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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stanley B. Greenberg, James Carville, Andrew Baumann and Jason Lunser

## **New Survey Shows Voters Back Obama's Priorities, Agenda on the Budget**

*President Remains Popular, Republicans Still Marginalized*

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A new survey by Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, completed on the eve of Congress' pending vote on President Obama's budget, shows increasing optimism among the electorate, sustained popularity for the president, and broad support for his priorities and approach to the budget, particularly when framed as part of a long-term economic program.

Four-in-ten voters (and 38 percent of likely voters), now say that the country is heading in the right direction, the highest level in over three years. And while the mood on the economy remains sour, we observed the first uptick in sentiment on the economy in several months. Amid these small signs of increasing optimism, the president continues to maintain a 61 percent favorability rating and 58 percent approval rating – both near their all-time highs. More important, Obama earns extraordinary ratings on a range of key attributes, down only slightly from the days immediately following his inauguration.

This popularity translates into broad support for President Obama's approach and priorities on the budget. Voters overwhelmingly agree with Obama's argument that we can only fix the economy and create long-term prosperity with a broad agenda that includes investments in health care and energy. And strong majorities support the president's position that we can best balance the budget in the long term by making investments that will lead to economic growth and reject the Republican assertion that Obama is trying to implement a radical liberal agenda after campaigning as a moderate.

On its own, Obama's budget has stable majority support, but when it is presented as a part of a plan for long-term economic growth and prosperity support is significantly stronger and more enthusiastic, and causes a small net increase in voters' intention to vote to reelect their congressional representative, even after facing Republican attacks.

This memo is based on a national survey of 1,000 2008 voters, including 166 interviewed on cell phones (120 unweighted) and 863 likely 2010 voters (871 unweighted), conducted for Democracy Corps by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner March 25-29, 2009.



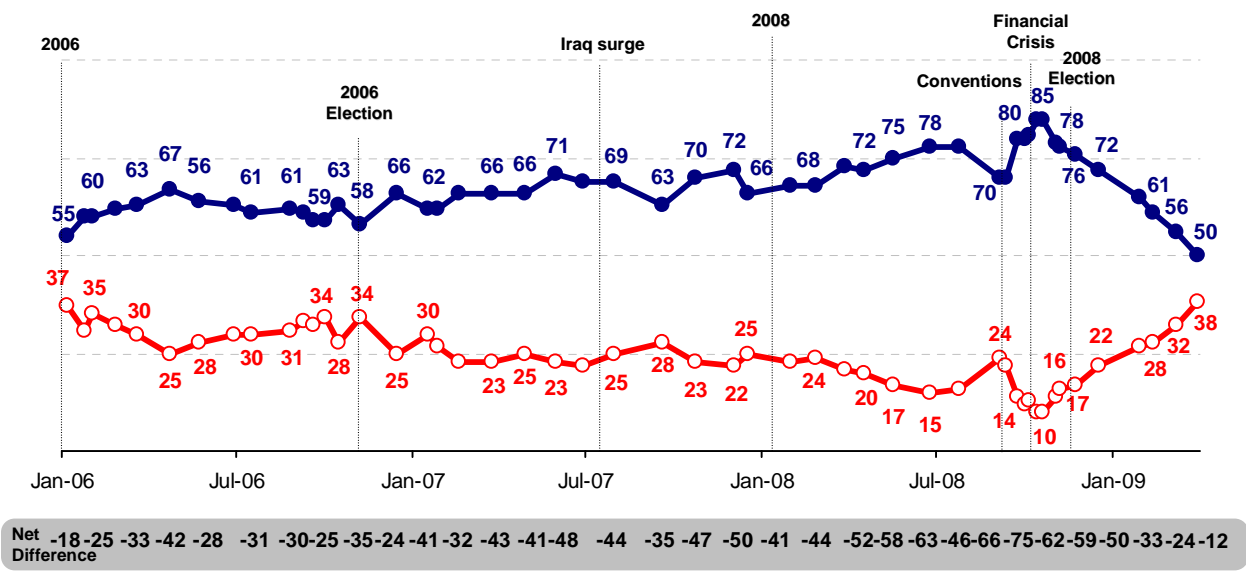
### Obama Sustains Popularity Amid Increased Optimism

Continuing a steady climb since President Obama’s inauguration, voters’ optimism about the direction of the country is at its highest level in three years with nearly two-in-five likely voters now saying that the country is headed in the right direction. Though most of this increase can be attributed to rising levels of optimism among Democrats, over a quarter of independents now believe the country is headed in the right direction, also the highest level we have observed since early 2006. And while deep pessimism remains on the economy, the percent of likely voters rating the “state of the economy” negatively dropped 6 percent in the last three weeks, the first sign of potential warming on the economy in months.

