

A Survey of Ohio Tea Party Activists, 2011

Bliss Institute of Applied Politics

Executive Summary

The Ohio Tea Party activists are part of a vibrant movement dedicated to pursuing their principles and issue agenda by electing like-minded candidates. These activists have a strong grassroots presence as well as connections with national and state organizations.

Largely Republican and conservative, Ohio Tea Party activists tend to have economic issue priorities and are strong advocates of reducing the scope and size of the federal government. They also tend to hold conservative views on cultural and foreign policy issues as well.

The Ohio Tea Party activists have mixed views of Republican leaders and there is no consensus on their “first choice” for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination.

The Ohio Tea Party activists are likely to be heavily engaged in the 2012 campaign, deploying extensive experience, skills, and resources. Given the competitiveness of Ohio politics, these activists could be an important factor in the outcome.

The Survey

This report is based on the results of a survey of Ohio Tea Party activists designed to better understand the key actors in the movement. The survey was conducted during the spring and summer of 2011 via mail and online by the Ray C. Bliss Institute at the University of Akron. It was distributed to a list of about 900 activists identified as involved with Tea Party organizations in Ohio drawn from public sources, such as websites, news reports, and public records. Researchers also attended a convention of tea party activists in August 2011 to encourage participation in the survey. The survey produced 374 usable responses (a response rate of 49% from the original list, excluding bad addresses). A careful comparison of the results to the original list suggests that the responses are representative. In addition, a parallel survey was conducted of a random sample of donors to a national organization, the Tea Party Express, drawn from public disclosure records. The results of the two surveys were very similar, suggesting that the Ohio results capture the central features of the movement’s activist corps. We would like to express our appreciation to Ohio Tea Party leaders and activists for encouraging participation in the survey, and to the respondents for their time and consideration in completing the survey.

Key Findings

Tea Party Membership: The Ohio activists have a variety of affiliations with movement organizations, national, state and local, with two-thirds belonging to local Tea Party groups. Most activists are strongly attached and heavily involved in these local groups, which have diverse origins.

Tea Party Goals: The Ohio activists support the Tea Party movement because of their principles and values, with a strong focus on electing like-minded candidates. They see political parties as valuable institutions for advancing issues, but are also critical of the operation of the major political parties.

Political Views: The Ohio activists identify as Republicans and conservatives. Their issue priorities are focused on the economy, and they strongly support reducing the size of the federal government. But these activists have conservative views on cultural and foreign policy issues.

Political Leaders: The Ohio activists have mixed views of Republican leaders, feeling close to Ohio Governor John Kasich, but distant from 2008 Republican presidential nominee John McCain. There is no consensus on the activists “first choice” for the 2012 Republican presidential nominee.

Political Activity and Information: The activists report extensive participation in the 2010 campaign and expect to be heavily engaged in the 2012 campaign. They report high levels of a wide variety of political activities, including online. The internet and talk radio are the most common sources of political information for these activists, but they use a variety of media for this purpose.

Demography: In keeping with their political views and level of engagement, these activists tend to be middle age, white men with relatively high levels of education and income. They also report relatively high levels of traditional religiosity and belong to a variety of community organizations.

Detailed Findings:

Tea Party Membership, Recruitment, and Involvement

How are the Ohio Tea Party activists organized? Overall, nearly nine-in-ten of the survey respondents consider themselves to be “a member” of the Tea Party in one form or another (87%). But among such members there was a variety of affiliations (Table 1). Two-fifths (40.2%) of the respondents are affiliated with a national, a state, and a local Tea Party organization. Another one-quarter are affiliated with a national and a local group (24.1%); about one-eighth with a national and state group (13%); and one-twentieth belong to just a national (5.3%) or just to a state/local group (4.4%).

These figures reveal the interplay of national and grassroots organizations among Ohio Tea Party activists, but also a strong grassroots presence: two-thirds of all the respondents report belonging to a local group (68.7%). These local organizations are found in all parts of Ohio and appear to be of diverse origins. More than one-half (53%) are directly linked to the Tea Party movement, and often with one of the national organizations, such as the Tea Party Patriots or Tea Party Nation. More than one-

quarter are “912” groups (inspired by talk radio host Glenn Beck), and about one-tenth are local “Liberty” groups or other conservative organizations (some of which predated the Tea Party movement).

