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**Starving the Beast**

*By* [*CATHERINE RAMPELL*](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/author/catherine-rampell/)

In his [Forbes.com column](http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/06/tax-cuts-republicans-starve-the-beast-columnists-bruce-bartlett_print.html) this week, Bruce Bartlett opines on the perniciousness of the “starve the beast” mantra. A former official in the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, Mr. Bartlett writes:

*I believe that to a large extent our current budgetary problems stem from the widespread adoption of an idea by Republicans in the 1970s called “starve the beast.” It says that the best, perhaps only, way of reducing government spending is by reducing taxes. While a plausible strategy at the time it was formulated, STB became a substitute for serious budget control efforts, reduced the political cost of deficits, encouraged fiscally irresponsible tax cutting and ultimately made both spending and deficits larger.*

Given Mr. Bartlett’s personal experience in crafting Republican tax policy, his recollection of the history of “S.T.B.” philosophy — and its shortcomings — is fascinating.

For a more quantitative approach to how well “S.T.B.” has fared, take a look at [this paper](http://elsa.berkeley.edu/%7Ecromer/draft708.pdf) by Christina Romer, the chairwoman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, and her husband, David Romer.

The paper is titled “Do Tax Cuts Starve the Beast?” and the Romers’ answer to that question appears to be “Not Even Close.” Or more specifically (emphasis added):

*The results provide no support for the hypothesis that tax cuts restrain government spending; indeed, the point estimates suggest that tax cuts may increase spending. The results also indicate that the main effect of tax cuts on the government budget is to induce subsequent legislated tax increases.*

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