

Trends in National Spending Priorities, 1973-2000

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January, 2001

Coming off the most closely divided election in American history, the new administration and Congress face a considerable challenge in forging and implementing a public agenda and legislative program. As the President and Congress work on budget proposals and frame policy initiatives, they may wish to know what the American people think governmental spending priorities should be.

Since 1973 the General Social Surveys (GSSs) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago have asked people whether government spending in various areas from health to foreign aid is too much, too little, or about right. Table 1 presents the spending preferences of the American public for all areas across all years. (The question wording is given in Table 1 and details on the GSSs appear in the Technical Appendix.)

Eleven spending topics have been covered in the 22 GSSs between 1973 and 2000 and 20 spending areas have been included in each GSS since 1984.

To help distill this crunch of numbers, public support for spending is summarized in net spending scores. Net spending is the % saying that "too little" is being spent minus the % saying "too much" is being spent. For example, in 2000 62.9% said that "too little" was spent on the environment and 8.5% said "too much" was spent for a net spending score of +54.4 (i.e. $62.9\% - 8.5 = +54.4$ percentage points). If everyone favored more spending for an area, the maximum net spending score would be +100.0 and if everyone wanted less spending, the net spending score would -100.0. Positive scores indicate that more people want to increase spending than to decrease it and negative scores mean that cutters outnumber the adders.

Current Priorities:

For the first time since 1991 Health has topped the list as the spending area that people most want to see the government spend more funds on (Rankings in 1973-2000 for the list of 11 areas are in Table 2 and rankings for 1984-2000 for the fuller list of 20 areas are in Table 3). Health

had fallen to fourth place in 1994 with a net spending score of +55.0, but has steadily regained popularity since then to a recorded high of +68.9 and first-place finish in 2000.

Education finished second in 2000, slipping from its first-place positions in 1996 and 1998. In absolute terms support for educational spending has been very high and changed little since 1989 (with net spending scores ranging from +66.2 to +71.5). Its drop in rank results from the strong gains in support for Health rather than any absolute decline in the public's backing of Education.

Together Health and Education distinguish themselves from the other areas as consistently being among the most favored programs during the last decade. In seven surveys since 1990 Health topped the list twice and Education finished first three times. Moreover, they both are well ahead of the next group of spending areas this year.

Next, comes five very closely grouped areas, Social Security 3rd at +55.2, Halting Crime 4th at +55.1, the Environment 5th at +54.4, Dealing with Drug Addiction 6th at +53.3, and Assisting the Poor 7th at +52.8. The differences between these closely clustered topics are so small as to be of little practical importance.

Social Security has gained major ground in recent years rising from 10th place in 1993 and 1994 to 9th in 1996, 5th in 1998, and 3rd in 2000. Its 3rd place finish and net spending score of +55.2 are the highest it has ever achieved.

Halting Crime was the perennial top choice from 1974 to 1988 and even regained first place in 1993 and 1994. But since 1994 net spending dropped from +71.4 to +55.1, the lowest support for Halting Crime ever recorded.

Support for environmental spending rose from +35.8 in 1980 to +70.4 and a first-place rank in 1989. But then backing of the Environment declined to +51.3 and a 7th place position in 1993. Since then the Environment has nudged upwards in its net spending score and its relative rank.

Dealing with Drug Addiction hit its recorded high of +66.8 and ranked 2nd in 1988, but slid back to a 7th place position with +57.7 by 1990. Its absolute score and relative ranks have changed little since then.

Assistance to the Poor has rebounded from a 10th place showing in 1996, but in both rank and absolute score remains below its more favored situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Law Enforcement is in 8th place with a score of +43.9. Support for spending on Law Enforcement has always trailed support for Halting Crime because people are attracted to the results-oriented action promised in the latter area. Like Support for Halting Crime, support for Law Enforcement this year is at its lowest, measured level.

Drug Rehabilitation comes in 9th place with a score of +43.6. Support for spending on Drug Rehabilitation has always been lower than support for Dealing with Drug Addiction since it emphasizes only the medical approach for solving the drug problem. Its net spending score has changed little since 1993.

In 10th place at the bottom of the top half of spending priorities comes Solving the Problems of Big Cities with a score of +39.5. In both rank and absolute score support for Solving the Problems of Big Cities has fallen since the mid-1990s.

Mass Transportation at 11th place with a score of +31.5 is at its highest position since spending preference towards it have first been measured in 1984.

Parks and Recreation is in 12th place with a score of +31.1. Parks and Recreation has usually finished it 12th position over the years, but its score of +31.5 is the highest it has ever achieved.

