

## *Libertarian Roots of the Tea Party*

by David Kirby and Emily Ekins

### Executive Summary

Many people on the left still dismiss the tea party as the same old religious right, but the evidence says they are wrong. The tea party has strong libertarian roots and is a functionally libertarian influence on the Republican Party.

Compiling data from local and national polls, as well as dozens of original interviews with tea party members and leaders, we find that the tea party is united on economic issues, but split on the social issues it tends to avoid. Roughly half the tea party is socially conservative, half libertarian—or, fiscally conservative, but socially moderate to liberal.

Libertarians led the way for the tea party. Starting in early 2008 through early 2009, we find that libertarians were more than twice as “angry” with the Republican Party, more pessimistic about the economy and deficit since 2001, and more frustrated that people like them cannot affect government than were conservatives. Libertarians, including young people who supported Ron Paul’s 2008 presidential campaign, provided much of the early energy for the

tea party and spread the word through social media.

Understanding the tea party’s strong libertarian roots helps explain how the tea party movement has become a functionally libertarian influence on the Republican Party. Most tea partiers have focused on fiscal, not social, issues—cutting spending, ending bailouts, reducing debt, and reforming taxes and entitlements—rather than discussing abortion or gay marriage. Even social conservatives and evangelicals within the tea party act like libertarians.

The tea party is upending the conventional wisdom that Republican candidates must placate socially conservative voters to win primaries. Increasingly, Republican candidates must win over tea party voters on libertarian economic issues.

To the extent the Republican Party becomes functionally libertarian, focusing on fiscal over social issues, the tea party deserves much credit—credit that political strategists, scholars, and journalists have yet to fully give.

## The political story of 2010 was the rise of the tea party.

### Introduction

[Ron] Paul is less a candidate than a “cause”. . . The other candidates had to pretend they were happy with their [New Hampshire] results. Paul was genuinely delighted with his, because, after a quarter-century in the wilderness, he’s within reach of putting his cherished cause on the map. Libertarianism will have gone from the fringes—those hopeless, pathetic third-party runs—to a position of prominence in a major party.<sup>1</sup>

—Charles Krauthammer, *Washington Post*, January 12, 2012

The surprise of the 2012 Republican presidential election cycle is that despite strong opposition to President Barack Obama, Republicans’ enthusiasm for their own candidates has remained low. After the first eight contests, turnout was down 10 percent from 2008.<sup>2</sup> Mitt Romney, the long-presumed front-runner, has inspired little enthusiasm among the grass roots. Tea party supporters, who represented more than half of all Republican primary voters, never unified around a single candidate. Candidates surpassed 50 percent of the tea party vote in only three primary states: Romney won 70 percent of tea party supporters in his home state of Massachusetts; Newt Gingrich won 51 percent of tea party support in his home state of Georgia; and Romney won 60 percent of tea party supporters in Virginia, where only two candidates appeared on the ballot. Rick Santorum never won more than 50 percent of the tea party vote in any primary.<sup>3</sup> And, we witnessed ephemeral surges for several other candidates, including Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, and Herman Cain.

Yet steady interest in Ron Paul has outstripped all other candidates by some measures. The Google Politics and Elections team reported that “Ron Paul” was the top political search term of the election, even beating out “Tim Tebow” and “Christmas”

in December 2011.<sup>4</sup> Political pros admired Paul’s well-organized grass roots operation in Iowa and New Hampshire. Paul has captured the imagination of many young people, winning young voters under 30 in a third of the primaries and caucuses in exit polls thus far and placing second in another third.<sup>5</sup> Long after it had become obvious that Ron Paul would not be the nominee, he continued to gather ever larger crowds. During the first week of April, Paul drew an estimated 6,000 supporters to a campaign stop at the University of California, Los Angeles,<sup>6</sup> and 8,500 at the University of California, Berkeley,<sup>7</sup> his largest crowds of the campaign. This occurred the same week Romney won the Wisconsin primary, making his nomination all but inevitable. As *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer recognized early, Paul may lose and still catapult libertarian ideas into the mainstream of the Republican Party.

The political story of 2010 was the rise of the tea party. A top political story of the 2012 presidential cycle is this curious persistence of the libertarian supporters of Ron Paul, despite his failure to win a single primary contest. But these may well be two parts to the same story—a story of the emergence of a libertarian constituency that has planted roots in the tea party but traces its history back to frustrations with the Bush administration since at least 2008, if not before. Indeed, *Washington Post* veteran election analyst Dan Balz put it this way: “Paul was . . . tea party when tea party wasn’t cool.”<sup>8</sup>

Liberals caricature the tea party as the same old religious right. Conservatives misunderstand it. Establishment Republicans fear it. But given all this political anxiety, and despite hundreds of articles and analyses, there is very little agreement on what the tea party is, and where exactly it comes from.

In this paper, we argue that the tea party has strong libertarian roots and is a libertarian influence on the Republican Party. We trace the origins of the tea party back to 2008, using data analysis techniques of political science. In the first section, we com-

pile data from local and national polls, as well as dozens of original interviews with tea party members and leaders. We find that the tea party is united on economic issues but split on social issues. About half the tea party is socially conservative and half is libertarian. The conservative half is more Republican. The libertarian half is more independent. While many tea partiers have a favorable opinion of Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin, libertarian tea partiers favor Ron Paul more than do conservative tea partiers.

Throughout this paper, we use the word “libertarian” to identify voters who are fiscally conservative but socially moderate to liberal, based on their answers to questions on polls. This is the same method used in previous Cato studies on the libertarian vote.<sup>9</sup> We do not claim that these are hardcore libertarians who have all read Ayn Rand and F. A. Hayek, or are as ideologically self-aware as readers of *Reason* magazine. Rather, these voters’ libertarian beliefs distinguish them from liberals and conservatives, even if the word “libertarian” may be unfamiliar to them.<sup>10</sup>

In the second section, we model the role of libertarians and the tea party in the right-leaning coalition, over time. The American National Election Studies (ANES), a familiar and respected data source in political science, conducted a panel survey of the 2008 presidential election and then followed these very same voters through early 2010. A panel survey differs from a traditional poll by calling back respondents over a period of time, much like following the same patients in a medical trial. In 2010 the survey identified tea party supporters, which enables us to understand what eventual tea partiers believed in 2008 and how their opinions changed over time.

Starting in early 2008 and through early 2009, we find that libertarians and tea party libertarians were more than twice as “angry” with the Republican Party as conservative tea partiers and Republicans more generally. Furthermore, we find that libertarians and tea party libertarians were more pessimistic

about the economy and deficit since 2001 and more frustrated that people like them cannot affect government.

Pollster Scott Rasmussen, in his book *Mad as Hell*, describes tea party members as above all else being defined by “near stratospheric” levels of anger—anger toward Washington’s overspending, bailouts, and takeovers at the hands of both Democrats and Republicans.<sup>11</sup> *New York Times* reporter Kate Zernike chose *Boiling Mad* as the title of her book on the tea party. If we use this anger and agitation as a proxy for the origins of the tea party, libertarians hit the stratosphere first. Evidence shows that the first waves of tea parties had a decidedly libertarian flavor. Many young libertarians played key a role as organizers, spreading the word through social networks built during the Ron Paul campaign of 2008.

In the third section, we then construct a time series that follows libertarians from February 2010 to March 2012, using polling data compiled by major media and national polling organizations such as ABC/*Washington Post*; CBS/*New York Times*; Gallup; Pew; and *Reason*-Rupe. This time series construction does not allow for as fine-tuned analyses as panel data, but nonetheless reveals the ebb and flow of support among libertarians in the tea party movement. We find that in these national surveys, libertarians averaged 41 percent of tea party supporters in 2010, but dropped to an average of 30 percent support in 2011—an 11 percentage point decline.

Libertarians seemed to have soured on the movement they helped create, perhaps as more conservatives got involved and congressional Republicans who waved the “tea party” flag failed to deliver promised cuts in spending. Young libertarians soured on the tea party most quickly. In 2012 however, there is some evidence that libertarian support of the tea party has increased again, perhaps as functionally libertarian tea party candidates have challenged establishment Republicans in Senate and House primaries. Taken together, this paper represents the most comprehensive analysis of polling data on the tea party to date.

**Evidence shows that the first waves of tea parties had a decidedly libertarian flavor.**

**TARP may well have brought libertarians and conservatives together in the tea party.**

### **Libertarian Energy Starts the Tea Party**

Libertarians had been expressing agitation toward George W. Bush's Republican Party since at least 2004, while many conservatives defended him.<sup>12</sup> In 2004 and 2006 libertarian voters expressed their anger at the ballot box by swinging away from Republicans.<sup>13</sup> In 2008 Ron Paul's presidential campaign excited many libertarians. Paul supporters scheduled a "money-bomb" fundraiser that netted over \$6 million on December 16, 2007—auspiciously, the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party.<sup>14</sup> But Paul's weak showing in Iowa and New Hampshire left some libertarians feeling restless.

For many libertarians who would come to join the tea party, the boiling point occurred in September 2008, during the congressional debate over the \$700 billion financial bailout, the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Angry citizens flooded the Capitol with telephone calls and emails. Congressmen began to get nervous. On September 29, 2008, to the surprise of many observers and jittering financial markets, the first vote on the legislation failed 228–205, with 138 Republicans voting against. And while TARP went on to pass in a revised form, Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, in their book about the tea party movement, argue that "September 29 is clearly the day the tea party movement was reborn in America."<sup>15</sup> This statement is bolstered by our analysis. More frequently, observers date the creation of the tea party to February 19, 2009, when CNBC commentator Rick Santelli vented his anger on the Chicago Mercantile Trading room floor about the government rewarding mortgage holders who got in over their head, encouraging those in Chicago to join him for a "tea party." We argue that Santelli ignited anger that had been smoldering for at least four months since the TARP financial bailout, and probably years before that. TARP may well have brought libertarians and conservatives together in the tea party.

### **Liberals Misunderstand the Tea Party**

Liberal commentators and scholars be-

moan the rightward drift of political discourse because of the tea party. But they misunderstand how the currents drift. Many still draw a caricature of the tea party as a resurrection of the religious right, or a partisan contrivance by political figures like Gingrich, or an "astroturf" movement ginned up by billionaire funders Charles and David Koch. For instance, in an August 2011 *New York Times* op-ed, Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam and Notre Dame's David Campbell argue that the tea party is a manifestation of the same old religious culture wars. Previewing data they plan to release in an upcoming book, they argue that tea party members were "disproportionately social conservatives in 2006" and are most defined by a desire to "see religion play a prominent role in politics."<sup>16</sup> The tea party is closest in its "unpopularity" to the "Christian Right," they argue.

In their book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, left-leaning Harvard sociologists Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson offer a more sympathetic account of the tea party and reject the "astroturf" characterization. But they nonetheless argue the tea party should be understood as "very right-wing" and "very conservative."<sup>17</sup> Skocpol and Williams acknowledge the two halves of the tea party—libertarian and social conservative—and admirably describe the "delicate balancing acts" in many tea parties to accommodate these different viewpoints. However they underestimate the role of the libertarians in the tea party, ascribe them to the "periphery," and conclude that social conservatives make up the "vocal majority" in most tea parties.<sup>18</sup>

Definitions matter here. Skocpol and Williamson define libertarians narrowly. Indeed, pop culture caricatures libertarians as comically radical, like the *Parks and Recreation* character Ron Swanson, who thinks public parks should be sold to Chuck E. Cheese and who gives a fourth grader a land mine to protect her private property.<sup>19</sup> The libertarians we identify are a broader group. Our research shows that many tea party members

who hold libertarian beliefs are unfamiliar with the word “libertarian.” Most polls don’t include the word “libertarian” as an option. Those that do reveal confusion about what the word means. Instead, libertarians identify themselves in polls as “independent,” “moderate,” or more often among tea partiers “conservative.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, political scientists Christopher Ellis and James Stimson, have shown that 6 percent of the population who identify as “conservative” actually hold libertarian views.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Tea Party Is Functionally Libertarian**

Understanding the tea party’s libertarian roots helps explain how the movement has remained *functionally* libertarian. Most tea partiers have remained focused on fiscal, not social issues—cutting spending, ending bailouts, reducing debt, and reforming taxes and entitlements, rather than discussing abortion or gay marriage. David Brody, the chief political correspondent at Christian Broadcast Network, coined the term “Teavangelical” to describe the evangelical half of the tea party. In his book, he acknowledges that tea party libertarians’ “views on abortion and gay marriage” are a “real problem for conservative evangelicals.” But since the tea party was “founded on economic bedrock issues, evangelicals typically gloss over these differences for the sake of standing in unison to fight a worthy, fiscally disciplined cause.”<sup>22</sup> Even social conservatives and evangelicals within the tea party act like libertarians.

Political self-identity may well be shifting in a libertarian direction. In their book *Declaration of Independents*, Nick Gillespie and Matt Welch, editors of the libertarian *Reason* magazine, suggest that we may well be living “at the cusp of what can only be called a libertarian moment.”<sup>23</sup> In many ways, the Ron Paul campaign can be understood as a social phenomenon as much as a political one. Brian Doherty, who wrote a book chronicling *Ron Paul’s Revolution*, describes the Paul operation in the early primary and caucuses states as a “crusade.”<sup>24</sup> Through Ron Paul, many libertarians have found that there are others who

think like they do: fiscally conservative, but socially moderate to liberal—de-emphasizing divisive social issues because they believe threats to the free enterprise system and the Constitution are too great.

One challenge for scholars trying to understand the tea party is the ebb and flow of enthusiasm among libertarians. But this is a big part of the story. Evidence shows that libertarians provided much of the early energy in the tea party. But as more establishment Republican organizations angled to capitalize on the energy, and as social conservatives assumed leadership roles in local and national tea party groups, some libertarians grew weary of the movement they helped create. There is a high degree of fluidity among tea partiers, with loose affinity and sometimes overlapping affiliation among groups. Thus, not all libertarians are tea partiers. Not all libertarian tea partiers support Ron Paul. Many tea partiers vote Republican, but strongly dislike the party. Even further complicating the picture, umbrella groups like Tea Party Patriots or Tea Party Express may claim local tea partiers as “members,” even if the tea partiers themselves do not consider themselves such.

Sound confusing? It is. But these subtleties and distinctions matter a great deal to tea partiers themselves. That is why, methodologically, point-in-time poll estimates—even the excellent surveys by CBS/*New York Times* and *Washington Post*/Harvard/Kaiser—are often not fine-tuned enough to capture these changes over time. This may lead even careful scholars to misinterpret the movement. For instance, a scholar who works to understand the tea party in 2011 may correctly perceive that the movement is mostly conservative, because libertarian support may be at a low point. And interviews with conservative tea partiers may confusingly bolster this interpretation. We hope the libertarian trend we have established in the data will help scholars put such observations of the tea party in context.

Of course, if there are two halves to the tea party, as we argue, one could logically tell two stories about the tea party. Our intention in

**Most tea partiers have remained focused on fiscal, not social issues.**

**To understand where the tea party comes from, we need to first understand what it is.**

telling the story of the libertarian roots of the tea party is not to ignore the role of conservatives. Rather, in polling, reporting, and scholarship on the tea party, the conservative story has been relatively well documented, if not over-interpreted. Instead, we aim to contribute to the academic literature by identifying and analyzing tea partiers' heterogeneity, and how groups within the tea party coalition have fluctuated over time. Our hope is that our analysis adds important data to the historical record and sheds light on how the tea party may well be refashioning a libertarian center to American politics.

## **The Libertarian Half of the Tea Party**

To understand where the tea party comes from, we need to first understand what it is. In 2009 and into early 2010, as the tea party took shape, many pollsters and analysts realized that the tea party was not a single, homogenous group of citizens, but that it could be divided up into various parts.

For example, in the first book-length treatment on the tea party, released in the fall of 2010, pollster Scott Rasmussen hypothesized that the tea party is comprised of three groups: political “newcomers,” who have never been involved; political independents who “feel betrayed by both the Democratic and Republican parties”; and, “core Republican conservatives.”<sup>25</sup> In a *Weekly Standard* cover story in June 2010, “The Two Faces of the Tea Party,” Matt Continetti argued that the tea party reveals “the dual nature of conservative populism. . . . One looks to the future. The other looks to the past.”<sup>26</sup> These early explanations of the dividing lines within the tea party movement, while shrewd, were unevenly supported by data, as polls worked to catch up with the fast spreading tea party movement.

Pollster Alex Lundry at TargetPoint first attempted to measure and categorize the two halves of the tea party, libertarian and conservative. In a survey commissioned by

*Politico*, Lundry included questions by which analysts could divide up the tea party ideologically on both economic and social issues, in part based on previous Cato Institute research in “The Libertarian Vote.” The poll asked, “which of these statements comes closer to your view?”:

- Government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses, OR Government should do more to solve our nation’s problems?
- Government should promote traditional values in society, OR Government should favor no particular set of values?

