AMERICA SPEAKS
Our Budget, Our Economy

The Difference that Deliberation Makes

Evaluating the "Our Budget, Our Economy" Public Deliberation

Preliminary analysis

Kevin Esterling, Archon Fung, and Taeku Lee

with Hollie Russon Gilman, Thomas Hayes,
Xavier Medina Vidal, Alex Street, and Antonio Ugues

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1. Introduction - What Was *Our Budget, Our Economy*?

On June 26, 2010, more than 3,000 individuals spent most of a Saturday discussing long term planning for the U.S. federal budget. The event, called "AmericaSpeaks: Our Budget, Our Economy" (OBOE), was held in 19 communities across the United States (plus 38 volunteer-organized "community conversations"). Organizers aimed to focus participants' attention on what they considered to be a critical public policy question: how should America grapple with its growing national debt? This event was meant to create a distinctive opportunity for ordinary Americans — not professional economists, policy makers, or political officials — to deliberate about these momentous choices according to their own values. The event also intended to provide one input — the considered views of ordinary Americans — into the deliberations of professional policy-making bodies such as President Obama's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Public deliberation is most constructive when differences of opinions are expressed. AmericaSpeaks went to great lengths to ensure that the participants were diverse and broadly representative of their local communities. In the weeks leading up to the event, AmericaSpeaks set up a webpage—http://usabudgetdiscussion.org—where interested citizens could register to participate. AmericaSpeaks worked with hundreds of groups in each of the nineteen localities to recruit a diverse and representative set of participants. They also hired grassroots organizers to recruit diverse, unaffiliated participants. The registration form asked potential participants a variety of questions, including their age, income, race and party identification. The organizers used the registration database to monitor the representativeness of likely participants. They invited participants to preserve representativeness, and in the cases where one group appeared underrepresented, they contacted local groups who could target the underrepresented groups most effectively.

AmericaSpeaks also made background reading material on the budget and fiscal policy available to potential participants via the website and in hard copy on the day of the event.[1] These materials were drafted in collaboration with a committee of 30 prominent experts on fiscal policy who covered the ideological range from conservatives to liberals. At the events, participants were seated at small discussion tables composed of 8-10 participants and one table

[1] "Federal Budget 101: An Introduction to the Federal Budget and our Fiscal Challenges." URL: http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/?page_id=17

facilitator. Participants were given randomized seating assignments, which helped to ensure that participants would encounter others with very different policy preferences and backgrounds.

The event program centered on working through the technical reading materials to give participants a primer on the topic, and then they were asked to complete a workbook with 42 policy options—spending cuts and tax increases—with the goal of reducing the deficit by $1.2 trillion in 2025. The options workbook estimated the revenues that would be realized by choosing each option, and outlined the pros and cons for each.[2] The workbook was vetted by the diverse set of policy experts.

From some vantages, the event was narrowly framed. Participants were asked to recommend measures such as spending cuts and tax increases that would reduce the projected annual deficit by $1.2 trillion — roughly half of the $2.46 trillion 2025 annual deficit if current policies continue. They were not, for instance, provided with options to make dramatic cuts to reduce the deficit in the immediate future nor were they given the option to accept higher deficits in 2025 and beyond.[3] Instead, the exercise focused participants' attention on making complex trade-offs in order to reach the given objective of reducing the deficit by half in fifteen years.

The MacArthur Foundation provided a generous grant to researchers from the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Riverside, and Harvard University to understand and evaluate this event. We believe that "Our Budget, Our Economy" is the largest national experiment in structured public deliberation to date in the United States and so constitutes an unprecedented opportunity to explore both public views about the substantive topic of public spending and more general questions about the dynamics of public deliberation.

In this preliminary report, we will explore several of the most important questions for public observers and policy makers to understand the character of this event and to help them interpret its results. We focus in particular on five main topics.

First, who participated in the OBOE event? Were participants predominantly liberal or conservative? How similar or dissimilar to the general public were participants on dimensions such as income, education, race, age, political interest, and political orientation?

[2] "Our Our Budget, Our Economy" Options Workbook, June 26, 2010. URL:

http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Federal-Budget-Options-Workbook-062510B.pdf

[3] Participants were, however, given the opportunity to offer their own options beyond those provided to them in the Options Workbook. They could also choose to select options that added to more or less than the stated $1.2 trillion deficit reduction goal.

Second, what do individuals think should be done to control the federal deficit? How do these "policy preferences" vary between participants in Our Budget, Our Economy and Americans generally? How (and how much) do the policy preferences of liberals, moderates, and conservatives differ? Since the topic of discussion centered on planning for long-term budgets, and touched on social welfare and entitlement programs that are important to current and future retirees, we also consider whether participants' policy preferences differed by age.

Third, we examine whether and how the views of participants changed though deliberation. Given the polarized character of the debate in media and among politicians, we pay special attention to changes among three groups: liberals, conservatives, and moderates, as well as among different age groups.

Fourth, we consider the underlying structure of OBOE participants' preferences for policy change, focusing in particular on whether OBOE participants were guided by traditional liberal-conservative ideological distinctions in their choices, or whether their preferences were more nuanced and complex. We conduct this analysis both for individuals, as well as for the decisions that groups of individuals made when they were asked to reach consensus decisions at their tables.

Fifth, we examine the extent to which OBOE shaped participants attitudes as citizens. How does their trust in government, confidence in their abilities to understand political issues and choices, and their sense of political efficacy differ from those who did not participate?

Finally, we examine how participants themselves evaluated their experience of public deliberation in Our Budget, Our Economy. Did they, for example, perceive the event to be fair and open? Did they express themselves and were they listened to? Did they agree with the conclusions reached by the group as a whole? Again, given the widespread impression that our polity is polarized, we focus on differences between liberals, moderates, and conservatives in this regard.

This report is the first of a series of analyses of the Our Budget, Our Economy events. In the first part of 2011, we will examine some longer-term effects of OBOE, specifically, whether participants continue to view public spending in ways that differ from those who did not participate and whether they are more (or less) politically and civically active than non-participants. We plan eventually to produce several research monographs that conduct a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the difference that deliberation makes.

2. Data Sources for the Evaluation

We use a variety of data sources for this evaluation. Specifically, survey data were collected from Our Budget, Our Economy participants just prior to the event and immediately after the event. Keypad votes at each of the 349 tables across the 19 sites were also compiled during the event. We also gathered qualitative assessments of the deliberations from 24 research assistants at the 19 sites. In addition to these data gathering efforts on June 26th, we also surveyed the opinions of four groups that offer various points of comparison to OBOE participants: individuals who registered for the event but did not show up on June 26th; a nationally representative sample interviewed by telephone; a nationally representative sample interviewed over the Internet; and policy elites. Finally, we draw from the Census Bureau's demographic profile of America where relevant. Summary details of each of these data sources follow.

Participant Surveys

On June 26, our project deployed 24 field researchers to all nineteen sites that composed the organized face-to-face component of OBOE (researchers did not attend the 38 volunteer-organized Community Conversations). These researchers administered two surveys, pre-event and post-event, to participants at all nineteen sites. Though not every participant completed a survey, the vast majority did. From these 19 sites, we received 2,576 pre-event surveys and 2,207 post-event surveys. These two rounds of surveys comprise our major source of quantitative data regarding the demographics, attitudes, and assessments of event participants.

Site-Based Field Reports

Each of the 24 field research assistants also conducted structured qualitative observations of deliberations at each site. They were given specific instructions and a guidesheet to assess participant engagement and attention, how the event was organized, the perceived quality of deliberations, and notable disagreements, disruptions, and breaks in the flow of deliberations. Our research team was asked to write-up their qualitative views as well as respond to a questionnaire that required their quantitative assessments along these dimensions.

Table-Level Keypad Responses

During the afternoon of the OBOE event, participants at each of the 349 tables were tasked to choose among a set of policy options to meet a goal of reducing the deficit by $1.2 trillion in 2025. These data were collected by AmericaSpeaks through the use of laptop computers at each table where participants in the AmericaSpeaks National Discussions were asked to first discuss the options with each other, and then attempt to agree upon a package of options to reach the goal.

Control Group Surveys

An important part of this project is to establish the extent to which event participants differ (or, importantly, do *not* differ) from those who do not participate. One recurrent note of skepticism about deliberative events like OBOE is that participants are a highly skewed cross-section of America. We took pains to construct three kinds of comparison groups. A survey mirroring the items asked of OBOE participants was administered to each "control group."

Our first control group consists of 2,594 individuals who registered to participate in the Our Budget, Our Economy event but who subsequently did not participate in the event itself. We reasoned that this is an excellent comparison group because they mirror event participants in one key respect: the willingness and intention to spend a day engaging in public deliberation on the nation's deficit. The "registered non-participants" were interviewed over the telephone during a period (June 21st to July 1st, 2010) just around the June 26th event.

The second group consists of 2,677 individuals who were selected to be representative of the general public. Given the dual goals of AmericaSpeaks to organize events nationwide and to recruit participants at each event to be as representative as possible of the cities in which the events were taking place, we adopted a two-track strategy. Using random digit dialed (RDD) telephone interviews, we drew one sample of 1,929 respondents selected to be nationally representative and an oversample of 748 respondents from six primary cities with Our Budget, Our Economy events that drew large numbers of participants (Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; Columbia, South Carolina; Dallas, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon). This sampling frame yields a final sample that includes between 234 and 285 completed interviews in each of these six main cities and a remaining sample of 1,119 respondents drawn from the rest of the United States.

We also collected data from a third control group of 1,350 individuals selected to be nationally representative and surveyed though the Internet. A Internet comparison sample is important for at least two reasons: (1) there is a growing concern about the validity and reliability of telephone surveys; (2) Internet survey respondents, even when recruited to be generally representative of the American public, are often likely to be more politically interested, and therefore more like the Our Budget, Our Economy participants, than those selected through our random digit dial telephone interviews.

Elite Opinion Survey

Policy elites are a fourth comparison group sometimes mentioned in criticisms of deliberative events. The concern here is that participants are essentially political insiders who mirror the well-versed views of elites. To compare participants in the OBOE event to elite actors, we draw on data from a survey of "Beltway influencers" on their views on the federal budget deficit

between February 10 and March 9, 2010. Funded by the MacArthur Foundation, this "Public Agenda" survey defined influencers as a mix of 153 "leaders" (identifiably key actors in federal agencies, legislative staff, mass media, foundations, and interest groups) and 150 "opinion elites" (politically and civically engaged individuals in the D.C. metro area).

Census Data

As appropriate, we also compare the data we collected for our evaluation of the Our Budget, Our Economy event with available Census Bureau data. In most instances, the purpose is to check how representative our various data sources are to a general demographic profile of United States (and geographic subunits of the U.S.), and we use the most recent available Census data from the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) as our point of comparison.

Data Analyzed in this Report

As mentioned, this report is partial and preliminary. We do not analyze, or even utilize, all of these data here. We also plan to follow-up our surveys conducted on or around the June 26th Our Budget, Our Economy event with another round of interviews – of participants, registered non-participants, and generally representative respondents – this December, following the mid-term elections.

For the main body of this report, we mainly present a tightly focused comparison of two groups: OBOE participants and survey respondents selected through random digit dial (RDD) telephone interviewing. We compare OBOE participants to the RDD sample because it represents the most common mode of finding out what the "general public" thinks about an issue using surveys. With both groups, we analyze data from the six largest OBOE sites: Albuquerque, Chicago, Columbia (SC), Dallas, Philadelphia, and Portland (OR). While smaller OBOE townhalls were held throughout the US and we collected data to mirror its national scope, we center our attention on these six cities for the simple and straightforward reason that the data – both of event day participants and relevant comparison groups of non-participants – is most numerous and representative in these six sites. Thus, short of more extensive statistical tests of our data, we are most confident about what we find from these six cities.

Having said this, we fully intend to analyze data from all sites and all participants in subsequent reports and monographs, and our preliminary data analysis suggest that the main points we highlight in this preliminary report, based on six cities, are constant across all event sites. In our comparison of the demographics of who participated below, we also draw on Census data and data from the Public Agenda survey of elites.

3. Who Participated?

The first major question regarding the Our Budget, Our Economy deliberations concerns the character of the participants themselves. To know what to make of the deliberations, we have to know something about who deliberated. How much like ordinary Americans are they? Was the group balanced across dimensions such as age, socio-economic advantage, and ideology?

The upshot of this section is that the participants of the OBOE discussions were in most instances representative of the populations of the six cities where these deliberations occurred. The distribution of OBOE participants in terms of income, age, and ethnicity/race is roughly comparable with a few exceptions (OBOE participants are somewhat likelier to be older and African American and somewhat less likely to be Latino). The biggest contrast between OBOE participants and the general populations of these cities is in educational background.

We also find some political differences between OBOE participants and the general public. Participants tended to be somewhat more likely to be Democrats (and less likely to be Republicans) than in the six-city population, but the largest political contrast was that OBOE participants reported themselves to be far more interested in politics than the respondents to our random-digit dial survey. This last difference comes as no surprise. We already know that OBOE participants are more likely to be highly educated, which correlates highly with political interest. We also anticipate that since participants were not compensated for their time, only those with a strong interest in politics are likely to volunteer to spend a Saturday discussing fiscal policy with strangers.

Below we consider the similarities and differences between **OBOE** participants, the random-digit dial control (**RDD**) telephone sample, and Census estimates from the 2009 American Community Survey (**ACS**) in the six primary cities.[4] In addition, we also compare the OBOE participants to a recent survey conducted by Public Agenda of elite Beltway insiders, also on the topic of the budget and long term fiscal policy.[5] Comparing to this latter sample is useful to see just how different the OBOE participants are from Beltway insiders who are involved in policy making as a routine matter.

Demographics

We find that AmericaSpeaks did a reasonably good job of recruiting a broad representation of Americans in the OBOE events. We reach this conclusion by comparing the demographic

[4] OBOE and RDD data are weighted to be comparable to the ACS data. Weights are necessary because some cities (i.e., Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Philadelphia) have substantially larger populations than other cities (i.e., Albuquerque, Columbia, Portland, Oregon).

[5] Survey conducted by Harris Interactive from February 10 to March 9, 2010. The sample had an N of 150.

background of our survey of participants to our RDD survey of the general population and to Census ACS data, and in contrast to the Public Agenda survey of elites. We draw this conclusion by comparing these four groups in several different ways.

Our first comparison is by income. Here we not only find that OBOE participants reasonably approximated the population of these six cities in income terms, but also that OBOE participants were *more* representative than the sample drawn from random digit dialing. Specifically, we find that there is a roughly equivalent proportion of OBOE participants in the lower income range (less than $50,000) as in the ACS Census data (46% in OBOE; 44% in ACS) and significantly more than found in the RDD telephone interview (31%). If there is any difference in income terms between OBOE participants and the Census data, it appears that there were fewer participants in the higher income brackets (more than $100,000) than found in the general public per Census data (18% in OBOE; 24% in ACS). The OBOE participants were, as a result, markedly more socioeconomic diverse than policy elites, as shown in the Public Agenda survey.[6]

We next compare these groups by age. Here too, there are greater similarities between the OBOE participants and the ACS Census data than there are between the RDD sample – usually assumed to be the benchmark of representativeness. The primary difference between the age distribution of OBOE participants and that of the population of the six primary cities per Census data is that OBOE participants were likelier to be in the older age groups (42% were aged 55 or older, compared to 27% in the ACS in those age categories). OBOE participants were also somewhat less likely than ACS figures to be in the 25-44 year old age groups (24% of OBOE participants were in these categories, compared to 38% in the ACS).

[6] N.B.: the Public Agenda survey sample of "opinion leaders" *only* interviewed those civically and politically engaged DC residents who earned more than $100,000 a year, so the income data on elites is somewhat arbitrarily truncated.

