

# Tea Party Women

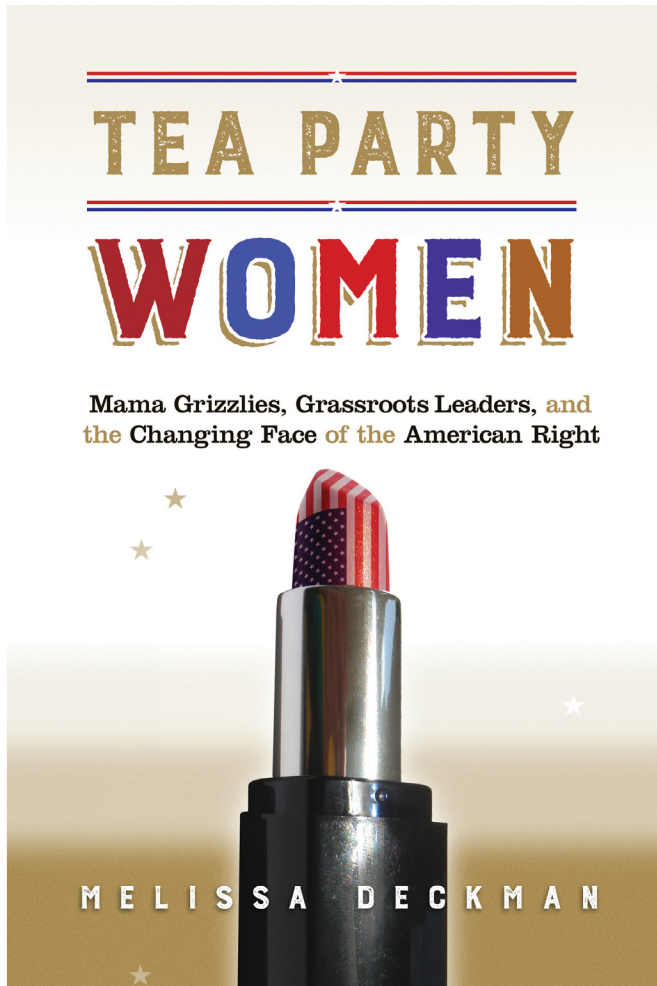
## Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right

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### Instructor's Guide

Notable for its radical conservative views, the Tea Party is progressive in one way that much of mainstream US politics is not: it has among its most vocal members not spokesmen but spokeswomen. Michelle Bachmann, Sarah Palin, Governor Nikki Haley, US Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, and many others are all prominent figureheads for the fiery and prominent political movement. Many major Tea Party organizations, such as the Tea Party Patriots, are led by women and women have been instrumental in founding new right wing organizations for women, such as Smart Girl Politics, with ties to the movement.

In *Tea Party Women*, Melissa Deckman explores the role of women in creating and leading the movement and the greater significance of women's involvement in the Tea Party for our understanding of female political leadership and the future of women in the American Right. Through national-level public opinion data, observation at Tea Party rallies, and interviews with female Tea Party leaders, Deckman demonstrates that many Tea Party women find the grassroots, decentralized nature of the movement to be more inclusive for them than mainstream Republican politics. She lays out the ways in which these women gain traction by recasting conservative political issues such as the deficit and gun control as issues affecting families, and how they rely on traditional gender roles as mothers and homemakers to underscore their particular expertise in understanding these issues. Furthermore, she examines how many Tea Party women claim to write off traditional feminist issues like reproductive rights and gender discrimination as distracting from the real issues affecting women, such as economic policies, and how some even reclaim the mantle of 'feminism' as signifying freedom and independence from government overreach—tactics that have over time been adopted by mainstream Republicans. Whether the Tea Party terrifies or fascinates you, *Tea Party Women* provides a behind-the-scenes look at the women behind an enduring and influential faction in American politics.



