

Tea Party Not Monolithic

By Mark A. Skoda

Much has been written during this election cycle about the tea party movement and its support of candidates during the Republican primaries. Now, after a caucus and three primaries, about all we can say for certain about people who support the tea party movement is that they are as diverse in their support and opinions as much of the Republican Party.

During the 2010 election cycle, we saw a tsunami that delivered the House of Representatives to the Republican Party. The tea party movement certainly had a great deal to do with that result through the energy and the activism that resulted from the 2009 protests, town halls and of course the 9/12 march on DC. However, according to a detail analysis of the results by [Pew Research](#), it was the Independents that delivered the decisive win to the Republicans.

The research narrative by Pew pointed this fact out:

Stated Pew Research, "The proportion of self-described conservative voters increased by nearly a third from 2006 -- from 32% to 42% -- and is the highest percentage of conservative voters in the past two decades. However, the single biggest factor in the GOP's victories was its striking gain among political independents. By 56% to 37%, more independents voted for the Republican candidate this year; four years ago, independents favored the Democrat by nearly an identical margin (57% to 39%). And just two years ago, Barack Obama won the votes of independents (by 52% to 44%) on his way to the White House."

Those people who supported the tea party movement or considered themselves part of that movement voted 86% to 11% for the Republican candidates. The outcome was not unexpected in as much as the tea party movement had rallied around the key tenets of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets. All part of the Republican platform and in general those candidates who ran as Republicans.

However, as we begin to look to the 2012 races and after completing the Iowa caucus and three primaries, we find that the tea party movement appears as fragmented as the electorate in general. The following polling by [American Research Group, Inc.](#) provides a dramatic view to this factor in why we are seeing so much churn amongst the candidates and frankly, the emotion amongst tea party supporters.

Preference by Tea Party support:

| Likely Republican Caucus Goers | Iowa | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | Supporter (40%) | Not/Undecided (60%) |
| Bachmann | 9% | 8% |
| Gingrich | 21% | 12% |
| Huntsman | 1% | 6% |
| Johnson | - | - |
| Paul | 11% | 21% |
| Perry | 10% | 8% |
| Roemer | - | 1% |
| Romney | 24% | 21% |
| Santorum | 16% | 16% |
| Other | - | 1% |
| Undecided | 8% | 6% |

Preference by Tea Party support:

| New Hampshire | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Likely Republican Primary Voters | Supporter (32%) | Not/Undecided (68%) |
| Gingrich | 19% | 6% |
| Huntsman | 5% | 25% |
| Paul | 22% | 15% |
| Perry | 2% | 1% |
| Romney | 29% | 40% |
| Santorum | 18% | 8% |
| Other | 1% | 2% |
| Undecided | 4% | 3% |

Preference by Tea Party support:

| South Carolina | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Likely Republican Primary Voters | Supporter (46%) | Not/Undecided (54%) |
| Gingrich | 48% | 33% |
| Paul | 14% | 22% |
| Romney | 19% | 31% |
| Santorum | 16% | 11% |
| Other | - | 2% |
| Undecided | 3% | 1% |

Preference by Tea Party support:

| Florida | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Likely Republican Primary Voters | Supporter (53%) | Not/Undecided (47%) |
| Gingrich | 38% | 23% |
| Paul | 4% | 15% |
| Romney | 35% | 52% |
| Santorum | 17% | 8% |
| Other | 1% | 1% |
| Undecided | 5% | 1% |

These numbers point to two factors; first, Romney enjoys broad support amongst those who support the tea party. Second, that tea party support is as diverse as the electorate when it comes to choice of a candidate.

Actual exit polls from the Florida primary actually show Romney beating Gingrich in tea party support. Exit polls show that 65 percent, nearly two-thirds of the Republicans who voted in the Florida primary, “support” the tea party. Of those, 41 percent chose Romney and 37 percent chose Newt Gingrich. However, “hard core” tea party supporters broke 45 percent Gingrich, 33 percent went with Romney, 17 percent backed Rick Santorum and 5 percent chose Ron Paul.

During this election cycle, the Memphis TEA Party, after doing a purely unscientific survey of its mailing list, [endorsed Mitt Romney for President](#). The results of that survey are indicated in the table below:

| | | |
|-------|--|----------|
| 43.9% | | Romney |
| 19.5% | | Gingrich |
| 12.2% | | Santorum |
| 9.8% | | Paul |
| 14.6% | | Other |

Informal Survey Memphis TEA Party Mailing

Interestingly, that endorsement raised a series of comments from support to excoriating disagreement. What I found troubling about that very dialogue or lack thereof, is that it ignores the diversity of the movement, its leadership and its supporters. Based on the aforementioned research polling, that endorsement was no more surprising than being a reflection of the electorate at large and the tea party in particular. In fact, our informal survey revealed that a good number of people didn't want any of the candidates.

So where is the tea party movement in all of this data? In my views, about where many of the electorate are in making a choice of candidates to represent the party for the nomination. I also believe this is one reason we have seen such churning in support for the various candidates from time to time. But out of this analysis I also suggest that the process of selection we are now undertaking is less about the differences in "we the people" and more about differences in the emotion and anger about Washington that exists within that electorate.

If past is prologue, it would appear that the eventual nominee will gain the support of the vast majority of Republicans, Independents and tea party supporters. And while some have stated they will simply stay home, the imperative to make Barack Obama a one term president may overcome even their inertia.

Exit polling continues to show that there is a very diverse set of views amongst the tea party. And that may be about all we can say from the exit polling. The tea party is comprised of Republicans, Democrats, Independents, Libertarians and folks who don't even have affiliations. After three years of being in this movement, I can say with some certainty that there are many agendas. The tea party is comprised of over 4,000 different tea party groups. It's just a fact that opinions and actions will be as diverse as that leadership, their experience, sophistication and ideology.

In the end, you can disagree with the numbers, ignore the data and be "mad as hell and not take it anymore". But the tea party movement is clearly not a monolithic movement. As [Senator Jim DeMint said in his interview with S.E. Cupp](#) when asked if he thinks the Tea Party's credibility will be tested this election, DeMint suggested "There is no one candidate that fits the Tea Party because the Tea Party comprises so many different small groups around the country — from Libertarians to disaffected Democrats to conservatives and Independents".

However, what is critical to this dialogue is to maintain a level of decorum and civility. Yet we are far better off with that emotion and intensity than fighting in the streets as we see in many parts of the world. Politics isn't a bean bag toss, so we will likely continue to contend with our particular point of view. And that's why no monolith exists in the tea party!

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