



## Libertarianism: Is It Happening?

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There's an idea in mainstream American politics that the two-party system, the elephants and donkeys, the red and the blue, the GOP and the Dems, are — and will always be — the most voters in this country will ever have to choose from. Third parties tend to pop up and then die a quick death in the history of American political preferences.

But something — as young libertarians are fond of saying — is happening to the older conservatism of the GOP. It's getting a streak of, well, libertarian purple in its gray hair. And this new conservatism may better resemble the original founders ideas about government and leadership better than the conservatism of the last 30 years. And it's making both young and old excited. So much so that cynical, inside-the-beltway publications as self-assured as *Politico* are, if they want to stay relevant, forced to address and explain just what is happening on the right — and increasingly the left — side of the aisle.

In a piece entitled, “The Libertarian Surge,” David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, writes a primer on just what it is libertarians think and believe — presumably because the demand to know exists:

*Libertarianism — the political philosophy that says limited government is the best kind of government — is having its moment. Unfortunately, that's mostly because government has been expanding in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks and the financial crisis. Somehow government failures lead to even more government.*

And more government, more than any of the other broad ideas libertarians espouse, is what libertarians consider representative of all that's wrong with the current state of affairs. Those ideas include a general anti-interventionist, small government, fiscally conservative/socially liberal hybrid, arguably responsible for the rise of Rand Paul and, to a lesser extent, the molding of Ted Cruz and Bobby Jindal and Mike Lee into warriors willing to stand for even the legalization of marijuana in some cases if it means getting the federal government out of the everyday lives of Americans.

Boaz acknowledges that one of the particularly attractive aspects of libertarianism is its ability to cross and blend those familiar two-party lines:

*Libertarian ideas often cross left-right boundaries. Lots of libertarians were involved in the tea party and the opposition to the bailouts, the car company takeovers, the 2009 stimulus bill and the quasi-nationalization of health care. But libertarians were also involved in the movement for gay marriage. Indeed, John Podesta, a top adviser to Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and founder of the Center for American Progress, noted in 2011 that you probably had to have been a libertarian to have supported gay marriage 15 years earlier. Or take marijuana legalization, which is just now becoming a majority position: Libertarians have been leaders in the opposition to the drug war for many years.*

*Libertarians have played a key role in the defense of the right to keep and bear arms over the years, notably in the two recent Supreme Court cases that affirmed that the Second Amendment means what it says: Individuals have a right to own guns. Support for stricter gun control has been declining for years.*

*Much of the libertarian energy in the past few years was generated by the presidential campaigns of former Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, and then by the leadership of his son Rand Paul representing Kentucky in the Senate.*

While Daddy Ron was marginalized fairly easily for his prescient economic views, son Rand is harder to dismiss because he's ever so slightly more mainstream yet retains the revolutionary adherence to the old principals of limited government and balance of power that existed at this country's inception.

He's so popular in fact that, even in this day of increasingly tumultuous world events, his relative non-views on international and defense policy are barely considered negatives:

*Unless an unpredictable international event in the next two years swallows the United States' attention span like the early years of the wars in the Middle East did, it's unclear his views, a malleable mush of his father's orthodox ban on intervention and a Reaganish devotion to "peace through strength," will matter much. Given the increasingly extracurricular role international affairs play on the list of important issues voters bring out once every four years, foreign policy seems unlikely — on the surface — to keep Rand Paul from the nomination if his party decides he's the one to beat. On the other hand, potential presidential candidates have been forced to air their views on international affairs quite a bit the past few months, as unforeseen events have crept into American policy discussions.*

So the original conservatism — the conservatism (if it can be called that) of the founders — is embodied again by an unassuming, yet doubtlessly courageous, young doctor from the Southern half of the United States.

And the young libertarians — an interesting activist that really just wants to be left alone — are banking a great deal of hope on the idea that it could very well *be happening*.