

## Study: Actually, there aren't many racist signs at tea-party rallies after all

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First we find out that “shovel-ready jobs” [don't really exist](#), now [this](#). Who knows what other “surprises” lie ahead this month as the growing inevitability of Democratic doom makes unpleasant truths safe for liberals to utter?

There were uglier messages, too – including “Obama Bin Lyin’ – Impeach Now” and “Somewhere in Kenya a Village is Missing its Idiot.” But Ekins’s analysis showed that only about a quarter of all signs reflected direct anger with Obama. Only 5 percent of the total mentioned the president’s race or religion, and slightly more than 1 percent questioned his American citizenship.

Ekins’s conclusion is not that the racially charged messages are unimportant but that media coverage of tea party rallies over the past year have focused so heavily on the more controversial signs that it has contributed to the perception that such content dominates the tea party movement more than it actually does.

“Really this is an issue of salience,” Ekins said. “Just because a couple of percentage points of signs have those messages doesn’t mean the other people don’t share those views, but it doesn’t mean they do, either. But when 25 percent of the coverage is devoted to those signs, it suggests that this is the issue that 25 percent of people think is so important that they’re going to put it on a sign, when it’s actually only a couple of people.”

Plenty of opportunities for lefty spin here — Ekins was a summer intern for an outfit sympathetic to the tea party agenda (the Cato Institute), the survey of signs was done at only one rally (the 9/12 Taxpayer March in D.C.), etc — but there’s nothing new or surprising in the findings. Michael Moynihan of Reason, which is also sympathetic to tea partiers, has been to multiple rallies and saw [almost nothing racist](#). Liberals as prominent as [John Judis](#) have defended the movement from racism charges even while condemning its policy platform as a “menace;” in fact, liberal challenges to the “tea party is racist” smear were running in WaPo, the same paper that reported on Ekins’s study, as far back [as six months ago](#). Even James Carville’s polling firm, as Verum Serum reminds us, attacked the narrative about tea-party racism last year, telling the media to [“get over it”](#) and focus on the far more salient ideological divisions inside the movement.

The irony is, you actually don’t hear much of the “tea party is racist” argument anymore. It’s still there, but it’s useful chiefly as a counterattack when TPerers are challenging Obama. That’s why it was such a hot meme earlier this year when the ObamaCare battle was approaching its final act. Since then, without any major new Obama legislation to target, tea partiers have spent more time culling RINOs from the herd in Republican primaries than beating up on The One. Hence the narrative shift from “tea partiers are racist” to [“tea partiers are crazy/unfit for office,”](#) which is much more widely applicable to vulnerable Democratic candidates nationwide than the racial smear is. No worries, though: It’ll be back next year, right around the time Obama’s reelection campaign gets going in earnest. Enjoy this respite while it lasts.