



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press

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All Sides Blamed After Close Call on Government  
Shutdown

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Budget Negotiations in a Word –  
“Ridiculous”

A Survey Conducted in Partnership with The Washington Post

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## All Sides Blamed After Close Call on Government Shutdown Budget Negotiations in a Word – “Ridiculous”

The public has an overwhelmingly negative reaction to the budget negotiations that narrowly avoided a government shutdown. A weekend survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Washington Post finds that “ridiculous” is the word used most frequently to describe the budget negotiations, followed by “disgusting,” “frustrating,” “messy,” “disappointing” and “stupid.”

Overall, 69% of respondents use negative terms to describe the budget talks, while just 3% use positive words; 16% use neutral words to characterize their impressions of the negotiations. Large majorities of independents (74%), Democrats (69%) and Republicans (65%) offer negative terms to describe the negotiations.

The full survey was conducted April 7-10 among 1,004 adults; people were asked their impressions of the budget talks in interviews conducted April 9-10, following the April 8 agreement that averted a government shutdown.

All of the principals in the budget showdown are blamed to some extent for the dispute that nearly resulted in the shutdown. Nearly four-in-ten (37%) say they blame Republican congressional leaders “a lot” for the dispute, while 33% say Democratic congressional leaders deserve a lot of blame and 32% say the same about President Obama. About a quarter (27%) say that representatives affiliated with the Tea Party movement deserve a lot of blame.

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### Budget Negotiations in a Word

	April 9-10 2011 # of responses
Ridiculous	29
Disgusting	22
Frustrating	14
Messy	14
Disappointing	13
Stupid	13
Bull****	12
Poor	7
Terrible	7
Childish	6
Fair	5
Horrible	5
Idiotic	5
Stinks	5
Chaotic	4
Confusing	4
Pathetic	4
Political	4
Slow	4
Sucks	4

Pew Research Center/Washington Post  
April 7-10, 2011. Figures show actual  
number of respondents who offered  
each response; these numbers are  
not percentages.

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Solid majorities say all four principal players – GOP leaders, Democratic leaders, Obama and Tea Party-affiliated representatives – deserve at least some blame for the budget dispute. Much smaller percentages say each deserves *no* blame: 23% Tea Party representatives; 22% Obama; 12% GOP leaders; and 11% Democratic leaders.

Opinions about how much blame the participants deserve changed after the agreement was concluded. In interviewing conducted prior to the deal (April 7-8), 58% said that Tea Party representatives would deserve either a lot or some blame if the government shut down. In polling conducted April 9-10, the number saying Tea Party representatives deserve a least some blame for the dispute jumped to 72%.

More also blamed Obama and Democratic leaders after the agreement than before it. In early interviewing, 66% said that Obama would deserve at least some blame for a possible government shutdown; after the agreement 79% expressed that view. Blame for Democratic leaders rose 10 points (from 77% to 87%) after the budget deal.

Criticism for Tea Party representatives increased among the GOP base after the budget agreement. In polling before the agreement, 40% of Republicans and GOP leaners said Tea Party representatives would deserve some blame if the government shut down. After the agreement, however, 61% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said that Tea Party

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## None of the Participants Escapes Blame for Budget Dispute

*Blame for dispute that nearly led to gov't shutdown ...*

	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>DK</b>
	%	%	%	%
President Obama	32	40	22	6=100
Democratic leaders in Congress	33	49	11	7=100
Republican leaders in Congress	37	44	12	8=100
Reps. affiliated w/ the Tea Party movement	27	37	23	13=100

Pew Research Center / Washington Post April 7-10, 2011. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Tea Party, Obama Blamed More After Budget Agreement

*Blame for dispute that nearly led to gov't shutdown ...*

	<b>A lot/ some</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>DK</b>
	%	%	%
<b>Tea Party representatives</b>			
Before agreement	58	26	16=100
After agreement	72	19	9=100
<b>Change</b>	+14	-7	
<b>President Obama</b>			
Before agreement	66	26	7=100
After agreement	79	17	5=100
<b>Change</b>	+13	-9	
<b>Democratic leaders</b>			
Before agreement	77	15	8=100
After agreement	87	7	6=100
<b>Change</b>	+10	-8	
<b>Republican leaders</b>			
Before agreement	80	10	10=100
After agreement	80	14	6=100
<b>Change</b>	0	+4	

Pew Research Center / Washington Post April 7-10, 2011. Before agreement (conducted April 7-8), 577 respondents were asked about blame if government shuts down; after agreement (conducted April 9-10), 427 respondents were asked about dispute that nearly led to shutdown. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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representatives in Congress deserved at least some blame for the dispute that nearly led to the shutdown.

