ADVOCATES
FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

PATHWAYS TO LIBERTARIANISM

1,000 people tell you how and why they became libertarians along with their thoughts on libertarian outreach and the movement's future.

The survey was sent to The Advocates for Self-Government's newsletter subscribers and to recent Quiz Takers. Students for Liberty and Young Americans for Liberty sent it to their audiences, as did the LP of California and People For Liberty.

Take The Survey For Yourself

Q1 Please tell us your age group:
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18 to 24
- ☐ 25 to 34
- ☐ 35 to 49
- ☐ 50-64
- ☐ 65 and over

Q2. Please tell us your gender:
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other

Q3. In the last Presidential election, who did you vote for?
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Joe Biden
- ☐ Jo Jorgensen
- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Howie Hawkins
- ☐ Did not vote / None of the above
- ☐ Decline to state

Q4. Which one of these four general groups do you tend to agree with the most, politically?
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Centrist / Moderate
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ Liberal / Progressive
- ☐ Conservative

Q5. First, think of libertarians you know (not you). Then, complete the following statement: The libertarians I know most often started off as...
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Conservatives
- ☐ Liberals
- ☐ Centrists
- ☐ Disinterested in politics
- ☐ Libertarians
- ☐ I don't know enough to give a valid answer

Q6. Donald Trump...?
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Moved the government in a libertarian direction
- ☐ Tried to move the government in a libertarian direction, but was prevented from doing so
- ☐ Was a necessary response to one or more existential threats that mattered more than libertarianism
- ☐ Was a non-factor in moving the government in a libertarian direction
- ☐ Was opposed to moving the government in a libertarian direction
- ☐ My view is different from the others listed here

Q7. Libertarianism may cover more than one option below, but it is mostly about: (Choose the best answer)
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Increasing individual happiness
- ☐ Limiting government to only essential functions
- ☐ Reducing the harm of government force
- ☐ Leave me alone; don't tread on me
- ☐ My view is different from the others listed here

Q8. Very briefly describe the first circumstance that made you aware of libertarianism? Note: This is an event, and it's not necessarily when you became a libertarian.
Open Ended Question

Q9. When did you adopt libertarianism as your political worldview? (Choose the oldest answer that describes you.)
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Previous to 1971
- ☐ Before 1979
- ☐ Before 1987
- ☐ Before 2001
- ☐ Before or during Ron Paul's first Republican campaign (2008)
- ☐ Before or during Ron Paul's second Republican campaign (2012)
- ☐ Since 2013

Q10. How old were you when you adopted libertarianism as your personal political worldview?
Answer Choices:
- ☐ In my teens
- ☐ Before age 25
- ☐ Before age 40
- ☐ Before age 65
- ☐ After age 65

Q11. Before I was a libertarian I was a/an...
Answer Choices:
- ☐ Moral Majority Conservative
- ☐ Supply-side Conservative
- ☐ Patriot (or John Birch) Conservative
- ☐ Moderate or Centrist
- ☐ Nationalist
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Progressive
- ☐ Socialist or Communist
- ☐ Left-anarchist or Anarcho-primitivist
- ☐ Anarcho-capitalist
- ☐ I was always a libertarian
- ☐ I was unaffiliated or apolitical
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Q12. What event(s) led you to rethink politics and explore libertarianism?

Open Ended Question

Q13. I first heard of libertarianism (choose the BEST answer)...

Answer Choices:

- ☐ From a Libertarian Party Presidential campaign
- ☐ From a Libertarian Party campaign (not President)
- ☐ From Ron Paul
- ☐ From Harry Browne
- ☐ From a friend
- ☐ Via Advocates for Self-Government or the World's Smallest Political Quiz
- ☐ From a book or TV show
- ☐ Via Robert Heinlein or another science fiction writer
- ☐ Via Ayn Rand or Objectivism
- ☐ Through the work of a rock band (e.g., Rush) or a rap artist
- ☐ From the Cato Institute or another libertarian think tank
- ☐ From a libertarian blog or podcast or magazine
- ☐ From some other source: (please specify)

Q14. What benefits do you get from libertarianism, that your previous political thinking failed to deliver? As you answer this question, please think of personal benefits you get, not societal benefits of liberty in general.

Open Ended Question

Q15. Do you tell others that you're a libertarian?

Answer Choices:

- ☐ Openly, I volunteer this information
- ☐ When asked, I share
- ☐ I'm reticent or do so rarely
- ☐ No, I keep my opinions to myself

Q16. The last time I explained libertarianism to a non-libertarian was (choose the most recently accurate answer)...

Answer Choices:

- ☐ Within the last month
- ☐ Since the Presidential campaign ended
- ☐ During the Presidential campaign
- ☐ More than a year ago
- ☐ I cannot recall when it was

Q17. In 140 words or less, please share your best pitch for recruiting someone to libertarianism.

Open Ended Question

Q18. When I think of who does the best job recruiting libertarians, I think of the following person or group.

