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The University of Southern Mississippi

Libertarian Acceptance Among the Students of the University of Southern Mississippi

by

M. Joseph LeBeau III

A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts (of Science, of Business Administration, etc.)
in the Department of Political Science

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Chapter One: Context and the Research Question

The American political system has changed little since the founding of the country. Though the founding fathers did not expect for political parties to exist, their impact on American politics over the years has been enormous. Different parties have existed throughout American history (for example, the Federalists and Anti-Federalists in the beginnings of the American republic, along with other minor parties such as the Progressives at the turn of the 20th Century and the Tea Party movement currently), but the Republican and Democratic parties have been the two major parties for over one hundred and fifty years. However, most citizens do not completely identify with either party. Because of this, many voters do not ever participate in elections (although there are many other reasons people do not vote). If significant portions of American citizens are not completely satisfied with either of the two major parties, then why do these two options continue to be the only ones available? This is the fundamental question that led to my interest in this subject.

Because of the large scale of the American political scene, party alignment is often blurred. Usually each party unites for presidential elections (particularly due to the electoral college), but party cohesion often ends there. The phenomenon of lack of party cohesion has been quite evident throughout the 2012 Republican Presidential Primary races. Each region of the country drastically differs in ideas and values; therefore, party representatives must adjust to the preferences of the particular region in which they represent. This lack of party cohesion has caused a political rift between many Americans.

If there is such a lack of cohesion within the two major parties, then why do they continue to be the only options given to American voters? Third parties exist (and have existed frequently in the past) but rarely receive a significant portion of the vote. In his textbook *Governing Subjects: An Introduction to the Study of Politics*, Isaac Balbus explained Bachrach and Baratz's proposed idea of opinion-formation power. This idea basically stated that certain "gatekeepers" (such as the media and current political powers) withhold information from the public in order to assure that certain beliefs and values be upheld.¹ This theory could apply to third parties in America in that these gatekeepers do not allow information regarding these third parties to be known by the public. This lack of knowledge would, in turn, cause the American public to not vote for or support a third party.

No matter the explanation, the fact is that no third party poses a serious threat to either of the two major parties at this time. Though I am not interested in examining why third parties have failed in America, it is important to note the fact that they have traditionally failed. It is with this understanding that my study is focused around the political philosophies of libertarianism, a philosophy that has gained popularity over the past 40 years.

David Nolan founded the Libertarian Party in 1971 because of his (and others) growing unhappiness with both of the major parties. Nolan's new political party was based on the fundamental philosophies of libertarianism. This party was founded on the idea that the government had become far too powerful in reducing the personal freedoms of American citizens,

¹ Balbus, Isaac, D. (2010). *Governing subjects: An introduction to the Study of Politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

*“Libertarians believe the answer to America's political problems is the same commitment to freedom that earned America its greatness: a free-market economy and the abundance and prosperity it brings; a dedication to civil liberties and personal freedom that marks this country above all others; and a foreign policy of non-intervention, peace, and free trade as prescribed by America's founders.”*²

What then is libertarian philosophy? Simply put, libertarians tend to have conservative views in regards to the economy and liberal views in regards to social issues. However, this does not adequately lay down the foundations of libertarianism. Therefore, over the next few paragraphs, I will explain the basics of libertarian political philosophy.

As the name suggests, libertarians are most concerned with citizens' personal liberties and freedoms. According to David Boaz in the book *Libertarianism*, “The one fundamental human right is the right to live your life as you choose so long as you don't infringe on the equal rights of others.”³ Also, libertarians feel there should be as little government reform as possible in regards to the right of privacy that each American citizen has naturally (that is before the formation of government). This belief in the protection of basic personal liberties is the fundamental ideal of a libertarian.

Libertarians believe that the government plays too much of a role in citizen's lives in general. In *Libertarianism*, David Boaz states, “The Declaration of Independence

² Our History. *Libertarian Party*. Libertarian National Committee. Retrieved from <http://www.lp.org/our-history>.

³ Boaz, David. (1997). *Libertarianism*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

claimed, ‘To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.’ Not ‘to make men moral.’ Not ‘to boost economic growth.’ Not ‘to ensure everyone a decent standard of living.’”⁴ According to libertarian philosophy, the government’s role should be limited to simply securing its citizens’ personal rights and liberties.

There is evidence that supports the idea that many Americans are not satisfied with either of the two major parties. The increasing number of independent voters along with the steady decline in voter participation (with exception of the 2008 Presidential Election) could suggest the possibility that American citizens are becoming more and more dissatisfied with the current electoral system, specifically the two-party system. Other political theories have been becoming more popular over the past several years. One example of a new belief system was the emergence of the Tea Party, which originated due to unhappiness over government bailouts (along with several other issues regarding the size and power of the United States government).⁵ However, I hypothesize that many citizens are not aware of these other political philosophies or simply dismiss them as irrelevant. Therefore, a voter could choose to identify himself or herself as a Democrat or Republican, while in actuality that voter’s political views are more in keeping with that of libertarianism or another “nonmainstream” political philosophy, unbeknownst to that individual.

Even though many Americans are not satisfied with either of the two major parties, most do not consider the Libertarian Party when voting. Instead, the majority of Americans vote for one of the two major parties they feel is “the lesser of two evils.” However, this does not necessarily mean that a significant libertarian population does not

⁴ Boaz, David. (1997). *Libertarianism*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

⁵ Sargis, John. (2010). Tea Party and Right Wing Populism. *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, 6(4), 1.

exist. “Offering some proof of this idea, a recent survey by Gallup identified 20 percent of voters as libertarian...”⁶ Many of these libertarians are not members of the Libertarian Party, but they continue to promote libertarian philosophies. According to Jennifer Burns, “Enclosed in Washington think tanks, business careers, or the Republican Party, libertarians went on to spread their ideas...”⁷ Several prestigious libertarian political think tanks, journals, and magazines exist today. These organizations (such as the Cato Institute) and publications (such as *Libertarian Forum*) promote libertarian philosophies to academics and politicians, as well as ordinary citizens.

