

Read the libertarian tea leaves after the results are in Tuesday

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David Boaz is the executive Vice President of the Cato Institute. The Cato Institute is the premier libertarian organization at the national level. He has penned an interesting analysis, which at first might appear self-serving for Cato, but when you reflect upon what he presents it becomes an interesting discourse that may well explain why Republican candidates (a la Thom Tillis) are not getting more voter attraction even though there is a strong backlash against Obama and Democrats.

In the coming days there will be much said about what happened today (11-4-14). We'll have much more to say over the coming days and weeks, and we are not prepared to say that Boaz is correct until we get better data. But if you care about what direction this country is going and whether it can be turned around you will want to at least consider what he has to say. The Gallup Poll has a new estimate of the number of libertarians in the American electorate. In their 2014 Gallup Governance Survey they find that 24 percent of respondents can be characterized as libertarians (as compared to 27 percent conservative, 21 percent liberal, and 18 percent populist).

For more than 20 years now, the Gallup Poll has been using two questions to categorize respondents by ideology:

Some people think the government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses. Others think that government should do more to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your own view?

Some people think the government should promote traditional values in our society. Others think the government should not favor any particular set of values. Which comes closer to your own view?

Here's a graphic depiction of the number of respondents who gave libertarian answers to both questions in the Bush-Obama years:

Libertarians, who disagree with both Democrats and Republicans on major issues, have not been reliable voters for either party. They generally tend to vote Republican by about a two to one majority. But as David Kirby and I wrote in our 2010 study, "The Libertarian Vote in the Age of

Obama":

In 2004 libertarians swung away from Bush, anticipating the Democratic victories of 2006. In 2008, according to new data in this paper, libertarians voted against Barack Obama. Libertarians seem to be a lead indicator of trends in centrist, independent-minded voters. If libertarians continue to lead the independents away from Obama, Democrats will lose 2010 midterm elections they would otherwise win.

And of course the Democrats did have a bad 2010. If libertarian-leaning voters react against Obamacare, overregulation, endless wars, and the surveillance state, then Democrats are likely to have a bad 2014 as well. But Republican positions on immigration, gay marriage, and marijuana push libertarian voters, especially millennial libertarians away; that might account for the surprisingly weak showing of many Republicans in polls in a year when President Obama is unpopular and the economy remains dismal.