

FEBRUARY 25, 2013

Little Partisan Difference in Views of Sequester's Impact

Most Say Spending Cuts Would Have Major Impact on Economy, Military

A Pew Research Center/Washington Post Survey

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT
THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE
PEOPLE & THE PRESS**

Michael Dimock

Director

Carroll Doherty

Associate Director

Alec Tyson

Research Associate

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel (202) 419-4372
Fax (202) 419-4399
www.people-press.org

Little Partisan Difference in Views of Sequester's Impact

Most Say Spending Cuts Would Have Major Impact on Economy, Military

While many Americans may be resigned to seeing automatic spending cuts in the budget sequester go into effect, the public is concerned about the potential impact of the reductions. A new national survey by the Pew Research Center and *The Washington Post*, conducted Feb. 21-24 among 1,000 adults, finds that most say the budget sequester would have a major effect on the economy as well as on the U.S. military. And by more than three-to-one (62%-18%), the public sees the impact on the economy as mostly negative rather than mostly positive.

But signs of public fatigue after a series of fiscal crises remain apparent. Just days before automatic federal spending cuts are set to take place, only a quarter are following the issue very closely. By comparison, four-in-ten were closely tracking the fiscal cliff debate in December a full month before the deadline.

And a Pew Research Center/USA TODAY survey just last week found 40% willing to see the sequester's cuts take hold rather than having them delayed.

Yet the new survey finds six-in-ten (60%) saying automatic federal spending cuts would have a major effect on the U.S. economy and nearly as many (55%) say the same for the U.S. military. Fewer (45%) say the cuts would have a major impact on the federal budget deficit, while just (30%) think their own personal finances would be affected in a major way.

How the Sequester Will Affect the Nation

<i>Sequester's effect on...</i>	Major effect	Minor effect	No effect
US Economy	60	25	5
US Military	55	25	10
Budget deficit	45	31	12
Your personal finances	30	40	19

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST Feb. 21-24, 2013.

Partisan Agreement: Sequester Would Negatively Affect Economy

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>% major effect</i>	%	%	%	%
U.S. economy	60	58	64	61
U.S. military	55	60	56	52
Budget deficit	45	45	51	42
Personal finances	30	28	36	28
<i>Effect on economy would be...</i>				
Mostly positive	18	20	19	15
Mostly negative	62	60	61	66
No effect/DK	<u>21</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST Feb. 21-24, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

And while earlier polls have found Republicans and Democrats offering different solutions to the nation's budget problems, there is substantial partisan agreement that the sequester will do more economic harm than good. Roughly six-in-ten Republicans, Democrats and independents alike say the sequester will have a major effect on the nation's economy, and by overwhelming margins all agree that the effect will be negative, not positive.

Fewer See Personal Finances Affected

Public views of the sequester's potential impact on the nation's economy are comparable to how they viewed the fiscal cliff late last year. However, unlike the fiscal cliff, which included potential tax increases, far fewer say the looming spending cuts would have a major impact on their personal finances.

In December of last year, 64% said automatic spending cuts and tax increases would have a major effect on the economy and by a 60% to 19% margin, more thought the economic impact of going over the fiscal cliff would be mostly negative rather than mostly positive. Today, opinion about the economic impact of pending federal spending cuts is nearly identical: 60% say there would be major economic effects; and by more than three-to-one the effects are seen as negative.

By contrast, just 30% say sequester will have a major impact on their own personal finances. In December, 2012, 43% thought going over the fiscal cliff would have a major effect on their finances.

Even with just days until the sequester deadline, relatively few Americans are paying close attention to the issue. Only a quarter (25%) say they are following news about

Views of Sequester vs. Fiscal Cliff

	Dec 2012*	Feb 2013	Diff- erence
Possible effects	%	%	
Major effect on your personal finances	43	30	-13
Major effect on the U.S. economy	64	60	-4
<i>Effect on economy would be...</i>			
Mostly positive	19	18	-1
Mostly negative	60	62	+2
Engagement			
Following news very closely	40	25	-15
<i>Understand what would happen</i>			
Very well	28	18	-10
Fairly well	29	35	+6
Not too well	22	25	+3
Not at all well	19	21	+2

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST Feb. 21-24, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
* Nov. 2012 survey asked about effect of "... automatic spending cuts and tax increases."

automatic federal spending cuts very closely. By comparison, 40% were following news about the pending fiscal cliff very closely in early December, several weeks before the Jan. 1 deadline. Interest in budget deficit debates was similarly high (38% very closely) in the summer of 2011, in the weeks leading up to the debt limit agreement.

Similarly, just 18% say they understand what would happen if the cuts take place “very well.” In December of 2012, 28% said they understood the fiscal cliff’s effect very well. In the current survey, partisans are about equally likely to say they have been following sequester news and that they understand the issue very well.