Major shifts in political ideology, such as the Progressive movement of the early 20th Century, have occurred in American history. No third party poses a serious threat to either major party at this time; however, it is possible for a shift to occur, potentially causing one or more third parties to become relevant in the American political scene. Many Americans, such as the members of the Tea Party, feel the government plays too large a role in the everyday lives of its citizens. The Libertarian Party claims to defend the rights of the individual. This idea of protection of civil liberties resonates with many American citizens, particularly young people and students. In his article, *On the New Student Politics*, Daniel Koffler stated that the libertarian movement is one of the most widespread political movements being embraced by young people and students. He believed that a candidate that held right-libertarian ideals such as small government could win the majority of the youth vote.⁸ An October 2010 survey of 2,145 MIT students (20% of the total student population) provided evidence of a significant libertarian population of students, “498 people, or about 23 percent of respondents, said that they did

⁶ Burns, Jennifer. (2007). O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?. *The Journal of Policy History*, 19(4), 464.

⁷ Burns, Jennifer. (2007). O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?. *The Journal of Policy History*, 19(4), 453.

⁸ Koffler, Daniel. (2005). On the New Student Politics. *Dissent*, 52(2), 77.

consider themselves to be a libertarian.”⁹ These studies suggest that a substantial population of libertarians potentially exists among college students. Is this phenomenon isolated to a few situations or is it representative of the United States population as a whole?

My study will not be able to completely answer this question. However, I hope to locate a possible libertarian population of college students. The students of the University of Southern Mississippi represent a convenient sample to test for the popularity of libertarianism. I am interested in finding out to what extent the current students at USM actually identify with the philosophies of libertarianism. I hypothesize that many current students may not be aware of libertarianism as a political philosophy or its stance on current political issues. If a significant portion of these students hold libertarian principles but simply do not realize it, this hypothesis can be accepted as plausible. In order to assess libertarianism’s potential to be recognized as a widely accepted political theory among students, I plan to attempt to locate a libertarian population at the University of Southern Mississippi.

How can a potential libertarian portion of USM students be differentiated from the conservative and liberal segments? The most obvious method is to classify students by their respective demographic factors. Demographic categories such as gender, race, age, religion, field of study, etc. could prove to be extremely useful when attempting to identify patterns in populations. The connections between these variables and political ideology are further examined in the literature review. The demographics of a potential libertarian faction have yet to be defined, specifically at the University of Southern

⁹ Soloman, Ethan A. (2011). MIT's Libertarians. *The Tech*, 130(61), 5. Retrieved from <http://tech.mit.edu/V130/N61/libertarian.html>.

Mississippi. Therefore, the goal of my research will be to first locate a potential libertarian population among the students at USM. If a significant libertarian sample is found, an analysis of the demographic patterns of this potential population will be conducted. Review of pertinent literature along with an analysis of a student sample will allow an answer to the research question, “To what extent does the current student population at the University of Southern Mississippi accept the political philosophy of libertarianism, regardless of party affiliation or self-identification as “liberal” or “conservative”?”

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To what extent does the current student population at the University of Southern Mississippi accept the political philosophies of the libertarianism, regardless of party affiliation or self-identification as “liberal” or “conservative”? In order to help answer this question, an extensive literature review has been conducted. The principal literature pertinent to this question concerns the correlation between demographic factors to individual political ideology. The purpose of this is to be able to recognize group tendencies of a potential libertarian population at USM.

In his famous essay *Politics*, Aristotle claims that we are by nature, political animals. By this he was referring to the fact that humans naturally live in city-states. He goes on to explain that in these city-states, citizens argue the just and unjust, forming factions amongst themselves.¹⁰ Based on this knowledge, it can be assumed that one’s political identification can be directly correlated to the beliefs of the groups in which he or she identifies with. Many different groups exist in our culture (too many to name). The most obvious groups are classified according to demographics. Therefore, the following sections will highlight several demographic groups and their typical political connections. After connections between demographics and political identification are discussed, the popularity of libertarianism in America will be examined to explain why a significant libertarian population potentially exists at the University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁰ Aristotle. (2009). *Politics*. MIT, Retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html> (accessed October 23, 2011).

Gender

It is an old cliché that men and women are so different they may as well be different species. While this is an extreme exaggeration of the differences between the two genders, there is no doubt that whether one is a man or woman plays an enormous role in his or her beliefs. For two centuries, men dominated the political scene in the United States. However, since the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, women have been increasingly active in politics. The question, then, becomes what effect does an individual's gender have on his or her political ideology?

A review of the literature regarding gender and political affiliation suggested that women tend to identify with the Democratic Party, while men tend to identify with the Republican Party. According to the Public Broadcast Service, there was a clear gender gap in each U.S. Presidential election from 1992-2000. The percentage gap between men and women remained at approximately 11 percent in each election, with women favoring the Democratic candidate (Clinton 1992 and 1996; Gore 2000).¹¹ Shapiro and Mahajan supported these findings, claiming, "The overall trend in partisan identification for women has resulted in increasing support for the Democratic Party..."¹²

Age

One obvious demographic factor that can be connected to political identification is age. Separate generations will often support one of the two major parties as a whole, for example,

¹¹ (2004). Women and the Vote. *Public Broadcasting Service*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/gendergap.html>.

¹² Ondercin, Heather L. (2009). What Scarlett O'Hara Thinks: Political Attitudes of Southern Women. *Conference Papers - Southern Political Science Association*, (2009 Annual Meeting 2009), 1-35.

“[A]ccording to data collected by the Pew Center for the People and the Press, those who turned 20 during the Clinton, G.W. Bush, Nixon, and Ford administrations tending to be disproportionately Democratic and those who turned 20 during the Reagan, elder Bush, and Eisenhower generations disproportionately Republican.”¹³

A common myth is that the oldest voters tend to vote Republican while the youngest voters tend to vote Democratic. However, when voting patterns are analyzed, there are discrepancies in this theory. According to data collected by the American National Election Studies voting patterns according to age vary from year to year. The sector with the most variability seems to be the 18-34 year old age group. From 1960-1976, this group voted for the Democratic Presidential nominee more than any other group; however, from 1980-1992, the 18-34 year old age group became the largest supporters of the Republican Presidential candidate. Yet again this group switched support to the Democratic candidates in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections. Over the last three U.S. Presidential elections, the 35-64 year old age group has voted opposite of their younger counterparts, supporting the Republican candidate as a group. The 65+-year-old age group (the group that has best predicted the election winner) voting patterns were more moderate in the 1996-2004 elections, having “voted in the middle of the three age cohorts.”¹⁴

Clearly, age plays a serious role in regards to voting behavior. Why is this important to note? First of all, the population of the United States is progressively getting older. “According to the U.S. Census, over this century that percentage is projected to

¹³ Fisher, Patrick. (2008). Is There an Emerging Age Gap in U.S. Politics?. *Society* 45(6), 504-511.

