

Public Agenda Survey Results - Beltway Influencers

The Beltway Influencer survey was conducted by Harris Interactive® between February 28 to March 28 2011 among a total of 305 Beltway Influencers comprised of 150 DC Opinion Elite, and 153 "Leaders," which consist of 50 Government (Congressional Staffers and Executive Branch), 45 Media, and 60 Thought Leaders from NGO's, Interest Groups, Foundations and Associations. Elite surveys were conducted online and figures were weighted on age, sex, education, race, household income and education where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the DC Opinion Elite population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for the DC Opinion Elite respondents' propensity to be online. All other groups were conducted via telephone and were not weighted.

Responses may not always total 100 percent due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

		April 2011		October 2010		March 2010	
		Leaders n = 155	Elites n = 150	Leaders n = 152	Elites n = 150	Leaders n = 153	Elites n = 150
Would you say that things in this country are going in the right direction, or have they pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?	Right Direction	48%	38%	49%	43%	50%	38%
	Wrong Track	44%	62%	43%	57%	43%	62%
	Don't know	3%		4%		4%	
Thinking about Congress during the past three months, how would you characterize relations between members of the two parties? Is this more a time of partisan conflict, or more a time of bi-partisan cooperation?	Cooperation	8%	13%	1%	2%	1%	2%
	Conflict	89%	87%	95%	98%	99%	98%
	Don't know	1%		3%			
How would you characterize relations between Congress and the President during the past three months? Is this more a time of conflict, or more a time of cooperation between the Administration and Congress?	Cooperation	27%	12%	29%	23%	24%	22%
	Conflict	70%	88%	65%	77%	71%	78%
	Don't know	3%		5%		3%	
What do you consider to be the one most important problem facing the country today? [Open-ended question]	Budget deficit / National debt / Government spending	28%	21%	10%	12%	13%	9%
	The economy	26%	21%	38%	43%	35%	37%
	Employment/jobs	19%	22%	23%	13%	19%	11%
	Health care (non-Medicare)	3%	1%	1%	3%	7%	11%
	Partisan conflict		3%	3%	4%	7%	6%
	Lack of confidence/trust in govt	5%				n/a	n/a
	Issues with public sector unions		4%			n/a	n/a
	Issues with Republican Party		4%			n/a	n/a
	Other	16%	20%	24%	24%	19%	26%
Don't know/Refused	3%	4%					
When considering proposals made by the federal government to address the issues that you care about, how important in your decision to support a proposal is the overall cost and how it affects the federal budget?	Very important	48%	50%	39%	55%	43%	57%
	Somewhat important	43%	41%	50%	34%	44%	31%
	Not too important	6%	5%	9%	4%	10%	11%
	Not important at all	3%	3%	3%	6%	3%	2%
Thinking specifically about improving the United States economy, which of the following do you think will help the most in getting the economy back on track? [Randomized response order]	Investing in job creation and retraining	38%	36%			52%	37%
	Doing more to reduce the national debt	28%	28%			16%	12%
	Greater banking and financial oversight	5%	8%			9%	16%
	Cutting taxes for the middle class	4%	5%			10%	13%
	Spending on another economic stimulus plan	Not asked	Not asked			7%	4%
	Improving national infrastructure	20%	16%				
	Cutting taxes for all, including business	Not asked	Not asked			1%	5%
	Something else	5%	8%			5%	14%

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These days how often would you say you personally advocate policies based around reducing the national debt by talking to elected officials and media organizations or by discussing the issue online?	Often	16%	20%	17%	22%	12%	21%
	Sometimes	17%	34%	16%	34%	15%	25%
	Rarely	31%	24%	20%	22%	30%	30%
	Never	35%	19%	45%	22%	41%	23%
	Don't know		4%			1%	
Please indicate how worried you are about the following. [Randomized item order]	China and other countries that hold much of the national debt will start to lose confidence in the United States economy and stop buying American bonds.						
	Very worried	19%	30%	18%	28%	21%	36%
	Somewhat worried	42%	41%	36%	38%	42%	39%
	Not too worried	28%	18%	28%	25%	27%	21%
	Not at all worried	10%	6%	17%	9%	10%	5%
	Don't know		5%			1%	
	These days, policy makers are focusing too much on controlling the national debt.						
	Very worried	16%	30%	18%	24%	12%	15%
	Somewhat worried	38%	23%	26%	25%	33%	25%
	Not too worried	13%	16%	23%	22%	20%	30%
Not at all worried	30%	27%	30%	28%	31%	29%	
Don't know	1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	1%	
The American people in general do not care enough about the growing national debt.							
Very worried	18%	45%	23%	31%	21%	49%	
Somewhat worried	45%	27%	32%	34%	35%	31%	
Not too worried	21%	17%	27%	27%	30%	16%	
Not at all worried	14%	7%	15%	8%	12%	4%	
Don't know	1%	4%	2%		2%		