#### “Right direction” at 3-year high

Generally speaking, do you think things in the country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

○ Right direction  
● Wrong track



\*Note: From Democracy Corps surveys conducted over the last several years. Data reflects likely voters. After 2008 election, data reflects likely 2010 voters.

Meanwhile, President Obama continues to sustain his remarkable popularity. Voters rate Obama favorably by a 2-to-1 margin (61 percent warm, 27 percent cool) with fully half of voters viewing him very favorably. Furthermore, a robust 58 percent of those interviewed approve of the way Obama is handling his job, virtually matching the highest level we have yet observed.

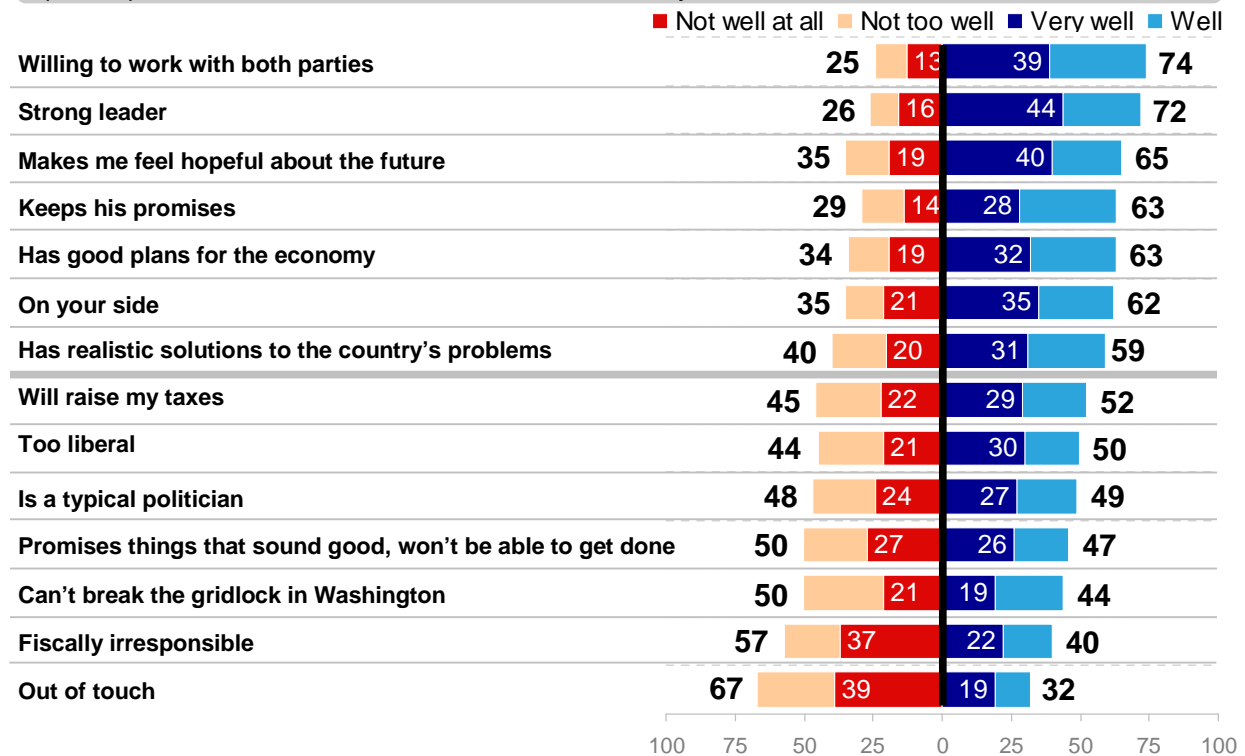
Obama’s appeal is better demonstrated by the extraordinary ratings he earns on a range of key positive attributes. The president continues to be seen as a “strong leader” (with 72 percent saying that phrase describes him well) and despite the increasingly partisan tone in Washington, three-quarters of voters, including half of Republicans, say Obama is “willing to work with both parties.” Perhaps most impressive, these scores are down only slightly from the halcyon days



immediately following Obama’s inauguration and all of them remain significantly higher than their pre-election levels.

