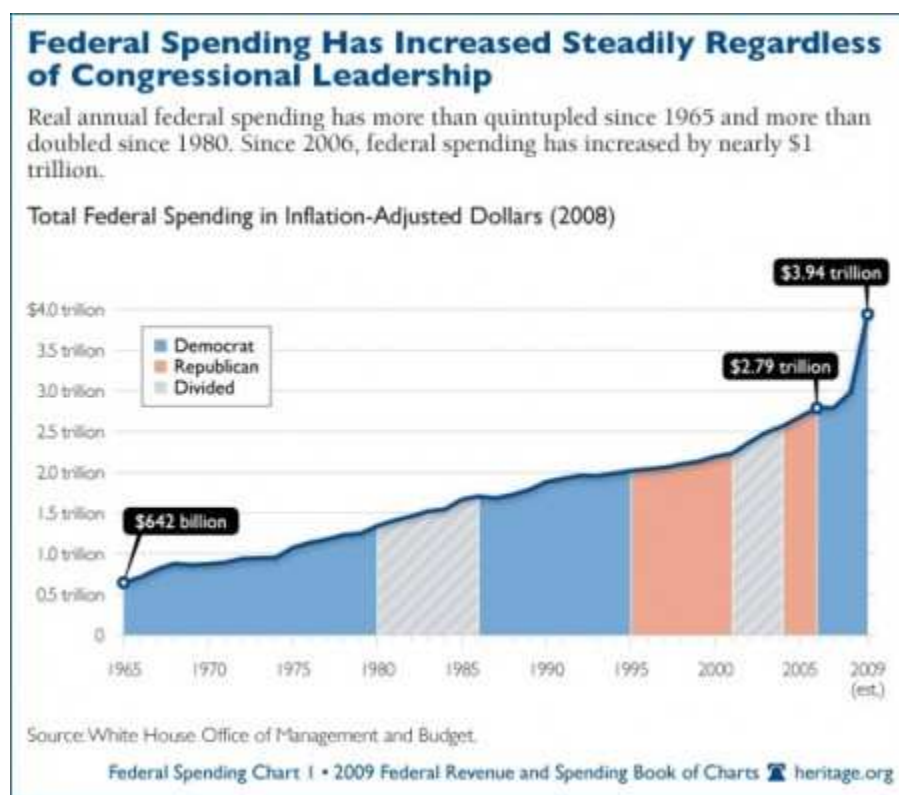


[Matt Yglesias](#)

Dec 5th, 2010 at 12:27 pm

[Things to Disagree About](#)

David Boaz observes that inflation-adjusted federal spending [tends to increase steadily](#) even as the political winds fluctuate:



But the bottom line is: **If we have two parties for a reason, because they believe in different things, why don't we see some real differences in the growth of federal spending?**

Is this really such a hard question? It's just that the disagreements between the parties must be about something else than the fake fight over "spending." For example, "what should we spend money on?" Or, "how should the burden of taxes be distributed?"

But on the spending front, let's note this. Barack Obama proposed a deficit-financed extension of some of the Bush tax cuts. Congressional Republicans calculated, accurately, that Obama was *so* committed to the goal of extending some of the Bush tax cuts that they could hold this goal hostage and force concessions on other issues. This would have been a golden opportunity, for example, to say they would only vote for Obama's precious tax cuts if Obama agreed to offsetting spending cuts. But they didn't do that. Instead they said they would block Obama's tax cuts unless Obama agreed to additional "rich people only" tax cuts. That's a real, meaningful disagreement, one that's typical of our times, but it's not a disagreement about the quantity of spending.

4

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[Morgan Warstler](#) Yesterday 12:37 PM

The only meaningful question we see here is this:

How are public employees going to like seeing their overall compensation being brought down to trend from 1965-2000?

It's going to be very ugly. Lets get it over with already.

Like

Reply

[Matt Stevens](#) Yesterday 01:01 PM [in reply to Morgan Warstler](#)

The only meaningful question we see here is this:

Why you think we give a shit.

3 people liked this.

Like

Reply

[James Gary](#) Yesterday 01:09 PM [in reply to Morgan Warstler](#)

The only meaningful question we see here is this:

Why hasn't your sorry ass been banned yet?

4 people liked this.

Like

Reply

[Kerry](#) Yesterday 12:49 PM

This is a somewhat inane comment (although, I've heard the bar for the comment section here isn't very high), but...am I the only thinking that Matt's upped his percentage of really good points lately? This might be the third or fourth day in a row that I've wanted to take one of his posts and make other people read it. Keep it up!

1 person liked this.

Like

Reply

[foosion](#) Yesterday 12:54 PM

Whatever happened to the estate tax?

Like

Reply

[robertwaldmann](#) Yesterday 12:54 PM

The colors under that graph are a bit odd. Boaz seems to think that the President doesn't count at all, so there was undivided Republican rule during the low spending growth period 95-2000 and undivided Democratic rule since 2007. That is, he cheated and still lost.