Table 1: Ohio Tea Party Memberships

National, State, and Local Groups	40.2
National and Local Groups	24.1
National and State Groups	13.0
National Group Only	5.3
State and Local Groups	4.4
Not a member of any group	13.0
Total	100.0

Recruitment. How were the Ohio Tea Party activists recruited into the movement? A majority of local Tea Party members say they were self-recruited (Table 2, multiple responses allowed). Two-fifths say they searched for a group to join (41.3%) and another one-sixth said they were organizers of local groups (15%). A little more than one-fifth were recruited by a friend active in a local group (or other friends/family). About one-half of these activists reported that publicity of one kind or another led them to join, with an ad or a notice for the local group being most common (19.6%).

Table 2: Local Tea Party Group Recruitment
% “Yes”

How joined local organization?

I searched for a group to join	41.3
A Tea Party friend asked me	20.0
I saw an ad or notice for group	19.6
Group organizer	15.0
Literature at a political event	11.7
I received mail or email	10.8
Media, publicity	4.2
Rally, event	2.9
Another friend asked me	1.7
Family	0.8

Involvement. How involved are Ohio Tea Party activists in their local organizations? The level of involvement is high (Table 3, multiple responses allowed): four-fifths claim to attend local meetings of the group (79.6%) and seven-in-ten participate in other group activities (69.2%). In addition, three-fifths receive a newsletter (60.8%), more than one-half pay dues or donate to the group (56.3%), and about one-half work with allied groups (49.2%). One-third of the respondents hold a local leadership position.

Table 3: Local Tea Party Group Involvement
% “Yes”

<i>Do you regularly engage in activities?</i>	
Attend local meetings	79.6
Participate in group activities	69.2
Receive newsletter	60.8
Pay dues/donate	56.3
Work with allied groups	49.2
Hold leadership position	33.8

In addition, Ohio Tea Party activists are strongly attached to their organizations, with one-half reporting their attachment as “very strong” and another one-third as “strong.” And they also have a generally positive view of the national leadership of the Tea Party groups (two-thirds choosing in the top-half of a seven-point scale, ranging from “excellent” to “very poor”); they have a modestly more positive view of the leadership of the state and local organizations (seven-in-ten in the top half of the scale).

Goals, Motives, and Political Values

Why do the Ohio Tea Party activists support the movement? Nearly one-half mentioned principles and issues as the reason for their involvement (Table 4, coded from verbatim responses), including reference to the U.S. Constitution, conservatism, patriotism, morals or religious beliefs. More than one-quarter mention economic matters, especially the size and growth of government. And

another one-sixth note problems with the political process, ranging from the government being “out of touch” to corruption.

Table 4: Reasons for Supporting the Tea Party

BELIEFS AND VALUES	
Constitutional Principles	34.2
Bring Conservative Principles	6.3
Patriotism	2.8
Morals/Religious Beliefs	2.5
ECONOMICS	
Size/Growth of Government	18.7
Fiscal Responsibility	5.4
Spending/Debt	3.2
Lowering Taxes	2.2
POLITICAL PROCESS	
Government Out of Touch	10.1
Opposition to Liberals/Progressives/Democrats	4.1
Need for Grassroots Movement	1.9
Corruption Within Government	.9
Other, Miscellaneous	7.7
Total	100.0

Political Goals. What about the political goals of Tea Party organizations? Here there is a strong electoral focus (Table 5): three-fifths of the Ohio Tea Party activists say electing good candidates (60.2%) and one-quarter say protesting the inaction of the major parties (23.9%). Less than one-tenth chose sharing their political beliefs, developing an alternative to the major parties, or offered another goal (often associated with a particular issue).

Table 5: Political Goals of Tea Party Organizations

To elect good candidates to office	60.2
To protest the inaction of Republicans and Democrats	23.9
To share political beliefs with like-minded individuals	6.5
To develop an alternative point of view to the Republicans and Democrats	1.5
Other Goals	7.9
Total	100.0

The electoral goals of the Ohio Tea Party activists are broad based, with four-fifths or more saying it is important to be involved in presidential, congressional, state and local campaigns. Similar numbers identified building a strong organization and raising issues as important goals. The least favored activity was lobbying the government, but almost two-thirds of the activists support this activity.