### Obama’s pretty extraordinary attributes

*Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes Barack Obama very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.*



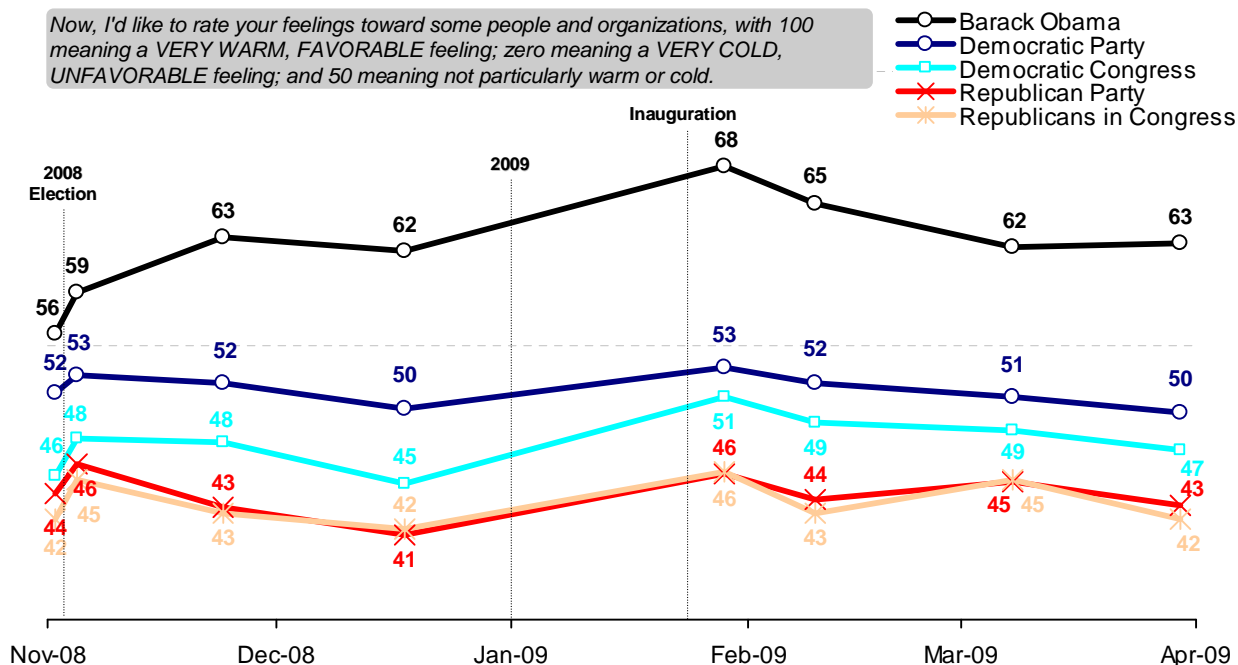
President Obama’s ratings on a series of negative attributes are more of a mixed bag. Over half of voters agree that Obama “will raise my taxes,” but this actually represents a slight improvement since January and is in line with Obama’s typical score on the measure during the campaign. Obama has also seen a slight improvement on being seen as able to “break the gridlock in Washington,” perhaps as a result of the passage of his economic recovery plan. Meanwhile, the president has lost a slight bit of ground on traits such as “too liberal” and “a typical politician” and now finds half of voters saying these phrases describe him well.

While President Obama retains his popularity through the recent debate over his economic plans, the Republicans have remained just as marginalized as they were on Election Day as the gap in feelings toward the two parties continues to be steady and large.



## Democratic brand remains much more popular than Republican

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with 100 meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold.



\*Note: Data represents the MEAN ratings from Democracy Corps surveys conducted over the past five months. After 2008 election, data reflects 2010 likely voters.

