

## Competing Perspectives on the Mosque Controversy

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An interesting set of perspectives on this whole idiotic brouhaha over the Manhattan mosque from three people I respect a lot. First, [Gene Healy](#) of the Cato Institute:

Faced with difficult choices, the alleged party of small government always retreats to the lazy politics of Kulturkampf. Hey, that guy's a "card-carrying member" of the ACLU! Ask me about my flag-burning amendment!

John Cornyn, R-Texas, head of GOP efforts to take back the Senate this fall, plans to make the Park51 "mosque" a major campaign issue. It's all too typical: Feed the rubes conservative identity politics, and, with luck, they'll be too distracted to notice you've grafted a Republican "K Street Project" atop the same old edifice of Big Government.

The establishment Right wants to play the Tea Party movement for suckers. It remains to be seen whether they'll play along.

But Will Wilkinson [says](#) this is all a bit naive. This is not a distraction from the GOP's real but difficult agenda for short-term political gain, it IS the GOP's real agenda:

This idiotic foofaraw could be a distraction only if the GOP rank-and-file actually cared more about the size of government than the cultural politics of American identity. But they don't. It's not even close. American conservatism is a movement consumed by protecting and asserting a certain fabricated conception of the traditional American way of life against imaginary enemies. Support for small government is no more than a bullet point on the Right's "What We Believe" cheat sheet, mouthed at opportune moments. I approve of what Gene's trying to do here rhetorically, but the fact is that complaining about Muslims and keeping holy the memory of 9/11 and Ground Zero -- the legitimizing altar of aggressive American imperialism -- is a direct manifestation of contemporary conservatism's essence. If it's not the twitchily bellicose identity politics of self-righteous middle-class white Americans, it's a distraction. Gene graciously lets the rank-and-file off the hook by blaming all this tiresome dim-witted chest-thumping on "the GOP establishment." But I'm afraid in this case the establishment is just nervously along for the ride.


Spot on, I think. Conor Friedersdorf [quibbles a bit](#):

This overstates the degree to which opposition to the mosque among the general public is a conservative phenomenon. The polling I've seen, and Harry Reid's recent anti-mosque statement, suggest it's far more widespread.

But this does not negate the truth of what Wilkinson said. Yes, opposition to the mosque is not exclusively to the right wing. And yes, Harry Reid is being as disingenuous here as many Republicans are. But Reid is only being spineless, not craven. He's reacting to a

controversy that would not exist if not for the deliberate and calculated demagoguery of the right wing.

But Wilkinson is also right to put the ultimate blame on the people who are buying this crock of stupidity. If such demagoguery didn't work, it wouldn't be used. And it is long past time when we could give the Republican leadership any benefit of any doubt. This is not a cynical ploy to regain power for the end of some positive agenda, this is the agenda itself -- emotional manipulation for the end of gaining power itself.

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