INCOME	OBOE	RDD	ACS	Elites
<$50K	46	31	44	--
$50-100K	36	40	32	--
>$100K	18	29	24	100
AGE	OBOE	RDD	ACS	Elites
18-24 yrs	14	6	15[7]	3
25-34 yrs	11	10	19	14
35-44 yrs	13	12	19	18
45-54 yrs	20	22	20	25
55-64 yrs	26	20	14	34
65+ years	16	30	13	7
RACE/ETHNICITY	OBOE	RDD	ACS	Elites
White	55	71	59	86
African-American	25	15	16	8
Latino	7	5	18	0
Asian American	3	3	5	1
Other / Multiple	10	6	2	3
EDUCATION	OBOE	RDD[8]	ACS	Elites
H.S. or less	12	25	40	--
Some college	19	28	21	9
College degree	31	24	27	38
Advanced degree	38	23	12	53

These age differences were significantly more pronounced in the RDD telephone sample, where roughly half the sample was aged 55 or older and 22 percent were between 25 and 44. The RDD telephone sample also substantially underrepresents the youngest adults (aged 18-24) compared to both OBOE and ACS data. Finally, the age distribution of OBOE participants is in terms of age, younger (18-24) and older (55-64) individuals are over-represented among OBOE participants compared to the random digit dial respondents, while the middle aged (35-54) are under-represented. Compared to Census data in the ACS, however, the greatest difference is the over-representation of older participants: 42% of the OBOE participants were 55 years or older, while roughly one quarter of the nation's adult population is in that age range. One possible source of this difference is that the fiscal future is most important to older Americans who are facing retirement and fixed incomes in the near future. In contrast to both the RDD and the OBOE samples, policy elites are typically in the middle age range.

In terms of race/ethnicity, there are several key similarities and differences. The proportion of whites among OBOE participants in the six cities we examine (55%) is not too different from that found in the ACS Census data (59%). By contrast, the proportion of African Americans (25%) is

[7] ACS data are for 15-24 years, given the incompatibility between Census Bureau age ranges and those in our surveys. ACS columns also are the percentage of those in the 15 to 65-plus year age range.

[8] Two percent of RDD respondents refused to state their education background.

much higher than in the ACS (16%) and the proportion of Latinos is much lower (7% in OBOE and 18% in ACS). Compared to the RDD telephone sample, we find that OBOE participants are more likely to be African American and less likely to be white. This underrepresentation of Latinos is consistent with other deliberative town hall meetings and, we believe, likely related (at least in part) to language and the predominant use of English at the townhalls (though translation services were provided for participants).[9]

We find the biggest demographic differences on the dimension of education. OBOE participants were without question more educated than the general public. Fully 38% of OBOE participants reported having a post-baccalaureate degree, while only 12% of the underlying population in the six cities of focus, per Census estimates, held an advanced degree. Viewed from the lower rungs of educational attainment, only 12% of OBOE participants had a high school degree or less, while 40% of the six-city population, per ACS data, had that equivalent level of educational attainment. On this one measure, the characteristics of the RDD telephone sample sit in between the OBOE and ACS figures: RDD respondents were less educated on the whole than OBOE participants, but more educated than the general population in the six metro areas per the Census ACS estimates. Finally, compared to the Public Agenda sample, it is clear that Beltway policy elites are even more highly educated than participants in the AmericaSpeaks OBOE event.

Political orientation and interest

In addition to demographic indicators of representativeness, a key concern leading into the OBOE event that budget debates are often heavily imbued with politics. Thus we also examine whether there are any notable differences in the political orientation of OBOE participants and other comparison groups. The three key political factors we consider here are partisanship, ideology, and level of political interest.

Before discussing what we find, we note a few caveats to this kind of comparison. First, there are no data that are similar in their quality and generalizeability to Census data with respect to political markers. In this section, we use one among several possible sources: the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (**CCES**), which has the benefit of conducting a large enough number of interviews at the congressional district level to allow us to say something reasonably reliable about political orientation in the six cities we focus on. Second, with respect to party identification and ideology, we are mindful of the fact that the categories that survey researchers use to label people politically representative are increasingly out of step with a growing number of Americans. Thus in our surveys to both OBOE participants and RDD telephone respondents, we included the option for someone to let us know that they did not think in terms of partisan labels like "Democrat," Republican," or "Independent" or in terms of

[9] 76 percent of Hispanics in the ACS report speaking a non-English language at home and nearly half of those individuals report speaking English less than "very well"

ideological labels like "liberal," "conservative," or even "moderate." Not surprisingly to us, a large proportion of individuals chose to tell us these labels are not meaningful to them. Importantly, the CCES and the Public Agenda elite interviews ask about partisanship and ideology more conventionally, so these data are not fully comparable.

PARTISANSHIP	OBOE	RDD	CCES
Democrat	39	28	47
Republican	14	21	21
Independent	23	22	27
Not applicable	24	29	5
IDEOLOGY	OBOE	RDD	CCES
Liberal	33	18	28
Conservative	21	28	24
Moderate	27	27	45
None of these	18	27	2
POLITICAL INTEREST	OBOE	RDD	CCES
Very interested	80	40	50
Somewhat interested	17	38	20
Slightly interested	2	15	5
Not at all interested	0	6	—[10]

With these caveats in mind, what do we find? First, the rank order of Democratic identification being most common, Republican identification least common, and Independents in the middle is common to all three non-elite surveys, OBOE, RDD, and CCES. At the same time, the overlap between OBOE participants and CCES respondents is much closer than either data to the RDD respondents. This is a similar pattern to that found earlier for several demographic factors. In specifics, OBOE participants are somewhat less likely to be Republican than respondents from either RDD or CCES; OBOE participants are much more likely to be Democrats than RDD respondents, but somewhat less likely to be Democrats than CCES respondents. These patterns are roughly similar with respect to ideology as well. A high proportion of people in America today choose not to think in terms of "liberal" or "conservative" labels. That said, OBOE participants were, on net, more likely to be liberal and somewhat less likely to be conservative than either RDD or CCES respondents.

The most dramatic difference between OBOE participants and the general population is in their very high degree of interest in politics and public affairs. Whereas only 40% of RDD respondents and 50% of CCES respondents report that they were “very” interested in politics, fully 80% of OBOE participants do so. This difference between OBOE participants and the general public is not surprising. There is little reason for someone to agree to participate in an all-day event on

[10] The CCES has a different set of response categories (only three categories), slightly different question wording, and a significantly higher proportion of respondents who indicated that they were "not sure" or "don't know." The column percentages do not sum to 100 because the remainder (25 percent) are in this category.

the federal budget deficit unless one is very interested in the issue and the politics surrounding debates over the budget deficit. This point is most clearly made by comparing our data on OBOE participants to our survey of individuals who registered to participate in OBOE but did not make it to the event. The distribution could not be more similar: 80 percent of these "registered non-participants" report being "very interested" in politics and a further 17 percent report being "somewhat interested," identical to what we find for OBOE participants.[11]

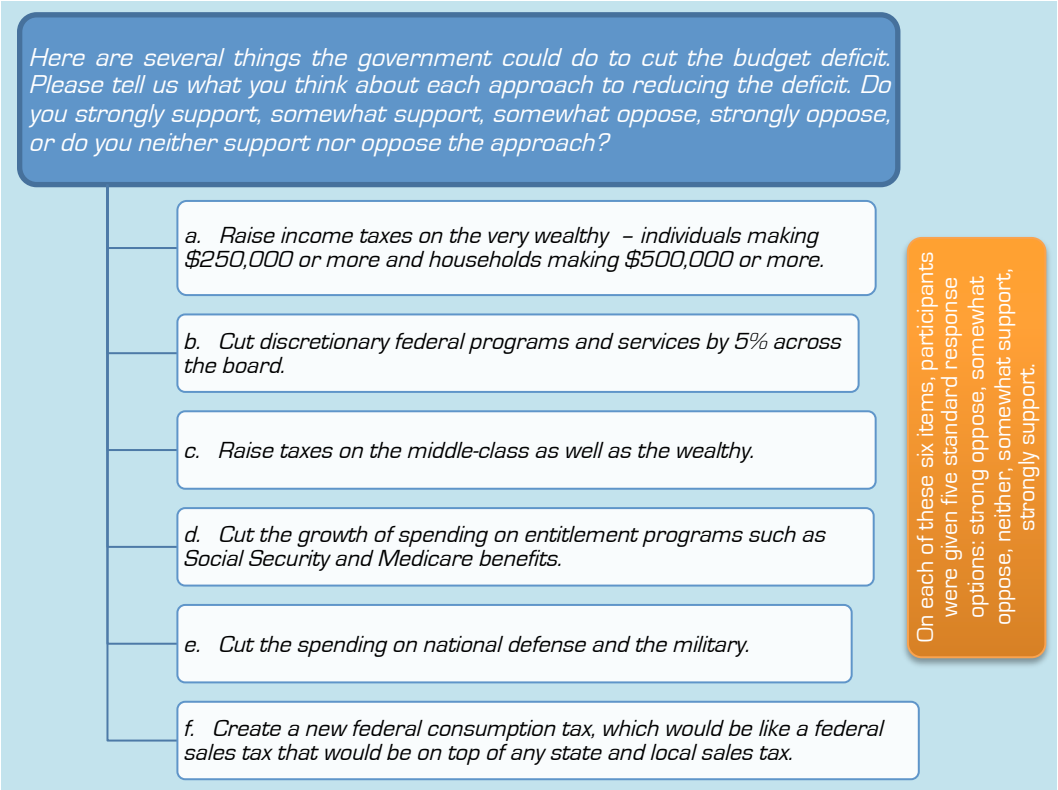
4. Policy Views on the Deficit and Debt

The aim of the Our Budget, Our Economy deliberation was to gather citizens to deliberate about the complex value trade-offs (increasing taxes, cutting programs) that are a necessary part of reducing the federal deficit. In the survey instrument that we administered to both OBOE participants and to the Random Digit Dial control group, we ask six questions that probe individual views on these policy trade-offs. Table 1 shows the policy options in our survey.

These six items measure broad policy preferences. Participants in the OBOE deliberation events had a full day to select from a range of 42 specific revenue and spending options in the context of a goal to reduce the deficit by around half by 2025. Our policy option questions tap into broader preferences on fiscal issues. In this respect, the options are more similar to the policies presented to voters by the major political parties. By comparing views on these options for reducing the deficit, before and after the deliberative event, we can measure the impact of deliberation on politically relevant issues. We can also check whether informed debate had distinctive effects on particular sections of the citizenry.

[11] To an extent, this skew in political interest also helps to explain the high degree of educational attainment among OBOE participants, since high political interest is most common among the highly educated.

Table 1. Policy Options in Pre- and Post-Event Surveys



In this section, we examine responses to each of these items. We focus on five questions:

1. Before the deliberation began (at the beginning of the day), how closely did the policy perspectives of OBOE participants match that of our random digit dial control group? That is, were the policy views of participants substantially different from those of the general population initially?

2. Probing this question of selection more deeply, we examine whether conservative participants were more or less conservative on these various questions than conservatives generally, and we ask this same question for liberal participants.

Then, we examine the extent to which participants views changed by the end of the day, after spending many hours considering these tradeoffs.[12] At the aggregate level of all participants — the group as a whole — we do not find large movements of preference on our six policy items. However, many individuals do change their views over the course of the day. In particular, for each of our six questions, we focus on two different kinds of participants.

[12] We only consider attitude changes among those who completed both the pre and the post test survey, so as not to introduce any biases that would result if specific types of participants failed to respond to the follow up survey (which was administered at the end of a very long day for participants).

3. We examine how those who identified themselves as liberals and conservatives changed over the course of the day.

4. For each item, we categorize as “neutrals” those who neither supported nor opposed a particular measure. We examine how these individuals, who began without a strong preference, changed over the course of the day.

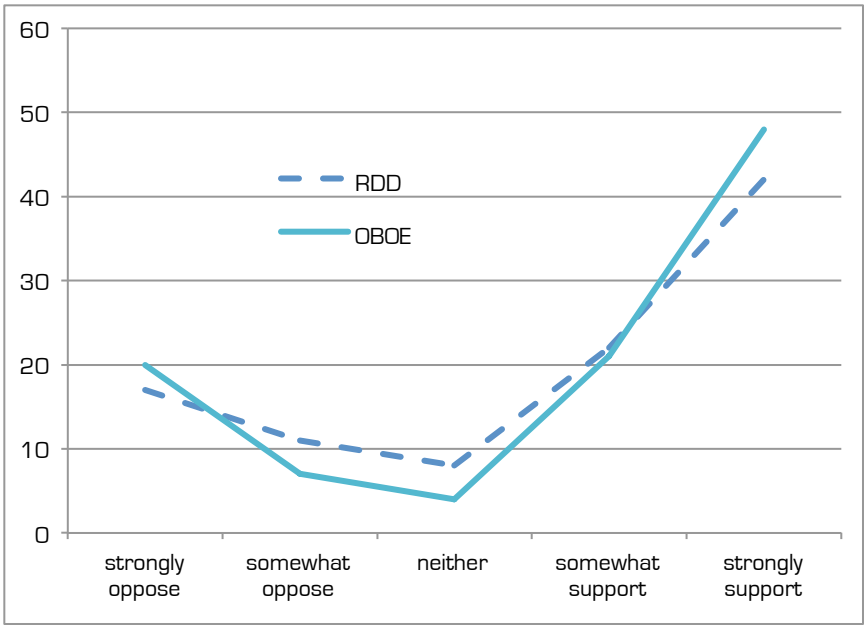
5. Since the discussions centered on the future of the budget, it may be that citizens of different age groups have different perspectives on what should be done, the priorities for and urgency of reform. To test for this, we analyze policy preferences and preference change within a range of age categories.

Consider now these six policy items in turn.

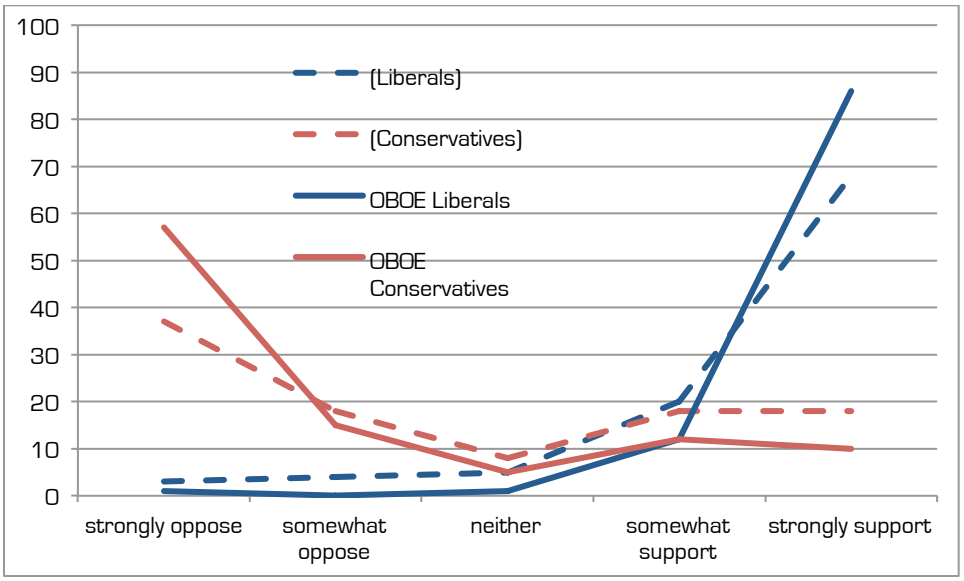
4a. Raising taxes on the wealthy

The first option is raising incomes taxes on the "very wealthy." In fact, the people referred to here fall within the top 1% of the U.S. income distribution. Given that the recent recession was widely blamed on rich Wall Street bankers, who were held up in the media and before Congress as the villains in the tale, we might expect citizens to take the chance to make these people pay. Voters who pay close attention to politics, especially those who read the liberal media, may already have heard that the main beneficiaries of the 2001 Bush tax cuts were just such wealthy Americans. One might therefore expect well-informed liberals to be especially supportive of this option. Of course, this kind of tax increase would also apply to other top executives and entrepreneurs, to the people who many see as the hard-working drivers of the U.S. economy. One might therefore expect ideological conservatives and partisan Republicans to oppose such a measure.

