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Regaining focus: Growing a progressive majority-Part 1

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#)

Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 13:30



Immediately following the 2004 election, Chris engaged in nearly month-long period of analysis and reflection, which culminated in a post "[Eureka! Or How To Break the Republican Majority Coalition](#)". In it, Chris proposed a very different direction from that of a liberal/libertarian coalition along the lines proposed by Markos (in his Cato Institute "[Libertarian Democrat](#)" article) and others. Instead of aligning ourselves with anti-government types, Chris argued we should align ourselves with government-reformer types--voters who *could be* anti-government in some ways or circumstances, but who were just as much reachable by a messages of reform, transparency and openness. Howard Dean took the party in a promising direction with his 50-state strategy, nurturing the grassroots s never before, and Obama campaigned by appearing to stand for more of the same. But by aligning himself with Wall Street & other insiders, Obama has drastically undercut the logic of the direction Chris laid out, even as libertarians have turned sharply against him, as others, such as Ed Kilgore ("[Liberals and Libertarians Finally Break Up](#)") have recently noted. Chris was right on target, I argue in this diary, and to get out of the hole Obama & the Democrats have dug for themselves, we need to get back to the strategy that Chris proposed. It's going to be harder with Obama working against us--no question about it. But it's far and away the most realizable political path forward over the long haul. Let's look at the argument in more detail.

The Potential of A Liberal/Reform Coalition

Specifically, in "Eureka!" Chris wrote:

I believe it is possible to break the majority Republican coalition, which is primarily an ideological coalition of conservatives against liberals, and create a majority Democratic coalition that will last for at least two or three decades, by liberalizing / progressivizing the 10-15% of the population that is currently primarily reform minded and non-ideological (and thus has a strong tendency to support major third-party efforts). While it is currently non-ideological, this segment of the population, which has existed in large numbers since at least the 1880's, has an outlook on politics that is far more closely allied with liberalism than conservatism because of its emphasis on reform. It is, to put it one way, latently liberal. This segment of the electorate can be swung toward the liberal camp, thus breaking the Republican majority coalition, if the pragmatic, non-dogmatic, reformer, anti-status quo, entrepreneurial aspects of liberalism are foregrounded and turned into a national narrative and platform. Pulling this off will also require dismantling the Great Backlash narrative of oppressive liberal elites, and replacing it with a narrative about conservatism being a force that relies on pure theory, faith-based worldviews, and that supports status-quo institutions such as corporations and the media.

More specifically, Chris presented a series of seven maps of significant third party presidential vote strength:



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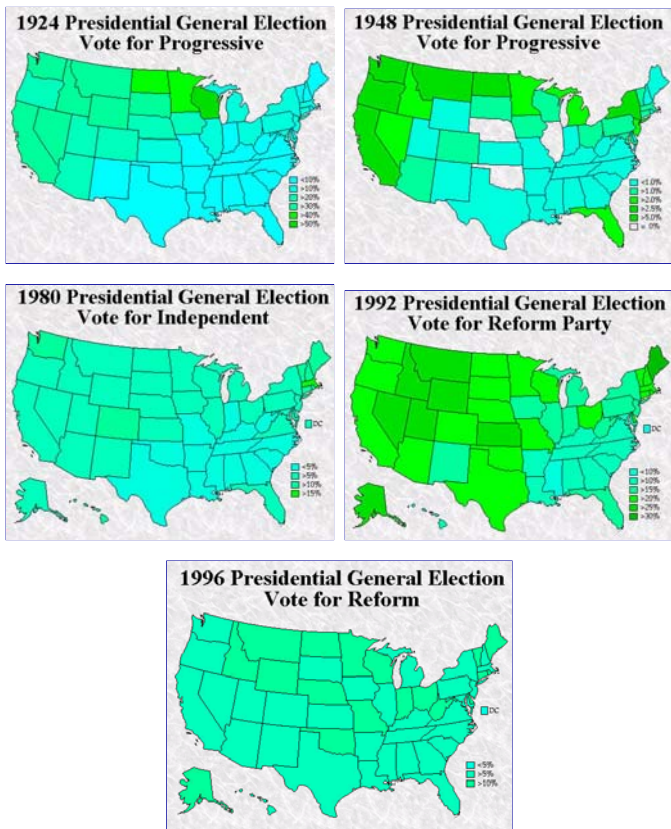
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Chris then argued:

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Take a while to look at these seven maps, as all seven show the same pattern. Specifically, these significant third party campaigns found their strength in the Western, Midwestern and Northeastern parts of the country, but were extremely weak in the South. Except for the regional, segregationist third-party movements of 1948-1968, the South is where third-party movements go to die. By contrast, from Perot to Wallace to Anderson to Debs to Roosevelt, the Northeast, and especially the Midwest and West, offer tremendous support to third-party movements. Considering the ideological diversity of these third-party movements, there seems to be a large group of voters living mostly outside of the South who base their vote primarily on change and reform, regardless of the ideology pushing that reform.

While this group of voters would seem like a natural ally of liberals, since voting for change and reform is a liberal act, unfortunately right now the reformers are voting Republican. Granted, there is nothing fixed about this, especially since the MO of the block, voting for change, is inherently liberal, and they can be brought back. Further, because the reformers can be swung, this group also holds the balance of power between the two coalitions. For example, in 2000, Gore only received 27% of the 1996 Perot vote, according to exit polls. In the 1984 and 1988 elections, I have little doubt where the majority of the 1980 Anderson vote went. **If Gore has received an equal share of the Perot vote in 2000, the election would have been a blowout in Gore's favor. If Dukakis has managed to acquire an equal share of the Anderson vote, 1988 would have been a toss-up.** The 50-52% national Republican majority exists primarily because Republicans and conservatives have managed to bring the majority of the non-ideological reform-minded voters into their coalition. Aply, the reformers hold the key to change this situation.