In 13th place comes Highways and Bridges with a score of +22.7. In both rank and absolute score this is the lowest that Highways and Bridges has ever been.

In 14th and 15th place are two items on government programs for African Americans. Support for Improving the Condition of Blacks is at +21.5 and for the less results promising Assistance to Blacks support stands at +9.3. Both have gained some ground from low points in the 1990s.

Defense is in 16th place and is the first topic to show a negative net spending score (-1.1). While low on the priority list and still in the negatives, support has risen appreciably in recent years from a low of -33.4 in 1993. In rank and absolute score this year represents Defense's best showing since 1982.

In 17th place comes Assistance to Big Cities at -3.9. It finishes much worse than Solving the Problems of Big Cities because it does not promise positive results. It has shown little change in its rank or absolute score over the years and it is one of only four areas that has always had negative scores.

Welfare in 18th place with a score of -18.6 has regained considerable ground from a near record low of -49.3 in 1994. (Its low point was -49.6 in 1977). Welfare has always been favored much less than Assistance to the Poor. People like the idea of the government helping those with low-incomes, but consider Welfare a failed program. Part of the rise in support for Welfare reflects a positive response to the welfare reforms of the mid-1990s.

In 19th place is Space with a score of -28.3. Space has always finished in 17th-19th place. While its absolute score is up from -44.5 in 1993, its rank fell this year when Welfare moved ahead of it.

In last place in this and every year comes Foreign Aid with a score of -50.2. This is by far Foreign Aid's best score, up from -70 to -72 in the early and mid-1990s, but still leaves it solidly in 20th place.

Overall Spending Trends:

Support for overall spending (i.e. the average net spending across areas) has always been positive with more people favoring increases than cuts (Table 4). Looking at the 11-items that can be tracked from 1973 to 2000, support declined in the early 1970s to low points in 1976-78 (+11).

The public then generally increased its overall support for spending over the next dozen years to highs of +24-25 in 1988-90. Then overall spending once again slipped to a moderate level of +16.8 in 1994 before rising again to a near record high of +23.7 in 2000.

Support for domestic social spending (average net spending for Health, Education, Welfare, Solving the Problems of Big Cities, and Improving the Condition of Blacks) has also always been in the pluses. It fell from an early high of +29.2 in 1974 to a low of +13-14 in 1977-78. Support then generally moved up to a record high of +39.9 in 1990. Support then slipped to +26.4 in 1994 and since then steadily rose to +35.5 in 2000.

Conclusion:

Despite a dislike of taxes (e.g. in 2000 64% said their own federal income tax was too high), more people have always favored increases in spending than cuts. In 2000, as in most years since the 1970s, people have backed more spending in three-quarters of the areas and less spending in only the bottom quarter. Moreover, the number of areas with positive net spending scores not only outnumber areas with negative scores, but are also larger. In 2000, the largest negative score (-50.2 for Foreign Aid) was bested by seven positive scores (Health +68.9, Education +66.4, Social Security +55.2, Halting Crime +55.1, the Environment +54.4, Dealing with Drug Addiction +53.3, and Assistance to the Poor +52.8).

The level of support has however waxed and waned over the decades and now is showing an upswing with overall spending scores approaching the record levels of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Currently Health and Education are clearly the public's top two spending priorities with very high scores (+66-69) that are above even other very popular areas like Social Security, Crime, the Environment, Dealing with Drugs, and Assistance to the Poor (+53-55). The public is united behind the idea that Health and Education should be the top governmental spending priorities.

Table 1
Trends in National Spending Priorities, 1973-2000

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First, (READ ITEM A)... are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on (ITEM)?

- A. Space Exploration Program/Space Exploration^a
- B. Improving and Protecting the Environment/The Environment
- C. Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health/Health
- D1. Solving the Problems of the Big Cities
- D2. Assistance to Big Cities
- E1. Halting the Rising Crime Rate
- E2. Law Enforcement
- F1. Dealing with Drug Addiction
- F2. Drug Rehabilitation
- G. Improving the Nation's Education System/Education
- H1. Improving the Condition of Blacks
- H2. Assistance to Blacks
- I. The Military, Armaments, and Defense/National Defense
- J. Foreign Aid/Assistance to Other Countries
- K1. Welfare
- K2. Assistance to the Poor
- L. Highways and Bridges
- M. Social Security
- N. Mass Transportation
- O. Parks and Recreation
- P. Assistance for Childcare

^aFor explanation of the dual headings see Technical Appendix.

