



A REPUBLIC, If We Can Keep It

Saving America, Once Again: Comparing the Anti-Trump Resistance to the Tea Party

Theda Skocpol (Harvard University)

MEMO PREPARED FOR CONFERENCE: A REPUBLIC, IF WE CAN KEEP IT

On April 12-13th, 2018, researchers, scholars, journalists, and policymakers came together at New America in Washington D.C. to address questions about the health and resiliency of American democracy. This conference considered questions such as: Can a liberal democracy and representative government persist in the United States? Are we experiencing a breakdown of democracy? Are checks and balances that are built into the political system and the mediating institutions that link citizens and government strong enough to sustain liberal democracy?

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SAVING AMERICA, ONCE AGAIN

Comparing the Anti-Trump Resistance to the Tea Party

**Theda Skocpol, Harvard University
(with Vanessa Williamson, Brookings Institution)**

MEMO FOR CONFERENCE

hosted by

Center for the Study of Inequality at Cornell University & New America

on

“A Republic, If We Can Keep It”

April 12-13, 2018

New America, 740 15th Street NW, Washington, DC

“We always voted, but being busy people, we just didn’t keep as involved as maybe we should have. And now we’re to the point where we’re really worried about our country. I feel like we came out of retirement. We do Tea Party stuff to take the country back to where we think it should be.”

-- Arizona husband (age 69) and wife (age 67) who organized a Tea Party in April 2009

“I had always been a consistent... voter [and]... donated to my party and some select candidates.... But... I had not been super involved. I felt secure that we had reasonable and competent leadership in Washington. Even the ones I disagreed with.... Then, the presidential campaign in 2016 became more and more ridiculous, and frightening – and ... our very worst nightmare happened. My life changed overnight on November 8th. My peace of mind was robbed from me. I was called to action.... I feel like a soldier in a war, trying to save this country, my children’s future, the climate! And the list keeps growing.”

-- Wisconsin woman (age 55) who organized a resistance group soon after the 2016 election

Emergence of Tea Party protests and groups

Nov. 4, 2008: Barack Obama elected first African American president, with Democratic Congress.

Jan. 20, 2009: President Obama inaugurated with record numbers of DC celebrants.

Feb. 2009: Scattered “Porkulus” protests as the Stimulus was debated in Congress and enacted.

Feb. 19, 2009: “Rant” by CNBC’s Rick Santelli called for a “Chicago Tea Party” protest. Went viral.

Feb. 20, 2009: 50 conservative leaders in conference call to promote “Tea Party” movement

Feb. 21, 2009: FreedomWorks issues Steinhauser’s “How to Organize Your Own ‘Tea Party Protest.’”

Feb. 27, 2009: Initial Tea Party rallies in dozens of cities across the country.

March 2009: Tea Party Patriots founded in Atlanta, by Jenny Beth Martin and Mark Meckler as an umbrella group for activists and local Tea Parties (ultimately claimed 2,200 groups).

April 16, 2009: Tax Day Tea Party protests across country, following weeks of Fox News buildup.

Spring 2009ff: Local citizen activists form 1000-1,500 regularly meeting Tea Parties.

