



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 5, 2014

The War on the Tea Party

The establishment is gunning for Tea Party congressmen who back civil liberties and oppose war, and is putting tens of millions of dollars on the line to defeat them in 2014. Congressman Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) claimed on MSNBC's *Now With Alex Wagner* January 15:

It's often said this is not your father's or grandfather's Republican Party. It's not even the Republican Party of five years ago. These folks have gone Tea Party over the edge and they're obsessive. They're extremists, and quite frankly, they've destroyed the Republican Party and used it only in name. The fact is, we haven't done anything. We've only passed about 60 bills. Most of them are suspensions, post office namings and a few of them have been bills to simply reopen the government after they shut it down.



Ellison specifically complained on MSNBC about the unwillingness of Tea Party Republicans to back pet leftist causes, such as increasing the minimum wage, providing amnesty for illegal immigrants, and transforming unemployment insurance into a long-term dole.

Ellison and his cheerleaders on MSNBC — and other establishment television networks — have decried the increasing partisanship in Congress and attributed it almost exclusively to the Tea Party movement. But is the Tea Party responsible for this partisanship?

Vitriol Over Nonexistent Votes

A closer look at the actual voting records of congressmen associated with the Tea Party movement, alongside Republicans who have rejected the Tea Party, reveals a more complex picture within the Tea Party movement, led in the House by Congressmen Justin Amash (R-Mich.) and Thomas Massie (R-Ky.).

The actual voting records reveal that Tea Party congressmen do not have markedly different voting habits on most economic issues from their GOP congressmen colleagues who don't identify with the Tea Party movement — “moderate” GOP congressmen — though there may be some real differences on that front. Tea Party Republicans did lead the abortive effort to defund ObamaCare last fall.

Among those Republicans first elected in 2010 or 2012, House members who identified with the Tea Party movement (either members of the Tea Party Caucus or publicly associated with the Tea Party movement) scored a little better on *The New American's* “Freedom Index,” which rates congressmen on their adherence to the Constitution and fiscal probity, an average of 72 percent, compared with non-Tea Party Republicans, who scored an average of 64 percent. But the procedural stranglehold Republican

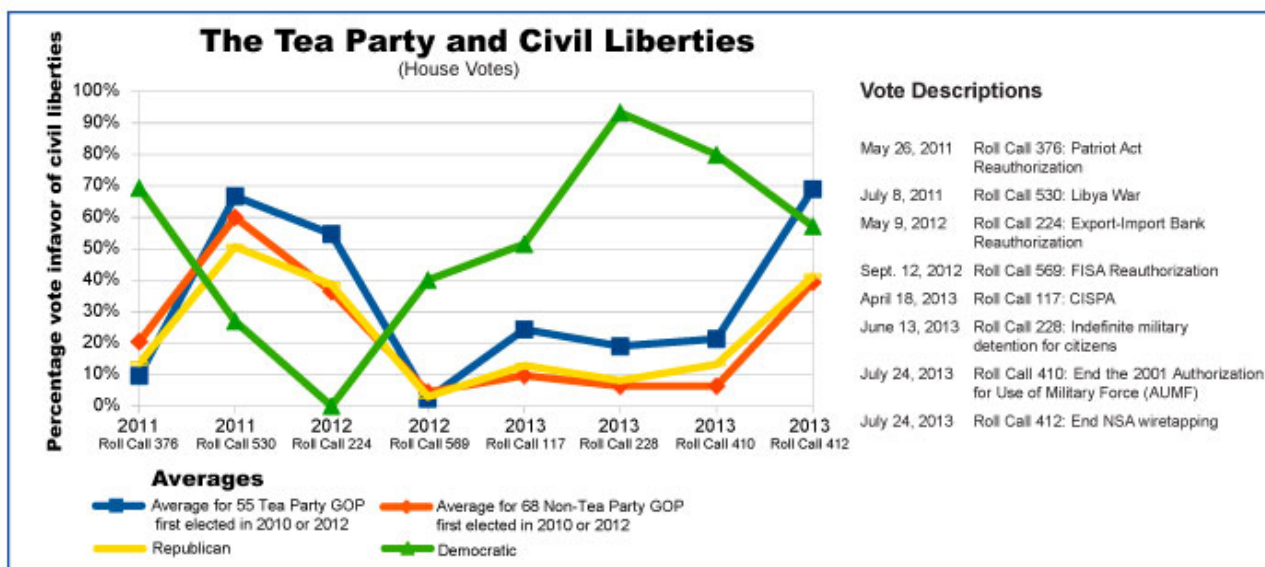


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House leaders and Democratic Senate leaders have had over the votes taken in recent years has guaranteed that votes are a measure of partisan loyalty rather than an indication of economic agenda or ideology.