Open Ended Question

Q19. The biggest external challenge confronting libertarians is:

Answer Choices:

- ☐ Issues of race and class
- ☐ The warfare state
- ☐ The welfare state
- ☐ State indoctrination
- ☐ Lack of libertarians in public office
- ☐ The youthful embrace of socialism
- ☐ The national debt
- ☐ The surveillance state
- ☐ Health freedom
- ☐ The war on drugs
- ☐ The coercion and burden of taxation
- ☐ Fiat money or the Federal Reserve
- ☐ Restrictions on trade and travel
- ☐ Lockdowns or 'states of emergency'
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Q20. Have you persuaded anyone to become a libertarian who started off with another political philosophy?

Answer Choices:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm unsure

Q21. Thinking now about the person or persons you persuaded to become libertarian, what were they before? If more than one person, please select all options that apply in your case. (Choose only one option per person)

Answer Choices:

- ☐ Centrist
- ☐ Apolitical
- ☐ Progressive
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Authoritarian
- ☐ Socialist/Communist
- ☐ Nationalist
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Q22. In what setting did that conversion take place? (Choose all options that apply.)

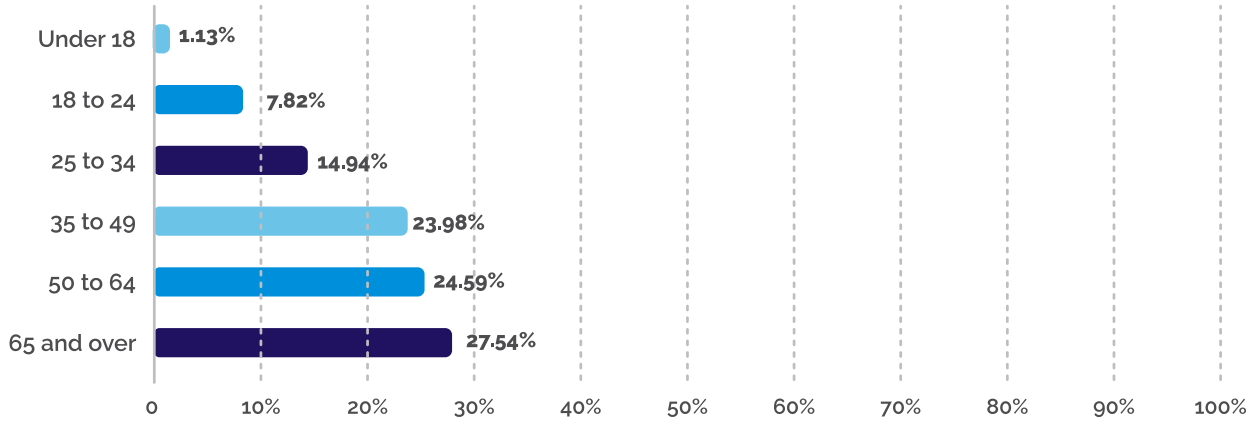
Answer Choices:

- ☐ Through social media
- ☐ Using email
- ☐ Face-to-face meals
- ☐ When meeting at parties and other events
- ☐ By lending, buying, or recommending books
- ☐ By sharing audio tracks
- ☐ By sharing articles
- ☐ By sharing videos
- ☐ Other (please specify)

1,151 people answered at least one question.

Q1 Please tell us your age group

Answered: 1,151 Skipped: 0

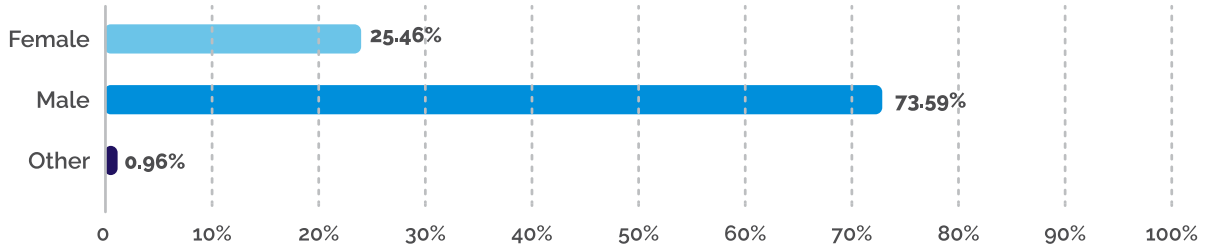


The Age Sample of this Survey

The Advocates' Liberator Online newsletter and the LP California list skewed the sample towards older libertarians. See Generational Divide opposite page.

