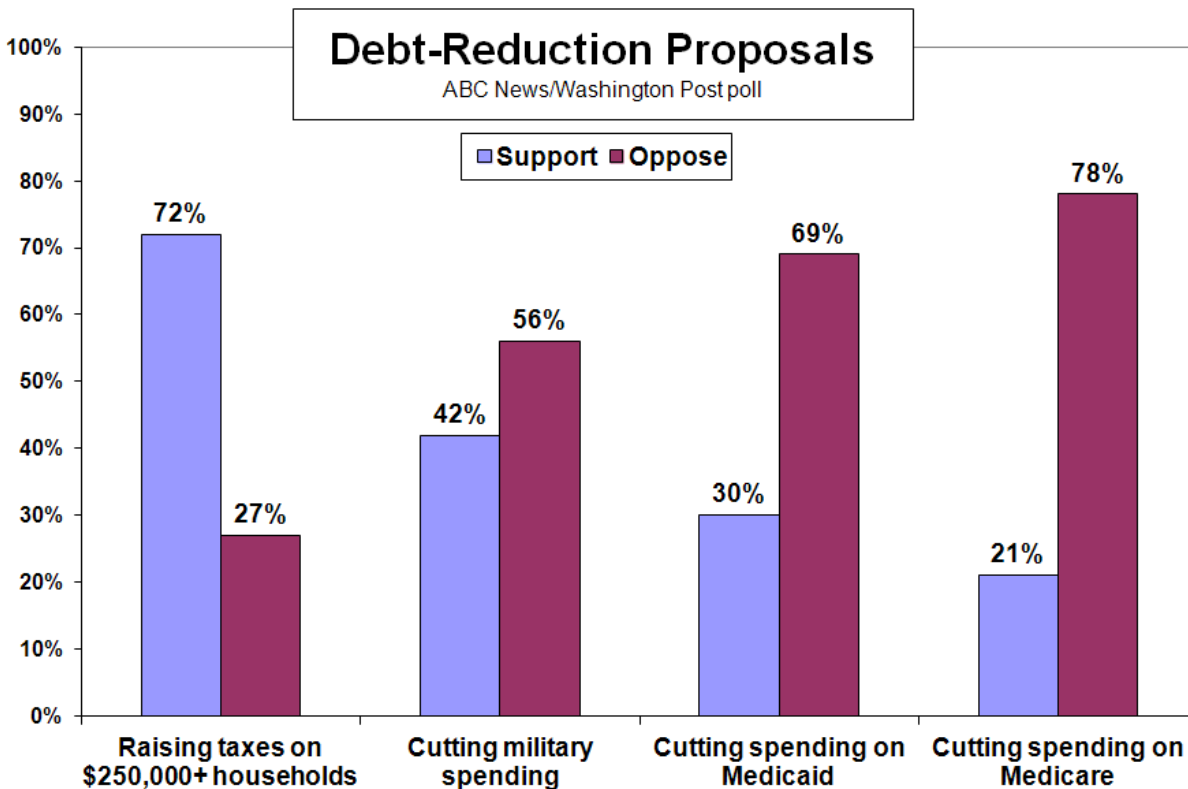


Broad Opposition to Medicare Cuts Marks GOP's Risks in the Debt Debate

Americans strongly reject Medicare cuts and broadly support higher taxes on the wealthy, underscoring the political risks in Republican debt-reduction plans. And on one key factor in the debate – protecting the middle class – President Obama retains the upper hand.

Those and other results from the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll underscore the hazards of the federal spending debate for Republicans as well as for Obama. As poorly as the president is rated for handling the deficit – just 39 percent approve – the Republican leaders in Congress do a bit worse, with just 33 percent approval on the same issue.

