A West European Style Populist Radical Right Movement in America? The Case of the Tea Party

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Abstract

The Tea Party (TP), whose candidates made significant gains in the 2010-midterm elections, lacks a place in the comparative party literature and also defies ready classification. Is it solely a movement to reduce the size of government and cut taxes as its name – some refer to it as the Taxed Enough Already party – implies? Or do its supporters share a broader set of conservative positions on social as well as economic issues? Does the movement draw support from across the religious spectrum? Or has the religious right "taken over" the TP, as some commentators have suggested (Koelkebeck, 2010)? In light of these various claims, this comparative study seeks to characterize the TP and asks: (1) Is it a populist party? (2) Is it a populist radical right party? The aim is to locate the TP in multi-dimensional space using a careful reading of the party literature as the primary data source and to do so by reference to three fundamental "isms" attributed to West European populist radical right parties – that is, populism, socio-cultural authoritarianism and ethno-nationalism (nativism). It is argued that the TP is indeed a populist radical right party – with Americanism as its pivotal concept – albeit one (thus far) lacking the xenophobic extremism of the likes of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPA) or the Danish People's Party (DPP).

Tea Party Influence

The growth in TP support has steadily increased, from its peculiar beginning on February 19, 2009, (the infamous 8:15 AM rant by CNBC on-air editor Rick Santelli on the floor of the Chicago mercantile exchange) right on to the dramatic achievements made in the 2010 mid-term elections that helped the GOP take control of the House of Representatives and make gains in the Senate. Indeed, TP supporters made up 41% of the electorate on Nov. 2, and 86% of them voted for Republican House candidates according to exit polls (Clement & Green, 2010). The movement owes much to the business reporter Santelli who, while live on his broadcast, criticized the government plan to refinance mortgages, which had just been announced the day before. He stated that this proposal was simply "promoting bad behavior" by "subsidizing losers' mortgages." He further suggested holding a tea party for traders to gather and dump the derivatives in the Chicago river on July 1. He clearly had the support of the traders around him, who cheered his strategy, as well as the apparently amused hosts in the studio and the video quickly went viral.

According to the *New York Times* reporter Kate Zernike, this is where the movement was first inspired to coalesce under the collective banner of "Tea Party." Websites materialized within hours of Santelli's broadcast (Zernike, 2010). John Shilling, an 18 year-old student in Hilton Head, South Carolina, launched a site called 92percentgroup.org. Its primary mission was to oppose the Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan. "We feel like 92 percent of the country has been paying their mortgage on time, and we've ben a silent majority this whole time," Shilling said. Within 72 hours of launching the site, it received 150,000 visits. That same day, reteaparty.com went live to coordinate tea parties. The founders reported that by the next morning they had received 40,000 e-mails, and by March they reported receiving 11,000 visitors a day (Last, 2009). As reported by The Huffington Post, a Facebook page was created a day after "Santelli's Rant" by FreedomWorks, who called for simultaneous TP protests across the country (Hamsher, 2009). Soon the "Nationwide Chicago Tea Party" protest was coordinated across over 40 different cities for February 27, 2009, thus establishing the first national modern TP protest (Berger, 2009).

In 2010, Tea Party-endorsed candidates upset established Republicans in several primaries, such as Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Nevada, New York, South Carolina and Utah, giving a new momentum to the conservative cause in the 2010 elections. Some notable veterans that were taken out by TP candidates in the primaries include Sen. Robert Bennett in Utah, defeated by now-Sen. Mike Lee; Rep. Mike Castle of Delaware, a former governor, upset by Christine O'Donnell; and Trey Grayson of Kentucky beaten by now-Sen. Rand Paul. Prior to the elections taking place the *New York Times* identified 138 candidates for Congress with significant Tea

Party support, and reported that all of them were running as Republicans—of whom 129 were running for the House and nine for the Senate. Presently, the Tea Party Caucus has 52 members in the House and four in the Senate having thus far has refused to be "co-opted" by the Republican establishment in Washington. Looking ahead to the 2012 presidential primary, several candidates, including Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich and Michele Bachman, are actively courting the various activist groups in the hopes of gaining early support.

