who welcome a knowledge system which had been advanced in previous decades (specifically the “Jefferson and Jesus” ideals), and it is these individuals who elected the Tea Party candidates in the 2010 primaries. They are the conservative Protestant and Evangelical voters who identify with the “Religious Right” and the “conservative Christian movement”, and they are the constituency who cite religious beliefs as major influence on their views of social policies (Clement and Green, 2011b, Khan, 2010). The nexus of power/knowledge relations can in this way be seen to drive the production of meaning in this environment.

The next two chapters will be dedicated to exploring the ways in which knowledge is produced and power exerted in this discursive field in specific policy articulations. Through analysis of the truth claims advanced by the Tea Party candidates relative to power relations, we will examine the procedures for exclusion inherent in this knowledge, how limit points of the discourse are fixed, and how individuals are able to articulate certain policy formulations. This will serve to give us more insight into how meanings are constituted in the discursive field, given the associated identity constructions we have witnessed here. Analysis of the Tea Party

economic and social policy platform allows us to access the concepts and themes that are inherent in their respective campaigns that led either to their success or their failure.

Chapter Four – Slouching Towards Socialism

The Christian Economics of the Tea Party

“...these are mainstream American opinions”

Marco Rubio, interview with Sean Hannity, 2010

The fiscal policies of the 2010 Tea Party primary candidates established the movement as the spiritual successor to the “Jefferson and Jesus” and “Gospel of Wealth” economic doctrines of the 20th Century. The pro-market populism of the Tea Party has been viewed by scholars as the latest iteration of the fusion of conservative Protestantism and economic conservatism at the elite policy making level (Smith, 2012). Dochuk (2012) pointed out that Tea Party economics bears many similarities to the laissez-faire approach to capitalism that was espoused by religious actors in the 1960s and 1970s, which discursively linked free market enterprise, individualism and devotion to Christian faith, largely in response to the New Deal state and liberal economic policies. The Tea Party economic policies represent the modern iteration of a far-right opposition to the welfare state and Keynesian economics, and create a link between a pro-market populist platform and the advancement of American exceptionalism.

In this chapter, we explore the discursive underpinnings of the Tea Party economic platform, and the extent to which it has evolved from the “Christian economics” of last century. We saw in Chapter 2 how this economic model developed in response to the perceived threats of communism and the New Deal state, establishing a fiscal doctrine which made its way into the elite levels of Republican policy making. We will analyse how the production of knowledge and the correlative power relations in the Tea Party’s economic discursive field descends from these historical antecedents, and what role they play in their policy formation. This will ultimately help us to understand the underlying ideas, concepts and themes in the Tea Party fiscal platform, and demonstrates the movement’s appeal to certain conservative demographics in the United States.

“Christian economics” very broadly refers to a field of thought that, in combination with a conservative Protestant doctrine, espouses free market principles, minimal government regulation, and low taxation (Smith, 2012, Iannaccone, 1996). The “New Christian Right” of the 1970s and 1980s most famously advocated this school of thought, as individuals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, using scripture as reference, praised the virtues of free enterprise whilst vehemently opposing social welfare programs and government control of the economy (Iannaccone, 1996). These theories bear similarity to the works of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, which place an emphasis on private property and the need for free markets (Dochuk, 2011). These economic theories are linked to passages in the Bible which espouse the concepts of free enterprise and respect for private property, in addition to the “Protestant work ethic”⁷(Jones et al., 2010).

Whilst there is varied academic support for the link between conservative Protestantism and economic conservatism, many have pointed to the adoption of “Christian economics” at the elite level of the Republican Party, perhaps even more so than at the mass level (Smith, 2012, Clifton, 2004). The most salient example of this development is the espousal of free market principles by the New Christian Right, a conservative Christian political group. In regards to this case study, various quantitative studies have found that not only do a significant amount of Tea Party supporters identify with the New Christian Right, but also broadly consider the government to be inefficient, prefer smaller government, and consider corporations in general to be making a “fair and reasonable profit” (Clement and Green, 2011a). These views are largely congruent with the pro-market, individualistic doctrine of the “Christian economics” line of thought. The Tea Party can thus be seen as a segment of the American population which is perhaps more receptive to the inherent concepts of this form of conservative economics.

⁷ The “Protestant work ethic”, a term initially coined by Max Weber, has been a common term used to describe the Protestant view of the individual as directly accountable to God for the lifestyle, which led to a dedication to hard work, and emphasis on saving money and honesty. It was argued that this led to economic success.

American Exceptionalism as an Economic Concept

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Tea Party candidates of 2010 built their ‘Self’ identity around the constitution of a socialist threat. The severity and extent of this threat, according to the candidates, was such that it defied the bounds of the Constitution, and this represented the underlying reasons behind the economic crisis facing America at the time. In turn, the candidates positioned themselves as free market advocates and fierce opponents of government expansion. However, the identity construction as pro-market constitutionalists led to a very particular fiscal policy platform. The underlying discursive mobilisation put forward by the Tea Party discourse ultimately boiled down to framing economic policies within the rubric of re-establishing American exceptionalism.

