

The Tea Party and the Republican Party Are the Same

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Recently the question of whether the Tea Party is [helping](#) or [hurting](#) the Republicans in the upcoming election has been the subject of much analysis and debate. This question seems to have displaced the [broader questions of what the Tea Party is and how it fits into American political history](#) as the most discussed Tea Party issue among the punditry and in the blogosphere. Both of these questions miss the reality of the relationship between the Tea Party and the Republican Party, allowing the pageantry and rhetoric of the Tea Party to obscure what remains the most clear answer -- that the Tea Party is a branch of the Republican Party and is moving towards simply becoming the Republican Party.

In this way, focusing on the effect the Tea Party will have on the Republican Party on Nov. 2 and beyond misses the point because it falsely suggests that the Tea Party and the Republican Party are different entities. In doing this, another increasingly inaccurate notion, that there is a difference between Tea Party candidates and other Republican Party candidates, is implicitly reinforced.

As the election approaches there is growing reason to believe that the Tea Party is neither distinct from, or even a part of, the Republican Party. Instead the two have, to a large extent, become the same. Some within the Republican Party may differ in style and presentation from Tea Party Republicans, but that is where the distinction ends. Few Republicans have spoken out about rhetorical excesses of the Tea Party, and when they have, they have turned their attention to individual actions or gaffes -- Rich Iott's Nazi outfits and the like -- rather than to positions or views on major issues. Even the most bizarre claims that have gotten good traction in the Tea Party movement, such as those asserting that President Obama is not a citizen, have rarely been soundly refuted by others in the Republican Party.

There is no battle within the Republican Party between Tea Party supporters and more moderate, wiser and establishment Republicans, because the latter group does not really exist anymore. The establishment of the Republican Party and the party's more extremist right flank merged around a decade ago with the election of George Bush. The moderate Republican has been a thing of the past for years, but the non-Tea Party Republican is almost a thing of the past as well.

The distinction between Tea Party candidates such as Sharron Angle or Christine O'Donnell and other Republican candidates may be a distinction, but it is not a difference. O'Donnell and Angle may be more outspoken or prone to saying strange things, but on the major issues they are well within the mainstream of the Republican Party. More precisely, on the major issues most Republican candidates are well within the mainstream of the Tea Party.

Most Republican candidates seem to agree with the absurd notion that President Obama who has returned the marginal tax rate to what it was under Ronald Reagan and pushed through a health care bill that will likely add millions to the roles of private health insurance firms, is a socialist. It

is not unusual to hear Republican candidates not explicitly identified with the Tea Party take up the themes of the loss of freedom in the US, or that the deficit is entirely the fault of Obama and his party. Even Republican candidates not generally associated with the Tea Party, like California Senate candidate Carly Fiorina, support the Tea-Party-endorsed notion that [global climate change has not been caused by human behavior](#). In general, Tea Party positions on everything from environmental regulations, to marriage equality to the proposed Islamic Community Center in Lower Manhattan are the same as those of the Republican Party.

It is good politics for the Republicans to present themselves as if the Tea Party is not really the same as the Republican Party. This will probably help the Republican Party during the next few weeks as the party seeks to reassure voters that they have not been captured by the Tea Party radicals, but that can only work in the short term. Once the new congress is seated in 2011, riffs between the Tea Party and the rest of the Republican Party will not be a major issue because there are no real differences between these groups

Christine O'Donnell, Sharron Angle, Rand Paul, Carl Paladino and other "Tea Party Insurgents" are not fighting a battle for the soul of the Republican Party; they are the Republican Party. Republican strategists have good reason to suggest otherwise, but progressives and Democrats should know better by now.