Administering an exit poll to participants at an April 15, 2010, Tax Day tea party event in Washington, D.C., Lundry found that an “overwhelming majority,” 88 percent, said the government is doing too many things. But in terms of values, tea party attendees “split right down the middle”: 51 percent of tea party attendees said government should favor no particular values, versus 46 percent who said government should promote traditional values. Combining these two questions, 43 percent of respondents said that the government was doing too much and should promote traditional values; 42 percent said that the government was doing too much and should favor no particular set of values, a libertarian viewpoint.<sup>27</sup> Summarizing the findings in *Politico*, reporter James Homann wrote that the findings “suggest a distinct fault line that runs through the tea party activist base,” exemplified by the politicians Sarah Palin and Ron Paul.<sup>28</sup>

At the time, *Washington Post* blogger David Weigel criticized the findings because the poll sampled a tea party rally that featured Ron Paul. No surprise, Weigel reasoned, that the survey “skewed” libertarian, because Ron Paul’s supporters “were out in force.”<sup>29</sup> A fair point.

To test whether we could replicate Lundry’s findings, we conducted our own exit

poll of 639 attendees at the Virginia Tea Party Convention on October 9, 2010, one of the larger state tea party gatherings of its kind. This tea party convention also featured Ron Paul—as well as Lou Dobbs, Rick Santorum, and Ken Cuccinelli. With this more wide-ranging speaker lineup, it would be harder to argue that the crowd skewed libertarian. If anything, we might have expected the sample to skew conservative. We also used questions to divide up the tea party ideologically on economic and social views:

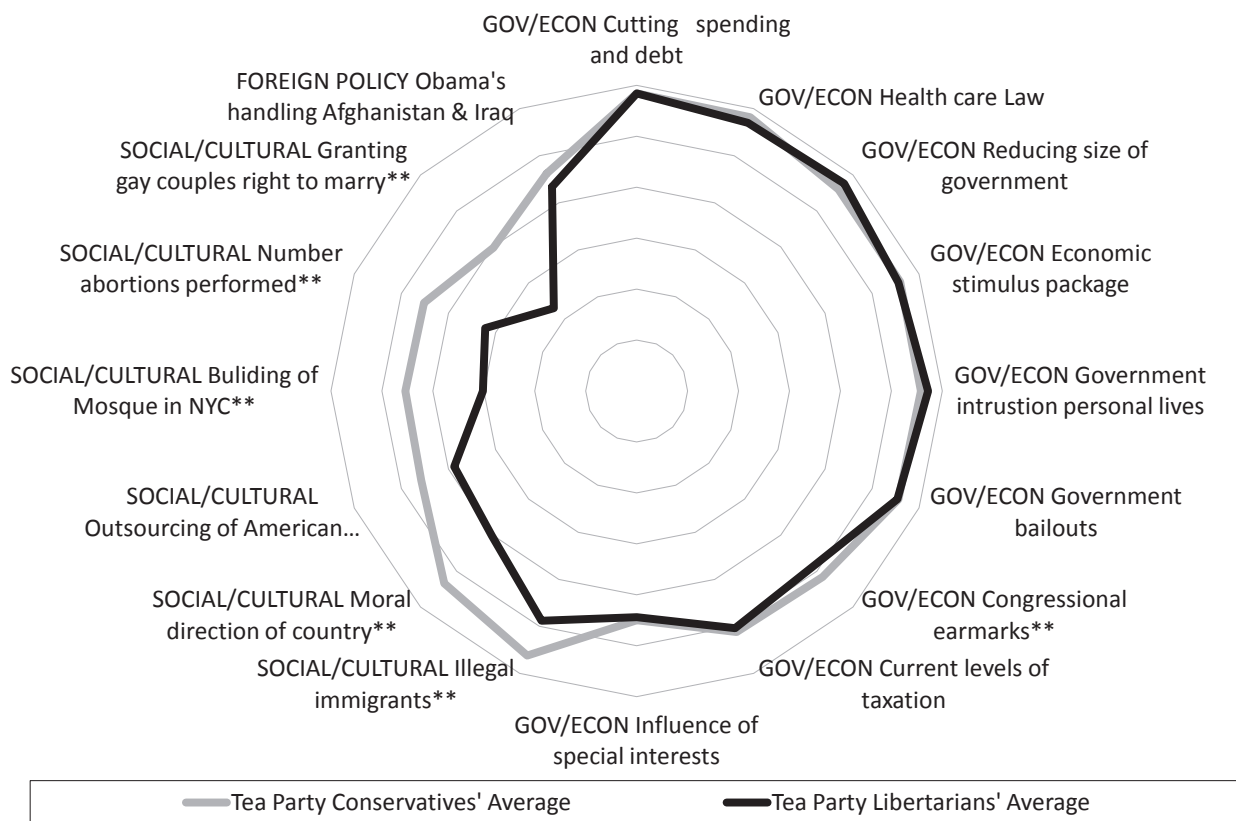
- The less government the better, OR there are more things the government should be doing?
- We need a strong government to handle today’s complex economic

problems, OR the free market can handle these problems without the government being involved?

- Government should promote traditional values in society, OR Government should favor no particular set of values?

Our findings echoed Lundry’s: libertarians made up 48 percent of tea partiers, versus 51 percent who held traditional conservative views. We defined traditional conservatives as agreeing that “the less government the better,” and that “the free market can handle these problems without government being involved,” but also believing that “the government should promote traditional values.” Tea party libertarians agreed that

**Figure 1**  
How concerned are you about each of the following?



Source: Entrance poll conducted by the Cato Institute at the Virginia Tea Party Convention, October 9, 2010.  
\*\*Differences between tea party conservatives and libertarians were statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Forty-eight percent in the *New York Times* poll, 53 percent in the *Washington Post*, and 30 percent in the Gallup poll are tea party libertarians.**

less government is better, and preferred free markets, but believe that “the government should not favor any particular set of values.”

These different background beliefs about the role for government in economic and social spheres—libertarian versus conservative—help explain tea party respondents’ differing views on the issues. Figure 1 shows strong agreement between tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives on fiscal issues, but diverging views on social issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and immigration.

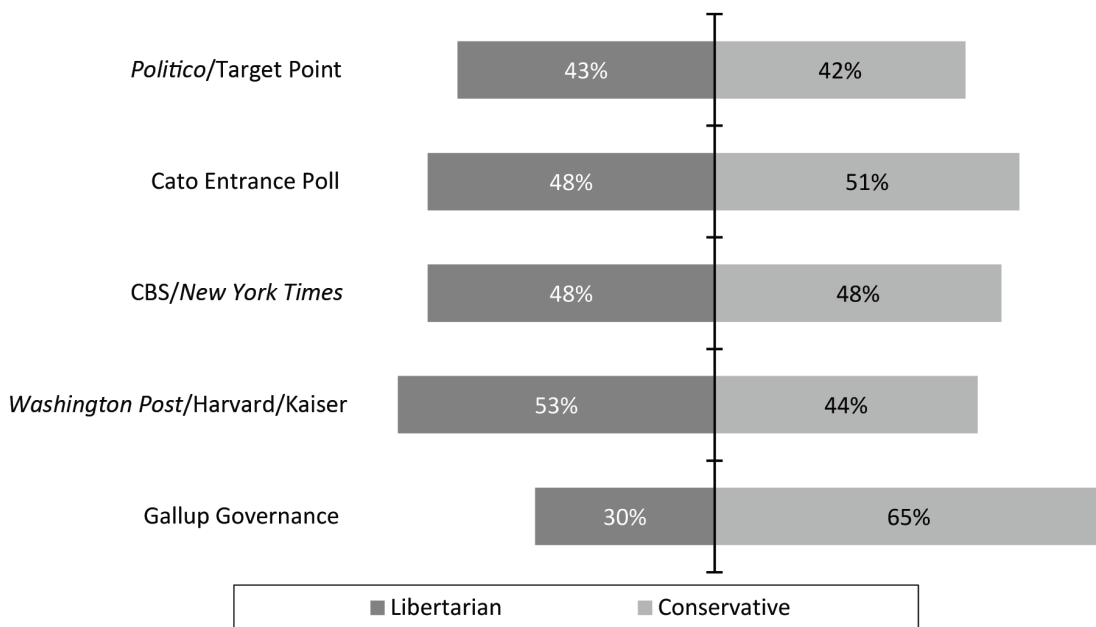
Both *Politico*/TargetPoint and our own Virginia Tea Party Convention survey sampled local tea party events. Do these findings apply nationally? To answer this question, we analyzed three national polls, an April 2010 CBS News/*New York Times* poll on the tea party, a September 2010 Gallup survey on governance, and an October 2010 *Washington Post*/Kaiser/Harvard survey on the role of government.<sup>30</sup> We chose these data sets as they are high-quality national samples, from reputable sources, and many academic scholars refer to these sources in their own analyses. Additionally, these surveys were written

in part to analyze the tea party. For instance, the *New York Times* poll oversamples tea party supporters to allow for more nuanced analyses.<sup>31</sup>

Using questions on the *New York Times* poll, we defined libertarians as preferring “smaller government with fewer services,” and believing that Obama expanded the “role of government” “too much,” but also agreeing that “gay couples” should be allowed to marry or form civil unions. Using questions from the *Washington Post* poll, we defined libertarians as respondents who want the “federal government” to “cost less in taxes, but provide fewer services” and want “less” or “no” federal government involvement in “promoting values and morality in the society.” Using questions on the Gallup poll, we defined libertarians as those who think the federal government has “too much power,” and who believe government should not promote “traditional values.” (Please see Appendix A for methodological notes on all the polls in this paper.)

Indeed, 48 percent in the *New York Times* poll, 53 percent in the *Washington Post*, and 30 percent in the Gallup poll are tea party libertarians. Conservative tea partiers represented

**Figure 2**  
**Tea Party Libertarians vs. Tea Party Conservatives**





50 percent in the *New York Times* poll, 44 percent in the *Washington Post* poll, and 65 percent in the Gallup poll.<sup>32</sup> See Figure 2.

Notice that in this analysis Gallup is somewhat of an outlier. But taken together, these five surveys suggest that our findings are robust: the tea party is divided roughly in half between libertarians and conservatives.

### The Tea Party's Two Halves

Who are these tea party libertarians and how are they similar and different from tea party conservatives? How do tea party liber-

tarians compare to libertarians more generally? And how are tea partiers different from Republicans? Tables 1–6 summarize these similarities and differences using national data from the three national surveys mentioned earlier: the *New York Times* poll, the *Washington Post* poll, and Gallup. (Note: in this analysis we define “tea party libertarians” as libertarians who also “support” the tea party. We define “tea party conservatives” as tea party supporters who are not libertarians and self-identify as “conservative” or “moderate,” not “liberal.”)

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Tea Party Political Profile**

	CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i> Tea Party Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Angry towards Politics in Washington. Why angry?</b>					
Size of government / Government spending	38	58	51	31	19
Health care reform	14	14	14	20	-
Not representing people	14	14	16	15	-
Bipartisan policies	11	5	10	10	-
Congress	10	9	4	5	-
Barack Obama	8	6	5	4	-
Socialist policies	4	3	1	3	-
<b>Most Important Problem Facing Country</b>					
Big government/government doing too much/spending	6	12	7	4	2
Economy	17	23	22	21	22
Jobs and unemployment	13	12	10	7	5
Budget deficit/national debt	22	22	24	23	27
Religious values	1	-	5	3	1
Health care	5	3	5	10	8
<b>On the Issues</b>					
Not spend money, reduce the deficit	78	81	73	59	43

*Continued next page.*

**Table 1 Continued**

	CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i> Tea Party Poll				
	All Libertarians	Tea Party	Tea Party	All Republicans	All Respondents
	%	Libertarians %	Conservatives %	%	%
Economy improved without government money to banks	71	75	76	63	51
Unfavorable opinion of Republican Party	47	46	38	20	54
Not much/none confidence in Federal Reserve	28	35	40	30	26
More concerned about taxes, jobs than abortion, gay marriage	91	91	67	76	81
<b>Favorable opinion of political figures</b>					
Ron Paul	26	31	24	11	11
Glen Beck	35	59	61	32	18
Sarah Palin	46	66	70	62	30
George W. Bush	49	58	58	58	27
<b>How support tea party?</b>					
Donate money	2	2	3	2	2
Attend political meeting, rally, speech	15	15	11	12	13
Both	7	7	4	6	6
<b>Vote Party Line</b>					
Always Republican	12	16	20	27	9
Usually Republican	42	52	48	50	19
Equally for both Republican and Democrat	40	26	24	21	31
<b>Party Identification</b>					
Republican	48	51	60	-	28
Independent	43	44	28	-	33
Democrat	6	2	6	-	31
<b>Ideology</b>					
Very conservative	18	32	47	26	12
Somewhat conservative	43	41	29	33	22
Moderate	33	23	19	27	38
Somewhat liberal	5	3	-	8	16
Very liberal	-	-	-	-	5

Source: Authors calculations from *Washington Post*/Harvard/Kaiser.

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Tea Party Political Profile**

	Gallup Governance Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>General feelings towards governance</b>					
“Dissatisfied” with way the “nation is being governed”	89	97	91	88	71
“Yes” government poses “immediate threat” to “rights” and “freedoms”	70	81	73	66	46
<b>Most important problem facing our country today (open response)</b>					
Mentioned gov’t. should not be bailing out large corporations	12	15	7	8	6
Mentioned government spending too much	17	16	7	13	10
<b>Relationship between government and business</b>					
“Agree” businesses more efficient than government	91	93	88	86	73
“Disagree” government is fairer than business	79	78	79	79	60
“Disagree” government should pay if businesses don’t have “incentive”	33	34	26	24	20
“Disagree” business will harm society if not regulated	68	78	78	75	53
<b>Government should have “little” or “no” responsibility for</b>					
Upholding “moral standards” among its citizens	58	63	37	36	37
Reducing income differences between rich and poor	66	78	72	65	45
Protecting “major” U.S. corporations from bankruptcy	74	81	77	67	56
Believes cost of entitlement programs will create “major” economic problems	86	86	84	86	77
<b>Party Identification</b>					
Republican	33	46	57	-	30
Independent	54	48	35	-	42
Democrat	13	6	8	-	28

**Table 2 Continued**

	Gallup Governance Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Ideology</b>					
Conservative	50	69	79	70	42
Moderate	38	26	20	26	38
Liberal	11	4	-	4	19

Source: Authors calculations from Gallup Governance, September 13–16, 2010.

**Table 3  
Comparison of Tea Party Political Profile**

	<i>Washington Post/Harvard/Kaiser</i>				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Give federal government an “F” for performance. Why?</b>					
Want your Congressman to fight to “cut spending”	73	87	64	63	39
Government “better” with Balanced Budget Amendment	65	74	74	68	60
Government “threatens” own rights and freedoms	70	86	69	63	46
Criticism of government “justified”	77	89	83	75	59
<b>Political Activism: “likely to” or “already have”</b>					
Convince someone to vote	53	75	66	57	47
Attend political meeting, rally, speech	46	65	48	41	38
Contribute money	32	46	35	33	28
<b>Party Identification</b>					
Republican	34	47	55	100	22
Independent	43	39	32	-	37
Democrat	13	4	6	-	33
<b>Ideology</b>					
Very conservative	30	50	34	35	15
Somewhat conservative	30	40	46	38	24
Moderate	23	6	19	17	29
Liberal	16	4	-	10	29

Source: Authors calculations from *Washington Post/Harvard/Kaiser*.

**Table 4**  
**Tea Party Demographics**

	CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i> Tea Party Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	56	62	55	50	49
Female	44	38	45	50	51
<b>Race</b>					
White	91	92	87	94	77
Black	1	-	2	4	12
Asian	2	1	1	1	3
Other	5	4	8	4	7
Hispanic	4	2	5	6	12
<b>Income</b>					
\$100,000 or more	28	25	14	18	14
\$75,000-\$100,000	16	12	11	16	12
\$50,000-\$75,000	21	24	26	19	18
\$30,000-\$50,000	18	17	18	19	16
\$15,000-\$30,000	10	12	14	17	22
Under \$15,000	3	4	5	6	10
Refused	5	7	13	5	7
<b>Education</b>					
Post-graduate	18	18	12	9	11
College graduate	29	27	21	21	15
Some college	29	30	34	26	28
High school or less	24	25	33	45	47
<b>Age</b>					
18-29	12	5	7	19	23
30-44	28	17	17	29	27
45-64	37	45	48	32	34
65+	22	33	27	20	16
<b>Region</b>					
Northeast	21	20	10	12	19

*Continued next page*

**Table 4 Continued**

	CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i> Tea Party Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
North Central	19	20	25	23	22
South	36	35	43	42	37
West	24	26	22	23	22
<b>Religion</b>					
Protestant	50	54	70	61	52
Catholic	28	24	19	26	21
Jewish	2	2	1	2	2
Other	7	7	4	3	6
None	10	10	4	6	17
Attend church "every week"	28	29	48	41	27
Evangelical	28	26	52	40	28

Source: Authors calculations from *Washington Post*/Harvard/Kaiser.

