

November 2012

**TO:** Interested Parties  
**FROM:** Michelle Diggles, Senior Policy Advisor  
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**RE:** Post-Election Poll: Obama Voters say “Let’s Make a Deal”

President Obama has continually stressed the need for a balanced approach to the fiscal cliff—calling for bipartisan agreements on taxes and spending. But there is a conversation going on in the Democratic Party and progressive movement about the meaning of the election results and whether the Obama Coalition really supports a balanced approach. Together with Peter Brodnitz of Benenson Strategy Group, Third Way conducted a post-election poll\* of 800 Obama voters, and the message on the fiscal cliff was clear: they are deeply concerned about the deficit and want a balanced deal.

Voters who supported the President this November are looking for both parties to compromise to reduce the deficit and get our fiscal house in order without shredding the safety net. And they reject “my way or the highway” approaches. Our poll demonstrates that Obama voters:

- 1) Want a bipartisan deal on the federal deficit;
- 2) Support raising taxes on the wealthy to help get our fiscal house in order; and,
- 3) Think the President and Congress should fix Social Security and Medicare, which they believe are on an unsustainable path.

### **1) They want a bipartisan deal on the federal deficit.**

Our poll reveals that debt and deficits are a top order concern for Obama voters. And these voters want Democrats and Republicans to compromise on a balanced approach—rejecting one-sided proposals—and they trust the President to cut an appropriate deal.

When it comes to the federal budget, there is remarkable unity in the Obama Coalition:

- 69% say the deficit is a *major* problem.
- Among Obama Liberals, 64% call it a major problem, as do 77% of Obama Moderates.
- Only 3% of the Obama Coalition believes the deficit is *not* a problem at all.

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\* Benenson Strategy Group conducted a poll for Third Way of 800 Obama voters November 7–9, 2012. The margin of error for the overall results is +/-3.46% and higher among subgroups.

- 83% of Obama voters identify reducing the deficit as an important priority in the next Obama term, including 77% of Obama Liberals and 90% of Obama Moderates.

When asked whether they believed that “Democrats and Republicans both need to make real compromises to come to an agreement on fixing the deficit,” 80% said that statement described their views *extremely* well (9 or 10 on a 0-10 point scale), making this the most strongly supported statement in the entire poll. That group included 75% of Obama Liberals, 78% of Obama Democrats, 79% of women who voted for the President, 90% of African Americans, 83% of Latinos, and 69% of voters aged 18–34.

When asked which concerned them more, that President Obama will compromise too much with Republicans to get things done or that he will stick too rigidly to his positions and not get things done, only 39% of Obama voters worry that the President might compromise *too much* with Republicans. And on the deficit specifically, only 40% are concerned that the President will agree to a deal that cuts too much spending. In fact, 31% of President Obama’s coalition says they worry he won’t do *enough* to reduce the deficit.

These high levels of support for a compromise between Democrats and Republicans on the deficit reflect Obama voters’ policy preferences. When asked which approach they favor to reduce the deficit:

- A miniscule 5% favor using *only* tax increases to reduce the deficit.
- A similar 10% favor using *only* spending cuts.
- Nearly all of the Obama Coalition wants a mix of tax increases and spending cuts, with 82% saying they supported either mostly tax increases with some spending cuts (41%) or mostly spending cuts with some tax increases (41%).

When voters pulled the lever for the President, most believed they were supporting someone who would compromise with Republicans to reduce our deficits and pay down the debt. And they hoped this plan would include a mix of spending cuts and tax increases.

## **2) They support raising taxes on the wealthy.**

The Obama campaign ran on a platform including raising taxes on the wealthy, and Obama voters are united in support of this position as a necessary ingredient in solving our fiscal problems. Eighty-five percent of the Obama Coalition believes that increasing taxes on the wealthy should be a priority for the President—making it the single highest rated priority at a mean of 8.09 on a 10 point scale. Simultaneously, Obama voters were clear about preserving middle class tax cuts, with 82% saying that should also be a priority.

The Coalition’s support for increasing taxes on the wealthy to cut the deficit was evident throughout our poll. Eighty-two percent of Obama voters agree that wealthy Americans need to pay more in taxes so we can fix our deficit. And 86% express more concern about wealthy people not paying enough in taxes, as opposed to only 10%

who are more concerned that some people, including the poor, do not pay any income taxes.

### 3) They want to fix Social Security and Medicare.

Obama voters are worried that the safety net pillars of Social Security and Medicare are in fiscal trouble and believe they should be fixed. An overwhelming 89% of the Obama Coalition believes these programs are in financial trouble—with 53% saying Social Security and Medicare have *major* problems, 36% identifying minor problems, and only 6% saying they have no problems.

- 90% of Obama Liberals and 88% of Obama Moderates worried the programs faced financial trouble, with 50% and 55%, respectively, believing those problems are major.
- Among women, those numbers were 89% and 54%, among Democrats they were 88% and 51%, and among Latinos they were 90% and 61%.
- This concern persisted across every age group, with even 81% of those over the age of 60 saying the programs were in financial trouble.