Personal Motives. These goals are reflected in the Ohio Tea Party activists' personal motivations for political activity in general (Table 6). The top four motives are connected to principles and issues: pursuing important issues (91.2% "very important"); supporting candidates "I believe in" (88.2%); civic duty (80.6%); and reforming the political "system" (79.6%).

Table 6: Personal Motives
% "Very Important"

Pursuing important issues	91.2
Candidates I believe in	88.2
A sense of civic duty	80.6
Reforming the system	79.6
Winning elections	54.7
Support for my party	28.6
Business/employment reasons	24.3
Friendship/social contacts	16.4
Fun and excitement	11.3
My political career	3.7
Social recognition	1.8

One-half of the Ohio Tea Party activists say that “winning elections” is “very important” to their political activity. The least important motives are material and social motives traditionally important to major party activists, such as business/employment (24.3), friendship/social contacts (16.4%), and political career (3.7%).

Political Values. What do the Tea Party activists value in the political process (Table 8)? A large majority of these activists agree that candidates “lose touch with voters once elected” (85.1% agree) and that the most important goal of a political party is to “take the right stands on the issues” (84.9%). A large majority is critical of the major political parties because they are “run for the benefit of special interests” (84.2%), but nearly as many say that good political parties are “essential to American democracy” (77.6%). A smaller majority support the idea of a “multi-party” system in the United States (56.1%).

Table 8: Political Values

% "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"

Once candidates get elected they lose touch with the voters	85.1
The most important goal of a party is to take the right stands on issues	84.9
The major parties are run for the benefit of special interests	84.2
Good political parties are crucial to American democracy	77.6
I'd rather lose an election than compromise on the issues	71.1
America needs a multi-party system	56.1
The most important goal of a party is to win elections	49.3
The key to political success is compromise and coalition building	22.7

In addition, a majority of these activists say they would rather “lose an election than compromise on the issues” (71.1%); one-half agree that the principal goal of political parties is to “win elections” (49.3%); and only one-fifth agree that the key to political success is “compromise and coalition building” (22.7%).

Table 9 supports these patterns among the Ohio Tea Party activists: when asked when they “strongly support” their political party, seven-in-ten say “only when it offers candidates I believe in,” and another one-quarter say they do so only when their party “pursues issues important to me.”

Table 9: Political Party Support
% “Agree”

<i>I tend to strongly support my political party:</i>	
Under all circumstances	12.5
Only when it offers candidates I believe in	70.4
Only when it pursues issues important to me	24.7
Only when the opposition is inferior	1.9
Only when it has a real chance of winning	0.0

Political Views: Identifications, Priorities, and Positions

What are the political identifications of Ohio Tea Party activists? Overall, a majority identify as Republicans (Table 10, first column). More than one-third are “strong Republicans” (35.4%), one-fifth “Republican” (21.1%), and one-quarter “lean Republican” (24.1%)—for a total of four-fifths of the activists. One-eighth say they are independents (12.2%) and less than one-tenth identify as Democrats (7.2%). (One-tenth of these activists also identified with a minor party, such as the Libertarian Party.)

Table 10: Political Identifications

Partisanship		Ideology	
Strong Republican	35.4	Extremely Conservative	23.3
Republican	21.1	Conservative	42.2
Lean Republican	24.1	Somewhat Conservative	14.7
Independent	12.2	Moderate	16.2
Lean Democrat	.9	Liberal	1.8
Democrat	4.8	Somewhat Liberal	1.5
Strong Democrat	1.5	Extremely Liberal	0.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

A majority of Ohio Tea Party activists also identify as conservatives (Table 10, second column): one-quarter as “extremely conservative” (23.3%), two-fifths as “conservative” (42.2%), and one-seventh “slightly conservative” (14.7%)—for a total of four-fifths of the activists. About one-sixth are “moderates” and less than one-twentieth identify as “liberal.” (Less than one-tenth of these activists also identified with another political perspective, such as libertarianism.)