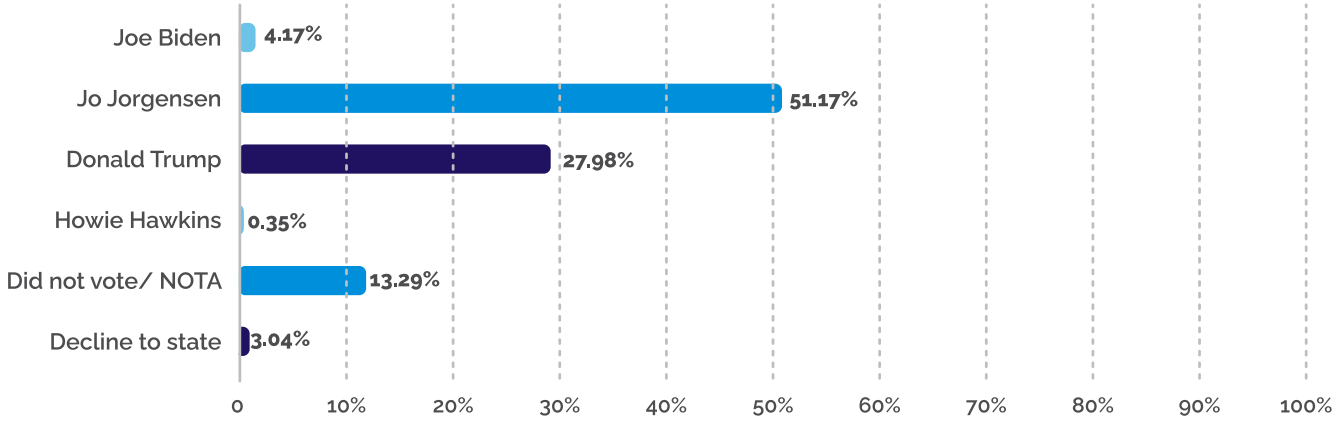
Q2 Please tell us your gender

Answered: 1,151 Skipped: 0



Q3 In the last Presidential election, who did you vote for?

Answered: 1,151 Skipped: 0

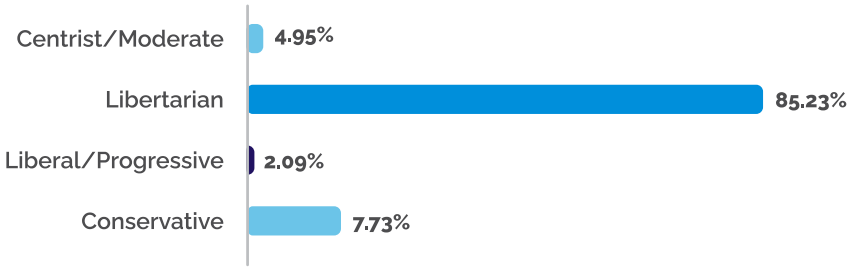


The Exit Question

Not everyone who received this survey was a libertarian. Question 4 was the "exit question" for non-libertarians. But, since we had their brief attention, we used the first four questions to get a bit of information.

Q4 Which one of these four general groups do you tend to agree with the most, politically?

Answered: 1,151 Skipped: 0



The Lean of the Audience Sample and a Generational Divide

Libertarians above age 50 recall the fusion era. Ed Clark, Ed Crane, the Koch brothers, Ron Paul, and Harry Browne were all products of a time when Republicans were perceived to be for smaller government, free trade, constitutionalism, and balanced budgets. Libertarians considered committed conservatives their cousins.

That alliance started to crack up over the War on Iraq, big bank bailouts, and gay marriage, so that libertarians under 40 no longer share this perspective.

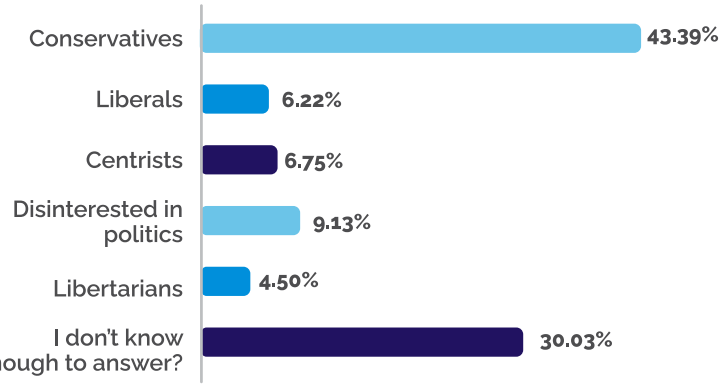
Fusion era via Reason Magazine

What Kind of Libertarians Responded?

These questions were designed to get a sense of who these libertarians are.

Q5 First, think of libertarians you know (not you). Then, complete the following statement: The libertarians I know most often started off as...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

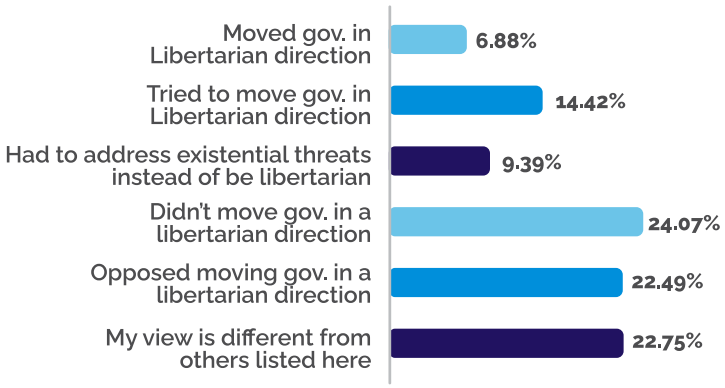


800-pound gorilla of American politics

Donald Trump had a huge impact on American politics. It even seemed like many Ron Paul supporters became Trump fans. What do libertarians actually see in Donald Trump?

