

# THE ENTERPRISEBLOG

## The growing libertarian impulse

By [Andrew Rugg](#)

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In this weekend's Des Moines Register poll, Ron Paul placed second among likely Iowa Republican voters, right behind Newt Gingrich. For many Paul supporters, the poll provides confirmation that libertarianism is on the rise. It's been a long-standing belief among libertarians that many Americans are fiscally conservative and socially liberal, even if they don't call themselves libertarians. Recent polling shows that the growing libertarian impulse extends beyond the Paul campaign and even the Republican Party.

Nationally, there doesn't appear to be much evidence that the number of libertarians is growing. [Two separate studies](#) done by David Kirby and David Boaz at the CATO Institute put the number of libertarians at around 14 percent. Their definition was based off questions on big picture ideological issues such as the role of government, broad traditional values, and the free market. But those questions obscure significant movement on a whole series of issues that is pulling America in a libertarian direction. In fact, I would go so far as to say there is now a libertarian consensus in the United States.

Views on government regulation have grown extremely critical. Fifty percent think it's probably a good idea to repeal or reduce existing regulations on U.S. businesses (October 2011 [CBS/NYT poll](#)). Trust in government has also collapsed. Only 10 percent think they can trust the government to do what is right always or most of the time (October 2011 [CBS/NYT poll](#)).

On social issues, the libertarian preference against government interference is growing. [Gallup reports](#) that record low numbers support banning the possession of handguns. When the question was first asked in 1959, 60 percent favored such a ban. In the latest asking, only 26 percent of Americans favored a ban and 73 percent did not. On marijuana, for the first time since Gallup began polling on the issue, [more Americans favor](#) rather than oppose making the use of marijuana legal. Not just medical marijuana, but all marijuana. And in May, also for the first time, [Gallup reported](#) that a majority of Americans believe marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages.

If polls only showed a growth in support for gay marriage and marijuana, it might be tempting to conclude that liberalism is gaining strength. But the combination of guns, pot, gay marriage, and anti-government attitudes is one that can only suggest libertarianism is on the rise.