The observation about Gore and Perot voters is particularly on target, given the detailed analysis of how Republicans wooed Perot voters to takeover Congress in 1994 in *Three's a Crowd: The Dynamic of Third Parties, Ross Perot, and Republican Resurgence*.

The "Contract With America" was deliberately crafted with Perot voters--not Christian conservatives--in mind after Clinton essentially sold out on NAFTA, and Gore was uncharacteristically personal and nasty in debating Perot on the issue. Of course, the GOP's real interests lay elsewhere, as can be seen by the fact that it steadily lost House seats it gained outside the South, while replacing them Southern seats from 1996 to 2004:

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LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS

43rd State Blues

House Membership						
	Party	Midwest	Northeast	South	West	Total
103rd (1992)	D	61	54	88	55	258
	R	44	42	52	38	176
	I		1			1
104th (1994)	D	46	51	62	39	198
	R	59	45	78	54	236
	I		1			1
105th (1996)	D	50	57	58	41	206
	R	55	39	82	52	228
	I		1			1
106th (1998)	D	51	59	58	44	212
	R	54	37	82	49	222
	I		1			1
107th (2000)	D	48	57	56	50	211
	R	57	39	83	43	222
	I		1	1		2
108th (2002)	D	39	55	60	52	206
	R	61	36	85	46	228
	I		1			1
109th (2004)	D	40	56	53	53	202
	R	60	35	92	45	232
	I		1			1
110th (2006)	D	50	68	61	57	236
	R	50	24	84	41	199
	I					
111th pessimistic	D	54	73	62	60	249
	R	46	19	83	38	186
	I					
111th average	D	60	75	64	63	262
	R	40	17	81	35	173
	I					
111th optimistic	D	66	78	77	71	292
	R	34	14	68	27	143
	I					

But the GOP double-cross of reform voters hardly mattered, since they got what they wanted: power. And with that power they continued doing a good-enough job stringing reform voters along, even as they catered more and more to their Southern "Christian" conservative base.

All that changed with the eventual conservative crackup of the Bush Administration, giving the Democrats an historic opportunity for political realignment. Obviously, if Obama had actually delivered on "change you can believe in," if he had sided with Main Street instead of Wall Street, and not stuffed his administration to the gills with insider detritus, the liberal/reformer coalition would have pretty much been cemented for the next 40 years or so. If the Democrats had delivered for reformers the way that Republicans had not, there would have been no turning back. In addition to cementing this coalition among older voters, Democrats would have consolidated their advantage among younger voters as well. It would have also been the epitome of "pragmatism," both politically, and in terms of *actually solving major problems* that severely threaten the future of America--and the world.

Furthermore, the reason this strategy would have been successful is directly rooted in the reality-based nature of the coalition Chris proposed. Reform is what's needed to break up the special interest power that's got us locked into patterns that work for special interests, even as they destroy America. And liberalism is what's needed to guide the long-term purposes of such reform--to expand security and opportunity for all. This applies to the financial sector's hijacking of the American economy, leading to the accelerated decline of the American middle class. It applies to the no-value-added private health insurance sector, which prevents us from getting anywhere close to First World standards of aggregate health outcomes, while keeping costs far higher than anyone else's. It applies to the fossil fuel/nuclear hijacking of American energy policy, preventing us from saving ourselves from the multi-faceted catastrophe of global warming. And it applies to the Cold War dinosaur military-industrial complex, with its mania for a 50+ year "long war" in the Middle East and South Asia--thus giving Osama bin Laden *precisely* what he wanted out of 9/11.

Breaking up the power of all these special interests would have opened up opportunity for the nation as a whole--as well as for much of the rest of the world. *Part* of that would have manifested itself in the form of market opportunities operating much closer to the free market ideal than the special interest/monopoly capitalist model that dominates America today. The prospective "green economy" is an example of such potential. The libertarian delusion lives on in the belief that that one *aspect* of expanded opportunity is actually the whole story. The liberal/reformer vision understands quite clearly that free markets have an important role to play in the larger picture, but that they are only part of the story, part of the solution--and indeed, they would inevitably become part of the problem over time, if the other parts of the solution were to be neglected, downplayed or forgotten.

The Liberal/Libertarian Crackup

The disintegration of a proposed liberal/libertarian coalition was neatly summarized by Ed Kilgore in early February ("**Liberals and Libertarians Finally Break Up**"). First he summarizes the rise of the fantasy:

One mini-saga of the past decade in American politics has been the flirtation-with talk of a deeper partnership-between progressives and libertarians. These two groups were driven together, in the main, by

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common hostility to huge chunks of the Bush administration's agenda: endless, pointless wars; assaults on civil liberties; cynical vote-buying with federal dollars; and statist panders to the Christian right.

This cooperation reached its height during the 2006 election, in which, according to a [new study](#) by David Kirby and David Boaz, nearly half of libertarian voters supported Democratic congressional candidates—more than doubling the support levels from the previous midterm election in 2002. (As Jonathan Chait [noted](#) after the first Kirby/Boaz study of libertarian voting, their definition is overly broad, encompassing 14 percent of the electorate.) At the time, left-wing blogger Markos Moulitsas [hailed](#) the influx of "libertarian democrats" into the Democratic coalition. Soon, even the Cato Institute's Brink Lindsey was [proposing](#) a permanent alliance of what he called "liberalarians."

But now, not so much:

Well, you can say goodbye to all that. The new Kirby/Boaz study reports that libertarian support for Democrats collapsed in 2008, despite many early favorable assessments of Barack Obama by libertarian commentators. Meanwhile, the economic crisis has raised the salience of issues on which libertarians and Dems most disagree. And there's no question that during Obama's first year—with the rise of the Tea Party movement and national debate over bailouts, deficits, and health care—libertarian hostility to the new administration has grown adamant and virtually universal. But what progressives need to understand is that the end of this affair is actually a good thing

And, Kilgore argues, that's probably all to the good. There were certain affinities, to be sure:

In terms of a deeper bond based on philosophical congruence, it's true that modern liberals and libertarians share common ideological roots in eighteenth and nineteenth century Anglo-American liberalism. Both believe in a world of rational actors, and both consider the promotion of individual autonomy to be a positive good. With the emergence of the "neo-liberal" and "New Democrat" movements of the 1980s and 1990s—which lauded capitalism, technological progress, and free trade—the potential for overlap only increased.