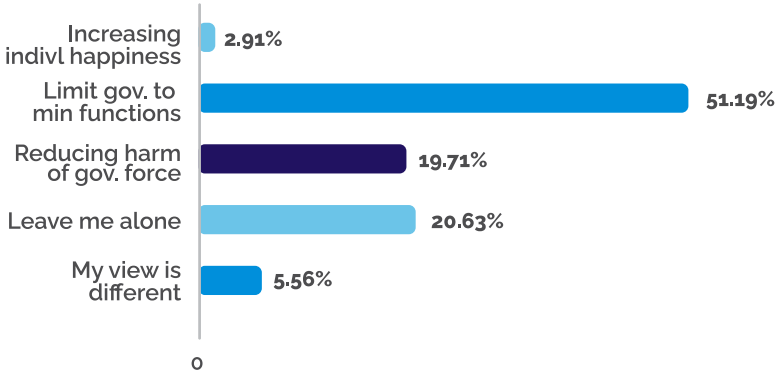
Q6 Donald Trump...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Q7 Libertarianism may cover more than one option below, but it's mostly about...(choose the best answer)

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

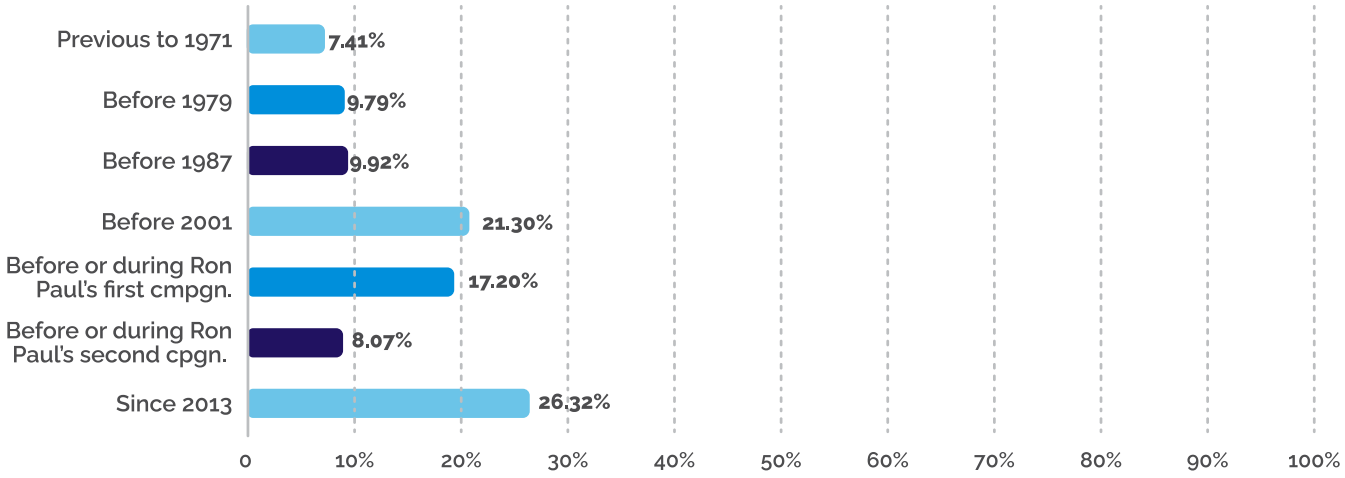


Damascus Road

Here, the respondents are explaining their pathway into libertarianism. That was the core purpose of this survey.
Question 8 will follow this page.

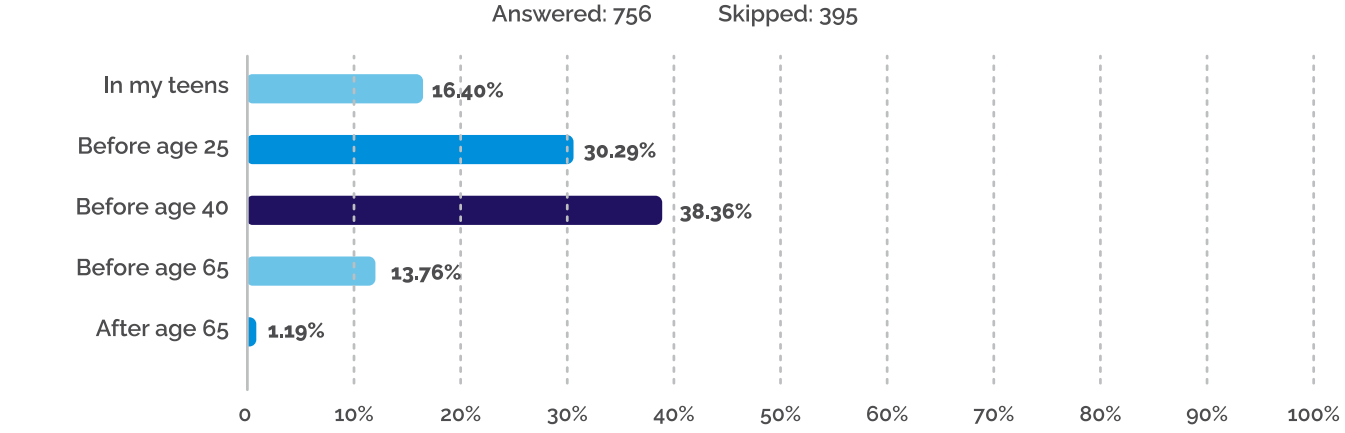
Q9 When did you adopt libertarianism as your political worldview? (Choose the oldest answer that describes you.)