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Politics |

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: Mama Grizzlies Rising Up

*Pages 1-29*

**Summary:** This chapter briefly discusses the major findings of the study about women in the Tea Party. First, it lays out why women have emerged as leaders within the Tea Party, especially in comparison to their role in the Republican Party. Second, it introduces the gendered rhetoric used by Tea Party women to defend and promote their conservative positions on economic policy, health care reform, the social welfare state, and gun rights. Lastly, it makes the case that Tea Party women are still likely to face an uphill battle when it comes to shaping the public opinion of most American women, who are generally far more supportive of a larger role for government to play in terms of the social safety net and regulation of the American economy.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. What methods does Deckman use to address her questions about women's role in the Tea Party and how responsive women in the general public may be to their message?
2. What is the "Sarah Palin" effect?
3. How do Tea Party women challenge what we know about women's "interests" in the political world?

#### Resources:

1. Watch Sarah Palin's SARAHPAC ad that adopts the "Mama Grizzly" metaphor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsUVL6ciK-c>. Why does she say that conservative politics should be appealing to women?

## CHAPTER 2

### Top Conservatives and Grassroots Leaders: the Women Behind the Tea Party

Pages 30-97

**Summary:** This chapter introduces women who make up the ranks of the Tea Party elite, including women who have founded and/or are currently leading national Tea Party organizations and well as self-identified Tea Party women nationally. The chapter profiles Tea Party women elites who are leading Tea Party organizations, both those that aim to reach a broad audience of men *and* women supporters and those that are more specifically geared at women, particularly Smart Girl Politics and As a Mom...A Sisterhood of Mommy Patriots. In addition, the chapter considers how more established conservative women's groups, such as the Independent Women's Forum, Eagle Forum, and Concerned Women for America, approach the Tea Party, relying on interviews with their directors. The analysis also incorporates interviews with women active in state and local Tea Party politics for a perspective on why they joined the Tea Party. Next, the chapter examines which American women nationally are likely to identify as part of the Tea Party using national survey data from Public Religion Research Institute and consider how Tea Party women compare with two other groups of American women: Republicans who do not consider themselves part of the Tea Party and women who are Democrats or who are politically independent. The chapter also considers how Tea Party women compare with Tea Party men on a host of measures, including a comparison of the roots of women's support for the Tea Party with men who support the Tea Party.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do many conservative women leaders believe the Tea Party holds appeal for women potentially?
2. How have conservative women's experience with the Republican Party and their attitudes about the Republican Party led them to be active in the Tea Party?
3. How has social media been critical to the success of Tea Party women?
4. How do Smart Girl Politics and As a Mom...a Sisterhood of Mommy Patriots represent different facets of Tea Party women's involvement? How are they similar?
5. How do Tea Party women nationally differ from Republican women who do not identify as part of the Tea Party? Or from other American women?
6. How do Tea Party women compare with men who also identify as part of the Tea Party?

**Resources:**

1. For a better understanding of Tea Party organizations today, including the ones profiled in this chapter, check out the following websites and/or twitter feeds:
  - a. <https://www.teapartypatriots.org>
  - b. <https://twitter.com/officialsgp>
  - c. <http://www.chicksontheright.com>

