



Libertarians Totally Exist

Robert Verbruggen

July 7, 2019

Henry Olsen, an occasional National Review contributor, writes in the *Washington Post*:

[Justin] Amash is right that millions of Americans are unhappy with the choices the two major parties give them. But he is wrong in his implicit assumption that they yearn for a more consistently principled libertarianism.

Political analyst Lee Drutman showed this conclusively in a 2017 paper. Using data from a massive national poll sponsored by the Voter Study Group, he broke the U.S. electorate into four groups. The libertarians — socially liberal and economically conservative — were the smallest group, comprising only 4 percent of the electorate. Most of these people, moreover, were only slightly libertarian, meaning they are likelier to be suburban moderates than true Goldwaterites.

This would be the same study that gave us this chart, which you'll see shared on social media pretty frequently:



Both Karl Smith of the Niskanen Center and Emily Ekins of the Cato Institute demolished this nonsense back when it came out.

The biggest problem, as Smith notes, is that the economic axis (left-right on the chart) is obviously incorrect. Most of the data points — 74 percent of them! — are left of center. This means that the center isn't actually, well, the center. When you make it so that the vast majority of people are left of "center" on economics, very few will be right on economics *and* left on social issues.

Ekins, meanwhile, reviewed numerous other data sources. While the libertarian share unsurprisingly depends on which methods you use, a reasonable range seems to be 10 to 20 percent. Fewer than a quarter of Americans reside on this quadrant of the political chart, which is probably why libertarians don't have a serious party of their own in our two-party system. But they're more than a rounding error; grant them that.