**Table 5  
Tea Party Demographics**

	Gallup Governance Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	59	65	52	44	48
Female	41	35	48	56	52
<b>Race</b>					
White	76	80	83	85	73
Black	6	4	4	2	10
Hispanic	4	4	4	6	7
<b>Income</b>					
\$100,000 or more	20	19	22	22	18
\$75,000-\$100,000	15	14	12	13	12
\$50,000-\$75,000	15	11	14	17	16

*Continued next page*

**Table 5 Continued**

	Gallup Governance Poll				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
\$20,000–\$50,000	30	33	30	32	34
Under \$20,000	13	15	12	7	12
Refused	6	8	9	9	8
<b>Education</b>					
Post-graduate	15	17	11	13	16
College graduate	17	15	18	16	15
Some college	35	36	37	39	34
High school or less	32	31	34	32	34
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	17	17	12	14	18
30–49	36	25	32	38	34
50–64	30	37	31	25	26
65+	17	21	26	23	21
<b>Region</b>					
East	25	21	12	15	21
Midwest	21	23	21	22	22
South	29	28	40	40	33
West	25	28	27	23	23
<b>Geographic Area</b>					
Urban	36	40	22	28	32
Suburban	46	43	55	48	48
Rural	19	17	23	24	20
<b>Religion</b>					
Protesant	37	39	58	58	47
Catholic	28	29	17	22	23
Jewish	3	3	1	2	2
Other	14	19	20	16	16
None	19	9	4	2	11

Source: Authors calculations from Gallup Governance, September 13–16, 2010.

**Table 6**  
**Tea Party Demographics**

	<i>Washington Post/Harvard/Kaiser</i>				
	All Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives) %	All Republicans %	All Respondents %
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	57	65	60	51	49
Female	43	35	40	49	51
<b>Race</b>					
White	88	91	87	92	78
Black	4	1	6	3	13
Hispanic	6	8	4	7	13
<b>Income</b>					
\$100,000 or more	24	22	15	21	16
\$75,000–\$100,000	13	14	14	11	10
\$50,000–\$74,999	16	19	13	17	14
\$35,000–\$49,999	15	18	17	14	16
\$20,000–\$34,999	10	8	16	12	16
Under \$20,000	9	7	6	9	15
Don't know/Refused	14	12	20	16	13
<b>Education</b>					
Post-graduate	17	12	10	11	12
College graduate	26	25	28	27	22
Some college	24	27	22	20	21
High school	26	27	28	33	31
< High school	6	8	12	9	13
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	10	7	16	18	22
30–49	44	44	34	36	36
50–64	28	30	29	28	25
65+	18	19	21	18	17
<b>Region</b>					
Northeast	18	20	13	15	18
North Central	22	21	21	18	22
South	37	39	46	44	37
West	23	21	20	23	23

Source: Authors calculations from *Washington Post/Harvard/Kaiser*.



First, comparing tea party libertarians to tea party conservatives, tea party libertarians tend to be more independent and less loyal to the Republican Party. The conservative members identify themselves as 60 percent Republican, according to *New York Times* data, and 28 percent independent, similar to Gallup and *Washington Post*. Compare this to libertarian tea partiers, who identify themselves as 51 percent Republican and 44 percent independent. When asked whether the Republican or Democratic Party has the best ideas to fix government, 80 percent of tea party libertarians said “neither can be trusted,” compared to 64 percent of conservatives, according to the Cato Virginia Tea Party Convention survey. According to Cato data, while 92 percent of tea party conservatives report voting for Sen. John McCain in 2008, only 75 percent of tea party libertarians supported him, with 16 percent backing third parties.

According to *New York Times* data, Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin enjoy high favorability among all tea partiers, but Ron Paul enjoys higher favorability among tea party libertarians, 31 percent to 24 percent. In our Cato survey, which sampled attendees of a tea party event, a more activist group, 15 percent of both tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives said Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin exemplified the movement. However, 25 percent of tea party libertarians said Ron Paul exemplified the movement, compared to 12 percent of tea party conservatives.<sup>33</sup>

Tea party libertarians tend to have higher incomes and more education than tea party conservatives. According to *New York Times* data, 45 percent of tea party libertarians report college graduate or post-grad education, versus 33 percent of conservatives. Twenty-five percent of tea party libertarians report earning over \$100,000 per year, versus 14 percent of tea party conservatives. According to *Washington Post* data, 37 percent of tea party libertarians report having a college education or higher, compared to 29 percent of tea party conservatives.

### **The Tea Party and the Religious Right**

Perhaps most striking, only 28 percent of tea party libertarians attend church every week, compared to 48 percent of tea party conservatives. According to *New York Times* data, only 26 percent of tea party libertarians consider themselves evangelical—no more than the average among all Americans—versus 52 percent of tea party conservatives. With such low levels of religiosity, it would be hard to argue that tea party libertarians are the same old religious right. To make this case, Robert Putnam and David Campbell point out that “Tea Partiers are, on average, more religiously observant than the typical American.”<sup>34</sup> On average, true—but only if you average out tea party libertarians’ lower levels of religiosity with tea party conservatives’ strong religiosity.

Indeed, Scott Clement and John Green at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a study on the tea party and religion in February 2011. They concluded that “support for the tea party is not synonymous with support of the religious right.”<sup>35</sup> They noted that nearly half of tea party supporters, 46 percent, had not heard of or had no opinion about “the conservative Christian movement sometimes known as the religious right.”<sup>36</sup>

We conducted our own analysis of Pew’s data on the religious right, dividing the tea party between libertarians and conservatives (see Table 7).<sup>37</sup> We find that 78 percent of tea party conservatives agree with the “religious right,” compared to 43 percent of tea party libertarians. Eighty-six percent of tea party conservatives think religion is “losing influence” “on government” and 90 percent think this is a “bad thing.” Sixty-five percent of tea party libertarians think this is a “bad thing,” about the same as among all respondents. So to the extent that tea partiers identify with the religious right, it is more likely among the tea party’s conservative half.

On the issues, tea party libertarians are less concerned than conservatives about the moral direction of the country. According to *New York Times* data, tea party libertarians

**Only 28 percent of tea party libertarians attend church every week, compared to 48 percent of tea party conservatives.**

**Table 7**  
**Pew Religion and Public Life Survey, July/August 2010**

	Tea Party Libertarians %	Tea Party Conservatives %	All Respondents %
<b>How much, if anything, have you heard about the conservative Christian movement sometimes known as the religious right?</b>			
A lot	42	47	25
A little	37	40	33
Nothing at all	21	12	41
Don't know	0	1	1
<b>In general, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the conservative Christian movement—or don't you have an opinion either way?</b>			
Strongly Agree	15	41	7
Agree	28	37	16
Disagree	8	3	16
Strongly Disagree	7	1	12
No Opinion Either Way	40	15	46
<b>At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on government leaders and institutions such as the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court, or losing its influence?</b>			
Increasing influence	15	5	23
Losing influence	78	86	62
Same	2	-	4
Don't know	5	9	10
<b>All in all, do you think this is a good thing or bad thing?</b>			
Good thing	28	10	26
Bad thing	65	90	66

Source: Authors' calculations based on Pew Religion and Public Life Survey July/August 2010.

are nearly unanimous, with 91 percent reporting that they are more concerned about taxes and jobs than gay marriage and abortion, compared to 67 percent of tea party conservatives. Less than 1 percent of tea party libertarians believe that “religious values” are the most important problem facing our country, while 5 percent of tea party conservatives do.

**The Tea Party and Personal Freedom**

Tea party libertarians are more concerned about personal freedoms than are tea party conservatives. According to *Washington Post* data, 86 percent of tea party libertarians believe government “threatens” their rights and freedoms, compared to 69 percent of tea party conservatives. According to Gallup data, 63 percent of tea party libertarians

believe the government should have “little” or “no” responsibility for upholding moral standards, compared to 37 percent of tea party conservatives.

However, tea party libertarians and conservatives share economic concerns and are more “angry” with the federal government than Republicans more generally. Fifty-two percent of tea party libertarians and 41 percent of tea party conservatives grade the federal government “F” for performance, compared to only 29 percent among Republicans, according to *Washington Post* data. Fifty-eight percent of tea party libertarians and 51 percent of tea party conservatives are angry about politics in Washington, compared to 31 percent of Republicans, according to *New York Times* data. Both tea party libertarians and conservatives are extremely concerned about cutting federal government spending, reducing the size of government, and repealing Obama’s health care reform. Three-quarters of tea partiers believe that the economy would have improved without the TARP bank bailouts, according to *New York Times* data.

### **Political Activism**

Tea party libertarians report higher levels of political activism according to *Washington Post* data. The *Washington Post* data show 65 percent of tea party libertarians report attending a political rally, speech, or meeting, compared to 48 percent of tea party conservatives. Forty-six percent of tea party libertarians report being likely to contribute money and 75 percent planned to convince neighbors to vote, compared to 35 percent of tea party conservatives who were likely to give money and 66 percent who planned to convince someone to vote. Taken together, these measures show that tea party libertarians seem to be the more active, angry, animated part of the tea party movement.

### **Not All Libertarians Support the Tea Party**

Next, tea party libertarians are a subset of libertarians more generally but differ in im-

portant ways. According to *Washington Post* data, only 44 percent of libertarians consider themselves supporters of the tea party; *New York Times* data shows only 46 percent of libertarians consider themselves supporters. Libertarians are even less loyal to the GOP than tea party libertarians. Libertarians are more of a swing vote, with 40 percent reporting voting equally for Democrats and Republicans. And libertarians consider themselves more moderate in their political views, with 33 percent “moderate” compared to 23 percent of tea party libertarians and 19 percent of conservatives who consider themselves moderate, according to *New York Times* data. Libertarians are about as equally likely to say they are independent as tea party libertarians (about 40 percent each), compared to about 30 percent among tea party conservatives.

Geographically, libertarians and tea party libertarians are similarly dispersed, and are more concentrated in the Northeast than tea party conservatives, according to *New York Times* data. Tea party conservatives and Republicans are more concentrated in the South and slightly more in the north central heartland. According to *Washington Post* data, libertarians are more educated than tea partiers generally.

### **How Libertarians Define Themselves**

As noted earlier, not all libertarians define themselves as such, and many are unfamiliar with the word “libertarian.” Pew has occasionally asked respondents if they have positive or negative reactions to political words such as “socialism,” “capitalism,” and “libertarian,” and more than twice as many respondents “don’t know” the word libertarian, compared to other political words. Respondents have a more positive reaction to the word “capitalism” than “libertarian,” perhaps resulting from confusion over what the word means.<sup>38</sup>

As is typical with national polls, none of the three national polls offered respondents an option of self-identifying as libertarian. What happens if you do? To find out, in a March 2012 *Reason-Rupe* poll, we included

**Both tea party libertarians and conservatives are extremely concerned about cutting federal government spending, reducing the size of government, and repealing Obama’s health care reform.**

**Tea partiers  
are angrier  
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our favorite background questions about ideology—about the role of government in fiscal and social matters—as well as a more inclusive ideology question. We offered respondents the option of identifying as “libertarian” or “progressive” in addition to the typical “conservative,” “moderate,” or “liberal.” While only 6 percent of respondents self-identify as “libertarian” in this question construction, 24 percent give libertarian answers to our fiscal and social questions.

Of the more broadly constructed group of libertarians, 29 percent consider themselves “conservative,” 33 percent “moderate,” 10 percent “liberal,” and 24 percent “libertarian.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, a plurality of libertarians consider themselves moderate. And about as many libertarians consider themselves “conservative” as “libertarian.” No wonder it’s confusing for political scientists to parse ideology among tea partiers.

#### **Tea Partiers Are Not Partisan Republicans**

Finally, some caricature the tea party as a Republican phenomenon. And while *New York Times* data show that 51 percent of tea party libertarians and 60 percent of tea party conservatives identify as Republican, they are far from your typical partisans. Only 16 percent of tea party libertarians and 20 percent of tea party conservatives report voting “always” for the GOP, compared to 27 percent among Republican partisans. Forty-six percent of tea party libertarians and 38 percent of conservatives have an unfavorable opinion of the Republican Party, while only 20 percent of Republicans do, according to *New York Times* data.

Tea partiers are angrier at the federal government than are Republicans. Fifty-two percent of tea party libertarians and 41 percent of tea party conservatives grade the federal government “F” for performance, compared to 29 percent of Republicans. Tea partiers tend to be older than Republicans more generally. The largest age group of tea party supporters is 45–65 according to *New York Times* data. Young people on the right are more

likely to be libertarian or even Republican than supporters of the tea party.

### **Digging for the Tea Party’s Libertarian Roots**

These three point-in-time surveys—from CBS/*New York Times* in April 2010, Gallup in September 2010, and *Washington Post*/Harvard/Kaiser in October 2010—show that tea party libertarians seem to be the more active, angry, and animated part of the tea party movement. Knowing this, we can now work backwards in time to see if we can corroborate this finding and discover where these two threads of the tea party come from—libertarian and conservative.

Using ANES Panel data from the 2008 to 2010, we model a coalition of the right: a non-overlapping sample of libertarian independents, tea partiers, and other Republicans (see Figure 3). We modeled the coalition this way to best reflect the base of right-leaning voters who influence elections. ANES asks the same questions of the same respondents in successive waves: how angry are you at the Republican Party, has the economy gotten worse since 2001, can people like you affect government, and so on. By plotting how these opinions change over time, we can help model the sequence of events to understand the tea party’s libertarian roots.

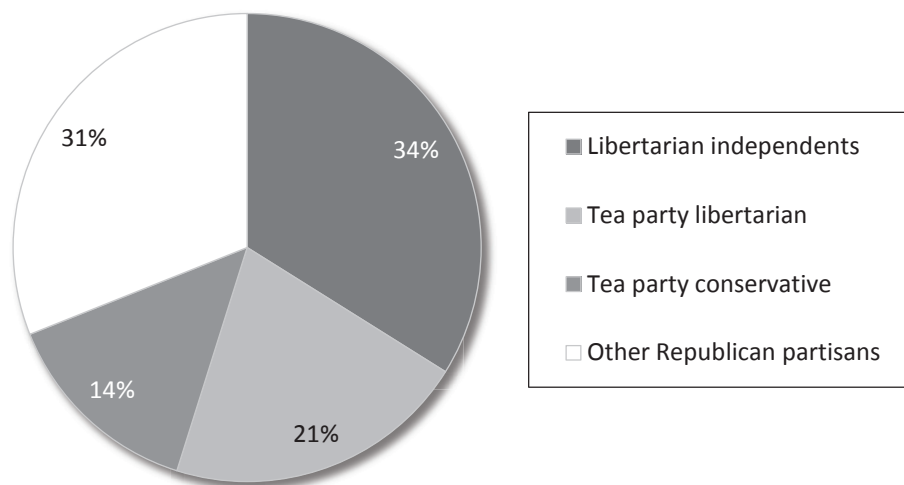
For this model, we first define libertarians as those who believe that the federal government should have “less” involvement in business and “less effect” on “American lives.” This gives us 25 percent of respondents, in line with Gallup and other estimates of libertarians. We then define tea partiers as only those who “like” the tea party “a great deal.” This is a stricter definition of a tea partier than the casual tea party “supporter” in other surveys, yielding only 12 percent of respondents compared to near 30 percent for tea party supporters. This means that tea partiers in this model would more fairly represent the activists or strong sympathizers who likely played the

**Table 8**  
**Coalition of Libertarians, Tea Partiers, and Republicans**

	N	%
Libertarian independents (not tea party, not Democrats, not strong Republicans )	178	34
Tea party libertarian	110	21
Tea party conservative	74	14
Other Republican partisans (strong and moderate Republicans who are not tea party and not libertarian)	163	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' calculations, American National Election Studies, 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

**Figure 3**  
**Coalition of Libertarians, Tea Partiers, and Republicans**



Source: Authors' calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

most significant role in the early tea party movement.

Further defining our terms, “tea party libertarians” are simply libertarian tea partiers. “Tea party conservatives” are tea partiers who are not libertarian and not liberal. Then, what we call “libertarian independents” are right-leaning libertarians who are independent—not tea partiers, not Dem-

ocrats, and not strong Republicans. Finally, what we call “other Republican partisans” are strong and moderate Republicans who are not tea partiers and not libertarian.