With such attention being paid to the movement there have naturally been myriad explanations for what this new political development is all about. Thus far it has been perceived alternately by its supporters as conservative and in line with what America's founders intended; by American media commentators as a case of right-wing populism; and by researchers as a Republican rebranding that is sure to fade away. Additionally, journalists have made reference to "the breakthrough of right-wing populism in America," attributing it above all as a response to several federal actions, including passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act (2008), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) and President Obama's sweeping health care reform bills (Barnes, 2009, Ferrara, 2009, & Seleny, 2009). Others saw the movement as a reaction to the problems associated with immigration, such as personal safety on the streets, crime and concern about jobs (Garber, 2010). Some go further, claiming that its supporters are nothing more than neo-Klansman, according to Patrik Jonsson of The Christian Science Monitor. Other organizations, such as the National Republican African American Caucus have expressed the fear that the TP is a racist party (Thompson, 2010) and is largely insensitive to the multi-cultural make-up of the country (Tucker, 2010). Significantly, a report published in the fall of 2010 by the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights and backed by the NAACP, found what it says are efforts by white nationalist groups and militias to link themselves to the TP movement (Thompson, 2010). All in all, there has been substantial growth in the TP's support in recent elections, but does this denote the breakthrough of a populist radical right party in America? Based on a careful study of its programmatic output since its inception in 2009, this comparative research project seeks to characterize the TP by reference to its core ideological features in relation to the populist radical right parties present in Western Europe.

The TP: A Populist Party?

Schedler (1996) has noted that populism has been associated with a broad array of anti-attitudes—among them anti-elite, anti establishment, anti-modern, anti-urban, anti-industrial, anti-state, anti-foreign, anti-intellectual, and anti-minority sentiments. Anti-political-establishment actors, he posits, declare war on the political class—in the pejorative sense of the stratum of professional politicians. When viewed in this light it seems the TP would qualify as an anti-establishment party, asserting the existence of a fundamental divide between the political establishment and the people (Abedi, 2009). The leading TP figures, including the likes of Glenn Beck and Michelle Bachman, have displayed the classic range of anti-attitudes, particularly the anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism that they use to attack the left and President Obama. In addition, they attack the Republican Party as being part of the establishment problem. This despite a The *Wall Street Journal*-NBC News poll in mid October that showed 35% of likely voters were Tea-party supporters, and they favored the Republicans by 84% to 10%. The TP leader Glen Beck in particular has railed against the elite in government. Typically, for example, he has asserted, "book-learned theoreticians, arrogant bureaucrats, cold-hearted technocrats, uncomprehending centralizers, big-money worshippers and smooth avant-garde thinkers do not trust the people. They do not value the people's views because they believe the people are stupid and indifferent and that all wisdom rests with the experts and an elite that is divorced from everyday life."

The TP also conforms to the conventional wisdom that populism is a phenomenon embedded in democratic systems, which is confrontational but not anti-democratic. It seeks to oppose the minority preventing the demands of the people from being realized (Ware, 2002), but while associated with a wide range of anti-attitudes, it is not anti-systemic in the sense of rejecting participation in the institutions of representative democracy. In Bergh's terms, populism channels "elite protest" rather than "system protest" (Bergh, 2004). Populist movements and parties may be a "by-product of the democratic malaise" (Meny & Surel, 2002) or a manifestation of what Canovan has referred to as "the insoluble paradox of democracy" (Canovan, 2002), but they are not generally anti-democratic in the sense of seeking to dismantle the constitutional and institutional structures of representative democracy.

However, a challenge to this observation occurs when these parties establish themselves and in their policies and rhetoric advocate a society based on ethnic and cultural homogeneity. This can lead to certain people, and groups with foreign backgrounds, being excluded from participating in society, their freedoms and rights limited and exclusion and inclusion mechanisms in society strengthened (Kiiskinen, Fryklund, & Saveljeff, 2007). The TP has in fact canvassed a model of populist democracy which places the emphasis on the "by" and "of" elements in Lincoln's classical formulation. The Contract From America website, which was founded as open-sourced platform

for the movement and supported by all major affiliates, states that the TP trusts the people, their strength and creativity and notes that a sustainable society is built from the bottom up by listening to the people. Well-grounded criticism is dubbed "hindsight" and "populist," but it is argued that it is futile to seek to intimidate the nation with the specter of populism. The TP will ensure that so-called populist themes, which concern the nation, rise to the fore in the coming election campaign. The manifesto concludes that the TP will provide a channel for "new ideas, bold initiatives and sensible protest" and serve as a counterpoise to the compulsory consensus demanded by the political establishment. In short, the TP has eschewed the pejorative connotations of populism and sought unashamedly to market what the Tea Party Express calls responsible populism.