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Q10 How old were you when you adopted libertarianism as your personal political worldview?

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Age plays a huge role in responses

Ayn Rand (deceased), Ron Paul (still living), Harry Browne (deceased), Neal Boortz (retired), and Robert Heinlein (deceased, science fiction writer) are people who've done a lot for our movement, but their times have passed. New figures will need to step up. Question 18, in our survey, starts seeking out those people.

The Most Important Question

Q8 Very briefly describe the first circumstance that made you aware of libertarianism? Note: This is an event, and it's not necessarily when you became a libertarian.

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

Question 8 was open-ended - participants could write anything they wanted. For survey processors, this is messy. We painstakingly hand-sorted the answers, and it paid off with real insights.

Top Five Answers...

We organized and grouped the full answers. That document is 20 pages long! We were able to "group" the answers to find and rank the most common phrases and concepts. There were 122 different answers. Here were the Top 5 specific responses...

- Ron Paul - 56
- Libertarian acquaintance/family - 50
- Ayn Rand - 43
- Unrepresented by either major party - 34
- World's Smallest Political Quiz/booth - 33

We categorized the 122 answers and ended up with 21 types of answers

We printed out all of the answers, generating a document 59 pages long! We tried to locate the key idea in each person's answer, but many people combined things. In response, we created an ad hoc point system so that we could rank the results and show them to you by Type in this simple format...

- Presidential Campaigns - 193
- Writers & Publishing - 172
- The Libertarian Party - 170
- Internet Discovery & Research - 145
- Reject D's & R's/politically homeless - 89
- Public Figures & Entertainment - 73
- Friends & Family - 72
- Non-LP Candidates Or Elected Officials - 68
- Pain & Frustration - an awakening - 64
- Provocative Conversation - 57
- Organizations & Groups - 40
- Quizzes - 37
- Outreach tools & tables - 33
- Secondary or Post-Secondary Education - 26
- Talk Radio or Podcasts - 24
- Economists - 19
- Philosophical considerations - 14
- Speeches, Debates, & Supper Clubs - 14
- Personal Interaction with the State - 9
- State Employment (military too) - 3
- Unclassified - 2

The Most Interesting Part!

You can't necessarily see the most interesting insight in those results, but we could see it by reading every single answer.

Call it an existential moment. The first time someone was exposed to libertarianism most commonly occurred during political campaign season.

- First, they might notice they didn't fit in with either party's candidate.
- Second - and this one happened outside of election campaigns too - in conversation, someone would tell them, "You sound like a libertarian."
- In both cases, they'd go on a personal journey, usually doing more research, and thereby discovering they really were a libertarian!

Who told them they were libertarians?

Teachers and family members told them about the libertarian alternative, especially their dads. People used the term dad, not father. And dear old dad was mentioned a surprising number of times.



It all starts with... Ron Paul

In individual responses, Ron Paul comes up more than any other person or thing. He defies category in our survey. Some read his books, saw his 1988 Libertarian campaign, or watched his special orders speeches on C-SPAN. But many recounted his 2007-08 and 2011-12 Presidential campaigns. Indeed, these two campaigns caused the largest swell of new libertarians ever. These people dug his long-term integrity, candor, and outsider status. They even went on to seek out free market and liberty-oriented works from Bastiat to Mises.

From Left: Advocates President, Mike Sertic; Rep. Ron Paul; Advocates Chair, Chris Rufer

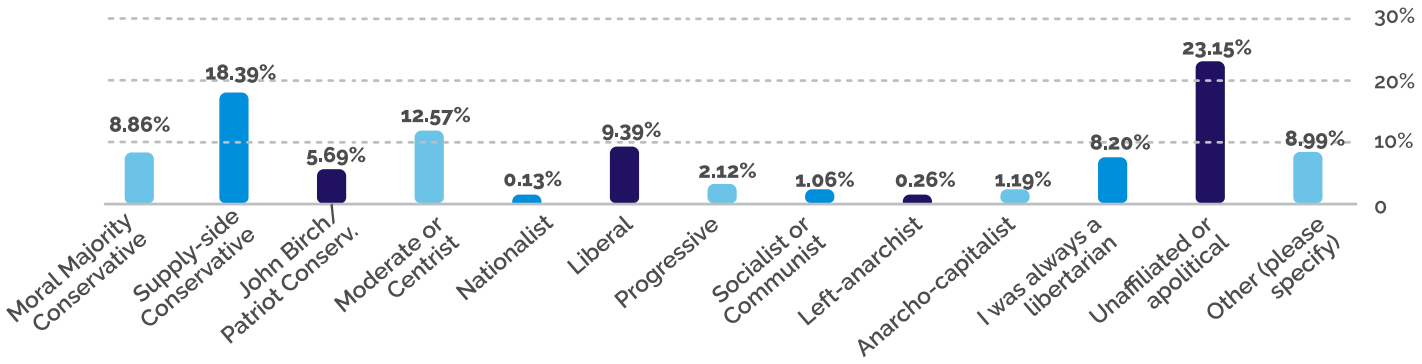
This question is about initial awareness. We ask how they became a libertarian in Question 12.