¹⁴ Fisher, Patrick. (2008). Is There an Emerging Age Gap in U.S. Politics?. *Society* 45(6), 504-511.

grow to almost 30% of the population.”¹⁵ As stated earlier, the 65+-year-old age group’s vote is often that of the winning candidate. Younger voters have a tendency to be politically inactive. In the essay, *Who Defects? Age, Issues, and Media Use in the 2006 Congressional Election*, Vanderbroek claimed that young voters often do not participate in elections simply due to a lack of interest or party affiliation. However, he points out that the, “younger population is beginning to vote more, with an all-time high turnout rate of 51.6% for the 2004 presidential election.”¹⁶

After looking at the before mentioned data, it becomes clear that the correlation between age and voting patterns should be discussed. According to the American National Election Studies, the most liberal group in 2004 was the 18-34 age group, with 25% identifying as liberal as opposed to 22% conservative; the most conservative group was the 35-64 age group, with 31% identifying as conservative as opposed to 20% liberal; and the 65+ age group fell in the middle, with 27% identifying as conservative and 13% liberal.¹⁷ A major flaw with this study is that they did not consider “libertarian” as a choice when asking individuals about their political ideology. My study will attempt to show that there is a significant libertarian population that should be accounted for.

Race/Ethnicity

Ever since the founding of our country, there has been a social separation between different races in America. Minority groups have long struggled to gain equality in American politics. “This is not only because of their diminutive size compared to the

¹⁵ Lau, Richard R. Redlawsk, David P. (2008). Older but Wiser? Effects of Age on Political Cognition. *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1, 168-185.

¹⁶ Vanderbroek, L. Matthew. (2008). Who Defects? Age, Issues and Media Use in the 2006 Congressional Elections. *Conference Papers -- Midwestern Political Science Association* (2008 Annual Meeting 2008), 1-37.

¹⁷ Fisher, Patrick. (2008). Is There an Emerging Age Gap in US Politics?. *Society* 45(6), 504-511.

Anglo population but also because of voting rights practices.”¹⁸ Because of this separation, different ethnic groups have a tendency to have different voting patterns.

Because my study will be focused on the current political ideology of students, I must look at the current data. In the 2008 presidential election, a clear pattern is shown in regards to race/ethnicity. According to CNN Exit Polls, Caucasians tended to vote Republican while most minority groups tended to vote Democratic. Fifty-five percent of white Americans voted in favor of John McCain, while only forty-three percent voted in favor of Barack Obama. Ninety-five percent African-Americans voted for Barack Obama as opposed to only four percent in favor of John McCain. Sixty-seven percent of Latino-Americans voted for Barack Obama, while only thirty-one percent voted for John McCain. Sixty-two percent of Asian Americans voted in favor of Barack Obama and only thirty-five percent voted for John McCain. Finally, sixty-eight percent of all other minorities voted for Obama, while thirty-one percent voted in favor of McCain.¹⁹

The connection between race and political preferences is an important one. The results of CNN’s exit polls clearly indicate that race has a strong connection to political ideology. Minorities have traditionally voted pro-Democrat and continue to do so. However, it is more difficult to tie the Caucasian population with a particular party, because of the inconsistency in voting patterns throughout history.

Geographic Location

The traditional view of American politics in regards to geographic location revolves around the idea of “Red and Blue” states. The basic idea is that certain areas of the country are predominantly Republican while other areas are predominantly Democrat.

¹⁸ Branton, Regina P. (2009). The Importance of Race and Ethnicity in Congressional Primary Elections. *Political Science Research Quarterly* 62(3), 459-473.

¹⁹ (2008). Exit Polls. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1>.

The traditional view is that metropolitan areas are strongly correlated with the Democratic Party, while nonmetropolitan rural areas are strongly correlated with the Republican Party. However, this traditional view contains inconsistencies; these include metropolitan areas that vote predominantly Republican (such as Oklahoma City) and rural areas that vote predominantly Democrat (such as small towns in the Pacific Northwest).

However, Brown and Knopp presented a new theory in their 2007 study of “Red and Blue America” that has resonated in recent years regarding the relationship between geographic location and political ideology. This theory states that political ideology of a particular area is based on a cultural split, “...a division of the electorate between a modern, more secular people and a traditional, more religious and socially conservative people.”²⁰ This theory states that an area’s political identification depends on the cultural attributes related to that particular area. For example, because south Mississippi contains a larger religious population, it tends to be more conservative.

Both theories regarding the relationship between geographic location and political identification are useful. In fact, a mixture of the two is most likely the best way to define “Red and Blue America.” Brown and Knopp found that, large metropolitan areas of the country contained a much higher rate of Democratic voters, as opposed to smaller cities and rural areas, which have a much higher percentage of Republican individuals.²¹ Brown and Knopp’s study clearly points out some type correlation between voting patterns and geographic regions, which clearly requires consideration when analyzing

²⁰ Brown, Michael. Knapp, Larry. Morrill, Richard. (2007). How Real are Red America and Blue America? *American Geographical Society’s Focus on Geography* 50(1), 22-29.

²¹ Brown, Michael. Knapp, Larry. Morrill, Richard. (2007). How Real are Red America and Blue America? *American Geographical Society’s Focus on Geography* 50(1), 22-29.

individual's ideology.

Religious Affiliation

The thought that a person's religious affiliation can be connected to his or her political ideology is not a new one. A person's religion plays a strong part in the type political ideologies and morals that person has. If a person is deeply religious, he or she will most likely base their moral framework on their religion's tenets. Religious affiliation cannot predict every political stance of a person; however, it can help predict the people's stances on political issues that have a moral background, namely social issues.

The connection between religion and political preferences is one that is often questioned. We know that there are trends between the two; "...there is evidence that a relationship exists between religion and some types of political behavior."²² In a study conducted by Sandie Wightman Fox and James T. Richardson, a clear connection between religion and the stance on abortion reform was made. Fox and Richardson found in a 1967 vote on abortion reform, that people of certain religions tended to vote the same. She found that Catholics voted against abortion reform at a rate of three to one, Mormons voted against abortion reform at a rate of seven to two, Protestants overwhelmingly voted for abortion reform at a rate of fifteen to zero, and the only Jewish member voted for abortion reform. Also, those that claimed no religious affiliation voted for abortion reform at a rate of five to one.²³

The above-mentioned study does a good job of laying the foundation for the

²² Fox, Sandie W. Richardson, James T. (1972). Religious Affiliation as a Predictor of Voting Behaviors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11(4), 347-359.