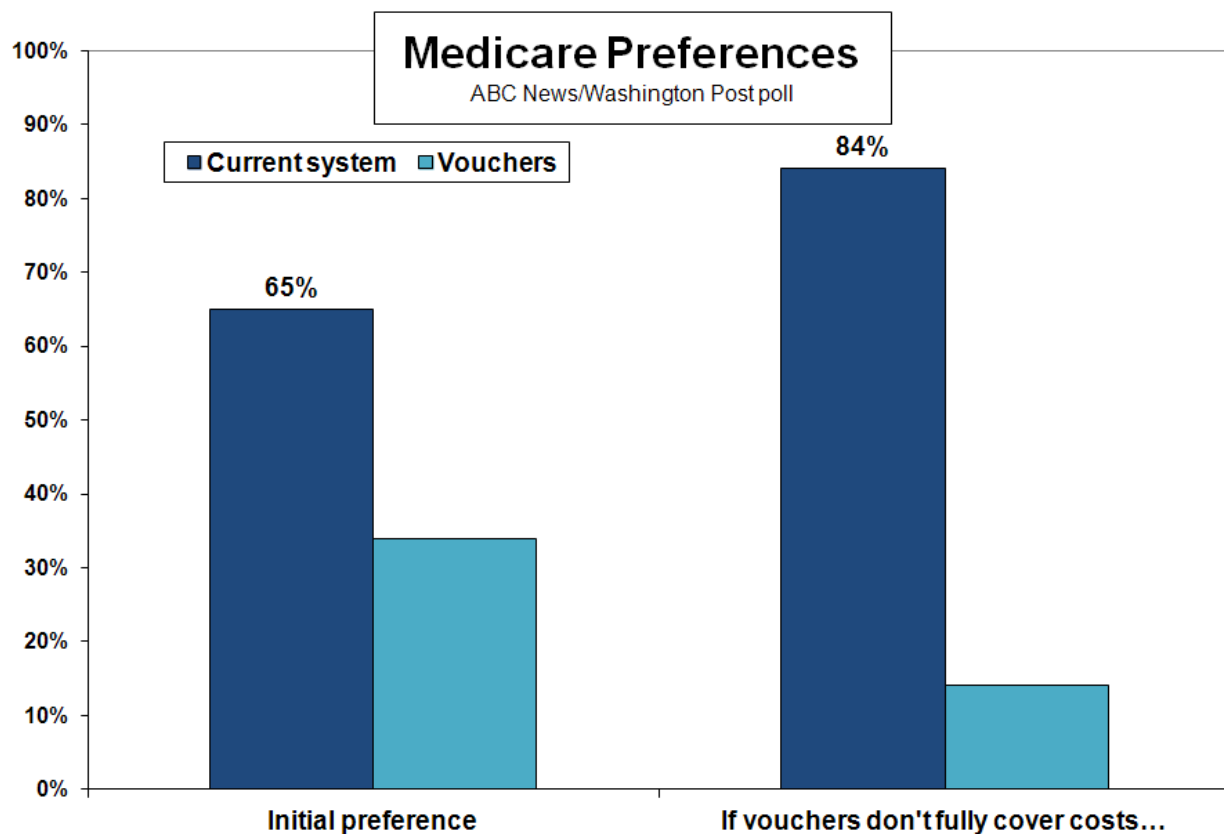
Similarly, while just 42 percent approve of Obama's handling of the economy overall, fewer still, 34 percent, approve of how the Republicans in Congress are dealing with it. And the public by a 12-point margin trusts Obama to protect middle-class Americans, a theme he's likely to sound loudly and often as the 2012 election campaign warms up.



The poll, conducted for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that 65 percent of Americans oppose changing Medicare to a system in which the government would give seniors vouchers with which to buy private insurance. Opposition was essentially the same in a Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health survey when the idea came up 15 years ago.

The Republican budget plan includes what's been widely described in news reports as a voucher or voucher-like system, though its author, Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wisconsin, has maintained that it's not a voucher system, because subsidies would go directly to insurance companies, from which seniors could pick from a menu of plans.

The language may matter, in that even most Republicans, 56 percent, oppose Medicare vouchers, as do more than seven in 10 Democrats. And opposition soars to 84 percent of all Americans, including nearly three-quarters of Republicans, if government payments failed to meet the full cost of seniors' insurance coverage.



Most Americans also differ with the dictum of Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, the House speaker, who ruled out tax increases to cut the deficit last week, saying, “Washington does not have a revenue problem. Washington has a spending problem.” In this poll, instead, 59 percent favor a mix of spending cuts and tax increases (or, for 3 percent, higher taxes alone) to address the deficit. Fewer, 36 percent, back spending cuts alone, though that is up 5 points from last month, chiefly among wealthier and very conservative Americans, two comparatively tax-adverse groups.

CUT? – And what to cut is hardly a simple matter. Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid and military spending consume nearly two-thirds of federal spending. But 78 percent in this survey oppose cuts in Medicare in order to address the federal debt (indeed 65 percent “strongly” oppose it); 69 percent oppose cuts in Medicaid, the insurance program for the poor (52 percent strongly); and fewer, but still 56 percent, oppose cutting military spending.