Issue Priorities. What are the issue priorities of Ohio Tea Party activists (Table 11, coding of verbatim responses). Overall, more than one-half of the respondents mentioned an economic problem. Here the national debt and the size of government are the most common topics mentioned. One-sixth of the Ohio Tea Party activists listed a problem with the political process (15.5%), almost as many listed a cultural issue (13.6%), and less than one-tenth mentioned a foreign policy problem (7.9%).

Table 11: Issue Priorities

% "Most Important Problem"

Economic Issues	58.5
Political Process Issues	15.5
Cultural Issues	13.6
Foreign Policy Issues	7.9
Other, Miscellaneous	4.5
Total	100.0

Issue Positions. What positions do Ohio Tea Party activists hold on major issues? Large majorities of activists hold conservative views on most—but not all—economic issues (Table 12). First, there is nearly unanimous agreement that the size of the federal government should be reduced. About nine-of-ten oppose the new federal health care law and agree that federal programs should be returned to the states. Seven-in-ten agree with a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution and disagree that government regulation is necessary to protect consumers and workers. However, nearly three-fifths disagree that trade laws, such as NAFTA and GATT, were good for the United States.

Table 12: Issue Positions

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	Total
Economic Issues				
The size of the Federal government must be reduced	95.1	0.9	4.0	100.0
Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is the right direction for the country	5.4	2.6	92.0	100.0
Federal programs should be returned to the states	87.6	6.9	5.5	100.0
We should amend the constitution to require a balanced budget	71.1	16.7	12.2	100.0
Government regulation is necessary to protect consumers and workers	10.3	19.1	70.6	100.0
NAFTA and GATT were good for America	12.0	29.6	58.4	100.0
Cultural and Foreign Policy Issues				
Minorities need special help to achieve their rightful place	3.5	10.4	86.1	100.0
Homosexuals should be legally allowed to marry	8.3	14.3	77.4	100.0
The U.S. should pull out of the United Nations	75.7	14.8	9.5	100.0
We should sharply restrict immigration into the U.S.	70.3	11.7	18.0	100.0
A woman's right to choose an abortion should be maintained	14.7	16.4	68.9	100.0
Defense spending should be reduced	32.1	22.7	45.2	100.0

The Ohio Tea Party activists also tend to hold conservative views on many—but not all—cultural and foreign policy issues. For example, more than four-fifths disagree with affirmative action, and almost four-fifths disagree with legalizing same-sex marriage. Three-quarters agree that the United States should pull out of the United Nations. Seven-in-ten agree with restricting immigration and are pro-life on abortion. However, these activists are more divided on defense spending, with less than half disagreeing with spending reductions.

Political Leaders and Groups

To whom do the Ohio Tea Party activists feel close to politically? Overall, these activists tend to feel close to many—but not all—conservative leaders and groups, and far from liberal leaders and groups.

By this measure, the Ohio Tea Party activists feel closest to talk radio host Glenn Beck (79.8% close), followed by Ohio Governor John Kasich (78.9%), and 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin (75.1%). Other popular groups include Freedom Works, an organization associated with the Tea Party movement (63.3%), and libertarian and presidential candidate Ron Paul (59.5%)—but also the Christian Coalition (59.5%) and Speaker of the House and Ohio Republican John Boehner (58.2%).

However, the Ohio Tea Party activists do not feel as close to former President George W. Bush (50.4% close), the Chamber of Commerce (40.8% close), and 2008 Republican presidential nominee John McCain (14.6% close and 51.7% far).