Table 8 and Figure 3 show the resulting model of non-overlapping right-leaning voters. Tea party libertarians and conservatives are spilt along similar lines as what we found in other surveys.<sup>40</sup>

**Starting in 2008, libertarian independents and tea party libertarians report much higher levels of anger than tea party conservatives or other Republican partisans.**

**Libertarian Tea Party Anger Grows**

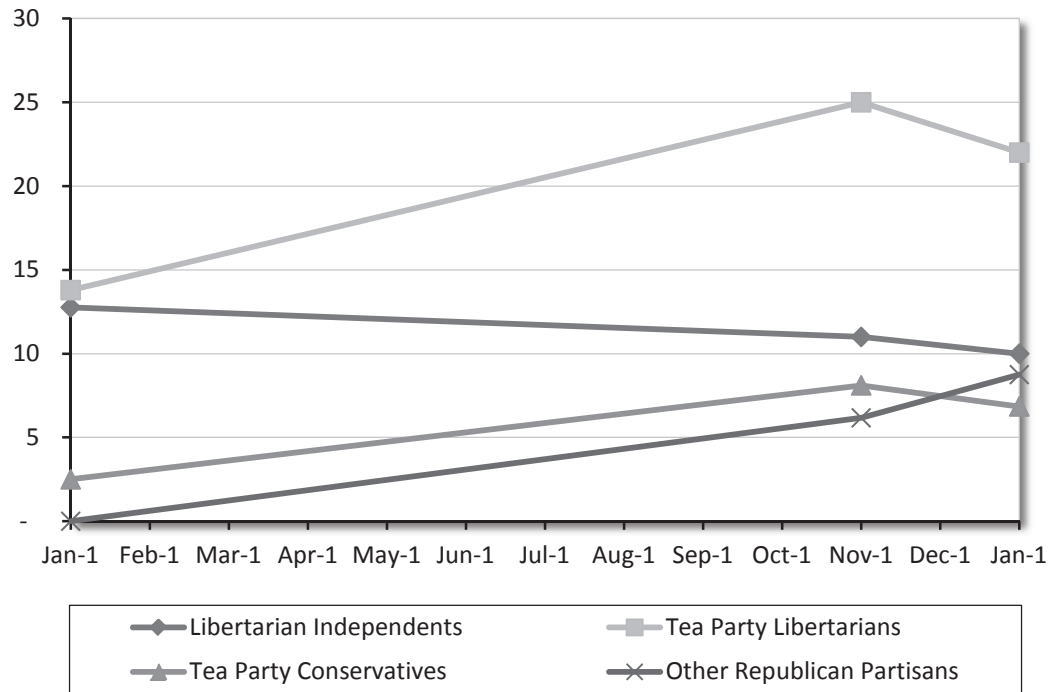
First, tracking anger over time in the coalition, Figures 4 and 5 show those who are “extremely” or “very” angry with Republicans and George W. Bush over time. Notice that starting in 2008, libertarian independents and tea party libertarians report much higher levels of anger than tea party conservatives or other Republican partisans. Thirteen percent of libertarian independents and 14 percent of tea party libertarians report anger toward Republicans, compared to 3 percent of tea party conservatives and zero percent among other Republicans partisans. When it comes to Bush, libertarians are angriest, with 16 percent reporting anger compared to only 5 percent of tea party libertarians and zero tea party conservatives. As 2008 continues, however, notice that tea party libertarians’ anger toward Republicans increases, nearly doubling to 25 percent by November 2008. Also, while libertarian independents’ anger toward Bush remains about the same, tea

party libertarians’ anger spikes from 7 to 17 percent by November. Libertarians are angrier than tea party conservatives or other Republicans, and tea party libertarians’ anger seemed to boil over first.

**Feelings about the Economy and Deficit**

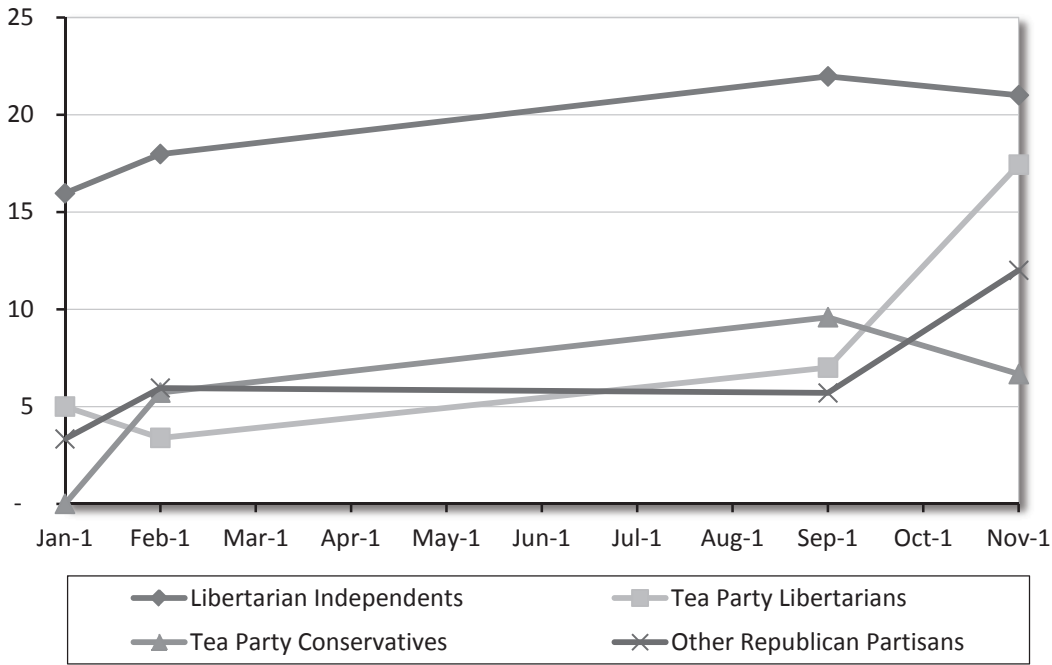
Figures 6 and 7 compile data on feelings about the economy and deficit over time. Here again, a higher percentage of libertarian independents believe the economy and deficit have grown “much worse” than tea partiers or other Republicans. In January 2008, 48 percent of libertarian independents believe the deficit is worse, compared to 38 percent of tea party libertarians and 36 percent of other Republicans. By November 2008, libertarians’, tea party libertarians’, and tea party conservatives’ feelings toward the economy and deficit grow much more bleak, with near 70 percent saying much worse. Libertarians seem to start at a higher level of agitation

**Figure 4**  
**Percentage Extremely/Very Angry with the Republican Party**



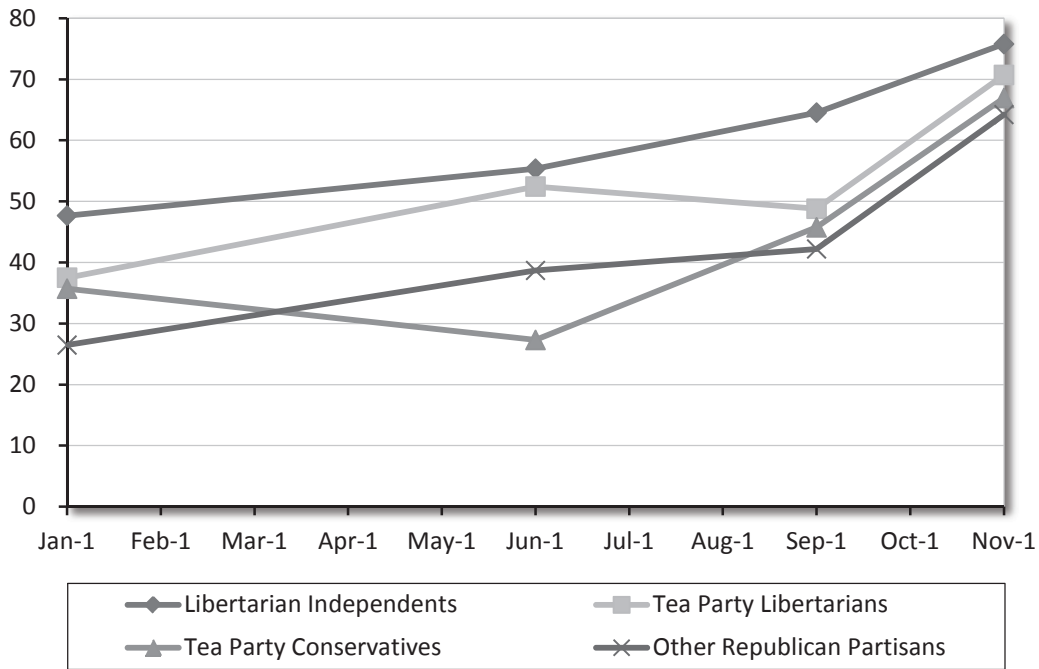
Source: Authors’ calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

**Figure 5**  
**Percentage Extremely/Very Angry with George W. Bush**



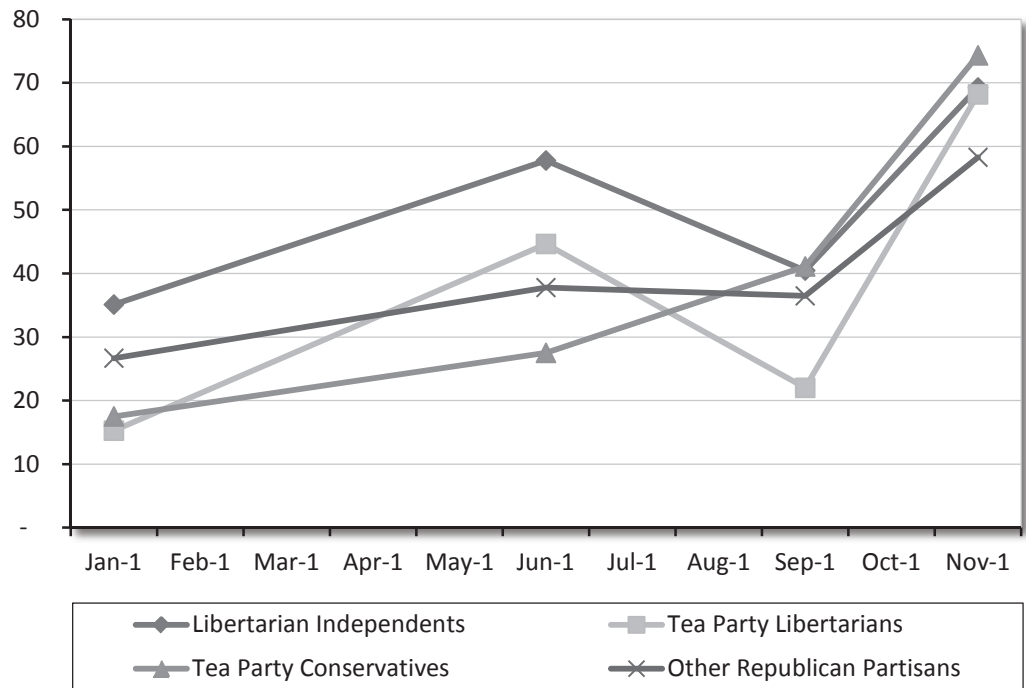
Source: Authors' calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

**Figure 6**  
**Percentage Who Believe Federal Deficit Is Much Worse since 2001**



Source: Authors' calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

**Figure 7**  
**Percentage Who Believe Nation's Economy Is Much Worse since 2001**



Source: Authors' calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

toward the economy and deficit, leading the way for tea partiers and Republicans, who catch up over time.

**Frustration with Government**

Finally, Figure 8 tracks frustration with whether “people like you” can affect government. Among those who say “a little” or “not at all,” we notice a similar pattern. Libertarians and tea party libertarians report higher levels of frustration than tea party conservatives and Republicans. Fifty-two percent of libertarian independents and 48 percent of tea party libertarians report little or no ability for people like them to affect government in January 2008, compared with 35 percent of tea party conservatives and 37 percent of other Republicans. Interestingly, frustration spikes for all groups in October 2008. This spike is consistent with the story of grassroots anger over the TARP bank bailouts, as Republicans and Democrats passed the bailout over heavy grass roots opposition. Yet while other groups’ frustration briefly dis-

sipates, tea party libertarians remain more agitated through May 2009, as the tea party protest began. It’s almost as if tea party libertarians’ high levels of frustration turned to desperation after TARP.

In sum, libertarians and tea party libertarians started angrier, more frustrated with government, and more pessimistic about the economy and deficit than tea party conservatives and Republicans, and only grew more so as the 2008 election wore on. These data show a simmering agitation among libertarians that reached a boiling point after the TARP bailouts, spilling over into the tea parties in early 2009.

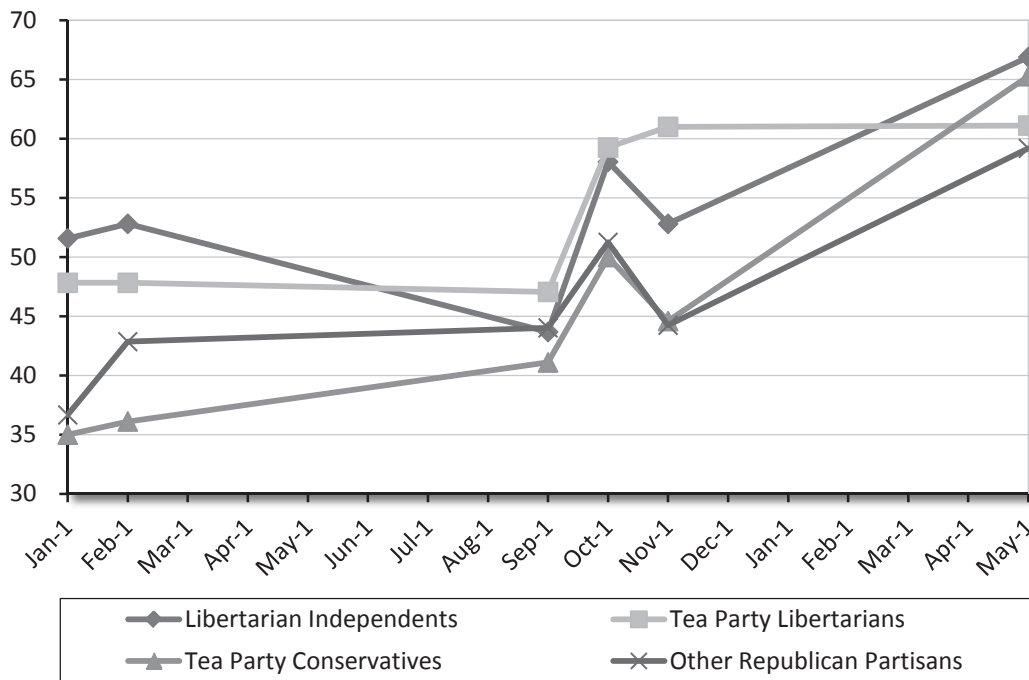
**Why Were Libertarians Angry?**

This pattern in the data—of early libertarian agitation boiling over after TARP—corresponds to the strong feelings many libertarians expressed at the time. In 2008 some of these libertarians supported Ron Paul—whether in earnest or as a protest vote. Even among those who did not, libertarian dis-

**Libertarians and tea party libertarians started angrier, more frustrated with government, and more pessimistic about the economy and deficit than tea party conservatives and Republicans.**



**Figure 8**  
**Percentage Who Believe People Can Affect Government a Little/Not at All**



Source: Authors' calculations; American National Election Studies; 2008–2010 Panel Survey.

satisfaction with the Republican candidates was higher than among conservatives. Libertarians were far from satisfied with McCain. Journalist Radley Balko aptly summarized what many libertarians felt at the time in an article for *Reason* magazine:

I voted for Bob Dole in 1996 and George Bush in 2000, generally because—though I'm not a conservative (I'm a libertarian)—I'd always thought the GOP was the party of limited government. By 2002, I was less sure of that. And by 2004, I was so fed up with the party that I did what I thought I'd never do—vote for an unabashed leftist for president. Since then, “fed up” has soured to “given up.” . . . In the last eight years, the GOP has given us a monstrous new federal bureaucracy in the Department of Homeland Security. In the prescription drug benefit, it's given us the largest new federal entitlement since

the Johnson administration. Federal spending—even on items not related to war or national security—has soared. And we now get to watch as the party that's supposed to be “free market” nationalizes huge chunks of the economy's financial sector.<sup>41</sup>

This story of being “fed up” synchs up with the pattern we find in the ANES data among libertarian independents and libertarian tea partiers. It was almost as if libertarians were yelling at the top of their lungs, but no one seemed to hear them. Indeed, at the 9/12 Tea Party March on Washington in 2009, several speakers took the podium on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lead the crowd in chanting, “Can you hear us now?!”<sup>42</sup> This was a common refrain that would come to be shouted through bullhorns and into podium mics at tea party protests around the country. And while speakers were certainly taunting Obama and Democrats like Speaker Nancy Pelosi, we suspect this chant reso-

**It was almost as if libertarians were yelling at the top of their lungs, but no one seemed to hear them.**

**How could it be, many reasoned, that so called “conservative” Republicans could support what amounted to a blank check to the Treasury Department for \$700 billion?**

nated with tea partiers because it applied equally to politicians of both parties who supported the bailout, from Bush onward.

During the TARP debate, FreedomWorks’ Dick Arney and Matt Kibbe pointed out that many beltway conservative organizations dutifully supported the GOP’s rationale for passing the bailout or issued tepid or tortured statements of support.<sup>43</sup> An uneasy feeling began to spread among grass roots libertarians that something was not right. How could it be, many reasoned, that so called “conservative” Republicans could support what amounted to a blank check to the Treasury Department for \$700 billion? This went against everything that was core to conservative principles. As Dick Arney wrote to House members on the eve of the vote, “Do you believe that the political process, having produced many of the perverse incentives that resulted in our economy’s current predicament, can solve the underlying distortions by essentially doing more of the same? I believe the answer to this question is unequivocally NO.”<sup>44</sup>

Even after TARP, too much was happening, too fast, and in too short a period of time: bailouts for banks, bailouts for automakers, cash for clunkers, the stimulus package, the auto takeover, and talk of new sweeping regulation of the financial industry, cap and trade, and an overhaul of the health care industry. All this in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression.