A. Space Exploration Program/Space Exploration

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	7.5	7.9	8.0	9.0	10.8	12.2	19.7	13.6
About right	31.1	29.2	32.2	29.4	37.3	37.9	37.7	44.5
Too much	61.4	62.9	59.8	60.8	51.9	49.9	42.6	41.9

Net (TL - TM)	-53.9	-55.0	-51.8	-51.8	-41.1	-37.7	-22.9	-28.3
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	14.8	12.1	11.5	10.8	16.9	20.3	16.1	11.4
About right	43.1	43.8	45.7	48.3	43.5	42.6	46.3	46.8
Too much	42.1	44.2	42.8	40.9	39.6	37.1	37.7	41.8
Net (TL - TM)	-27.3	-32.1	-31.3	-30.1	-22.7	-16.8	-21.6	-30.4
	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000		
Too little	12.9	7.9	9.5	12.7	11.5	14.9		
About right	48.3	39.7	41.6	44.6	46.9	41.9		
Too much	38.8	52.4	48.9	42.7	41.6	43.2		
Net (TL - TM)	-25.9	-44.5	-39.4	-30.0	-30.1	-28.3		

B. Improving and Protecting the Environment/The Environment

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	64.6	63.7	57.9	58.6	52.1	55.0	51.9	54.4
About right	27.6	27.9	32.2	32.0	36.3	34.7	32.0	33.4
Too much	7.7	8.3	9.9	9.4	11.6	10.3	16.1	12.2
Net (TL - TM)	+56.9	+55.4	+48.0	+49.2	+40.5	+44.7	+35.8	+42.2
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	58.1	60.4	62.4	62.4	66.5	68.1	75.0	75.0
About right	32.5	32.4	29.6	31.3	27.4	27.4	20.4	21.2
Too much	9.4	7.1	8.0	6.3	6.1	4.6	4.6	3.8
Net (TL - TM)	+48.7	+53.3	+54.4	+56.1	+60.4	+63.5	+70.4	+71.2
	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000		
Too little	71.8	60.5	62.7	62.0	64.7	62.9		
About right	23.2	30.2	28.2	27.7	27.5	28.6		
Too much	5.0	9.2	9.0	10.3	7.8	8.5		
Net (TL - TM)	+66.8	+51.3	+53.7	+51.7	+56.9	+54.4		

C. Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health/Health

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	63.4	66.9	65.6	63.0	59.2	57.2	57.9	59.3
About right	31.8	28.8	29.1	32.4	34.0	35.9	34.3	33.8
Too much	4.8	4.3	5.4	4.6	6.8	6.9	7.8	6.9
Net (TL - TM)	+58.6	+62.6	+60.2	+58.4	+52.4	+50.3	+50.1	+52.4
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	59.5	58.8	57.8	60.6	68.5	70.2	70.4	72.2
About right	34.7	33.4	34.5	34.1	25.3	25.5	25.0	24.1
Too much	6.9	5.8	7.8	7.7	5.5	6.1	4.6	3.7
Net (TL - TM)	+52.6	+53.0	+50.0	+52.9	+63.0	+64.1	+65.8	+68.5
	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000		
Too little	70.7	73.2	66.0	65.6	69.6	72.6		
About right	26.0	16.2	23.0	24.9	23.5	23.7		
Too much	3.3	10.7	11.0	9.4	6.9	3.7		
Net (TL - TM)	+67.4	+62.5	+55.0	+56.2	+62.7	+68.9		

D1. Solving the Problems of the Big Cities

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	55.4	58.6	56.5	48.0	47.7	45.0	45.9	49.8
About right	31.0	29.0	29.5	29.9	29.6	33.6	29.5	26.9
Too much	13.7	12.3	14.0	22.0	22.7	21.5	24.6	23.4
Net (TL - TM)	+41.7	+46.3	+42.5	+26.0	+25.0	+23.5	+21.3	+26.4
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	47.3	51.9	43.3	49.2	44.4	54.7	53.1	59.0
About right	34.5	33.3	38.0	33.3	39.2	34.4	34.0	30.4
Too much	18.3	14.7	18.8	17.5	16.4	10.9	12.9	10.7
Net (TL - TM)	+29.0	+37.2	+24.5	+31.7	+28.0	+43.8	+40.2	+48.3

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	52.5	62.1	60.8	59.1	51.6	51.8
About right	33.5	25.3	25.0	25.9	34.5	36.0
Too much	13.9	12.5	14.1	14.9	13.9	12.3
Net (TL - TM)	+38.6	+49.6	+46.7	+44.2	+37.7	+39.5