For many scholars populism is either a mass movement (Barr, 2009), a specific style of communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and/or a political mobilization strategy. Eatwell (2009), for example, argues that "populism is best seen as a style rather than a specific body of thought," adding that "it has no clear ideology and tends to be negative." In similar vein, Luther (2007) has noted how the populist vote maximization strategy of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in the 1990s produced inconsistency in the party's policies—a type of "ideological promiscuity" born of electoral opportunism. Equally, there are those writers, albeit scarcely a majority, who have viewed populism as an ideology, although it is pointed out that the spatial location of populism will be determined by "additives" from other ideologies. The ideological "overlay" will dictate the particular form of populism and, by extension, allow us to consider the most appropriate characterization of the TP's populism.

Mudde (2007) notes that social populism is left-wing populism, combining socialism and populism, whereas neo-liberal populism is right-wing populism, combining economic liberalism and populism. Abts and Rummens (2007) hold that left-wing versions of populism will refer to socio-economic relations and "identify the people with the laborers and farmers." The wider point here is that populism can occur at various points on the political spectrum and is not the sole preserve of either side. Secondly, whereas left-wing and right-wing versions of populism have been defined principally in socio-economic terms, extreme-right or radical-right populism had been conceptualized in essentially socio-cultural terms—by reference to "ethnic characterizations of the true people," for example (Abts and Rummens, 2007). Thus, Mudde identifies the core ideological features of populist radical right parties as nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, and while it is clear that populism can be placed on a conventional left-right continuum, nativism is viewed as the ultimate determinant of this party family. It is defined as "an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (Mudde, 2007).

Rydgren (2007) also defines the new radical right in essentially socio-cultural rather than socio-economic terms and like Mudde, he too, identifies three core ideological features. First, there is ethno-nationalism, which involves fortifying the nation by making it ethnically homogeneous and by returning to basic values. Then there is populism, which has essentially involved accusing the political establishment of placing internationalism ahead of the nation and its own narrow self-interest before the interests of the people. Rydgren regards populism as a characteristic but not a distinctive feature of the new radical right. Rather, it is the combination of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism that forms the quintessence of the radical right, which also embodies a general socio-cultural authoritarianism emphasizing the importance of law and order and family values. He concludes that the new radical right is right wing primarily in the socio-cultural sense of the term. It prioritizes socio-cultural issues and in particular those related to national identity.

The second part of this paper follows a "core ideological features" strategy in search of the TP's basic "driving force." The discussion is predicated on a "qualitative content analysis"—that is, a careful reading and interpretation—of the TP's programmatic output (the Contract from America, interviews, statements of short-term policy goals, etc.) since 2009. There are two obvious objections to this approach. While definitions of populist radical right parties, such as those above, give precedence to socio-cultural over socio-economic values, an examination of party literature does not permit entirely safe conclusions about dimension salience—that is, the relative importance attached to particular policy content. There is always likely to be an element of expert (subjective) judgment involved, and in this respect, comparativists may well fall foul of the country specialist. Furthermore, characterizing the spatial position of parties on the basis of programmatic themes inevitably simplifies the reality of party behavior. In practice, parties are rarely unitary actors and internal factions and tendencies will differ in emphasis from the programmatic "standard."

The TP's Populism: Center-based or Radical Rightest?

Ultimately, of course, the spatial position of thought is bound to be somewhat arbitrary, which is presumably why O'Malley makes the point that "if it is not the economic right that is being referred to [in relation to

radical right parties] it is unclear why the term 'right' is employed" (O'Malley, 2008). Indeed, while the primacy of socio-cultural values may define radical right parties, it has already been emphasized that populism is not the exclusive preserve of the political right and it may enjoy coordinate or indeed greater importance in the ideological fabric of a party than authoritarianism or ethno-nationalism. In relation to the socio-economic dimension of TP's populism, several fundamental party objectives warrant emphasis.

