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No, Support For Limited Government Is Not In Any Way ‘Racist’

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It ought to be no surprise that, these days, leftists are fond of tarring run-of-the-mill conservatives as racist, sexist, bigoted homophobes. What ought to be at least mildly more surprising is that many of the same folks engaged in these calumnious character assassinations are sometimes fond of lambasting routine belief in limited government measures — as opposed to traditionalist views on highly sensitive cultural issues — as necessarily being "racist."

[Partial government shutdown has taken huge toll on federal workers, communities](#)

Lee Drutman is a Senior Fellow in the Political Reform Program at New America, and is one of the scholars affiliated with the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group — which describes itself as a "research collaboration of more than two dozen analysts and scholars from across the political spectrum examining and delivering insights on the evolving views of American voters." In June 2017, Drutman published an election postmortem, entitled, "Political Divisions in 2016 and Beyond." Daily Wire Editor-in-Chief Ben Shapiro referred to the postmortem in a recent podcast episode.

Drutman's study attempted to analyze the specific substantive and attitudinal issues that divide voters for the two parties, and he charted out all data accumulated from the Voter Study Group's underlying Views of the Electorate Research Survey into a highly intuitive scatterplot. The respondents' data agglomerated in the scatterplot can be separated into four quadrants, in a basic two-axis analysis:

We can break the electorate into four types, based on their position in the four quadrants of Figure 2:

Liberal (44.6 percent): Lower left, liberal on both economic and identity issues

Populist (28.9 percent): Upper left, liberal on economic issues, conservative on identity issues

Conservative (22.7 percent): Upper right, conservative on both economic and identity issues

Libertarian (3.8 percent): Lower right, conservative on economics, liberal on identity issues

Drutman's study thus attempts to demonstrate that a whopping 73.5% of voters hold "liberal" views on economic issues, whereas only 26.5% are "conservative" on those same issues. In Drutman's model, Hillary Clinton won overwhelmingly among "liberal" voters, Donald Trump won decisively among both "populist" and "conservative" voters, and the tiny minority of

"libertarian" voters were almost perfectly split as among Trump, Clinton, and "other" (with Gary Johnson likely taking the most in this sub-category).

To be sure, Drutman's is hardly the first study to paint a picture of the modern, post-Reagan GOP electorate as being more inherently populist than it is libertarian-leaning. Henry Olsen, Senior Fellow at the D.C.-based Ethics and Public Policy Center, persuasively made the case in his 2017 book, *The Working Class Republican: Ronald Reagan and the Return of Blue-Collar Conservatism*. More broadly, the debate between ascendant populism and seemingly descendant libertarianism/neoliberalism is one of the leading sources of current tension in the wider conservative fold. I find myself somewhere in the murky middle of this debate, as I wrote two weeks ago:

...while we ought to always retain a default presumption in favor of the wonders of free-market capitalism...we also ought to be open to rethinking outmoded orthodoxies whose abolition might help incrementally improve our metastasizing crisis of societal rot and a widening cultural chasm between the classes. Ours is not to foment a victimization mentality or to promote internecine class warfare. But ours is — and emphatically is — to do our best to incentivize the inter-generational inculcation of civic virtue, to champion the Tocquevillian mediating institutions of civil society, and to promote a generally more wholesome and less internally fraught politics.

Nonetheless, despite ascendant populist and nationalist sentiment at home and around the globe, Drutman's 3.8% figure for "libertarians" likely still strikes us as shockingly low. And, upon looking at the statistic more closely, there is good reason for us to doubt the figure's veracity. Consider this excerpt from a 2017 Reason interview between Nick Gillespie and Cato Institute's Emily Ekins, who serves with Drutman as part of the Voter Study Group:

Ekins: One of the questions [in the Views of the Electorate Research Survey], it's an annoying question. It should put off most people but the question goes something like this, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Irish, the Italians, the Jews overcame prejudice without any special favors, African Americans should do the same. I think most people who hear this think, Ugh, why are we talking about groups? We're individuals. The problem is if someone who, if someone believes that no one should get special favors then they're going to probably agree with that statement. However if you agree with that statement you're coded as racist. Or not in the liberal direction shall we say.