What's more, these groups have a sociocultural affinity. Secularism, prevalent in both liberal and libertarian circles, makes them more comfortable with each other in an era of culture wars. (In my own Washington think tank years, the two camps often coexisted on panels and over lunch or drinks—the sort of professional and social interaction that rarely if ever occurred with the Christian warrior wonks of the Family Research Council.) Plus, people on both sides of the "alliance" undoubtedly enjoyed the psychic rush of breaking bread with someone from "the enemy camp" who could quote Thomas Jefferson and rage against the Iraq war and corporate welfare.

But in the cold hard light of day, not so much:

Yet this liberal-libertarian lovefest was doomed. As Jonathan Chait [argued](#) in his 2006 essay, true "liberalitarianism" would require progressives to give up their core goals of smoothing capitalism's rough edges and delivering economic security. Amid the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, that ain't happening.

Moreover, with the arrival of the Tea Party movement, libertarians have acquired a kind of mass political cachet that they've never before enjoyed. As Nate Silver [estimated](#) last year, the early tea parties were "two parts Ron Paul/libertarian conservative—with its strength out West and in New Hampshire—and one part Sarah Palin/red-meat conservative—with its strength in rural areas, particularly in the South." This phenomenon has pulled libertarianism rightward: Despite some expressed concerns about the crudeness and cultural conservatism of many Tea Party activists, it has become clear that most self-conscious libertarians are willing to participate in, and cheerlead for, the Tea Party movement as though their political futures depend on it.

That, in turn, has torn open cultural rifts between libertarians and liberals. Progressives who previously fawned over the libertarians' Jeffersonian modesty are now exposed to the unattractive aspect of libertarianism that is familiar to readers of Ayn Rand: a Nietzschean disdain for the poor and minorities that tends to dovetail with the atavistic and semi-racist habits of reactionary cultural traditionalists. After all, it is only a few steps from the Tea Party movement's founding "rant"—in which self-described Randian business commentator Rick Santelli blasted "losers" who couldn't pay their mortgages—to populist backlash against all transfer payments of any type, complaints about people "voting for a living" instead of "working for a living," and paranoid conspiracy theories about groups like ACORN.

Certainly, few self-conscious libertarians have much tolerance for racism, but they are encouraging a point of view about "welfare" that has long been catnip to racists. And that's a problem for liberals. How can an alliance last in a climate where a progressive think tanker has to look down the rostrum at that nice Cato Institute colleague and wonder if he or she privately thinks the poor are "looter scum"; or if he's willing to get behind the Sarah Palin presidential candidacy that's so wildly popular in Tea Party circles?

To my mind the liberal-libertarian alliance was always a bad idea, simply because the things we have in common are relatively superficial, and tend to favor the libertarians, whereas the things that divide us are deep, and favor liberals. This makes the proposed alliance far more appealing to political operatives than to voters, much less flesh-and-blood people who might well decided they have nothing to vote for if liberals would rather hang out with libertarians than pay attention to them.

Kilgore's analysis is itself skewed by insider-itis. Who else would say "Certainly, few self-conscious libertarians have much tolerance for racism"? The libertarians one encounters on the internet have always been tone-deaf at best, and more often downright hostile to the needs, interests, grievances and values of racial and ethnic minorities. Racist assumptions are commonplace, and a certain percentage have *always* been overtly racist in a rather crude throwback way. The same can be seen among the backers of Ron Paul (more on that momentarily.) But rather than quibble over this further, let's simply look at how explanations for black's lower levels of economic success correlate with attitudes toward government social spending. As far back as Free and Cantril's *The Political Beliefs of Americans: A Study of Ppublic Opinion* (1967), it's been known that attitudes toward government spending produce a much smaller hard core of "operational conservatives" than those who either self-identify as conservatives or agree in principle to broadly-worded conservative principles. Thus, the truest picture of actual hard-core libertarians--those who really *don't* want government doing much of anything at all--comes from looking at attitudes towards specific spending items.

The charts below use a combined measure of six such spending items: solving problems of big cities, improving nations education system, improving & protecting environment, welfare, improving & protecting nations health, and improving the conditions of blacks.

Those who have negative views of blacks--blaming them for their lower economic status--are far more likely to oppose social spending. First we compare those who think that lower black economic status is due to discrimination versus those that do not:

Support for Social Spending by Reasons For Lower Black Income*					
General Social Survey 2000-2008					
	Spending On Items				
Mainly due to discrimination	Too Little On 4-6	Too Little On 1-3	About Right on All	Too Much on 1-6	Total
Yes	60.7	37.5	21.9	21.1	41.2
No	39.3	62.5	78.1	78.9	58.8
Y/N Ratio	1.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.7
N/Y Ratio	0.6	1.7	3.6	3.7	1.4
* On the average (negroes/blacks/African-Americans) have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are: a. Mainly due to discrimination?					

Operational libertarians are 3.7 times more likely to think that discrimination is not to blame rather than think that it is. In contrast, operational liberals (those who think we're spending too little on 4-6 items) are 1.5 times more likely to think the reverse--that discrimination *is* to blame, rather than not.

Using another attitudinal measure, blaming blacks' lower economic status on lack of willpower, yields similar results:

Support for Social Spending by Reasons For Lower Black Income*					
General Social Survey 2000-2008					
	Spending On Items				
Mainly due to lack of will	Too Little On 4-6	Too Little On 1-3	About Right on All	Too Much on 1-6	Total
Yes	34.1	50.0	62.9	64.7	47.5
No	65.9	50.0	37.1	35.3	52.5
Y/N Ratio	0.5	1.0	1.7	1.8	0.9
N/Y Ratio	1.9	1.0	0.6	0.5	1.1
* On the average (negroes/blacks/African-Americans) have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are: Because most (negroes/blacks/African-Americans) just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty?					