While the concept of American exceptionalism has traditionally been employed in the context of foreign policy and divine providence, the Tea Party framed it in economic terms. Marco Rubio advanced the idea that America is exceptional because of economic circumstances which exclusively allow for upward mobility and entrepreneurship. In his estimation, this spirit of entrepreneurship defines the unique and unmatched qualities of the American character. According to Rubio, this aspect of American exceptionalism is being subverted and directly threatened:

“Americans chose a free enterprise system designed to provide a quality of opportunity, not compel a quality of results. And that is why this is only place in the world where you can open up a business in the spare bedroom of your home. That is why this is the only place in the world where a company that started as an idea drawn out on the back of a cocktail napkin can one day be publicly traded on Wall Street. That's why this is the only country in the world where today's employee is tomorrow's employer. And yet, there are still people in American politics who, for some reason, cling to this belief that America is better off

adopting the economic policies of nations whose people who immigrate here from there.”

(Rubio, 2010a)

This particular view of American economic exceptionalism is the central aspect of the Tea Party’s economic platform. Rubio argues that it is free enterprise that produced the exceptional nature of America’s society, and more critically, that it is exceptional and unique because it is the sole society in the world to have done so. The subsequent policies articulated - which are ostensibly framed as pro-business and pro-market - are presented as ways to re-establish an aspect of this exceptionalism that has been lost. Clint Didier articulated this connection during a candidates’ debate:

“...wouldn’t it be a good idea to lower taxes and stimulate the economy? Now it is imperative, it is imperative to give the money back into the hands of the Americans to rebuild our entrepreneurial business infrastructure” (Didier, 2010c)

This “entrepreneurial business infrastructure” is a theme which echoes Rubio’s sentiments, and represents an individual-oriented, free-market focused economic ideology. From this view, lowering taxes is viewed as essential to stimulating the economy, as opposed to Keynesian thought which tends to call for government stimulus. This fiscal doctrine is further linked to conceptions of the “American dream”, as both Didier and Joe Miller argued that the “American Dream” was in severe danger, citing their concerns that children would not be able to realise it in the same way that they had^{8,9} (Didier, 2010b, Miller, 2010f).

⁸ At the Washington State Republican Convention, Didier stated that part of his motivation for running for office was to make sure the “kids” he coached at football “have that same shot for the American dream that I, and every one of you have had”.

⁹ Joe Miller, at a debate with his opponent, argued that “we must not allow our children’s future to be stolen from them; the American Dream is far too important”

The core concept that lies at the centre of this construction of American exceptionalism is ultimately a devotion to free market capitalism. Rand Paul, during a candidates' debate, argued that Americans "need to be proud of capitalism...we don't need to vilify the wealthy" (Paul, 2010a). This espousal of capitalism is the other side of the socialism coin - wherever opposing policies are vilified for being too socialist in nature, there is a promulgation of pro-market, pro-individualist concepts, generally in a populist manner. As an example, in that same debate, Paul identifies his main opposition to Obama's health care reform bill is because of the fact that there "is not enough free market in it" (Paul, 2010a). This ultimately completes the process of subject positioning, where the Tea Party candidates are presented as bulwarks of capitalism, an idea which produced the exceptional nature of America, railing against a socialistic central government.

The linkage of American exceptionalism to pro-market populist policies appeals to the portion of the conservative American population which had previously followed the economics of the "Jefferson and Jesus" and "Gospel of Wealth" movements. The mere evocation of the idea recalls the Puritan conception of American exceptionalism as a "shining city on the hill". These candidates take that a step further, by creating a relationship between the free market and the advancement of exceptionalism. The Tea Party fiscal policies - the *actual* policies - boil down to less taxation, less government, and more money in the hands of consumers and employers (Dochuk, 2012). The Tea Party recovery plan, as we can tell from the above quotes, relies on the resiliency of the private sector. Echoing the views of Ronald Reagan, government is largely viewed as a cumbersome problem, and it is up to individuals to create jobs and boost investment.

A specific aspect of the Tea Party economic platform is a stern opposition to liberalism and the welfare state; Joe Miller and Clint Didier explicitly campaigned against New Deal programs. Miller asserted that the concept of a federal safety net is unconstitutional and wasteful, arguing that unemployment benefits, federal emergency funding and the Department of Education were

all unconstitutional, and pledged to eliminate all forms of federal welfare (Bellantoni, 2010). Similarly, Didier expressed a desire to cut Medicare, Medicaid, welfare and food stamp programs, questioning the accepted wisdom that federal spending and Keynesian economics ended the Great Depression (Huffington Post, 2010). Aside from the economic argument that the programs don't work, the justification for eliminating these programs was found in the fact that the constitution doesn't specify that they should exist in the first place (Brunner, 2010).