Table 1.

Tea Party: Conservative on Economic Issues

	All Registered Voters	Rep/ Lean Rep	Tea Party	*Tea Party-Reg Voter Diff*
	%	%	%	
Prefer smaller government	56	80	88	*+32*
Prefer bigger government	37	16	9	*-28*
Gov't almost always wasteful	61	79	87	*+26*
Gov't does better job than it gets credit for	35	18	10	*-25*
Corporations make a fair and reasonable profit	39	55	62	*+23*
Corporations make too much profit	54	37	30	*-24*
N	2,816	1,281	887	

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Among Registered Voters. Aug. 25-Sept. 6, 2010. Figures read down.

As reported by the Pew Research Center, the TP is much more Republican and conservative than the public as a whole. Indeed, TP supporters are more conservative on economic issues and the size of government than either Republicans in general or all registered voters. According to a September 2010 survey by Pew, almost nine-in-ten registered voters who agree with the TP (88%) prefer a smaller government with fewer services, compared with 80% of all Republicans and Republican-leaning independents and 56% of all registered voters.

In the same survey, fully 87% of TP supporters said government is almost always wasteful; eight points more than Republicans overall (79%) and 26 points more than all registered voters (61%). And while more than half of registered voters (54%) said that corporations make too much money, TP supporters were inclined to see corporations as making a fair and reasonable amount of profit. Indeed, TP supporters took this position by a two-to-one margin (62% fair profit vs. 30% too much profit). A somewhat smaller percentage of all Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (55%) said corporations make a fair and reasonable profit. In short, when viewed in traditional socio-economic terms, the TP's populism has been "right-leaning" or at least "center-right-inclined" in its concern to tackle fundamental social inequalities.

The TP has unquestionably been traditionalist in its socio-cultural attitudes defending fundamental values and standards against those of the "permissive society." One group has propounded a neo-Jeffersonian small-firm-small-farm model predicated on the belief that family-sized enterprises generate the type of solid inter-personal relations which, when coupled with fundamental Christian values, provide a firm moral foundation for society. Correspondingly, the TP has taken a hard line on those insidious forces eroding the secure moral base of society and in particular those liberal attitudes perverting the traditional family concept. The Grassfire Nation website has noted, for example, that, over the course of the "rainbow coalitions," the notion of the family has been broadened in a most unnatural way (same-sex marriage now gaining legality at a steady pace) and the door accordingly opened to an ever-deeper decay in the ethical base of society. Indeed, in connection with a law (enacted in May 2009) enabling one of the partners in a registered same-sex relationship legally to adopt the child of the other partner, the TP Patriot organizer Mark Meckler, expressed his dismay at the collapse of basic standards and stated (controversially, to put it mildly) that people would be seeking permission to marry their dogs next!

Table 2.

Tea Party: Also Conservative on Social Issues

	All Registered Voters	Rep/ Lean Rep	Tea Party	*Tea Party-Reg Voter Diff*
Same-sex marriage...	%	%	%	
Favor	42	24	26	*-16*
Oppose	49	67	64	*+15*
Abortion should be...				
Legal in all/most cases	52	38	34	*-18*
Illegal in all/most cases	42	56	59	*+17*
Illegal immigration priority...				
Better border security	31	45	51	*+20*
Path to citizenship	22	13	10	*-12*
Both equally	44	41	37	*-7*
More important to...				
Protect gun rights	51	72	78	*+27*
Control gun ownership	45	24	18	*-27*

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Among Registered Voters. Same-sex marriage, gun rights and illegal immigration data from survey conducted Aug. 25-Sept. 6, 2010. Abortion data from survey conducted July 21-Aug. 5, 2010.

While registered voters as a whole are closely divided on same-sex marriage (42% in favor, 49% opposed), TP supporters oppose it by more than two-to-one (64% opposed, 26% in favor). Similarly, almost six-in-ten (59%) of those who agree with the TP say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, 17 percentage points higher than among all registered voters. TP supporters closely resemble Republican voters as a whole on these issues.