Operational libertarians are 1.8 times more likely to think lack of willpower is to blame for black's lower economic status, rather than to think it is not to blame. Operational liberals are 1.9 times more likely to believe the opposite.

Combining these two measures together produces an even more striking difference:

Support for Social Spending by Reasons For Lower Black Income*					
General Social Survey 2000-2008					
Spending On Items					
External v. Internal	Too Little On 4-6	Too Little On 1-3	About Right on All	Too Much on 1-6	Total
All External	40.0	21.4	10.3	8.0	25.1
Mixed	39.0	38.3	39.1	36.0	38.3
All Internal	21.0	40.4	50.6	56.1	36.6
Ext/Int Ratio	1.9	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.7
Int/Ext Ratio	0.5	1.9	4.9	7.0	1.5

* 'Lack of will' is internal, 'discrimination' external, no to each is the reverse.

Operational libertarians are 7 times more likely to blame internal factors for black's lower economic status, rather than to blame external factors. Operational liberals are 1.9 times more likely to believe the opposite.

This is the broader general population picture of libertarian racism. It's not that every libertarian is a racist, or even that most are, consciously. But libertarians as a whole are far more likely to have negative views of blacks, and to blame them for their lower economic status. That's racism, pure and simple. Or more precisely, it's white supremacism. And it only gets more intense if you look at the activist core, the way Robert Farley did at [Lawyers Guns and Money recently](#):

It's a Core Part of the Movement...

....

Every now and then folks like to pretend that the Rand/Ron Paul wing of the Republican Party is somehow less loathsome or dangerous than the Mitt Romney wing. This, of course, is a mistake; the Pauls do espouse certain civil liberties protections, but the source of these views is **embedded in a vision of the state and of the relation of the state to society** that is deeply racist and quite violent. In short, the purpose of the militia movement and its associated right wing terrorist element is not to eliminate or reduce coercion, but to replace state sponsored coercion with private or communal violence. The Federal government, in this vision, acts primarily in the interests of racial minorities; by limiting state power, private terrorist groups can install and preserve the "correct" racial hierarchy. That this vision is particularly popular in the South, which has a long history of state-ignored terrorist violence against racial minorities, is hardly surprising.

Whatever the Paul's private attitudes towards race and violence, both have happily accepted the support of white supremacist organizations that have anti-statist views, and that see attacks on federal power as code for the defense of white supremacy.

The link above is to [a post at Barefoot and Progressive](#) with a YouTube video and transcript of a militia leader speaking alongside Rand Paul at a recent "2nd Amendment" event. Here's a brief excerpt:

The treasonous left wing socialist politicians, and their lapdogs in the press, have gotten a wedgie here recently in their underpants over the tea parties. And a little broken glass (wink, wink). I sure hope they're out there today. If they read history, they should know and fear what came after those events over 200 years ago. This latest forced health care bill, which is really about people control, the same thing as gun control, is the modern day equivalent of the 1765 standback, its only more disastrous to our freedom living way of life, etc...

History it seems is ready to repeat itself. After a long and costly civil war that is eminent, and sure to be forced upon us, **we are taking note of those who are responsible for the treason, and they will be held accountable. I advise the press to start getting it right from this moment on, and stop aiding and abetting un-American activities. Like the Tories of old, the worst shall be hung**, most will be exiled, and I'm a contractor so I have a little bit of tar and feathers for those who are only partially guilty.

Now recall this passage, from Kilgore's piece above:

As Nate Silver estimated last year, the early tea parties were "two parts Ron Paul/libertarian conservative--with its strength out West and in New Hampshire--and one part Sarah Palin/red-meat conservative--with its strength in rural areas, particularly in the South."

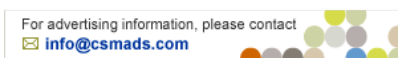
In light of the evidence I've presented after quoting from Kilgore's piece, I think it's safe to say that there's a whole lot less difference between the Ron Paul and Sarah Palin factions

than Nate imagines. And this is why the liberal/libertarian alliance was *never* more than a passing illusion, while the breakup is deeply real. Put simply, libertarians as a whole hate our guts, and some would gladly shoot us.

Of course, this isn't true of all of them. What's more libertarianism appeals in spirit to a significant group of voters who would also support a *more* activist government, if it were more open, transparent, and directly accountable to the people. These were many of the voters that Perot appealed to when he got 19% of the vote in 1992, as well as similarly-minded voters who've entered the electorate since then. Which brings us back to the subject of how to build that coalition Chris was talking about.

I will take that up in Part 2.

Update: Now available [here](#).



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interesting, but (0.00 / 0)

general attitudes are one thing

but a big problem of the Dems in Congress (and Dems in WH) is a simple lack of competence

Ironically, this flows from a very casual attitude toward politics. The pols, the staff, the pollsters, the fundraisers -- they are not FROM anywhere, and they do not care very much. Not like the son of a union organizer, or the daughter of a small farmer. Instead, they are just aging college brats. Part of Hollywood East.

The thrill for them is to be part of the scene.

This changes their focus. The focus becomes not helping "our kind" - the focus becomes how to succeed in the hothouse world of cliques on Capitol Hill and in the White House.

Indeed, people who care about policy are scorned. Wonks. Who don't "get it." The key is ass-kissing, and intra-mural assassination of rivals by gossip campaigns.

The press is part of the insider game. And they all share the cynical "policy does not matter that much" attitude, where spin can conquer any warts in actual policy. Virtually no one is interested in the big picture, over time.

Regulation of finance is the most recent example, but there are examples everywhere.

To think that the public will be "better conquered" by a "new brand of spin" plays into the existing conceits.

