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Americans Want Smaller Government

David Boaz, executive vice president of Cato Institute, writes: "A new *Washington Post*-ABC News poll again shows that voters prefer 'smaller government with fewer services' to 'larger government with more services':

Obama has used the power and financial resources of the federal government repeatedly as he has dealt with the country's problems this year, to the consternation of his Republican critics. The poll found little change in underlying public attitudes toward government since the inauguration, with slightly more than half saying they prefer a smaller government with fewer services to a larger government with more services. Independents, however, now split 61 to 35 percent in favor of a smaller government; they were more narrowly divided on this question a year ago (52 to 44 percent), before the financial crisis hit.

The *Post* calls a 54 to 41 lead for smaller government 'barely more than half,' which is fair enough, though it's twice as large as Obama's margin over McCain. It's also twice as large as the margin the *Post* found in the same poll in November 2007."

Mr. Boaz continues his commentary: "I've always thought the 'smaller government' question is incomplete. It offers respondents a benefit of larger government – 'more services' – but it doesn't mention that the cost of 'larger government with more services' is higher taxes. The question ought to give both the cost and the benefit for each option. A few years ago a Rasmussen poll did ask the question that way. The results were that 64 percent of voters said that they prefer smaller government with fewer services and lower taxes, while only 22 percent would rather see a more active government with more services and higher taxes. A similar poll around the same time, without the information on taxes, found a margin of 59 to 26 percent. So it's reasonable to conclude that if you remind respondents that 'more services' means higher taxes, [the margin by which people prefer smaller government rises by about 9 points](#). So maybe the margin in this poll would have been something like 59 to 37 if both sides of the question had been presented. For more on 'smaller government' polls, see [here](#) and [here](#)."

Posted by Shay Riley at [6/23/2009](#)

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