On immigration, TP supporters are 20 percentage points more likely than registered voters overall to say better border security is the most important priority in dealing with illegal immigration (51% vs. 31%). About half as many TP supporters (10%) as registered voters on the whole (22%) see the establishment of a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants as the top priority.

The TP has also taken a tough "zero tolerance" line on drugs and alcohol abuse and demanded suitably punitive and effective measures to deal with a deteriorating situation, including devoting more resources to policing. The Oathkeepers website pointed out the effect of drugs on crimes against the person and property, along with the increase in drug-related traffic accidents. It concluded that the TP is opposed to the liberal line on so-called "soft drugs" adopted in some countries, not least because of the complex social problems that are stored up for the future.

Table 3.

Support for Tea Party Among Religious Groups

	Opinion of Tea Party			
	Agree	**Disagree**	**No Opinion/Haven't Heard/Refused**	**N**
Protestant	31	21	48	2,523
White evangelical	44	8	48	994
White mainline	30	26	44	941
Black Protestant	7	37	56	371
Catholic	29	23	48	1,011
White non-Hispanic	33	22	45	798
Jewish	15	49	35	103
Unaffiliated	15	42	43	720
Atheist/Agnostic	12	67	20	206
Nothing in particular	16	32	52	514

Among Registered Voters. Combined surveys from November 2010 through February 2011.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Support for the TP varies dramatically across religious groups. Surveys from November 2010 through February 2011 show that white evangelical Protestants are roughly five times as likely to agree with the movement as to disagree with it (44% vs. 8%), though substantial numbers of white evangelicals either have no opinion or have not heard of the movement (48%). Three-in-ten or more of white Catholics (33%) and white mainline Protestants (30%) also agree with the TP, but among these two groups at least one-in-five people disagrees with the movement.

Among Jews, the religiously unaffiliated and black Protestants, however, there is more opposition than support for the TP. Nearly half of Jews (49%) say they disagree with the TP movement, compared with 15% who agree with it. Among the unaffiliated, more than four-in-ten (42%) disagree with the movement while 15% agree with it. About two-thirds of atheists and agnostics (67%) disagree with the movement. Most black Protestants polled (56%) say they have not heard of the TP or have no opinion about it. But among black Protestants who offer an opinion, those who disagree with the movement outnumber those who agree with it by more than five-to-one (37% disagree vs. 7% agree).

Table 4.

Tea Party and the Conservative Christian Movement

Of those who agree with the conservative Christian movement...

69%	Agree w/Tea Party
4%	Disagree w/Tea Party
27%	Have no opinion/haven't heard of Tea Party

While of those who agree with the Tea Party...

42%	Agree w/conservative Christian movement
11%	Disagree w/conservative Christian movement
46%	Have no opinion/haven't heard of conservative Christian movement

Among Registered Voters. Data from survey conducted July 21-Aug. 5, 2010.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Americans who support the conservative Christian movement, sometimes known as the religious right, also overwhelmingly support the TP. In the Pew Research Center's August 2010 poll, 69% of registered voters who agreed with the religious right also said they agreed with the TP. Moreover, both the religious right and the TP count a higher percentage of white evangelical Protestants in their ranks (45% among the religious right, 34% among the TP and 22% among all registered voters in the August 2010 survey). Religiously unaffiliated people are less common among the TP or religious right supporters than among the public at-large (3% among the religious right, 10% among the TP and 15% among all registered voters in the August poll). In short, the TP has been authoritarian rather than libertarian, espousing the authority and legitimacy of a Christian society grounded in traditional family values.