D2. Assistance to Big Cities

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	19.2	20.5	17.1	22.5	25.3	22.3	24.9	24.2
About right	42.0	37.4	43.4	43.1	40.3	40.1	44.7	39.5
Too much	38.8	42.1	39.5	34.4	34.4	37.6	30.4	36.3
Net (TL - TM)	-19.6	-21.6	-22.4	-11.9	-9.1	-15.3	-5.5	-12.1

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	27.2	27.2	25.6	22.0	26.9
About right	35.9	38.0	37.9	44.8	42.3
Too much	36.9	34.9	36.5	33.2	30.8
Net (TL -TM)	-9.7	-7.7	-10.9	-11.2	-3.9

E1. Halting the Rising Crime Rate

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	68.3	70.6	69.2	70.0	70.6	67.7	72.2	75.9
About right	26.9	24.4	25.1	21.8	23.4	25.9	21.7	18.9
Too much	4.8	5.1	5.7	8.2	6.1	6.4	6.1	5.2
Net (TL - TM)	+63.5	+65.5	+63.5	+61.8	+64.5	+61.3	+66.1	+70.7

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	68.8	71.3	65.1	66.4	72.2	72.4	74.9	70.9
About right	25.8	23.8	29.0	29.1	22.5	23.4	20.1	24.8
Too much	5.4	4.9	5.9	4.5	5.3	4.2	4.9	4.3
Net (TL - TM)	+63.4	+66.4	+59.2	+61.9	+66.9	+68.2	+70.0	+66.9

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	68.1	73.7	77.6	69.3	63.7	60.7
About right	26.7	21.1	16.3	23.1	28.9	33.7
Too much	5.2	5.1	6.2	7.6	7.4	5.6
Net (TL - TM)	+62.9	+68.6	+71.4	+61.7	+56.3	+55.1

E2. Law Enforcement

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	57.7	58.1	52.8	53.7	56.4	62.3	58.0	56.9
About right	35.3	36.2	40.5	39.8	38.1	30.9	36.4	37.1
Too much	6.9	5.7	6.6	6.5	5.5	6.8	5.7	6.1
Net (TL - TM)	+50.8	+52.4	+46.2	+47.2	+50.9	+55.5	+52.3	+50.8

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	60.4	65.3	59.1	56.8	52.2
About right	33.3	27.8	32.1	35.0	39.4
Too much	6.2	7.0	8.8	8.3	8.3
Net (TL - TM)	+54.2	+58.3	+50.3	+48.5	+43.9

F1. Dealing with Drug Addiction

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	70.3	63.6	59.3	63.6	59.5	57.8	64.9	61.2
About right	23.1	29.4	32.3	28.5	31.9	32.7	27.3	29.6
Too much	6.6	7.0	8.5	7.9	8.7	9.5	7.9	9.3
Net (TL - TM)	+63.7	+56.6	+50.8	+55.7	+50.8	+48.3	+57.0	+51.9

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	62.0	66.2	64.8	60.1	66.4	70.9	73.0	64.6
About right	32.2	27.7	29.6	33.8	28.1	25.0	20.7	28.5
Too much	5.8	6.1	5.6	6.1	5.5	4.1	6.3	6.9
Net (TL - TM)	+56.2	+60.1	+59.2	+54.0	+60.9	+66.8	+66.7	+57.7

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	60.3	63.3	63.2	60.4	60.8	62.3
About right	31.8	28.7	27.6	27.8	29.5	28.7
Too much	7.9	8.1	9.2	11.7	9.7	9.0
Net (TL - TM)	+52.4	+55.2	+54.0	+48.7	+51.1	+53.3

F2. Drug Rehabilitation

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	50.7	57.8	55.6	60.8	61.3	62.5	66.7	61.4
About right	39.2	33.9	34.4	31.2	30.4	28.2	25.1	30.8
Too much	10.1	8.3	10.0	8.0	8.2	9.3	8.2	7.8
Net (TL - TM)	+40.6	+49.5	+45.6	+52.8	+53.1	+53.2	+58.5	+53.6

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	57.9	55.5	57.2	56.0	54.8
About right	31.4	32.6	30.7	31.6	34.0
Too much	10.7	11.9	12.1	12.4	11.2
Net (TL -TM)	+47.2	+43.6	+45.1	+43.6	+43.6

G. Improving the Nation's Education System/Education

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	51.3	53.5	51.8	52.6	50.4	53.3	55.9	57.2
About right	39.4	38.3	36.5	38.1	39.8	34.9	34.3	33.8
Too much	9.3	8.2	11.7	9.3	9.8	11.8	9.9	9.0
Net (TL - TM)	+42.0	+45.3	+40.1	+43.3	+40.6	+41.5	+46.0	+48.2

