

# Tea Party movement has paved the way for racialized language in US politics

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Overtly racially motivated rhetoric is becoming increasingly acceptable in Republican politics in the US. Two Italian researchers now argue that this can partly be traced back to the conservative Tea Party movement which has reshaped the Republican party's identity away from its traditional conservative axioms to one that is more nativist and racially tinged. Luigi Leone and Fabio Presaghi from the Sapienza University of Rome have published their findings in Springer's journal *Race and Social Problems*.

The Tea Party movement's name refers to the 1773 Boston Tea Party, when demonstrations against taxes imposed on colonists by the British government launched the American Revolution. The modern-day Tea Party began in 2009 in opposition to the Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan of former President Barack Obama, and the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare). Various Tea Party organizations rapidly made their mark in the Republican Senate and House primaries, and subsequent midterm elections.

Leone and Presaghi investigated the influence of the Tea Party on current US political discussions by analysing data collected from 3495 white respondents who took part in the 2012 survey of the American National Election Studies. The researchers found that people who supported the Tea Party were more likely to feel resentment against races other than their own, and – more importantly – that those supporting the Tea Party relied more strongly on their racial resentment in evaluating Obama.

"The interaction we found between [racial resentment](#) and support for the Tea Party could reflect how tolerance for overtly racially motivated rhetoric increases the role of racial animus in shaping attitudes," says Leone.

The researchers contend that the form of overtly racialized political language used by Trump is not unexpected.

"This type of language was tested by the Tea Party as a new way of reintroducing into mainstream political discourse overtly racialized political meanings," explains Leone.

"Racial resentment and racially motivated political discourse have become less disturbing as an after effect of Tea Party rhetoric and Trump's communication strategy," adds Presaghi. "The tense racialization of several political topics under the Trump presidency is a legacy of the Tea Party's ability to make racially hostile content in political communication acceptable to a large number of white Americans."

**More information:** Luigi Leone et al, Tea Party Support, Racial Resentment and Evaluations of Obama: A Moderation Analysis, *Race and Social Problems* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s12552-018-9224-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-018-9224-6)

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