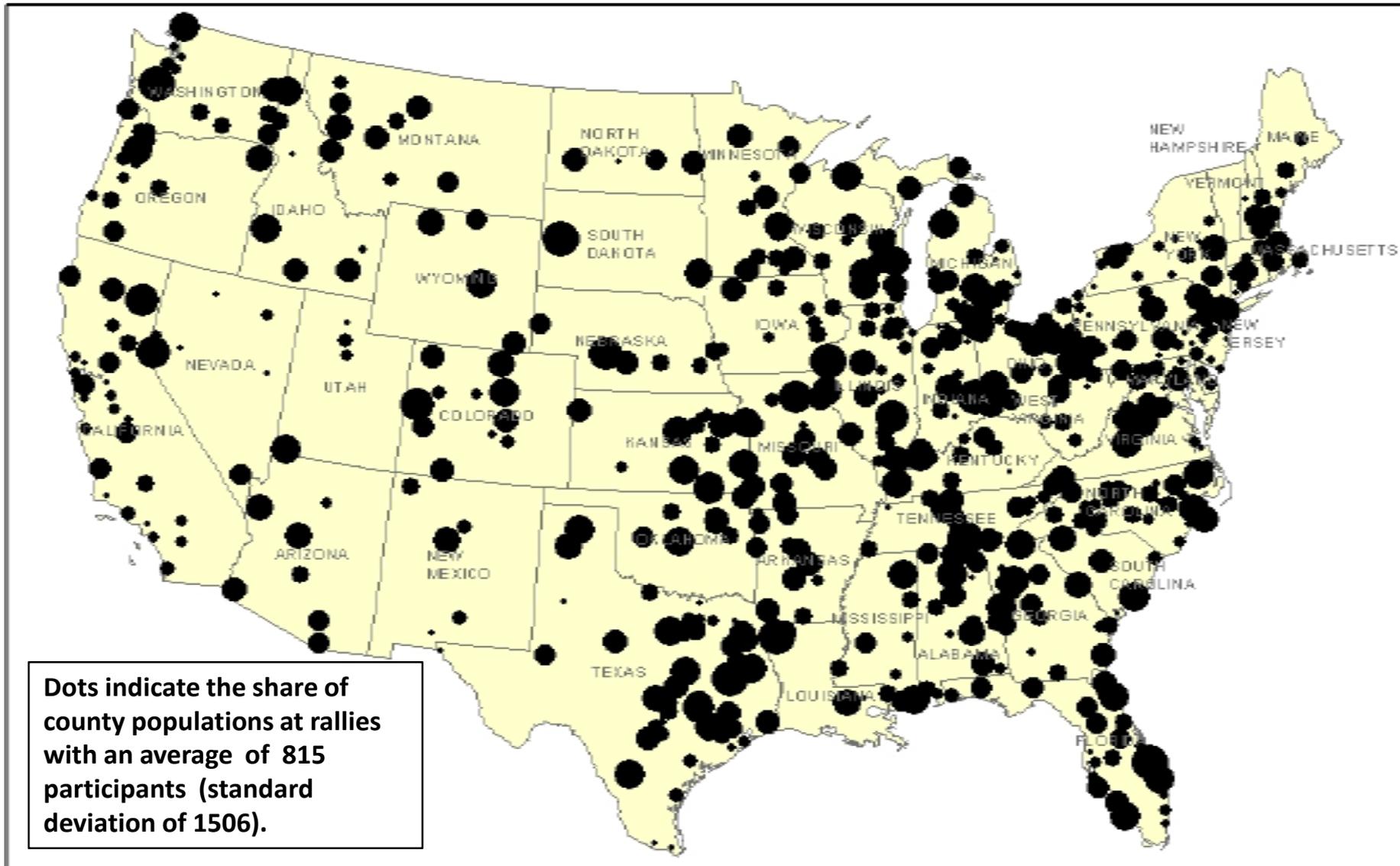
Summer 2009: Protests against the health reform effort – many at August Congressional Town Halls.

September 12, 2009: March in Washington DC with c.60,000-75,000 Tea Party protesters.

November 2, 2010: Mid-term elections bring huge GOP majorities in the U.S. House, governorships, and state legislatures. Many Tea Party supporting candidates elected.

Tea Party Rallies on Tax Day, April 15, 2009

444,000 to 810,000 protesters nationwide in 542 counties



Source: Madestam et al., "Do Protests Matter?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2013).

Emergence of anti-Trump protests and groups

Nov. 8, 2016: Donald Trump wins narrow Electoral College victory; GOP maintains control of Congress.

Before and after Nov 8: Clinton supporters connect via *Pantsuit Nation* to anticipate, then organize.

Mid-Nov. 2016: Action Together Network founded to support “leaders of activist groups.”