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Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following items. <i>[Randomized item order]</i>	Pragmatic solutions to the national debt will be impossible to achieve due to partisan politics.						
	Strongly agree	30%	52%	29%	50%	36%	43%
	Somewhat agree	36%	31%	46%	35%	42%	42%
	Somewhat disagree	28%	9%	16%	11%	14%	9%
	Strongly disagree	6%	4%	7%	4%	8%	3%
	Don't know		5%	1%	1%		2%
	There are at least several practical policy approaches to meet the country's needs without causing the national debt to significantly rise.						
	Strongly agree	37%	43%	34%	46%	29%	41%
	Somewhat agree	43%	43%	43%	40%	48%	42%
	Somewhat disagree	11%	6%	14%	9%	14%	9%
	Strongly disagree	6%	2%	5%	2%	4%	4%
	Don't know	3%	6%	3%	3%	3%	3%
	If we do not act to get the national debt under control, it will overwhelm the federal budget and damage the economy in the long run.						
	Strongly agree	57%	55%	51%	49%	53%	55%
	Somewhat agree	26%	29%	32%	29%	32%	31%
	Somewhat disagree	10%	10%	12%	19%	11%	11%
	Strongly disagree	6%	2%	5%	3%	4%	3%
	Don't know		4%				0%
	There is no realistic way to address the rising national debt by solely cutting spending or by solely raising taxes - both cutting spending and raising taxes are required to reduce the debt.						
	Strongly agree	56%	53%	43%	44%	54%	44%
	Somewhat agree	21%	20%	32%	29%	27%	32%
	Somewhat disagree	8%	11%	11%	17%	10%	8%
	Strongly disagree	14%	13%	13%	10%	8%	14%
	Don't know	1%	4%	1%		1%	2%
Do you think that the issue of the rising national debt can be best addressed by...? <i>[Base: Those that disagree that spending and taxes are required]</i>	Cutting spending	79%	87%	80%	62%		
	Raising taxes	3%	7%	6%	17%		
	Neither cutting spending nor raising taxes will really address the growing national debt	12%	6%	11%	21%		
	The national debt does not need to be addressed	3%					
	Don't know	3%					

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Please indicate which of the following two opinions comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right. [Randomized response order]	These days elected officials are often factoring in the national debt in their decisions because they think it is an important issue.	41%	18%			22%	13%
	Elected officials generally do not make decisions with the goal of reducing the national debt, because they are focused on more short-term issues.	57%	82%			78%	79%
	Don't know	1%				1%	8%
In the past few months, would you say you have seen more, less or about the same amount of the following? [Randomized response order]	Nonpartisan Policy Experts coming out with proposals designed to control the growth of the national debt.						
	More	45%	41%			24%	28%
	Less	11%	21%			12%	18%
	About the same	41%	38%			60%	41%
	Don't know	2%				5%	13%
	Elected Officials Or Leaders Of Advocacy Organizations That You Agree With coming out with recommendations designed to control the growth of the national debt.						
	More	43%	45%			24%	33%
	Less	12%	17%			18%	22%
	About the same	41%	38%			56%	38%
	Don't know	2%				3%	7%
Which statement comes closer to your own view? The healthcare reform plan that was passed by Congress and signed into law in March 2010 will...?	Increase the size of the national debt over the next ten years	37%	33%				
	Decrease the size of the national debt over the next ten years	37%	32%				
	Virtually make no difference on the size of the nation debt over the next ten years	21%	24%				
	Don't know	3%	10%				
Do you think that the report which came out of the National Deficit Commission that was formed by the President has generally had a...?	Positive impact on the debate over the national debt	45%	38%				
	Negative impact on the debate over the national debt	7%	23%				
	Not sure		39%				
	Don't know	43%					
In your own words why do you think it has had a positive impact on the debate over the national debt?	Increased awareness/Helped elevate the issue	40%	24%				
	Contributes more to the dialogue that there is a problem/added to the discussion	20%	3%				

