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### [And I'm tly like The Tea Party is all fascist n stuf, U kno?](#)

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10 Comments

**Recommenders:** [ColdWarrior](#), [Finrod](#), [Mary Beth](#)

The other day, an old friend sent me an altnet article to get my opinion. It asserts that [America is well on its way to fascism, and the Tea Party will take us there](#).

When I see the word “fascist” in popular discourse (and especially in non-academic, politically-oriented media), I put on my skeptic hat, because [“fascist” has an objective meaning](#), but it has become a dysphemistic weasel word that means something akin to “blue-meanie stuff I don’t like”.

One of the reasons that I approach the word with a pinch of salt (more than a grain is required) is that I remember what it was like to be a teenager and wield such a powerful noun without any knowledge (or, truth be told, any desire for knowledge) of what it means. Even knowing its meaning, I have misused it occasionally as an adult.

When I hear about fascist this or fascist that, my stock response is that there is no credible fascist movement in America (Note that the Fabulous Fascist Gun Association long ago folded its membership into the Gay Communist Gun Club, which shuttered its doors and burned its membership lists when Phil Hartman was so tragically murdered).

A classic textbook example of a fascist is an individual who believes that unless the constitution is amended, the United States government does not have the legal authority to compel an individual, under penalty of a noncompliance tax, to enter into a private contract with a corporation, such as an insurance company. (N.B. The previous sentence is completely false.)

The closest thing to it I’ve observed in America is the [corporatism](#) (not to be confused with the influence of corporations) of the current administration (similar to the corporatism of the New Deal). I should make clear that virtually all of my criticism of the Obama administration is true for all presidents, in varying degrees, since FDR; President Obama is simply the most extreme example since Roosevelt.

Here’s an important quote from an important book: “Few recognize that the rise of fascism and Nazism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period but a necessary outcome of those tendencies.” – F.A. Hayek from [The Road To Serfdom](#).

[A condensed version of The Road To Serfdom is available here](#). I haven’t read the condensed one, but the full-length book is a must-read.

[The comic book version is here](#). This is pretty sweet too and has cool, clean-edged, line-drawing illustrations. As a mega-condensation of a book by an economist about political theory, it sharpens and

amplifies the pitch of a carefully courteous discourse into a fun cartoon howl.

To borrow from C.S. Lewis (in the old radio broadcasts that became the book *The Four Loves*, regarding a considerably different subject), nothing is more needed on the subject of fascism and the Tea Party than a good dose of belly laughter.

The biggest reason why this article deserves a sort of light mockery is that the Tea Party is calling, more than anything else, for the restraint of government. This is the **opposite** of fascism. Clearly, there are a few (and by few, I mean *very* few) genuine extremists who want to use the Tea Party as a megaphone to spout poisonous rhetoric, but they are not the core of the movement and generally have been denounced and disclaimed by movement leaders when their presence is discovered.

Seriously, 35% of the United States are not “Right-wing apocalyptic Christians who fear a Satanic New World Order”, “Nebulous conspiracy theorists who fear a secular New World Order”, or “Nationalistic ultra-patriots concerned that US sovereignty is eroding”. There are probably a few million Americans in the first group. It's their right to believe weird things, and there's no evidence that the Tea Party is composed primarily (or even largely) of this sort of individual. If you brought together every American in the second and third group, you might be able to fill high school auditorium somewhere in Idaho (Note to self: Figure out a way to insert snarky reference to Bill Clinton's recent [inability to fill a high school gym in Detroit](#)).

Here's the [Contract From America](#), which enumerates some common “Tea Party” positions. Take a minute and read them. You may disagree with their principles (Many do), but there's no fascism there.

Here's [Americans For Prosperity](#). Obama has attacked this group repeatedly. I think that he sees them as a threat because they appear to borrow a few of his tactics (adapted from Saul Alinsky's [Rules For Radicals](#)) and use them to push for limited government, rather than the much-touted but little-understood bromide of social change. Many progressives, including the president himself, have hinted darkly about foreign control of AFP. As far as I can ascertain, this accusation is nothing more than classic, demagogic fear-mongering.

[FreedomWorks](#): Again, no fascism here. A great sample of non-fascist language from their section on privacy: “[T]oday, the Internet does not present the largest threat to American privacy. Despite concern about the way businesses manage information, the most pervasive abuser of your privacy remains federal, state, and local governments. Governments already maintain massive databases of detailed, personal information— from taxes to the census to medical records— and new technologies like cameras and email filtering software continue to erode the privacy Americans have long recognized as our birthright...Even worse, some of the ideas coming out of Washington regarding the war on terrorism could lead to policy changes that could threaten fundamental American freedoms.”