²³ Fox, Sandie W. Richardson, James T. (1972). Religious Affiliation as a Predictor of Voting Behaviors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11(4), 347-359.

connection between religious affiliation and political ideology. However, more current data is required to truly show the connection between the two. In a 2004 study by Markels and Zausner, it was found that, “Nearly twice as many red-state voters attend weekly religious services as do blue-state voters, and 50 percent more red staters say they want their president to worship a higher being.”²⁴ This fact implies that more religious areas tend identify more with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party.

Religiosity (one’s level of religious participation) seems to play a major role in voting patterns (regardless of denomination). In a study conducted by Diane Forster, a relationship between religiosity and political identification was found. According to the study, “[A]s the respondent moves from the minimum to maximum levels of religiosity, his or her probability of voting for the Democratic candidate over Bush declines substantially.”²⁵ This study found that in the 2004 Presidential election, 49% - 50% of voters (depending on denomination) who claimed to have a minimum level of religiosity voted for John Kerry (D), while only 28% - 38% of voters who claimed the maximum level of religiosity voted for Kerry.

Clearly, one’s religious practices (both denomination and religiosity) play a significant role in political identification. A person’s religion plays a major role in that person’s moral beliefs, which most likely affect their political stances. Because such an obvious relationship exists, an individual’s religion and religiosity become important demographic characteristics to consider when studying individual political identification.

²⁴ Markels, Alex. Zausner, Robert. (2004). Angry in America. *U.S. News & World Report* 137(14), 34-40.

²⁵ Forster, A. Diane. (2008). “Religion, Voting Behavior, and Electoral Context in Contemporary U.S. Presidential Elections.” *Conference Paper – Southern Political Science Association (2008 Annual Meeting 2008)*, 1-18.

Libertarian Popularity in America

A review of literature regarding libertarianism's popularity in the United States points to the probability of locating a libertarian sample at the University of Southern Mississippi. E.J. Dionne argued that although libertarianism had not yet become a mass movement, it had become a mass belief system.²⁶ The overall failure of the Libertarian Party has caused many voters to be weary of the legitimacy of the movement. However, several other trends suggest that the libertarian movement is actually alive and strong,

In 1977, the first legitimate libertarian think-tank was created, the Cato Institute. Upon its founding, Cato was recognized as one of the top political research institutions. The development and long-term success of this libertarian think tank provides evidence that a significant amount of U.S. citizens hold at least some libertarian philosophies. Further proof of a libertarian sample was provided through a survey conducted by Gallup, which identified 20 percent of respondents as libertarian.²⁷

A more striking trend is the growing popularity of libertarianism among America's youth. Koffler (2005) stated that libertarianism was the "most widespread and pervasive of all recent political developments among young people and students..."²⁸ Evidence of this trend is provided in a 1975 study regarding support for civil liberties among college students. In his study, Montero found that "the college sample reports a mean libertarian response of 67%."²⁹ A more recent survey of MIT students in 2010 found a significant number of libertarians (498 of 2,145 respondents).

Evidence of libertarianism's popularity (particularly among college-age students)

²⁶ Burns, Jennifer. (2007). O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?. *The Journal of Policy History*, 19(4), 453.

²⁷ Burns, Jennifer. (2007). O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?. *The Journal of Policy History*, 19(4), 453.

²⁸ Koffler, Daniel. (2005). On the New Student Politics. *Dissent*, 52(2), 77.

²⁹ Montero, Darrel. (1975). Support for Civil Liberties among a Cohort of High School Graduates and College Students. *Journal of Social Issues*, 31(2). 123-130.

provided by the aforementioned studies support the hypothesis that a libertarian sample exists among the students at the University of Southern Mississippi. In order to better understand the potential libertarian segment, an analysis of that segment's demographic characteristics will be conducted. The method of this analysis is further explained in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Methods

To what extent does the current student population at the University of Southern Mississippi accept the political philosophies of libertarianism, regardless of party affiliation or self-identification as “liberal” or “conservative”? In order to answer this question, certain methodology will be followed. I plan on conducting a survey to be handed out amongst the students of the University of Southern Mississippi. In order to obtain usable results, my sample size must be sufficient. However, an unbiased sample must be obtained. By handing out surveys throughout several departments of the university, I hope to gather enough responses to warrant a useable sample.

The sample chosen to participate is probably the most important aspect of this study. The universe for this study will be a convenience sample gathered from the students at the University of Southern Mississippi. In order to best assure that the sample is not biased, members of the sample will be recruited from several different colleges at the university. My thesis adviser (Dr. Troy Gibson) and I agree that a sufficient sample size will be 50 students. This sample will provide the best chance of the respondent pool consisting of members from an even gender split (or as close to even as possible), a variety of ethnicities, numerous hometowns, multiple religious affiliations, and multiple group affiliations.

A representative sample alone does not ensure useable data. In order to attempt to gather the most valid data possible, my survey will consist of two sections: demographic characteristics and political ideology. The survey, in its entirety, can be found directly following this section. If properly answered, these two sections should supply the desired

information, such as true political philosophy compared to that individual's demographics.

The first section of the survey will consist of asking the participants' demographic characteristics. Included in this section will be questions regarding the participant's gender, race (Caucasian; African-American; Asian; Indian; Hispanic; Native American; Pacific Islander; Other), religion (Christian-Catholic; Christian-Protestant; Judaism; Islam; Buddhism; Hinduism; Other, None), age, current political affiliation, and field of study (college and major). This section will be quite simple to quantify because of the statistical nature of the questions. I will use a simple chart, displaying the frequencies and percentages of respondents who identified with each respective demographic category; for example, X number of the respondents (Y% of the total sample) identified as African-American, Christian, etc.

