



The Ron Paul Revolution Continues

If they continue to malign and ignore the libertarian wing of the Republican Party, GOP elders will be slamming the door on their future.

BY CHRISTOPHER PREBLE | MARCH 6, 2012

For most of this campaign season, an unassuming septuagenarian has been striking terror in the hearts of the Republican establishment. Much as he did in 2008, Ron Paul has exposed a rift within the Republican Party between small-government, anti-war libertarians and big-government, pro-war neoconservatives. Although Paul has yet to win a plurality in any state, he **more than doubled** his 2008 vote percentage in Iowa and tripled it in New Hampshire. He retains an enthusiastic following, particularly among younger voters. And he will make a lasting mark on the Republican Party, and the United States, if his followers remain active in politics after he leaves the scene. Whether they will do so, as well as which party they will call home, remains very much in doubt.

Much as in 2008, differences over foreign policy define people's impressions of Paul. He and his supporters think that America's recent wars have undermined the country's security and prosperity, which rankles those who believe that Paul justifies acts of terrorism against the United States by seeking to explain why they occur. *National Review's* Rich Lowry has labeled Paul a "**blame America first**" Republican -- a sentiment that others in the GOP seem to share.

The amorphous Tea Party movement, meanwhile, speaks with no unified voice and is especially inscrutable when it comes to foreign policy. In an early survey of Republican members elected to Congress in the Tea Party wave of 2010, my Cato Institute colleague Benjamin H. Friedman **concluded** that the incoming class was no less hawkish than the incumbents whom they ousted. A recent *New Yorker* article observed that Tea Party voters are not more inclined to support Paul, even though his own campaign literature bills him as the "**Godfather of the Tea Party**," and other profiles have dubbed him the "**Tea Party's Brain**."

In the face of this resistance, Paul is not only doing better this year than four years ago, but also better than in any of his other nationwide campaigns, including his run on the Libertarian Party ticket in 1988. Unlike with some politicians, the shift in interest is not attributable to a late conversion on the part of the candidate. Paul's views haven't changed much over his nearly four-decade political career. His railing against the Federal Reserve and warnings about the perils of government power long attracted a following, but never a very large one.

So, what changed? In short, people's attitudes toward the country's wars and their concerns about the country's debt, which the wars have exacerbated. When the Iraq war went south and the counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan morphed into a quixotic nation-building crusade, Paul's bold stance against both wars earned him plaudits from those on the left who do not share his libertarian philosophy. Now, some on the right have begun to embrace Paul's views as well. In addition to his strong performances in several recent primaries and caucuses, he has done well in various straw polls, including last year's **Values Voter Summit** and the **2010** and **2011** meetings of the Conservative Political Action Conference.