

# The Tea Party's Challenge

✘ By Peter Wehner

There is a lot of chatter these days about the effect of the Tea Party movement on American politics. In the short term, the answer is blindingly obvious: It's a huge boost for Republicans. The energy and enthusiasm the Tea Party movement is generating will work for GOP candidates and against Democratic candidates in almost every race in the country. Democrats are on course to be administered an epic defeat, one that will exceed, perhaps by a sizeable margin, even the one they experienced in 1994.

What the longer-term effects of the Tea Party will be on the GOP and the country is harder to know. The Tea Party is, at this stage in its development, much more of a protest movement than a governing philosophy. There is plenty of talk about "constitutional conservatism" – an encouraging impulse that seeks to ground political efforts in the American tradition – but what that means in practice isn't always clear. To the extent that we can discern what the fuel is behind the Tea Party movement, it has to do with bringing the deficit and debt under control and checking the size, role, and reach of the federal government.

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