When the Tea Party stories cropped up last year, I was quite worried about racism and extremism in them. But when I began looking at the Tea Party groups themselves, rather than relying on the media as a filter, I found that their positions and candidates had been badly distorted by the press to craft a narrative. For the record, I do not think that this is something conscious or that there's any media conspiracy of any sort. I just think that reporters and editors catch hold of memes and unconsciously craft their stories to fit the memes, especially when they're being lazy.

[Quick aside: A great example is Christine O'Donnell. I choose her because she's a relatively weak Senate candidate, and a good deal of this weakness is due to her portrayal in the media, plus I've written about her a couple of times, so I don't have to do rework. She has clearly said some really goofy things

in the past, and I imagine that she and I would disagree on tons of issues. That said, she is routinely caricatured by the media, who have misquoted her (in a couple of articles I've seen), failed to give her the benefit of the doubt (A great example is when she said that scientists had created mice with [“fully functioning human brains”](#), rather than “functional human brain cells”, which [National Geographic had highlighted, bringing up the animal-human chimera issue](#)), played embarrassing soundbites in a transparent bid to discredit her, edited her critics to make them sound more legitimate ([Meghan McCain](#)), and taken things out of context to make her look silly. Take the kerfuffle last week about her saying that the [“separation of church and state” is not in the First Amendment](#). She was goading Coons to recite the amendment by objecting to the inclusion of the separation phrase. When he tried, he misquoted it and was [unable to name the five freedoms established by the First Amendment](#). This should have been a rhetorical victory for her, but the media soundbit her and removed the punchline that she'd set up (When she pushed him to name the five freedoms, he faltered, and when she pushed a little harder, he asked the moderator to control things and be the person who asked the questions). She is pretty sharp in long interviews, especially friendly ones.]

I actually think that the Tea Party may represent our best hope for preventing a disastrous expansion of governmental authority (I avoid saying that it may be an antidote to fascism because I don't want to make the mistake that I'm criticizing).

Now, on to the article that my friend shared. Here are some responses to the most substantive points made, such as they are, addressing the paragraph quoted at the beginning of each:

“Paxton laid out the five basic lifecycle stages of successful fascist movements. In the first stage a mature industrial state facing some kind of crisis breeds a new, rural movement that's based on nationalist renewal. This movement invariably rejects reason and glorifies raw emotion, promises to restore lost national pride, co-opts the nation's traditional myths for its own purposes, and insists that the country must be purged of the toxic influence of outsiders and intellectuals who are blamed for their current misery.”

Now really, could this be any more condescending? I just don't see this in the Tea Party movement, though I am open to the possibility of its applicability if someone can make the case using facts and logic. Admittedly, the Tea Party has something of a rough exterior, but I think that its palpable anger is a reaction against the encroachment of government power. A lot of this started as frustration under Bush and is a rejection of crony capitalism. It has come to a boiling point under Obama because he has taken a good deal of this to a greater extreme.

“In the second stage, the movement takes root, turns into a real political party, and seizes a seat at the table...”

The Tea Party is not a real political party. Although many of its “members” (or admirers—I don't even know what word is most appropriate here) are political independents, [the overwhelming majority \(80%\) are Republicans](#). In other words, it is a movement within the Republican Party, and I see very little possibility of it becoming an independent party, because it is clear to organizers (who are much more savvy than they are portrayed as being) that this would, in effect, hand power to the Democratic Party and ensure the outcome that they oppose.

“In the face of this deadlock, the corporate elites forge an alliance with rural nationalists, creating an unholy marriage that, if it continues, will soon breed a fascist state. And, of course, this is precisely what's happening now between the Koch Brothers, the oil companies, Americans for Prosperity, and the Tea Party.”

Oh, come now. This is just silly. Americans For Prosperity is an advocacy group that pushes for limited government and free markets, both of which are antithetical to fascism. Same deal with the [Koch Brothers](#); they fund a bunch of libertarian groups and are pretty clearly anti-fascist. Anyone who thinks that the Cato Institute, a Koch-backed think-tank, is fascist has zero understanding of what the word fascist means. (They may have negative understanding...Is that what you'd call understanding that is 180 degrees from correct?) FreedomWorks is another one (not mentioned, but one of the most well-organized Tea Party organizations); they agitate and advocate for limited government, and no one in his/her right mind would call Dick Arme y a fascist (N.B. Ms. Robinson does not mention Arme y or FreedomWorks, but it was presumably due to a word count limit).

“1. Are [neo- or profascisms] becoming rooted as parties that represent major interests and feelings and wield major influence on the political scene?”