Morgan do you know what fraction of Federal spending goes to public employees ? This is out of date and a huge monster pdf

<http://www.opm.gov/feddata/htm...>

but in 2005 total civilian payroll costs (pay plus premiums) were \$ 203.5 billion. The budget for 2005 was about 2 trillion 400 billion (that's an estimate) <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbud...> Civilian human resources expenses were about 1/12 of the total.

Cutting the pay of Federal civilian employees won't do the trick. Even if they worked for free, we would still have a huge deficit.

2 people liked this.

Like

Reply

[Ban_Everyone](#) Yesterday 12:58 PM

Is there any value in the chart displaying total spending as opposed to spending as a percentage of total GDP (or whatever measure is more appropriate)? The government could be shrinking relative to the total economy and this chart wouldn't reveal it.

Even then you run into the issue (that I believe Matt has mentioned several times before) that what would look like exploding government spending could just be anemic economic growth.

Also, everyone should just ignore the Moronic Warbler, he's best treated like the spambot that he is. There is no value in attempting to consider or respond to his "thoughts".

4 people liked this.

Like

Reply

abb11 [Yesterday 01:03 PM](#)

I think the reason for two parties is for the population to feel that they can hold one party responsible by electing the other party. Then the first one again to punish the second. And so on. It's a better, more clever way to control than with just one party.

3 people liked this.

Like

Reply

kafkania [Yesterday 01:10 PM](#) [in reply to abb11](#)

Yeah, that's a perfect rendition of our good cop, bad cop phony "2 party" system. The real beauty of it lies in both parties whoring for the elites, so the elites don't give a rat's ass which party wins. It's all kabuki for the rabble. They just watch and laugh their asses off.

6 people liked this.

Like

Reply

neilwilson [Yesterday 01:11 PM](#)

The chart should be on a logarithmic scale. The current increase is nowhere near as big as it appears in percentage terms.

3 people liked this.

Like

Reply

James_Gary [Yesterday 01:12 PM](#) [in reply to neilwilson](#)

Logarithms are science, and science is a soshulist librul conspiracy plot. I'll stick with good old patriotic addition and subtraction. As long as the result fits with my pre-existing worldview, that is.

1 person liked this.

Like

Reply

CapitalistRoader [Yesterday 04:41 PM](#) [in reply to neilwilson](#)

A linear scale is fine; the data fit easily on the graph. But per capita spending (also in real dollars) would be a better representation:

<http://www.usgovernmentspendin...>

Like

Reply

Tyro [Today 12:57 AM](#) [in reply to CapitalistRoader](#)

Yep. As would be spending as a % of GDP. The simple "spending goes up every year" graph that MattY presents is almost useless.

Like

Reply

JustKarl Yesterday 01:24 PM

Congressional Republicans calculated, accurately, that Obama was so committed to the goal of extending some of the Bush tax cuts that they could hold this goal hostage and force concessions on other issues.

And the next logical step is for Obama to threaten to veto any bill that doesn't achieve his goal. Why do we keep skipping this step in negotiations?

2 people liked this.

Like

Reply

DonxWilliams Yesterday 01:36 PM

That right end looks like a financial bubble to me. What happens when it pops?

1 person liked this.

Like

Reply

smilner Yesterday 02:00 PM

Plot spending per GDP, please! The country grows larger and richer, therefore government spending should be expected to rise even in inflation-adjusted dollars. Of course the recent spending (since the 2008 crash) spikes up; this is the Federal government trying to prevent Great Depression II (but mostly just filling in the enormous hole left by sharp cuts in state spending).

5 people liked this.

Like

Reply

CapitalistRoader Yesterday 05:14 PM [in reply to smilner](#)

Here's a spending chart based on GDP (federal + state):

<http://www.usgovernmentspendin...>

Looks like about a 1% drop in state spending in 2008.

Like

Reply

FGS Yesterday 04:49 PM

Republicans want to cut Federal spending on Social Security benefits for retirees. Democrats don't.

All this bickering at the margins over Living History of Pot Belly Stoves museums and scientific analyses of fish farts and their effects on lake temperature, is all just nonsense.

Like

Reply

smilner Yesterday 05:23 PM

Of course, normalized by GDP, government spending goes up sharply in a severe recession. GDP fell by about 7% off the trendline prior to the crash. But if you plotted total government spending over the past 2-3 years, you'd

find that the Federal "stimulus" to first approximation cancelled out the cratering of state spending. In summary: for long-term trends in government spending, plot as a fraction of GDP. For short-term behavior surrounding a recession, plot in inflation-adjusted dollars.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[robertwaldmann](#) Yesterday 06:47 PM

@kerry I agree that Yglesias has been even more excellent than usual lately.

@Matt_Stevens, James and uhm myself: Don't feed the trolls.

@ Morgan Warstler

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/03/AR2010120303160.html

1 person liked this.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

[mikTek](#) Today 12:40 AM [in reply to robertwaldmann](#)

Thanks for the WAPO link re: Myths of Fed Employees. Pretty interesting. Facts can be helpful. But can be too easily dismissed if they don't support what you want/need to believe.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

Real-time updating is **enabled**. ([Pause](#))

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