Dec. 14, 2016: Former Congressional staffers led by Ezra Levin and Leah Greenberg post on Google docs *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda*.

Jan, 20, 2017: Inauguration of President Donald Trump.

Jan. 21, 2017: Massive Women’s Marches in DC and 600 places against Trump and for women’s rights.

March 2017: Indivisible organized with a website and map and DC-headquarters with dozens of staff.

During 2017: Marches and rallies by anti-Trump groups, around 2% of Americans in c. 6,500 protests.

From 2017 into 2018: Thousands of local groups formed.

Nov.-Dec. 2017; March 2018: Female voters and resistance groups buoy Democrats in special Congressional elections in VA, AL, and southwestern PA.

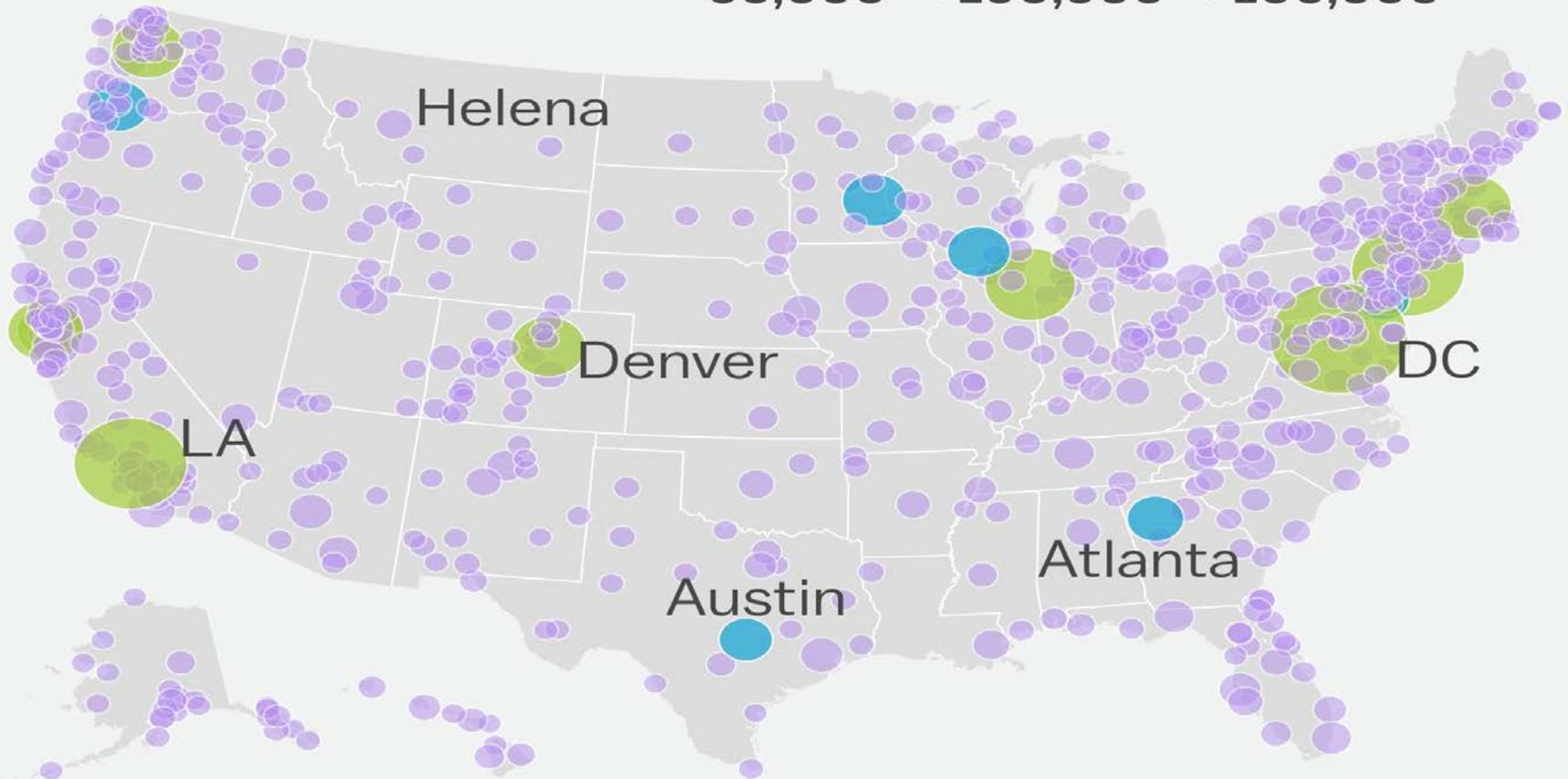
January 21, 2018: Follow up Women’s Marches in hundreds of locations around US and world.