Who Would Be to Blame?

More continue to say Republicans in Congress (45%), rather than President Obama (32%), would be more to blame if an agreement to prevent automatic spending cuts is not reached before the deadline; 13% volunteer that they think both would be equally to blame. Opinion is about the same as in a Pew Research Center/USA TODAY survey conducted a week ago.

In December of 2012, a 53%-majority said Republicans in Congress would be to blame if an agreement on the fiscal cliff was not reached, just 27% said Obama would be more to blame.

In the current survey, about as many independents say Republicans in Congress (39%) as President Obama (32%) would be more to blame if an agreement on spending cuts is not reached. A week ago, independents blamed Republicans in Congress by a somewhat wider margin (47%-29%); and in December, 52% of independents would have blamed Republicans more for going over the fiscal cliff, compared with 21% who would have blamed Obama.

GOP Leaders Would Take More Blame for Sequester

	Dec 2012	Feb 13-18	Feb 21-24
Republicans in Congress	53	49	45
President Obama	27	31	32
Both equally (Vol.)	12	11	13
Neither/Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST Feb. 21-24, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding

Low-Income More Likely to Expect Hit to Personal Finances

Those in households earning less than \$30,000 a year are especially likely to say automatic federal spending cuts would have a major effect on their personal finances. Nearly four-in-ten (39%) say this, compared with 27% of those earning \$30,000-\$74,999 and just 21% of those making over \$75,000 a year.

College graduates are less likely to say their own personal finances would be majorly affected (22%) than are those with some college experiences (33%) and those with no college experience (34%).

Impact on Personal Finances

	Major effect
	%
Total	30
College grad+	22
Some college	33
HS or less	34
<i>Family income</i>	
\$75,000+	21
\$30,000-75,000	27
<\$30,000	39

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/
WASHINGTON POST Feb. 21-24,
2013.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted February 21-24, 2013 among a national sample of 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (500 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 500 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 223 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,000	3.7 percentage points
Republicans	252	7.4 percentage points
Democrats	304	6.7 percentage points
Independents	377	6.1 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
February 21-24, 2013, OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,000

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE;] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a. Murder charges against Oscar Pistorius, an Olympic sprinter from South Africa February 21-24, 2013	12	25	29	32	1
b. Allegations that China's military has hacked into computer networks in the United States February 21-24, 2013	14	23	23	40	1
c. News about automatic cuts to federal spending that will take effect next week, unless the president and Congress act February 21-24, 2013	25	26	19	29	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
December 13-16, 2012: <i>The debate in Washington over automatic spending cuts and tax increases that would take effect in January unless the President and Congress act</i>	37	28	16	18	1
December 6-9, 2012	37	26	17	20	1
November 29-December 2, 2012	40	26	14	20	1
November 15-18, 2012	33	24	16	25	1
November 8-11, 2012	38	20	20	20	*
July 19-22, 2012	23	21	22	33	1
February 16-20, 2012: <i>Congress passing a bill to extend payroll tax cuts and unemployment benefits¹</i>	24	27	21	27	1
August 4-7, 2011: <i>Congress and the president agreeing to cut federal spending and raise the debt limit</i>	46	25	13	14	1
December 16-19, 2010: <i>The extension of tax cuts and unemployment benefits approved by Congress and signed by President Obama²</i>	37	27	15	19	1
December 9-12, 2010: <i>The agreement reached between Barack Obama and Congressional Republicans to extend tax cuts and unemployment benefits</i>	37	29	15	17	1
December 2-5, 2010: <i>The debate in Washington over the federal income tax cuts passed when George W. Bush was president</i>	39	26	17	17	1

¹ The wording of item PEW.1d was changed after the first night of interviewing (February 16, 2012) to reflect Congress passing this legislation. On February 16, 2012, the item wording was "Negotiations in Congress to extend payroll tax cuts and unemployment benefits."

² The wording of item PEW.1c was changed after the first night of interviewing (December 16, 2010), to reflect Congress passing and Obama signing this legislation. On December 16, 2010 the item read "The debate in Washington over extending tax cuts and unemployment benefits."