These concepts demonstrate the link between the Tea Party platform and the anti-New Deal Evangelical activists of the 1950s. Rand Paul, for example, argues that the schism between expansionist and constrictivists (or strict constitutionalist) approaches to government emerged in the 1930s, with the advent of the New Deal (Paul, 2010e, Paul, 2010a). Paul voices the opinion that government should return to pre-New Deal policies in order to return to the days of small government. We can therefore draw a direct discursive and historical link between the Tea Party and the anti-liberals of yesteryear. The general Tea Party line, which calls for the abolishment of the welfare state in general, can be viewed as the ideological derivative of the anti-liberalism, anti-New Deal movement established by the Evangelical activists of last century.

Both the Tea Party and "Christian economics" modes of thought produce a pro-market populist ontology which places emphasis on the individual and the power of free enterprise. Whilst the Tea Party lacks the direct calls to religion in their economic policies, there is still a general distrust of government, aversion to taxation and a call to what type of fiscal measures are "American" and "un-American" (Dochuk, 2012). This aspect of Tea Party economics is given meaning by virtue of the fact that such policies are required for the continuation and re-establishment of American exceptionalism.

The Capitalistic Field of Knowledge

The historical antecedents of the Tea Party also have ties to the production of knowledge within the discursive field. Aside from associating the Obama administration with socialism (or, in Clint Didier's case, communism), the Tea Party knowledge field reflects the influence of the anti-New Deal, anti-liberalism movement that developed in tandem with the "Gospel of Wealth" doctrine in the 1950s and 1960s. It is these historical precedents that have led to the ways in which statements in the discursive field were judged as "truths" or were systematically excluded; that resulted in the formation of internal processes and rules; and produced provisions of restriction of access to the discourse. This production of knowledge subsequently gave power, and indeed, granted meaning, to the Tea Party assertion that pure free enterprise economics was the only way to ensure the maintenance of American exceptionalism.

It is within this anti-New Deal ontology that the Tea Party not only presented their platform of promotion of free enterprise, but framed it as a necessary requisite for re-establishing American exceptionalism. Within this rubric, certain statements were systematically deemed acceptable or a constituent part of knowledge. In an interview with Fox commentator Sean Hannity, Marco Rubio said:

"I believe in free enterprise, I have seen it with my own eyes - how it has made us the freest, most prosperous people in history...I was born in America, so I have opportunities my parents couldn't even dream of. That's because of limited government and free enterprise, which is what I'm campaigning on." (Rubio, 2010b)

Rubio espouses the truth claim that it is free enterprise and limited government that rendered the idea of American exceptionalism a reality. This truth claim is ultimately grounded in the idea that America is a country that embodies individual liberty and upward mobility, and

Rubio's promulgation of these concepts grounds his political doctrine in an effective manner. Rubio establishes these concepts as a constituent part of knowledge regarding the American identity insofar as he constitutes them as the underlying reasons behind the maintenance of American exceptionalism. Rubio establishes the link between free enterprise and these constituent parts of knowledge as *acceptable knowledge*. In the same interview, Rubio establishes statements or "truths" which, by the same token, are systematically *excluded*:

"You know, Sean, the things we believe in - limited government, free enterprise, that the world is a better place when America is the strongest country in the world - these are mainstream American opinions" (Rubio, 2010b)

Whilst there is an affirmation of what is viewed as acceptable knowledge in this statement, the relational dynamics inherent in the phrasing are such that Rubio essentially asserts that any views that are *not* congruent with limited government and free enterprise are *outside* of "mainstream American opinions". This is a way of making certain forms of knowledge unacceptable - in this case, state-centric policies and Keynesian economics. In making such a truth claim, Rubio appeals to the power of the populace - grounding his justification for his political views by asserting that he is simply echoing widely held beliefs. This is a call to power in the social realm - aligning his own policies and political ontology with the "mass" population. In doing so, Rubio solidifies the process of casting a certain type of knowledge as acceptable by placing his views in the majority, whilst simultaneously excluding or marginalising another type of knowledge.

This tendency to paint apparently un-capitalistic policies as a form of knowledge that deserves exclusion is also characteristic of Joe Miller. At a Tea Party rally, Miller stated:

“How many people want to see a smaller government, a balanced budget? How many want to see jobs created by the private sector, and not by Obama’s socialistic, dead-end policies?” (Miller, 2010a)

The truth claim that Obama’s policies are “socialistic” is made in direct reference to the power relations in the social field. As a term, socialism is a highly negative moniker among the conservative constituency in America, and thus carries a great level of power in the social realm (Foner, 1984). Socialism, in the context of American political discourse, is widely viewed as antithetical to not only free enterprise, but also American society itself (Dochuk, 2012). As we discussed in Chapter 3, the development of far-right economic doctrine in opposition specifically to socialism and liberalism came about largely because of a perceived irreligiosity that were inherent in those respective doctrines. The associated truth claim that Obama’s policies have socialist qualities (and are, as a result, a “dead-end”) play to this power dynamic. This ultimately comes as a result of establishing these “socialistic” policies as a system of knowledge that requires exclusion. In Miller’s discursive field, small government and a balanced budget are elevated to the position of “acceptable knowledge”.