**Tea Partiers’ Own Words**

We hear this story echoed again and again in our interviews with tea partiers themselves. Robert Gordon of the Bayshore New Jersey Tea Party traces the evolution of his involvement back to 2008 recession:

Our ultimate involvement in the tea party was probably the beginning of the recession in 2008. A national depression was going on, and the first proposal of the bailouts of the banks, that the majority of America was against. It came to light for us

. . . in the 1994–1998 period where we had the contract of America that changed the balance of power in congress. But it quickly soured because the Republicans became as careless with our money as the Democrats were. In 2000 Bush was elected with control of both houses of Congress and they continued practicing disregarding the bedrock conservative principles of fiscal responsibility and you see the results of that in 2004 and drastically in 2006. Republicans stopped voting for Republicans because they weren’t behaving like Republicans. That was the real disillusion era from being a responsible voter to being disillusioned with the system. . . . Rick Santelli crystallized everything in spring of 2009.<sup>45</sup>

Bill Haney, a 64-year-old member of the West Jersey Tea Party and 9/12 Burlington County Project, described it this way:

I had internal visceral issues with the Patriot Act passed by Bush, with the increase in spending under Bush and this act [TARP] is Bush’s too. . . . When they all make a grandstand show of returning to Washington, D.C. Taking time off from the hustling to vote on TARP. I knew that TARP was wrong. They should have let the banks fail, they should have let the auto industry fail, they should have let the AIG fail, they should have let those things fail. They—I knew that that was definitely wrong, that was the wrong thing to do because they ripped away the mask of whether or not we are a capitalist nation and it says that we are not a capitalist nation, that we’re a government subsidy.<sup>46</sup>

Adam Light, of the Jeffersonville, Virginia, Tea Party, agreed:

So that’s why people are glad to take it towards the tea parties. Because the

tea parties are about principle and about sticking to your guns, whereas the political parties—the mainstream political parties haven’t been.<sup>47</sup>

David Webb, leader of Tea Party 365 in New York City, explains, The “[tea party] was founded at a seminal moment of frustration with out of control government spending, and frankly a political class that had not listened to the populace.”<sup>48</sup> Kevin Kelly, leader of the Loyal Opposition in Philadelphia, put it this way, “Eventually John Galt leaves, [saying] ‘Everybody out of the car! I’m done pulling all of the people in the car. I’m tired of doing all the work.’”<sup>49</sup>

After TARP, many conservatives began to pick up on and amplify points libertarians had made for years earlier—about the limits of government enshrined in the Constitution, about the folly of rampant overspending, bailouts, takeovers, and regulatory overreach. Conservatives began to share a feeling of betrayal by the GOP leaders many had helped elect. In his book *Teavangelicals*, Brody writes that “libertarians had been complaining for decades” that our “freedoms and liberties” had been “eroding slowly.” But through the tea party, evangelicals began to “break bread” with libertarians.<sup>50</sup> Libertarian anger, it seems, was contagious.

### **Libertarians Lead the First Wave of Tea Parties**

As we track the first tea party protests as they spread around the country, we find evidence that libertarians led the way. There were three distinct waves of protests and events in the early days of the tea party.

The first wave followed a tiny protest started by Mary Rakovich on February 10, 2009, in Fort Myers, Florida, outside a convention center where President Obama was hosting a townhall in support of his \$787 billion stimulus plan. The *Washington Post* described Mary as a 53-year-old “unemployed automotive engineer, an anti-abortion vegetarian”<sup>51</sup>—not the image one conjures of an arch-conservative protestor. She held hand-

written signs reading, “Real Jobs Not Pork,” and “Stop Stealing Our Children’s Future.”

Fox News host Neil Cavuto invited Mary to appear on his show the next day. There was something contagious about Mary’s authentic anger and passion that hit a nerve with many viewers. Mary’s Fox News appearance spread through social media, and citizens began to host incrementally larger events in cities such as Seattle, Denver, and Mesa, Arizona.<sup>52</sup> The budding movement got its name on February 19, when Rick Santelli called for CNBC viewers to join him in Chicago for a “tea party.” A FreedomWorks staffer quickly posted a website called *IamwithRick.com* to share information and planning about various events.<sup>53</sup> And the first wave crested with large simultaneous protests in at least 25 cities on February 27 and February 28.<sup>54</sup>

The second wave of tea parties built up to massive protests around tax day, April 15, 2009. Statistician Nate Silver, who later joined the *New York Times*, estimated that those events drew 311,460 attendees in 346 cities.<sup>55</sup> The third wave of events led up to July 4, 2009, Independence Day, with an estimated 511 separate protests.<sup>56</sup> After July 4, the tea parties had gone viral, with so many events, it became nearly impossible for scholars to keep track of them all.

Looking at these successive waves of tea party events, we find some evidence to suggest that libertarians led the way. Unfortunately, no datasets exist during this critical period of the early tea party to test these claims. Most election season polls ended after the election. Pollsters didn’t survey the tea party until late 2009, when the movement had proven its newsworthiness. These early tea party protests of 2009 occurred during a dead zone of data. Reports from citizens and anecdotal evidence may be the best political scientists have to work with. Nonetheless, taken holistically, the evidence paints a compelling picture of early libertarian energy.

The first thing to note is that the early waves of tea parties were primarily an urban phenomenon, hosted in major cities like

**After TARP, many conservatives began to pick up on and amplify points libertarians had made for years earlier.**

**Nate Silver argued that the tea parties “had their origins in the libertarian movement,” noting that the message—“anti-tax, anti-big government—was about as libertarian as it gets.”**

Boston, Chicago, Washington, Houston, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Recall that the Gallup survey shows that 40 percent of tea party libertarians reside in urban areas, compared to 22 percent of tea party conservatives. By the second wave, tea parties had spread to smaller cities and suburbs. A majority of tea party conservatives live in the suburbs, compared to 43 percent of tea party libertarians. The story we heard from several interviewees was that the early tea parties were primarily organized or populated by urban libertarians, including many young people. As the tea party spread in the second and third waves, the complexion changed. Tea parties became more conservative.

For instance, we hosted a focus group of leaders of Students for Liberty, a libertarian student group. One student who was involved in the Ron Paul campaign of 2008 recalls his early involvement in the April 2009 Tax Day Tea Parties:

I was really involved in the initial part of it. One of the larger tea parties was in Sacramento and I helped put that together, and then I helped host one of my own. . . . And when I was involved then, and when a lot of the other youth were involved then, the tea party was very different. I mean, this was before the 9/12 march on Washington . . . the first tax day tea party. This is when, right when Glenn Beck got involved. . . . Back when it was just very spontaneous, just kind of bubbly. And that point, there was a lot of youth that got involved, at least from my perspective and from my own story. But after people started standing up and saying, “Oh, Glenn Beck represents the tea party movement”—Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin . . . when Sarah Palin started speaking as the leader of the tea party movement, that was the point where I was like, “I’m done.”<sup>57</sup>

As this student described, libertarians and

young people played a big role spreading the word in these early events. For instance, the Libertarian Party of Illinois claims to have posted the first Facebook page organizing a Tax Day Tea Party, more than a week before Santelli’s rant.<sup>58</sup> Readers of high-trafficked Ron Paul websites such as DailyPaul shared ideas for signs, and Campaign for Liberty, Ron Paul’s advocacy group, helped spread the word for various tea party events.<sup>59</sup> *New York Times* reporter Kate Zernike, in her book *Boiling Mad*, describes this mash-up of young and old in the early days: “the movement had been created and continued to be organized largely by young people . . . well versed in the new social media that was changing political campaigns. And they provided the movement with an ideology, largely libertarian and marked by a purist and ‘originalist’ view of the Constitution.”<sup>60</sup>

A few observers noticed right away. In April 2009 Nate Silver argued that the tea parties “had their origins in the libertarian movement,” noting that the message—“anti-tax, anti-big government—was about as libertarian as it gets.”<sup>61</sup> Looking for some evidence to test this claim, Silver compared cities with high levels of Ron Paul donations to the cities where tea parties were particularly large, finding a “fairly strong” correlation.<sup>62</sup> In the early tea parties, he argued:

What we seem to have is an audience that was about two parts Ron Paul/libertarian conservative (with its strength out West and in New Hampshire) and one part Sarah Palin/red-meat conservative (with its strength in rural areas, particularly in the South).

Analyzing and modeling the early geography of the tea party rallies, political scientists Wendy Tam Cho, James Gimpel, and Daron Shaw find additional evidence to confirm Silver’s back-of-the-envelope calculations. They write that “unorthodox Republicans” such as “those identified with Ron Paul” were attracted to the movement early on, while “committed Republicans were slightly

slower to fully engage.” It was these “libertarian and small government activists” who “drew Republican regulars into the fray.”<sup>63</sup>

In an interview with tea partier Daryl Mikhail Brooks, a leader of the Greater Trenton Tea Party, he reports finding “libertarian ways” among early tea partiers:

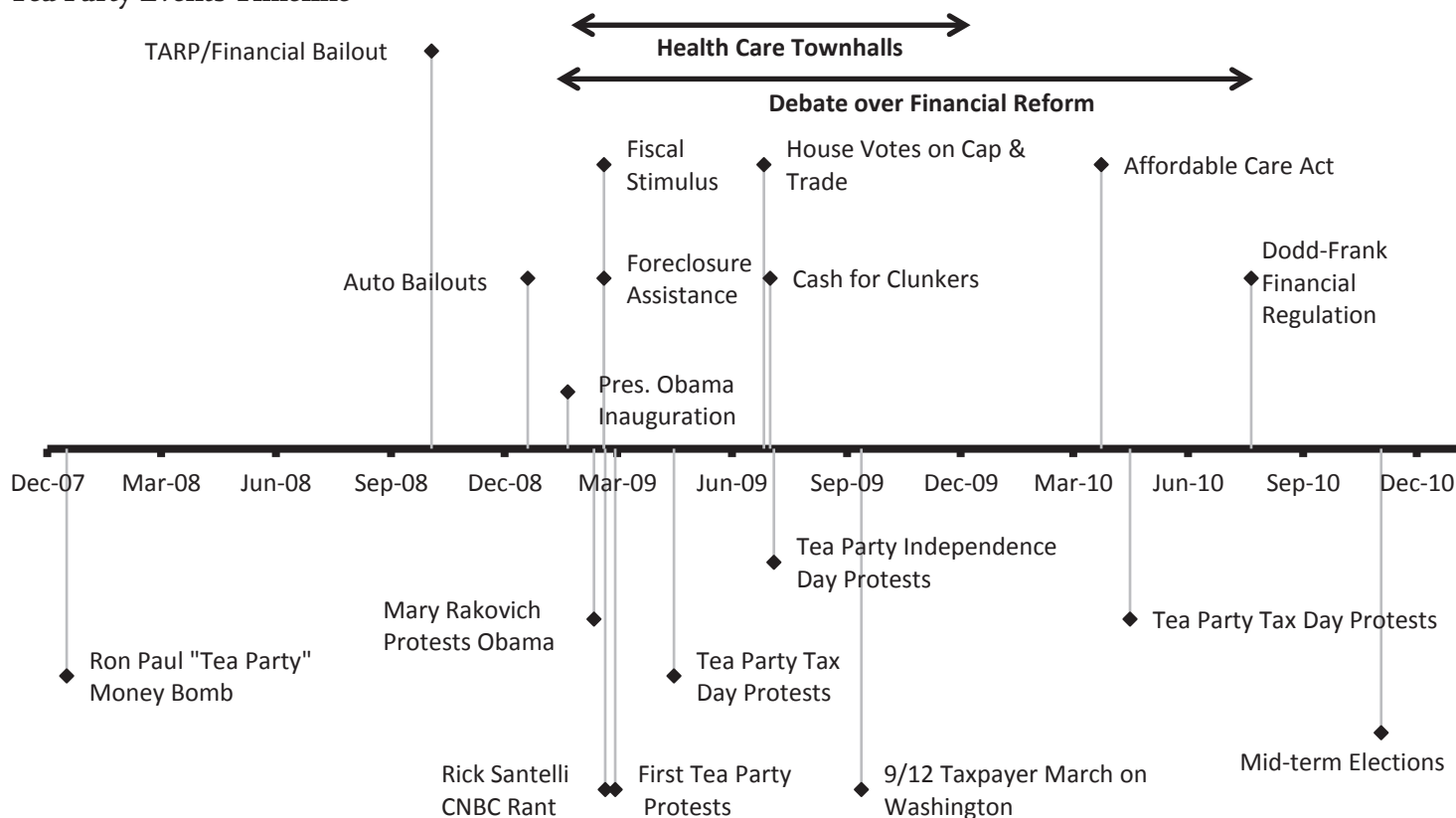
I am a libertarian, and part of the Libertarian Party. But, also, I am a part of the tea party movement . . . the majority of the tea party people have a lot of libertarian ways. And they are starting to talk about it openly. Before, they thought that libertarians were just kind of kooky . . . now, when you look at the Republican Party, and the old tea party movement, they’re speaking in a lot of libertarian ways.<sup>64</sup>

These early rallies culminated in the larg-

est single protest on September 12, 2009, in Washington, D.C. Accurate estimates of number of attendees are difficult, given the highly politicized nature of observations. Matt Welch at *Reason* magazine, who attended the rally, summarized the controversy around estimates, with “credible” estimates ranging from 70,000 to 850,000.<sup>65</sup> What is not in dispute is that the protest gathered citizens from across the country, many of whom traveled long distances to express their anger and frustration. As one tea party protester put it, “Do you have any idea what it takes to get someone from Montana to come to DC? You’ve got to be pissed!”<sup>66</sup> Thus, the tea party was born.

Throughout this period, a relentless flow of legislation and actions from Washington continued to provoke these tea party members. Figure 9 summarizes key events in the early tea party movement with key policy events for tea partiers in Washington.

**Figure 9**  
**Tea Party Events Timeline**



Source: Authors' calculations.

**Data show that libertarians were more angry and animated going into early 2009. And there is evidence that libertarians played a strong role in the first waves of the tea party.**

## **The Ebb and Flow of Libertarians in the Tea Party**

ANES data show that libertarians were more angry and animated going into early 2009. And there is evidence that libertarians played a strong role in the first waves of the tea party. But as the tea parties progressed, many conservatives began to take on leadership roles in local groups—as organizers, fundraisers, list compilers, and evangelists of the movement. Some evidence suggests this changed the complexion of the tea party. Conflicts began to materialize. And some libertarians began to feel less welcome in the movement they helped create.

To model the ebb and flow of enthusiasm among libertarian tea party supporters, we collected and analyzed 10 surveys by major media groups and national polling organizations between 2010 and 2011. We defined libertarians by using questions on the surveys on the role of government in fiscal and social matters. (See Appendix A for the survey questions.) We then asked what percentage of the tea party supporters were libertarian. Table 9 and Figure 10 summarizes these data.

Notice that libertarian tea party support

appears to crest in 2010, decline in 2011, and increase slightly in 2012. If we average all the data points for 2010, we find libertarian support of the tea party is 41 percent. If we average all the data points for 2011, we find libertarian support of the tea party is 30 percent. Comparing these two averages, there is an 11 percentage point decline in libertarian support for the tea party from 2010 to 2011. (See Appendix B for methodological details.)

To corroborate the trend we observe, we constructed a meta-sample of tea partiers in three *Reason*-Rupe national opinion polls from August 2011, December 2011, and March 2012. The surveys asked respondents who do not support the tea party whether they once did. This revealed a drop-off rate of about 9 percent from the tea partiers. Interestingly, among those who had dropped out of the tea party, 58 percent were social moderates/liberals, and 38 percent were social conservatives. This provides some evidence that since August 2011, those who say they have left the tea party are more likely to be libertarian tea partiers. Taking all this together, the evidence suggests that libertarian tea party support likely declined.

### **Libertarians Clash with Conservatives**

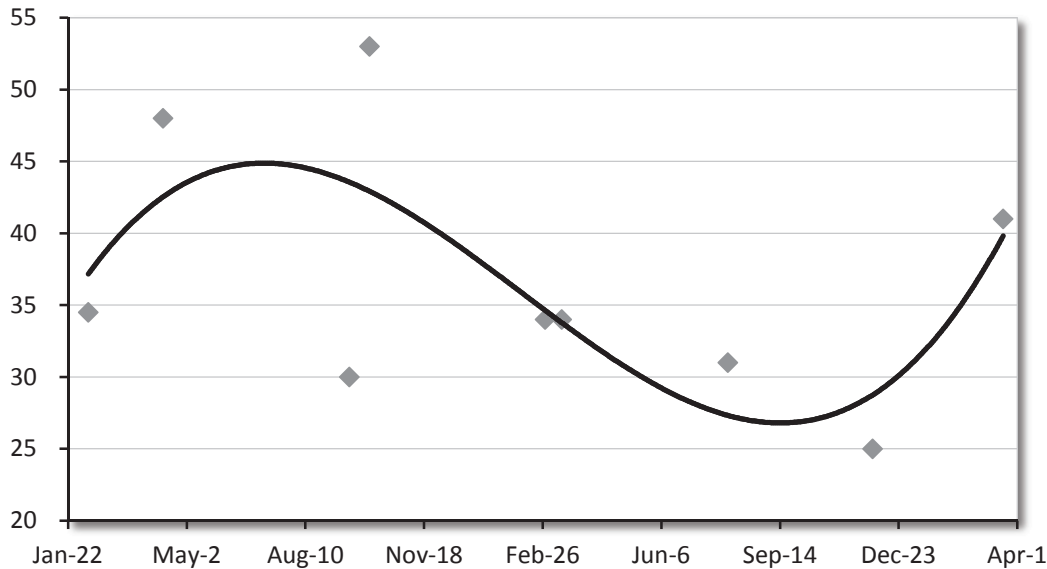
What explains the fluctuations of liber-

**Table 9  
Percent of Tea Party That Is Libertarian over Time**

<b>Poll</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Tea Party Libertarians %</b>
ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>	February 8	34
CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i>	April 12	48
Gallup Governance	September 16	30
<i>Washington Post</i> /Harvard	October 3	53
NBC/ <i>Wall Street Journal</i>	February 28	34
Pew Typology	March 14	34
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	August 1	31
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	December 1	25
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	March 20	41

Source: Authors' calculations.

