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## Young Libertarians Flaky, Increasingly Republican-Leaning

*Katherine Mangu-Ward* | January 21, 2010

In 2006, the Cato Institute's David Boaz and David Kirby crunched some numbers in the service of finding out more about the elusive **Libertarian Vote** and its role in American politics. Now, they have updated their work, tracking **The Libertarian Vote in the Age of Obama**. Here's what they found:



Libertarians are about 14 percent of the electorate. Libertarian voters swung away from Bush and the GOP in 2004 and 2006, but in 2008 they swung back, voting for McCain by 71 to 27 percent.

Younger libertarians voted 59 percent for Obama versus 36 percent for McCain. But their enthusiasm for his policies may be short-lived. Younger Americans are an optimistic generation, but easily shaken when things go badly. If unemployment continues to remain weak, an economic issue that disproportionately affects young people, this generation of voters could quickly become disillusioned with Obama's policies.

Before the 2006 elections, we predicted that if the swing away from the Republicans continued, "Republicans will lose elections they would otherwise win." Now we offer the reverse prediction: if libertarians continue to lead the independents away from Obama, Democrats will lose 2010 midterm elections they would otherwise win.

Boaz and Kirby write about it—but Massachusetts senator-elect Scott Brown is **living it**.

For those interested in the study's definition of libertarian, here are the details. Snagging results from a respected long standing public opinion poll series, the study uses three questions to mark someone out as a libertarian:

- I am going to ask you to choose which of two statements I read 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: ONE, The less government, the better; or TWO, There are more things that government should be doing.
- ONE, We need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or, TWO, The free market can handle these problems without government being involved.
- We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own. (Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?)

Only those respondents who said "the less government, the better," "the free market can handle these problems," and strongly agreed or agreed that "we should be more tolerant" were classified as libertarian.

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