We can begin to see the inherent processes, rules and formations that “fix” this discourse and form its boundary points. The discursive field itself is essentially fixed by rules that affirm the need to reduce taxation. That is, the “problem with government” is not a lack of revenue, but rather the government’s tendency to spend beyond its means. As Clint Didier argues, “anybody that raises taxes doesn’t understand the problem. It’s not a revenue problem, it’s a spending problem” (Didier, 2010c). The focus becomes reoriented away from the issue of revenue streams (i.e. taxation), with boundary points of the discourse regarding “fixing” the government being positioned around how the government spends its money.

The discursive field contains processes which refocus the argument not on the need to reduce the federal deficit through increased responsibility at the individual level (that is, increased taxation), but through an increased responsibility at the government level to reduce expenditure. The boundary points are fixed such that the conservative populace in these primaries are told that it is up to the government to rein in spending practices. The inherent formations revolve around ways of describing the problems of an “out of control” government, with the answers and policies provided within the Tea Party discursive field are directed at this kind of production of knowledge. Rand Paul, in his candidacy filing speech, argued that:

“Americans are waking up to these fake cheques, these illusions of wealth, this cash-for-clunkers, these stimulus of cheques - that they’re not real, they’re an illusion” (Paul, 2010b)

Given the boundary points of the discursive field, this truth claim that the government’s stimulus policies make use of illusory wealth plays well into the bounds of the discursive field. The internal rules of the discourse therefore allow for an existential critique of an “out of control” government to spring forth. This is ultimately representative of the points around which the discourse is fixed, specifically fixing the internal spending practices of the government and modes of encouraging the free market. This is a key concept inherent in the production of knowledge in Tea Party discourse, and ultimately forms the source of its populist nature.

The final aspect of power/knowledge relations in the Tea Party economic discursive field is the way in which individuals are given access to speaking roles in the discourse. Given the nature of the primary elections, where candidates attempt to come across as “more conservative” than their opponents, the key feature of these campaigns was defining who was a “true” conservative. Rand Paul, at a Tea Party rally, argued that it wasn’t enough “to have an R next to

your name, unless you believe in something” (Paul, 2010f). In addition to this, in an interview with Andrew Napolitano on Fox News, Paul made the following argument:

“...every Tea Party I’ve been to Kentucky has been 10 times larger than the largest Republican events I’ve attended. The tea party movement is big, they’re unhappy about big government. I think there’s a body of independent voters out there that have left the Republicans because they’re not true enough to conservative principles.” (Paul, 2010c)

The concept that Republicans had erred from “true conservative principles” became a key aspect of Tea Party rhetoric, and the truth claim that Republican party candidates were not conservative enough played into the overall demonization of the federal government. Access to the Tea Party discourse was denied to incumbent, establishment candidates who had supported the Obama stimulus measures. Marco Rubio continually attacked his opponent, Charlie Crist, for supporting the federal stimulus package, and ran attack ads showing Crist and Obama involved in a physically close handshake, casting an illegitimate speaker role on Crist (Rubio, 2009b). In a media interview, Rubio said that the primary “is about what we want Republicanism to mean, and what our movement is going to be about”, and goes on to say that the fundamental difference between himself and Crist was “a very different view for what Republicanism should be about” (Rubio, 2009a). Rubio sought to redefine what Republicanism represents by establishing the Tea Party as the “true” conservatives.

Joe Miller, for his part, similarly painted his opponent, Lisa Murkowski, as an Obama sympathiser. For example, at a Tea Party rally Miller asked the crowd: “How many people want to the next Senator for Alaska stand up to Obama, and not be co-opted by him?” (Miller, 2010a) The tactic of painting incumbents as sympathisers to the Obama administration and the Democratic Party can be seen as an effort to restrict the ability for their political opponents to

claim a speaking role in the conservative discursive field. By appealing to the conservative “principles” that many conservative Americans may well hold, there is an attempt to establish the conditions under which someone is permitted to engage in the conservative discursive field. This has the effect of casting illegitimate speaking roles on non-Tea Party candidates as false heirs to the conservative throne. In turn, it further legitimised the Tea Party label as true fiscal conservatives combating a wasteful government body, which reinforced the idea of returning to the “true” principles of American governance.