Throughout 2018: Record numbers of women and resistance-backed candidates for fall elections.

4.2M joined Women's Marches in more than 600 US cities

January 21, 2017

  
< 50,000 < 100,000 >100,000

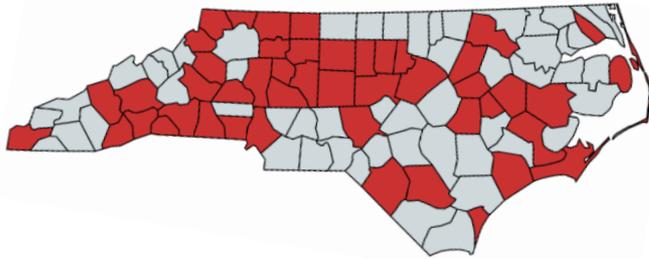


Source: Data from Jeremy Pressman and Erica Chenoweth

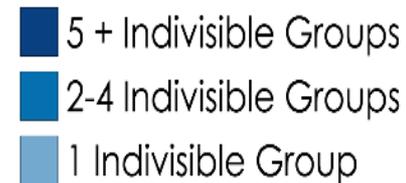
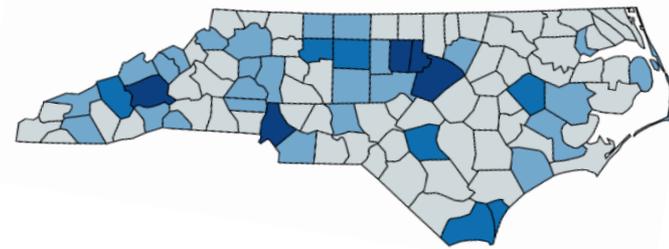
Vox

Both the Tea Party and the anti-Trump resistance achieved a widespread local presence... as North Carolina data suggest

NC Tea Parties ever present 2010-17



Resistance groups, 2017-18



From Caroline M. Tervo, *Conservatives in Concert: The Impact of Partisan Organizational Networks on Policy and Politics in North Carolina* (Senior honors thesis, Department of Government, Harvard University, March 2018).

Who are the local organizers and participants?

- **Tea Partiers** and sympathizers are overwhelmingly white, older (45+), tilted toward males, and very conservative-minded. Husband-wife pairs often participate together. Retirees, sales and small businesspeople, military veterans are typical participants.
- **Resisters** are overwhelmingly white, younger as well as older adults with political outlooks ranging from centrist to left-liberal. Two-thirds or more are women, some with husbands or partners accompanying them. Retired or active teachers, businesswomen, nonprofit and public employees predominate.
- **Anti-Trump resistance groups** are usually led by teams of two to four women.
- Even though **Tea Party** supporters are disproportionately male, groups we saw in 2011 were often led or co-led by teams of women or by a male-female pair.
- **Resistance group** meetings may include mothers with young children. Children were rarely present in 2011 **Tea Party** meetings -- invariably grandchildren.

