And The Debate Deficit over Federal Budget Deficit

Americans Don't See Federal Budget Deficit as Top Concern or Priority for Political Leaders

But Ranked Concerns and Priorities by Republicans and Democrats Explain Emphasis of Political Foes on US Agenda

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The Debate Deficit over Federal Budget Deficit

Americans Don't See Federal Budget Deficit as Top Concern or Priority for Political Leaders

But Ranked Concerns and Priorities by Democrat and Republican Voters Help Explain Emphasis of Political Foes on US Agenda

Washington, DC – Even though the Federal budget deficit keeps growing at enormous pace, a new Thomson Reuters/Ipsos poll shows that most Americans don't rate it as the economic issue that they're most concerned about or one that should be the priority of its elected leaders.

But the poll also shows that outside of two issues that Republicans and Democrats seem to agree on that should be a priority for each of their respective political leaders—unemployment and jobs, and economic growth—there are two very distinct agendas playing out across the political landscape; where the federal deficit is the second most important priority for Republicans, it is the fifth most important for Democrats.

When it comes to issues related to the economy, unemployment ranks highest in concern…

When asked to rank which issues related to the economy that Americans are most concerned about, those who are very concerned make the emphasis clear – with high unemployment outpacing concern about the federal deficit by a margin of two to one:

- High unemployment (33%)
- Higher taxes (22%)
- Federal budget deficit (16%)
- Slow economic growth (14%)
- Weak dollar (13%)

And even when ranked as a priority that their political leaders should be dealing with, the federal budget deficit falls well below the top of the list…

When Americans are asked to rank the priority that their political leaders should be placing on various issues on the US domestic agenda, the federal budget deficit falls well off the pace for those who want unemployment to be a very high priority:

- Unemployment and jobs (68%)
- Economic growth (53%)

- Terrorism/war (50%)
- Healthcare (49%)
- Federal budget deficit (48%)
- Taxes (38%)
- Weak dollar (37%)

But Democrats and Republicans Have Different Agenda Concerns, Priority Lists…

Perhaps why the debate on the Federal budget deficit seems so one-sided or marginalized is because when Democrat and Republican supporters are lined up for a comparison of the issues that are of greatest concern to them or which should be receiving the highest priority from their political leaders, is a clear differentiation in terms of rank order and emphasis.

In particular, Democrats who are very concerned about economic issues affecting the country place the Federal deficit at the bottom of the list: high unemployment (45%), slow economic growth (17%), higher taxes (15%), weak dollar (13%) and Federal budget deficit (8%).

This contrasts with Republicans who are very concerned about the economic issues confronting America. They have a completely different set of ranking concerns and place the federal budget deficit closer to the top: higher taxes (31%), Federal budget deficit (25%), high unemployment (16%), weaker dollar (14%) and slow economic growth (12%).

And so, while the issue is clearly of higher concern to Republicans, it is far from the fact for Democrats—hence the one sided resonance of the issue.

This is also apparent when contrasting those who want their political leaders to place a very high priority on various issues across the land.

For Democrats, the priority list for their political representatives is topped with the issue of high unemployment (72%), followed by healthcare (62%), economic growth (53%), terrorism/war (44%), Federal budget deficit (37%), weak dollar (34%) and taxes (30%).

For Republicans, the priority list for their political representatives is also topped by unemployment and jobs (63%), but then is followed by the Federal budget deficit (60%), terrorism/war (59%), economic growth (53%--tied with Democrats), taxes (48%), a weak dollar (40%) and healthcare (31%).

As such, outside of having relative agreement that unemployment and jobs should be a top priority for political leaders and having similar percentages of each political grouping that economic growth should be a very high priority (53%), it's clear that the Federal budget deficit is a second-place Republican concern and priority but is "out voiced" by Democrats and their concerns and priorities which puts the Federal budget deficit near or at the bottom of their agenda.

