

[Fiscally conservative, socially liberal](#)

Written by Tom Clougherty

Tuesday, 02 February 2010 07:00

[View Comments](#)

In recent years, David Boaz and David Kirby have authored a [couple of papers](#) for the [Cato Institute](#) on "The Libertarian Vote" – that is, on the question of how many American voters can be said to have libertarian views. On their own strict criteria, they found that 14 percent of those polled were libertarians. This is based on the following questions from the American National Election Studies surveys:

- Next, I am going to ask you to choose which of two statements I read comes closer to your own opinion. You might agree to some extent with both, but we want to know which one is closer to your own views: ONE, The less government, the better; or TWO, There are more things that government should be doing.
- ONE, We need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or, TWO, The free market can handle these problems without government being involved.
- We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own. (Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?)

Only those who said "the less government the better", "the free market can handle these problems", and strongly agreed or agreed that "we should be more tolerant" qualified as libertarians.

However, Boaz and Kirby have also pointed to other polls using less stringent criteria, which found many more people with libertarian leanings. For example, 59 percent of people agreed that they would describe themselves as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal" while 44 percent were happy to describe themselves as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal, also known as libertarian".

Whichever way you cut it then, libertarians are clearly a significant group in the US. No doubt this goes some way to explaining the remarkable success of the tea party movement - some 23 percent of Americans would vote for a 'Tea Party Party' rather than the Republicans or the Democrats, according to a recent poll. But what kind of results would a similar poll in the UK come up with? And would conducting such a poll be worthwhile? I'd be interested to know what readers think.

P.S. Boaz [blogged](#) about the libertarian vote on [Cato-at-Liberty](#) yesterday.

---

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#)

[back to top](#)