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
September 16-19, 2010: <i>The debate in Washington over competing Democratic and Republican tax plans</i>	21	24	21	34	*
September 9-12, 2010	16	19	22	42	1
May 8-11, 2009: <i>The debate in Washington over the federal budget</i>	22	28	19	31	*
March 27-30, 2009: <i>Debate over Barack Obama's budget proposal</i>	28	34	18	19	1
February 27-March 2, 2009: <i>Barack Obama's budget proposal for next year that raises taxes on wealthy Americans and increases spending on health care, education and other programs</i>	47	34	9	10	*
May, 2003: <i>George W. Bush's tax cut and economic stimulus plan</i>	25	36	22	15	2
February, 2003	26	33	23	16	2
January, 2003	28	34	21	15	2
February, 2002: <i>Debate in Congress over G.W. Bush's budget and tax cut plan</i>	17	31	28	23	1
April, 2001	24	38	20	18	*
February, 2001: <i>G.W. Bush's tax cut plan</i>	31	35	19	14	1
September, 1999: <i>The debate in Washington over how much to cut taxes</i>	18	30	28	23	1
July, 1999	14	34	21	31	*
June, 1997: <i>Competing proposals on ways to cut taxes as part of the recent bipartisan budget agreement</i>	11	27	28	33	1
September, 1992 (RVs): <i>George Bush's plan to improve the economy by cutting government spending and cutting taxes</i>	28	44	18	9	1

NO QUESTIONS PEW.2-PEW.3**ASK ALL:**PEWWP.4³

How well do you feel you understand what would happen if automatic federal spending cuts take place next week? **[READ]**

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:

... automatic spending cuts and tax increases were to go into effect in January

		Nov 29-Dec 2	Nov 8-11
Feb 21-24			
<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2012</u>
18	Very well	28	26
35	Fairly well	29	32
25	Not too well	22	23
21	Not at all well	19	17
1	Don't know (VOL.)	1	1
*	Refused (VOL.)	*	1

³ Questions PEWWP.4-PEWWP.7 asked in conjunction with *The Washington Post*.

ASK ALL:

PEWWP.5

If automatic federal spending cuts take place, do you think they would have a major effect, a minor effect, or no effect on **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE ITEMS a AND b IN BLOC FIRST, FOLLOWED BY ITEMS c AND d]**? How about on **[INSERT NEXT ITEM] [IF NECESSARY, AND ALWAYS FOLLOWING PEWWP.6: would automatic federal spending cuts have a major effect, a minor effect, or no effect on ... ITEM]**

		Major <u>effect</u>	Minor <u>effect</u>	No <u>effect</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	The U.S. economy				
	February 21-24, 2013	60	25	5	11
	TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
	Nov 29-Dec 2, 2012 ⁴	64	20	7	9
	Nov 8-11, 2012	68	21	2	10
b.	Your own personal financial situation				
	February 21-24, 2013	30	40	19	11
	TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
	Nov 29-Dec 2, 2012 ⁴	43	35	14	7
	Nov 8-11, 2012	44	38	9	9
c.	The federal budget deficit				
	February 21-24, 2013	45	31	12	12
d.	The U.S. Military				
	February 21-24, 2013	55	25	10	11

ASK IF EFFECT ON ECONOMY (PEWWP.5a=1,2), DIRECTLY FOLLOWING RESPONSE TO PEWWP.5a [N=854]:

PEWWP.6

And would the effect on the U.S. economy be mostly positive or mostly negative?

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:

Asked after reference to: "if these automatic spending cuts and tax increases go into effect"

Feb 21-24 <u>2013</u>		Nov 29-Dec2 <u>2012</u>	Nov 8-11 <u>2012</u>
21	Mostly positive	23	23
73	Mostly negative	71	70
6	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	6	7

⁴ Nov 29-Dec 2, 2012 and Nov 8-11, 2012 surveys asked about the effect of "... automatic spending cuts and tax increases ..."

ASK ALL:

PEWWP.7

If an agreement to prevent automatic federal spending cuts is not reached before next week's deadline, who do you think would be more to blame **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**?

Feb 21-24 <u>2013</u>		Feb 13-18 <u>2013</u> ⁵
45	Republicans in Congress	49
32	President Obama	31
13	Both equally (VOL.)	11
1	Neither (VOL.)	1
10	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	7

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:

Do you think President Obama and Republicans in Congress will reach an agreement to prevent automatic spending cuts and tax increases from going into effect before January 1st, or not?

*If an agreement is not reached, who do you think would be more to blame: **[READ AND RANDOMIZE: Republicans in Congress or President Obama]**?*

	Nov 8-11 <u>2012</u>
Republicans in Congress	53
President Obama	29
Both equally (VOL.)	10
Neither (VOL.)	2
Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	7

*If the federal government shuts down because **[RANDOMIZE: Republicans and the Obama administration]** can't agree on a budget, who do you think would be more to blame: **[READ IN SAME ORDER AS ABOVE: Republicans or the Obama administration]**?*

	Mar 30-Apr 3 <u>2011</u>	Feb 24-27 <u>2011</u>
Republicans	39	36
The Obama administration	36	35
Both equally (VOL.)	16	17
Neither (VOL.)	2	1
Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	7	10

⁵ In February 13-18, 2013 survey, question was worded: "If a deficit reduction agreement is not reached before the deadline, who do you think would be more to blame?"