



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 25, 2011

Poll Finds Tea Partiers Won't Cut Spending, Will Hike Taxes

The telephone survey of 1,274 adults was conducted April 10 through April 14. Eighty percent of those surveyed were registered voters; and of those, 28 percent said they support the Tea Party movement.

Tea Party members and associated politicians have made much noise about reducing the federal deficit, and the poll indicates that the deficit is indeed one of their primary concerns. Asked to choose the top priority for Congress among reducing the deficit, cutting taxes, and maintaining services and benefits, Tea Party supporters overwhelmingly (66 percent) chose reducing the deficit. Furthermore, 85 percent of Tea Party supporters disapproved of President Barack Obama's handling of the deficit, which suggests that they want to see actual cuts as opposed to the faux cuts Obama is offering.



When it comes to selecting which programs to cut, however, Tea Party supporters seem just as reluctant to make any significant reductions as Obama (and [congressional Republicans](#), for that matter). In fact, for all their opposition to ObamaCare because of its socialist nature, they seem to have little problem with socialized medicine in general — a double-mindedness noted by Obama himself, who once said, “One of my favorite signs during the health care debate was somebody who said, ‘Keep Your Government Hands Out Of My Medicare’ — which is essentially saying ‘Keep Government Out Of My Government-Run Health Care Plan.’” Asked if they supported or opposed cutting Medicare and Medicaid to help reduce the deficit, a whopping 70 percent of Tea Party supporters said they opposed it, while only 28 percent favored it. Moreover, when given suggested reasons to support a government shutdown, 13 percent of Tea Party supporters actually said they would favor a shutdown if it would prevent Republicans from cutting spending for Medicare and Medicaid. (At the same time, 55 percent supported a shutdown to stop Democrats from increasing the deficit, and 23 percent of this allegedly extremist group opposed a shutdown under any circumstances.) Jon Terbush of TalkingPointsMemo.com [remarked](#) on the seeming contradiction between the Tea Party's message of “slash[ing] government spending” and the fact that “they're loathe [sic] to touch what amounts to about 20% of the entire federal budget.”

Another 20 percent or so of the budget that seems to be off limits to Tea Partiers is defense spending. Sixty-six percent of Tea Party supporters opposed cuts in military spending to reduce the deficit, while 32 percent favored such cuts. This is somewhat more understandable but still misguided. The United States spends nearly as much as the rest of the world combined on defense, and what do we get for it?



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Continual foreign wars; thousands of killed, wounded, and psychologically scarred servicemen; terrorist blowback; and an empire of military bases circling the globe. If the wars were ended, the foreign bases closed, the troops brought home and used solely to defend America from attack, and the Constitution's requirement that Congress — not the President — initiate all military campaigns obeyed, the defense budget could be drastically shrunk. The man who inspired the formation of the Tea Party, Ron Paul, understands this. Many of those who came late to the party do not.

By their answers to this poll, Tea Party supporters reveal that they have already declared 40 percent or more of the federal budget to be sacrosanct. Cutting spending on some of the biggest budget-busters is simply not on their agenda.

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If Tea Party fans are committed to tax hikes but not to spending cuts, they surely are not the slash-and-burn fanatics the press has made them out to be. Judging from these poll results, they appear to be nothing so much as standard-issue Republicans. On almost all questions their responses were within a few percentage points of those of Republicans in general. (Interestingly, on the few questions where Tea Party supporters and overall Republicans differed significantly, Tea Partiers actually looked *more* favorably upon Obama and congressional Democrats than Republicans did.)

Has the Tea Party's ardor for restraining government cooled now that Republicans have taken control of the House or Representatives and of so many other offices across the country? Was the movement, perhaps, more anti-Democrat than pro-limited government? Has its popularity attracted a significant number of less ideologically pure adherents? The answers to these questions may well decide the fate of the Tea Party — and possibly American liberty.

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