The fiscal policy platforms of the 2010 Tea Party primary candidates mobilised a discourse which centred on re-establishing America’s economic exceptionalism. The pro-market, capitalistic populist positions were ultimately given meaning by tying them to the concepts of “what made America great”. The inherent ideas and themes that emerged within this discourse reflected the “Christian economics” of the 20th Century, whereby a fierce opposition to liberalism and a general distrust of government led to a call for lower taxes and fewer regulations. By establishing a relationship between these concepts and the idea of American exceptionalism, the Tea Party candidates created a link between their fiscal policy platform and the structural foundations of the American identity. The sum of this discourse therefore appealed to a broad conservative Protestant population that had adopted the “Jefferson and Jesus” and “Gospel of Wealth” doctrines as constituent parts of knowledge, and were receptive to the anti-socialist and pro-market forms of logic that these candidates produced.

Chapter Five - Keeping It In The Family

The Social Policy Platform of the Tea Party

“When the President said that we folk here in middle America were clinging to our guns and our religion, he had it half right, I’m clinging to my guns, my religion and my ammunition!”

Rand Paul, Remarks at a Tea Party rally, 2010

The social policy platform of the Tea Party in the 2010 Republican primaries largely derived from a religious political ontology. Discourse surrounding the policy areas of health care, abortion, stem cell research, gay rights, and gun control revolved around the concepts of strict constitutional adherence and the importance of religious values in society. Whilst the economic platform of the 2010 candidates hinged on the discourse of the threats of socialism and an ever expanding leviathan government, their social policies focused on the need to respond to the threat of immorality and the importance of individual rights and liberties. This discursive approach was primarily influenced by the religiously driven identity construction, and as a result, many of the justifications of social policy had theological underpinnings.

Discourse on social issues in Republican primaries in general tends to produce faith-driven articulations regarding social issues. Opposition to abortion and stem cell research, aversion to gay rights, and relaxed views on gun control have traditionally dominated these primaries, as vying candidates attempt to assert themselves as “more conservative” than their opponents (Kabaservice, 2012). Naturally, the 2010 Republican primaries in Florida, Kentucky, Washington State and Alaska were no different. What was unique about these campaigns was the extent to which religious rationalization drove policy formation and articulation.

The Preservation of American Society

The Tea Party social policy platform introduced two key concepts into their discursive field. Certain policy areas, such as gun control and health care, represented the advancement of individual liberties and constitutional adherence. However, other policy areas such as abortion, stem cell research and gay rights demonstrated the religious themes inherent in the Tea Party discursive field. The driving force behind these theological underpinnings was the concept of “family as the cornerstone of society”, which informed many of the opinions of the 2010 candidates. This idea was, in turn, given meaning through tying these concepts to the Christian concepts of the Constitution.

One of the key pillars of the Tea Party social policy platform was the defence of individual liberties. For example, within the framework of the Tea Party platform, gun control laws of any kind were presented as an affront to the second amendment, which protects the right to bear arms. Any effort to curtail the ability for Americans to own firearms was framed within the truth claim of betraying the spirit of this enumerated right. At a Tea Party rally, Joe Miller argued that “the second amendment exists...to protect your right to be a threat to government.” (Miller, 2010c) Not only did this play into the overall “government as threat” construction, but it also articulated the importance of individual liberties within the discursive realm. The right to bear arms was essentially framed as an unalienable right that should not, under any circumstances, be disparaged.

The theme of individual liberties was also deployed in the discussion of President Obama’s health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). The PPACA was chiefly designed by the White House to extend health coverage to 30 million previously uninsured citizens by legislating that it be a requirement for Americans to purchase insurance (Pear, 2012). From the point of view of the Tea Party candidates, this was framed as an affront to the Constitution in the sense that the government did not have the power to impel individuals to

engage in a commercial activity (Miller, 2010d). As we noted in Chapter 3, this affront to the concept of individual liberty was discursively linked to a misunderstanding on the government's part of the nature of individual rights. According to the Tea Party platform, rights are "creator given", and the Constitution is designed to *protect* rather than *grant* rights. The idea that the government should decide that citizens have a right to health care was thereafter framed as disrespectful of the Constitution's relationship with God (Rubio, 2010a, Miller, 2010f). This ultimately served to echo one of the key concepts established by Billy Graham in the 1950s - the Constitution as a product of theology, and recalled many of the Evangelistic campaigns that fought against perceived state infringement on the public sphere (Dochuk, 2011, Williams, 2010a).