## CHAPTER 3

### A New Civic Motherhood? The Evolution of Conservative Women's Political Rhetoric

Pages 98-131

**Summary:** This chapter places Tea Party women in larger historical context, examining the role of earlier “Mama Grizzlies” in 20th century conservative causes such as Temperance, Suffrage, anti-communism, and, lastly, the anti-ERA campaign. Particular attention is paid to how these early female activists used their status as mothers to compel women to participate in conservative causes. Reliance on motherhood rhetoric, often steeped in religious fervor, provided for these traditional women a legitimate rationale to engage in the male-dominated world of politics, albeit largely as behind-the-scene movement organizers. While employing their status as mothers gave women a sense of political agency in these earlier causes, when combined with social norms of the day, it also effectively placed limits on their ability to engage in political issues that superseded family concerns. In contrast to earlier female conservative activists, Tea Party women are engaged in political advocacy at a time when women are more fully engaged in public life and in the workforce. Yet perhaps paradoxically, much of their political rhetoric remains steeped in motherhood appeals. This chapter takes a closer look at the motherhood frame developed by women of the Tea Party to build support among American women for its vision for limiting the size and scope of government. At the same time, some Tea Party women have deliberately avoided using this type of rhetoric as a way to build broader support for the Tea Party movement.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. How do Tea Party women potentially differ from previous generations of conservative women activists, particularly women engaged in the Christian Right?
2. What three variations of the motherhood theme does Deckman identify in her analyses that are often invoked by Tea Party women to defend their conservative views?
3. What are some downsides of the use of motherhood appeals by Tea Party women to grow the movement, according to some Tea Party women?

#### Resources:

1. To learn more about Phyllis Schlafly, watch these video segments of The Makers: <http://www.makers.com/phyllis-schlafly> and read about her organization Eagle Forum: <http://www.eagleforum.org>.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Sexist Safety Net: Free Enterprise as Feminist Principle

Pages 132-174

**Summary:** This chapter considers how Tea Party women view economic inequality, the role of government in addressing economic inequality, and tax policy. This chapter also considers why Tea Party and other conservative women actively oppose efforts by the federal government to issues regulations aimed at combating sex discrimination and pay equity. The chapter demonstrates that many Tea Party women employ gendered rhetoric that moves beyond the motherhood frame as to why limiting the size and scope of government is good for American women, much of which has been increasingly adopted by prominent Republican women in Congress. While Tea Party women's advocacy in these areas demonstrates that American women are far from monolithic in their policy choices, the national data demonstrate that most American women disagree with Tea Party women's positions. In some cases, even self-identified Tea Party women nationally are not as conservative in their views as Tea Party movement leaders or prominent GOP women.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. What was the Life of Julia meme and how does it help illuminate Tea Party women's concerns about the social safety net and the role of the federal government in Americans' lives?
2. What sorts of gendered claims do some Tea Party women make about the size and scope of government apart from the Motherhood Frame introduced in Chapter 3?
3. Why do Tea Party women believe that government programs aimed at helping get women out of poverty are not effective for women? Why do some believe such programs may even be sexist? How do such views link with classic conservative values?
4. Why do Tea Party women oppose the Affordable Care Act and the Birth Control Mandate? Why do they think such policies are bad for women ultimately?
5. In what ways, according to the analysis of national PRRI data, do Tea Party women in the general public depart from Republican leaders or conservative policy wonks when it comes to social welfare policies and government regulations?
6. Why do some conservative women leaders reject policies intended to boost women's average salaries compared with men, such as the Paycheck Fairness Act?

**Resources:**

1. Consider analyses by the Independent Women's Forum who oppose progressive policies that liberal women's groups often tout, specifically those geared at "women who work." What are some of its opposition to more government involvement in helping women better balance their work and family lives and in addressing pay equity? <http://www.iwf.org/issues>.

## CHAPTER 5

### Freedom Feminism: Individualism, Conservatism, and Gender Roles

Pages 175-213

**Summary:** This chapter considers Tea Party women's attitudes on feminism and gender roles and compares them with other American women nationally. Some Tea Party women are willing to embrace identification as feminists if allowed to define it in their own terms. For other Tea Party women, particularly those with conservative religious values, feminism is a concept that is too tied to abortion rights and to the denigration of traditional gender roles, so they reject attempts by some conservative women's to reclaim the feminist label. One unifying feature, however, among Tea Party women is outright hostility to liberal feminists, who they believe portray women as victims in need of government help. This chapter also considers whether Tea Party women are nationally distinct from other American women in terms of attitudes about gender roles, more generally, and abortion rights and sex discrimination, more specifically—all issues that liberal feminist groups maintain that government should actively address.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do Tea Party women and prominent Republican women denounce the claims by Democratic leaders that the right is waging “a War on Women?”
2. Why do some Tea Party women, such as Sarah Palin, reclaim feminism? Can Tea Party women be considered feminists? Why do some Tea Party women remain steadfastly opposed to the feminist label?
3. How have more current debates among Tea Party and conservative women with respect to feminism echo similar ones during the rise of the “New Right” in the 1980s? How are they different?
4. Why do Tea Party women reject the modern feminist movement?
5. Why do some libertarian women in the Tea Party take issue with feminism?
6. Turning to the national data, how do the views of Tea Party women differ from other American women when it comes to sex discrimination and gender roles, or do they? Do Tea Party women in the general public differ from Tea Party elite women leaders on these issues? Explain.