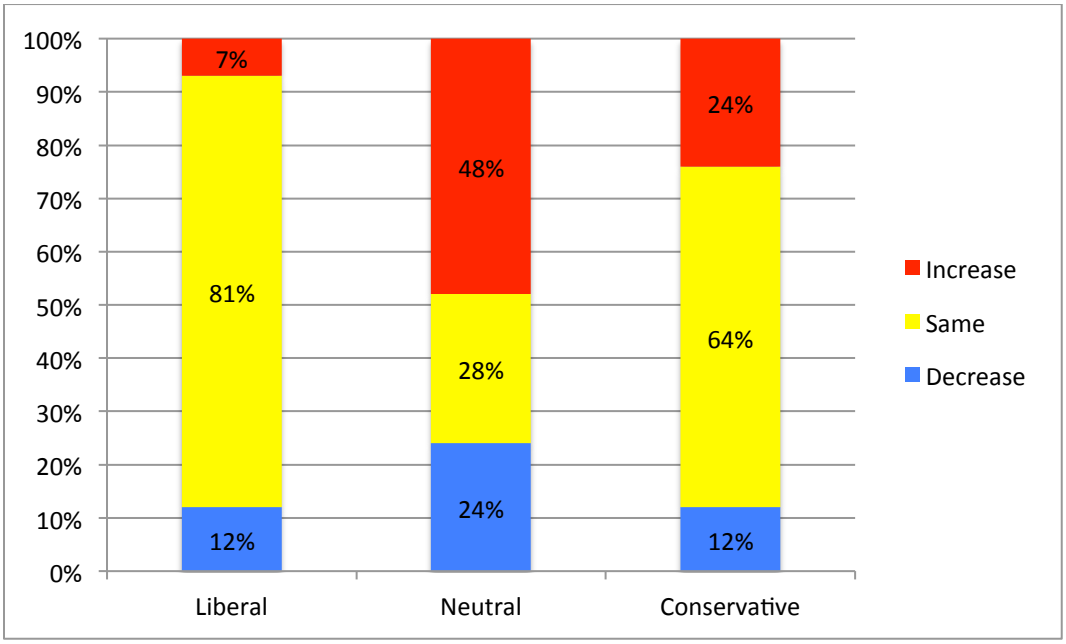
When asked whether they support or oppose raising income taxes on the very wealthy (individuals making $250,000 or more and households making $500,000 or more) we see that 69% of OBOE participants “somewhat” or “strongly” supported this measure at the beginning of the day, before deliberations began. Furthermore, as the graph below shows that participants’ views matched that of the general population quite closely (OBOE = program participants and RDD = random digit dial responses), although OBOE participants were a bit more likely to have strong views either way.



Comparing the responses of self-identified liberals and conservatives helps to identify the reasons for the strong views on this question in the OBOE sample. We find that OBOE conservatives are significantly more opposed to this measure than conservatives generally (57% of conservative participants "strongly oppose" as opposed to 37% of conservatives generally) and liberal participants are significantly more supportive of this measure (86% of OBOE liberals "strongly support" this measure as opposed to 67% of liberals generally). So, on this policy item, conservative participants are more conservative than the general population and liberal participants more liberal. In this figure, the views of participants are charted with a solid line and those from the random digit dial are depicted with a dashed line.

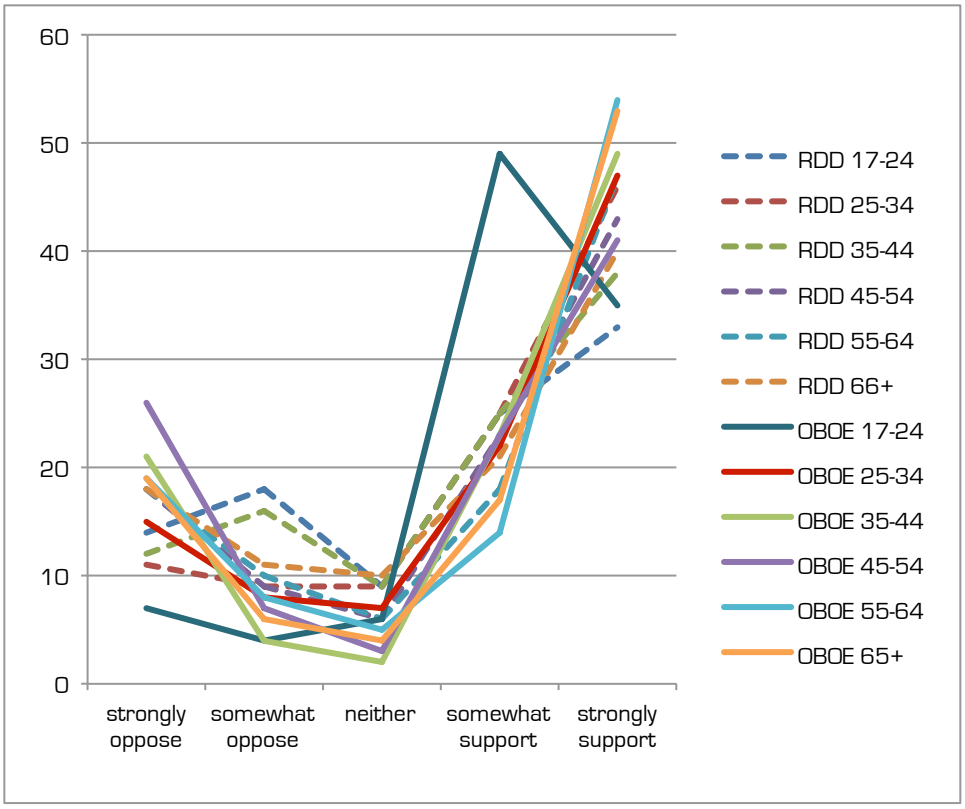


Did participants change their views on taxing the rich over the course of these deliberations? The figure below shows the percentage of participants in three groups of participants (liberals, conservatives, and "neutrals" discussed above) who either stayed the same in their support for the measure, increased their support, or decreased their support as measured by the difference between their pre- and post- event survey responses.

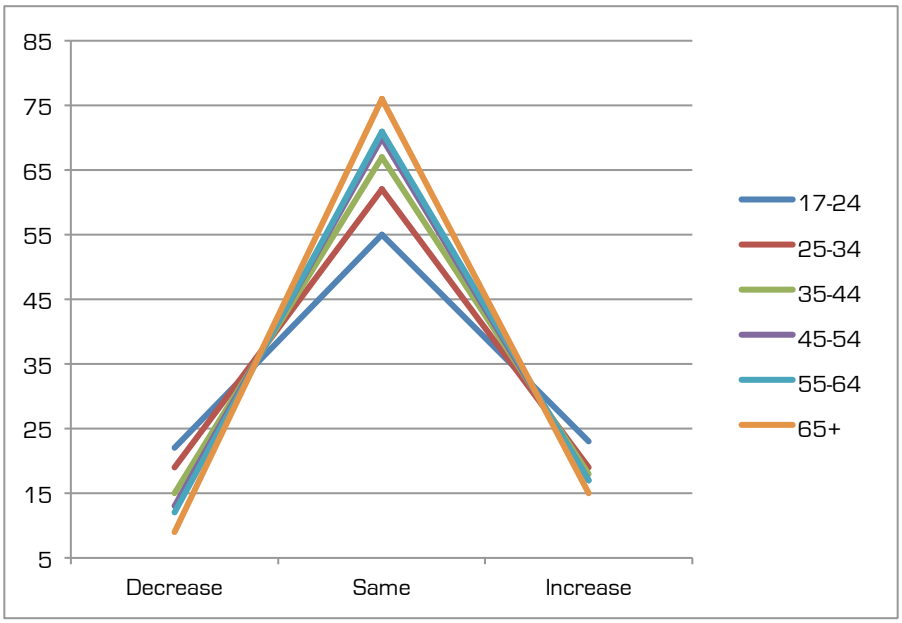


An interesting pattern emerges. Among liberals, about as many liberals increase support as decrease their support. Conservatives as a group, however, seem to moderate their position on taxing the very wealthy — 24% increase support for the measure, while 12% decrease their support. One interpretation of this shift is that conservatives, who felt most strongly prior to deliberating, moderated their position on this tax measure after deliberating about it in light of the common goal of reducing the deficit.

We see the biggest shift among neutrals — those who were neither supportive nor opposed. 48% of neutrals increased their support for taxing the very wealthy, 28% remained the same, but only 24% decreased their support for the measure. Twice as many neutrals increased their support for taxing the wealthy (compared to those who decreased support) after deliberating about the issue.



The next figure breaks down the support and opposition to taxing the rich by age group, for both the RDD sample and the OBOE participants. Most age groups in both samples show similar levels of support for this policy; all groups express a considerable amount of support for this option. The one exception appears to be the youngest among the OBOE participants, who show support for this option prior to the event, but not especially strong support.

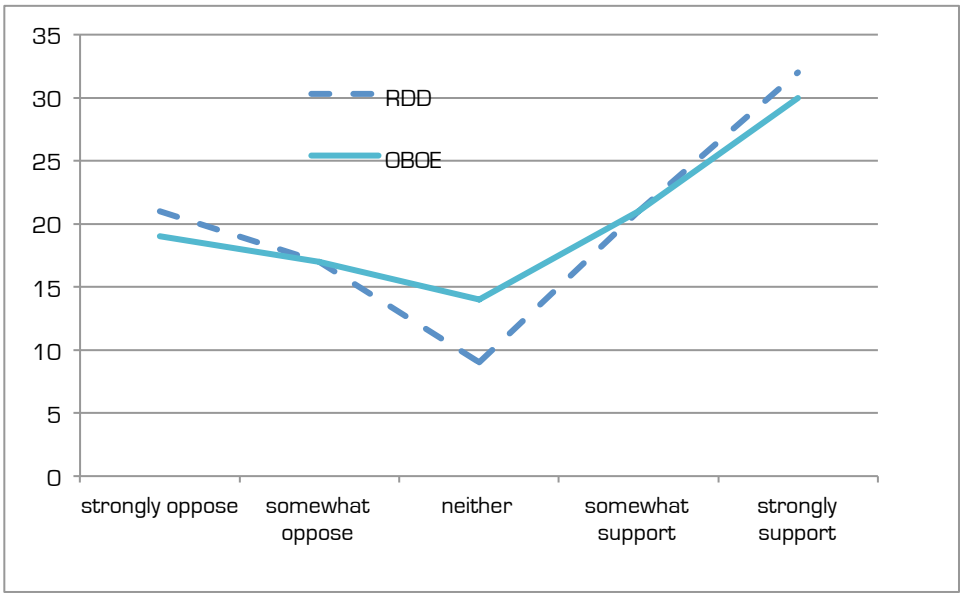


Most participants did not change their views as a result of the day-long discussion, although the extent of this constancy differs by age group. Interestingly, it appears that the extent of attitude changes decreases as one moves to older age categories.

4b. Cut discretionary programs

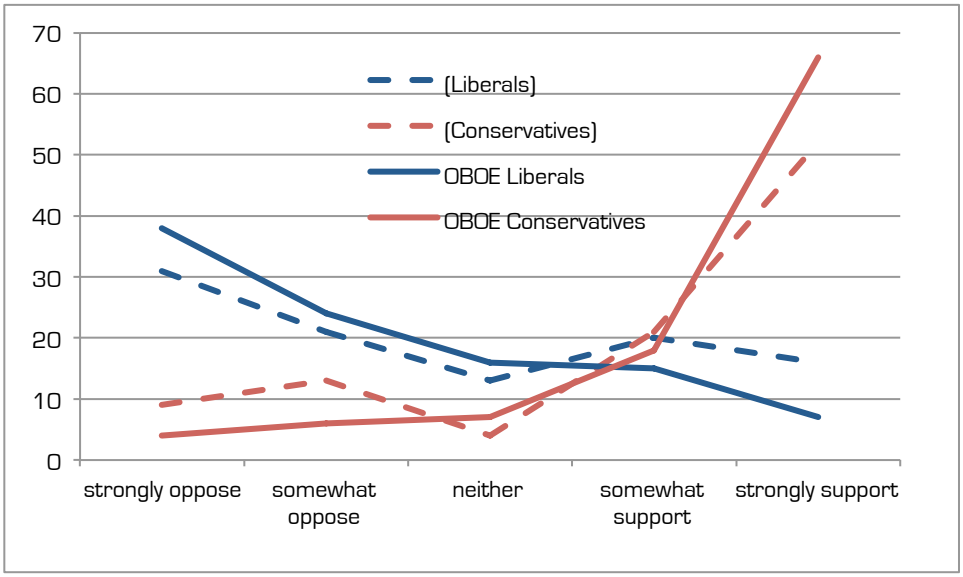
Our second policy question asks whether individuals support cutting "discretionary federal programs and services by 5% across the board." This option is appealing partly for its simplicity and partly because it seems fair to cut funding for all programs. Whereas tax increases for the rich target the most privileged in society, this proposal hits federal largesse. It could also be expected to have effects on the poor, who are more likely to depend on federal assistance. Although many Americans are unclear exactly what counts as 'discretionary' spending, participants in the Our Budget, our Economy events were given some relevant information. They were told, for example, that cutting federal spending would hurt the unemployed, would slow repairs to infrastructure, and could hurt educational programs too. We may therefore expect that deliberation produced more nuanced views. We can test this idea by comparing responses to the post-event surveys with those conducted beforehand.