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But Why no Engaged National Debate on Federal Budget Deficit: It Takes Two to Tangle…

So why is there no engaged national debate on the federal budget deficit? Likely, and simply, because only Republicans view it as something that's very concerning and should be a very high priority, and because Democrats don't see it as something that's very concerning or should be given high priority, really, at all. Clearly, for President Obama, the Federal budget deficit is not a current political issue that has any traction, at least at this time, for his political constituency. For a Republican opposition they have come up against Democrat voters that have a different agenda that doesn't include getting tangled up in a debate over something that to them, can wait for another day.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted Thursday, October 29 to Monday, November 2, 2009. For the survey, a nationally representative, randomly selected sample of 1,077 adults aged 18 and older across the United States was interviewed by Ipsos. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population in the U.S. been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the actual U.S. population according to U.S. Census figures. Respondents had the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish.

Who are Most Concerned about What?

When asked to think about the issues related to the economy and what concerns the most, those who indicate they are very concerned are more likely to be:

High unemployment (33%) -- women (35%), aged 35-54 (36%), earning under $25,000 annually (36%) and those earning between $25,000 and $50,000 annually (39%), in the West (39%), Hispanic (43%), non-Hispanic black (40%) non-Hispanic other (39%) and **Democrat** (45% versus Republican at 16%).

Higher taxes (22%) -- those aged 18-to 34 (32%), in the Northeast (30%), with children (27%), not employed (30%), and **Republican** (31% versus Democrat at 15%).

Federal budget deficit (16%) -- those aged 55+ (22%), earning more than $50,000 annually (19%), in the Midwest (18%), with no children (21%), retired (19%), married (19%) and Republican (25% versus Democrat at 8%).

Slow economic growth (14%) -- those working part-time (18%) and **Democrat** (17% versus Republican at 12%).

Weak dollar (13%) -- those earning $50,000 or more annually (16%), those in the South (18%), full time (16%), retired (16%), non-Hispanic white (16%) and **Republican** (14%, in a virtual tie with their Democrat counterparts at 13%).

Who Wants What Priority for their Political Leaders?

When asked to think about some issues and how much of a priority their political leaders should put on them, those Americans who believe it should be a very high priority are more likely to be:

Unemployment and Jobs (68%) -- women (71%), those aged 35-54 (71%), those in the south (71%), non-Hispanic black (79%), non-Hispanic other (50%) and **Democrat** (72% versus 63% Republican).

Economic growth (53%) --Hispanic (60%), non-Hispanic black (60%) and a tie between **Democrats and Republicans** (53%).

Terrorism/war (50%) -- women (54%) those aged 55+ (56%), those earning under $25,000 annually (60%), Midwest/South (54%), high school or less (55%), not employed (55%), retired (56%) and **Republican** (59% versus 44% Democrat).

Healthcare (49%) – women (54%), those earning under $25,000 annually (56%), high school or less education (53%), working part time (55%), Hispanic (2%), non-Hispanic black (66%), non-Hispanic other (60%) and **Democrat** (60% versus 31% Republican).

Federal budget deficit (48%) -- those aged 55+ (55%), those earning more than $50,000 annually (56%), in the Northeast (50%), with a college degree or more education (53%), working part-time (58%), retired (55%), married (54%), non-Hispanic white (52%) and **Republican** (60% versus 37% Democrat).

Taxes (38%) -- those aged 55+ (43%), Northeast (41%), high school or less education (43%), working part-time (42%), retired (43%), Hispanic (47%) and **Republican** (48%) versus 30% Democrat).

Weak dollar (37%) -- those aged 55+ (42%), those earning $25,000-$50,000 annually (45%), in the south (43%), with children (41%), retired (41%), non-Hispanic black (50%) and **Republican** (40% versus 34% Democrat).

Measuring Overall Concern and Priority…

A full set of detailed tables that accompany this release provides a breakdown on the responses to the questions asked. Taking into account the lack of differentiation on the total response to each question, those who were "very concerned" or wanted the issue placed as they "very high" priority" provided an optimum waiting to the strength of each response.

As an example, when asked a straight up question as to how concerned Americans are about the Federal budget deficit, a total of 84% indicated that they were "concerned"; however, further detailed analysis shows that 47% of Americans are "very concerned" compared to 37% who are "somewhat" concerned. Those who are "very concerned" are men (50%), those aged 55+ (58%), with college education or higher (51%), working part-time (58%), retired (58%) and **Republican** (63% versus 32% Democrat).

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