The second section of the survey is more complicated to quantify. This section will consist of a series of ten questions regarding the participant's stance on the biggest political issues (speech, assembly, press, internet, and property rights; guns; homosexual marriage; foreign policy; national ID card; corporate welfare; trade and money; social security; health care; and taxes, spending, and the national debt). The questions that make-up the political ideology section are based on the Nolan Chart, which is a graphical representation of the political ideology spectrum created by Libertarian Party founder David Nolan. Unlike traditional political spectrums, which only measure from left (liberal) to right (conservative), the Nolan Chart is in two-dimensional form, measuring liberal versus conservative ideologies as well as libertarian versus statist ideologies. Personal freedom issues are graphed on the Y-axis while economic issues are graphed

along the X-axis. The chart was slightly modified by Marshall Fritz, “His modification was to take the original Nolan chart (which was displayed as a square) and turn it 45° counter-clockwise to make the chart into a diamond shape and add a 10 question ‘quiz.’”³⁰ This ten-question quiz will be used verbatim as the political ideology section of my survey. Each respondent’s results of this section of the survey will be quantified using the output provided by nolanchart.com.

In order to argue that libertarianism is a major political movement in the United States, a possible unknown libertarian population must be identified. In order to locate this population, certain demographic factors can be tied to libertarianism. It is well known that demographics play a role in voter behavior. However, the most common demographic characteristics of a libertarian are not well known. Therefore, this study will attempt to better define the demographics of a libertarian. Once the data is gathered, I will first determine what percentage of the respondent pool identified with libertarian philosophy. From this sample, I will examine the demographic factors of the “libertarian sample”. I will use a simple chart displaying the frequencies and percentages of demographic variables of the libertarian sample; for example, X number (Y%) of respondents that identified as libertarian were men, Caucasian, etc. A logistic regression model will then be used to analyze the possible predictive probabilities of demographic variables in regards to political ideology. These results should answer my question regarding the popularity of libertarianism among the students of the University of Southern Mississippi.

³⁰ Q8: What is the Nolan Chart?. *Nolan Chart, LLC*. Retrieved from <http://www.nolanchart.com/faq/faq8.php>.

The purpose of this survey is to help discover the political views of the respondents. The results of the surveys will help determine potential relationships between political philosophy, demographic factors, and group affiliation among students at the University of Southern Mississippi. All respondents must be at least 18 years of age. This survey will take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without penalty or prejudice to the subject. The confidentiality of each subject's results is guaranteed, as no personal information should be provided. If you have any questions concerning this survey or the overall project please contact me, Joseph LeBeau, at (225) 274-6976 or joelebeau921@yahoo.com.

“This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.”

Section One: Demographics

Please select that answer that best describes you and/or answer the given question.

1. Gender: Male
 Female
2. Race: Caucasian Hispanic
 African-American Native American
 Asian Pacific Islander
 Indian Other: _____
3. Religion: Christian (Catholic) Islam
 Christian (Protestant) Buddhism
 Judaism Hinduism
 None Other: _____
4. What is your age? _____
5. What is your hometown (city and state)? _____
6. What is your current political affiliation? _____
7. What is your field of study (major)? _____
8. Please list any organizations you are currently involved in (optional):

Section Two: Political Ideology

This questionnaire is derived from the Nolan Chart (Nolan Chart LLC, 2011). Due to the nature of political ideology, perfect answers cannot be created. Given the limitations, please select the answer that most closely represents your opinion.

1. Speech, Assembly, Press, Internet, and Property Rights:
 - a. Government should not restrict speech, press, media or Internet. The rights of free citizens who don't violate other people's rights must be respected and protected at all times. Exercise of eminent domain should be extremely limited and its use avoided whenever possible. Private property and privacy rights should be protected at all times.
 - b. Speech, assembly, press, and Internet should be free except when it comes to protecting against terrorism and other threats to public safety. Free speech zones can be established to protect the right of free speech while insuring security at public events. Eminent domain should be maintained in practice, but it should not be available merely as a means to enrich private developers via enforced land transfers.
 - c. Speech, assembly, press, and Internet should be free; however the government has a role in regulating certain speech, such as criminalizing hate speech and regulating sexual or violent content over public airwaves. Some limits should also be placed on campaign contributions to limit excessive influence by special interests and corporate entities. It is also vital that the State not become a tool to impose religious beliefs in schools or other public settings and that limited use of eminent domain is acceptable for public projects like roads and schools, but inappropriate for private projects like shopping malls or condominiums.
 - d. Government should regulate speech, press, media, Internet, and property rights at its own discretion within reason as needed to meet all of government's many obligations.

2. Guns:

- a. The Second Amendment only applies to "militias" (such as the National Guard), and thus there is no specific protection afforded by it to individuals. It should be up to the government to decide the degree to which guns should be regulated for the public good.
- b. The Second Amendment to the Constitution clearly protects the right of all individuals to bear arms. Government regulation of guns is a violation of the Second Amendment. Having the right to self-defense is meaningless without also having the means to defend you. An armed society is a peaceful society, is the best defense against criminals, and serves as a deterrent against government tyranny. Gun control has encouraged society to become lax and negligent in teaching and training on the safe handling and maintenance of weapons by individuals.
- c. In general, I support the right to bear arms. However, it is prudent to have government regulate arms via registration requirements and other regulations to ensure that mentally unstable people can't get guns and go on shooting rampages.
- d. Gun control is essential and must continually be made stronger if we're ever going to reduce and hopefully eliminate gun violence in this country.

3. Homosexual Marriage:

- a. Passing laws, which protect gay marriage, including civil statute alternatives to gay marriage, should support gay rights. All government benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy should also be granted to gay couples.
- b. The government should define civil unions and the legal ramifications and rights attached to such constructs based on scientific study. "Marriage", being a religious concept, has no place in legal structures, and attempting to legislate morality is inefficient.
- c. There should be no laws regarding either heterosexual or homosexual relationships among consenting adults. Marriage of any kind is a private, contractual matter between free, private individuals that should not be

regulated.

- d. Homosexuality is an abomination and is banned by the Bible. Gay marriage should be illegal in all cases.

4. Foreign Policy:

- a. A strong defense requires playing an active, interventionist role in world affairs. As the last remaining superpower, we have a moral duty to police the world at any cost, or else we will surely pay the ultimate price. If we don't militarily wipe out terrorism, the terrorists will wipe us out. We must resolve to win no matter how long it takes. It's better to strike now than to pay later for our inaction.
- b. America should play an active role in world affairs. We need to move toward more world government, particularly when it comes to issues such as global warming. The war on terror should rely heavily on diplomatic action. Military intervention should be used when there is a threat to our sovereignty.
- c. The role of government is to administer, direct and control the nation. Foreign policy, and the use of our military forces, should always be primarily focused (in order of importance) on defending the nation from external threats, ensuring internal threats are neutralized, and promoting a stable world society.
- d. Peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations; entangling alliances with none. America's interventionist policies over the past 100+ years have done little or nothing to reduce international instability, have led us into an endless series of wars, and have cost us dearly in American lives and money. The best defense of our borders is to defend our rights and liberty, not to sacrifice them while constantly growing our gigantic military, led by a parade of Presidents who repeatedly stick our nose into other countries' affairs.

