

How the Resist Trump movement could transform into the Tea Party of the left

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Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the United States has sparked waves of mass protests against his administration as well as the disruption of many legislators' town hall meetings. [Melissa Deckman](#) draws the parallels between the current emerging Resist Trump movement and 2009's Tea Party protests against President Obama. She writes that while this new movement appears to have far more support than the Tea Party ever did, it faces significant challenges in translating this into significant electoral victories.



In 2017, millions of Americans have taken to the streets to protest the new President while disrupting congressional town-hall meetings nationwide over concerns about health care reform. Sound familiar? Such activism on the part of progressives appears to take a page out of the playbook of the conservative Tea Party movement, which also held marches early in Obama's presidency to protest his administration's efforts to expand the size and scope of government. These activists swarmed congressional town hall meetings too, in bitter reaction to what would ultimately become the Affordable Care Act.

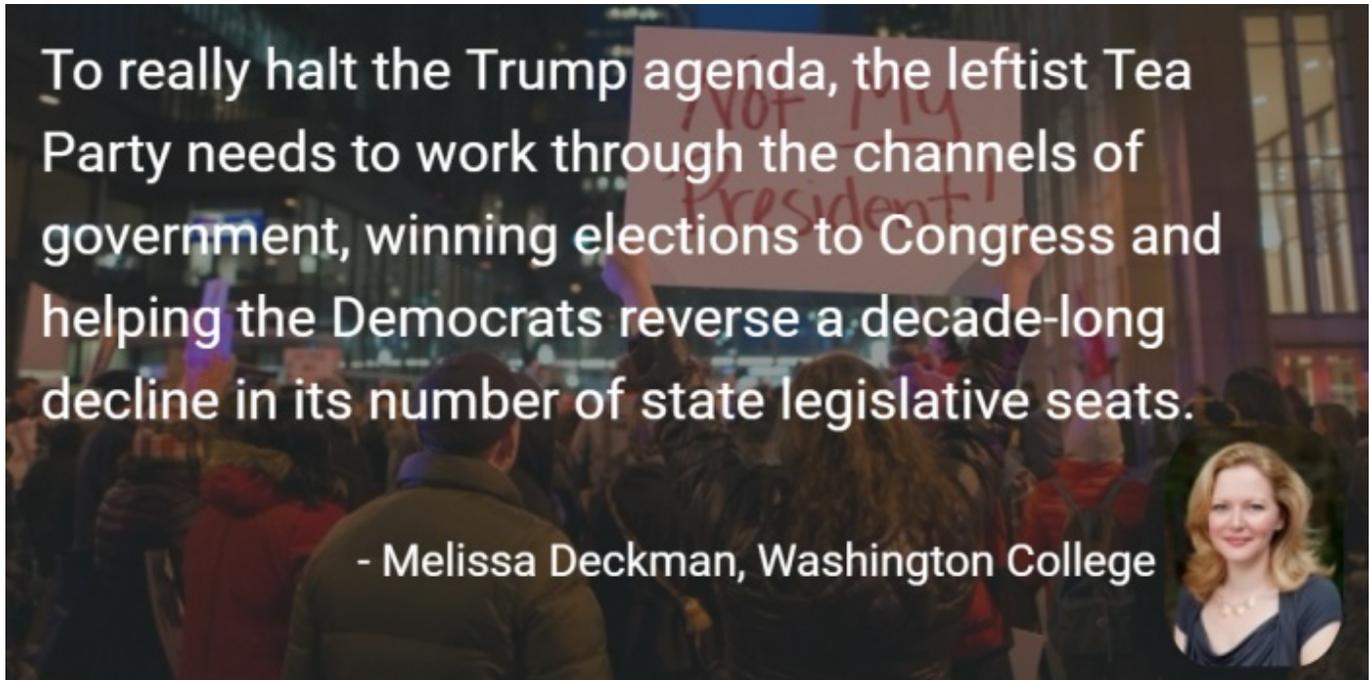
Although they are poles apart politically, there are striking similarities between the two movements. Both have drawn an unprecedented level of first-time activists into politics, despite attempts by political leaders on both sides to dismiss such activism as the product of elite forces. In 2009, [then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared](#) that Tea Party activism across the country was really the result of a well-organized campaign funded by longer-standing right-wing organizations such as [FreedomWorks](#)—with ties to the billionaire Koch Brothers—rather than an authentic groundswell of activists concerned about the liberal policies emanating from Washington. While it is true that the Tea Party was and continues to be aided by professional organizations through logistical support and other resources, [my own research](#) and the [work of others](#) demonstrates that many such activists came to the movement as political novices at the grassroots.