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	61.7	64.4	64.9	65.0	65.1	68.5	71.2	74.5
About right	32.2	20.6	28.8	30.4	29.3	27.7	25.5	22.5
Too much	6.1	5.0	6.2	4.7	5.6	3.8	3.3	3.0
Net (TL - TM)	+55.6	+59.4	+58.7	+60.3	+59.5	+64.7	+67.9	+71.5

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	70.7	71.4	73.0	73.0	72.9	71.4
About right	24.8	23.0	21.5	21.5	20.5	23.7
Too much	4.5	5.6	5.5	5.5	6.6	5.0
Net (TL - TM)	+66.2	+65.8	+67.5	+67.5	+66.3	+66.4

H1. Improving the Condition of Blacks

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	35.3	33.4	29.4	29.6	27.5	26.3	26.7	30.2
About right	41.9	44.5	44.4	42.7	46.2	46.9	47.8	48.0
Too much	22.8	22.0	26.3	27.6	26.3	26.8	25.5	21.8
Net (TL - TM)	+12.5	+11.4	+3.1	+2.0	+1.2	-0.5	+1.2	+8.4

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	31.7	37.3	32.1	37.2	37.4	38.0	37.3	41.1
About right	47.2	46.0	46.3	46.2	46.3	45.3	46.1	42.7
Too much	21.1	16.3	21.6	16.6	16.3	16.6	16.1	15.9
Net (TL - TM)	+10.6	+21.0	+10.5	+20.6	+21.1	+21.4	+21.2	+25.2

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	39.0	39.4	34.0	35.4	36.9	38.1
About right	45.3	43.6	43.9	43.2	45.2	45.2
Too much	15.6	17.0	22.1	21.4	17.9	16.6
Net (TL - TM)	+23.4	+22.4	+11.9	+14.0	+19.0	+21.5

H2. Assistance to Blacks

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	26.5	28.8	23.5	28.2	29.0	31.3	31.1	34.5
About right	45.9	44.8	47.8	47.6	46.2	44.7	45.7	45.4
Too much	27.6	26.4	28.8	24.2	24.8	24.0	23.2	20.1
Net (TL - TM)	-1.1	+2.4	-5.3	+4.0	+4.2	+7.3	+7.9	+14.4

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	27.2	26.5	25.4	29.3	33.4
About right	44.8	44.1	46.4	45.6	42.5
Too much	28.0	29.4	28.2	25.2	24.1
Net (TL - TM)	-0.8	-2.9	-2.8	+4.1	+9.3

I. The Military, Armaments, and Defense/National Defense

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	12.1	17.9	17.8	26.2	25.7	29.8	60.9	31.2
About right	47.4	48.5	49.3	45.0	49.4	47.4	37.1	37.2
Too much	40.5	33.6	32.9	28.8	24.8	22.9	12.0	31.6
Net (TL - TM)	-28.4	-15.7	-15.1	-2.6	+0.9	+6.9	+48.9	+0.4

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	25.5	17.8	15.5	17.1	18.0	17.9	15.8	10.8
About right	40.2	43.0	42.5	44.3	41.3	42.6	42.9	44.9
Too much	34.3	39.1	42.0	38.7	40.8	39.5	41.3	44.3
Net (TL - TM)	-8.8	-21.3	-26.5	-21.6	-22.8	-21.6	-25.5	-33.5

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	14.2	11.2	17.3	18.2	18.8	24.5
About right	59.1	44.2	49.3	48.9	49.2	49.9
Too much	26.8	44.6	33.4	32.9	32.0	25.6
Net (TL - TM)	-12.6	-33.4	-16.1	-14.7	-13.2	-1.1

J. Foreign Aid/Assistance to Other Countries

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	4.9	3.2	5.6	2.9	3.7	4.3	5.5	5.6
About right	21.9	18.3	17.8	18.5	25.5	25.3	21.5	19.0
Too much	73.2	78.5	76.7	78.6	70.8	70.4	72.9	75.3
Net (TL - TM)	-68.3	-75.3	-71.1	-75.7	-67.1	-66.1	-67.4	-69.7

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	4.4	4.4	7.6	5.2	6.3	4.9	5.6	6.2
About right	17.7	19.3	23.6	19.3	21.1	22.3	22.4	23.4
Too much	77.9	76.3	68.8	75.5	72.6	72.8	72.1	70.4
Net (TL - TM)	-73.5	-71.9	-61.2	-70.3	-66.3	-67.9	-66.5	-64.2