**Figure 10**  
**Percentage of Tea Party That Is Libertarian, 2010–2012**



Source: Authors' calculations; surveys listed in Table 9.

tarian tea party support? During the height of libertarian tea party support, libertarians flexed their new muscle at Republican events, often to an unwelcome reception.

For instance, in February 2010, at the Conservative Political Action Conference, organizers were somewhat overwhelmed by all the new grass roots libertarian energy. This exposed tensions between libertarians and social conservatives lurking just below the surface. CPAC organizers allowed GOProud, a gay Republican group, to host a booth, angering social conservatives. Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, and the Heritage Foundation pulled out of CPAC.<sup>67</sup> On Fox News, Mike Huckabee criticized CPAC for becoming “increasingly libertarian and less Republican.”<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, libertarian activists helped Ron Paul win the presidential straw poll for the second year in a row.<sup>69</sup> The grass roots libertarian energy was so palpable that Grover Norquist, in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, confessed, “I hear it from social-conservative leaders who say, ‘Where are my issues?’”<sup>70</sup>

Yet toward the end of 2010, libertarian tea party members expressed some discom-

fort that the project they had invested in had taken a more conservative turn. Enthusiasm ebbed. Some libertarian tea party organizers threw in the towel. For instance, in August 2011, the *Wall Street Journal* interviewed Dan Blackford, of Houston, Texas, who had boxes of tea party “Don’t Tread on Me” flags, a favorite among libertarian tea partiers. Dan reported that he “no longer believes in the movement.” He believed the tea party was being co-opted by other conservative groups and the mainstream Republican Party to gain power, without truly embracing the movement’s focus on cutting federal spending.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly Tony Corsaut, a 50-year-old small-business owner and father of four, stepped down from the Wichita Falls tea party that he founded in 2009. The movement was losing focus, he said, by straying into issues such as opposition to abortion and gay marriage.<sup>72</sup>

### **Republicans Don’t Live Up to Their Tea Party Promises**

Another possible explanation for this drop in libertarian support is that Republicans didn’t live up to their tea party promis-

**During the height of libertarian tea party support, libertarians flexed their new muscle at Republican events, often to an unwelcome reception.**

**Seventy-four percent of tea partiers viewed their new GOP leaders favorably reflecting the optimism after the election, but that had dropped to 37 percent by August.**

es. Tea partiers played a key role in the 2010 elections, which swept Republicans to control of the House and narrowed the Democrats' majority in the Senate. But as budget and debt-ceiling negotiations in Congress played out in 2011, tea partiers grew frustrated at how quickly Republicans backed off on spending discipline.

In the "Pledge to America," Republican leaders pledged to cut at least \$100 billion of spending, returning spending to the 2008 level before Obama took office.<sup>73</sup> And yet on January 5, the day before the newly elected class of tea party freshman arrived, Republican leaders were already on the defensive for backsliding on the promise.<sup>74</sup> Our Cato colleagues tracked the slide. On January 6, Cato's Chris Edwards pointed out that a return to 2008 budget level represented only a \$55 billion cut.<sup>75</sup> By February, House Republicans managed to pass a bill that would cut \$61 billion and fund the remainder of fiscal year 2011.<sup>76</sup> This \$61 billion immediately met resistance in the Senate. As Senate negotiations continued, Harry Reid and Chuck Schumer blamed the tea party for the impasse.<sup>77</sup>

By April, when Congress agreed to a budget continuation, the number had dropped to \$38 billion. But as our colleague David Boaz pointed out, the \$38 billion really only represented \$352 million in actual cuts.<sup>78</sup> The frustration among tea partiers was high. Tea partier Robert Gordon vented to us:

One of the things that the Republican Party could benefit from the last midterm elections—so many tea party activists, was a sweeping out of a whole lot of people, both Republican and Democrat. And they still don't get it. The Republican super structure doesn't get it. Michael Steele doesn't get it. Newt Gingrich doesn't get it. Mitch McConnell doesn't get it.<sup>79</sup>

The sad saga continued. After the budget, Republicans in Congress clashed with President Obama over the raising the debt

ceiling. And while leaders of the Tea Party Patriots and others decried the dealmaking, it didn't seem to matter. *Slate* reporter Dave Weigel mused that individual tea party leaders had grown "less fearsome" because "they've already. . . been co-opted by Republicans."<sup>80</sup>

In August 2011 Pew released a poll showing that among Republicans and Republican-leaning who "agree" with the tea party, approval of the GOP leadership had dropped by half. In January 2011, 74 percent of tea partiers viewed their new GOP leaders favorably reflecting the optimism after the election, but that had dropped to 37 percent by August.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this declining favorability affected tea party libertarians more than tea party conservatives, given libertarians' weaker support of Republicans.

### **Is the Tea Party Declining?**

By late 2011 media reports suggested that the tea party was in decline. In November 2011, the *New York Times* and other media outlets reported on a new Pew Research study purportedly showing declining support for the tea party.<sup>82</sup> However, a closer look at the data reveals weak and contradictory evidence for this claim.

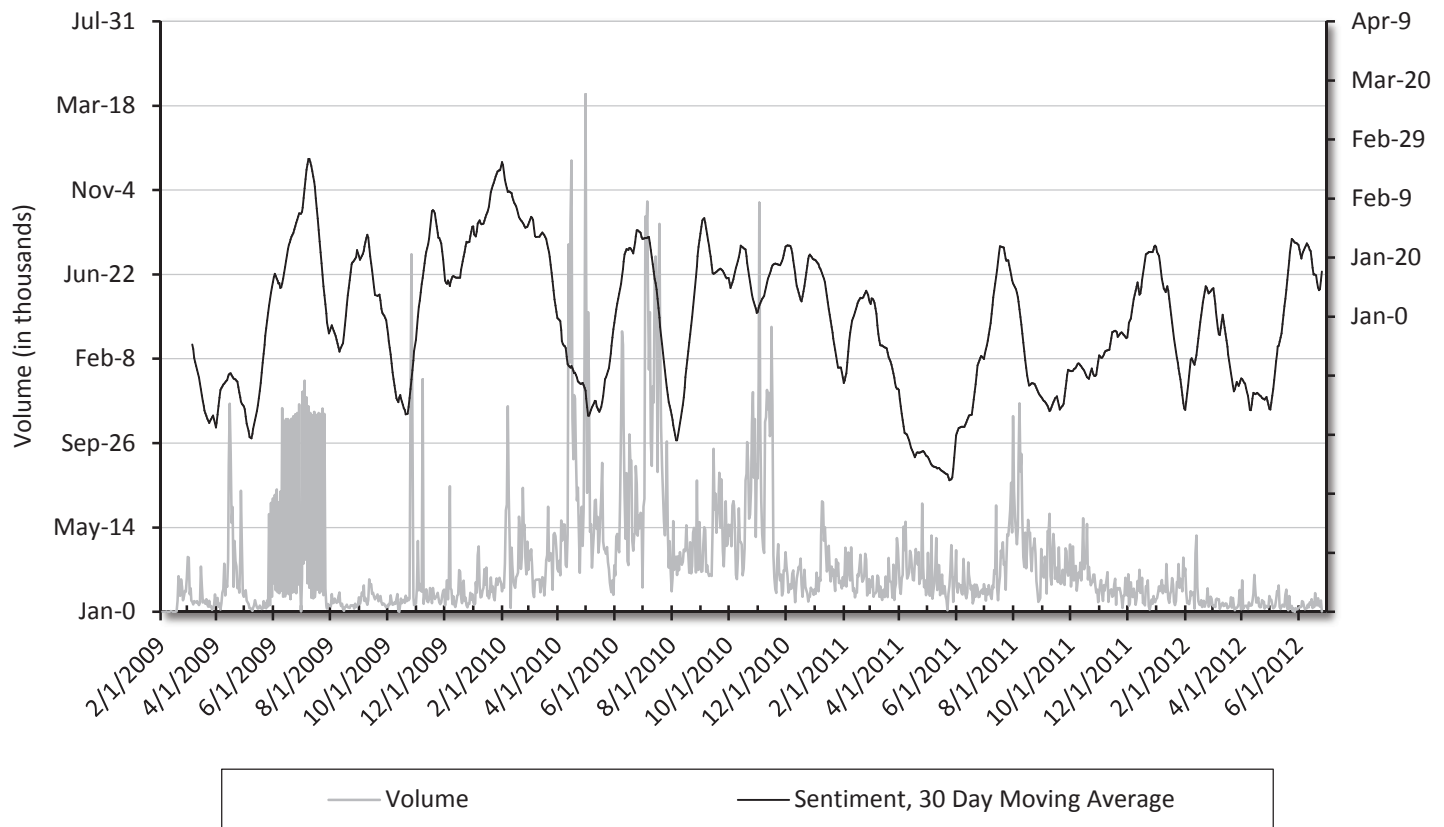
The Pew study showed that by November 2011, more Americans said they disagree than agree with the tea party movement, 27 percent to 20 percent respectively. Just one year earlier in November 2010, after the midterm elections, the balance of opinion was the opposite: 27 percent agreed and 22 percent disagreed with the tea party.<sup>83</sup>

Other polls show contradictory evidence. According to ABC/*Washington Post* polling, support for the tea party is "stable," ranging from 42 to 47 percent of all respondents from April 2011 through April 2012, and "strong" support has ranged from 16 to 12 percent.<sup>84</sup>

While support may not be declining, unfavorable views of the tea party among non-supporters had intensified. For instance, between April and August 2011, a CBS/*New York Times* polling showed that respondents



**Figure 11**  
**Tea Party Volume and Sentiment, All Internet**



Source: National Dialogue Monitor data provided by Alex Lundry and Mike Knee, TargetPoint Consulting.

who view the tea party unfavorably had increased from 29 to 40 percent.<sup>85</sup> CNN also reported an increase in unfavorable views in its polling, from 42 after the mid-term election to 53 percent by September 2011.<sup>86</sup>

Negative portrayals of the tea party in the media may well have taken a toll. Alex Lundry at TargetPoint shared with us an analysis of the National Dialogue Monitor—a tool that adds up all the mentions of “tea party” in the media, on blogs, on Facebook, and Twitter, and then rates mentions as either positive or negative. Notice that mentions of the tea party in 2011 were more negative than previous lows and stayed negative from March through September 2011, as Congressional budget negotiations wore on. Many mentions, perhaps unfairly, connected the

tea party to the Republican Party. With favorability of Republicans also in decline, this may well have taken a toll on citizens’ perceptions of the tea party movement.

While negative media may have taken a toll, Figure 11 shows that media mentions begin to trend more positive in late 2011 and into 2012. As we mentioned before, Figure 10 shows a slight uptick of libertarian enthusiasm for the tea party in early 2012. And finally, CNN polling shows a reversal of the reported decline in tea party opinion. Between September 2011 and April 2012, CNN polls show that respondents with a favorable opinion of the tea party increased from 28 percent to 34 percent, and those with an unfavorable opinion decreased 53 to 43 percent.<sup>87</sup> While the media story has

## Ron Paul never convinced tea party voters he could win.

been that the tea party is in decline, this recent evidence shows that enthusiasm for the tea party may well be on an upswing.

### How Ron Paul Lost the Tea Party Vote

But despite early enthusiasm for Ron Paul, he performed relatively poorly among tea partiers after New Hampshire. Commenting on this phenomenon, Felicia Sonmez, a *Washington Post* election blogger, wrote: “A funny thing happened on the campaign trail: Ron Paul, the father of the tea party movement, lost the tea party vote.”<sup>88</sup>

If the tea party is so libertarian, how could this be? Surely, the most libertarian politician of a generation should have done better among the half of tea partiers who are libertarian, if not functionally libertarian, as we argue. We can offer several possible explanations for this seeming contradiction.

First, Ron Paul never convinced tea party voters he could win. As Karlyn Bowman and her colleagues at American Enterprise Institute noted, tea party supporters have backed the winner in every contest except Ohio.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the candidate quality that matters most to Republican primary voters was the ability to defeat Obama.<sup>90</sup> For Republicans and tea party voters focused on defeating Obama, Paul may well have felt like too much of a vanity vote in an election season where the country could ill afford it. Anecdotally, we hear much admiration among tea partiers for Paul, but he often ended up as the second choice on voting day. John Stahl of Berks County Patriots from Reading, Pennsylvania, admits, “I’m not sure that Ron Paul is presidential material, but I tend to agree with him.”

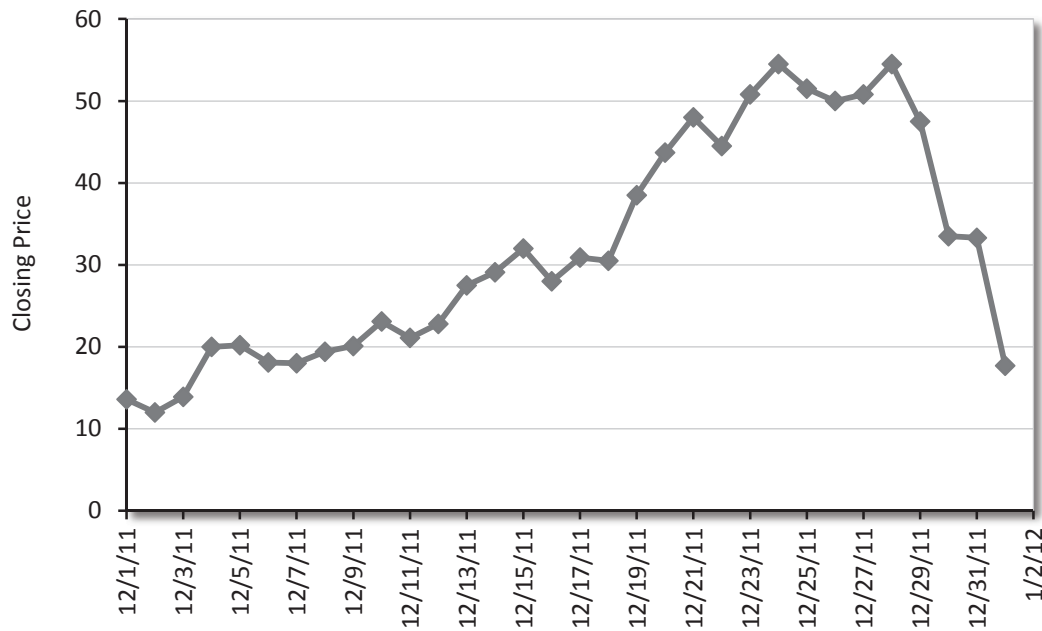
Second, some tea partiers were turned off by Ron Paul’s positions on foreign policy and drugs. Stahl explains, “If it weren’t for Ron Paul’s position on [foreign policy] . . . I understand it, and I appreciate it. But the practical side of the matter is that nature abhors a vacuum.”<sup>91</sup> Donna Cousins of the Colts Neck Tea Party in New Jersey felt that Ron Paul “is a little extreme in some cases, especially when it came to the war.”<sup>92</sup> Oth-

ers were not ready to accept his position on drugs. Dennis Mahon from Liberty and Prosperity Tea Party in Atlantic City, New Jersey, explains, “Ron Paul is very much like members in our tea party group. . . . He’s more libertarian, there are some things he’s for that they would not be—like relaxation of drug laws, foreign policy. But financially they agree 1,000 percent.”<sup>93</sup> This may well explain the Paul campaign staff’s reported frustration with the large and boisterous crowds at rallies that didn’t translate into votes.<sup>94</sup>

Third, at the peak of Paul’s momentum in late December 2011, news reports resurfaced of racist newsletters published under Ron Paul’s name in the 1980s and 90s. While reporters had uncovered this story during the 2008 campaign,<sup>95</sup> it was news to many people considering voting for Ron Paul for the first time. The newsletter story took a toll. Indeed, days before the newsletter story broke, traders on the political prediction market Intrade valued the contract for Ron Paul to win Iowa at over 50 percent, the highest of any candidate. But on December 26, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story about the Ron Paul newsletters, arguing that Paul “did not disavow” the support of “white supremacists, survivalists, and anti-Zionists who have rallied behind his candidacy.”<sup>96</sup> On December 27, the *New York Times* editorialized that Ron Paul had “disqualified himself for the presidency” by failing to “convincingly repudiate racist remarks that were published under his name for years.”<sup>97</sup> As the story circulated online and in the mainstream media, the Intrade market for Paul plummeted. By the close of the market on January 1, traders valued Paul to win Iowa at 17 percent (see Figure 12).<sup>98</sup> Ron Paul never recovered.