Far more popular is taxing people perceived as being most able to pay: Seventy-two percent support achieving debt-reduction by raising taxes on people with household incomes more than \$250,000 a year. That again counters the GOP position, and works for Obama, who last week ruled out another extension of tax cuts for better-off Americans.

Ninety-one percent of Democrats favor higher taxes on better-off Americans – but so do 68 percent of independents, the crucial political center, and, in fact, 54 percent of Republicans. Support for raising taxes on the wealthy falls below a majority in only a few groups, e.g., people who call themselves “very” conservative, conservative Republicans and strong supporters of the Tea Party political movement.

Indeed Obama now holds a slight 47-42 percent advantage over the Republicans in Congress in trust to handle taxes, after an essentially even split in December and January. And he leads by a wider margin, 51-39 percent, in terms of “protecting the middle class.”

In all this there may be some room for the “shared sacrifice” mooted in Washington. If a package “significantly” reduced the federal debt and included a “small” tax increase for all Americans and “small” cuts in Medicare and Social Security benefits, opposition eases, albeit to a still-majority 53 percent, with 45 percent support. Support spikes among young adults, to 62 percent. However, intensity of sentiment pushes back: Strong opponents to this notion outnumber strong supporters by 2-1, 40 percent to 19 percent.

Compromise nonetheless can be popular; a bipartisan 59 percent support the budget agreement that avoided a government shutdown the week before last – although that is tepid, with just 18 percent “strong” support.

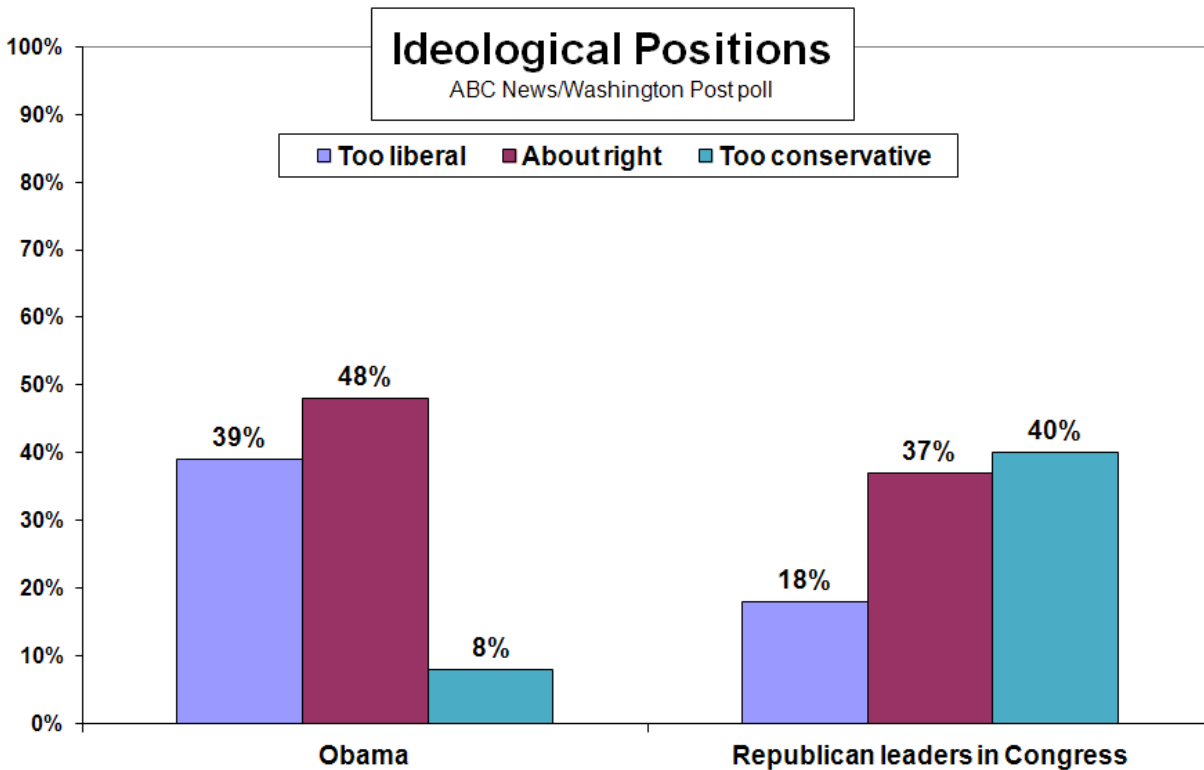
ADVANTAGE? – While Obama holds a small lead on taxes and a larger one on protecting the middle class, there are close divisions on related issues. The president and the Republicans in Congress score about evenly, 45-44 percent, in trust to find the right balance between cutting spending that’s not needed and continuing programs that are needed. And it’s 42-46 percent, a numerical GOP advantage, in trust overall to deal with the national debt, despite differences in how to do that.