Question 8 vs Question 12

Question 8 was about initial awareness. Someone heard about libertarianism; maybe they became a libertarian, or perhaps a seed was planted. Question 12 is directly about how they became a libertarian.

Q11 Before I was a libertarian I was a/an...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Q12 What event(s) led you to rethink politics and explore libertarianism?

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

This was an open-ended question, not multiple choice

Text: There are 23 pages of raw data with lines that look like this...

199	The government does not have my best interest at heart and giving them power reduces my freedom	4/29/2021 10:15 AM
200	when looking into the subject of personal responsibility and exceptionalism	4/29/2021 9:50 AM
201	Learning about NAP and the states monopoly on force	4/29/2021 9:46 AM
202	The 2020 election	4/29/2021 9:34 AM
203	Ron Paul speech to Congress about them stopping the requirement on the Federal Reserve to report some of their Mx statistics. In 2007, I believe	4/29/2021 9:26 AM
204	Large steps towards self governance are very difficult to achieve due the largely successful social engineering throughout the world	4/29/2021 9:21 AM
205	The emergence of the plutocratic duopoly	4/29/2021 9:17 AM
208	Ron Paul Convention 2008	4/29/2021 8:55 AM
209	Ayn Rand and Objectivism	4/29/2021 8:55 AM
210	The continuing attacks on our constitutional rights by BOTH parties	4/29/2021 8:20 AM

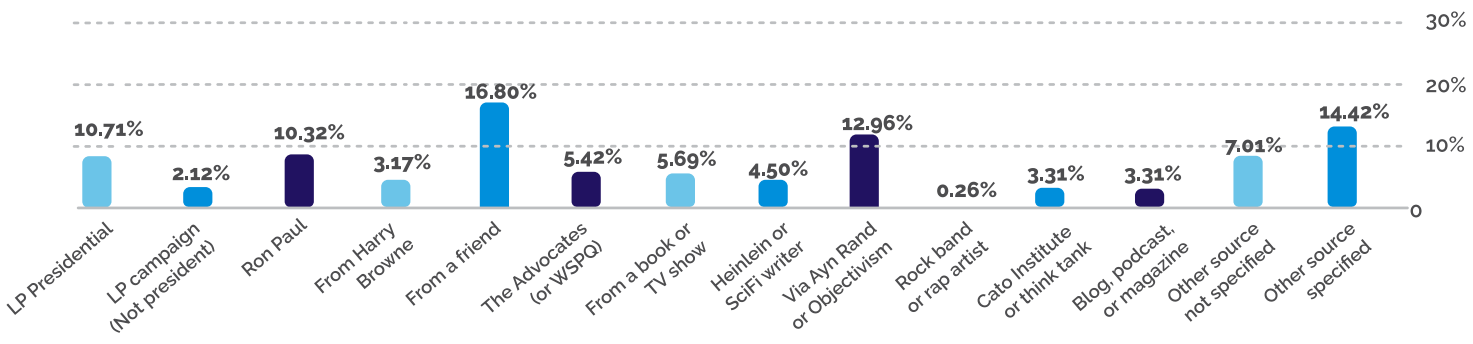
Keyword Results

Our survey tool took the open-ended answers and measured two things: The number of times real words appeared in the answers and a relevance score - the words that seemed most important. Relevance separates out noise and gets to a more specific detail. For example, the system might count all the times the word "government" gets used, and even if that's many more times than the term "Ron Paul" appears, Ron would get a greater relevance score. A nice way to get a feel for how people responded is a "word cloud."

Looking LP control GOP Learning better libertarianism follow 2020 election nothing Seeing Atlas Shrugged Ayn Rand Republican Party knew failed libertarian party many realized Patriot Act friend college saw people president candidates fit Obama high school book always libertarian election freedom campaign tax war Democrats parties lot Ron Paul believed reading found government Trump Libertarian tried Republicans 2016 election even vote republicans Democrats work Reading Atlas Shrugged 2016 actually Vietnam War run conservative remember years military moving war drugs COVID Going Economic discovering longer Reading Ayn Rand 2008 major parties state specific event really rethink policies seems say liberty made think rights Watching national 2020 one Constitution politics

Q13 I first heard of libertarianism from (choose the BEST answer)...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



What Does Libertarianism Do For You?

We hoped to glean insights that might help with messaging.

Q14 What benefits do you get from libertarianism that your previous political thinking failed to deliver? As you answer this question, please think of personal benefits you get, not societal benefits of liberty in general..

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

Another open-ended question where we used the "word cloud."

Live life friendship force actions answer find liberty see take Libertarian Party Understanding left alone focus country want will politics sense always Nothing Peace mind individuals way clearer choice alone consistency personal liberty moral care political need libertarian able right principles libertarianism perspective benefits us make personal benefits better values people economic feel support freedom personal responsibility think logical government longer others beliefs political party ability change party ideas personal much knowing peace life knowledge personal freedom small government vote agree free self views state live mind less world None control issues actually Libertarianism gives philosophy world view previous political thinking society person believe everyone consistent Logic hope clarity make sense

How Are You Selling Libertarianism? What Do You Think Works?

What is the state of libertarian outreach? Are libertarians sharing the message? If so, how much? What is the setting for their outreach? And what are they saying and is it working?