Fierce antipathy to Obama and Trump

- **Both movements were sparked by fear and loathing of newly elected Presidents backed by co-partisans in Congress.**
- **To **Tea Partiers**, Barack Obama symbolized “un-American-ness” because of his race, immigrant father, urban and professorial background, beyond just his Democratic Party affiliation.**
- **To **resisters**, Donald Trump lacks character and qualifications, represents disrespect and hatred toward women, minorities, and immigrants – and a selfish disregard for the public good.**
- **Presidential evils resonate with what each movement opposes overall:**
 - **Tea Party** versus racial-ethnic and cultural changes, establishment GOP squishiness in compromising too much with Democrats.
 - **Resistance** versus threats to good government, and to democracy and to public policies that include and help less privileged people.

What local groups do

- **Tea Parties** formed by organizers who met at rallies, on buses to marches. Communicated through MeetUp, email, and personal networks.
- **Tea Party** groups usually meet monthly for programs featuring speakers provided by outside advocacy groups. Activities include lobbying local government, state legislature, Congress; hearing from candidates; organizing to attend protests.
- **Resistance groups** formed by organizers who met through SuitUp, on buses to marches. Communicate through FaceBook, email, newsletters, personal networks.
- **Resistance groups** met frequently in early 2017, now less often; usually have task forces and issue sub-committees. Meetings are focused on organizing, some discussion, occasionally speakers. Activities include contacting legislative offices, hearing from candidates, organizing for voting and anti-gerrymandering campaigns, attending protests.
- **Resistance groups** seem more open to federating with others and co-sponsoring with unions, NAACP, churches, Democratic Party, etc.

Top-down and bottom-up in jostling organizational fields

- Both the **Tea Party** and the **anti-Trump resistance** are *loosely interconnected fields of organizations* – including local volunteer groups, national advocacy and funding organizations, and regional or state federations.

- National organizations exaggerate their capacities to direct and speak for the entire endeavor:
 - Local groups leverage resources but do not fall in line.
 - Supralocal organizations network in DC and complete to deploy money, ideas & staff experts to influence/support locals.
 - National media find it easy to ask supralocals to speak for the whole.

