

Heading into Election Day, Voters across Political Spectrum Want National Debt to Be a Priority for Next President and Congress

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The October 2016 Fiscal Confidence Index, Modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 52 (100 is Neutral)

NEW YORK — As Election Day approaches, the nation’s fiscal health remains a top concern for voters, according to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation’s October 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. The Fiscal Confidence Index, modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 52 (100 is neutral), indicating the nation’s fiscal future remains a top issue on voters’ minds as they head to the voting booth.

As the hard-fought campaign season comes to its conclusion — and as both presidential candidates were asked about their plans to address the debt in the final presidential debate — voters of all political stripes agree strongly that the national debt needs to be a major priority for the country’s leadership. Overwhelming majorities of Democrats (73%), Independents (82%), and Republicans (91%) all agree that the issue should be a top three priority for the President and Congress. Moreover, a majority of voters (53%) are optimistic that the country can make progress on the issue, a 7-point increase from September (46%).

“Heading into Election Day, it’s clear that the nation’s fiscal future is a key issue on the minds of voters,” said Michael A. Peterson, President and CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. “Americans understand that a sustainable fiscal foundation is needed to secure a strong and growing economy. Americans want fixing the debt to be a top priority for the next administration and incoming Congress, and they are looking for leadership as they enter the voting booth. The good news is that there are many solutions available to right our fiscal ship.”

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 October 2016 Fiscal Confidence Index value is 52.** (The September value was 51 and the August value was 50.)
- The current Fiscal Confidence Index score for CONCERN about the debt is 44, indicating deep concern about the debt. The score for debt as a PRIORITY that leaders must address is 20, 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 93, indicating strong pessimism about the direction of long-term fiscal policy in the next few years. The Fiscal Confidence Index 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 October 17 and October 20, 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.

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.

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 (44)

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?	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
Increased a lot	46%	47%	46%
Increased a little	20%	19%	23%
Decreased a little	12%	10%	11%
Decreased a lot	5%	5%	5%
(No change)	15%	15%	13%
(Don't Know/Refused)	2%	3%	2%
INCREASED (NET)	66%	66%	69%
DECREASED (NET)	17%	15%	16%

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?	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
Right direction-Strongly	12%	10%	9%
Right direction-Somewhat	17%	14%	16%
Wrong track-Somewhat	14%	14%	20%
Wrong track-Strongly	44%	49%	44%
(Neither/Mixed)	6%	7%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	6%	6%	5%
RIGHT DIRECTION (NET)	29%	24%	25%
WRONG TRACK (NET)	59%	63%	64%

PRIORITY (93)

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?	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
Strongly agree	60%	52%	57%
Somewhat agree	21%	22%	24%
Somewhat disagree	9%	12%	10%

Strongly disagree	7%	9%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	3%	5%	3%
AGREE (NET)	81%	75%	81%
DISAGREE (NET)	15%	20%	16%

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?

	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
A lot more time	62%	59%	61%
A little more time	23%	22%	25%
A little less time	5%	8%	5%
A lot less time	3%	3%	2%
(The same amount of time)	5%	3%	4%
(Don't Know/Refused)	3%	5%	3%
MORE TIME (NET)	85%	81%	85%
LESS TIME (NET)	7%	11%	7%

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)?

	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
Much better	8%	7%	9%
Somewhat better	19%	18%	21%
Somewhat worse	21%	25%	23%
Much worse	24%	22%	23%
(No change)	7%	6%	5%
(Don't know/Refused)	21%	22%	19%
BETTER (NET)	27%	25%	30%
WORSE (NET)	45%	47%	46%

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?

	October 2016	September 2016	August 2016
Very optimistic	23%	19%	20%
Somewhat optimistic	30%	27%	31%
Somewhat pessimistic	13%	15%	17%
Very pessimistic	20%	21%	19%
(Neither/Mixed)	6%	6%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	8%	12%	8%
OPTIMISTIC (NET)	53%	46%	50%

PESSIMISTIC (NET)

33%

36%

36%

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