This is an exercise in question-begging. It assumes that the Tea Party is fascist, but the author has not successfully made that case (and by not successfully, I mean that she fails utterly).

“2. Is the economic or constitutional system in a state of blockage apparently insoluble by existing authorities?”

Not exactly. **Our system of government has processes for unblocking problems; they're called elections.** Now, I would argue that in many ways, we threw away the written constitution during FDR's administration, but if we can elect enough politicians who will limit the power of government to its textually-defined bounds, then we can go a long way toward solving a lot of problems with the power brokers in Washington. This is what the Tea Party purports to advocate, and based on its candidates and public positions, it seems like it's actually attempting it.

Our economic “blockage” is caused by excessive, unsustainable levels of government spending, excessive regulations, corporate welfare, etc (I'm using her word, and what I mean is our huge economic mess, particularly near-20% under- and unemployment, which will continue for a significant period of time).

At current rates, our entitlement programs will eventually collapse under their own weight, unless they are significantly overhauled, and a generation who paid into Social Security and Medicare will be unable to cash out their paid-in benefits. There are a minimum of ~\$100,000,000,000,000 (that's **100 trillion dollars**, or  $\$1 \times 10^{14}$ ) in unfunded liabilities in our entitlement programs (e.g. Social Security and Medicare). **This is a staggeringly large number.**

Let's try to picture it:

A dollar bill is 2.61 inches high, 6.14 inches wide, and 0.0043 inches thick. **\$100T is a stack of dollar bills 6,786,616 miles high**, which is 273 times the circumference of the earth at the equator. That's still an unimaginably large number, so let's try to picture it another way.

Imagine taping off a 12-inch X 12-inch square of your desk and covering it with dollar bills. A square foot holds about 9 dollar bills (8.985735145, to be precise). Now imagine a one mile X one mile square. This is 5,280 feet X 5,280 feet, or 27,878,400 square feet. So we multiply our two numbers (bills/square foot and square feet/mile) and see that a square mile would hold 250,507,919 dollar bills (~\$250 million).

**\$100T would cover an area** of 399,189 square miles with one-dollar bills. That's approximately **the**

**size of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, combined** ([They cover 399,470 square miles](#)). It's still a bit hard to imagine what this means, but if you take a map of the United States and color all of those states green, then think about how tiny a dollar bill is, you can begin to understand how much \$100T is.

Okay, but this is a physical example, and everybody knows that really large numbers are hard to imagine in the physical world. In an economic context, it has to be better, right? There's a lot of money in the world. Well, yes, this is true, but there's not as much as you'd think. In the year 2000, **the gross world product (That's the GDP of every country in the world, summed) was \$41 trillion**. **The current net worth (all income, real estate, houses, investments, etc) of all U.S. households is \$53 trillion**.

This is clearly a disaster waiting to happen.

By the time I retire (I am 36 years old), the government will have to raise the retirement age, slash benefits, significantly increase payroll taxes, or allow a massive influx of new immigrants (or a combination of these factors). This is because Social Security is not actuarially sound and is not a real trust fund, not matter how many times people repeat the phrase; it is essentially a Ponzi scheme that pays out its current beneficiaries using the taxes paid in current workers, and so there has to be a high enough ratio of workers to retirees to pay benefits, plus administrative costs (and at the point of retirement, people generally make pretty decent money). A good way to think of this is picturing Bernie Madoff on a national scale, but you can't say no to the pyramid because your boss takes the money out before paying you (N.B. Not boss's fault), and if you are self-employed, then you pay Bernie or go to jail.

The number of current workers per retiree used to be very high (16:1). It's around 3:1 right now and is projected to be 2:1 in a couple of generations. Now, if productivity increases considerably, this will help to offset the declining number of workers per retiree, but if our government has policies that inhibit economic growth and/or disincentivize productivity growth, then we will not make productivity gains as significant as we need in order to dampen the effects of a graying population and declining birth rates. The United States has some of the highest individual and corporate tax rates in the world (for the 50% of Americans who actually pay income tax), and these serve as a significant economic dampers.

The only people offering long-term solutions to these problems are Republicans, most notably [Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan](#), who has crafted a "[Roadmap to America's future](#)" that lays out changes in the structure of many programs to make them sustainable.

Most Tea Party candidates (of whom I'm aware) have Ryan-esque approaches (or perhaps would be willing to go along with his Roadmap). The irony is that the people who are "in favor" of the system (Democrats and many or most establishment Republicans) are advocating a path that will lead to its eventual dissolution. The people who are "against the system" (Paul Ryan, Sharron Angle, etc) are in favor of changes that would make entitlement programs sustainable and long-lasting.