It will be recalled that ethno-nationalism or nativism—that is, strengthening the nation by making it ethnically homogeneous—has been viewed as the ultimate determinant of membership of the populist radical right party family. In practice, in the globalized world of the new millennium, the threat to the homogeneity of the nation has come principally from the free movement of peoples and, as Ivarflaten has observed, the grievances uniting all successful populist right parties have been those arising from Europe's ongoing immigration crisis (Ivarflaten, 2008). On the face of it, the party's stance on the immigration question has been moderate, at least at the rhetorical level. Bachman has not resorted to the xenophobic extremism of the likes of Heinz-Christian Strache of the FPA, insisting before the 2012 general election that demonizing other social groups and stirring racial hatred involved kicking the weak and that she does not want a victory at any price. The Contract From America website, moreover, held that the TP favors a responsible immigration policy. Equally, the TP has undoubtedly attracted racist elements, both candidates and voters. For instance, during the 2012 primary campaign, Herman Cain has used the kind of racist and homophobic language commonly associated with the radical right. Indeed, standing as an Independent on the TP list for President, he has attracted considerable notoriety—as well as a sizeable following—after his idiosyncratic characterization of Muslim attitudes and his argument that it would be constitutional to ban mosques.

Much of the TP's literature indicates a hard party line on foreigners. On the basis of readings from several TP websites including Americans for Prosperity, The 9/12 Project, and Liberty Central, two intertwined threads in the party's attitude towards immigrants are worth separating.

First, the TP is mono-culturist rather than multi-culturist in orientation, opposed to wholesale immigration while pursuing a line of what might be termed comprehensive acculturation—a basic "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" approach. Ginni Thomas (who, interestingly, is the wife of SC Justice Clarence Thomas) of Liberty Central asserts that it is not sensible to create a system where persons come to America simply to spend time and find happiness while officials seek artificially to preserve the immigrant's own culture. Preserving their culture is the immigrants' own business and public resources should not be expended on it, as it does not directly assist in the integration of immigrants into American society. "We can never accept those decisions which involve urging the native population to sacrifice their own traditions to accommodate foreign cultures. Multiculturalism should not be promoted at the expense of the native culture." She maintains that since the present body of immigrants does not really try to integrate into society but instead constitutes ethnic sub-cultures, large-scale immigration will ultimately threaten the indigenous American culture.

Second, the TP is welfare chauvinist in the sense that the welfare of the native population must come first and should not be deleteriously affected by immigration. Of particular concern has been the position of young persons and young-parent families. Resistnet.com insists that America does not need significant numbers of immigrants to meet a possible labor and skills shortage but rather vocational education should be increased and its quality improved. It holds that too many young persons were being channeled into an academic route at the end of which there was no guarantee of a job. Many also incur levels of debt (in the form of student loans) that delay the start of a family because no child benefit was built into the student support system. If nothing is done, America will witness the emergence of a white-collar proletariat whose work and family life will rest on a shaky foundation. American working society, too, would rest on a precarious base in so far as racism would breed in a situation in which, shortsightedly, immigrants and foreign labor are available while the native population is experiencing difficulties in obtaining work.

A case can be made for viewing the TP as a center-right populist party. Firstly, although the TP's electorate conforms rather closely to that of the archetypal radical rightist voter (Lubbers, Gijssberts, & Scheepers, 2002) and its voters are the most hostile of all the parties to increased immigration, the TP supporters have not seen their party as radical right-wing. They display relatively low levels of party identification and have substantially lower than average levels of political trust in politicians. On the basis of the 2010 general election survey, moreover, the TP's voters were preponderantly white, male, derived overwhelmingly from the age cohorts over 45 years and likely to be wealthier and have more education than the general population (Thee-Brenan & Zernike, 2010).

Secondly, and more tenuously, the TP emerged from a populist movement and not from an extremist right-wing tradition as in the case of the Front National (Rydgren, 2005) or Sweden Democrats (Widfeldt, 2008) and its rhetoric and leadership style have been moderate compared with the xenophobic extremism of the Danish People's Party and the Freedom Party of Austria. There has been no widespread insistence on the threat posed by "Islamization," proposals of the type of Haider's sonderlager—a special camp for the elderly, sick and criminal asylum-seekers on an isolated 1,200 meter-high alpine pasture (Connolly, 2008), or wholesale repatriation.