The leftist cry of Tea Party hyper-partisanship and extremism completely misfires as soon as one moves away from annual budget votes. Much of the difference between Tea Party Republicans and their colleagues has been on issues where the Tea Party Republicans moved across the aisle to vote with Democrats in favor of civil liberties and against unnecessary wars, or on issues of corporate subsidies that Democrats claim to oppose. *The New American* analyzed eight votes taken since the 2010 elections and compared new Tea Party Republicans with non-Tea Party Republicans and found that Tea Party Republicans were twice as likely to vote in favor of civil liberties, against crony capitalism, and against unnecessary wars.

Democrats voted more reliably in favor of constitutionally protecting Americans' data privacy and against indefinite detention of Americans without trial than Republicans, even Tea Party-linked Republicans. But on issues such as passage of the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act, a ban on indefinite detention of U.S. citizens without trial, or limits on NSA surveillance of Americans without a warrant, Tea Party Republicans were twice as likely as other Republicans to vote with the majority of Democrats to protect civil liberties than with their own party's leadership.



And there is a wide spectrum of opinion among Tea Party-linked members of Congress, from the libertarian-leaning Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, and Rep. Thomas Massie to the more interventionist-minded Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, Rep. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, and former Rep. Allen West of Florida. The former are reliable defenders of constitutionally protected liberties, while the latter are more inclined to establishment interventionism and less inclined to protect the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

But even among the more interventionist-minded Tea Party candidates, there's a measurable difference on civil liberties between them and the establishment senators long hailed by the leftist media as paragons of compromise, such as John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.). While Graham and McCain were beating the war drums to bomb Syria, Senator Rubio voted against air strikes upon Syria and said on September 4, 2013, "I have never supported the use of U.S. military force in the conflict. And I still don't. I remain unconvinced that the use of force proposed here will work." And



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while Rep. Cotton rose to defend the warrantless NSA surveillance of Americans during the House debate last summer alongside establishment Republicans, interventionist-minded former Congressman Allen West has come around to expressing skepticism about the breadth of that surveillance. “We know who the enemy is, target the enemy, and get their records. Get their conversations. Get their emails,” Allen West told NewsMax.com after Obama’s January 17 address on the NSA. “But ... grandma, who is calling and sharing her hot apple pie recipe, does not need to be listened into by any surveillance agency.”

So which Republicans are the most partisan? Which are the most “extreme”?

Neocons’ Noses Bent Out of Shape

The political Left is a tiny threat to the Tea Party movement — despite liberals’ dominance of traditional mass media — compared with the furious establishment GOP drive organizing to destroy the Tea Party movement. Senator John McCain lashed out at Amash, Paul, and Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) as “wacko birds” last spring. And Bush strategist Karl Rove launched into an all-out attack on House Liberty Caucus Chairman Justin Amash last summer. (Amash has become the virtual leader of the Tea Party movement in the House, as Michele Bachmann’s Tea Party Caucus has collapsed into inactivity and become all but defunct.) Rove complained, “The *National Journal* put out its ratings of the most liberal to conservative Republicans,” and “the most liberal Republican is Justin Amash of Michigan — far more liberal than any other Republican. And why? Because he is a 100 percent purist libertarian. And if it’s not entirely perfect, I’m voting with Nancy Pelosi.”

The reality was exactly the opposite of Rove’s claim. OpenCongress.org noted that Amash was the *least* likely member of the entire Congress to vote with Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, according to the actual record. The *National Journal* study did reveal, however, that Amash votes with his party leadership less than any other Republican. In other words, the independent-minded Amash was most likely to vote against the GOP leadership when it agreed with Democratic leadership. Where Amash and his fellow Tea Party Republicans most often vote against leadership is on civil liberty issues and war issues, where Boehner and Pelosi usually agree. And it’s this tendency to support civil liberties against the will of the partisan leaders of both parties — and to cross the line to form coalitions with rank-and-file Democrats — that has sent the establishment into conniptions.

Establishment Congressman Peter King (R-N.Y.) has recently made a habit of publicly attacking Senator Rand Paul on the issue of NSA surveillance, claiming that Paul has “disgraced his office,” “doesn’t deserve to be in the United States Senate,” and tells “absolute lies.” King claimed in a January 5 interview with Fox News that the NSA should continue its warrantless surveillance of the American people:

The NSA is doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing. No one’s privacy is being violated, despite what Senator Rand Paul is talking about. The NSA is not listening to Americans’ phone calls. All they are doing is taking the records from the phone companies of phone number to phone number, no names, no addresses, no content. The only time those numbers can even be looked at is if a foreign terrorist makes a call into the United States. Then the NSA can find out what number they called.... The NSA is not listening to anyone’s calls at all. And no record can be looked at at all unless it has a direct connection to a foreign terrorist.