Democrats grew more critical of Obama after the budget deal was concluded. Prior to the agreement, 51% of Democrats and Democratic leaners said Obama would deserve a lot or some blame if the government shut down. Following the agreement, 69% of Democrats and Democratic leaners said Obama deserved at least some blame for the budget dispute.

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted April 7-10, 2011 among a national sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (673 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 331 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 138 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/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2010 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 within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the 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	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,004	4.0 percentage points
Apr 7-8 sample	577	5.0 percentage points
Apr 9-10 sample	427	6.0 percentage points
Republicans	271	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	291	7.0 percentage points
Independents	360	6.5 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.

## About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

Andrew Kohut, Director  
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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST  
APRIL 7-10, 2011 OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,004**

**PEW.1-PEW.2 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL APRIL 9-10 ONLY [N=427]:**

PEW.2A If you had to use one single word to describe your impression of the budget negotiations in Washington, what would that one word be? **[IF "DON'T KNOW" PROBE ONCE: It can be anything, just the first word that comes to mind...]** **[OPEN END: ENTER VERBATIM RESPONSE]**

*NOTE: The numbers listed represent the number of respondents who offered each response; the numbers are not percentages.*

Apr 9-10

2011

29	Ridiculous
22	Disgust/Disgusted/Disgusting
14	Frustrated/Frustrating
14	Mess/Messy
13	Disappointing/Disappointment/Disappointed
13	Stupid/Stupidity
12	Bull/Bull****
7	Poor/Poorly
7	Terrible
6	Childish
5	Fair
5	Horrible
5	Idiot/Idiotic
5	Stink/Stinks
4	Chaos/Chaotic
4	Confusing
4	Pathetic
4	Politics/Political
4	Slow
4	Suck/Sucks
202	Other
45	Don't know/Refused

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.3 How much, if at all, would you blame each of the following for the dispute over the budget that nearly led to a government shutdown? (First/Next) do you think **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]** deserve(s) a lot, some, or none of the blame for a shutdown?<sup>1</sup>

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a. President Obama April 7-10, 2011	32	40	22	6
b. Democratic leaders in Congress April 7-10, 2011	33	49	11	7
c. Republican leaders in Congress April 7-10, 2011	37	44	12	8
d. Representatives affiliated with the Tea Party movement April 7-10, 2011	27	37	23	13

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.4 Would you or a member of your family be personally inconvenienced by a partial shutdown of the federal government, or not? **[IF YES, ASK: Would it be a major inconvenience or a minor inconvenience?]**

Apr 7-10

2011

33	Yes, major
20	Yes minor/not sure
42	No, hasn't had any impact
5	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

*Were you or a member of your family personally inconvenienced by the recent partial shutdown of the federal government, or not? **IF YES:** Was it a major inconvenience or a minor inconvenience?*

	Mid-Jan <u>1996</u>	ABC News/Wash Post Early Jan <sup>2</sup> <u>1996</u>	Nov <u>1995</u>
Yes, major	7	4	6
Yes minor/not sure	9	8	6
No, hasn't had any impact	84	88	88
Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	*	1	*

<sup>1</sup> Wording shown was used April 9-10, 2011. Wording for April 7-9, 2011 was: "How much, if at all, would you blame each of the following for a government shutdown? (First/Next) do you think **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]** deserve(s) a lot, some, or none of the blame for a shutdown?"

<sup>2</sup> ABC News/Washington Post question wording in Early January 1996 and November 1995 was: "Have you personally been inconvenienced by the partial shutdown of the federal government, or not? If yes: Is it a major inconvenience or a minor inconvenience?"