The second pillar of social policy in the Tea Party platform was the concept of upholding Christian values and principles in American society. This was broadly applied to the controversial areas of abortion and gay rights. On his website, Joe Miller, in explaining his stance on abortion, justified his pro-life position by asserting that "the right to life is the most basic of all rights", further arguing that the protection of the unborn is critical in preserving the institution of the family, which represented the "foundation of a free society" (Miller, 2010e). This view is given material meaning by Miller when he argues this "most basic right" is guaranteed under the 5th and 14th amendments in the Bill of Rights, grounding the view within the framework of the nation's founding documents (Miller, 2010e). This echoes Marco Rubio's truth claim that "a society that does not respect the sanctity of life cannot make sense of anything else" (Hudson, 2010), establishing a moral relational construct, whereby if all life is not valued, then there is no value in society itself.

This "right to life" concept, and the inherent religious implications involved, is ultimately reinforced by Clint Didier, who stated that: "I'm 100% behind life, from conception to natural death, because we gotta [sic] recognise who is the author of life" (Didier, 2010a). The "author of

life” evidently refers to God, and the argument Didier puts forward is representative of the generally religiously-driven pro-life argument - as God is the “author”, those who seek to take it away any time after the point of conception essentially disrespects this very authorship. The reasoning in Didier’s statement is clear - he is pro-life principally because of the idea that God designed life to begin at conception. Religion drives his positioning on the matter, as he employs openly theological reasoning in his statements.

The “sanctity of life” argument, at least in the Tea Party platform, can be viewed as an unequivocally religiously informed position insofar as it reflects the teachings of the Bible, and this position bears strong similarities to the Evangelical rhetoric of the religious activists from the 20th Century (Dochuk, 2012). Following the *Roe v. Wade* decision, activists such as Murray Norris, and later, Jerry Falwell, argued that legalisation of abortion threatened the traditional family home, contradicted the moral foundations of the country, and were blasphemous in that they contradicted the teachings of scripture (Dochuk, 2011, p.348-9). A hallmark of the discourse surrounding the pro-life activism of the 1970s was the opposition to abortion even in cases of rape, incest and when the mother’s life is in danger - a position shared by Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Joe Miller and Clint Didier, who all support the passage of a Human Life Amendment or Sanctity of Life Amendment to the Constitution (Hudson, 2010, Wartman, 2010, Miller, 2010e, Didier, 2010a).

This theme of preserving “foundations of society” by protecting the “institution of the family” extended to the argument on marriage rights. All four candidates came out fiercely opposed to broadening the definition of marriage between one man and one woman, with every candidate but Rand Paul supporting the passage of a Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) (Hudson, 2010, Miller, 2010f, Huffington Post, 2010). The FMA would ultimately serve the purpose of overriding the passage of gay marriage laws in certain states, officially restricting the definition of marriage to between one man and one woman. Marco Rubio qualified his position

on the matter by arguing that the union between a man and woman “is the cornerstone of society”, and is the “product of a thousand years of wisdom” (Hudson, 2010). The “thousand years of wisdom” can be inferred to mean the wisdom of scripture, and is therefore a call to religious authority. The truth claim that society is built on heterosexual marriages by using the Bible as the chief source plays to the conservative religious demographics in these primaries.

The underlying connotation behind these discursive articulations is that Christian theology has dictated a certain conception of marriage in the past, and so it is best not to contest this. Further to this point, *should* the law be broadened to allow for homosexuals to marry, the relational inference is that society itself may somehow be altered or transformed for the worse. This mirrors the arguments of Evangelical activists like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, who made similar assertions regarding the family as the “foundation of society” (Williams, 2010a, McKenna, 2007). Rand Paul, interestingly, put forward an ambivalent position regarding the topic, but did argue that “only churches should be in the marriage business”, supporting the authority of the Church in relation to the discussion of marriage rights (Wartman, 2010). Whilst not as spurious as his fellow Tea Party candidates, Paul’s articulation nevertheless ties marriage to the “Church”, binding the concept to religion, grounding it in theology.

Certainly, there were many topics addressed by the Tea Party candidates that broadly fit into the realm of social policy. Discussion of immigration and welfare was largely framed as a states’ rights issue, and candidates generally advocated less federal interference in regards to these issues (Abramowitz, 2011). However, many of the Tea Party social policies did feature religious concepts and themes, and played a large part in their statement formulation. Candidates’ policies regarding the PPACA, abortion, and gay rights featured themes of the importance of individual rights (as granted by God), and the necessity for safeguarding the family. By inferring the presence of theology in the Constitution, these concepts and ideas were

given hefty meaning in a conservative environment insofar as they represented largely faith-driven candidates.

The Christian Knowledge Field

The effort to re-institute moral values and principles by the Tea Party was given meaning through the construction of a specific field of knowledge. The candidates established a form of primacy and authority over modes of knowledge regarding social issues by linking their positions to religious rules and forms of logic. The result was a discursive field where social policies were by and large justified through codified ways of assessing the morality and values inherent in certain issues. This was completed in various ways by establishing “acceptable knowledge”, “fixing” specific discursive boundary points, and casting certain speaker roles. This process was most salient in the debate of the issue of abortion, so we will examine how knowledge was produced in the context of that debate.