Similarly, Donald Trump is dismissing progressively-bent activists who are turning out in large numbers as a response to his election as the work of liberal political professionals, [tweeting](#), “The so-called angry crowds in home districts of some Republicans are actually, in numerous cases, planned out by liberal activists. Sad!” Yet it appears that [many Americans who have signed on](#) to be part of the Resist Trump movement represent an authentic groundswell of opposition to Trump.

Social media has also proven to be the lifeblood of both political movements. The Tea Party's initial success can be attributed, in part, to its adroit use of Twitter and Facebook to raise awareness about its political causes and to serve as a platform for newer grassroots activists looking to make an impact in politics apart from the traditional and more labor-intensive avenue of Republican Party politics. Likewise, the most popular on-line resource to emerge among newer activists on the left is the [Indivisible Guide](#), written by a [group of former Democratic congressional staffers](#) right after Trump's election to give practical advice on political organizing based, in part, on lessons learned from the Tea Party's success. It also identifies local organizations that have sprung up nationally, helping political newcomers find like-minded activists to join in their opposition to the new administration's policies and to fight more conservative policies touted by many Republican-controlled state legislatures and city councils. In this respect, the organizers of Indivisible echo the work of Tea Party Patriots, a social media organization formed after Obama's election that helped to [bring together like-minded conservative activists with local chapters of Tea Party groups nationally](#).

There are important differences between the two movements, however. While both started as movements reacting

to a President whose views they found objectionable, the Resist Trump movement may be starting with an advantage in terms of public support. At the height of the Tea Party's success in late 2010, when it appeared that Tea Party activism helped propel the GOP takeover of Congress, [only about 3 in 10 Americans](#) considered themselves supporters of the movement. While there is relatively little polling out yet on this nascent movement on the left, the Washington Post reported [that 60 percent of Americans](#) said they supported the Women's March that took place one week after Trump's inauguration.



While broad public support for a political movement does not always result in the willingness of individuals to engage in sustained, political activism, there is some reason for optimism for Trump opponents. [Several studies estimate](#) that the number of Tea Party organizations active at the grassroots level likely numbered fewer than 1,000 in 2010. By contrast, [more than 6,000 local groups](#) as of mid-February have registered at IndivisibleGuide.com.

To really halt the Trump agenda, the leftist Tea Party needs to work through the channels of government, winning elections to Congress and helping the Democrats reverse a [decade-long decline in its number of state legislative seats](#). Indeed, the reason the Tea Party has been largely successful from a policy perspective on many fronts has been its ability to shape the GOP into a more conservative party, capitalizing on its ability to frighten moderate Republicans with Tea Party challenges in congressional primaries.

But that strategy faces two big hurdles. First, it is unclear if the activists involved in the Resist Trump movement view the Democratic Party as the vehicle through which to channel its political passion—or if the movement represents a far more progressive brand of politics that the “establishment” Democrats have been reluctant to embrace. Second, even if the Resist Trump movement can be harnessed effectively through the Democrats, the 2018 midterm electoral map favors the Republican Party. In the US Senate, for instance, [Democrats have to defend 23 seats](#) (plus the two independents who caucus with the Dems) compared with 8 Republicans; moreover, many of those seats are in states that Trump won last November. That midterm electorates are typically older and trend more white and conservative than presidential electorates, combined with the fact that Republicans [now hold a 24-seat advantage](#) in many gerrymandered districts designed to maximize GOP control in the House of Representatives, means the Democrats will have their work cut out for them.

Yet, stranger things have happened. Democrats faced long odds in winning back control of Congress in 2006, but they capitalized on Americans' extreme displeasure with the Bush administration. If Trump remains particularly unpopular, and the initial burst of left-leaning activism across the nation builds into a sustained political movement,

then the Resist Trump forces may have an enormous impact on our politics, perhaps for years to come.

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