

Americans Continue to View Long-Term Debt as Key Issue for Policymakers; 7 in 10 Voters Say Their Level of Concern Has Increased

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The February 2015 Fiscal Confidence Index, Modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 45 (100 is Neutral)

NEW YORK — The Peter G. Peterson Foundation’s February Fiscal Confidence Index, a monthly measure of public attitudes about the nation’s long-term debt and the efforts elected leaders are making to address America’s fiscal challenges, shows that Americans remain highly concerned about the country’s unsustainable fiscal path. The Fiscal Confidence Index, modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 45 (100 is neutral), indicating voters’ continuing concern over the nation’s fiscal health.

As the President and Congress begin the annual budgetary process, Americans overwhelmingly believe that putting the nation on a sustainable fiscal path should be a primary focus. A clear majority of voters (82%) want the President and Congress to spend more time addressing our national debt, with over eight in ten (82%) agreeing that the issue should be one of the top three priorities for the President and Congress, including over half (55%) who agree strongly. Seven in ten voters say their level of concern about the nation’s fiscal outlook has increased in the last few years.

"Voters understand that we need to address our long-term fiscal challenges in order to secure a growing and prosperous economy," said Michael A. Peterson, President and COO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. "As our economy gains strength, voters are looking to Washington for leadership to put our nation’s fiscal house in order."

The Fiscal Confidence Index measures public opinion about the national debt by asking six questions in three key areas:

- **CONCERN:** Level of concern and views about the direction of the national debt.
- **PRIORITY:** How high a priority addressing the debt should be for elected leaders.
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Expectations about whether the debt situation will get better or worse in the next few years.

The survey results from these three areas are weighted equally and averaged to produce the Fiscal Confidence Index value. The Fiscal Confidence Index, like the Consumer Confidence Index, is indexed on a scale of 0 to

200, with a neutral midpoint of 100. A reading above 100 indicates positive sentiment. A reading below 100 indicates negative sentiment.

Fiscal Confidence Index Key Data Points:

- **The February 2015 Fiscal Confidence Index value is 45.** A score of 100 is neutral. Values below 100 show negative sentiment, while values above 100 show positive sentiment. (January's value was 52. December's value was 44.)
- The current Fiscal Confidence Index score for CONCERN about the debt is 42, indicating deep concern about the debt. The score for debt as a PRIORITY that leaders must address is 22, indicating that Americans want elected leaders to make addressing long-term debt a high priority. The score for EXPECTATIONS about progress on the debt is 72, indicating strong pessimism about the direction of long-term fiscal policy in the next few years. The Fiscal Confidence Index of 45 is the average of these three sub-category scores.
- For a description of the complete methodology, see the Appendix below.

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation commissioned a poll by the Global Strategy Group and North Star Opinion Research to survey public opinion on the national debt. The nationwide poll included 1,000 U.S. registered voters, surveyed by telephone between February 16 and February 19, 2015. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%. The poll examined voters' opinions on the national debt, political leadership, and America's fiscal and economic health.

Detailed poll results can be found online at: www.pgpf.org/what-we-are-doing/education-and-awareness/fiscal-confidence-index

About the Peter G. Peterson Foundation

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that is dedicated to increasing public awareness of the nature and urgency of key long-term fiscal challenges threatening America's future, and to accelerating action on them. To address these challenges successfully, we work to bring Americans together to find and implement sensible, long-term solutions that transcend age, party lines and ideological divides in order to achieve real results. To learn more, please visit www.pgpf.org.

APPENDIX: Fiscal Confidence Index Methodology and Questions

- The Fiscal Confidence Index is released monthly by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation.
- The Fiscal Confidence Index value is based on six questions in three categories.
- As is done with the Consumer Confidence Index, the first step in calculating the Fiscal Confidence Index is determining the "Relative Value" for each question. This calculation is made by taking the positive response for each question and dividing it by the sum of the positive and negative responses. Each question was asked on a four-point scale, and answers were weighted according to intensity, with the strongest responses counting twice as much as the middle responses ("much" better or worse answers count twice as heavily as "somewhat" better or worse answers).
- The scores for the Concern, Priority, and Expectations categories are determined by averaging the scores derived from the two questions in each category.
- The Fiscal Confidence Index value is converted from the Relative Value to place it on a scale on which 100 indicates equal positive and negative sentiment, while values below 100 indicate negative sentiment and values above 100 indicate positive sentiment.
- The Peter G. Peterson Foundation commissioned the poll by the Global Strategy Group and North Star Opinion Research to survey public opinion on the national debt. The nationwide poll included 1,000 U.S.

registered voters, surveyed by telephone between February 16 and February 19, 2015. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%. The poll examined voters' opinions on the national debt, political leadership, and America's fiscal and economic health.

- The questions are as follows:

CONCERN (42)	
<p>Thinking about our national debt over the last few years, would you say your level of concern has increased or decreased? ? Is that a lot or just a little?</p>	
	(Don't know)
	INCREASED
DECREASED	

<p>When it comes to addressing our national debt, would you say things in the United States are heading in the right direction or do you think things are off on the wrong track? ? Do you feel that way strongly or just somewhat?</p>	
	Right direction
	Right direction
	Wrong track
	Wrong track
	(Don't know)
	RIGHT DIRECTION
WRONG TRACK	

PRIORITY (22)	
<p>Some people say that addressing the national debt should be among the President and Congress' top 3 priorities. Do you agree or disagree? ? Do you feel that way strongly or just somewhat?</p>	
	Strongly agree
	Disagree
	(Don't know)
	DISAGREE
	STRONGLY AGREE

And when it comes to our national debt, do you think it is an issue that the President and Congress should spend more time addressing or less time addressing? ? Would you say a lot (more or less) time or just a little?	
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EXPECTATIONS (72)	
And thinking about our national debt over the next few years, do you expect the problem to get better or worse? ? Is that much (better or worse) or just somewhat (better or worse)?	
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And when it comes to our national debt, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the United States will be able to make progress on our national debt over the next few years? ? Would you say you are very (optimistic or pessimistic) or just somewhat?	
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