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“3. Is a rapid political mobilization threatening to escape the control of traditional elites, to the point where they would be tempted to look for tough helpers in order to stay in charge?”

This sentence, given its orientation toward the Tea Party movement, seems devoid of anything that one might call actual content, though it certainly meets the requirements of a grammatical unit containing a

subject and a predicate. The only people (other than Democrats) seeking to hang onto power (contra the Tea Party) are Lisa Murkowski (in Alaska) and Charlie Crist (in Florida), both mounting independent Senate bids that are transparently similar in their sort of craven, tawdry nature; clearly, neither of these politicians has much of a philosophical core (Wanting to be a United States Senator is not, to the best of my knowledge, a philosophy). Murkowski in particular, a Senator who was appointed by her father when he was governor, seems to be clutching a bit desperately to hold onto a beloved birthright.

The article never really gets better, and so I quit taking it apart pretty early, even though I finished reading it. Its points would be cogent and sound if its facts and assumptions were, but they are not. I do not mean to pick on Ms. Robinson; she represents her ideas and cause well. The problem is that the progressive vision and, more importantly, its understanding of opposing positions, is quite faulty and incomplete. Many progressives hold to classic misunderstandings about who opposes whom politically. One cannot understand the present and the future if one's vision of the past is fatally flawed, at least in an area where the two overlap.

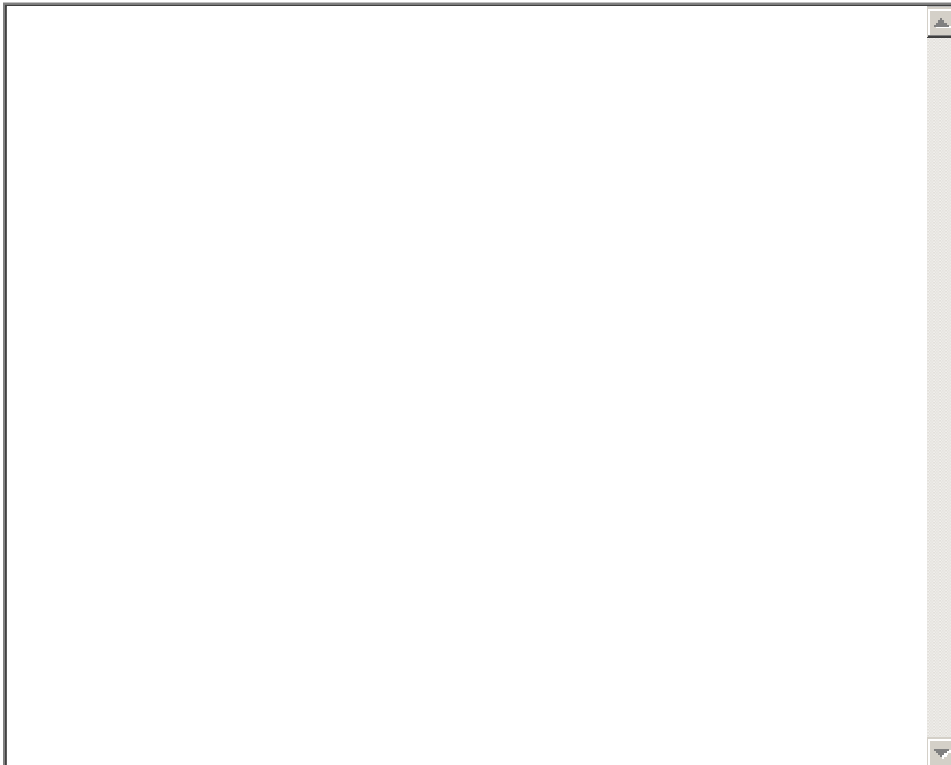
The opposite of socialism is not fascism, but laissez faire capitalism. Hitler and Mussolini were opponents of Stalin because of nationalism far more than ideology.

The opposite of a planned economy is a free market.

The opposite of collectivism (whether socialist collectivism, fascist collectivism, communist collectivism, corporatist collectivism, religious collectivism, etc) is individualism. It is this individualism, more than anything else, that seems to fuel the torches carried by members of the Tea Party, as they prepare to turn unwanted baggage into ballast and dump it into the salty sea.

## **Ooh! I almost forgot! Extra fun! Bonus videos!**

**Fascist Blue Meanies:**



**Infamous crypto-*fascists* [Americans For Prosperity](#):**



**Finally, [the most effective political ad of this election season](#). What? You find this moving? You *fascist*.**

