

# Americans Remain Concerned about Nation's Fiscal Health

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*The September 2016 Fiscal Confidence Index, Modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 51 (100 is Neutral)*

**NEW YORK** — As the presidential debate season begins, voters remain deeply concerned about the country's long-term fiscal health. The Peter G. Peterson Foundation's September 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, is 51 (100 is neutral), indicating that the nation's fiscal outlook remains a top issue for voters. Although Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump acknowledged America's growing national debt during the first presidential debate, Americans want more discussion of policy solutions to this fundamental fiscal and economic challenge.

A clear majority of Americans believe the country is currently on the wrong track in addressing the national debt (63% wrong track/24% right direction), and more than 8 in 10 voters (81%) believe that the president and Congress should be spending more time addressing the issue. Meanwhile, 2 in 3 (66%) voters say their level of concern about our national debt has increased over the last few years. To achieve more progress on our fiscal challenges, 3 in 4 (75%) Americans want addressing the nation's debt to be among the president and Congress' top three priorities.

"While the candidates have acknowledged that our growing national debt is a problem, Americans want to hear more," said Michael A. Peterson, president and CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. "Voters are concerned about America's fiscal and economic future, and the remaining debates are an ideal venue for the candidates to present their plans to put our nation on a sustainable fiscal path."

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 September 2016 Fiscal Confidence Index value is 51. (August and July's values were both 50.)
- The current Fiscal Confidence Index score for CONCERN about the debt is 39, indicating deep concern about the debt. The score for debt as a PRIORITY that leaders must address is 28, 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 86, indicating strong pessimism about the direction of long-term fiscal policy in the next few years. The Fiscal Confidence Index of 51 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 1,007 U.S. registered voters, surveyed by telephone between September 19 and September 22, 2016. 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/FiscalConfidenceIndex](http://www.pgpf.org/FiscalConfidenceIndex).

### **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 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](http://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 questions are as follows:

### CONCERN (39)

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?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
Increased a lot	47%	46%	47%
Increased a little	19%	23%	24%
Decreased a little	10%	11%	10%
Decreased a lot	5%	5%	4%
(No change)	15%	13%	15%
(Don't Know/Refused)	3%	2%	1%
INCREASED (NET)	66%	69%	70%
DECREASED (NET)	15%	16%	14%

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?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
Right direction-Strongly	10%	9%	7%
Right direction-Somewhat	14%	16%	15%
Wrong track-Somewhat	14%	20%	21%
Wrong track-Strongly	49%	44%	45%
(Neither/Mixed)	7%	6%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	6%	5%	6%
RIGHT DIRECTION (NET)	24%	25%	22%
WRONG TRACK (NET)	63%	64%	66%

### PRIORITY (20)

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?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
Strongly agree	52%	57%	54%
Somewhat agree	22%	24%	24%
Somewhat disagree	12%	10%	12%
Strongly disagree	9%	6%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	5%	3%	4%
AGREE (NET)	75%	81%	78%
DISAGREE (NET)	20%	16%	18%

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?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
A lot more time	59%	61%	58%
A little more time	22%	25%	28%
A little less time	8%	5%	5%
A lot less time	3%	2%	3%
(The same amount of time)	3%	4%	3%
(Don't Know/Refused)	5%	3%	3%
<b>MORE TIME (NET)</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>LESS TIME (NET)</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>

### EXPECTATIONS (92)

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)?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
Much better	7%	9%	8%
Somewhat better	18%	21%	21%
Somewhat worse	25%	23%	28%
Much worse	22%	23%	21%
(No change)	6%	5%	5%
(Don't know/Refused)	22%	19%	18%
<b>BETTER (NET)</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>WORSE (NET)</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>48%</b>

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?	September 2016	August 2016	July 2016
Very optimistic	19%	20%	17%
Somewhat optimistic	27%	31%	36%
Somewhat pessimistic	15%	17%	20%
Very pessimistic	21%	19%	15%
(Neither/Mixed)	6%	6%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	12%	8%	7%
<b>OPTIMISTIC (NET)</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>PESSIMISTIC (NET)</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>34%</b>

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