With all due respect, the liberals will never win the game the way it is played now. The interwoven cliques do not want it, and they are very strong and obstinate. There is no fair or intelligent press to act as referee. Lies work.

The focus cannot be on ideology. Or, at least, ideology alone.

The rules of the game have to change. Unless we change the dynamic, any progress will be small and fleeting.

The first and most important way to change the rules of the game is to shine a light. The cliques rule because no one has a clear idea of what they do, or why.

We need to expose the processes in Congress and in the administration.

This is done only episodically now.

We need organization.

I have thought about it, and the only plausible organization is from the universities or some big donor like Soros.

We do not need a partisan light. More than one point of view would be good. But we need a light that is constant.

We need to count things. We need to keep track - of everything - in an organized way.

Bloggers cannot fill that gap. It must be organized, funded, sustained.

I do not see it on the horizon now.

by: [watchman @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:08:04 PM CDT](#)

Big Picture (4.00 / 1)

This diary is presenting a big picture analysis. I don't quibble with the laundry list of complaints you tick off, I just don't see it as being very useful *without* some sort of big picture analysis. Otherwise we end up largely spinning our wheels over relatively minor differences of strategy, tactics and prioritization.

Does this make any sort of sense to you?

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:35:20 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

we need to know what we are for (0.00 / 0)

and whom we are for

I am not sure it has to be a comprehensive, or even coherent, ideology. I certainly think any ideology should be flexible over time as new things come along

my sense right now is that the public is not hungering for an ideology

it is hungering for some practical solutions

and the public will look to political leaders (God help us)

there are unaccountable cliques running/screwing up in DC

I think we should focus on our one or two big issues (finance?), and what to do about it (a big picture inquiry)

and then focus like a laser on the nuts and bolts of who, exactly, is doing or not doing, exactly what

until a more institutional approach arrives, that is probably as much as blogger raiding parties can accomplish

by: [watchman @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 16:43:48 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Looking forward to Part 2 (4.00 / 1)

Anti-incumbent sentiment is high. Approval numbers for Congress are not. Reformers want reform and aren't getting it. Palin supporters are nuts, and militia people are scary nuts. Neoliberals, new Democrats, and Republicans all embrace run amok capitalism and that leaves liberals where? I'm looking forward to your answer.

They're asking for another four years -- in a just world, they'd get 10 to 20. ~ ~ Dennis Kucinich

by: [dkmich @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:13:12 PM CDT](#)

See You Then! (4.00 / 2)

I just finished it, and it will run at 6:30 PM, EST.

I'm not sure how well it will answer your questions directly, but I hope it *will* help provide a framework in which we can do a significantly better job of answering them.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:32:14 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Deficit (0.00 / 0)

Obviously, if Obama had actually delivered on "change you can believe in," if he had sided with Main Street instead of Wall Street, and not stuffed his administration to the gills with insider detritus, the liberal/reformer coalition would have pretty much been cemented for the next 40 years or so.

Ironically, I'm not so sure this is true, either way. Assuming the Perot voters still think the same way, the deficit is largely what these people think of as "reform". I doubt seriously, for example, that the reform voters liked the stimulus bill or thought it was too small.

There is a reason why Republicans keep harping on the deficit, cynical as it is.

Conversely, I don't think it is too late to take on the banks and reform Wall Street. Break up the big banks* or something dramatic like that and you got your majority back.

(*No, it won't happen. Just say'n.)

by: [Mark Matson @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:37:21 PM CDT](#)

Look Who CAUSED The Deficit, Okay? (4.00 / 1)

Some Perotistas you're never going to get, nor would you want to. Some are downright racists. Some are Ron Paulists.

But the deficit itself was, IMHO, never the core issue for most, it was merely the most compelling, big fat easy-to-point-to *symptom*, and the 18 years since Perot ran in 1992 have shown that Clinton set the path for eliminating it, while Bush set the path for exploding it. The differences could not possibly be more stark. If Clinton had not *also* embraced and pushed through NAFTA, 1994 would not have happened, Gore would have won 2000 in walk, and our deficit today would be dramatically lower than it is.

Government spending to put millions to work might tick off a certain segment of reform voters... until they get their second or third paycheck. That's precisely what you *do* when you win an election: take actions that might be immediately unpopular with some, but that should pay off handsomely by the time the *next* election rolls round.

That's also why your better-late-than-never philosophy:

I don't think it is too late to take on the banks and reform Wall Street. Break up the big banks* or something dramatic like that and you got your majority back.

strikes me as strategically lame. Of course, this late in the game *all* proposals will be similarly lame, compared to doing the right thing in the first place. "Let's suppose we have a can-opener."

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:56:00 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Timing (0.00 / 0)

strikes me as strategically lame. Of course, this late in the game all proposals will be similarly lame, compared to doing the right thing in the first place.

I guess the optics would be better if bank regulation occurred before Obama gave any TARP money to the banks... but then, Obama *hasn't* given any TARP money to the banks. Of course, approximately no one knows that.

I guess I'm not in the mood this morning (er, afternoon) to assume reality effects optics and politics all that well. It seems to be all noise machine all the time. Real solutions like the stimulus and jobs really matter, of course. The reality of people's real lives cuts through the noise better than anything. But bank regulation doesn't really fall into that category; not in the near term, at least. Even in the long term, how many people will notice the banks are *not* failing. If a tree doesn't fall, does it not make a sound?

by: [Mark Matson @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 15:59:51 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

My Perspective Is Different (4.00 / 1)

I see a multi-dimensional failure with respect to the financial industry and its failure. And I see the solutions adopted as enabling a Wall Street recovery that has largely bypassed Main Street, which is still seeing mounting losses where it really counts--home bankruptcies, for example--even as there are some modest signs of recovery.

In short, I think the horse left the barn a *long* time ago, and closing the barn door now is more than a little late.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 16:27:05 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Reformists' Perspective (0.00 / 0)

But this isn't about your perspective or my perspective, it is about the perspective of Perot voting "reformists".