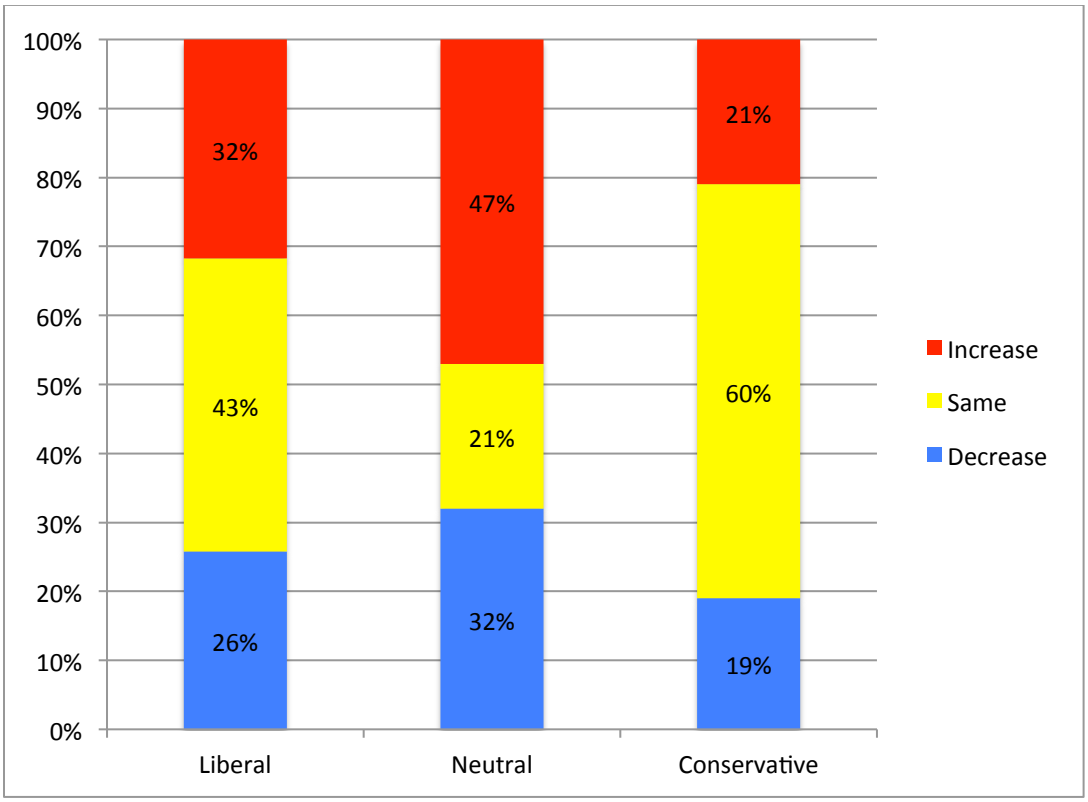
On this measure, OBOE participants were somewhat polarized, with 51% strongly or somewhat supportive, 36% strongly or somewhat opposed, and 14% in the middle. This pattern fits quite closely the views expressed in our random digit dial survey:



This polarization is explained by the strong support of conservatives for such spending cuts and the strong opposition of liberals. The figure below shows a pattern similar to that of positions on

taxing the wealthy: conservative participants are more strongly supportive than conservatives in the general population, and liberal participants are more strong opposed than liberals generally:

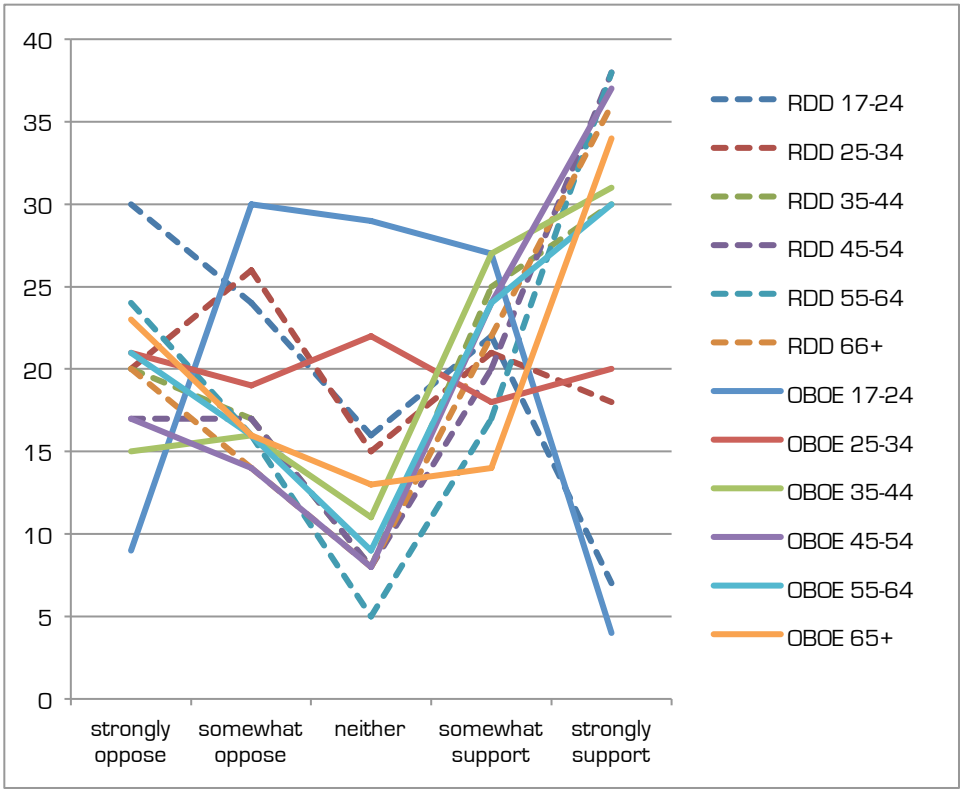




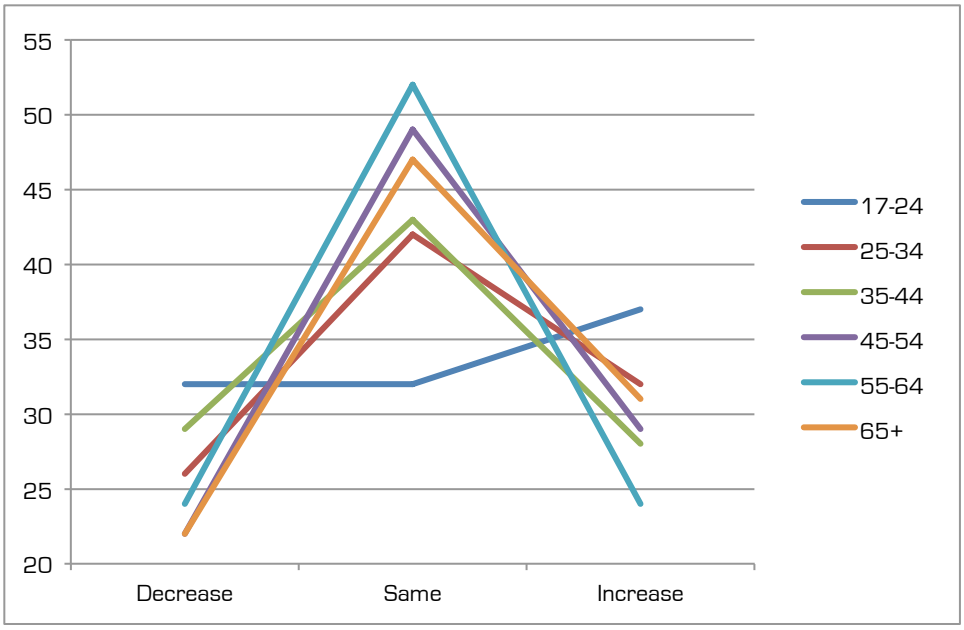
When we examine changes in policy views over the course of the day, we see a pattern that is something of a mirror image of the results for raising taxes on the wealthy. Conservatives as a

group do not change their position; about as many increase their support for the measure as decrease it. Among liberals, however, more (32%) increase support for cutting discretionary programs than decrease it (26%). One interpretation is that liberals moderate their objections to cutting discretionary programs after deliberation given the common goal of deficit reduction. On this issue, we see a very large shift among neutrals: 47% increase their support for cutting discretionary programs, 32% decrease their support, and 21% do not change their position.

As with taxing the rich, the different age groups have similar levels of support and opposition to cutting the discretionary programs, with the modal choices for all RDD age groups, and for the older OBOE participants, are to either show strong support or opposition. And again the exceptions to this rule are the younger OBOE participants (up to age 34), who tend to be the neutrals, not showing strong feelings either way on this question.

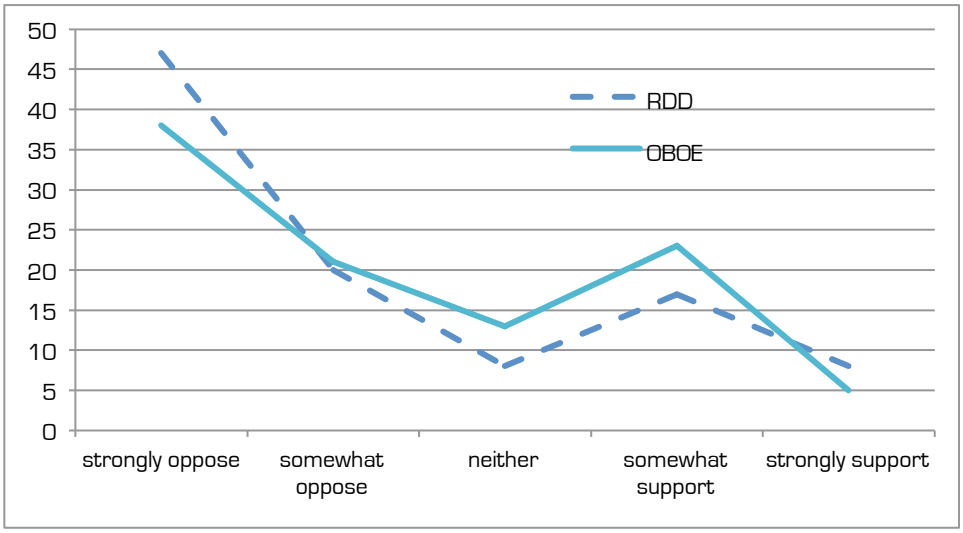


Continuing the parallel with the tax the rich option, older groups were less likely to change their preferences as a result of the discussion. In contrast, younger OBOE participants were more open to change, with the youngest group (up to age 24) showing a pronounced increase in support for cutting these programs.

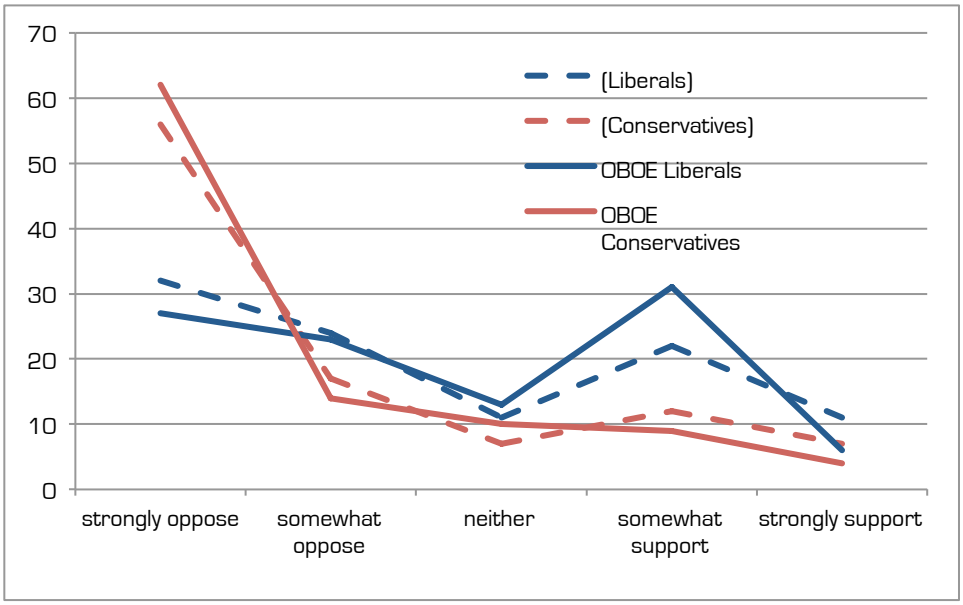


4c. Raise taxes on the middle class as well as the wealthy

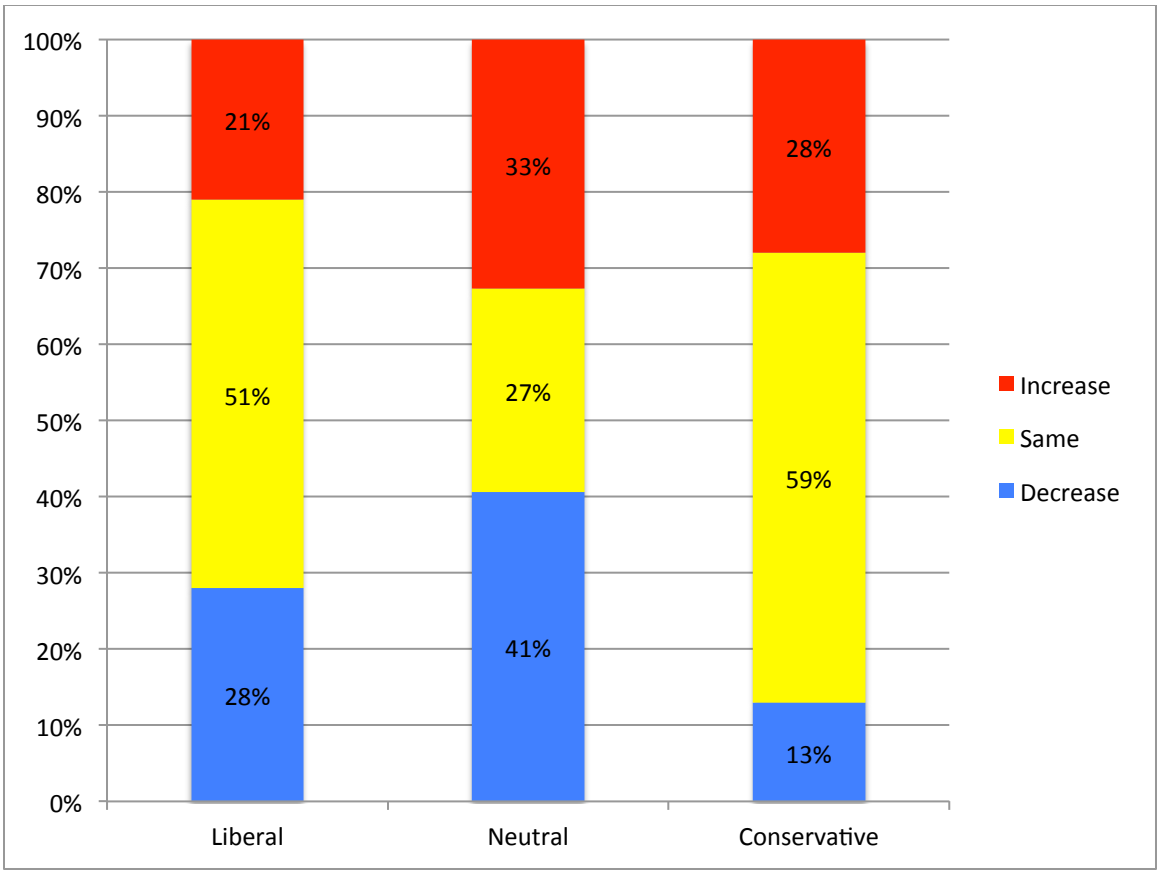
Our third item asked whether respondents favored measures to "raise taxes on the middle class as well as the wealthy." Since most Americans consider themselves middle class, OBOE participants presented with this option will likely assume they themselves would have to pay higher taxes. This might therefore be an unpopular option. This proposal may also divide public opinion by partisanship given candidate Obama's 2008 campaign promises to tax the most well-off and not the middle class. Democrats also more generally prefer a more progressive tax, while Republicans can be expected to be skeptical of any tax hikes.