Table 13: Proximity to Political Leaders and Groups

	<i>Close</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Far</i>	Total
Glenn Beck	79.8	10.5	9.7	100.0
John Kasich	78.9	11.7	9.4	100.0
Sarah Palin	75.1	16.0	8.9	100.0
Freedom Works	63.3	23.4	13.3	100.0
Christian Coalition	59.5	29.1	11.4	100.0
Ron Paul	59.5	23.2	17.3	100.0
John Boehner	58.2	28.5	13.3	100.0
George W. Bush	50.4	30.7	18.9	100.0
Chamber of Commerce	40.8	45.9	13.3	100.0
John McCain	14.6	33.7	51.7	100.0
Sierra Club	4.2	20.5	75.3	100.0
Ralph Nader	5.0	14.0	81.0	100.0
National Organization for Women (NOW)	3.0	11.5	85.5	100.0
Ted Strickland	4.0	8.6	87.4	100.0
Sherrod Brown	4.7	7.4	87.9	100.0
Bill Clinton	4.5	7.4	88.1	100.0
Hillary Clinton	3.4	6.3	90.3	100.0
AFL-CIO	4.1	5.2	90.7	100.0
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)	4.3	3.2	92.5	100.0
Barack Obama	3.2	0.2	96.6	100.0

In contrast, the Ohio Tea Party activists feel far from liberal groups and leaders, ranging from the Sierra Club (75.3% far) to former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland (87.4%), and Ohio U.S. Senator Democrat Sherrod Brown (87.9%). President Barack Obama (96.6%) is the least popular figure in this question.

2012 Presidential Candidates. Who do the Ohio Tea Party activists favor for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination? Overall, there is no clear consensus among these activists “first choice” of candidates, with no candidate drawing more than about one-tenth of the responses and eight candidates drawing five percent support (Table 14, coded verbatim responses).

Given the volatility of the presidential race, one must view these particular results with great caution. For example, Texas Governor Rick Perry was mentioned rarely partly because he entered the presidential race recently. But this pattern does suggest that the Ohio Tea Party activists have no firm, prior commitment to a potential GOP standard bearer in 2012.

Table 14: First Choice for 2012 GOP Presidential Nomination

<i>Candidate</i>	
Ron Paul	11.2
Sarah Palin	9.7
Michelle Bachmann	9.4
Chris Christie	8.8
Herman Cain	8.2
Mitt Romney	7.0
Newt Gingrich	5.2
Mike Huckabee	5.2
All Others	35.3
Total	100.0

Political Activity and Information

Besides involvement in local Tea Party groups, how active are these individuals in the political process? Three-quarters say they were active in the 2008 campaign (74.2%) and more than four-fifths say they were active in the 2010 campaign (83.9%). When asked about 2012, one-half say they expect to be “very active” in the campaign (50.7%) and another two-fifths expect to be active (36.8%).

Specific Activities. The Ohio Tea Party activists report extensive participation in a wide variety of political activities in 2010 (Table 15). For example, more than three-quarters signed a petition (83.4%) and contacted a public official (78.9%); more than three-fifths made a campaign contribution (65.7%) and attended a campaign rally (62%); approximately one-half attended a party meeting (53.7%) and demonstrated or protested (46.5%).

Table 15: Specific Political Activities
% in 2010

Signed petition	83.4
Contacted public official	78.9
Made campaign contribution	65.7
Attended campaign rally	62.0
Attended party meeting	53.7
Demonstrated/protested	46.5
Wrote letter to editor	34.3
Recruited campaign volunteers	34.1
Canvassed door-to-door	30.2
Organized a political event	24.4
Raised campaign funds	20.8
Served as a party official	13.3
Ran for public office	11.4

In addition, roughly one-third wrote a letter to the editor (34.3%), recruited campaign volunteers (34.1%), and canvassed door-to-door (30.2%). One-quarter said they organized a political event (24.4%) and one-fifth raised campaign funds (20.8%). And finally, about one-eighth served as a

party official (13.3%) and ran for public office (11.4%). Other evidence reveals that many of these activists have long been involved in politics.

Online Activity. The Ohio Tea Party activists also report participation in a wide variety of online political activities in 2010 (Table 16). Two-thirds or more signed an online petition (72.6%), emailed political information to friends (71.2%), read a political blog (69.5%), viewed a political video (67.3%), or signed up for political emails (66.2%). Between one-half and two-fifths of these activists say they made a donation online (49.3%), participated in a “meet up” (46.3%), emailed a campaign (45.7%), downloaded voter guides (45.7%) and “friended” a candidate (43.5%). Almost one-third listened to a political podcast (30.5%). And between one-quarter and one-tenth contributed to internet content by talking politics on a social media (26.6%), wrote about politics on a blog (24.4%), engaged in a live web chat (19.9%), raised money online (11.4%) and sent political “tweets” (11.4%).