Yet an analysis based on its core ideological features does not support the TP's characterization as a center or center-right populist party. Rather, the mix of traditional conservatism (socio-cultural authoritarianism) and ethno-nationalism (nativism) defines the TP as a spin-off party (Rydgren, 2005)—a populist radical right party endorsing many of the themes of its harsher European counterparts. Many TP supporters are quite anti-globalism and oppose continuing membership in the United Nations and indeed any further renunciation of national sovereignty. This has been coupled with support for the immediate deportation of criminal asylum-seekers, protection for domestic agriculture and industry and tougher penalties for drug-abusers. Crucially, the central concept in the TP's ideology—and one that permeates the entire party literature—is the notion of (true) Americanism. The term appears widely on many of the TP's websites. The Tea Party Nation for example, contains sections entitled "Americanism is strength" and "Americanism is a competitive advantage" and it insists that Americanism is cultural capital, which should be capitalized upon and not dissipated. It holds somewhat obscurely that "society and nation go hand in hand towards the future and if we as a nation are not able to influence society and if society has no nation to influence we will lose our competitive edge over less successful countries in which society and nation are less well integrated than in America." Americanism is the pivotal, pre-eminent concept and the TP's basic geist. It is that which defines the TP as belonging to the family of radical right parties.

Conclusions

Contrary to the conventional wisdom among American political scientists who have viewed the TP as a "right-based populist party" or the "most right-wing of the non-radical parties," this article has argued—on the basis of the core nature of nativism or ethno-nationalism in the party's ideological armory—that the Tea Party is best classified as a populist radical right party in the West European tradition. The party's anti-immigrant rhetoric has undoubtedly been less extreme than say the Danish People's Party but, not insignificantly, it has had questionable admirers overseas. Andrew Brevik's manifesto mentions a great admiration for the movement and Strache of the FPA has declared a wish to meet with the "leaders of the American Tea Party movement," which he described as "highly interesting" (AP, 2010).

The article has also made the case that the party has a rather hard line on foreigners although it might reasonably be speculated that (thus far) the populist anti-consensus character of the TP has been more appealing to most of its voters than its nativist credentials. Populist parties have generally been leader-dependent, context-dependent and drawn on the most volatile sections of the electorate. On the point of leadership dependency, Michele Bachman's decision to run for president was largely designed to capitalize on her personal popularity, maintain the party's media profile, and above all prepare the way for a strong TP performance in the 2012 general election. However, populist parties have been notoriously prone to factional strains and maintaining the unity, drive and direction of a movement as disparate as the TP will be highly challenging.

On the point of context dependency, the TP undoubtedly profited during the 2010 local and state elections from a widespread anti-establishment, anti-party mood spawned of revelations about "corporate bail-outs" and vague iterations of "too big to fail." Undeclared contributions from corporate-sector sources created a strong sense of sleaze and a widespread sentiment of "a plague on all your houses" among the public at large. The TP could continue to profit from this—particularly during present economic hard times—not least as, almost daily, fresh murky revelations appear in the press, although the ability of the TP leadership to continue to rein in the racist elements attracted to the party will be crucial. The 2010 mid-term election campaigns triggered many debates about immigration, during which a number of controversial views from high-profile politicians were expressed, and a concerted attempt made by the Democrats to tar the TP with the racist brush. It is highly doubtful if the TP could continue to grow as a blatantly (Danish-style) racist party and the recruitment of both sufficient, and as importantly suitable, candidates for the 2012 presidential election will be vital to its continuing success.

Finally, there is the highly volatile nature of the TP's support base. Indeed, it should be remembered that TP upsets in Boston and elsewhere were achieved in a heady time and may not necessarily be replicated in a general election, although before midsummer 2011 TP registered 22% percent in the opinion polls (Campbell & Putnam, 2011). The wider point here though concerns the TP's strategic direction. On the one hand, as a populist party it must retain its protest appeal to attract votes. On the other, Bachman has indicated that she has not ruled out

participation and compromise in governance if elected. Mény & Surel (2002) have noted that populist parties "are by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government. Their fate is to be integrated into the mainstream or to remain permanently in opposition." The Austrian Freedom Party was an office-seeking party and indeed formed part of the governing coalitions between 2000 and 2005. However, the loss of its anti-establishment credentials significantly undercut the party's vote and radical image. The rise of the TP has witnessed the breakthrough of a West European style populist radical right party in the U.S., but the wider question will be whether, in America and elsewhere, a populist radical right party can continue to appear radical except as an anti-political-establishment party.

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