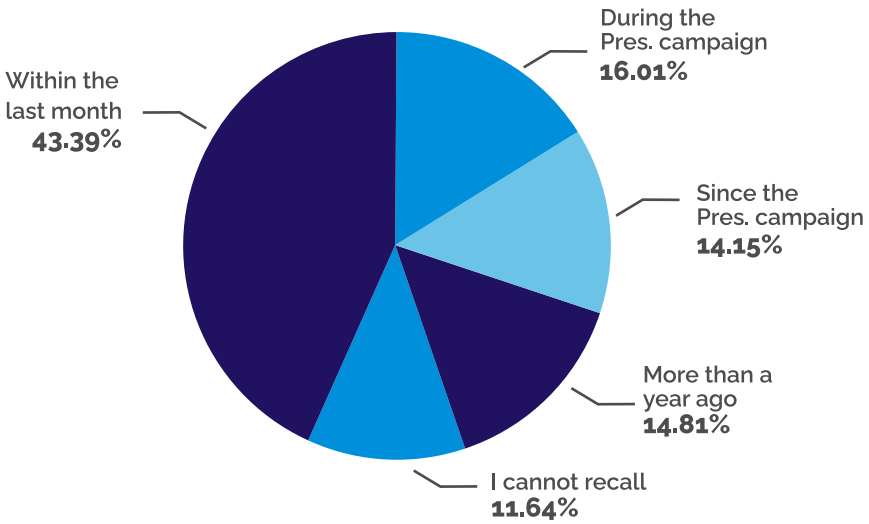
Q15 Do you tell others that you're a libertarian?

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Q16 The last time I explained libertarianism to a non-libertarian was (Choose the most recently accurate answer)...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



Q17 In 140 words or less, please share your best pitch for recruiting someone to libertarianism.

This is our second hand-sorted question. Most of the 756 answers were assigned to one category, receiving one point. But there were answers assigned to two categories, receiving a half-point each.

These are the Top 10 directly-answered categories...

Category	Points
Don't Tread on Me (Individualism, Live & Let Live, Freedom)	136
Downsize/Limit Government (anti-statism)	91
Lesser Evil (R's & D's are bad/wasted vote)	61
Government Doesn't Work	41.5
Zero Aggression (The NAP)	41
Don't Tread on Others (Golden Rule, Pro-choice, Tolerance)	31.5
Fiscal conservative/Socially liberal	23
Everyone is a libertarian	19.5
Human Respect	19
Use World's Smallest Political Quiz	16



Additionally, "No pitch" is an interesting category with a score of 46.5. It can mean "I don't have a pitch." It can also mean that I think "pitching" is un-libertarian. Relatedly, there was a specific category devoted to people who wanted to build common ground first, with a score of 27.5.

Q18 When I think of who does the best job recruiting libertarians, I think of the following person or group.

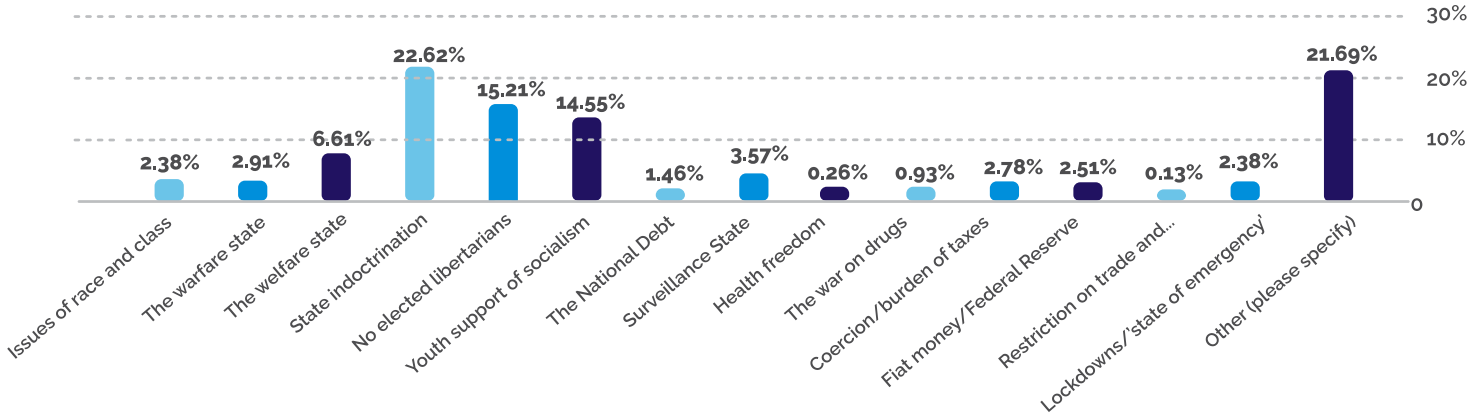
Answered: 756 Skipped: 395

Another open-ended question. This is a great question for using a word cloud.