## Voters Endorse Obama Approach on Budget, Economy

President Obama's popularity translates into broad support for his approach and priorities on the budget and the economy. The Republicans have joined the debate on the budget with an argument that Obama should focus solely on the economy, that we must put deficit reduction first and cannot afford new investments, and that Obama has emerged as a liberal radical after selling himself as a moderate. Those arguments are repudiated by the results of both this survey and our previous survey from earlier this month.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly six-in-ten voters agree with Obama's argument that we can only fix the economy and create long-term prosperity with a broad agenda that includes investments in health care and energy (versus just 39 percent who agree with critics that say Obama should put those issues on hold until the financial crisis is past). More important, when this argument is further developed using language from both sides of the debate, the president's message wins even more decisively

<sup>1</sup> Survey of 1,000 2008 voters conducted for Democracy Corps by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, March 5-8, 2009. See: <http://www.democracycorps.com/strategy/2009/03/obama-democrats-well-positioned-for-budget-debate/>



(60 to 35 percent) with fully 45 percent siding strongly with Obama. A solid majority (55 percent) of independents also side with the president.

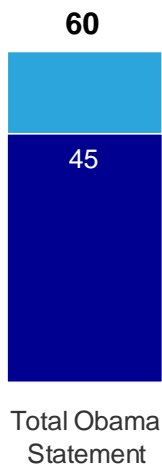
### Voters agree with Obama: broad agenda needed to fix the economy

*Now let me read you a pair of statements that describe what President Obama and some of his critics are saying about his budget plan. After I read these statements, please tell me which one you agree with more.*

#### **Must deal with health care, energy to fix economy**

President Obama says we can only end the bubble-bust cycle of the past and lay the groundwork for true long-term prosperity by attacking the problems that have dragged the economy down for too long: reforming health care to bring down costs for business and consumers and making American the leader in renewable energy so the jobs and industries of the future are built right here, not in China or India.

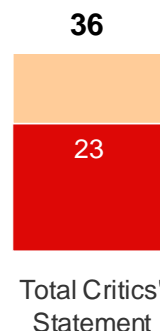
■ Obama Stmt Smwht  
■ Obama Stmt Strong



#### **Must focus on economy, other issues should wait**

Obama's critics say that dealing with the economy has to be Job One. The only priority right now should be to pulling us out of this economic death spiral and start creating jobs again by solving the financial crisis. But Obama has lost focus by concentrating on other priorities like health care and global warming. Those may be worthy goals, but they need to be put on hold until we're through this crisis.

■ Critics Stmt Smwh  
■ Critics Stmt Strong



And by nearly two-to-one, voters concur that Obama is right to seek solutions on a range of issues, including health care, energy and education, rather than focusing solely on the economy. Independents strongly agree (61 to 35 percent with 54 percent strongly) and even moderate Republicans side very slightly (51 to 47 percent) with Obama.