What is it that they are looking for? Quite honestly, I don't know the answer to that question. For this strategy to work, though, that needs an answer. (Perhaps I'll go re-read Chris' old posts to see if he looked into that.)

For example, to the reformists approve of Obama's school "reform" ideas? Are they looking just for change

with the word "reform" attached?

Or are they mostly looking to, as they say, stick it to the man. Are they mostly just angry populists looking for someone or something to blame and attack? My guess is it is mostly this second thing, but it could be a mixture or something I haven't even thought about.

by: [Mark Matson @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 16:59:55 PM CDT](#)
[[Parent](#)]

I'll Have More To Say About This In Part 2 (0.00 / 0)

but one salient point is that Millennials seem to be far more liberal--including support for government--than previous generations. It's my hypothesis that at least part of this--and probably the lion's share--is due to this convergence of liberals and reformers. And that, in turn, marks a significant shift from the Perot-era configuration.

Obviously we need to know a whole lot more than we do right now. But do we have *something* to go on, and a sense of how to learn more.

Some of them are angry populists, no doubt.

But probably many more are sad populists, who thought Obama was going to deliver what he promised.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school."
-- *Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3*

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:21:49 PM CDT](#)

[[Parent](#)]

The possible coalition partners of progressives (0.00 / 0)

Although I like to claim that the Nolan chart is used in "the world's smallest piece of propaganda", let's take a look at it.

The quadrants of it could roughly be seen as modern liberalism and modern conservatism in opposing corners, with the other two quadrants being libertarian and populism. The libertarian propagandists sometimes refer to the latter as authoritarianism or statism.

Wikipedia say that quadrant also include communitarianism. (Disclaimer: Whenever I humor someone, I tend to be around the border between leftist and populist/statist and generally in the statist quadrant.)

While the Nolan Chart is simplistic, it does help bring into focus that if you have a progressive-populist coalition that agrees on economic issues (and, perhaps as Chris Bowers suggests, reform of the political process), it may disagree on things like secularism and personal liberty that were supposed to be the bedrock foundation of a liberal-libertarian alliance.

Any theory of how to form a progressive-populist (or progressive-anything) reformist coalition will have to explain how to navigate those difference. That's true in building any coalition; you have unifying issues that the components rally around and other issues where you have to smooth over differences.

Things You Don't Talk About in Polite Company: Religion, Politics, the Occasional Intersection of Both

by: [Anthony de Jesus @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:40:19 PM CDT](#)

Sorry, I REJECT The Nolan Chart As Propaganda (4.00 / 1)

I won't play in that frame.

I'm about constructing a different one.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- *Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3*

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:58:52 PM CDT](#)
[[Parent](#)]

I think it is propaganda too (0.00 / 0)

And I detest libertarians. It's just a two dimensional example to illustrate a concept.

But my basic point stands. If you have a coalition between progressives and non-progressives, you have groups that will agree on some issues, and disagree on others. Building a coalition is not just about determining which issues you agree on but also how you manage the disagreements.

Any talk about constructing a coalition will be incomplete if it doesn't talk about the latter.

Things You Don't Talk About in Polite Company: Religion, Politics, the Occasional Intersection of Both

by: [Anthony de Jesus @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 15:42:46 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

My Point Is (0.00 / 0)

that there are non-linear possibilities.

One can reframe the set of problems so that new solutions appear that don't have the same sort of cost structure that appears inevitable if the problems are considered separately, or if embedded in the existing system.

This is where political *vision* comes in.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fall history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 16:29:44 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Is there anyone on the left besides Alan Grayson.... (4.00 / 1)

...who is giving voice to the popular rage at the way the taxpayers are picking up the tab for Wall Street's screw-up?

No, they're afraid of losing access to the money.

Paradoxically, while they are basically a vending machine for Wall Street favors, the incoherent rage of the Republicans may well tap into that popular anger.

The Democrats are in a very dangerous situation, and judging by their reaction to Brown's election, the best they can muster is deer-in-headlights or run-like-hell. Why was Barney Frank, chair of the House Financial Services Committee, in such a panic?

by: [Taylor @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 14:54:05 PM CDT](#)

Grayson Isn't The Only One (4.00 / 1)

But he's an order of magnitude more visible, I think, in part because he *is* a freshman, and doesn't have investments in other ways of doing things.

Also, he's not black, so the penalty for being angry in public is not nearly so high.

The problem, in short, lies deeper than the Congressmembers. If there were coordination, then we could have 20 or so folks as angry and outspoken as Grayson, and no one would be seen as a lone figure. But we lack coordination not just in Congress, but virtually everywhere.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fall history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 15:03:13 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Interesting, But WHO Are These Reformers? (4.00 / 1)

Interesting so far Paul, but I think you need to pin down more information on these reform minded voters.

To summarize, at the risk of being too simplistic in your analysis, you are setting up a liberal-libertarian alliance as one suggestion from some (Markos, etc.) in contrast to a liberal-reform alliance from Chris and others.

But I don't immediately see a clear cut way to differentiate between the two.

I hope you're not suggesting that Obama's pro-Wall Street behaviors fit the liberal-libertarian alliance so far. He seems to be going on his own way, a "third way" or a liberal-corporation alliance.

Quoting Chris, the description of these "reformers" is: "the 10-15% of the population that is currently primarily reform minded and non-ideological (and thus has a strong tendency to support major third-party efforts)."

You reference Jonathan Chait's criticism of the Boaz/Kirby Cato Institute study of libertarian voting, which produces a very large 14% of the population through a very, very broad definition. While I think Chait is correct in that the definition Boaz/Kirby uses is too broad, it's worth noting that the "libertarian" vote they come up with gave significant support not only to Perot in 1992 but to Anderson in 1980.