Despite Paul’s inability to gain votes from tea partiers, the data indicate he had greater relative favorability among tea party libertarians than tea party conservatives. A *Reason*-Rupe December 2011 poll shows tea party libertarians were twice as likely to support Ron Paul, as tea party conservatives: 18 percent of tea party libertarians supported Ron Paul, compared to 8 percent of

**Figure 12**  
**Intrade Closing Price for Ron Paul to Win Iowa Caucus 2012**



Source: Intrade data provided by Carl Wolfenden, Intrade.

tea party conservatives. Of course, during the volatile campaign season, tea party support has been spread among many candidates. Additional evidence comes from the New Hampshire primary, where exit polls showed Ron Paul performed well among Republican primary voters with “moderate” to “liberal” views on “social issues such as abortion,” a likely libertarian leaning group. Ron Paul won 28 percent of these voters. Jon Huntsman, who earned some praise among libertarians,<sup>99</sup> also won 24 percent of these voters. If you combine Paul and Huntsman’s tally among these social moderates, they beat Mitt Romney’s own tally at 38 percent.

**What about Santorum? Tea Party Far from Unified in Presidential Primaries**

While Paul failed to gain traction among tea party supporters, what about Rick Santorum? If the tea party is a libertarian influence on the Republican Party, as we argue, surely Santorum should never have done so well among tea partiers. Indeed, our Cato colleague Gene Healy called Santorum “liber-

tarianism’s sweater-vested arch-nemesis.”<sup>100</sup> In a June 2011 townhall meeting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Santorum himself said, “I fight very strongly against the libertarian influence of the Republican Party. . . . I’ve got some real concerns about this movement within the Republican Party and the tea party movement to sort of refashion conservatism. I will vocally and publicly oppose it.”<sup>101</sup>

Santorum is the opposite of the functionally libertarian candidate. On the campaign trail, Santorum emphasized his social conservative positions on abortion and gay marriage. The fiscally conservative Club for Growth noted Santorum’s “mixed record” on spending and that his record was “plagued by the big-spending habits that Republicans adopted during the Bush years.”<sup>102</sup> Santorum voted for No Child Left Behind, expanding the federal government’s role in education, and supported the prescription drug entitlement for Medicare, adding \$16 trillion in unfunded liabilities.<sup>103</sup> In the 2004 Senate primary in Pennsylvania, Santorum backed

**Santorum is the opposite of the functionally libertarian candidate.**

**An analysis of the entrance and exit poll data from the 2012 Republican presidential primaries show that the tea party was far from unified behind Santorum or any other candidate.**

moderate Republican Arlen Specter, who later became a Democrat, over strong fiscal conservative Pat Toomey.

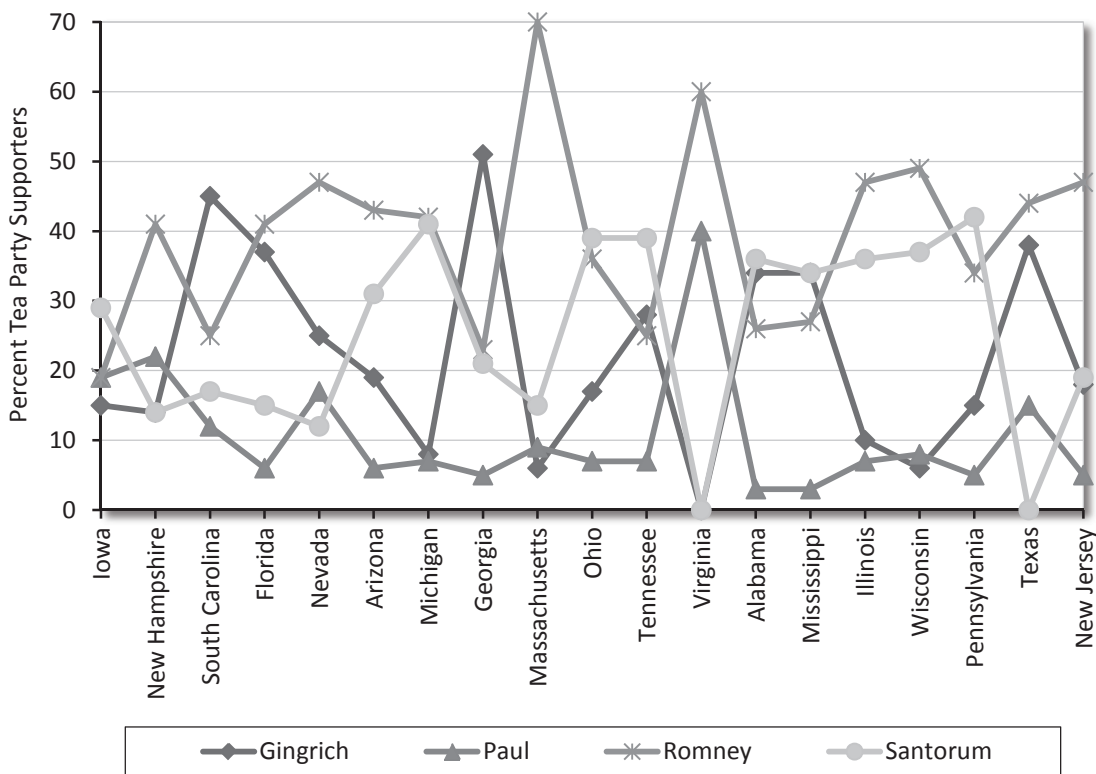
An analysis of the entrance and exit poll data from the 2012 Republican presidential primaries show that the tea party was far from unified behind Santorum or any other candidate. Figures 13 and 14 track tea party supporters' vote for the four major candidates—Paul, Santorum, Gingrich, and Romney—in every primary with entrance or exit polls.

Figure 13 shows the wild swings among tea party supporters throughout the primaries. Indeed, candidates surpassed 50 percent of the tea party vote in only three primary states: Romney won 70 percent of tea party supporters in his home state of Massachusetts; Gingrich won 51 percent of tea party support in his home state of Georgia; and Romney won 60 percent of tea party sup-

porters in Virginia, where only Romney and Paul appeared on the ballot. Neither Santorum nor Paul won more than 50 percent of the tea party vote in any primary, perhaps reflecting the divide among libertarian and conservative tea party supporters.

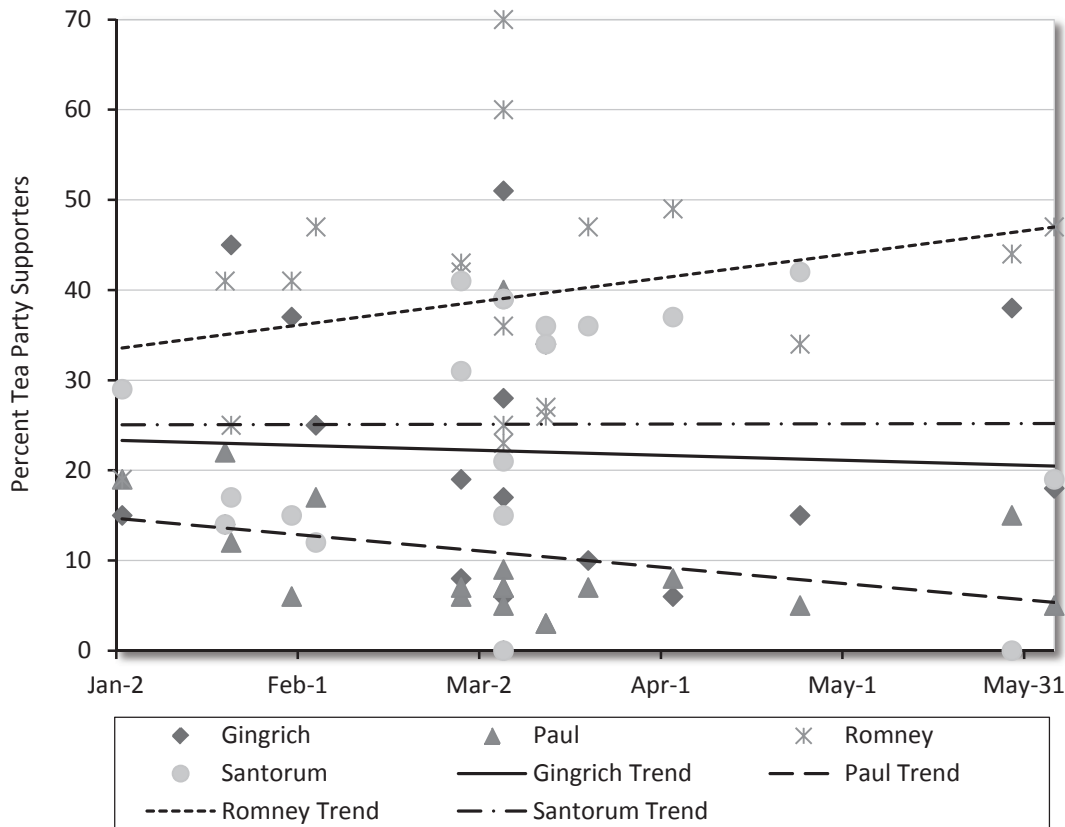
Interestingly, by adding linear trendlines to the primary results, as we do in Figure 14, we find Santorum and Gingrich's support among the tea party to be relatively flat, while Romney and Paul seem inversely related over time. Notice that Santorum averaged about 25 percent of tea party supporters over the primary season, and Gingrich declines slightly from about 24 percent to 20 percent. However, as the primaries wore on, Paul's tea party vote share declined while Romney's increased proportionally. Perhaps this reflects strategic voting among libertarian tea partiers, who would rather support Romney, notwithstanding his weaknesses,

**Figure 13**  
**Tea Party Vote in 2012 Republican Presidential Primaries**



Source: CNN 2012 exit and entrance polls.

**Figure 14**  
**Tea Party Trends in Republican Primaries**



Source: Authors' calculations, CNN 2012 exit and entrance polls.

than be stuck with the anti-libertarian Santorum. Unfortunately, until the full data are released, we cannot model libertarians in the exit polls to test this.

**Tea Party Backs Functionally Libertarian Candidates in the States**

In an interview with CNN, *New York Times* political reporter Kate Zernike observed that while the tea party movement might not have wielded much influence in presidential primaries, the movement has been influential in some Senate races during this election cycle: “[The tea party] got rid of [Sen.] Richard Lugar and in Texas they’ve kept the candidacy of Ted Cruz alive . . . and, of course, Orrin Hatch [is] having his fight in Utah.”<sup>104</sup> Zernike refers to how the 36-year incumbent Richard Lugar lost to tea party-backed Rich-

ard Mourdock in the Indiana primary, how constitutional lawyer Ted Cruz forced a run-off election in Texas with tea party support, and how 36-year incumbent senator Orrin Hatch faced his first ever primary against tea party challenger Dan Liljenquist. *Slate’s* Dave Weigel was blunter in his assessment of the tea party’s impact: “[the] purification of the GOP is coming right along. Forget about the presidential primary.”<sup>105</sup>

The conventional political wisdom for at least two decades has been that Republican primaries are won by placating socially conservative voters by emphasizing values issues. Many strategists interpreted Rick Santorum’s performance in the Republican presidential primaries as evidence of the continuing success of this strategy. Ralph Reed, founder of the Christian Coalition, argued

**The conventional political wisdom for at least two decades has been that Republican primaries are won by placating socially conservative voters by emphasizing values issues.**

**Thanks to tea party support, candidates who emphasize their strong commitment to libertarian economic issues are winning in Republican primaries.**

that “Romney needs” to “channel” Santorum and appeal to “evangelical and tea party voters,” claiming “remarkable overlap between the two.”<sup>106</sup> Another interpretation is that Santorum’s loss demonstrated the declining relevance of this social conservative strategy. No candidate unified tea party supporters in the presidential race, and religious *bona fides* alone are no longer sufficient to win.

Looking at Republican primaries in the states, we see anecdotal evidence that a new, functionally libertarian strategy is succeeding. Thanks to tea party support, candidates who emphasize their strong commitment to libertarian economic issues—cutting spending, reducing the debt, slashing government programs and departments—are winning in Republican primaries over candidates who emphasize social issues but are weak on fiscal issues. Some of these functionally libertarian candidates may well be personally conservative but deemphasize those issues on the campaign trail. Beyond the headline-grabbing races in Indiana, Texas, and Utah, below are examples where this dynamic is playing out:

- In Kentucky’s 4th congressional district, libertarian and tea party-backed candidate Thomas Massie won against socially conservative Alecia Webb-Edgington. Massie, an MIT trained engineer, won tea party acclaim as judge-executive for aggressively cutting spending—enough to pay for his first three years of salary. Massie won the endorsement of Sen. Rand Paul, in part because of his strong stance on civil liberties. Reason reporter Mike Riggs noted that Massie “opposed the PATRIOT Act, warrantless wiretapping, the police state, the drug war, and military adventurism.” Massie’s opponent Webb-Edgington ran against these views, arguing at a 2010 Lincoln Day Dinner that “We don’t need any more socialists, communists, or libertarians in the Republican Party.”<sup>107</sup> In 2010 the Kentucky Club for Growth scored Webb-Edgington 58 out of 100 for her voting record in the State House, noting her sup-

port of tax-and-spending increases.<sup>108</sup> In the June primary, Massie beat Webb-Edgington 45 to 28 percent.<sup>109</sup>

- In the Florida Senate primary, functionally libertarian representative Connie Mack has won the backing of the tea party over fiscal moderate senator George LeMieux and big-government social conservative representative Dave Weldon. Mack voted twice against TARP, and his “Penny Plan” to cut spending was incorporated as part of the FreedomWorks’ Tea Party Budget.<sup>110</sup> Mack won the endorsement of tea party favorites senators Rand Paul and Mike Lee. LeMieux allied himself with fiscal moderates, called himself a “Charlie Crist Republican,” and in his time as a U.S. senator, sponsored more bills with Democrats than Republicans.<sup>111</sup> After Mack won the backing of many tea party groups, LeMieux dropped out of the race. Social conservative Weldon has failed to gain momentum among tea partiers, despite hiring Santorum’s communications director and winning the endorsement of evangelical leaders such as David Barton, who praised Weldon as an “articulate champion of unborn life and traditional marriage.”<sup>112</sup> Weldon also voted for TARP and the prescription drug entitlement for Medicare. Mack leads in the polls for the August 14 primary.
- In the Missouri Senate primary, functionally libertarian candidate John Brunner is gaining in the polls against social conservative representative Todd Akin. Brunner is a first-time politician and has won the endorsement of tea party favorites senators Ron Johnson and Tom Coburn. Brunner highlights his libertarian roots, promoting his study of economics at the Foundation for Economic Education, one of the oldest libertarian organizations in the country.<sup>113</sup> In contrast, Akin is a favorite of the religious right, telling Family Research Council president Tony Perkins on his radio show that “the heart of liberalism really is a hatred for God and a belief that government should

replace God.”<sup>114</sup> Among the top candidates, Brunner is gaining fastest in the polls, increasing from 6 percent in September 2011 to 25 percent in May 2012, according to Public Policy Polling.<sup>115</sup>

- In the Wisconsin Senate primary, social conservative Mark Neumann has failed to knock out moderate former governor Tommy Thompson, leaving room for functionally libertarian businessman Eric Hovde. Neumann attends an evangelical Lutheran church that has raised controversy for declaring the Pope to be the Anti-Christ and denouncing Jews.<sup>116</sup> In 1996 Neumann told the *New York Times* that he would refuse to hire a gay staffer. In a 1997 speech before the Christian Coalition, Neumann said, “If I was elected God for a day, homosexuality wouldn’t be permitted.”<sup>117</sup> Neumann’s strong stance against gay marriage would make for an awkward match-up against openly gay Democratic nominee Tammy Baldwin. Thompson’s weakness on fiscal issues has gotten him in hot water with tea partiers, particularly his reserved support of President Obama’s health care reform.<sup>118</sup> Hovde is a first-time politician and successful businessman who entered the race with a functionally libertarian campaign, emphasizing his strong commitment to fiscally conservative issues. Tea party supporters seem to be warming to Hovde,<sup>119</sup> and a July 8 Public Policy Polling shows Hovde up by 2 percentage points over Thompson, with Neumann trailing by 16 percentage points.<sup>120</sup>
- In Georgia’s 9th congressional district, social conservative and tax-hiker Doug Collins trails talk show host and tea party favorite Martha Zoller, who is running a functionally libertarian campaign, emphasizing fiscal issues. Zoller was a speaker at the 2009 Taxpayer March on Washington and has been a strong champion of fundamental tax reform. In contrast, Collins voted for the largest tax increase in Georgia his-

tory, in violation of Grover Norquist’s Taxpayer Pledge.<sup>121</sup> Collins has been attacking Zoller for her past statements in support of civil unions for gay couples and her reluctance to support a federal marriage amendment.<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, Zoller won a June straw poll after a GOP debate with 48 percent to Collins’s 33 percent.<sup>123</sup>

What is surprising about these functionally libertarian candidates is that they seem to be having success in a wide range of locations around country—from the traditional southern Republican strongholds like Georgia and Kentucky, to the heartlands of Wisconsin and Missouri, to battleground states like Florida. It is too early in the election cycle to gauge how widespread this functionally libertarian strategy will become or how ultimately successful it will be. But the tea party seems to be rewriting the Republican playbook, nudging candidates to emphasize fiscal over social issues. In this election cycle, candidates following Santorum’s playbook have failed to achieve the success that conventional wisdom would suggest.