Gillespie: Would you end up as a conservative or a populist?

Ekins: Those people are probably going to get pushed into the conservative or populist buckets. Essentially if you were to be a libertarian with this analysis, you would want less government spending, lower taxes, less government involvement in health care but also want government to, quote, give special favors. It's a very bizarre combination of attitudes that I'm unfamiliar with in the literature.

Put another way, unless one agrees with a policy prescription of the government doling out "special favors" to certain aggrieved groups, one risks being pegged by the Voter Study Group as "racially conservative/racist."

The underlying academic theory at work driving this inane categorization is "symbolic racism" — the notion that an ostensibly coherent, purportedly defensible belief system might nonetheless reflect a prejudice toward minority groups. This is how the Left, the academy, and their mainstream media abettors invariably arrive at such incandescently hot takes as this 2014 Washington Post headline: "Yes, Opposition to Obamacare is Tied Up With Race." A 2013 academic paper, accessible via the the federal government's own National Institute of Health, also attempts to tar Second Amendment supporters as motivated, in part, by racial animus: "Racism, Gun Ownership and Gun Control: Biased Attitudes in US Whites May Influence Policy Decisions."

This is, no doubt, a convenient way for academics and leftists to paint the vast majority of limited government-advocating Republicans as racists.

It is also utter insanity.

A belief in limited government is not only not "racist," but it is also affirmatively moral. Limited government — and the free-market capitalist system it structurally secures — are but natural derivatives of our God-given natural rights to liberty, property, and contract. Those natural rights, some of which are enumerated in our Declaration of Independence, form the normative legal backbone of our positive legal charter — the U.S. Constitution. As I wrote in December 2016:

The Constitution, read plainly and at face value, may appear to be a morally neutral document — unless, that is, one considers the strict limits the Constitution places on government power to be morally probative. To be sure, it is true that conservative theorists themselves have long been divided on the question; at the U.S. Supreme Court, originalist stalwarts Justice Clarence Thomas and the late Justice Antonin Scalia famously disagreed on the role of the Declaration in constitutional exegesis. But I would posit, as old Republican Senators Elihu Root of New York and Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts once did, that the Declaration's asserted natural rights proclamation and the Constitution's structural safeguards against political actors' raw ambitions are inextricable "to the end that individual liberty might be preserved."

Limited government is woven into our very constitutional framework. It is the reason that the Framers, ever-wary of both majoritarian tyranny (see The Federalist No. 10) and a tyrannical accumulation of clout in one branch of government (see The Federalist No. 51), devised numerous structural precautions against power run amok. Our tripartite separation of powers, our innovative federalist system of genuine dual sovereignty as between the federal government and the states, and the Electoral College are all reflective of the Framers' concerns — and demonstrative of their everlasting sagacity.

And as far as free-market capitalism, well:

Since 1980, free-market capitalism has eliminated roughly 75-80% of all real, inflation-adjusted poverty.

There is nothing "amoral" about that.

More generally, "symbolic racism" is, like the legal Left's egregious reliance upon "disparate impact theory," a form of pseudo-intellectual tripe that saps individual initiative and sloppily seeks to reverse-impute animus for dishonest reasons having nothing to do with one's inner, true feelings. "Symbolic racism" is, at its core, a pure and simple lie — one either holds actual racial animus, or one does not hold actual racial animus. Just like there is nothing misogynistic whatsoever about a flat tax policy proposal that may incrementally help more male than female taxpayers, on the margins, there is nothing racist whatsoever about a firearms policy proposal that may incrementally help more male than female gun owners, on the margins.

To the extent Drutman's study engages in such shameful slandering of morally neutral — and, indeed, actually morally positive — stances as symbolically racist, the study ought to be sternly criticized. Conservatives and libertarians alike have a duty to publicly rebut the wildly misguided notion that a belief in limited government is somehow indicative of clandestine animus