5. National ID Card:

- a. There should be no national ID card. Period. The issuance of required National IDs controlled via interconnected databases will effectively end

all privacy in this country.

- b. We need a national ID card in order to prevent events like the attacks of 9/11 but without intruding too far into the personal privacy of the innocent.
- c. National ID cards should be permitted but greatly restricted in scope because the potential for danger to personal liberty is present.
- d. I'm not at all concerned about having a national ID card. Only the guilty need to worry.

6. Corporate Welfare:

- a. The government has a significant role in regulating the market and should regulate corporations and have state-owned corporations, if necessary.
- b. End "corporate welfare." No government handouts to business.
- c. Government involvement is necessary where private industry can't do the job all by itself. As an example, agricultural subsidies should continue to support small farmers.
- d. Corporate welfare should be eliminated for big business, but the social safety net for individuals should be retained.

7. Trade and Money:

- a. Trade that isn't fair isn't free. Fair trade practices should be enforced as needed to ensure free trade while maintaining reasonably open borders. The Fed's policies should be revised to help the poor rather than the rich.
- b. The government should involve itself in the regulation of trade as needed to ensure a healthy economy at all times. The Federal Reserve System has made our money supply the most stable in all history.
- c. End government barriers to international free trade. The regulation of trade tends to enrich selected interest groups and industry captains at the expense of everyone else. We must move away from the inflationary approach of the Federal Reserve by re-adopting a hard money approach and dissolving the Federal Reserve System. Ever wonder why prices of everything (including real estate) keep going up over time? The Federal Reserve System is the culprit.

- d. Trade should be free in general, but it should be controlled as needed to ensure that our borders are protected against outside threats. Monetary policy under the Fed has generally been good for our economy. Hard money can't keep up with a modern economy.
8. Social Security:
- a. Social Security should be maintained by the government as-is for current and near retirees, while offering younger workers the choice to invest some of their retirement money in the private market from Government-maintained and managed plans. The government should create incentives for private retirement planning. The government should discourage taking social security early. Payroll taxes should not be increased to fund social security.
 - b. Social Security is a vital part of the social safety net and should be properly funded and protected at all times. If necessary, make big business and the rich pay for any shortfalls.
 - c. Government has an obligation to provide for its citizens, both those who are disabled and those who are retired. Social security is the proper expression of government control, but as with any program of such size must be constantly adjusted to ensure a lack of corruption and that it is funded correctly. If need be, the balance should be made to those who cannot provide for themselves rather than those who simply have not chosen to provide for themselves.
 - d. Let people control their own retirement and they'll retire richer and better off. The Social Security system is already bankrupt, despite what the politicians and bureaucrats keep telling us. Allow individuals to choose for themselves whether to opt out of the Social Security system. If we force everyone to remain in its pyramid scheme, the end result will be disastrous. We must act now before Social Security becomes completely insolvent.
9. Health Care:
- a. Government regulation of health care is the main cause of the health care

industry's upward spiraling costs. The FDA, EPA, Medicare, and a host of other bureaucracies have created mountains of regulations that have led to the deaths of thousands and even millions of people who were denied needed treatments and resources. The cost of creating new treatments is also out of control because of this regulation. The only way to make health care affordable again is to get government out of the health care business.

- b. Health care costs are spiraling primarily due to lawsuits. We need to place caps on these suits while avoiding socialized medicine. Where possible, we should reduce regulation to save money. The rising cost of health care is primarily the fault of big government politicians and lobbying groups.
- c. We need universal health insurance to ensure all Americans are adequately protected. Insurance companies' and drug companies' greed, lack of competition among insurance providers, and patent protections on life-saving drugs must be combated. The government should ensure that no one is denied the right to life-saving medical care because of the inability to pay for it. Use antitrust legislation and enforcement to ensure competition.
- d. Private enterprise has failed to deliver satisfactory health care. Government's role is clear: fix the problem.

10. Taxes, Spending, and the National Debt:

- a. There should be no limits placed on the ability of government to raise sufficient revenue to do all the jobs government should be doing better, as expressed via majority rule.
- b. Cut taxes and government spending by 50% or more. This will have an incredibly positive impact on the economy starting at its very lowest and smallest levels. The national debt must be paid down rather than endlessly increased, or we'll soon face national bankruptcy.
- c. The budget should be balanced and fully funded at all times, rather than actually cutting spending on a permanent basis. As needed, the national debt should be expanded to ensure that there is sufficient funding for government operation and military growth needs. Occasional, temporary

tax cuts should be offered in token amounts to keep the taxpayers mollified.

- d. We should be emphasizing the good that government can do to help people without getting all wrapped up in the costs involved. By spreading the load, such good can be spread out fairly and evenly. Progressive taxation helps ensure that the rich don't live at the expense of the poor. However, we want to make sure we don't place too much of a burden on the middle class.

Chapter Four: Results

The total number of student respondents for the survey conducted totaled fifty-one. These fifty-one members of the population were selected randomly via three classrooms. The first survey was administered in a senior level marketing class at USM; the second was administered in a statistics class consisting of mostly political science and other liberal arts students; the final survey was given in a freshman level biology class consisting of a variety of majors. A few discrepancies were found in the results. Survey respondent twelve was deemed invalid due to an error in answering (several questions contained multiple answers). Also, respondent eleven provided two answers for several questions of the Political Ideology section; therefore, section two of respondent eleven's survey was deemed invalid. In addition, two variables were found to be invalid.

Age was deemed invalid due to the short range of responses, varying from 18 to 25 with one outlier of 47. Also, the academic major variable was deemed invalid due to the number of responses that occurred only once, causing too much variation throughout the relatively small sample. The response frequencies of the remaining five variables (gender, race, religion, perceived political identification, and college) of the demographic section of the surveys collected are provided in tables 1-5:

Table 1

Gender Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Female	17	33.3
Male	33	64.7
Total	49	98.0
Missing (Error)	1	2.0

For convenience purposes, the respondent’s demographic frequencies of gender and race have been compared with those of the 2010 Mississippi Census.³¹ These figures are relatively representative of the population of the state of Mississippi. The first variable, gender, was biased toward the male population, with females only making up 33.3 percent of respondents, while making up 51.4 percent of total Mississippi residents.