Obama has an advantage on another gauge, ideological positioning. Forty-eight percent of Americans say he’s “about right” ideologically on most issues. Fewer, 37 percent, say the same of the Republican leaders in Congress.

The number of Americans who call Obama “too liberal” on most issues has eased by 6 points since September, to 39 percent, declining by 9 points among independents and moderates alike.

And while he's gotten some criticism recently from liberal groups, just 8 percent call him "too conservative," essentially unchanged.

It's the Republicans, instead, who have more trouble on their flank – not only do 40 percent call them "too conservative," but 18 percent call them "too liberal" – including a third of very conservative Americans and more than a quarter of strong Tea Party supporters.



The public by a narrow 45-40 percent also says the Republicans in Congress currently are taking the stronger leadership role in Washington. Many more said so about the Democrats in April 2007 and the Republicans in April 1995, but then the parties were newly in control of the House and Senate alike, not solely the House, as now.

In any case, especially given the sour economic mood, no one in Washington's wearing a halo. The Republicans in Congress have a 34 percent approval rating overall; the Democrats in Congress are right alongside them at 36 percent. Both are less popular than Obama, with his 47 percent job approval rating, itself a single point from his career low.

Boehner, personally, does better than his party overall, with 43 percent approval for his work; Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, lags, with 33 percent approval.

SNIT – These kinds of ratings mark not only the political hazards of deficit-reduction, but the public's sour mood more generally, fueled by the still-difficult economy. As noted, as weak as Obama is on the economy, approval of the Republicans in Congress on this critical issue is weaker still.

The key reason: disproportionate defections in the GOP base. Democrats are staying loyal to Obama; 75 percent approve of his handling of the economy. Among Republicans, though, many fewer, 58 percent, approve of their party's economic performance. That makes the economy – certain to be a central issue in the 2012 presidential campaign – a knife that cuts both ways.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 14-17, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1 previously released.

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

4/17/11 - Summary Table*

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
a. Previously released.							
b. The federal budget deficit	39	21	18	58	11	47	3
c. The situation in Afghanistan	44	17	27	49	17	31	7
d. Held for release.							

*Full sample asked item a-b; half sample asked item c; other half sample asked item d.

Trend:

a. Previously released.

b. The federal budget deficit

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
4/17/11	39	21	18	58	11	47	3
3/13/11	39	18	20	55	13	42	6
1/16/11	43	21	22	52	11	41	6
12/12/10	38	16	22	55	19	36	7
9/2/10	39	18	20	58	13	45	3
7/11/10	40	20	20	56	11	45	4
6/6/10	39	22	17	56	13	42	6
4/25/10	40	20	20	55	14	42	5

3/26/10	43	22	21	52	14	38	5
2/8/10	40	17	23	56	16	40	4
1/15/10	38	18	20	56	15	41	6
12/13/09	37	16	21	56	12	44	6
11/15/09	42	19	23	53	10	43	5
10/18/09	45	20	25	51	14	37	4
9/12/09	39	17	22	55	13	42	6
8/17/09	41	19	22	53	12	41	5
7/18/09	43	19	24	49	11	38	8
6/21/09	48	22	26	48	13	35	5
4/24/09	51	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	7
3/29/09	52	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	5

c. The situation in Afghanistan

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
4/17/11	44	17	27	49	17	31	7
1/16/11	49	19	30	41	17	24	10
12/12/10	45	17	28	46	16	30	10
7/11/10	45	20	25	45	14	31	10
4/25/10	56	20	36	36	16	20	7
3/26/10	53	25	29	35	15	20	12
1/15/10	50	22	28	45	18	27	6
12/13/09	52	24	28	44	13	32	4
11/15/09	45	23	23	48	16	32	6
10/18/09	45	22	23	47	17	31	7
9/12/09	55	23	33	37	17	21	7
8/17/09	60	25	35	33	14	19	7
7/18/09	62	33	29	30	13	17	8
4/24/09	63	NA	NA	26	NA	NA	11

d. Held for release.

3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way [ITEM] are doing their job?

