

Debt, gov't dysfunction surpass unemployment to become Americans' top concerns: survey

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14 (Xinhua) -- Fewer Americans cite unemployment as their top concern, while the state of economy, federal budget deficit and governmental dysfunction become issues looming large in Americans' minds, found a survey released on Monday.

Twenty-one percent of Americans said the state of U.S. economy tops their concerns, while 20 percent citing federal budget deficit as No. 1 issue and 18 percent saying they were most worried about the dysfunction of the government, the Gallup poll showed.

Meanwhile, 16 percent of Americans said they regarded unemployment as the most important issue that the country has to deal with, according to the poll conducted between Jan. 7-10.

The survey was conducted just after U.S. lawmakers narrowly avoided the "fiscal cliff" by virtually postponing the deadline for legislated sequestration of spending until March 1.

It underscores a general shift from the dominance of concerns about the economy and unemployment to an increasing focus on problems more directly associated with government. The economy and unemployment had ranked as the top two problems each month since December 2009.

The rate of dissatisfaction with federal government was as high as it has been since 1974, while the percentage mentioning the deficit as the top problem is as high as it has been since 1996.

Despite the recent media spotlight and political focus on gun violence due to the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre that killed 26 people in December, only 4 percent of Americans said that gun violence was their top concern, unchanged from December.

The results suggested that average Americans are generally shifting their focus from worry about macroeconomic problems to worry about issues associated with the way the U.S. government works, Gallup said.

These concerns are expected to become even more salient in the weeks ahead, as another partisan fighting is brewing in Washington as Congress has to act again to raise the debt ceiling in order to avoid a default.

The U.S. federal government reached its debt limit of 16.4 trillion U.S. dollars on Dec. 31, 2012, and the U.S. Treasury Department has been taking extraordinary measures to temporarily postpone the date of a possible default.

The Republicans want to tie government's spending cuts to further raising the debt ceiling, while President Barack Obama has rejected this demand. A similar fight in 2011 led to the downgrade of the U.S. credit rating for the first time.