Table 2
Race Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Caucasian	32	62.7
African-American	12	23.5
Hispanic	5	9.8
Native American	1	2.0
Total	49	98.0
Missing (Error)	1	2.0

As a whole, the race variable was more closely representative of the Mississippi population. As seen in table 2, Caucasian respondents made up 62.7 percent of respondents as compared to 59.1 percent of Mississippi residents. Minorities made up 37.3 percent of survey respondents as compared to 40.9 percent of the Mississippi population. African-Americans were slightly underrepresented at 23.5 percent of respondents as compared to 37 percent of the Mississippi population. Hispanics and Native Americans were each slightly overrepresented at 9.8 percent and 2.0 percent respectively (2.7 percent and 0.5 percent state wide, respectively).³²

Table 3
Religion Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Catholic	19	37.3
Protestant	24	47.1

³¹ (2010). State Quick Facts. *U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28/2831020.html>.

³² (2010). State Quick Facts. *U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28/2831020.html>.

Judaism	1	2.0
Other	4	7.8
None	2	3.9
Total	49	98.0
Missing (Error)	1	2.0

Unfortunately, religious demographic statistics are not available via the Mississippi Census. However, religious demographic statistics do exist regarding the United States population as a whole. When compared to results provided by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the respondents' religion frequencies (shown in table 3) are quite representative of the United States population. Christians made up 84.4 percent of respondents as compared to 78.4 percent of all adults in the United States. Judaism accounted for 2.0 percent of respondents, almost identical to the 1.7 percent of U.S. adults. Those that responded as not being affiliated with a particular religion (other or none) made up 11.7 percent of respondents; this is favorably compared to the 16.1 percent of U.S. adults that do not affiliate with any particular religion.³³

Table 4
College Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Business	18	35.3
Arts & Letters	22	43.1
Science & Technology	5	9.8
Education & Psychology	1	2.0
Criminal Justice	1	2.0
Undeclared	3	5.9
Total	49	98.0
Missing (Error)	1	2.0

Table 4 shows the respondent's respective colleges, which were less representative of the overall student population at the University of Southern Mississippi. Exact percentages pertaining to the number of students in each college was unavailable.

³³ (2010). U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. Retrieved from <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>.

However, examination of the overwhelming number of members of the College of Business (35.3 percent) and College of Arts & Letters (43.1 percent) make it clear that these two colleges are well overrepresented.

Table 5
Perceived Political Ideology Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Conservative	23	45.1
Liberal	11	21.6
Independent/Moderate	8	15.7
Libertarian	2	3.9
None/Unknown	6	11.8
Total	49	98.0
Missing (Error)	1	2.0

Table 5 depicts the frequencies of the final variable included in the demographic section of the collected surveys, the respondents' perceived political identification. This variable represented what each respondent perceived was his or her personal political affiliation, not necessarily their actual political ideals. The frequencies of each political ideology are compared to results of a 2012 Gallup Poll. Perceived liberals were slightly overrepresented at 21.6 percent of respondents as compared to 13.8 percent of Mississippians, according to Gallup. Self-identified moderates were the most underrepresented group at 15.7 percent of survey respondents as opposed to 32.1 percent of Mississippi residents polled by Gallup. Conservatives were slightly underrepresented at 45.1 percent, despite the largest represented group. It comes as no surprise that conservatives made up the largest group, considering the surveys were conducted in the state that had, "the largest percentage of conservatives among U.S. states, with a slim majority [50.5 percent] identifying...as conservative."³⁴

³⁴ Jones, Jeffrey M. (2011). Mississippi Rates as the Most Conservative U.S. State. *Gallup Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/146348/mississippi-rates-conservative-state.aspx>.

Now that the demographic characteristics of the respondent pool is known, a review of the results of section two of the survey, the political ideology section (Nolan Chart survey) is provided in the table 6:

Table 6
Political Ideology Section Results Frequencies

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Conservative	9	17.6
Centrist	23	45.1
Libertarian	17	33.3
Total	48	96.1
Missing (Error)	2	3.9

The results of the Nolan Chart Survey identify each respondent’s actual political ideology according to his or her views on the ten political issues contained in the survey. The results of the surveys found that twenty-three respondents held “Centrist” political views, meaning these individuals have views consistent with several political ideologies concerning separate major political issues. Most citizens do not hold political views purely rooted in one philosophy; therefore, it is no surprise that the largest sample consisted of these moderate individuals. The results of the political ideology section also found that nine respondents maintained “Conservative” political ideals. A conservative sample was expected because of the geographic location of the sample (south Mississippi). Surprisingly, zero individuals in the respondent pool were found to identify with true “Liberal” political ideals.

As hypothesized, a significant libertarian population was found. With seventeen total respondents, the “Libertarian” sample was the second largest only to “Centrist.” The total libertarian sample made-up one-third (33.3%) of the total survey population. Because a significant number of respondents were found to hold libertarian political beliefs, an analysis of the demographic factors of this libertarian sample was possible.

Table 7 depicts the predictive probabilities for being libertarian of the demographic variables of the total survey sample. Tables 8-12 provide the frequencies and percentages of demographic factors found in the libertarian sample, followed by a brief analysis of each variable:

Table 7

Demographic Predictive Probabilities for being Libertarian

<u>Demographic Category</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Caucasian	.4068
Non-Caucasian	.0528
Male	.4068
Female	.0528
Caucasian Male	.6046
Caucasian Female	.13
Non-Caucasian Male	.11
Non-Caucasian Female	.01

Table 8

Race and Gender Frequencies for the Libertarian Sample

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Race		
Caucasian	16	94.1
Hispanic	1	5.9
Total	17	100
Gender		
Males	16	94.1
Females	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Table 9

Mixed Demographic Frequencies for the Libertarian Sample

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Caucasian Males	15	88.2
Caucasian Females	1	5.9
Non-Caucasian Males	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Table 8 shows an overwhelming number of members of the libertarian sample as Caucasian (94.1 percent). The logistic regression model suggested that a Caucasian individual had an approximate 41 percent chance of identifying as libertarian (logit = 0.4068). Non-Caucasian individuals had only a 5 percent chance of identifying as libertarian (logit = 0.0528).