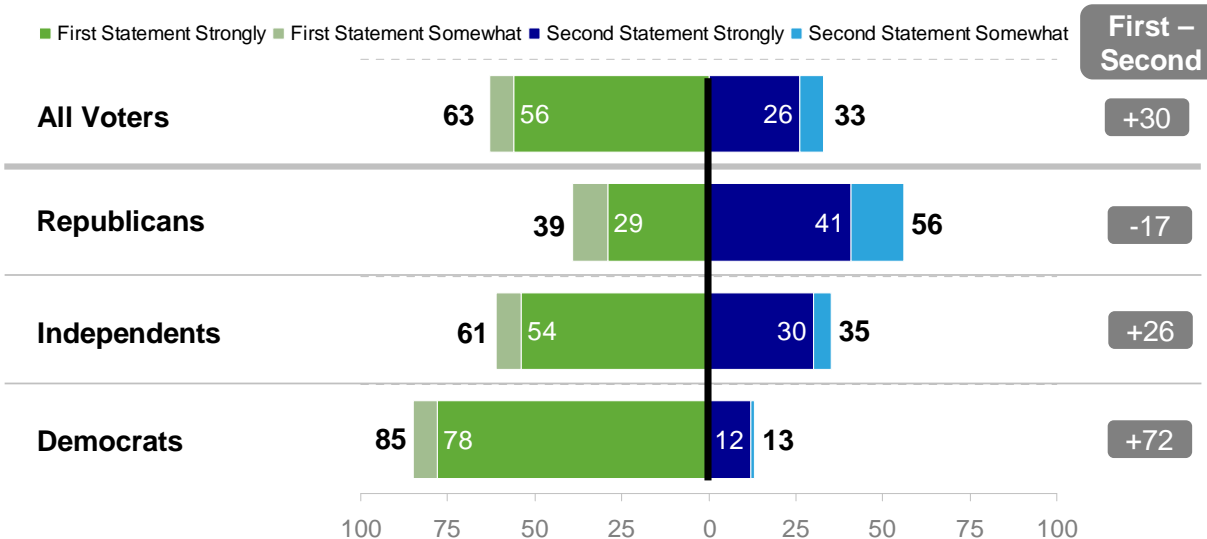


## Voters strongly seek big agenda, not just economy

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

**First Statement:** The challenges America faces are too big to ignore. President Obama is right to seek solutions on health care, energy and education while still making the economy his top priority.

**Second Statement:** President Obama is trying to do too much. He should put his entire focus on the economy and deal with health care, energy and education when we're through this crisis.



Similarly strong majorities of at least 60 percent endorse the president's argument that to balance the budget in the long term we need to make investments to restore the economy and ensure economic growth (rather than simply limiting spending) and reject the recent Republican assertion that Obama is trying to implement a radical liberal agenda after campaigning as a moderate.

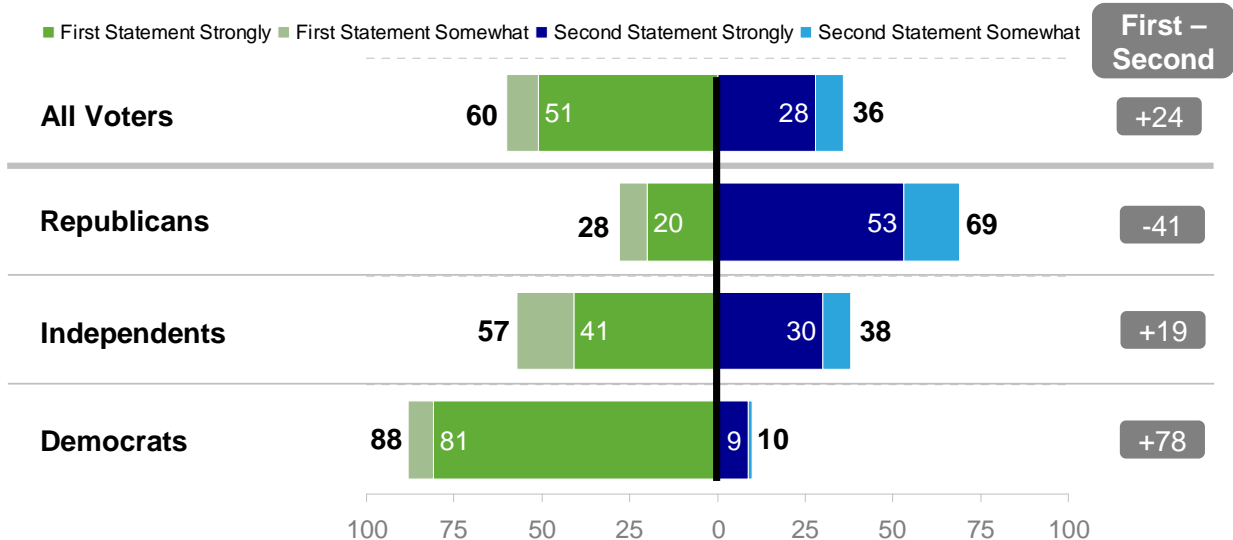


## Obama keeping promises, not new radical agenda

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

**First Statement:** President Obama is governing as he promised during the campaign: trying to deliver big changes on issues like health care, energy and taxes.

**Second Statement:** President Obama campaigned as a moderate, but now he is trying to implement a radical liberal agenda on issues like health care, energy and taxes.