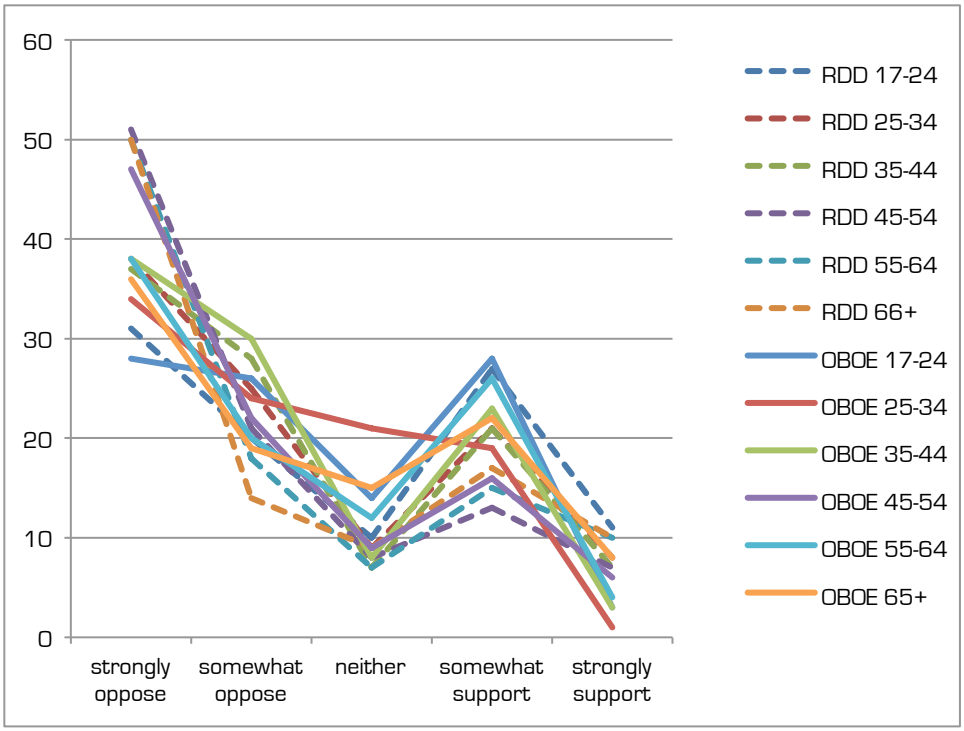
On this third option, OBOE participants were somewhat less opposed to this deficit reducing tax increase than the general population as measured by the random digit dial survey. One can say that OBOE participants were somewhat more polarized on this issue than the population survey respondents. OBOE conservatives were slightly more opposed to this tax increase than conservatives generally, and OBOE liberals were somewhat less opposed than liberals generally.

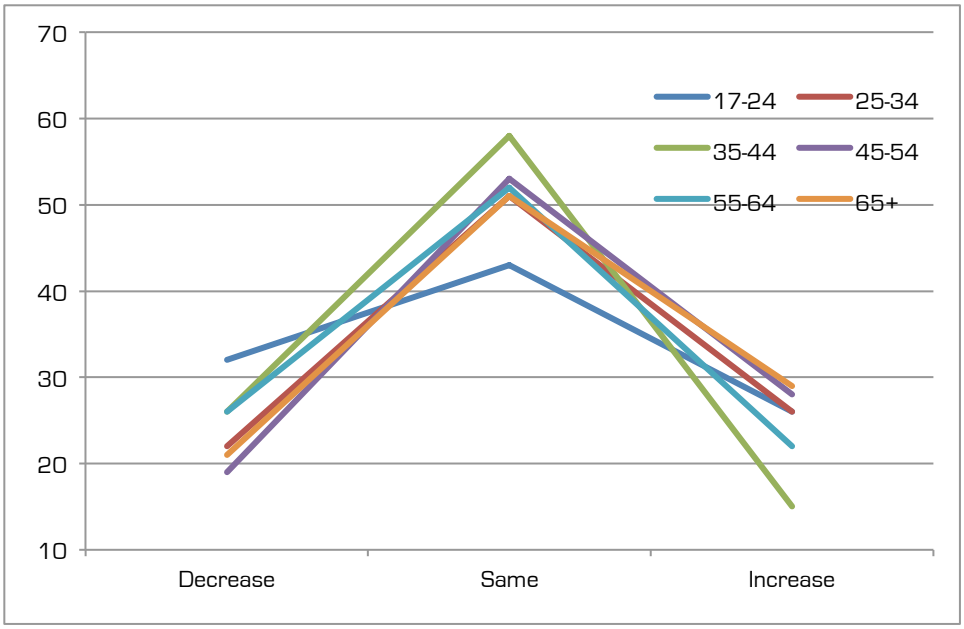


Interestingly, when broken down by political ideology, both liberal and conservative OBOE participants moderated their views on this position. Support for raising these taxes increased among conservatives, and decreased among liberals.



That move toward convergence may indicate that liberals and conservatives were swayed by the arguments of the other side (whereas if desire for deficit reduction were driving the results, all groups would have increased their support for this tax). For this item, we observed most opinion change among neutrals. Among those who were neutral on this question, more decreased their support for this tax (41%) than increased their support for it (33%). This reverses the shift among "neutrals" on the question of raising taxes on the very wealthy, in which twice as many neutrals (48%) increased support for the tax on the rich after deliberation as decreased their support.



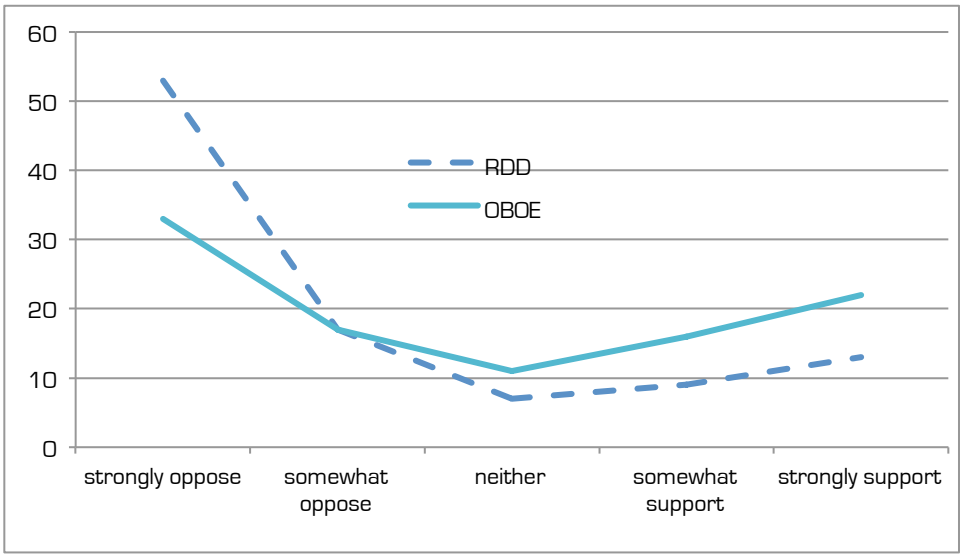


The above figure shows that all age groups tend to show strong opposition to broad-based taxes, and those who support this option tend not to be moderate in their support. Again, as the next figure shows, it was the youngest age group that showed the most change over the day, although the modal response was not to change one's opinion on the matter.

4d. Cut growth in cost of entitlement programs

The option of cutting spending on 'entitlement' programs like Social Security and Medicare has received a lot of political coverage over recent years. These programs were also discussed in some depth during the OBOE events. The popular perception, and the dominant message in current debates, is that these programs are in crisis. The materials provided for the deliberation also refer to "larger and larger imbalances" in the funding of Social Security over the coming decades. Participants were told that health care and Social Security, together, will account for nearly half of federal spending by 2025.

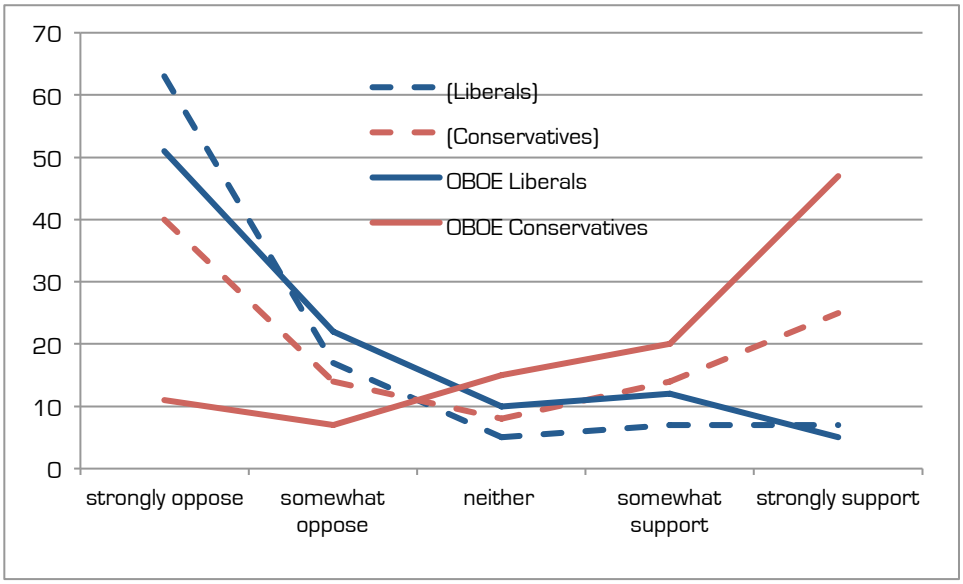
But if these fears are seen as exerting irresistible force for cutting these programs, it is also true that politicians who have tried to attack Social Security and Medicare have hit an immovable object. These programs are viewed as a universal benefit, one that people have "earned" by paying into. Threats to Social Security and Medicare have also been politically costly because older citizens are especially well organized and ready to exert electoral pressure. Overall, we may expect some partisan and age-based differences on this option. Not surprisingly, this is one option met with considerable controversy in the lead up to and wind down from OBOE.



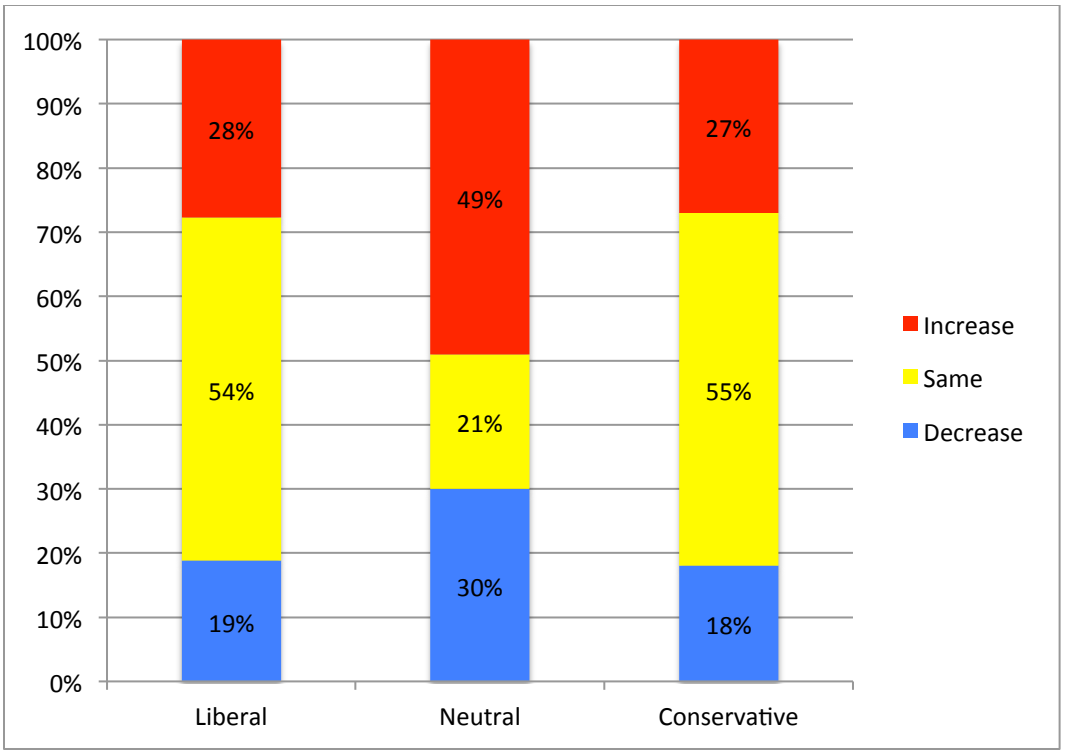
Our fourth policy question asks whether people supported cuts in the growth of the cost of entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare. (We emphasize that this item measured support for cuts in the *growth* in spending on these programs, not cuts to the programs.) On this item, OBOE participants were more supportive of this cut in growth compared to the general population survey.

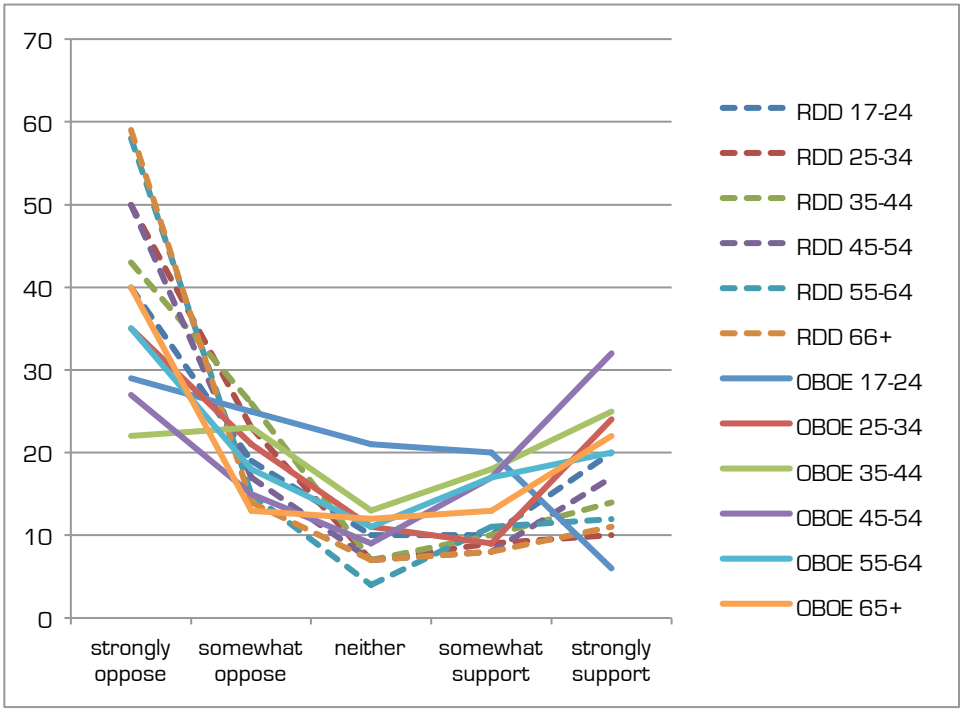
Viewed by political ideology, we see a somewhat different pattern of representation compared to the prior policy items. With regard to entitlement programs, the liberals who participated in OBOE are somewhat *less* liberal — that is they are a bit more supportive and less opposed, to

cutting the growth of entitlement programs than liberals generally (as revealed by our random digit dial survey). Conservatives who participated in OBOE, on the other hand, were considerably *more* supportive of such cuts in growth (and less strongly opposed) than conservatives generally.



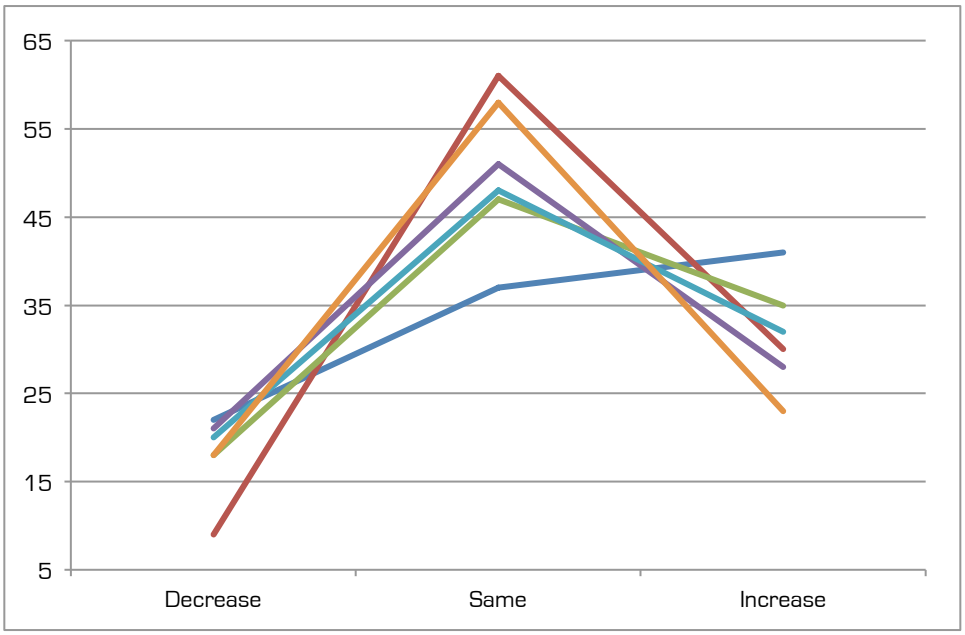
When we consider the effects of deliberation on this policy preference, liberal and conservative participants look remarkably similar in their opinion shifts: the majority did not alter their views over the course of the day, but a few more conservatives and liberals increased their support for cutting the growth in entitlement programs than decreased their support. Again, we see the greatest shift in the "neutrals" who began the day neither supporting nor opposing this cut in spending growth. Whereas only 20% of "neutrals" remained neutral, 50% became supportive of this cut and only 20% shifted to somewhat or strongly opposing such measures.