So on the one hand we have Boaz/Kirby arguing for this huge libertarian vote out there that potentially doesn't exist, but certainly they think they've found something. And then you and Chris are talking about a huge reformer vote out there as well. And both of these voters overlap in the fact that they were a main source of voters for both Perot and Anderson.

I'd like your opinion on what is going on, but it seems like Boaz/Kirby are talking about the same group that you are, "reform voters" who tend to support Anderson and Perot, and identify them using a really broad screen to determine "libertarian." These voters aren't strong ideological anti-government types but voters who probably could fall into an "anti-government" or "libertarian" category if the questions used were broad enough and were

simply picking up on their support for reform, transparency and openness.

If you agree with this, I think it's concerning that this block of voters were already swinging to the GOP in the 2008 election. I'd be interested in thoughts as to why.

by: [LibDem @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 16:49:41 PM CDT](#)

Good points (0.00 / 0)

There is also the possibility that the reformist block is mostly just against who ever has power, which makes them very difficult to include in any voting block beyond one or two elections. But, taking on the corporations might be the ticket that would actually work for a longer stretch of time.

But without a more thorough understanding of who these people are, we can't be sure.

by: [Mark Matson @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:05:08 PM CDT](#)

[[Parent](#)]

Reformers Are Squishy (4.00 / 2)

They don't share a well-defined ideology, so much as they share common concerns and impulses. But this sharing is often along the lines of Wittgenstein's description of a category as opposed to Aristotle's.

The best imagery is that of a rope, composed of countless strands overlapping with one another, but just because two strands both overlap with a third doesn't mean that they overlap with each other. They don't have to in order to be a part of the same rope. So they can be in the same category without sharing any properties in common--an impossibility by definition for an Aristotelian category.

This is why Perot had some followers who really were ripe for Buchanan to swoop in as their candidate in 2000--but not a whole hell of a lot of them, as it turned out. It's also why some Ron Paul followers would fall into this group. But so would a lot of folks who'd violently disagree with both the Buchaninites and the Paulistas.

In particular, there was a poll done by Alan Kay, one of the most innovative pollsters of all time, which found large majorities--not just a reformer subset--favoring *both* measures that would cut back the power of legislatures (such as term limits) *and* that would make them much more responsive to citizen input--such as regular issue/preference polling as a guide to the legislative process. Unfortunately, I can't seem to locate his book that has that poll in it, or I would have included that in this post.

But the point is that this indicates a huge number of people who could go either way--toward a much more robust form of civic life driving our democracy, or a towards a much more minimalist one. Totally contradictory impulses.

But, rather obviously, if they're only presented with one of those options, and not the other, then they'll support the only option in front of them. And thus create the totally false impression that they are diametrically opposed to the missing option.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:15:15 PM CDT](#)

[[Parent](#)]

Reform Impulses (0.00 / 0)

I like that you highlight that they are squishy voters who don't have firm ideologies but impulses. See my comment below where I try to firm out my questions and concerns (<http://www.openleft.com/showComment.do?commentId=227089>). I think these voters could have some "libertarian" impulses to the extent that they probably have a cynical view of government based on the performance of government not right now, but they are not ideological anti-government libertarians. So they fall into Boaz's study as being libertarians because they share some impulses. But he doesn't speak for them.

by: [LibDem @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:20:23 PM CDT](#)

[[Parent](#)]

Libertarian Shell Game (0.00 / 0)

Paul, I had a follow up thought on how best to describe my question to you.

As we know, the number of actual, ideologically consistent libertarians (and not just conservatives who oppose government when the Democrats are in power) is virtually meaningless. It numbers probably no more than 3 to 4 percent of actual voters, optimistically, especially when you consider the number of ideological libertarians who just refuse to vote at all.

Now the Koch-funded Cato Institute and other Beltway libertarian organizations aren't worth notice if the perception was that they spoke for such a small part of the political populace. Their job is to provide rhetorical cover for a host of policies desired by big corporations and intellectual defense of white male Republicans who aren't Christian.

So Boaz inflates the size of the libertarian voting block by using a survey question that includes not only the actual ideological libertarians, but a host of more reform minded

voters who may have libertarian instincts, but could also be described as reformers, or progressives, or Mugwumps!

If this is so, the problem with the proposed liberal-libertarian alliance isn't with the block of voters they want to go after. It was assuming that Boaz, Cato, and others "speak for" these voters. That gives them a seat at the table and an ability to influence Democrats to adopt not the policies these voters would want, but the policies that Koch and others funding Cato want.

by: [LibDem @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:17:15 PM CDT](#)

Agreed (0.00 / 0)

I've made a similar point repeatedly.

In this diary, I use the variable "NatSpend6Sp", which I created from the 6 spending items listed in a two-step process. Step one created an intermediate variable "NatSpend6", which didn't have the groupings, just a the raw net totals all the way from "Too Little" for all 6 to "Too Much" for all 6.

If you look at the totals broken down that fine, Cato is actually only speaking for those who would say "Too Much" for all 6. But that's only about 1% of the population.

Thus, your "no more than 3 to 4 percent of actual voters" is actually a wild over-estimate.

But not compared to everyone else, of course!

At the same time, though, there are a shitload of folks who will adopt the lingo, even though it's not what they actually believe.

And hence my post "A Tea Party 10-point guide to fighting socialism in your own life".

Let me tell ya, politics is messy.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 17:30:31 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Koch Veto (0.00 / 0)

So, effectively, Cato wants to convince Democrats to go after the same group of voters that you and Chris identify as reformers, but Cato wants a seat at the table to determine what policies these voters would support.

It would be a Koch Veto, in effect.

I don't doubt that we'd like some of the policies they'd suggest to liberals, like speeding up the withdrawal from Iraq, or charting an end to the war in Afghanistan. But they'd also suggest to put aside financial regulations and health care reform.

What we need to do is-

1- Determine what these voters really want, not just what others tell us they want.