Maybe magazine Cato Institute one good nobody comes mind idea recruit Harry Browne write best currently Liberty groups Kennedy Larry Sharpe particular John Stossel idk Mises Institute Institute None rights Mises Caucus Reason good job one individual know friends YAL people Lew Rockwell Rand Paul Jo Jorgensen Spike Cohen answer Ron Paul Matt Kibbe Advocates Self Government no one comes mind Libertarian anyone Justin Amash Tom Woods Dave Smith candidates Libertarian Party Milton Friedman sure Foundation Reason Magazine Cato Ayn Rand Democrats Cato Institute SFL Young Americans Liberty recruiting Dr national LP family think Democrats Republicans Eric July parties Larry Elder memes Murray Rothbard Students Liberty don't know FEE

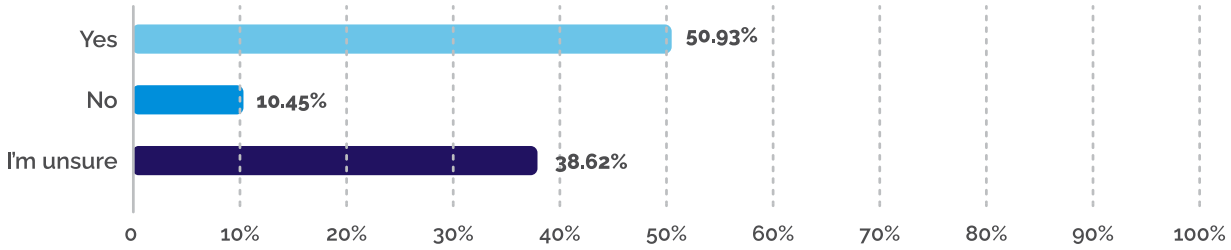
Q19 The biggest external challenge confronting libertarians is...

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



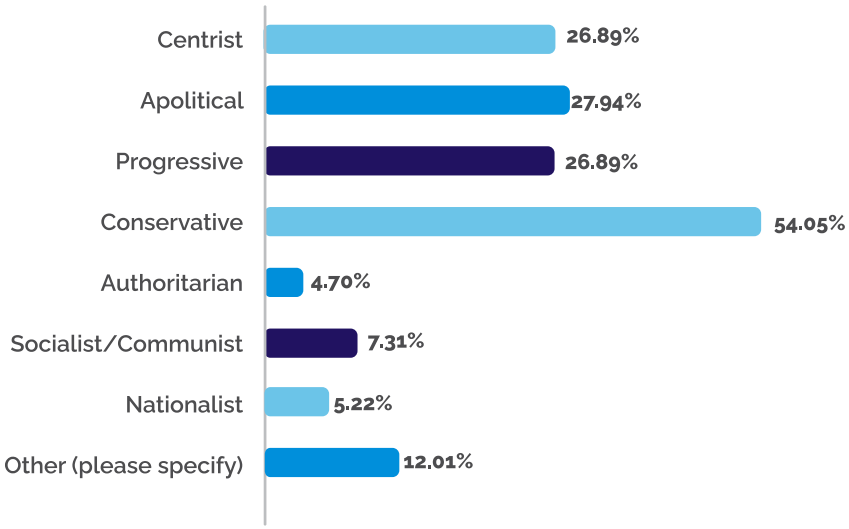
Q20 Have you persuaded anyone to become a libertarian who started off with another political philosophy?

Answered: 756 Skipped: 395



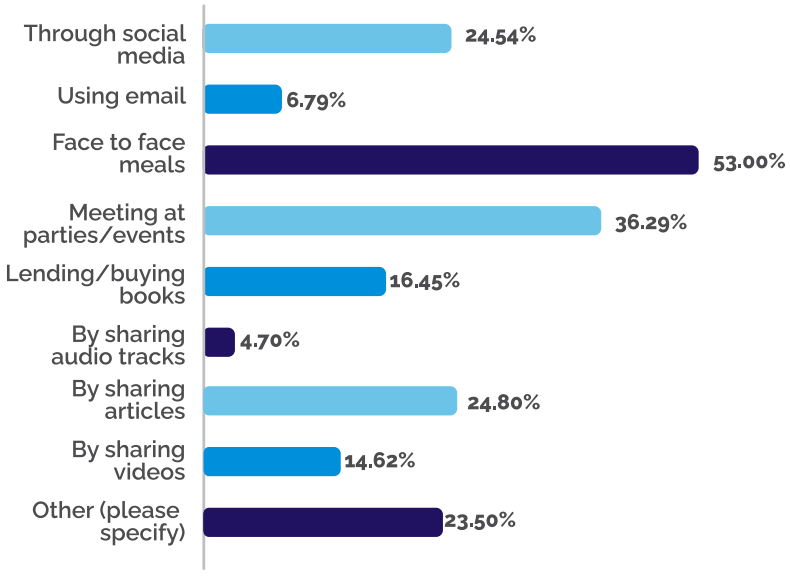
Q21 Thinking now about the person or persons you persuaded to become libertarian, what were they before? (If more than one person, please select all options that apply in your case. Choose only one option per person.)

Answered: 383 Skipped: 768



Q22 In what setting did that conversion take place? (Choose all options that apply.)

Answered: 383 Skipped: 768



Libertarian Pathways: A Learning Experience

We believe Question 8 was worth this effort, all by itself. "You sound like a libertarian," when applied appropriately, works like Magic Words! We also learned that Libertarian Presidential campaigns have real recruitment value. What's your "big takeaway?"

Tell us at info@TheAdvocates.org.