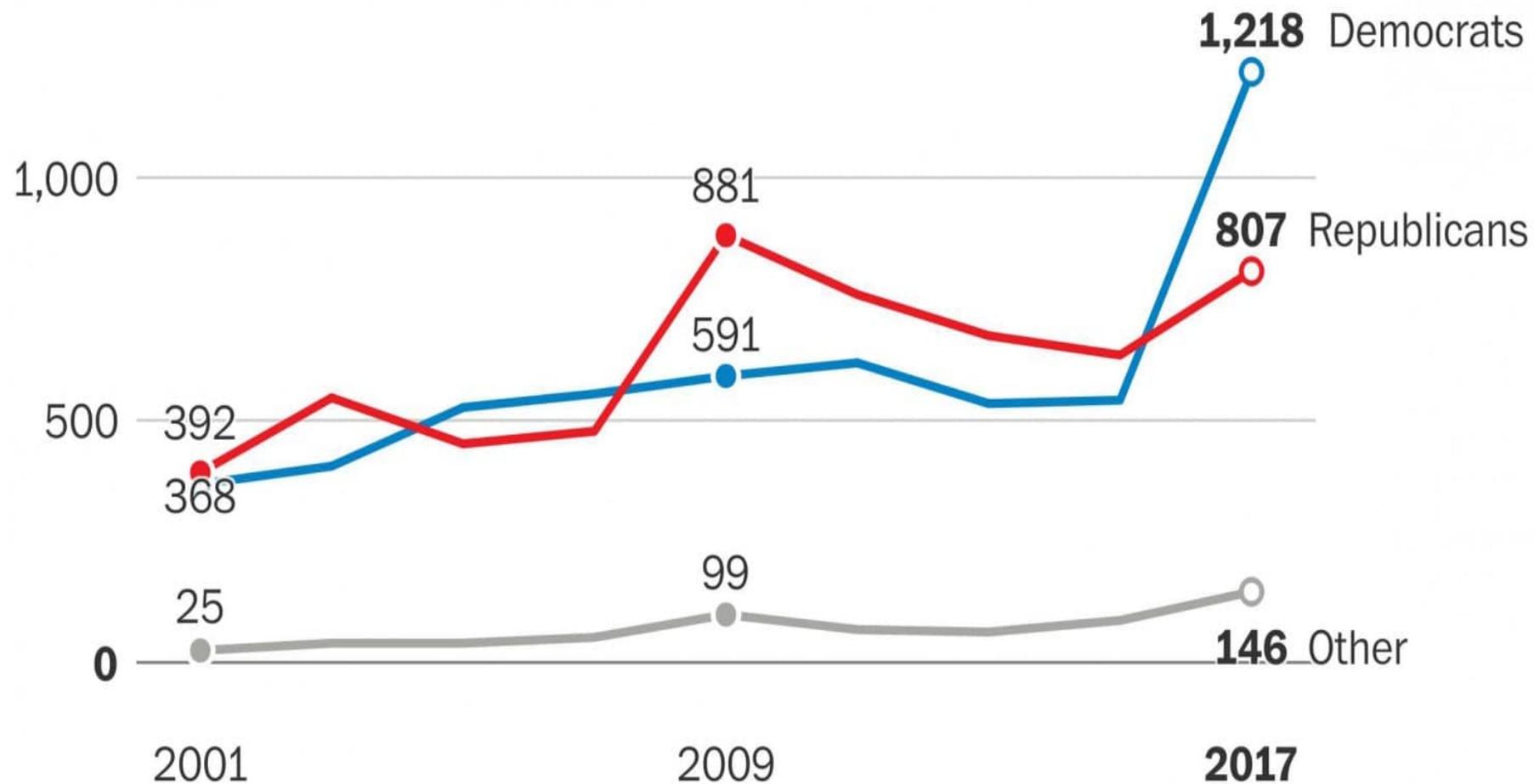
- Agenda clashes develop:
 - **Tea Party Patriots** and **FreedomWorks** claimed that the movement mainly wanted federal budget cuts, including “entitlement reform” – but **local Tea Partiers** cared more about crackdowns on immigrants, crime, and “welfare” spending.
 - **National resistance organizations** have pushed Democrats to shut down government over DACA, but most **local groups** are more moderate and pragmatic.

Relations with the major political parties

- Both the **Tea Party** and the **resistance** were sparked, in part, by political party actors, but they spread as extra-party formations.
- **Tea Partiers** are mostly very conservative and were originally opposed to the GOP establishment. They pressured GOP candidates and officeholders from the right; often took over local and state parties.
- **Resisters** are *not* consistently to the left of Democratic Party politicians; some groups include Independents and moderate Republicans. These groups and activists bring new energy at the local level, welcomed by some local and state Democratic Party officials, feared by others.
- Both **Tea Parties** and **resistance groups** are courted by candidates for public office, and both have generated new candidates for offices at all levels.
- **Resisters** are pushing reforms such as anti-gerrymandering and voting rights measures, and appear more engaged in voter outreach. **Tea Partiers** may not have felt the same need, because older white conservatives vote at high rates and the GOP made huge gains in 2010.

Surge in Democratic candidates ahead of midterms

Number of candidates running for Congress, by party



Source: Federal Election Commission

THE WASHINGTON POST

Impact on party and governing agendas

- In recent years, GOP agendas have been revamped – toward ethno-nationalism by **Tea Party** activists pushing from below, and toward anti-government ultra-free-market economics by the **Koch network** wielding money and ideas and lobbying in state and national arenas.
- The Republican Party itself has had little institutional capacity to withstand pressures and penetration from these forces – and GOP institutional weaknesses opened the door for Donald Trump in 2015-16.
- The impact of widespread **grassroots resistance groups** on the Democratic Party remains to be seen:
 - **Resisters** may take over local party offices in many non-big-city areas
 - Unlikely to simply push the party to the left
 - Early indications – e.g., in VA, AL, and southwestern PA -- suggest that **resistance groups** are boosting the participation of educated white women and expanding Democratic coalitions and voter turnout.