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	3.7	4.5	4.6	4.2	6.8	9.4
About right	21.0	20.9	19.8	20.7	25.3	31.0
Too much	75.2	74.6	75.6	75.1	67.9	59.6
Net (TL - TM)	-71.5	-70.1	-71.0	-70.9	-61.1	-50.2

K1. Welfare

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982
Too little	20.9	23.8	24.6	14.1	13.1	13.5	14.3	20.4
About right	25.0	32.8	30.0	22.7	24.2	24.9	26.5	28.4
Too much	54.1	43.4	45.4	63.2	62.7	61.6	59.2	51.2
Net (TL - TM)	-33.2	-19.6	-20.8	-49.1	-49.6	-48.1	-44.9	-30.8

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Too little	22.1	24.4	18.9	23.4	21.5	24.7	24.2	24.4
About right	28.7	35.9	34.7	34.5	32.6	32.5	32.7	37.1
Too much	49.2	39.8	46.4	42.1	45.9	42.8	43.1	38.4
Net (TL - TM)	-27.1	-15.4	-27.5	-18.7	-24.4	-18.1	-18.9	-14.0

	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	24.0	17.1	13.1	15.3	16.0	20.8
About right	36.7	25.6	24.6	26.6	37.7	39.8
Too much	39.3	57.3	62.4	58.1	46.3	39.4
Net (TL - TM)	-15.3	-40.2	-49.3	-42.8	-30.3	-18.6

K2. Assistance to the Poor

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	63.2	65.8	63.2	67.3	70.2	68.1	68.7	66.4
About right	25.6	24.3	28.1	23.3	22.8	23.4	24.5	24.5
Too much	11.3	9.9	8.7	9.4	6.9	8.5	6.7	9.2
Net (TL - TM)	+51.9	+55.9	+54.5	+57.9	+63.3	+59.6	+62.0	+57.2
	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000			
Too little	64.4	59.3	55.1	62.8	64.3			
About right	23.0	25.2	26.3	25.8	24.2			
Too much	12.6	15.5	18.6	11.4	11.5			
Net (TL -TM)	+51.8	+43.8	+36.5	+51.4	+52.8			

L. Highways and Bridges

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	49.1	44.0	36.5	36.9	37.4	40.1	47.0	36.4
About right	44.2	48.2	54.8	54.0	54.7	52.4	46.6	52.2
Too much	6.8	7.7	8.6	9.2	7.9	7.5	6.3	11.4
Net (TL - TM)	+42.3	+36.3	+27.9	+27.7	+29.5	+32.6	+40.7	+25.0
	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000			
Too little	38.5	40.1	38.1	40.5	35.1			
About right	52.4	51.9	52.3	49.4	52.5			
Too much	9.1	7.9	9.6	10.1	12.4			
Net (TL -TM)	+29.4	+32.2	+28.5	+30.4	+22.7			

M. Social Security

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	53.9	54.2	57.3	57.1	55.5	57.1	52.1	55.8
About right	35.9	38.5	36.2	36.1	39.4	37.9	42.2	40.2
Too much	10.2	7.3	6.5	6.8	5.1	5.0	5.8	4.0
Net (TL - TM)	+43.7	+46.9	+50.8	+50.3	+50.4	+52.1	+46.3	+51.8
	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000			

Too little	46.0	49.1	51.7	59.8	60.3
About right	46.2	43.6	39.6	33.3	34.5
Too much	7.8	7.3	8.7	6.9	5.1
Net (TL -TM)	+38.2	+41.8	+43.0	+52.9	+55.2

N. Mass Transportation

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	37.2	32.1	30.6	32.2	31.7	33.3	37.1	37.2
About right	50.9	54.2	55.3	53.7	57.2	56.3	53.2	53.0
Too much	11.9	13.7	14.1	14.1	11.1	10.3	9.8	9.8
Net (TL - TM)	+25.3	+18.4	+16.5	+18.1	+20.6	+23.0	+27.3	+27.4

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	38.1	38.2	35.0	34.9	39.9
About right	50.9	53.1	53.4	54.7	51.7
Too much	11.0	8.7	11.6	10.4	8.4
Net (TL -TM)	+27.1	+29.5	+23.4	+24.5	+31.5

O. Parks and Recreation

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Too little	33.9	31.5	30.6	30.2	31.3	35.0	32.7	32.1
About right	60.5	60.7	63.1	63.2	63.2	59.7	61.3	63.1
Too much	5.6	7.8	6.4	6.6	5.5	5.3	6.0	4.8
Net (TL - TM)	+28.3	+23.7	+24.2	+23.6	+25.8	+29.7	+26.7	+27.3