2- Figure out ways to reach them. Not just through campaigns, but through their existing social networks and lifestyles.

by: [LibDem @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 18:17:36 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

It's Not Really That Simple, I'd Argue (0.00 / 0)

People often don't know what they want in terms of what's right in front of them. They usually have a better idea of where they want to go in the long run. Short-term political actors spend a whole lot of time, energy and money creating confusion regarding the former. With scarce resources, I think it makes more sense to focus more attention on the later.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 19:24:16 PM CDT](#)
[Parent]

Libertarians on the Ron Paul forums DON'T "cheerlead the Tea Party" (0.00 / 0)

I put the question to them, [here](#), and got a number of answers.

This raises the question of what else you got wrong....

Here is one of the responses:

not in Colorado they haven't our Tea party was formed by Ron Paulers and is organized by Ron Paul Republicans and Liberty-Minded folks from

all Parties!!!

It is not being hi-jacked by the failed gop establishment and it never will!!
i cannot speak for other states!!

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by: [metamars](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 18:23:45 PM CDT

So You Deny The Existence Of This: (0.00 / 0)



It makes me wonder what else you deny the existence of.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 19:27:42 PM CDT
[Parent]

Nice duck (0.00 / 0)

From the clapping, I'd guesstimate that there's less than 50 people in the "crowd". And he mocked the establishment for getting a "wedgie" over the Tea Party. Big deal. Have you considered that he's appreciative of any dissent against what he calls "socialism", at all? And that this doesn't amount to a blanket approval of the Tea Parties (which are not even a unified force)? (Though the turd of the healthcare bill is more fascist than it is socialist, IMO. I don't think this guy is very educated...).

The only really interesting thing about this video is that these guys seem to want a revolution, and have very little faith in the electoral process. Gee, whiz, most tea parties, of either the Ron Paul variety, or the more recent incarnations, are supposed to be comprised of people who want an armed rebellion/revolution? Is that what we're supposed to think? And the Tea Party is their ticket to militia heaven, and a resounding defeat of the New World Order? Am I getting warm, here?

If some dyed-in-the-wool militia guy makes a joke about wedgies over Tea Parties, you can go ahead and get all excited. Just go right ahead and ignore the fact that Tea Party surveys showed a preference for Sarah Palin as their presidential candidate, which sort of makes it obvious that militia dudes hankering for insurrection appreciate pro-gun rights aspects of Tea Parties, even if they don't think much of their electoral aspirations.

Or maybe you'd like to argue that they harbor a fantasy of Palin losing the election, and the having her turn her own guns from moose hunting onto the US Army and various National Guards, to lead the glorious revolution? What's the deal, here?

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by: [metamars](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:04:01 PM CDT
[Parent]

Pity (0.00 / 0)

You don't do pithy.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:28:55 PM CDT
[Parent]

Your ducking (0.00 / 0)

is not ducky. Pithy enough?

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by: [metamars](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:48:03 PM CDT
 [Parent]

Another point (0.00 / 0)

The militia dude says, less than 1 minute into his speech, that "We are open to membership to patriots of all ages, sexes and race".

Now, a guy who makes threats about hanging, banishment, and tar and feathering is not what you call politically correct. On this point, I must **insist**. Which means that if you want to rhetorically tar and feather this guy with the charge of racism, I won't take you seriously.

So, if you want to claim that these guys are libertarians who cheerlead for the Tea Party, you have to at least acknowledge that they're a non-racist subset of same.

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by: [metamars](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:45:36 PM CDT
 [Parent]

And Chairman Michael Steele Proves The GOP Isn't Racist (0.00 / 0)

Puh-leez!

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:47:51 PM CDT
 [Parent]

You ducked, again! (0.00 / 0)

Nice strawman, BTW.

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by: [metamars](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 20:58:59 PM CDT
 [Parent]

No Luck / No Duck (0.00 / 0)

No strawman, either.

In both cases: Overt symbolic denials of racism are not self-validating.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 21:14:32 PM CDT
 [Parent]

Validating a contradictory thesis (0.00 / 0)

Is not possible, for some. Political-religious convictions demand as much.

Which does squat for people who don't share that religion....

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by: [metamars](#) @ Mon Apr 12, 2010 at 02:33:45 AM CDT
 [Parent]

Libertarians are for shrinking the government, open or not open (0.00 / 0)

I'm getting ready to read part 2, but first I have to disagree with something in part 1:

You wrote: "What's more libertarianism appeals in spirit to a significant group of voters who would also support a more activist government, if it were more open, transparent, and directly accountable to the people."

Are you quite sure about that? Virtually all of the libertarian people and literature I've

heard or read are for the least possible government (except for national defense and security), whether it's open, transparent, and accountable, or not. They want to shrink government as much as Grover Norquist; I really don't think they care if a government with interdependent, compassionate communal and social concerns is open or not - they are against it, period. (They almost psychotically deny community exists, and are hyper-individualistic, instead of being aware that persons and community/environment are co-existent-that's just a fact.)

by: [racetoinfinity](#) @ Sun Apr 11, 2010 at 23:00:58 PM CDT

You're Quite Right About Libertarianism (0.00 / 0)

But that's the difference between libertarians--a relatively tiny group--and those who find it somewhat appealing.

A lot of people say they want a smaller government, but at the same time support stable or increased spending on a wide range of spending items. I've written about this on numerous occasions, it's very well known to scholars of public opinion, and was first documented as far back as 1967, in the book *The political beliefs of Americans: A study of public opinion* by Lloyd Free and Hadley Cantril, two of the pioneers of public opinion research.

Tie-breakers for many include things like trust in the government to do what it sets out to do, and that encompasses the government being "more open, transparent, and directly accountable to the people." OTOH, covert racism tends to directly reduce support for spending programs.

"You know what they say -- those of us who fail history... doomed to repeat it in summer school." -- Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Season 6, Episode 3

by: [Paul Rosenberg](#) @ Mon Apr 12, 2010 at 07:20:50 AM CDT
[Parent]

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