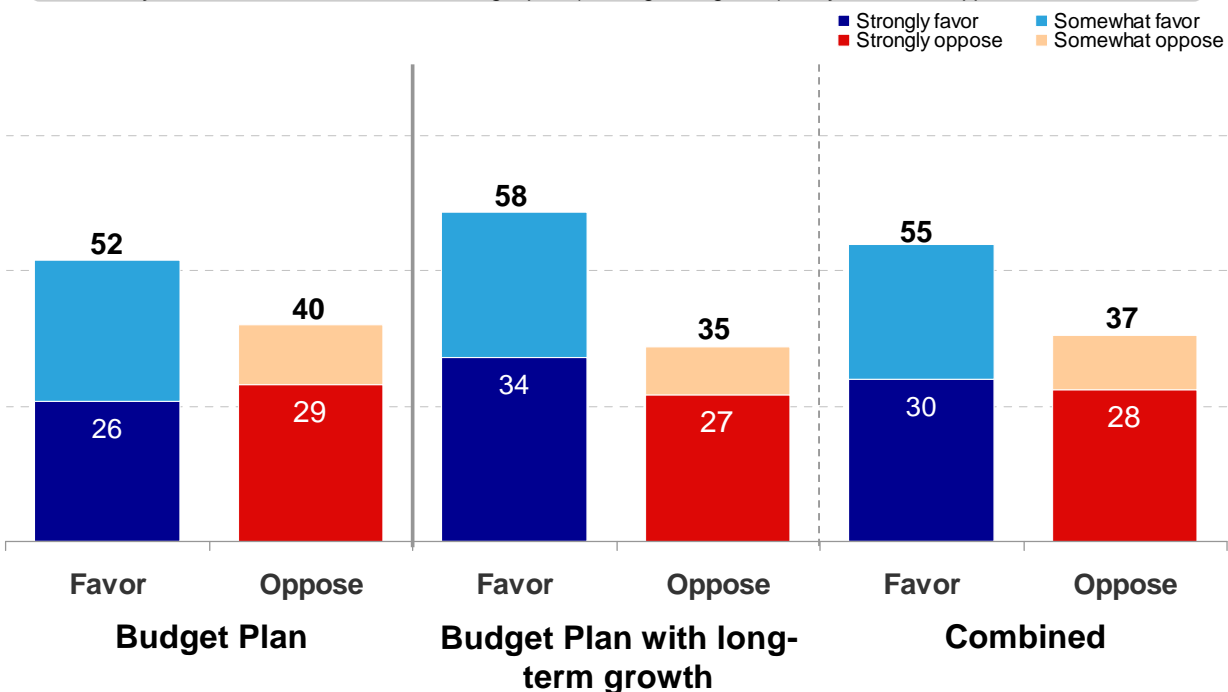
### Support Stronger When Budget Framed as Part of Plan for Long-Term Growth

Obama's budget, when presented alone, has stable majority support with 52 percent favoring the plan and 40 percent opposing it, but that support lacks intensity and does not necessarily move voters to reward members of Congress who back the plan (30 percent of voters say that if their Representative supported the plan it would make them more likely to reelect them in 2010 and 30 percent say it would make them less likely). When the budget is presented as a part of a plan for long-term economic growth and prosperity, support is significantly stronger (near 60 percent) and more enthusiastic. Perhaps more important, it causes net 7-point increase in voters' intention to vote to reelect their Member in two years.



### More support for Obama’s budget when tied to long-term growth

As you may have heard, President Obama recently released his plan for the federal budget (and long-term growth). From what you have heard about Obama's budget plan (for long-term growth), do you favor or oppose it?



While voters strongly agree with President Obama’s priorities and Democrats have some strong messaging on the budget (with the strongest being a message that focuses on rebalancing the tax code so the middle class pays less and the wealth pay their fair share), Republican attacks, particularly those centered on linking the budget to AIG and bailouts do have an effect, causing a slight shift in support away from Obama’s budget. The concern for progressives is that Obama’s plan might be seen as just a budget and be conflated with the unpopular bailouts of the financial and auto industries. However, when framed as part of a larger, long-term economic plan, Obama’s budget still has a small net-positive impact on the vote, even after the simulated debate that includes these Republican attacks.



### After debate, small shift against budget, but still net-positive impact on vote

Now let me ask you again, if your Representative in Congress voted in favor of President Obama's budget plan for **long-term growth**, would it make you more or less likely to support your Representative for reelection it two years, or does it make no difference?