#### Resources:

1. Watch Sarah Palin's speech to the Susan B Anthony List in 2010: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?293509-1/sarah-palin-remarks-prolife-agenda>. Why does Palin believe there is an emerging conservative feminist identity in American politics?
2. In Reason.com, Christina Hoff Sommer's defends “freedom feminism.” Read her analysis here: <https://reason.com/archives/2014/01/18/saving-feminism>



3. Consider the case of Carly Fiorina, who ran unsuccessfully to be the Republican Party's presidential nominee in 2016. What does Fiorina have to say about feminism and voting for Hillary Clinton: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/hillary-clinton-feminism-carly-fiorina/487886/>.

## CHAPTER 6

### Guns are the Great Equalizer: Mama Grizzlies and the Right to Bear Arms

Pages 214-241

**Summary:** While the Tea Party's emergence was rooted in the fiscal crisis of 2008, support for gun rights has become a dominant issue for the movement in wake of national gun tragedies that has sparked debate about gun control initiatives. Passion for gun rights has long been a hallmark of conservative political activism, certainly, but Tea Party groups have joined more traditional pro Second Amendment organizations such as the National Rifle Association in fiercely defending the right to bear arms. And, in a notable twist, part of the new effort to defend the right to bear arms has involved women. This chapter considers the "gendered" tone that inhabits the rhetoric of Tea Party women who defend their right to bear arms, particularly as it relates to their ability to protect their families. It also examines whether Tea Party women are distinct in their attitudes about the need for gun control, concealed weapons, and the second amendment as an important Constitutional right.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are recent trends when it comes to gun ownership among American women in the past few decades?
2. What sorts of gendered arguments do pro-gun women make as to why gun rights are especially important to women?
3. How do such debates about extending women's access to gun extend to college campuses? Do most American women think this is a good idea?
4. Do Tea Party women and Republican women who do not identify with the Tea Party nationally differ in their attitudes about gun ownership?
5. Are there any surprising findings with respect to American women's attitudes about gun rights? Explain.

#### Resources:

1. Watch this ad by pro-gun proponent Dana Loesch. Why does Loesch invoke motherhood to defend her position on guns? <http://danaloeschradio.com/moms-like-me-new-nra-ad-featuring-dana-loesch>.
2. Take a look at Shoot Like a Girl, an organization geared at getting more women involved in gun sports. <http://www.shootlikeagirl.com/about.html>. What is its position on the 2nd Amendment?

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion: Tea Party Women and the Future of American Politics

Pages 242-258

**Summary:** The major findings from the book are summarized in the conclusion, including discussion about how Tea Party women differ from earlier generations of conservative women activists. It also details how some Tea Party women are shaping the larger political dialogue about how conservative issues are women's issues, with some Tea Party women actually reclaiming the feminist mantle. Lastly, the conclusion considers the challenges that the Tea Party faces in convincing more American women to side with its views.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. What challenges does the Tea Party face in trying to get more socially conservative women active in their cause? What potential opportunities exist?
2. What challenges and opportunities do Tea Party women face in working with the Republican Party?
3. Why is it likely that Tea Party is off-putting to many American women in the general public? Alternatively, what areas might offer some promise for the Tea Party in the future when it comes to convincing women that their stands on economic policies are better for American women?