As shown in Table 8, an extremely high number males was found in the libertarian population (94.1%). The logit model produced the same predictive probabilities as the race variable for the gender variable. Therefore, male respondents had 41 percent odds of identifying as a libertarian (logit = 0.4068). On the other hand, females only had a 5 percent chance of identifying as libertarian (logit = 0.0528). These findings are similar to the findings of the 2010 MIT survey that found twice as many male libertarians as compared to female.³⁵

When the variable of race and gender are combined, an even clearer picture of the libertarian sample is discovered. It is evident in table 9 that white males dominated the libertarian segment. According to the logistic regression model, Caucasian males had a 60 percent chance of identifying as libertarians (logit = 0.6046). The odds that a Caucasian female was libertarian were approximately 13% (logit = 0.13). A non-Caucasian male had an 11 percent likelihood of identifying with libertarian political ideals, while non-Caucasian females were found to have the smallest chance of agreeing with libertarianism at less than 1 percent (logit = 0.01).

³⁵ Soloman, Ethan A. (2011). MIT's Libertarians. *The Tech*, 130(61). 5. Retrieved from <http://tech.mit.edu/V130/N61/libertarian.html>.

Table 10
Perceived Political ID Frequencies for the Libertarian Sample

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Conservative	11	64.7
Liberal	0	0.0
Moderate/Independent	3	17.6
Libertarian	1	5.9
None/Unknown	2	11.8
Total	17	100

The perceived political identity variable does not share the predictive qualities of gender and race. However, an interesting trend is revealed in Table 10 by the high frequency of perceived conservatives that actually held libertarian political philosophies. Of the seventeen identified libertarians, well over half (64.7 percent) thought they were conservative. This trend is likely caused by the geographic location of the survey population. According to a 2012 Gallup poll, Mississippi was considered the most conservative state in the union, with over half the population identifying as politically conservative.³⁶ These results support the hypothesis that a significant number of people maintain libertarian political ideals but identify as a holding beliefs consistent with a different political philosophy.

Table 11
Religion Frequencies for the Libertarian Sample

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Catholic	6	35.2
Protestant	8	47.1
Jewish	1	5.9
Other	1	5.9
None	1	5.9
Total	17	100

Similar to the perceived political identity variable, the religion variable shows a clear bias. As shown in table 11, fourteen of the seventeen libertarians identified

³⁶ Newport, Frank. (2012). Mississippi Most Conservative State, D.C. Most Liberal. *Gallup Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152459/mississippi-conservative-state-liberal.aspx>.

themselves as Christians or 82.3 percent of the respondent pool. These results are consistent with the religious frequencies of citizens found in geographic location of the survey respondent pool in a 1990 U.S. Department of Commerce study, which found that over 70 percent of Mississippi residents identified with some type of Christian religion.³⁷

Table 12
College Frequencies for the Libertarian Sample

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Business	5	29.4
Arts & Letters	7	41.2
Science & Technology	3	17.6
Undeclared	2	11.8
Total	17	100

Unlike the previously discussed demographic variables, an individual's college did not seem to provide any useful data when describing the libertarian population. A logistic regression model showed no predictive capability of the college variable in regards to political identity. One interesting trend was located within the sample of Science & Technology students surveyed. Three of the five Science & Technology students identified with libertarian principles (60 percent). Unfortunately, this sample was not large enough to draw significant conclusions regarding the population as a whole. Therefore, the vast degree of variation in the colleges found among the libertarian sample causes the relationship between one's college and their political identity of this particular sample to be credited to pure chance.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce. (1997). Christian Church Adherents, U.S. State. *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (117). Retrieved from http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_christian.html.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The original libertarian movement of the early 1970s gave rise to the overall unsuccessful Libertarian Party. Though this party has not been seen as viable to many people, the philosophies of libertarianism have become increasingly popular. As a self-identified libertarian, I felt that several of my peers unknowingly shared in my beliefs. Based on this knowledge, I sought out to locate a potential libertarian sample at the University of Southern Mississippi.

The results of my survey found a significant number of unknown libertarians within the tested population. These results cannot prove a significant number of libertarians exist throughout the U.S. population as a whole; however, the results do provide evidence that the libertarian ideals are becoming popular among college students. However, this popularity has not translated into a successful political party. Burns pointed out that libertarians found in “Washington think tanks, business careers, or the Republican Party...went on to spread their ideas through more durable political vehicles.”³⁸

Surprisingly, Burns felt the Libertarian Party’s failures were actually beneficial to the overall libertarian movement by quarantining the most extreme libertarian ideologists. However, I believe that the extreme nature of the party is one of the major reasons for libertarianism’s lack of popularity among the general population. Because the libertarianism is directly associated with the party by name, many voters do not consider the philosophy. A party that represents the basic ideals of maintaining civil liberties,

³⁸ Burns, Jennifer. (2007). O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?. *The Journal of Policy History*, 19(4), 453.

while maintaining the willingness and ability to compromise with the other major parties is likely necessary for this popular political philosophy to become a credible political option for libertarian voters. Whether or not this is even possible remains to be seen.

After analysis of the survey population, a clear stereotype emerged in regards to the demographics of the libertarian sample. The typical libertarian individual found in this sample was a conservative, male, Caucasian. Ronald Reagan claimed that, “the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism.”³⁹ If this sentiment is true, it is no surprise that in an overwhelmingly conservative state, a significant amount of libertarians were found. Although clear patterns were established, the extreme nature of the libertarian sample’s gender and race frequencies most likely require further tests to support the results. However, these results clearly identify a connection between these variables and libertarianism within this particular sample of students.

Completion of this study has led to several questions regarding libertarianism’s legitimacy and popularity: How can unknown libertarians become aware of their true political beliefs? Can libertarianism become more than just a popular idea? Will citizens continue to disregard libertarianism as a legitimate party choice? Will the U.S. political landscape remain a two-party system, or can a third party emerge as a true political force? Is libertarianism the best philosophy to use as the basic ideals of this potential third party? While this study does not answer these questions, it has hopefully raised awareness of libertarianism’s popularity and shown its potential to become a serious player in American politics.

³⁹ Klausner, Manuel. (1975). Inside Ronald Reagan. *Reason Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://reason.com/archives/1975/07/01/inside-ronald-reagan/singlepage>.