Of course, King’s remarks conflicted directly with President Obama’s remarks less than two weeks later, when Obama claimed in a speech that the data was already being used for a wide array of



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criminal offenses: “In terms of our bulk collection of signals intelligence, U.S. intelligence agencies will only use such data to meet specific security requirements: counter-intelligence; counter-terrorism; counter-proliferation; cyber-security; force protection for our troops and allies; and combating transnational crime, including sanctions evasion.” The term “transnational crime” includes any type of drug transaction, and “cyber-security” means any type of identity theft, computer hacking case, or misuse of electronics. In short, they are exceptions that devour the rule King laid out in his Fox News interview.

The Amash Effect

The pro-war and anti-constitutional faction of the GOP that King represents has good cause to worry. The divergence between Tea Party and non-Tea Party congressmen on civil liberties — barely noticeable in the 2011-12 Congress — accelerated dramatically in 2013. And much of that difference is a result of what may be called the “Amash effect.” While Senators Ted Cruz and Rand Paul have taken the headlines for Tea Party candidates nationally with their filibusters, Michigan Representative Justin Amash has quietly built and grown a coalition of constitutionally minded Republicans within the Tea Party movement.

Much of the groundwork for Amash’s growing House Liberty Caucus had been done by former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas), who labored on the same issues for decades with little apparent progress and less than a handful of converts. The elder Paul did have a significant influence on North Carolina Republican Walter Jones and a lesser influence on Tennessee Republican Jimmy Duncan, the only two members of the House to endorse his 2008 presidential candidacy.

The Tea Party revolution of 2010 changed all that. The Tea Party arose in the wake of the massive TARP bailout of banks with taxpayer money during the 2008 financial crisis, followed by the drive to stop passage of the unconstitutional ObamaCare mandate. Tea Party organizations sprung up spontaneously across the nation, without national leadership or controls, and with the twin goals of less spending and restoring the limits of the U.S. Constitution. Though the Republican Party establishment tried to co-opt Tea Party leadership, and the grassroots effort was labeled “Astroturf” by sarcastic Democrats, the Tea Party grassroots unleashed their fury on bailout Republicans in 2010 and 2012 as often as upon Democrats. Bailout Republican Senators Bob Bennett of Utah and Richard Lugar of Indiana were given their electoral pink slips in the GOP primary, as were many in the House of Representatives. Others faced tough primary contests.

While establishment Republicans counseled voters to vote “bailout Republicans” back into office, and warned that the Tea Party could create a Democratic Party wave, the reverse happened. The GOP experienced a near-record swing of new seats in the House elections of 2010, and largely held on to those seats in 2012.

The revolution of 2010 swept Amash, then a little-known 30-year-old lawyer and state legislator, into the House, and Rand Paul into the U.S. Senate. Subsequently, eight of the 11 Ron Paul-endorsed congressional candidates won their elections in the 2012 elections, including Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, all with significant Tea Party support.

Amash took control of the House Liberty Caucus upon the retirement of Rep. Paul from the House in January 2013, bringing his youthful energy into it, along with Paul’s coalition-building strategies. Amash and his new right-hand man, Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie, repeatedly employed “Rebel Alliance” rhetoric to build a variety of coalitions with rank-and-file Democrats and even leftist members of



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Congress. The Amash/Massie team allied with Democrats such as John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) over issues as diverse as preventing war with Syria, limiting the NSA, and auditing the Federal Reserve Bank. Amash's USA Freedom Act, which would abolish the NSA's warrantless surveillance of the American people, is cosponsored by an almost equal number of his fellow Tea Party Republicans (60) and Democrats (64).

The establishment backlash against Tea Party Republicans has not been limited to a series of severe tongue-lashings in public. Amash and Massie will both draw deep-pockets primary opponents recruited from the crony capitalist wing of the GOP. Amash's opponent Brian Ellis has reportedly planned to spend more than a million dollars of his own money in the primary effort. Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce leader Steve Stevens has openly toyed with the idea of a Massie primary challenge, just weeks after the U.S. Chamber of Commerce unveiled a \$50 million electoral war chest the establishment organization plans to devote to defeating Tea Party congressmen nationally.

Neither Amash nor Massie appears to be in immediate danger of losing their GOP primaries this year; both remain popular in their districts. Unlikely to be able to unseat the two, the establishment goal seems to be to keep Amash and Massie campaigning in their districts all year and disrupt their work of building larger coalitions and widening Tea Party support for constitutionally protected liberties.

It remains to be seen if the well-funded GOP establishment primaries against Tea Party candidates will successfully keep the constitutionalist movement a minority movement within the Republican Party, or if the Republican Party will return to its traditional 20th-century roots of being the party more inclined toward peace and limited government under the U.S. Constitution. But it is clear that the constitutionalist movement in Congress has been growing, and has increased energy going into the 2014 midterm elections.

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