	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000
Too little	32.5	31.4	33.5	36.3	36.8
About right	60.6	62.2	60.2	57.4	57.5
Too much	6.9	6.4	6.2	6.3	5.7
Net (TL -TM)	+25.6	+25.0	+27.3	+30.0	+31.1

P. Assistance for Childcare

2000

Too Little	64.9
About Right	29.5
Too Much	5.6
Net (TL-TM)	+59.3

Table 2
Rank of Net Spending Priorities, 1973-2000

RANK	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	1983
1	Drugs +63.7	Crime +65.5	Crime +63.5	Crime +61.8	Crime +64.5	Crime +61.3	Crime +66.1	Crime +70.7	Crime +63.4
2	Crime +63.5	Health +62.6	Health +60.2	Health +58.4	Health +52.4	Health +50.3	Drugs +57.0	Health +52.4	Drugs +56.2
3	Health +58.6	Drugs +56.6	Drugs +50.8	Drugs +55.7	Drugs +50.8	Drugs +48.3	Health +50.1	Drugs +51.9	Educ. +55.6
4	Envir. +56.9	Envir. +55.4	Envir. +48.0	Envir. +49.2	Educ. +40.6	Envir. +44.7	Defense +48.9	Educ. +48.2	Health +52.6
5	SolCity +41.7	SolCity +46.3	SolCity +42.5	Educ. +43.3	Envir. +40.5	Educ. +41.5	Educ. +46.0	Envir. +42.2	Envir. +48.7
6	Educ. +42.0	Educ. +45.3	Educ. +40.1	SolCity +26.0	SolCity +25.0	SolCity +23.5	Envir. +35.8	SolCity +26.4	SolCity +29.0
7	ImpBlks +12.5	ImpBlks +11.4	ImpBlks + 3.1	ImpBlks + 2.0	ImpBlks + 1.2	Defense + 6.9	SolCity +21.3	ImpBlks + 8.4	ImpBlks +10.6
8	Defense -28.4	Defense -15.7	Defense -15.1	Defense - 2.6	Defense + 0.9	ImpBlks - 0.5	ImpBlks + 1.2	Defense + 0.4	Defense - 8.8
9	Welfare -33.2	Welfare -19.6	Welfare -20.8	Welfare -49.1	Space -41.1	Space -37.7	Space -22.9	Space -28.3	Welfare -27.1
10	Space -53.9	Space -55.0	Space -51.8	Space -51.8	Welfare -49.6	Welfare -48.1	Welfare -44.9	Welfare -30.8	Space -27.3
11	ForAid -68.3	ForAid -75.3	ForAid -71.1	ForAid -75.7	ForAid -67.1	ForAid -66.1	ForAid -67.4	ForAid -69.7	ForAid -73.5

Abbreviations/Labels Used in Tables 2-3:

AidBlks=Assistance to Blacks

AidCity=Assistance to Big Cities

Crime=Halting the Rising Crime Rate

Defense=The Military, Armaments, and Defense/National Defense

Drugs=Dealing with Drug Addiction

Educ.=Improving the Nation's Education System/Education

Envir.=Improving and Protecting the Environment/The Environment

ForAid=Foreign Aid/Assistance to Other Countries

Health=Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health/Health

ImpBlks=Improving the Condition of Blacks

LawEnf=Law Enforcement

Parks=Parks and Recreation

Poor=Assistance to the Poor

Rehab.=Drug Rehabilitation

Roads=Highways and Bridges

SocSec=Social Security

SolCity=Solving the Problems of the Big Cities

Space=Space Exploration Program/Space Exploration

Trans.=Mass Transportation

Welfare=Welfare

	- 1.1	+ 2.4	- 5.3	+ 4.0	+ 4.2	+ 7.3	+ 7.9	+14.4	- 0.8	- 2.9	- 2.8	+ 4.1	+ 9.3
16	Welfare	AidCity	Welfare	AidCity	Defense								
	-15.4	-21.6	-18.7	-11.9	- 9.0	-15.3	- 5.5	-12.1	- 9.7	- 7.7	-10.9	-11.2	- 1.1
17	AidCity	Defense	Defense	Defense	Space	Welfare	Welfare	Defense	Defense	Defense	Defense	Defense	AidCity
	-19.6	-26.5	-21.6	-22.8	-16.8	-18.9	-14.0	-12.6	-33.4	-16.1	-14.7	-13.2	- 3.9
18	Defense	Welfare	AidCity	Welfare	Welfare	Space	Space	Welfare	Welfare	Space	Space	Space	Welfare
	-21.3	-27.5	-22.4	-24.4	-18.1	-21.6	-30.4	-15.3	-40.2	-39.4	-30.0	-30.1	-18.6
19	Space	Space	Space	Space	Defense	Defense	Defense	Space	Space	Welfare	Welfare	Welfare	Space
	-32.1	-31.3	-30.1	-22.7	-21.6	-25.5	-33.5	-25.9	-44.5	-49.3	-42.8	-30.3	-28.3
20	ForAid												
	-71.9	-61.2	-70.3	-66.3	-67.9	-66.5	-64.2	-71.5	-70.1	-71.0	-70.9	-61.1	-50.2