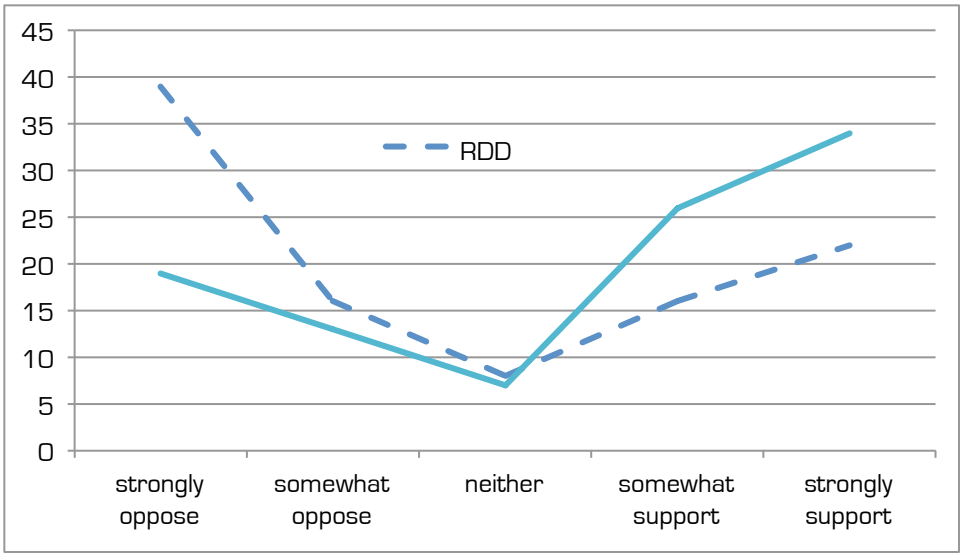
All age groups show considerable opposition to reducing the growth in costs for the entitlement programs. Although this question touches on retirement and old age security, there does not appear to be much generational disagreement on this matter, again with the exception of the

youngest participants, who show moderate support for this option. The younger group also appears to have been somewhat persuaded to favor this policy over the course of the day.

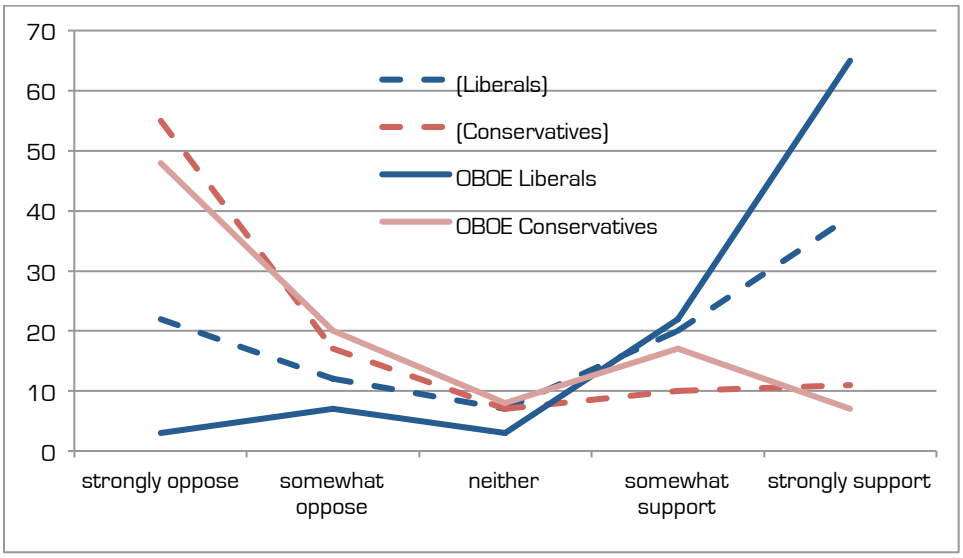


4e. Cut defense spending

Attitudes on the fifth option, cutting defense spending, might also be expected to follow partisan and ideological lines. In recent political history, this option is likely to tap into the experience of drawing down defense spending to historic lows during the Clinton years; the doubling down on defense during the Bush presidency in response to the 9/11 attacks; and the high salience of continued U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan during the 2008 election season. On this policy item, OBOE participants were much more supportive (and less opposed) to this measure than our random digit dial comparison group:

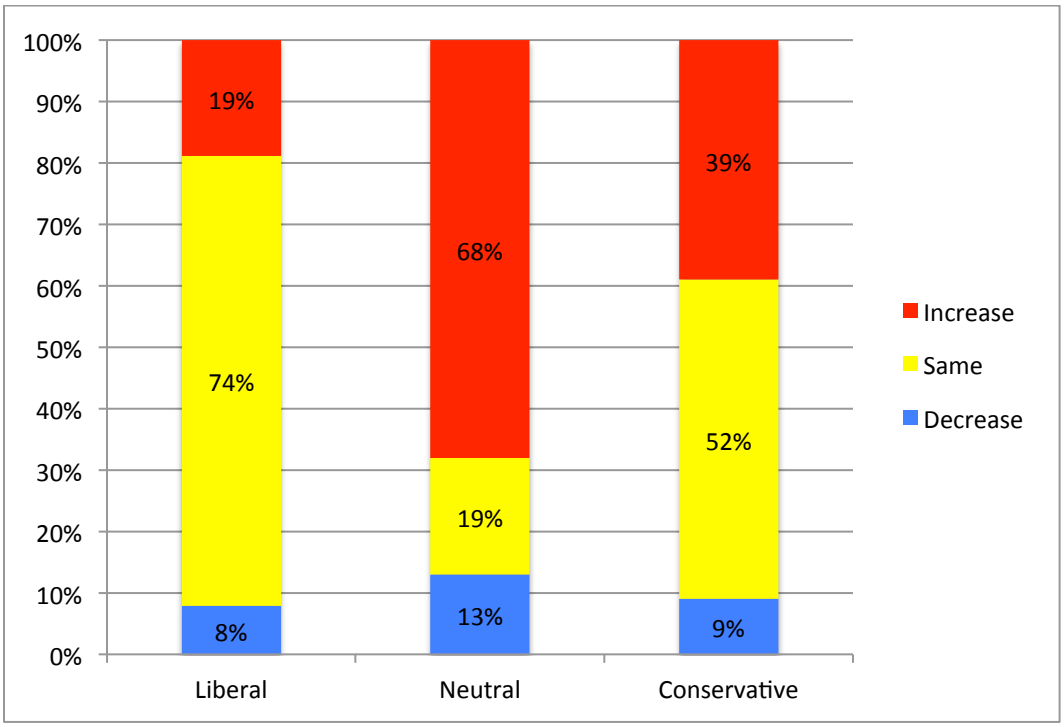


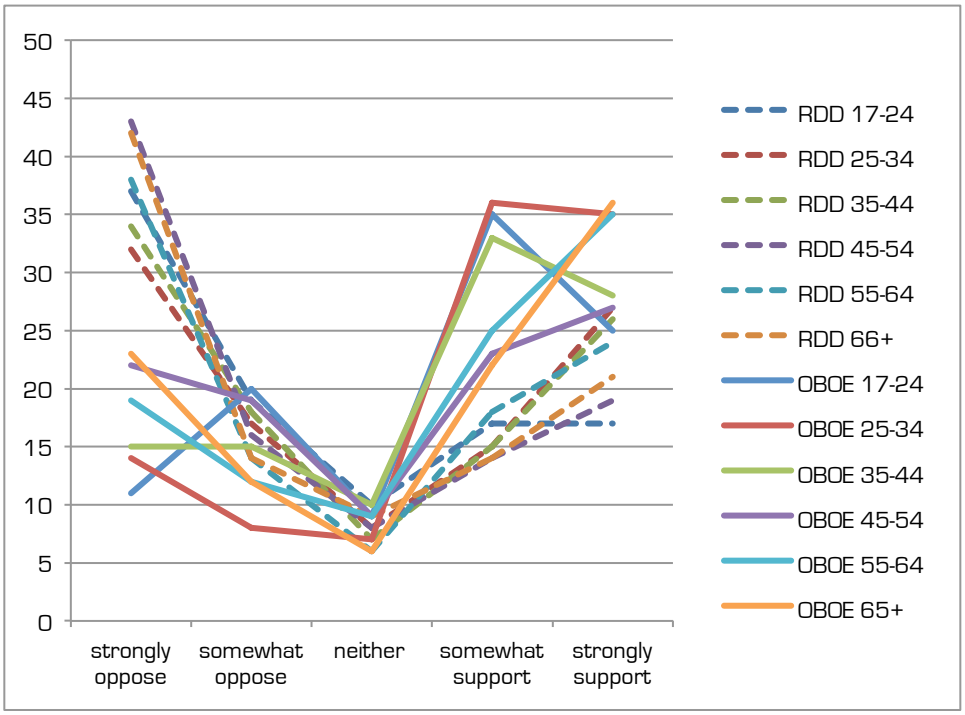
Disaggregated by political ideology, we see that the conservatives who participated in OBOE match conservatives generally in their support for defense spending on this question. However, liberals and moderates who participated in OBOE were more sympathetic to defense cuts as a budget reduction measure than liberals and moderates generally (views of moderates not depicted in figure below):



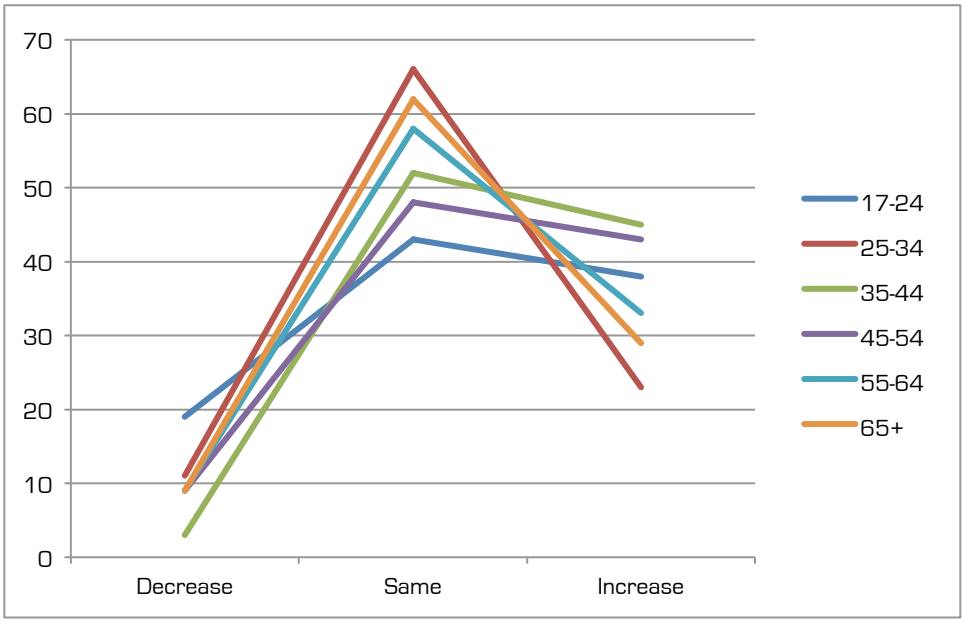
How did one day of deliberation affect participants' views? Liberals did not alter their positions very much; 75% did not change their views, and a few more increased support for defense cuts than decreased support. Conservatives as a group, however, became more willing to cut defense spending; 39% increased support for cutting defense whereas only 9% decreased support. Again, we see the largest change among those who began the day neutral on this issue.

68% of "neutrals" increased support for cutting defense, while only 13% of them decreased support.



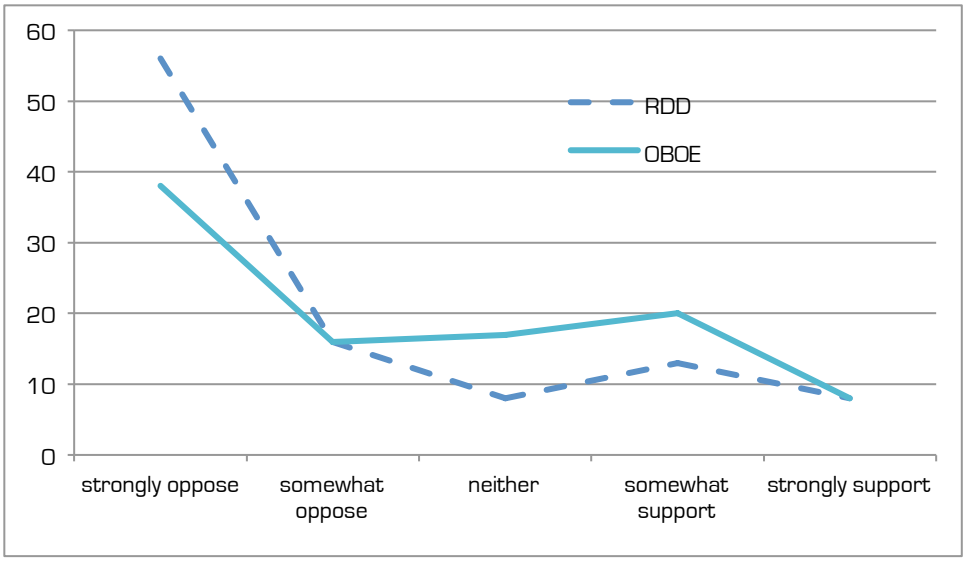


The different age groups appear to express similar preferences to each other on defense spending, typically having an opinion either to protect or to cut. The discussion appears to have persuaded the OBOE participants of all age groups to increase support for defense cuts, although less so for those in the 25-34 and the 65+ age range.

