

# How do you score on the big/small govt circle test?

## So, how do you score on the big government versus small government test? Total socialism or total freedom? Check out your credentials

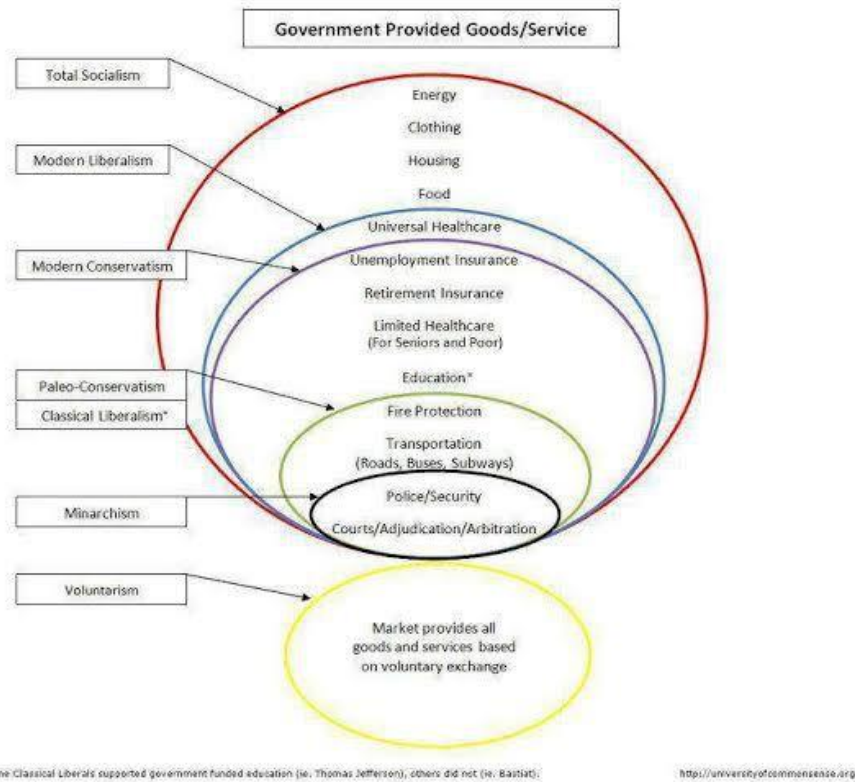
By Daniel J. Mitchell

May 18, 2014

It's not as sophisticated as [Professor Bryan Caplan's Purity Quiz](#) and it doesn't have the simple elegance of the [World's Smallest Political Quiz](#), but at least you don't need to answer any questions to see where you stand in this Venn Diagram that my intern shared with me.

We don't know who created it, but it's a clever shortcut to help people to identify their philosophical alignment based on what they think are the proper roles of government.

I'll do a bit of nit-picking later in this column, but my immediate observation is that I belong in the "Minarchism" camp but that I'm willing to settle for "Classical Liberalism."



Now it's time to quibble.

1. There's no scope for federalism in this Venn diagram, and that may affect the answers of some people. I am completely against the notion that Washington should have any role in our education system, for instance, but I wouldn't lose much sleep if state and local governments operated [school choice systems](#). Does this mean I'm in the "modern conservatism" camp?
2. I'm also not clear why the person who created the Diagram decided that buses and subways are part of "classical liberalism." I [don't consider](#) transportation to be a core function of the state. Though this may be another issue where federalism plays a role. I'm not going to get overly agitated if the taxpayers of New York City want to tax themselves (and only themselves) to operate mass transit. Just don't ask me to pay for it.
3. For reasons [I've explained before](#), there's a difference between socialism (government ownership of the means of production) and redistributionism (government taxing some to give things to others). So at the risk of being pedantic, I would reclassify the big red circle as "total statism."

But let's not make the perfect the enemy of the good. This Venn Diagram/Circle Test is very well done.

P.S. The [worst political quiz I ever took](#) was the one that pegged me as a "moderate" with "few strong opinions."

P.P.S. *Reason's* [political candidate quiz](#), by contrast, produced a much more logical conclusion.

P.P.P.S. I've written a few times about the [politicized corruption at the IRS](#). Building on recent revelations, Kevin Williamson has a [superb column](#) at *National Review* on this topic.

The first excerpt notes that the IRS engaged in an ideological witch hunt.

"...the evidence, now conclusive and irrefutable, that the Internal Revenue Service, under the direction of senior leaders affiliated with the Democratic party, was used as a political weapon from at least 2010 through the 2012 election. ...the IRS targeted these conservative groups categorically, regardless of whether there was any evidence that they were not in compliance with the relevant regulations. Simply having the words "tea party," "patriot," or "9/12" ...in the name was enough. Also targeted were groups dedicated to issues such as taxes, spending, debt, and, perhaps most worrisome, those that were simply "critical of the how the country is being run." Organizations also were targeted based on the identity of their donors. Their applications were delayed, their managements harassed, and the IRS demanded that they answer wildly inappropriate questions, such as the content of their prayers."

Our second excerpt explains that the witch hunt was directed by partisans in Washington.

"...the direction came from Washington and was, in the words of the agency's own e-mails, "coordinated with" a senior manager there, Rob Choi, director of rulings and agreements. This began at the behest of Democratic officeholders, including Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, who requested that the IRS disclose to him information about tea-party groups that it would have been illegal for the IRS to disclose."

In our final excerpt, Kevin explains why this is – or at least should be – very troubling for anyone who thinks America should have the rule of law.

"The IRS is not just a revenue agency — it is a law-enforcement agency, a police agency with far greater powers of investigation and coercion than any normal police force. Its actions in this matter are not only inappropriate — they are illegal. Using government resources for political ends is a serious crime, as is conspiring to mislead investigators about those crimes. ...The most important question that must be answered in this matter does not involve the misbehavior of IRS officials and Democratic officeholders, though those are important. Nor is it the question of free speech, vital and fundamental as that is. The question here is nothing less than the legitimacy of the United States government. When law-enforcement agencies and federal regulators with extraordinary coercive powers are subordinated to political interests rather than their official obligations — to the Party rather than to the law — then the law itself becomes meaningless, and the delicate constitutional order we have enjoyed for more than two centuries is reduced to a brutal might-makes-right proposition. ...The IRS investigation is no mere partisan scandal, but a moral challenge for the men and women who compose the government of this country."

Amen. Unconstrained government enables [corruption](#) and [oppression](#).

*Daniel J. Mitchell, a long standing contributor to [The Commentator](#), is a Senior Fellow at the [Cato Institute](#), the free-market, Washington D.C. think tank. His articles are cross-posted on his [blog](#) by agreement*