4/17/11 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a. The Democrats in Congress	36	60	4
b. The Republicans in Congress	34	63	3

Trend:

a. The Democrats in Congress

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
4/17/11	36	60	4
10/3/10	36	61	3
7/18/09	47	48	5
4/24/09	45	49	6
2/22/09	50	44	6
7/13/08	35	57	8
2/1/08	39	54	7
12/9/07	40	53	6
11/1/07	36	58	6
9/30/07	38	57	5
7/21/07	46	51	2
6/1/07	44	49	6
4/15/07	54	44	2
10/8/06	48	50	3
5/15/06	39	58	4

11/2/05	41	54	5
6/5/05	42	56	3
6/6/99	51	42	7
3/14/99	51	42	7
7/8/97	45	49	6
4/5/95	36	60	4
10/31/94	39	53	8
10/23/94	36	59	5
9/11/94	41	53	6

b. The Republicans in Congress

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
4/17/11	34	63	3
10/3/10	30	67	3
7/18/09	36	58	6
4/24/09	30	64	6
2/22/09	38	56	6
7/13/08	25	69	6
2/1/08	30	63	7
12/9/07	32	63	5
11/1/07	32	63	6
9/30/07	29	67	4
7/21/07	34	64	2
6/1/07	36	58	6
4/15/07	39	59	2
10/8/06	35	63	2
5/15/06	33	64	3
11/2/05	35	61	4
6/5/05	42	56	2
6/6/99	41	52	7
3/14/99	40	56	4
7/8/97	40	54	6
9/15/96 RV	46	48	6
6/30/96	38	56	6
4/5/95	45	50	5
10/31/94	33	59	7
10/23/94	31	64	5
9/11/94	35	59	6

4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way John Boehner is handling his job as Speaker of the House of Representatives? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/17/11	43	13	30	40	20	20	17
1/16/11	39	12	28	27	14	14	33

Nancy Pelosi:

3/26/10	42	20	22	46	9	37	12
1/15/10	40	12	28	48	11	37	12
6/21/09	38	NA	NA	45	NA	NA	16
4/15/07	53			35			12
2/25/07	50			31			18
1/19/07	54			25			21

Newt Gingrich:

11/7/98*	38			58			4
7/12/98	41			44			15
5/12/98	41			44			15
1/19/98	40			52			7
4/24/97	26			62			12

3/9/97	33			61			7
9/15/96 RV	39			54			7
1/7/96	30			61			8
11/19/95	27			65			8
6/8/95	35			50			15
3/19/95	37			48			15
3/5/95	38			51			11
1/29/95	40			48			12
1/4/95	35			37			28
12/20/94**	35	"	"	43	"	"	22

* "has handled"
** "as incoming speaker"

5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Harry Reid is handling his job as majority leader of the Senate? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/17/11	33	9	24	49	19	30	18
3/26/10	29	10	19	47	16	30	25
1/15/10	35	7	28	47	18	29	18
4/15/07	46	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	21
Trent Lott:							
3/9/97	44	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	31
Bob Dole:							
5/22/96*	56	15	41	34	15	19	11
1/7/96	38	NA	NA	49	NA	NA	13
11/19/95	45			46			9
3/19/95	60	21	38	28	14	14	12
1/4/95	62	23	39	25	12	13	13
12/20/94	59	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	13

* "has handled"

6. Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Republicans in Congress are handling [ITEM]?

4/17/11 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a. The economy	34	62	3
b. The federal budget deficit	33	64	3

Trend:

a. The economy

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
4/17/11	34	62	3
11/4/90 LV*	26	69	5

* "the nation's economy"

b. The federal budget deficit

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
4/17/11	33	64	3
10/14/90	23	72	5
10/7/90	33	59	8

7. Who do you think is taking a stronger leadership role in the government in Washington these days, (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	40	45	3	9	2
3/13/11	39	46	2	9	3
12/12/10	43	42	3	8	5

Compare to:

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
6/1/07	43	45	3	7	3
4/15/07	34	58	2	4	2
1/19/07	36	56	1	3	3
7/30/01	51	38	3	4	4

	Clinton	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/5/95	27	67	2	3	7
1/24/95	24	61	4	5	6
12/15/94	25	59	3	5	7

8 previously released.