Table 16: Online Political Activity
% in 2010

Signed online petition	72.6
Emailed political information to friends	71.2
Read political blog	69.5
Viewed political video	67.3
Signed up for political emails	66.2
Made online political donation	49.3
Participated in a political "meet-up"	46.3
Emailed a campaign	45.7
Downloaded voter guides	45.7
"Friended" a candidate	43.5
Listened to political podcast	30.5
Talked politics on social media	26.6
Wrote about politics on a blog	24.4
Live web chat on politics	19.9
Raised money online	11.4
Sent political "tweets"	11.4

Political Information. Where do the Ohio Tea Party activists obtain political information? More than four-fifths say the Internet (84.8%) and more than three-quarters say talk radio (78.7%) are important sources of political information for them. TV news ranks next, with nearly three-fifths (59.3%), followed by newspapers (40.2%), radio news (39.9%), and family/friends (39.6%), all at about two-fifths. Approximately one-fifth report newsletters (22.4%), social media (21.6%), opinion magazines (20.2%), and religious broadcasting (17.7%) as important. Direct mail, co-workers, and faxes were the least important.

Table 17: Sources of Political Information
% Important

Internet	84.8
Talk radio	78.7
TV news	59.3
Newspapers	40.2
Radio news	39.9
Family/friends	39.6
Newsletters	22.4
Social media	21.6
Opinion magazines	20.2
Religious broadcasting	17.7
Direct mail	12.5
Co-workers	10.8
Faxes	1.7

Demography and Community Groups. The Ohio Tea Party activists have the demographic characteristics generally associated with conservatives and Republicans. Overall, they tend to be male (58.1%), white (96.7%), and over 50 years of age (70.1%). A majority has a college degree or post-graduate training (60.6%) and almost one-half have an annual family income of over \$75,000 (48.6%). But less than one-twentieth have an annual family income of over \$250,000.

A majority of the Ohio Tea Party activists say they attend worship services once a week or more often (55.4%). Two-thirds are Protestants and one-quarter Roman Catholics; one-quarter claim to be “born again” Christians and two-fifths identify as “traditional” in religious terms. Nearly one-half of the activists live in suburban communities within the state’s metropolitan areas, and about the same percentage live in non-metropolitan urban places or in rural areas.

Table 17: Age, Education, Income, and Worship Attendance

<i>Age</i>	
18-35	8.3
36-50	21.6
51-65	48.0
over 65	22.1
Total	100.0

<i>Education</i>	
High school graduate or less	7.3
Some college	32.1
College graduate	32.1
Post-graduate training	28.5
Total	100.0

<i>Income</i>	
Less than 25,000	5.4
25,001 to 50,000	18.8
50,001 to 75,000	27.2
75,001 to 100,000	20.8
100,001 to 175,000	17.3
175,001 to 250,000	5.8
More than 250,000	4.7
Total	100.0

<i>Worship attendance</i>	
More than once a week	17.8
Once a week	37.6
Once or twice a month	10.7
Several times a year	10.1
Seldom	18.0
Never	5.8
Total	100.0

Ohio Tea Party activists report belonging to a variety of community groups besides local Tea Party organizations. For example, two-thirds belong to a church or religious group (65.7%), three-fifths to a conservative political group (60.7%), and more than one-half to a gun owners group (54.3%). One-third belongs to a professional group (34.1%) and about one-quarter to a community (27.1%) or a civic association (24.4%). One-fifth belongs to a business (22.4%) or a taxpayers group (19.7%). Only a small portion of these activists are members of fraternal, women’s, environmental, or liberal political groups.

Table 18: Community Group Memberships

% Belong

Church/religious group	65.7
Conservative political group	60.7
Gun owner	54.3
Professional association	34.1
Community group	27.1
Civic association	24.4
Business association	22.4
Taxpayers group	19.7
Fraternal	12.2
Women's group	9.7
Environmental group	3.9
Liberal political group	1.4