The Tea Party candidates of 2010 managed to constitute a knowledge field by privileging statements which promoted moralistic values, whilst denigrating or excluding those that appeared to be irreligious or immoral. Marco Rubio, for example, argued that without a conviction for protecting unborn life “the entire society is endangered, and social justice cannot be the outcome of such an unjust system” (Hudson, 2010). In one broad stroke, Rubio denigrates as unacceptable any statement which is not committed to protecting the unborn as essentially “unjust”. At the same time, this statement simultaneously establishing as “acceptable” the view that society is built upon the protection of the unborn. This was ultimately representative of the general privileging of religious rationalization in terms of what was deemed “acceptable knowledge” this policy area.

Another key way in which the Tea Party candidates came to command a primacy over certain policy issues, and the associated fields of knowledge, was the way in which they “fixed”

the discussion of one of the key roles of the federal government. Within the context of the abortion issue and the debate over pro-life/anti-choice, the discursive boundaries were fixed to the extent where it became less of a matter of whether life began at conception or not, so much as the need to establish where the moral responsibility of the federal government lay. Within these boundary points, an exclusively religious conception of the debate on abortion came forward.

On his website, Rand Paul argued that the main task of the government was to “protect life”, thus it had the responsibility to prevent the practice of abortion. The question of “where life begins” thus becomes a constituent part of knowledge in this area, and it became a natural part of the Republican point of view. This allows for Paul’s truth-claim to emerge in the following sentence: “it is unconscionable that government would facilitate the taking of innocent life” (Paul, 2010d). The truth claim that the government “facilitates” the taking of human lives comes about because the processes inherent in the Tea Party discursive field dictate that discussion revolve around the fact that current laws allow for abortion to occur.

This process of knowledge formation plays into the power dynamics of the conservative constituency to which the Tea Party candidates are speaking. Given that the demographic that voted for candidates like Rand Paul are known to use religious rationalization in making their political choices (Jelen, 1991), fixing the discursive field around how to best stop the “taking of innocent life” is an effective way of presenting a faith-based political ontology. This allowed for a discourse surrounding the “rights of the unborn” to come forward, where, for example, Joe Miller argues that a priority of the government should be ensuring the protection of these rights (Miller, 2010f, Miller, 2010e).

Indeed, Miller’s position on the issue displays the way in which speaking roles are cast regarding this topic. On his website, Miller argued the following:

“The right to life is the most basic of all rights and specifically guaranteed in the 5th and 14th Amendments and in the Declaration of Independence. I do not understand why the Senator is unwilling to protect the most vulnerable among us” (Miller, 2010e)

This is a common discursive strategy utilised by the Tea Party candidates, whereby certain actors or objects are given illegitimate speaker roles because they are positioned as somehow immoral in the discursive field. Joe Miller, in the above statement, positions Senator Murkowski as lacking in moral fibre, as she is “unwilling” to protect the unborn. Critically, he predicates the unborn as the “most vulnerable”, a turn of phrase which enhances the moral issues that are present in the abortion debate. This solidifies the production of knowledge in this field as unequivocally linked to principles and values, by presenting political opponents as immoral, or not respectful of certain religious realities.

Similarly, Clint Didier invokes the abortion debate when discussing his foreign policy stances. When asked why he would advocate the United States withdrawing from the United Nations, he said that the US should not “want to sit with these people, who don’t respect life...who don’t respect our values” (Didier, 2010d)¹⁰. Didier evidently refers to a broad collection of countries with progressive abortion laws, and makes the connection that these other countries, in some way, also share a deficit of values. Within the realm of the Washington State 2010 Republican primary, this serves to establish a highly moralistic position whereby pro-life principles are granted values, and pro-life candidates are given prominent speaking roles. Additionally, it solidifies the importance and general saliency within this field of knowledge, such that discussion of these very morals and values become requisites for speaking.

In sum, the social policy platform of the 2010 Tea Party candidates was mostly a product of a variety of religious influences. The discursive field established by these individuals reflected

¹⁰ Interestingly, Didier’s position that the US should withdraw from the UN is reminiscent of Vernon McGee’s 1950s-era campaign which fought against the establishment United Nations.

a desire to introduce certain policies which would guarantee the protection of the family unit, which was established as a foundational aspect of American society in Tea Party rhetoric. Building on the concept that the Constitution was influenced by Christian theology, the discursive field of the candidates produced a form of knowledge which excluded statements, actors and concepts which were not, in some form, positively influenced by Christianity. In turn, many of the key ideas and concepts reflected the influence of the Evangelical political actors of the 20th Century, as many Tea Party policy proposals echoed many of the initiatives of the Moral Majority and the New Christian Right.

