

Melissa Deckman. *Tea Party Women: Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right.* New York: New York University Press, 2016. xi, 343 pp. (\$95.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper).

In the early weeks of the Obama administration, the idea of a protest movement against the federal government's plans for a mortgage foreclosure relief program burst upon the cable TV scene in the form of a reporter's rant, then rapidly cascaded across the media and digital echo chamber, and resulted in public demonstrations and the formation of numerous free-market, limited-government, grassroots advocacy organizations whose political backing helped propel some fiscally and constitutionally conservative candidates to victory in the 2010 midterm elections. Since that time, the Tea Party has become an important subject for scholars of social and political movements, political ideology, state and local politics, Congress, political parties, public opinion, and voting behavior. By incorporating a gender dimension – most significantly, an analysis of the key contributions of female Tea Party leaders and activists to the movement's public discourse and policy emphases -- Melissa Deckman's *Tea Party Women* adds a most welcome and worthy contribution to this burgeoning scholarship.

Utilizing the qualitative research technique of textual analysis of the (predominantly online) documents, blogs, and Twitter feeds of Tea Party female leaders and their organizations, Deckman finds that unlike their male counterparts these women construct uniquely gendered appeals that variously focus on a *motherhood* frame (mothers as adept at balancing the family budget and thus as overseers of the federal budget; mothers' role in reducing the debt burden for future generations; mothers fighting government programs that usurp the role of the family; and mothers as protectors of the family via fiscal responsibility and even gun ownership) and a *big-government-as-harmful-to-women-in-general* frame (big government promotes female dependency; paints women as victims; and promotes a "war on women" by limiting their individual agency and equality). Deckman supplements her content analyses with semi-structured interviews of both local and national Tea Party activists, and presents in-depth case studies of their backgrounds, political and social attitudes and concerns, and paths to leadership within their various Tea Party organizations. From these interviews, it becomes obvious that there has been no single route to female Tea Party support or activism and that a nuanced explanation is essential.

Deckman also carefully notes that there exists a diverse array of Tea Party organizations, and that while all support fiscal restraint and a reduction in big government as primary goals and present individual liberty as their underlying value, some are predominantly libertarian whereas others are more socially and culturally conservative. Thus both the issues they emphasize and the discourse they employ vary, and Deckman provides useful illustrations of these differences in her textual analyses as well as the summaries of her interviews. And in her comparison of the role of Tea Party women to that of earlier female conservatives, Deckman provides an informative discussion of how the Tea Party's dispersed organizational structure has helped female activists to start and grow their own organizations, and how the external "opportunity structure" – i.e., gains in women's educational and professional backgrounds, coupled with the Republican Party's quite rigid and hierarchical organizational structure that has been reluctant to welcome right-leaning women to leadership positions – has enabled politically conservative

entrepreneurial women to emerge as independent political forces. An additional qualitative analysis of the differing political perspectives of female Tea Party and female GOP leaders provides further understanding of the often-subtle differences found within contemporary conservative U.S. political ideology.

A strength of *Tea Party Women* is Deckman's inclusion of a wealth of 2012 and 2014 cross-national survey research data from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). Her analyses of the American Values Surveys and Religion Surveys allow her to situate the information gleaned from her interviews and textual analyses within a wider comparative context that provides answers to the following questions: How do the attitudes of Tea Party supporters in the mass public compare to those of its leaders? How do the attitudes of male Tea Party leaders contrast with those of its female leaders? How do the attitudes of male Tea Party supporters compare to those of female supporters? Of particular interest is Deckman's discussion of the sizable gap between the attitudes of female Tea Party supporters and leaders and the opinions of the usually more liberal female public – as well as many women's hesitancy to accept the Tea Party's "take no prisoners" rhetorical style -- and hence the problems confronting those who wish to expand the popularity and longevity of the Tea Party.

To answer additional questions about the major determinants of Tea Party identification as well as whether and how Tea Party membership affects attitudes on a variety of social and political issues, Deckman conducts a series of logistic regression analyses and clearly analyzes the results in the latter chapters of the book. Her discussion of the similarities as well as differences between Tea Party women and GOP women who do not support the Tea Party is particularly instructive. A quick methodological note is also warranted: the tables and charts she includes in the text are very accessible even to a non-statistically sophisticated audience, while the data analysis in the Appendix should provide additional detailed information for those who wish to understand the specifics of her quantitative analyses.

One of the hallmarks of excellent research is that it promotes further investigation of the topic as well as new ways of framing the research questions. While *Tea Party Women* was published during the waning days of the 2016 presidential primaries, it relies on textual analyses, intensive interviews, and surveys from several years prior to the current election campaign. It is my hope that Professor Deckman will continue her fine qualitative and quantitative exploration of the backgrounds, worldviews, and public discourse of female Tea Party supporters and leaders, uncovering patterns of both continuity and change in their beliefs, opinions, and voting patterns, especially in light of the harsh and misogynistic discourse of Donald Trump.

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