

The Tea Party Teens

By DAVID BROOKS

The United States opens this decade in a sour mood. First, Americans are anxious about the future. Sixty-one percent of Americans believe the country is in decline, according to the latest NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey. Only 27 percent feel confident that their children's generation will be better off than they are.

Second, Americans have lost faith in their institutions.

During the great moments of social reform, at least 60 percent of Americans trusted government to do the right thing most of the time. Now, only a quarter have that kind of trust.

The country is evenly divided about President Obama, but state governments are in disrepute and confidence in Congress is at withering lows. As Frank Newport of the Gallup organization noted in his year-end wrap-up, "Americans have less faith in their elected representatives than ever before."

Third, the new administration has not galvanized a popular majority. In almost every sphere of public opinion, Americans are moving away from the administration. The Ipsos/McClatchy organizations have been asking voters which party can do the best job of handling a range of 13 different issues. During the first year of the Obama administration, the Republicans gained ground on all 13.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:30 AM

Comment: Title gives the impression that your thesis is that individuals who are in the tea party movement are like teens. That's not actually your thesis, is it? Isn't your thesis something like "I don't care for the tea party movement, but I think it may be influential in coming years?"

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:07 PM

Comment: "Begins" would be more appropriate.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:19 PM

Comment: Nations don't have moods; they are not animate. "The American people" would be a better term than "The United States" here.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:20 PM

Comment: "Second"? Does your essay begin with the first item on a list without an introduction setting forth the proposition the three items are meant to support? Or are the three items supposed to prove the U.S. is in "a sour mood"? If the latter, it is difficult to see how point #3 supports your thesis; it appears to be on another topic entirely. Arguably, too, #2 has little to do with mood.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:20 PM

Deleted: , not toward it

The public is not only shifting from left to right. Every single idea associated with the educated class has grown more unpopular over the past year.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:22 PM

Comment: Choppy. Suggest you combine these two sentences into one.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:22 PM

Comment: Please define "educated class."

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:25 PM

Comment: You assert a cause and effect without showing evidence. What information was used to conclude the public's skepticism here is based on a reaction to the "education class" believing in it? Are not Climategate, or the long period without temperature increases, possible alternative explanations?

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:25 PM

Comment: Again, cause and effect is asserted without being shown.

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:26 PM

Comment: Again, cause and effect is asserted without being shown.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:32 AM

Comment: Did Pew survey Americans on why they are increasingly isolationist or did it simply determine that isolationist sentiment is at an "all-time high"? Your wording is unclear, but I'm guessing the latter, in which case, cause and effect, yet again, has not been established. Furthermore, how can a single survey determine an "all-time high"? Wouldn't a series of surveys going back to the founding be required for that?

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:38 PM

Comment: Again, cause and effect is asserted without evidence. The phrase "go our own way" is fatally vague. Are we talking about the need to get the UN Security ... [1]

Amy Ridenour 1/5/10 11:41 PM

Comment: Without disagreeing that tea party "brigades" (are you sure "brigades" is the best term for what you shortly will refer ... [2]

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:32 AM

Comment: Which definition of "fractious" do you mean? Quarrelsome? Cranky? Troublemaking?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:32 AM

Comment: You don't believe the movement is at all defined by support for the Constitution or federalism?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:29 AM

Comment: Replace "they" with "These Americans" - "confederation" is not a "they."

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:35 AM

Comment: Source? You may be inadvertently referring only to why the tea party movement is famous in Manhattan.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:36 AM

Comment: Fragment. Acceptable in certain circumstances, but no need for it here.

The educated class believes in global warming, so public skepticism about global warming is on the rise. The educated class supports abortion rights, so public opinion is shifting against them. The educated class supports gun control, so opposition to gun control is mounting.

The story is the same in foreign affairs. The educated class is internationalist, so isolationist sentiment is now at an all-time high, according to a Pew Research Center survey. The educated class believes in multilateral action, so the number of Americans who believe we should "go our own way" has risen sharply.

A year ago, the Obama supporters were the passionate ones. Now the tea party brigades have all the intensity.