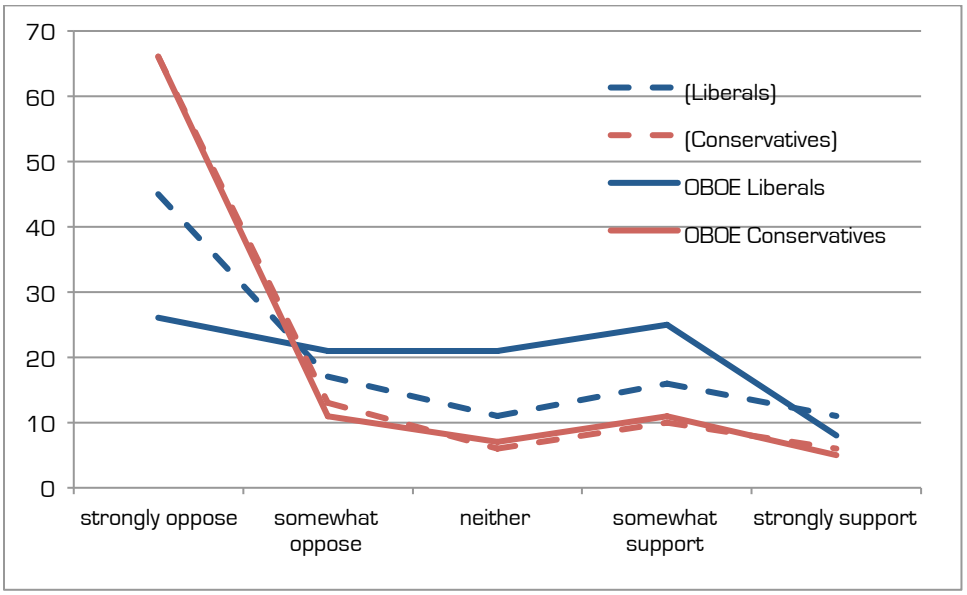


4f. A Federal Sales Tax

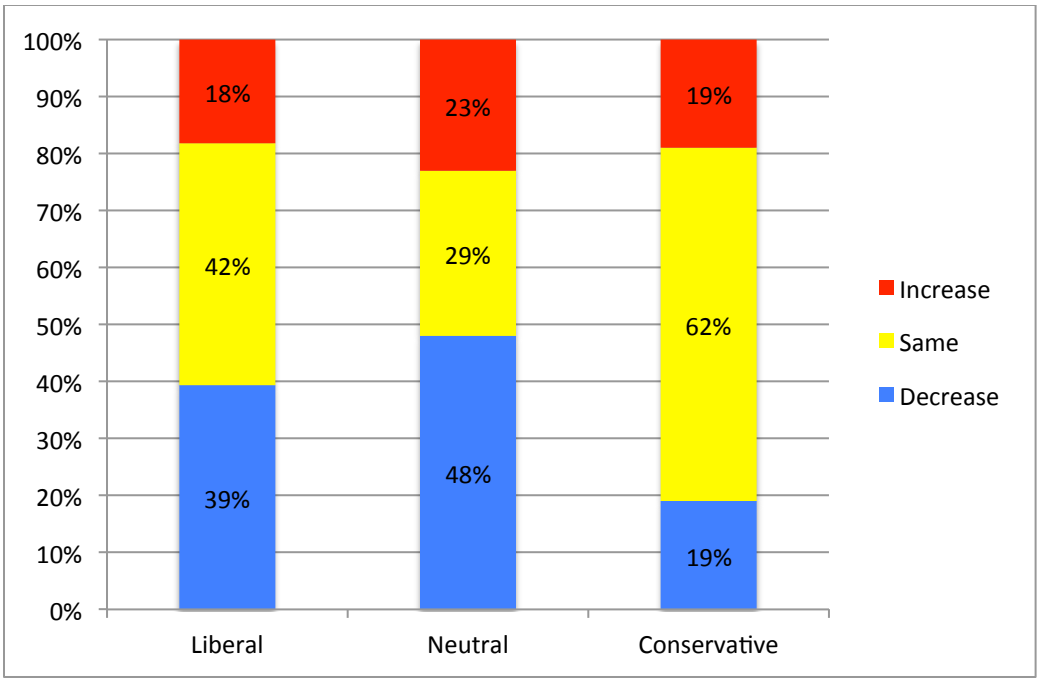
In our final policy item, we asked individuals whether they support creating "a new federal consumption tax, which would be like a federal sales tax that would be on top of any state and local sales tax." Unlike income tax increases, which fall more heavily on higher earners, this tax would apply to all Americans. Liberals and better-informed citizens may see sales taxes as regressive and imposing a higher burden on the poor. For their part, conservatives may worry about any new tax. This option may therefore suffer on both sides of the partisan divide. On this last policy option, OBOE participants resemble the RDD comparison group for the most part, but participants were slightly less opposed to this measure than the general public:

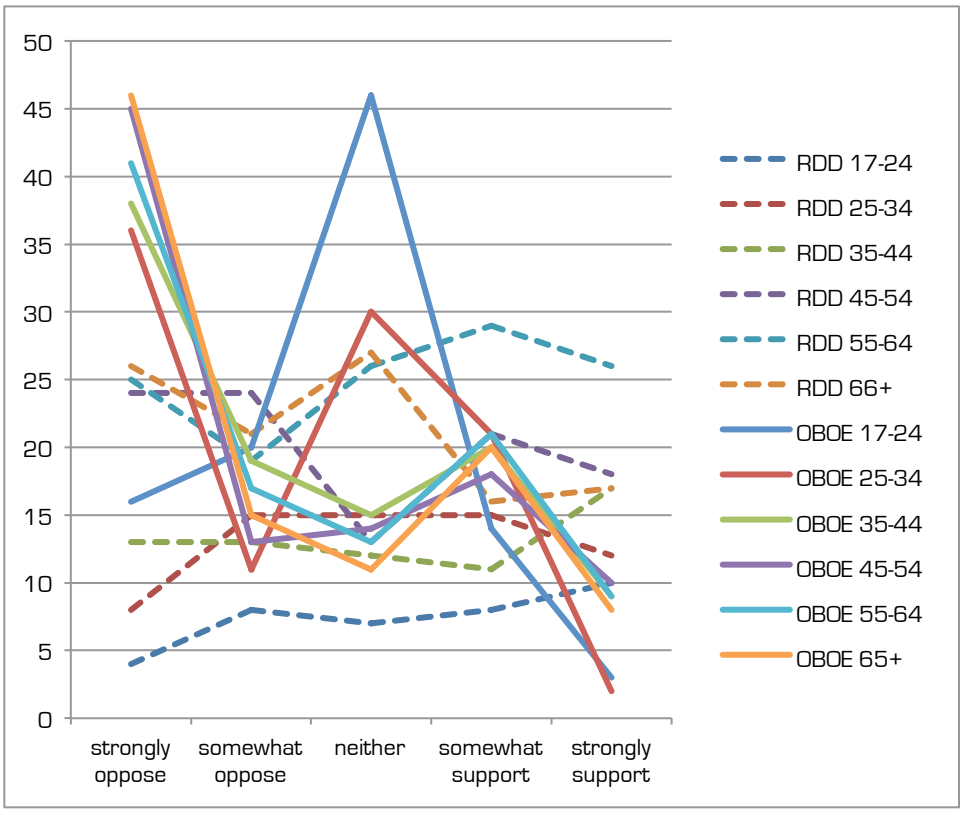


Viewed by political ideology, the attitudes of OBOE conservatives track those of conservatives generally almost exactly. OBOE liberals, however, were somewhat less opposed to a federal sales tax than liberals generally:

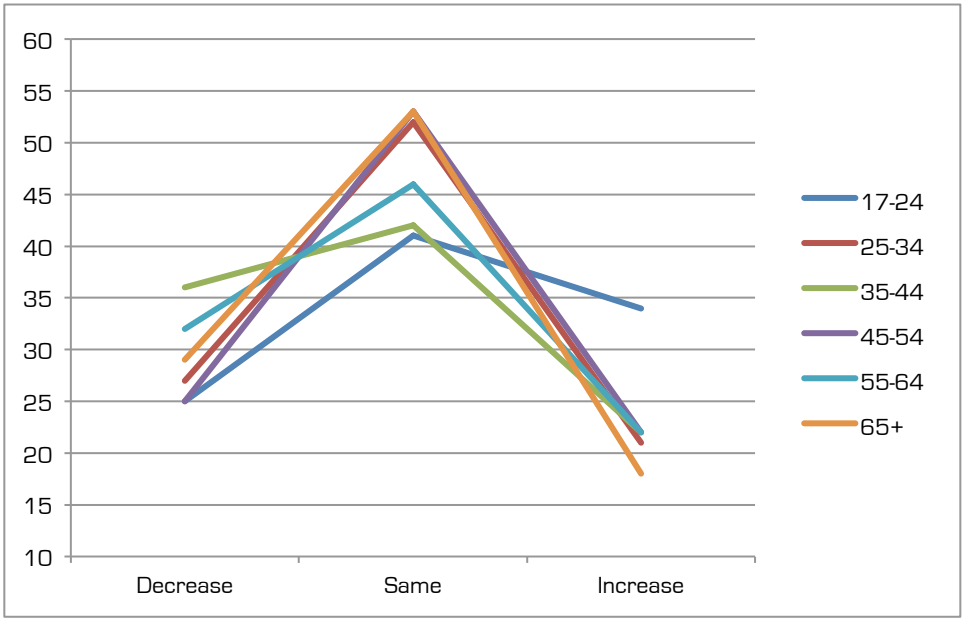


After a day of deliberation, 60% of conservatives did not alter their position, 20% increased support, but 20% decreased support. Liberals, on the other hand became more like conservatives in their opposition to a federal sales tax; while 20% of liberals increased their support for the tax, 40% decreased their support. We see a similarly large shift among "neutrals." Of those who began the day neutral on this question, 23% increased their support for this tax but almost half, 48%, decreased their support for a federal sales tax.





The OBOE younger participants are least likely to have an opinion on this new tax, and also appear to be most persuaded to favor it by the day long discussion.


60
55
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
Decrease
Same
Increase
17-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+

5. Table Options Package Analysis

In this analysis is we attempt to uncover the *structure* of the OBOE participants' preferences for policy change. In particular, we are interested in discovering the extent to which participants' preferences are structured by the traditional liberal-conservative ideology that dominates traditional forms of political decision making, or whether their preferences are more nuanced and complex. To discover the structure of participants' preferences, we use statistical factor analysis.

Table 2 – Policy options presented to table groups

Medicare and Medicaid	•Reduce spending by 5% •Reduce spending by 10% •Reduce spending by 15%
Social Security	•Raise age for receiving full benefits to 69 years of age •Limit increases in starting benefits for all but the lowest wage earners •Change the formula for raising benefits yearly to reflect a lower rate of inflation •Raise the 12.4% payroll tax gradually to 13.4% by 2025 •Raise the 12.4% payroll tax gradually to 14.4% by 2025 •Raise the limit on taxable earnings so it covers 90% of total earnings in America •Create personal savings accounts within the system •Make no changes
All Other Non-Defense	•Reduce overall spending in this category by 5% •Reduce overall spending in this category by 10% •Reduce overall spending in this category by 15% •Make no changes
Defense	•Reduce overall spending in this category by 5% •Reduce overall spending in this category by 10% •Reduce overall spending in this category by 15% •Make no changes
Raising Existing Taxes	•Raise personal income taxes by 10% for everyone •Raise personal income tax rates by 20% for everyone •Raise personal tax rates by 10% for everyone in the top two tax brackets •Raise personal tax rates by 20% for everyone in the top two tax brackets •Create an extra 5% tax for people earning more than $1 million a year •Raise the tax rate on capital gains and dividends •Raise the top corporate income tax rate to 40%, from 35% •Make no changes
Reduce Deductions and Credits	•Limit the value of itemized deductions to 28% •Convert the mortgage interest deduction into a credit •Limit the deduction for state and local taxes, real estate, personal property •Limit corporate depreciation for equipment •End the business deduction for domestic production •Make no changes

In the afternoon of the event, the participants were charged with putting together a package of policy options, tax increases and spending cuts, that would reach a goal of reducing the long term deficit by $1.2 trillion in 2025. The participants were to consider the options they preferred, but then they had to work with others at their table to find agreement on a package. The policy options presented to the participants of the AmericaSpeaks National Discussions cover a range of policy categories including healthcare, social security, non-defense, defense, raising existing taxes, reducing deductions and credits, reforming the tax code, and creating new taxes. There are a total of 42 policy options with 349 tables. The specific policy options given to the tables during the session are listed in Table 2.

Toward the end of the deliberative event, after they had the chance to discuss the options, and then agree on a specific package of spending cuts and tax increases to reach the $1.2 trillion target. Each table had a facilitator who entered the table packages into a laptop computer. Afterwards, participants were given the opportunity to vote for their own personal package (not necessarily the one agreed to by consensus processes at the table). Participants recorded their own package decisions using a keypad to respond to prompts displayed on a screen.[13]

To discover patterns in the table packages, we constructed a set of new variables that combine mutually exclusive choices into single variables. For example, participants were given the options to reduce health care spending by 5%, 10%, 15%, or no change, and each of these appears as separate variables in the dataset. If the tables were following the directions they would choose only one of these options. To account for this, we created a single new variable ("cuthealth") that equals 0 if they chose no changes, 1 if they chose 5%, 2 if they chose 10%, and 3 if they chose 15%. We did the same transformation for the other options that were mutually exclusive: all other nondefense ("cutnondef"), defense ("cutdef"), and reform the tax code ("reform"). As a statistical matter, the factor analysis could not yield results[14] if we included each of the raise existing taxes items and/or each of the reduce deductions and credits items. So instead of including these items separately, we simply included the variables indicating whether they chose not to raise taxes ("taxes8") and not to reduced deductions and credits ("dedcred6"). For the same reason, we only can include the subset of variables listed in table 3, which gives a summary of the variables we created for the factor analysis.

For both table data and the individual keypad data, we conducted principal components factor analysis (using tetrachoric and polychoric correlations to create the covariance matrix since there are ordinal variables) and in both cases recovered two factors. One can think of a “factor” as a package of choices that tend to go together. The results show that there are two different dimensions (“factors”) that account for these data. If people were choosing based on their (liberal v. conservative) ideology alone, then we would observe only one dimension; the liberal-conservative divide would determine the packages. In contrast, as we discuss below, we observe

[13] Participants used the same clicker throughout the day, and each clicker has a recorded identification number. The identification number, however, is not connected to the identities of participants, so we cannot link the clicker data up to our survey data that we report above.

[14] Technically, including these variables made the covariance matrix nonpositive definite, hence not invertable. The mathematical problem is exactly analogous to trying to divide a number by zero.

among individuals that their choices in responses to our survey questions on these options are highly structured by ideology. This shows that at the table level, the decision making among the options is more complex and nuanced, likely as a result of the discussion, compromise and voting required in group decision making.

Table 3. Variables Used in the Analysis

cuthealth	•0= Make no changes •1= Reduce spending by 5% •2= Reduce spending by 10% •3= Reduce spending by 15%
socsec1	•Raise age for receiving full benefits to 69 years of age (1=yes, 0=no)
cutnondef	•0= Make no changes •1=Reduce overall spending in this category by 5% •2= Reduce overall spending in this category by 10% •3= Reduce overall spending in this category by 15%
cutdef	•0= Make no changes •1= Reduce overall spending in this category by 5% •2= Reduce overall spending in this category by 10% •3= Reduce overall spending in this category by 15%
taxes8	•Make no changes that would raise existing taxes (1=yes, 0=no)
dedcred6	•Make no changes that would reduce existing deductions or credits (1=yes, 0=no)
reform	•0= Make no changes •1= Use 90% to lower tax rates and 10% to reduce deficit •2= Use 80% to lower tax rates and 20% to reduce deficit •3= Use 70% to lower tax rates and 30% to reduce deficit
newtax2	•Create a carbon tax (1=yes, 0=no)

The two dimensions are as follows:

> *Dimension 1: The "decrease spending factor."* This factor groups together several of the options related to spending cuts, but is largely unrelated to the options regarding tax increases. Participants' positions among the spending cut options were driven to a large extent by their ideological proclivities: those who favored raising the social security retirement age, cutting health care spending, and cutting entitlement spending were opposed to defense spending cuts, and vice versa. Along this dimension, participants who favored spending cuts were in favor of reforming the tax code and against the carbon tax, and again vice versa.