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In your own words why do you think it has had a positive impact on the debate over the national debt? (cont)	Focused on specific issues/issues that are not popular but are required to reduce debt	17%	12%				
	Includes entitlement reform/Medicare/Social Security	17%	16%				
	Bi-partisan support	16%	11%				
	Laid out strategies that need to be considered to reduce long term debt	11%	24%				
	Created a set of recommendations for discussion	9%	17%				
	Other miscellaneous mentions	7%	4%				
	Provides information/facts from experts	6%	2%				
	Focused on areas of wasteful spending	3%	3%				
	First report of dealing with the underlying problems	3%	1%				
	Other awareness mentions	1%	2%				
	Other recommendations/ideas for a resolution mentions	1%	2%				
	Proposed both increased taxes and spending cuts	1%	7%				
	Don't know		3%				
In your own words why do you think it has had a negative impact on the debate over the national debt?	Does not address the real problem	27%	9%				
	Not enough mention of raising taxes	27%	9%				
	Too much focus on social security	18%	1%				
	Skewed view of healthcare	9%	1%				
	Commission's work focuses too much on entitlement spending	9%					
	Doesn't touch the issue for employment/jobs	9%	4%				
	Other problem not addressed mentions	9%	8%				
	Recommendations were not realistic	9%	2%				
	False assumptions/fraudulent/bogus	9%	4%				
	Politicians have no backbone to raise taxes	9%	2%				
	Won't touch sacred cows/entitlements	9%	12%				
	Burden is placed on middle class	9%	7%				
	Declined to answer	9%	16%				
	Aren't worried about the debt		8%				
	Too much partisan/can't agree		14%				
	Added fuel to the fire		1%				
Other partisan mentions		14%					
Other mentions		6%					
Please indicate which of the following two opinions comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right.	Congress needs to raise the debt ceiling in the next few months; there is a risk of a financial crisis if they do not	67%	56%				
	Congress should not raise the debt ceiling; opportunity to limit federal spending and control the national debt	29%	44%				
	Don't know	3%					
Some experts track the national debt	Around 30%	26%	19%			33%	14%

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as a percentage of GDP, that is, they report the debt as a certain percentage of the total size of the U.S. economy (the GDP). What percentage of the total economy do you think the national debt represents as of today?	Around 40%	15%	22%			22%	15%
	Around 50%	7%	5%			12%	8%
	Around 60%	15%	20%			10%	14%
	Around 70%	7%	8%			4%	16%
	Higher than 70%	17%	26%			8%	13%
	Don't know					11%	20%
What percentage of GDP do you think the debt should be in order to allow the government to sustain essential services without harming the overall economy?	Around 30%	26%	19%			58%	42%
	Around 40%	15%	22%			10%	22%
	Around 50%	7%	5%			8%	7%
	Around 60%	15%	20%			2%	1%
	Around 70%	7%	8%				
	Higher than 70%	17%	26%			1%	1%
Don't know	12%				15%	28%	
Which in your mind is more important to preserve when trying to cut federal spending?	Investments such as education and national defense, for instance, because these are important for the future of the United States.	48%	58%			49%	49%
	Benefits such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, for instance, because these were promises we made as a nation to our citizens.	37%	42%			41%	41%
	Don't know	5%				3%	10%

Characteristics of the Sample		Leaders n = 155	Elites n = 150
Gender	Male	70%	58%
	Female	30%	42%
Age	18-29		
	20-24		
	25-29	7%	2%
	30-34	6%	7%
	35-39	3%	4%
	40-44	10%	6%
	45-49	13%	15%
	50-54	21%	15%
	55-59	22%	9%
	60-64	9%	23%
65+	9%	19%	
Political Affiliation	Republican	23%	23%
	Democrat	48%	50%
	Independent, no party affiliation	25%	25%
	Other party	4%	1%
Educational Attainment	High School	1%	2%
	Some college	2%	11%
	Associate Degree	1%	2%
	Bachelors Degree	37%	39%
	Graduate or Professional Degree	61%	46%
Income [Elites only]	Less than \$100,000		
	\$100,000 to \$124,999		18%

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Race	\$125,000 to \$149,999		18%				
	\$150,000 to \$199,999		28%				
	\$200,000 to \$249,999		15%				
	\$250,000 or more		22%				
	White	84%	83%				
	Black	3%	8%				
	Asian or Pacific Islander	4%	1%				
	Native American	1%	0%				
	Mixed racial background	1%	1%				
	Hispanic	3%	1%				
	Other race	3%	3%				