9. When it comes to finding the right balance between [cutting government spending that is not needed] and [continuing government spending that is needed], who do you trust to do a better job - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	45	44	2	7	2
3/13/11	43	42	2	10	3

10. Who do you trust to do a better job [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

4/17/11 - Summary Table

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
a. Handling taxes	47	42	1	8	2
b. Protecting the middle class	51	39	1	8	1

Trend:

a. Handling taxes

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	47	42	1	8	2
1/16/11	44	42	2	9	4
12/12/10	43	44	1	7	5

b. Protecting the middle class

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	51	39	1	8	1
1/16/11*	51	37	1	8	3
12/12/10	53	38	1	6	2

*1/16/11 and previous: "Helping the middle class"

11. Do you think Obama's views on most issues are too (liberal) for you, too (conservative) for you, or just about right?

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right	No opinion
4/17/11	39	8	48	4
9/2/10	45	9	45	2
4/25/10	39	5	53	3
1/15/10	37	7	54	2
11/15/09	40	7	52	2
9/12/09	39	5	53	3
4/24/09	33	4	62	2
1/16/09	29	4	65	2
10/31/08 LV	39	3	56	2
10/21/08 LV	40	2	55	4
10/20/08 LV	39	2	55	4
10/11/08 RV	37	4	55	4
6/15/08	36	5	52	7
3/2/08	31	6	56	7

12. Overall, would you describe the Republican leaders in Congress as (too liberal) for you, (too conservative), or about right?

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right	No opinion
4/17/11	18	40	37	5

Compare to: the political views of the Republican Party

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right	No opinion
8/6/00	13	30	48	9
8/5/96	14	38	44	5
11/8/95*	18	38	37	7
3/29/95	14	32	48	6
11/6/94	13	33	44	9
10/25/94	15	35	44	6
8/19/92 RV	12	39	38	11

*11/95 and earlier: Gallup

13. Do you think Obama is doing too (much), too (little) or about the right amount to compromise with the Republican leaders in Congress on important issues?

	Too much	Too little	About the right amount	No opinion
4/17/11	12	48	38	2
12/12/10	11	40	45	4
2/8/10	9	44	45	2

14. Overall, what do you think is the best way to reduce the federal budget deficit - (by cutting federal spending), (by increasing taxes), or by a combination of both?

	Cutting federal spending	Increasing taxes	Combination of both	No opinion
4/17/11	36	3	59	2
3/13/11	31	3	64	3
12/12/10	36	2	60	1

15. (Obama), (the Democrats in Congress) and (the Republicans in Congress) agreed last week to cut about 38 billion dollars from the federal budget, avoiding a partial shutdown of the federal government. Given what you've heard or read about it, do you support or oppose this budget agreement? Do you support/oppose strongly or somewhat?

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/17/11	59	18	42	33	14	20	7

16. The national debt is the total amount of money the U.S. government owes to its bondholders and to some programs, such as Social Security. Who do you trust more to handle the national debt, (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	42	46	1	9	2

17. In order to reduce the national debt, would you support or oppose [ITEM]? Do you feel that way STRONGLY or SOMEWHAT?

4/17/11 - Summary Table

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No
	NET	Strngly	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Strngly	op.
a. Cutting spending on Medicaid, which is the government health insurance program for the poor	30	14	16	69	17	52	2
b. Cutting spending on Medicare, which is the government health insurance program for the elderly	21	8	13	78	13	65	1
c. Cutting military spending	42	22	20	56	15	41	2
d. Raising taxes on Americans with incomes over 250-thousand dollars a year	72	54	18	27	10	17	1

18. Say the national debt could be reduced significantly by raising taxes on all Americans by a small percentage and making small reductions in Medicare and Social Security benefits. Is this something you would support or oppose? Do you support/oppose this strongly or somewhat?

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/17/11	45	19	26	53	13	40	2

19. I'm going to read you two statements about the future of the Medicare program. After I read both statements, please tell me which one comes closer to your own view: Medicare should remain as it is today, with a defined set of benefits for people over 65, OR Medicare should be changed so that people over 65 would receive a check or voucher from the government each year for a fixed amount they can use to shop for their own private health insurance policy.

	Should remain as it is today	Should be changed	No opinion
4/17/11	65	34	2
7/9/96*	64	32	4

*Kaiser-Harvard

20. (IF MEDICARE SHOULD BE CHANGED) What if the cost of private insurance rises faster than the value of the vouchers, so seniors have to pay more of their own money for health insurance? In that case, would you support or oppose replacing Medicare with a voucher system?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
4/17/11	37	60	3

19/20 NET:

	-Should remain as is-			- Should be changed-			No
	NET	At first	Now	NET	Still	DK/REF	opinion
4/17/11	84	65	20	14	12	1	2

21-36 previously released or held for release.

END