



Is the Tea Party libertarian?

Brian Micklethwait (London) [North American affairs](#) • [Opinions on liberty](#)

A few days ago I stuck up a couple of postings here pertaining to the forthcoming US Presidential election, one specifically about [Paul Ryan](#), and the other about, more generally, whether it makes sense to worry about which particular lizard is elected Lizard King. Does the fact that the [wrong lizard](#) might get in really signify?

My own opinion is that it all depends on the Tea Party, people who I want to believe to be [good people with good ideas](#).

I would like the Tea Party to make a big and visibly decisive difference to America electing the least worst lizard to be Lizard King. That would mean that they would then really count for something. But what I would *really* like would be for the Tea Party *then* to use the clout they thus amass to subject the new Lizard King to political pressures such that, whatever his personal inclinations or past habits, the new Lizard King finds himself obliged to do Tea Party things. By which I mean run the US government less like a sting-the-suckers-for-all-they-have crime syndicate.

To put all that another way, I really want to believe that [this](#) (by David Kirby and Emily Ekins for the Cato Institute) is true:

Many people on the left still dismiss the tea party as the same old religious right, but the evidence says they are wrong. The tea party has strong libertarian roots and is a functionally libertarian influence on the Republican Party.

Compiling data from local and national polls, as well as dozens of original interviews with tea party members and leaders, we find that the tea party is united on economic issues, but split on the social issues it tends to avoid. Roughly half the tea party is socially conservative, half libertarian - or, fiscally conservative, but socially moderate to liberal.

Libertarians led the way for the tea party. Starting in early 2008 through early 2009, we find that libertarians were more than twice as "angry" with the Republican Party, more pessimistic about the economy and deficit since 2001, and more frustrated that people like them cannot affect government

than were conservatives. Libertarians, including young people who supported Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign, provided much of the early energy for the tea party and spread the word through social media.

Understanding the tea party's strong libertarian roots helps explain how the tea party movement has become a functionally libertarian influence on the Republican Party. Most tea partiers have focused on fiscal, not social, issues - cutting spending, ending bailouts, reducing debt, and reforming taxes and entitlements - rather than discussing abortion or gay marriage. Even social conservatives and evangelicals within the tea party act like libertarians.

That's as far as I've so far read. There's another fifty or more pages.

Meanwhile ... I wish.