Dimension 2: The "increase revenue factor." This factor groups together the tax increase options, and again choices among the tax options showed ideological structure, where participants were either in favor of increasing existing taxes, reducing deductions, reforming the tax code and enacting a carbon tax, or against all of these options.

While these two dimensions show that the participants had preferences among the spending options and among the tax options that were ideologically structured, the analysis overall shows that OBOE participants did not link tax and spending options together in their table and keypad responses. This suggests that the OBOE package recommendations were not strongly structured by the traditional liberal-conservative ideological divide. This is in contrast to individual level choices, which we show below link the tax and spending options together on the first dimension.

To some extent, then, the solutions that the tables came up with tended to be loosely structured along traditional liberal and conservative divides. But the choices are more nuanced and do not fall strictly on what we think of as liberal and conservative divide. Importantly, each of these factors (spending and revenues) account for an equal amount of the variance in the data, meaning that each of these two factors were equally weighted in the OBOE participants' decisions.

We ran the same factor analysis for the individual-level data we collected in our post-discussion survey of the participants as well as for the RDD data.[15] These variables are described in Table 1 of section 4. In both cases, at this individual level, we also find two factors. On the first factor, we observe that the participants themselves had opinions that were highly structured by ideology, where some were strongly in favor of taxing the rich and cutting defense, and opposed to cutting entitlement and discretionary programs (and, ambivalent about taxing both rich and the middle class and about a new federal consumption tax), and some were just the opposite. On the second factor, participants were either in favor of both spending increases and tax cuts (i.e., working toward the common goal of deficit reduction using both spending and revenue changes) or against all of these options.

At the individual level, the first dimension, the ideological dimension, explained most of the variance, and hence received the greatest weight in individuals' decisions. This is in contrast to the table and keypad choices, which had a much more complex structure to their decision making, only loosely structured by ideology, which likely reflects the compromises and

[15] In the keypad data analysis for statistical reasons we had to omit all of the social security reform options except for raising the retirement age, and the options for a new VAT tax and a securities transaction tax. Including these variables in the analysis made the covariance matrix among the variables nonpositive definite, and the model could not solve.

discussion that went into the exercise, as well as the publicness (as opposed to the anonymity of the survey) of their choices.

6. Trust and Efficacy

In this section, we consider whether the OBOE events affected participants' attitudes relevant to their citizenship in a democracy.[16] In particular, we consider participants' sense of external and internal efficacy. External efficacy taps into participants views of how responsive the government is to their own views and opinions, and internal efficacy taps into their views of how equipped they are to participate in politics in an informed and effective manner. We also compare participants' feelings of efficacy to those in our random sample.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	39	24	7	17	12
OBOE PRE	**21**	**32**	**9**	**26**	**12**
OBOE POST	**24**	**38**	**9**	**22**	**7**

Question wording: "Elected officials in Washington, DC don't care what people like me think."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

We begin by noting that the OBOE participants have a relatively high sense of external efficacy, in the sense that they largely began the day with the belief that elected officials in DC care about what they think, when compared to the random sample. Comparing the pre and post surveys, however, participants seem to feel slightly less efficacious toward elected officials in DC. If we were to compare the percentage of those who either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement "Elected officials in Washington, DC don't care what people like me think," 53 percent of participants agree (38 percent disagree) in the pre-survey, but a total of 62 percent agree (29 percent disagree) in the post-survey. Among the RDD sample, 63 percent agree that officials do not care about what they think.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	33	20	4	23	19
OBOE PRE	**14**	**26**	**7**	**32**	**21**
OBOE POST	**15**	**30**	**8**	**30**	**17**

Question wording: "People like me don't have any say about what the state's government does."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

[16] Again, we only compare pre and post responses among those who completed both surveys.

OBOE participants also have a stronger sense of external efficacy vis a vis their state government compared to the RDD sample. At the beginning of the event, 40 percent agreed that they do not have a say in state politics, compared to 53 percent in the RDD sample. Comparing the pre and post surveys, participants again seem to have become less efficacious regarding state of government. If we were to compare the percentage of those who either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement "People like me don't have any say about what the state's government does," 40 percent of participants agree (53 percent disagree) in the pre-survey, but a total of 45 percent agree (47 percent disagree) in the post-survey. While the shift in opinion between pre and post surveys is less pronounced that the previous question, there is a slight change overall in participants becoming less efficacious in this sense.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	45	25	7	17	6
OBOE PRE	**35**	**31**	**17**	**13**	**3**
OBOE POST	**35**	**32**	**16**	**15**	**2**

Question wording: "Trust the government in Washington to do what is right."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

While the participants have higher levels of external efficacy than the RDD sample, surprisingly they also report substantially lower levels of trust in government officials. This suggests that OBOE participants feel especially that accountability is required for democratic government to work well, to the extent they can influence the process. The event itself appears not to have affected participants' views, at least in the aggregate.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	31	28	8	17	17
OBOE PRE	**47**	**34**	**11**	**6**	**3**
OBOE POST	**57**	**32**	**7**	**4**	**1**

Question wording: "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

Moving on to measures of internal efficacy, most participants in the AmericaSpeaks event indicated that they feel well-qualified to participate in politics, and show far higher levels of internal efficacy compared to the RDD sample. Comparing the pre and post-survey, there is an increase in the number of participants indicating they strongly agreed with the statement "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics." It seems that participating in the event made them feel even more well-qualified, or more internally efficacious in this sense. This is in

contrast to external efficacy, where participants tended to report slightly lower levels of efficacy in the aggregate at the end of the day.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	40	36	5	12	7
OBOE PRE	**50**	**33**	**6**	**8**	**3**
OBOE POST	**58**	**31**	**5**	**5**	**1**

Question wording: "I think I am as well informed about politics and government as most people."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

Again, the participants tend to believe they are well-informed about politics compared to the representative samples. In addition, participants sense of being informed seemed to improve slightly by the end of the event. Overall, it appears that the events helped improve participants' sense of internal efficacy, that is, their own capacity for participating in politics effectively, but may have reduced their sense of external efficacy.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	58	24	5	6	6
OBOE PRE	**61**	**21**	**7**	**6**	**6**
OBOE POST	**61**	**24**	**7**	**6**	**3**

Question wording: "Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed." (all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

Finally, we consider whether the event had an effect on the purpose of democratic government, in particular, on whether the government should have an active role in promoting equality among citizens. The participants in the events began the day with a very similar set of beliefs about the need to promote equal opportunity as the RDD sample, and the event appears to have had little effect on these beliefs.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
RDD	23	17	7	18	35
OBOE PRE	**11**	**12**	**11**	**13**	**53**
OBOE POST	**12**	**13**	**10**	**13**	**51**

Question wording: "We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country ."
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

In contrast, OBOE participants had somewhat stronger views that we have not gone far enough to promote equal rights in this country, compared to the RDD sample. Comparing the pre and post-survey responses, the event itself appears to not have changed this distribution of opinion.

7. Participants' Assessments of Our Budget, Our Economy

Participants were asked in the post-event survey to evaluate the event, the exercise in deliberative politics, itself. Results of these survey questions are presented below.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am more informed about the challenges and options for cutting the federal budget deficit	4	3	7	38	47
People at this meeting listened to one another respectfully and courteously.	1	2	1	24	73
Other participants seemed to hear and understand my views.	1	2	4	38	55
The meeting today was fair and unbiased. No particular view was favored.	8	11	8	24	49
Even when I disagreed, most people made reasonable points and tried to make serious arguments.	1	3	5	36	56
Everyone had a real opportunity to speak today. No one was shut out and no one dominated discussions.	1	3	3	22	71
Participating today was part of my civic duty as an American to speak out and be heard on this issue.	1	1	4	18	75
I personally changed my views on the budget deficit as a result of what I learned today.	19	15	20	37	10
I personally agree with the voting results at the conclusion of today's meeting.	7	14	17	45	17
Decision makers should incorporate the conclusions of this town meeting into federal budget policy.	5	5	9	35	46
I had fun today. Politics should be like this more often.	1	2	9	32	55
I would participate in an event like this one again.	1	2	5	23	69

Participants evaluations of Our Budget, Our Economy
(all numbers in cells indicate percentages; row percentages sum to 100%)

Large majorities of OBOE event participants had positive evaluations of their experience with deliberation on fiscal matters. Notably, 85 percent of the participants felt more informed about the challenges and options for cutting the federal budget deficit, 97 percent believed all

participants listened to one another respectfully and courteously, and 93 percent felt that other participants seemed to hear and understand their views.

Perceived fairness of the OBOE event was also high, with 73 percent of participants believed the event was fair and unbiased and that no particular view was favored. Participant evaluations suggest the learning from the exercise in deliberation had a positive effect on changing individuals' views on the budget deficit. Forty-seven percent of participants agreed that they personally changed their views on the budget deficit, while 34 percent disagreed, and 20 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Participant evaluations of the quality of the OBOE event reveal a positive assessment of the deliberative experience. Eighty-seven percent of participants had fun at the event, and 92 percent would participate in a similar event in the future. Furthermore, 81 percent agreed decision makers ought to incorporate the conclusions of the event into federal budget policy.

The twelve items that measure OBOE participants' perceptions of the events, each in their own way, measure participants' perceptions of the deliberative quality of the event. In this sense, one can think of participants' perceptions of the deliberative quality as inducing their response on all twelve of these items. We again use principal components factor analysis to uncover this underlying dimension of Perceived Deliberative Quality (the PDQ score). This factor analysis uncovers a single dimension for PDQ, which then can serve as a summary measure of the quality of the discussions and of the event from the participant's viewpoint.

Using this summary measure, we find no statistically significant differences in the average PDQ score between liberals, moderates, or conservatives, or among the age categories. In addition, we find that PDQ score is not related to the percent liberal, moderate or conservative participants that happened to be seated at one's table (seat assignments were done at random, so the composition of tables varied dramatically). Again, this was true for liberals, moderates and conservatives alike. For example, liberals did not report their experiences at the event as either higher or lower quality (higher or lower PDQ score) as the percent of conservatives at table increased, nor did conservatives report more or less PDQ as percent of liberals at table increased. This suggests that table-level conversations were constructive, even when they were done across the ideological divide.

One possible reason for constructive across-table exchanges is the format of the discussion. AmericaSpeaks seated a "table facilitator" at each table, who was charged with ensuring the discussion was balanced, and that everyone could speak. Our survey included a short battery of items measuring how helpful participants felt the table facilitators were. We found that 96 percent felt that the facilitator were helpful keeping the table on task and to follow the discussions; 97 percent felt they were helpful at making sure everyone was heard at table; and 96 percent felt they were helpful at remaining neutral and not expressing his or her opinion

during the discussion. Overall, the table facilitators appeared to do a very good job ensuring constructive across-table discussions.

The field evaluations of the event indicate that the majority of participants were actively engaged throughout the OBOE discussion. There was some doubt however as to how much participants were influencing each other and changing each others' minds, as well as concern that many participants were not using fact based arguments, but relied on opinion. There seems to have been a small minority of participants that grew frustrated, complained, and used negativity in the discussions, although the summaries from the RA reports indicate most looked favorably on their experience. Many RAs noticed differences between the deliberative quality, as some pointed to age being a factor that hampered the discussion for the elderly. While there were sporadic protests outside of a few of the sites, and some participants seemed to be part of a group with a specific policy goal in mind (some brought handouts and fliers), the OBOE discussion and deliberation seemed to run relatively smoothly at each site.

8. What Difference Did Deliberation Make? Preliminary Interpretations

Overall, the OBOE event appears to have achieved its goals of bringing together a diverse group of ordinary Americans to engage each other in constructive discussion. Both liberals and conservatives appear to have moderated in their policy views regarding spending cuts and tax increases. And the organizers appear to have been quite successful in creating a forum for open and balanced discussion, based on the self-reports of participants as well as the extensive observation by our 19 on-site research assistants.

We find the tendency for both liberals and conservatives to moderate their positions to be quite encouraging. Indeed, the shifts in views of our three groups — liberals, conservatives, and neutrals — on our six policy items offers a rich field of interrogation. In a highly preliminary way, we can interpret these shifts as exhibiting five distinct patterns.

First, participants in the aggregate began and ended with quite progressive policy views on the whole — they want to tax the rich, they don't want to raise taxes on the middle class. They are opposed to cutting social security[17] and they want to cut defense. (However, they also supported cutting spending on health care and discretionary spending.) These attitudes are revealed not just in our data, but in the keypad polling results that have been reported by AmericaSpeaks (available at http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/). At the aggregate level, there are

[17] Although we don't ask about cuts to the program in our survey, OBOE participants had the opportunity to express their views on cutting social security (not cutting growth) in the keypad polling at the event.

small changes on some items and very little change on others. However, very clear and striking changes emerge when we examine our three subgroups.

Second, a strong force at work in these group changes may be *moderation* toward the entire group's *common objective of reducing the deficit*. The broad frame and task given to all participants was to reduce the deficit; it was a goal they had in common. On different policy items, liberals and conservatives seem to have given ground on their specific priorities in order to help achieve this goal over the course of deliberation. For example, conservatives became more supportive of raising taxes on the very wealthy (liberals began with high levels of support for this measure and didn't change much). To a similar degree, liberals became more supportive of a 5% across the board cut to discretionary programs after one day of deliberation.

Third, there are some measures in which liberal, conservatives, and neutrals all shift their views in similar ways to reach the common goal of deficit reduction. This pattern is most clear on the question of defense spending. After a day of deliberation, all three groups shifted — with conservatives and neutrals shifting very strongly (liberals already strongly supported this measure) — toward supporting cuts in national defense and military spending. Similarly, liberals, conservatives, and neutrals all became more supportive of cutting the spending growth of entitlement programs after deliberation.

Fourth, it is important to note that deficit reduction did not take priority on every policy item. On some questions, other values seem to have trumped concern for reducing the deficit. On the question of broad tax increases — on the middle class as well as the rich — we see a pattern of moderation that does not favor deficit reduction. Conservatives *increase* their support for this measure, but liberals and especially the neutrals — perhaps from concerns for distributive justice — decrease their support for broad tax increases after deliberation. Similarly, both liberals and neutrals shifted strongly to opposing a federal sales tax (conservatives were already opposed) after deliberation, again perhaps out of a concern for distributive justice.

Fifth, we find in our analysis of table-level options packages that decision making for the recommendations was not strongly ideological in structure. The OBOE participants were nearly unanimous that the discussion at the events was constructive and engaging, and we find that this assessment was the same even for those who were seated at tables with citizens that were very different from themselves. The lack of ideological structure in the table packages strongly suggests that the packages were the result of creative and compromise processes at each table.

We do find that individuals, when responding individually to our survey, tend to have preferences that are highly structured by ideology. This suggests very strongly the difference between survey responses and a structured public deliberation. When asked to discuss policies with their fellow citizens, participants tended to set aside their ideological commitments to work toward the common goal of fiscal responsibility. If one were to rely exclusively on individual survey responses to gauge public opinion, one would be misled to believe that our society can

only consider policy options through a rigid ideological lens. But public opinion surveys have their limits in helping us understand the structure of public opinion. Public deliberation helps to reveal the *considered* opinions of citizens, a kind of opinion policy makers should care about as well.

More generally, we take it as a sad comment on society that apparently so few seem to believe it possible to construct a balanced forum for open discussion, from left to right bloggers to esteemed political scientists. In today's polarized political discourse, we might well expect to observe such cynicism from liberal and conservative bloggers. We would hope that concerned citizens of all stripes could maintain an open mind regarding the possibility that diverse Americans can come together to discuss policy constructively with each other. Indeed, at the end of the day, participants at the town halls had the chance to choose a single most important message to politicians. The vast majority of participants indicated they wanted politicians to set aside partisan bickering in favor of finding solutions to America's problems. This sounds like good advice to us.