Because they fear that Social Security and Medicare are in jeopardy if we remain on the same track, ***nearly 8 in 10 Obama voters believe the President and Congress should make changes to fix the programs.*** We asked, “Which would be better for the country? The President and Congress make changes to fix Social Security and Medicare? OR The President and Congress make no changes to Social Security and Medicare?” Seventy-nine percent of the Obama Coalition said the first outcome would be better for the country—only 17% wanted no changes made to these programs. Obama Liberals (79%), Obama Moderates (81%), Obama Independents (80%), men who voted for the President (79%), women (78%), Democrats (79%), Latinos (85%), and African Americans (80%) all agreed by wide margins. Even those Obama voters over the age of 60 believed it would be better for the country if the President and Congress made changes to Social Security and Medicare, choosing that option by a whopping 35-point margin.

On a 0 to 10 point scale of priorities for the President in his second term, Obama voters ranked fixing Social Security and Medicare at 8.01—*second only to raising taxes on the wealthy*. A full 85% of the Obama Coalition listed fixing the programs as an important priority, with 48% saying it was extremely important, ranking it a 9 or 10 on the scale. The good news for Democrats is that 71% of the Obama Coalition believes leaders in the party have a plan to make these programs financially secure.

Our findings from recent focus groups with Democratic and Independent voters indicate that they want these programs fixed to keep them solvent, but not to pay down the debt. And participants envision a range of fixes including modernizing the programs to take account of changes since their enactment. They were willing to take minor measures like incrementally raising the retirement age to keep up with rising life expectancy. As we said in our analysis of these focus groups:

*Minor changes weren't viewed as kicking the can down the road or gutting our generational compact. Rather, they were viewed as solving the "natural causes" of the problems these programs face—as opposed to man-made problems stemming from Congressional inaction or irresponsible management of the programs. As one participant stated, "We owe it to future generations to fix the problem."*

## **Conclusion**

The Obama Coalition elected the President on the hopes that he would work with Republicans to solve the major fiscal issues facing the country, including the impending cliff and the solvency of Social Security and Medicare. Those voters want a bipartisan plan including real compromises to reduce the deficit. They believe increasing taxes on the wealthiest will solve some, but not all, of our financial problems. They also want Social Security and Medicare fixed so the programs remain strong for themselves and generations to come.

## Appendix

**Third Way  
Post-Election Survey of 2012 Obama Voters  
November 7–9, 2012  
800 Obama Voters**

**Questions 1–12 held for future release.**

**Q13. Which concerns you more about Barack Obama’s next term as President?**

He will compromise too much with Republicans to get things done	39%
He will stick to rigidly to his positions and not get things done	28%
Don’t know	33%

**Q14. Which concerns you more about Barack Obama’s next term as President?**

He won’t do enough to reduce the deficit	31%
He will agree to a deal that cuts too much spending	40%
Don’t know	29%

**Questions 15–22 held for future release.**

*Please tell me how important it is for President Obama to do each of the following in his next term, using a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning it is not at all important and 10 meaning it is extremely important.*

<b>Q23–29 Ranked by Very Important</b>		<b>Very Important “Net 9–10”</b>	<b>Net Important “Net 6–10”</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Q25	Increases taxes on the wealthy	53%	85%	8.09
Q29	Fixes Social Security and Medicare	48%	85%	8.01
Q24	Preserves middle class tax cuts	47%	82%	7.80
Q23	Reduces the deficit	46%	83%	7.89
Q28	Increases investments in clean energy	41%	83%	7.72
Q27	Reduces income inequality	35%	68%	7.13
Q26	Reduces government spending	34%	72%	7.15

**Questions 30–45 and 47–48 held for future release.**

*Please tell me how well each of the following statements describes your views using a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means not at all and 10 means extremely well.*

<b>Q46 and 49 Ranked by Very Well</b>		<b>Very Well “Net 9–10”</b>	<b>Net Well “Net 6–10”</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Q46	Democrats and Republicans both need to make real compromises to come to an agreement on fixing the deficit	80%	96%	9.2
Q49	Wealthy Americans need to pay more in taxes so we can fix our deficit problem	49%	82%	7.77

**Questions 50–55 held for future release.**

**Q56. Which approach do you prefer to reduce the deficit?**

Tax increases only	5%
Mostly tax increases with some spending cuts	41%
Mostly spending cuts with some tax increases	41%
Spending cuts only	10%
Don't know	3%

**Q57. Which concerns you more?**

Wealthy people not paying enough in taxes	86%
Some people, including the poor, not paying any income taxes	10%
Don't know	3%

**Q58. In your view, is the federal deficit a major problem facing this country, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?**

Major problem	69%
Minor problem	27%
Not at all a problem	3%
Don't know	1%

**Q59. Some say Social Security and Medicare are in financial trouble. In your view, do Social Security and Medicare have major financial problems, minor financial problems, or no financial problems?**

Major problems	53%
Minor problems	36%
No problems	6%
Don't know	6%

**Q60. Which would be better for the country?**

The President and Congress make changes to fix Social Security and Medicare	79%
The President and Congress make <b>no</b> changes to Social Security and Medicare	17%
Don't know	4%

**Questions 61–81 held for future release.**