Table 4

Trends in Overall and Domestic Welfare Spending, 1973-2000

Overall Spending	Domestic Social Spending	
1973	+14.1	+24.2
1974	+16.1	+29.2
1975	+13.6	+25.0
1976	+10.7	+16.1
1977	+10.9	+13.9
1978	+11.3	+13.3
1980	+17.4	+14.7
1982	+13.8	+20.9
1983	+16.3	+24.1
1984	+19.1	+31.0
1985	+15.5	+23.2
1986	+17.9	+29.4
1987	+20.3	+29.4
1988	+24.4	+35.2
1989	+24.5	+35.2
1990	+24.3	+39.9
1991	+22.9	+36.1
1993	+17.0	+32.0
1994	+16.8	+26.4
1996	+16.9	+27.8
1998	+19.5	+31.1
2000	+23.7	+35.5

Overall Spending = Average Net Spending for all 11 items

Domestic Welfare Spending = Average Net Spending for 5 items
(Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health, Solving the
Problems of the Big Cities, Improving the Nation's Education
System, Improving the Condition of Blacks, Welfare)

Technical Appendix

General Social Surveys (GSS)

The GSS are conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. James A. Davis, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden are the principal investigators. The GSS are full-probability samples of adults living in households in the United States. Interviews are conducted in-person. Sample size across 1973-2000 totals 38,613 respondents (1973=1504, 1974=1484, 1975=1490, 1976=1499, 1977=1530, 1978=1532, 1980=1468, 1982=1506, 1983=1599, 1984=1473, 1985=1534, 1986=1470, 1987=1466, 1988=1481, 1989=1537, 1990=1372, 1991=1517, 1993=1606, 1994=2992, 1996=2904, 1998=2832, 2000=2817). Full technical details on the sample, response rates, and other methodological matters are presented in James A. Davis, Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden, *General Social Surveys, 1972-2000: Cumulative Codebook*. Chicago: NORC, 2001.

National Spending Priority Items

Items covering 11 areas have been asked in every GSS since 1973 (Space Exploration Program, Improving and Protecting the Environment, Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health, Solving the Problems of the Big Cities, Halting the Rising Crime Rate, Dealing with Drug Addiction, Improving the Nation's Education System, Improving the Condition of Blacks, The Military, Armaments, and Defense, Foreign Aid, Welfare). Since 1984 an additional four areas have been included (Highways and Roads, Social Security, Mass Transportation, Parks and Recreation). In 2000 a 16th area (Assistance for Childcare) was added. Also since 1984, 11 alternative wordings for the original spending items have been asked on a random sub-sample (Space Exploration, The Environment, Health, Assistance to Big Cities, Law Enforcement, Drug Rehabilitation, Education, Assistance to Blacks, National Defense, Assistance to Other Countries, Assistance to the Poor). When the alternative wordings produced distributions that did not significantly differ from the original wordings they have been combined together (Space Exploration Program/Space Exploration, Improving and Protecting the Environment/The Environment, Improving and Protecting the Nation's Health/Health, Improving the Nation's Education System/Education, The Military, Armaments, and Defense/National Defense, Foreign Aid/Assistance to Other Countries). For the remaining five original spending areas the standard and alternative results are presented separately. Differences between the standard and alternative wordings are examined in Tom W. Smith, "A Preliminary Analysis of Methodological Experiments in the 1984 GSS," *GSS Methodological Report No. 30*. Chicago: NORC, 1984; Tom W. Smith, "That Which We Call Welfare by Any Other Name Would Smell Sweeter: An Analysis of the Impact of Question Wording on Response Patterns," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51 (Spring, 1987), 75-83; and Kenneth A. Rasinski, "The Effect of Question Wording on Public Support for Government Spending," *GSS Methodological Report No. 54*. Chicago: NORC, 1988.