

Author(s): Bartels, Larry
Title: Budget Items on 1995 Pilot Study
Date: January 15, 1996
Dataset(s): 1995 Pilot Study

Abstract

Bartels examines the budget tradeoff items in the 1995 Pilot Study. He finds that the only tradeoffs supported by a majority of the respondents are those that propose cuts in defense spending. Responses to other proposed tradeoffs indicate that there is little public support for any major changes in the current balance among domestic spending, taxes, and the budget deficit. Bartels also finds that the tradeoff items correlate at low levels -- even those items designed to tradeoff the same two goods. This finding suggests that the tradeoff items may not be very reliable. Next, to uncover the structure of those items, Bartels performed an exploratory factor analysis of the items and found three dimensions: (1) opposition to defense spending, (2) preferences for deficit and tax reduction, and (3) a response set. While the first dimension is well covered by existing NES items, Bartels argues that the second dimension should be measured in future survey efforts by incorporating several of the experimental budget tradeoff questions into the 1996 NES. Bartels then examines the correlates of the tradeoff items and finds that all the items correlate at moderate levels with partisan identification and ideology and correlate strongly with political information. Finally, Bartels finds that once partisanship and ideology are controlled, only the domestic spending vs. deficit tradeoff has a significant impact on Clinton approval and Clinton feeling thermometers. Moreover, this tradeoff item has only weak effects in determining Gingrich approval and has no effect on evaluations of Dole. Thus, the budget tradeoff items appear to have weak predictive power. Bartels concludes by conceding the potential problems with the tradeoff items. Still, Bartels recommends moving through the domestic spending vs. tax increase tradeoffs to future survey efforts because of the likely difficulty of finding items that will work better in filling a noticeable gap in NES instrumentation.