Conclusion

The success of Tea Party-backed candidates at the 2010 midterm elections heralded a period of maturation for a political movement that had evolved into a political force. The Tea Party label managed to attract the vote of a conservative Protestant base that had traditionally prioritised religious rationalisation in the construction of their political preferences, and warmed to a discourse that was driven by a faith-based political ideology. The primary campaigns of Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Joe Miller and Clint Didier mobilised a discourse that presented a Christian nation at threat, in a markedly similar way to how Evangelical political actors from the 1950s through to the 1980s gained political traction by railing against perceived threats to the fabric of American society.

Having constructed a threat that broadly linked the material economic crisis facing America at the time with socialist and unconstitutional policies, the 2010 candidates established an identity that revolved around a religious conception of the American character. The US Constitution was framed as a document inspired by theological thought, and allowed for a general articulation of religious principles and values within the Tea Party discursive field. Calling for a reimplementation of faith into public life, the candidates positioned themselves as bulwarks of Constitutional adherence and defenders of moralistic values, whilst casting their political opponents and the Obama administration as constitutionally ignorant and lacking in moral fibre. These concepts were given meaning by a production of knowledge that was heavily influenced by the historical influences of Billy Graham, the Moral Majority and the New Christian Right.

In turn, this led to the formation of a fiscal policy platform which reframed the concept of American exceptionalism in economic terms. According to the candidates, socialism has eroded the exceptional nature of American society, and the only way to ensure its revival is

unequivocally free market, pro-business policies. This entailed an anti-New Deal, anti-liberalism platform which featured a vehement opposition to the welfare state, a focus on eliminating government waste, and a full throated defence of capitalism. The mobilised discourse in relation to these policies evoked many of the themes and concepts from the “Christian economics” doctrine of the 20th Century, whereby the threats of communism and liberalism were met with efforts to ground free market economics in biblical scripture. Subsequently, this discourse appealed to a broad conservative Protestant voter bloc which had previously followed the “Jefferson and Jesus” and “Gospel of Wealth” movements of yesteryear.

Meanwhile, a social policy platform was presented whereby Tea Party candidates fought for the preservation of American society by attempting to uphold the institution of the family. Whilst emphasising the need to preserve individual liberties, as granted by God, the 2010 candidates cast the issues of abortion and gay marriage as threats to the family unit, and therefore also threats to the foundations of American society. Within this framework, opposing actors and objects in the discursive field were cast as immoral, or ignorant of certain religious realities. This element of the Tea Party discourse was given meaning through internal forms of logic that represented processes of religious rationalisation that symbolised the inherent influences, aims and motivations of the Tea Party candidates.

The primary campaigns that took place in Florida, Kentucky, Alaska and Washington State represented the intellectual energy that has driven the electoral success of the Tea Party movement. The fusion of a strict constitutionalist approach and a faith-driven political ideology appealed to a conservative Protestant base that responded to a “nation at threat” narrative which framed the Puritan exceptionalist nature of America at risk. This discourse capitalised on the historical influences of the “Religious Right”, which had previously emphasised the Puritan exceptionalist narrative, and similarly fought for reduced government intrusion in the private sphere and the insertion of faith into modes of governance. The Tea Party movement, in this

sense, can be seen to represent the latest iteration of the Republican Party's "move rightward", and represents the growing religious influences in conservative discourse in America.

It should be pointed out, however, that Clint Didier was not successful in his primary campaign, and Joe Miller was eventually defeated in the general election. What made Marco Rubio and Rand Paul succeed where Didier and Miller failed is perhaps a more nuanced discourse, whereby the same concepts and ideas are mobilised in a more effective, less literal fashion. Clint Didier's forceful language accusing the Obama administration of practicing Marxism and employing "known communists" is a good example of common themes presented in way that was perhaps too extreme. Joe Miller's more practiced and developed rhetoric certainly helped him in the primary, but his failure in the general election (against the same opponent he faced in the primary, no less) suggests the Tea Party's success with a conservative population may not always translate to a broader level of success with other constituencies. However, the fact that there was consistency in how the Tea Party mobilised a discourse of threat across all four campaigns tells us that it nevertheless is successful in a conservative environment, at the very least.

The general success of the Tea Party brand, and the associated discursive field, tells us that religious rhetoric continues to have significant power in conservative politics in America, particularly when coupled with a "nation at threat" narrative. It remains to be seen whether the Tea Party label will have staying power in the near future, but the concepts it stood for in the 2010 midterms – strict adherence to the Constitution, free market principles, and a devotion to implementing faith into the public sphere – are likely to be a constant for years to come. Given that the Tea Party can be viewed as the modern iteration of the "Jefferson and Jesus" movement, or as the spiritual successor to the Evangelical activists of the 20th Century, we can at least count on the concepts that the Tea Party candidates espoused to continue to have traction. The

influence of theology and faith-driven ideologies on conservative politics has been a mainstay in the United States for the past sixty years, and continues to be felt to this day.

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