The tea party movement is a large, fractious confederation of Americans who are defined by what they are against. They are against the concentrated power of the educated class. They believe big government, big business, big media and the affluent professionals are merging to form self-serving oligarchy - with bloated government, unsustainable deficits, high taxes and intrusive regulation.

The tea party movement is mostly famous for its flamboyant fringe. But it is now more popular than either major party.

According to the NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 41 percent of Americans have a positive view of the tea party movement. Only 35 percent of Americans have a positive view of the Democrats and only 28 percent have a positive view of the Republican Party.

The movement is especially popular among independents. The Rasmussen organization asked independent voters whom they would support in a generic election between a Democrat, a Republican and a tea party candidate. The tea party candidate won, with 33 percent of independents. Undecided came in second with 30 percent. The Democrats came in third with 25 percent and the Republicans fourth with 12 percent.

Over the course of this year, the tea party movement will probably be transformed. Right now, it is an amateurish movement with mediocre leadership. But several bright and polished politicians, like Marco Rubio of Florida and Gary Johnson of New Mexico, are unofficially competing to become its de facto leader. If they succeed, their movement is likely to outgrow its crude beginnings and become a major force in American politics. After all, it represents arguments that are deeply rooted in American history.

The Obama administration is premised on the conviction that pragmatic federal leaders with professional expertise should have the power to implement programs to solve the country's problems. Many Americans do not have faith in that sort of centralized expertise or in the political class generally.

Moreover, the tea party movement has passion. Think back on

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:03 AM
Comment: "like" Rubio and Johnson? Or them specifically?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:03 AM
Comment: "They"? If Rubio and Johnson are competing against each other, only one can succeed, so the singular form should be used.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:37 AM
Comment: Are you saying that if either Rubio or Johnson takes over the tea party movement, the movement will become a major force? It seems counter-intuitive that a grassroots movement will succeed better if a politician takes it over, especially after your essay told us earlier that the public is quite disenchanted with politicians. Please re-consider your thinking here.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:37 AM
Comment: Will the movement succeed because it represents arguments deeply rooted in American history, or because Rubio or Johnson took it over? You seem to be arguing with yourself in this paragraph.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:38 AM
Comment: Surely you don't mean what this sentence literally says, which is that the Administration not only supports, but is premised upon, the notion that pragmatic leaders with expertise should have power? This would be undemocratic. Possibly you mean the Obama Administration is premised on the conviction that empowering pragmatic federal leaders who have professional expertise is the best way to solve the country's problems?

the recent decades of American history – the way the hippies defined the 1960s; the feminists, the 1970s; the Christian conservatives, the 1980s. American history is often driven by passionate outsiders who force themselves into the center of American life.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:10 AM

Comment: They did?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:10 AM

Comment: They did?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:39 AM

Comment: Please explain your thinking in terming participants in the tea party movement as “outsiders.”

In the near term, the tea party tendency will dominate the Republican Party. It could be the ruin of the party, pulling it in an angry direction that suburban voters will not tolerate. But don't underestimate the deep reservoirs of public disgust. If there is a double-dip recession, a long period of stagnation, a fiscal crisis, a terrorist attack or some other major scandal or event, the country could demand total change, creating a vacuum that only the tea party movement and its inheritors would be in a position to fill.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:13 AM

Comment: At this point in an essay, it is not usually a good idea to suddenly switch to first person.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:14 AM

Comment: If?

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:40 AM

Comment: I take it you take for granted that a Ross Perot/Jesse Ventura-like figure not associated with the tea party movement could not possibly step forward? Also, is there no possibility whatsoever of a leadership void being filled by a person or persons on the left?

Personally, I'm not a fan of this movement. But I can certainly see its potential to shape the coming decade.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:42 AM

Comment: A good essay provides solid conclusions, backed up by facts. Don't waste space telling us your feelings. Your family cares about your feelings; your readers, by and large, do not.

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:23 AM

Comment: Fragment

Amy Ridenour 1/6/10 12:43 AM

Comment: This essay is no where near ready for inclusion in the New York Times. Please re-draft, starting with an outline.