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Tea Party Tally

'Dancing with the Stars': Is tea party conspiracy helping Bristol Palin?

'Dancing with the Stars' judges are giving Bristol Palin low marks, but mama grizzly's tea party supporters may be keeping her swirling. What hath Election 2010 wrought?



Bristol Palin and her partner Mark Ballas perform on the celebrity dance competition series, 'Dancing with the Stars,' Nov. 1, in Los Angeles.

(Adam Larkey/ABC/AP)

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Atlanta

Bristol Palin is no Mick Jagger on the dance floor. So how did the famous teen mom survive last night's "Dancing with the Stars" after crashing through a samba?

A tea party conspiracy, perchance?

Conspiracy is a strong word, of course, seeing that the center of the storm is a fluffy, albeit entirely entertaining, reality show that normally has little bearing beyond popcorn-littered living rooms.

But even the show's producer, Conrad Green, told Bloomberg last week that "it's entirely possible" that young Ms. Palin may be picking up support from her mom Sarah Palin's political supporters and a wave of tea party voters turning their attention from upsetting Washington to tweaking Hollywood. Callers, Mr. Green said, may be behind Bristol Palin "for political reasons."

Callers trump judges

Two weeks in a row Ms. Palin, a frequent tabloid subject, self-effacing mom, and "teen advocate," has received the lowest scores from the judges (including for last night's "instant samba"), but has squeaked through thanks to support from call-in voters, who make the final elimination call.

The apparently tea party-fueled call-in campaign, experts say, waltzes around her mother's rock-star power among conservatives and her figurehead status among tea partyers. It also points to the growing influence of distant social media operators, who with the flick of a few thumb strokes can prod like-minded people to the polls and, now, even affect the story arc of call-in reality TV shows.

"It's a game-changer," says Elayne Rapping, a pop culture expert at SUNY-Buffalo. Tea party activists on Twitter "are part of a large community that has power, and when this group of people with this power decide to put it in the service of Bristol Palin, it's kind of mind-boggling."

The tea party conspiracy theory does have legs. The Daily Beast website tracked Palin's Twitter support in part to conservative author Tammy Bruce, whose Twitter-centric "Operation Palin" has championed the teen mom's dance floor tenure. Ms. Bruce tweeted before last night's show: "Operation Bristol waltzes in tonight! As #DWTS starts vote at abc.go.com Tweeps pls tweet phone info, will RT."

In other words, "Vote early and often for Palin!"

GOP and social media

"The Republicans really do have this whole social-media thing figured out," writes Simone Wilson in LA Weekly "'Operation Bristol' has been posted and re-posted by websites such as Conservatives4Palin and us4Palin, gathering a clickety little army with the sole mission of securing the Palins as much screentime as possible."

While polarizing, the Palins are indeed becoming the poster family for how to walk the line between politics and pop culture. And it all appears to be heading in one direction. In the lead-up to her new reality TV show, "Sarah Palin's Alaska," which starts next week, the elder Ms. Palin again toyed with a presidential run in a Tuesday speech, saying that if she ran, she "would be in it to win it." Sarah Palin is also in the audience at DWTS.

But whether getting involved in TV dance contests is really a formula for building tea party electoral power is another question, says Ms. Rapping, adding, "If this is part of what the tea party is up to, it's goofier than it seemed."

Yet others contend there is a more serious edge to Bristol Palin, despite her two left feet, moving closer to victory in one of America's must-watch TV events.

"Bristol's survival on 'DWTS' is a testament to the power of her mother and her Tea Party fans," says CBS News. "And, it's an indicator of how the Palin brand is viewed as Sarah Palin contemplates running for president in 2012."

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