The libertarian energy of the tea party may well be maturing. In an interview on the *Huffington Post*, FreedomWorks’ president Matt Kibbe describes the evolution of the party this way:

Think about the tea party movement in phases. First it was a protest movement. . . . Then it morphed into a get-out-the-vote-machine. . . . [Now] activists are getting very engaged in specific legislative agendas, learning how the state budget process works, learning how the debt ceiling works at the federal level, how would you repeal Obamacare. . . . you see them sort of digging into the process and trying to understand how it works.<sup>124</sup>

In his book *Hostile Takeover*, Kibbe argues that tea partiers are now acting like shareholders working to boot out entrenched manage-

**The libertarian energy of the tea party may well be maturing.**

ment. They are using a bottom-up strategy to take over the Republican Party. If Kibbe is right, libertarian tea partiers may be most successful in 2012 in efforts to influence state and local Republican primaries, quietly building, organizing, and taking over.

## Conclusion

These people are not conservatives. They're not Republicans. They're radical libertarians and I'm doggone offended by it. I despise these people, and I'm not the guy you come in and dump on without getting punched in the mouth.

—Sen. Orrin Hatch, National Public Radio interview, April 2012<sup>125</sup>

In 2010 the tea party claimed perhaps its biggest prize, ousting sitting Utah senator Robert F. Bennett in the state convention. Bennett was an 18-year incumbent, a powerful appropriator in the Senate, and heir to a Utah political dynasty that dated to the 1950s. Upon defeating Bennett, tea party activists on the convention floor chanted “TARP, TARP” because of his support for the \$700 billion financial bailout.<sup>126</sup> In 2012 Sen. Orrin Hatch, a 36-year incumbent, faced the fight of his political life against the same tea party forces. Hinting at this earlier anger over the bailout, Hatch’s challenger Dan Liljenquist rallied activists on the convention floor, saying, “No one senator is too big to fail.”<sup>127</sup>

As Senator Hatch seems all too aware, tea party activists do not easily fit within neat categories. As we have shown, the tea party has strong libertarian roots. About half the tea party is libertarian. More angry and agitated, libertarians provided the early energy for the first waves of the tea party. There remains some debate whether the tea party is in decline. But in the longer sweep of history, libertarian ideas are undoubtedly on an upswing.

In February 2012 the conservative American Enterprise Institute hosted a debate asking, “Are libertarians part of the conservative movement?” with Matt Welch, editor in chief of libertarian *Reason* magazine, and Jonah Goldberg, a contributing editor to conservative *National Review*. Welch and Goldberg agreed more than disagreed. Yes, Goldberg argued, libertarians always have been part of the conservative movement. When you talk economics, “there’s no distinction between the two,” libertarian and conservative. Welch seemed content to set aside differences as long as libertarians and conservative can agree to focus on the impending debt crisis: “What are you going to do, today” to cut entitlements and get rid of the “\$1.4 trillion deficit?” Welch argued that this is “the issue, the only issue that matters.” Indeed, to the extent the Republican Party returns to this limited government focus, Goldberg was willing to give credit to libertarians. In some ways, he argued, the threat posed by the national debt “is very similar to the Cold War” era, which united libertarians and conservatives.<sup>128</sup>

To the extent the Republican Party becomes functionally libertarian, focusing on fiscal issues like the debt, spending, and limiting the size and scope of government, libertarian members of the tea party deserve much credit—credit that political analysts, scholars, and journalists have yet to fully give.

It may take some years for the libertarian impulse of the tea party to come to fruition. For many tea partiers, the movement is bigger than any single race or any single politician. Ron Paul himself may have this in the back of his mind, as his son, Kentucky senator Rand Paul, had joined him prominently on the campaign trail. *Politico*’s Jonathan Martin quipped that the Pauls are like the “libertarian Kennedys.”<sup>129</sup> If so, Rand Paul may be heir to the libertarian dynasty.

Of course, national political figures are often trailing indicators of shifts in the underlying political culture. No doubt the tea party would not be possible but for a deep cultural resonance of the libertarian themes of suspicion of power, limited government,

**In the longer sweep of history, libertarian ideas are undoubtedly on an upswing.**



hard work, and personal responsibility. Indeed, political strategists who recognize the libertarian roots of the tea party, and this recent upsurge of libertarian energy, may discover political opportunities—opportunities around an emerging center of American politics that is functionally libertarian.

## Appendix A: Notes on Methodology

For each survey in this paper, we constructed a libertarian group of respondents who gave fiscally conservative and socially moderate-to-liberal answers to questions. Below, we have listed the questions as well as additional details on each survey.

Once we had identified libertarians, we then divided tea party supporters between libertarian and conservative. Tea party supporters are those respondents who support or agree with the tea party. Tea party libertarians are tea party supporters who are also libertarian, by our construction. Tea party conservatives are tea party supporters who are conservative, not libertarians, and not liberals.

### ***Politico/TargetPoint***

The *Politico/TargetPoint* survey was conducted as an in-person intercept poll at a Washington, D.C., Tax Day Tea Party Rally on April 15, 2010, among 457 tea party supporters. Two questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses, OR, Government should do more to solve our nation's problems?

Government should promote traditional values in society, OR, Government should favor no particular set of values?

Tea party libertarians responded “govern-

ment is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and business” *and* that “government should favor no particular set of values.” Tea party conservatives responded “government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses” *and* that “government should promote traditional values in society.” The difference between these two groups is their response over government promoting traditional values in society.

### **Cato Institute Entrance Poll**

The Cato Institute survey was conducted as an in-person entrance poll at the Virginia Tea Party Convention in Richmond, Virginia, on October 9, 2010, among 639 tea party members. Three questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

The less government the better, OR there are more things the government should be doing?

We need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems, OR, the free market can handle these problems without the government being involved?

Government should promote traditional values in society, OR Government should favor no particular set of values?

Tea party libertarians responded “the less government the better” *and* “the free market can handle these problems without the government being involved” *and* “government should favor no particular set of values.” Tea party conservatives responded “the less government the better” *and* that “the free market can handle these problems without government being involved” *and* that “the government should promote traditional values.” The difference between these two groups is their response over government promoting traditional values in society.

**No doubt the tea party would not be possible but for a deep cultural resonance of the libertarian themes of suspicion of power, limited government, hard work, and personal responsibility.**

### **CBS/*New York Times***

The *New York Times* survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from April 5–12, 2010, among a nationally representative sample of 1,591 adults. The survey oversampled tea party supporters and then constructed weights to weigh down the proportion of tea party supporters when analyzing the entire dataset. This oversample reduces the margin of error for tea party supporters. Three questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement, or not?

If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?

In trying to solve the economic problems facing the country, do you think Barack Obama has expanded the role of government too much, not enough, or about the right amount?

Which comes closest to your view? Gay couples should be allowed to legally marry, OR gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry, OR there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship?

First tea party supporters were identified as respondents who said “yes” they considered themselves supporters of the tea party movement. Tea party libertarians responded they would “rather have a smaller government with fewer services” *and* that “Barack Obama has expanded the role of government too much” *and* that “gay couples should be allowed to legally marry” or “form civil unions.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

### ***Washington Post*/Harvard/Kaiser**

The *Washington Post* survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from September 22 to October 3, 2010, among a nationally representative sample of 2,054 adults. Two questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Overall, would you say you support the political movement known as the Tea Party, you oppose the Tea Party, or that you neither support nor oppose it?

In general, would you rather have the federal government provide more services, even if it costs more in taxes, or the federal government cost less in taxes but provide fewer services?

I am going to read you a list of activities that the federal government is involved in or might be involved in. Please tell me whether you'd like to see more federal government involvement in that area, less involvement, about the same amount of involvement, or no federal involvement at all. How about . . . promoting values and morality in the society?

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondents who said they “support the political movement known as the Tea Party.” Tea party libertarians responded they would rather have the government cost less in taxes but provide fewer services” *and* that they would like to see “less [government] involvement” or “no [government] involvement” in “promoting values and morality in society.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

### **Pew Religion and Public Life Survey**

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from July 21 through Au-

gust 5, 2010 among a nationally representative sample of 3,003 adults. This survey primarily focuses on religious rather than economic issues. As a result, the survey did not include an economic or fiscal question to use for identifying libertarians. Instead, one social issues question was used to separate tea party conservatives from tea party libertarians.

From what you know, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

All in all, do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose . . . allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?

For this survey, we only identified tea party supporters who "strongly agree" with the movement, a stricter criteria than other surveys, because these respondents are most likely to be economically conservative. Tea party libertarians were those who strongly agree with the tea party and did not strongly oppose "allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally." Tea party conservatives were the remaining tea party supporters who strongly opposed "allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally."

### **American National Election Studies 2008–2010 Panel Survey**

The American National Election Studies 2008–2010 Panel survey was conducted as a national telephone-recruited Internet panel study with 11 ANES surveys and 11 primarily non-ANES surveys between January 2008 and June 2010. Panelists were initially recruited by telephone to complete up to 21 monthly surveys on the Internet from January 2008 to September 2009. Panelists who completed at least one ANES wave of the Panel Study before November 2008 and who also completed the November 2008 survey were then re-contacted for a follow-up interview in June 2010. Each panel wave surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,420 to 2,628 adults, depending on the month.

Primary ANES survey waves were conducted in January, February, June, September, October, and November of 2008 and January, May, July, and August 2009. The June 2010 re-contact survey was the first survey of the panel to ask about support for the tea party movement, and surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,561 adults. Knowledge Networks administered the survey. Two questions were used to divide tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Do you like the Tea Party movement, dislike it, or neither like nor dislike it? {If LIKE} Do you like it (a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little)?

Do you think the U. S. federal government should have more effect on Americans' lives than it does now, less effect, or about the same amount of effect that it has now on Americans' lives?

Do you think the U. S. federal government should do more to influence how businesses operate in this country, should the federal government do less to influence businesses, or should the government do about what it's doing now to influence businesses?

Tea party supporters were identified as respondents who "like" the tea party a "great deal." Since we conduct a time series analysis to determine first-movers to the tea party, strong sympathizers are more likely to represent the activists who likely played the most significant role in the early tea party movement. Tea party libertarians responded the federal government should "do less to influence business" *and* that the federal government should have "less effect" on "Americans' lives than it does now." Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self identify as ideologically "liberal".

We construct a libertarian-independent variable to represent right-leaning libertar-

ians who generally do not identify as Republicans or identify with the tea party movement. Libertarian-independents, like tea party libertarians, also responded that the federal government should “do less to influence business” *and* that the federal government should have “less effect” on Americans’ lives than it does now,” but also were not strong Republicans or Democrats. We construct a variable for other partisan Republicans as self-identified Republicans who are not tea partiers or libertarians.

**ABC News/*Washington Post* Survey, February 2010**

The ABC/*Washington Post* survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from February 4–8, 2010 among a nationally representative sample of 1,004 adults. Two questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Given what you know about the Tea Party’s positions on the issues, would you say that overall you agree with them strongly, somewhat, disagree somewhat or strongly?

How much do you feel you know about what the Tea Party stands for—a great deal, a good amount, just some or very little?

Do you support or oppose stricter federal regulations on the way banks and other financial institutions conduct their business?

Do you think gay and lesbian couples should or should not be allowed to form legally recognized civil unions, giving them the legal rights of married couples in areas such as health insurance, inheritance, and pension coverage?

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondents who “agree” with the tea

party and also know “a great deal” or a “good amount” about “what the Tea Party stands for.” Tea party libertarians opposed “stricter federal regulations on the way banks and other financial institutions conduct their businesses” *and* said gay and lesbian couples “should be allowed to form legally recognized civil unions.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self identify as ideologically “liberal.”

**Gallup Governance**

The Gallup Governance survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from September 13–16, 2010 among a nationally representative sample of 1,019 adults. Three questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement, an opponent of the Tea Party movement, or neither?

Some people think the government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses. Others think that government should do more to solve our country’s problems. Which comes closer to your own view?

Do you think the federal government today has too much power, about the right amount of power, or too little power?

Some people think the government should promote traditional values in our society. Others think the government should not favor any particular set of values. Which comes closer to your own view?

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondents who considered themselves supporters of the tea party movement. Tea

party libertarians responded “the government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses” *and* that the “federal government today has too much power” *and* that “the government should not favor any particular set of values.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

### **NBC/Wall Street Journal**

The NBC/Wall Street Journal survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from February 24–28, 2011, among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults. Two questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Do you consider yourself a supporter of the Tea Party Movement?

I’m going to read you two statements about the role of government, and I’d like to know which one comes closer to your own view: government should do more; government is doing too many things.

Suppose a candidate running in the 2012 Republican primary for president says the party should focus more on issues such as the economy and the federal budget and focus less on social issues such as gay marriage and abortion. Would you be more likely or less likely to vote for a Republican presidential candidate who says this, or would this make no difference in how you might vote one way or the other?

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondents who consider themselves supporters of the tea party movement. Tea party libertarians responded that “government is doing too many things” *and* they would prefer to vote for a Republican candidates who focused on “the economy and the federal budget and less on social issues such as gay marriage

and abortion” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

### **Pew Typology**

The Pew Typology survey was conducted as a national telephone poll from February 22–March 1 and March 8–14, 2011, among a nationally representative sample of 3,029 adults. Two questions were used to divide tea party supporters into tea party libertarians and tea party conservatives.

From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don’t you have an opinion either way?

[Please] tell me whether the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your own views—even if neither is exactly right. . . . First statement: Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient. Second statement: Government often does a better job than people give it credit for.

The government should do more to protect morality in society [OR] I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondent who “agree” with the tea party movement. Tea party libertarians responded, “government is almost always wasteful and inefficient” *and* that they ‘worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

### **Reason-Rupe, Reason Foundation**

The three Reason-Rupe surveys were conducted as national telephone polls on August 9–18, 2011; December 1–13, 2011; and March 10–20, 2012, respectively. Each poll included a nationally represented sample of 1,200 adults. Two questions were used to divide tea party

libertarians and tea party conservatives.

Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement or not?

I am going to read you two statements. After I read both statements, please tell me which comes closer to your own opinion. You might agree to some extent with both, but we want to know which one is closer to your own views. The less government the better; OR, there are more things that government should be doing.

Some people think the government should promote traditional values in our society. Others think the government should not favor any particular set of values. Which comes closer to your own view?

First, tea party supporters were identified as respondents who consider themselves supporters of the tea party movement. Tea party libertarians responded “the less government the better” *and* that the “government should

not favor any particular set of values.” Tea party conservatives are the remaining tea party supporters who do not self-identify as ideologically “liberal.”

## Appendix B: Declining Libertarian Tea Party Support

Here are a few methodological notes about the series of polls we constructed to establish the trend of declining libertarian support for the tea party. First, we used the best available questions in each survey to define libertarians. Since not all the questions are the same in each survey, we get slightly different samples of libertarians. Notice that the share of libertarians ranges from 19 to 25 percent. This is within a reasonable range found in other studies on the libertarian vote.

Second, pollsters use different questions to identify tea partiers. For instance, NBC/*Wall Street Journal* pollsters ask whether respondents are supporters of the tea party, “yes” or “no.” Gallup asks whether the re-

**Table B-1**  
**Percent of Tea Party That Is Libertarian over Time**

Poll	Date	Libertarians %	Tea Party Libertarians %
ABC News/ <i>Washington Post</i>	February 8	21	34
CBS News/ <i>New York Times</i>	April 12	19	48
Gallup Governance	September 16	23	30
<i>Washington Post</i> /Harvard	October 3	26	53
NBC/ <i>Wall Street Journal</i>	February 28	16	34
Pew Typology	March 14	14	34
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	August 1	22	31
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	December 1	18	25
<i>Reason</i> -Rupe	March 20	24	41

Source: Authors' calculations.

spondents are supporters of the tea party “movement.” Pew asks whether respondents “agree” or “disagree” with the tea party. And the *Washington Post* asks whether respondents are “supporters” or “strong” supporters of the tea party. These differences in wording yield different cuts of who is a tea partier and who is not. To keep things as consistent as possible, we chose to define tea partiers broadly as “supporters” or those who “agree,” because more polls asked that way. This helps keep the percentage of tea partiers similar across polls. Notice that the share of tea partiers ranges from 30 to 22 percent, but averages 24 percent. Table B-1 includes the full percentage libertarians and tea partiers for each poll.

Because of this potential “noise” in the data with different wording for tea party supporters and different questions to identify libertarians, we chose to average the data points to control for this, as best as possible. We average all the polls in 2010 and compare them to all the polls in 2011. This averaging method is similar to how RealClearPolitics and FiveThirtyEight report trends using multiple polls. But as a consequence, we are less confident about the uptick in libertarian support we observe in March 2012, because it is only one data point, and does not represent an average among several polls.

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