
Slight Majority Gives Obama Positive Marks on Handling Afghanistan

Almost six in ten agrees on sending 20,000 additional troops, though few are confident of success

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – May 6, 2009 – After three months in office a slight majority – just over half – rates President Obama positively on his handling of the situation in Afghanistan. Even though many U.S. adults remain skeptical of the situation in this country, a solid majority – larger than the number giving Obama positive rating on Afghanistan – is willing to see an additional 20,000 US troops sent to Afghanistan.

These are the some of the results of *The Harris Poll*, a nationwide survey of 2,401 U.S. adults surveyed online between April 13 and 21, 2009 by Harris Interactive. Other findings include:

- Currently, President Obama receives a 51% vs. 36% positive majority on his handling of the situation in Afghanistan over the past several months. This compares to George Bush's 63% vs. 29% negative rating (from Harris Poll: February 5, 2009) when he left office in January;
- By political party, the country is split with Democrats endorsing Obama's decision to send more troops by 70% vs. 19% positive and Republicans opposing it by 57% vs. 32% negative. Independents are more closely split though still at 50% vs. 36% positive.

Most U.S. adults (45%) do not see real change in the situation in Afghanistan though more than twice as many adults (28%) think things are getting worse rather than better (12%). These figures represent a slight improvement from August 2008 when slightly more (37%) people thought things were *getting worse* as compared to 11% who said *getting better* and 35% who said *staying the same*.

- Thinking about U.S. policies in Afghanistan, four in ten (40%) are *not confident* about the future with only a quarter (27%) feeling *confident*. A third (33%) is not sure. Again, these are an improvement from August 2008 when a majority (54%) was not confident and 17% said they were confident.
- When compared to Iraq, most U.S. adults feel the situation in Afghanistan is either the same as in Iraq (39%) or worse (30%) for U.S. troops with only 13% thinking things are better for U.S. troops.

President Obama's recent decision that the U.S. would be sending an additional 20,000 troops to Afghanistan is meeting with solid initial support. Almost a six in ten (59% vs. 29%) majority agrees with the decision. This is favored across the board not only by Democrats (59% vs. 29%) and Independents (59% vs. 30%), but even more so by Republicans (68% vs. 25%)

So What?

Back in January, as President Obama was taking office, The Harris Poll asked the U.S. public how good a job they thought Obama *might do* regarding Afghanistan. At the time just over four in ten thought he would do an excellent or pretty good job. Despite not being a ringing endorsement, in comparison to the job President Bush had been doing President Obama's marks were quite optimistic.

Three months later, even though the public continues to have strong reservations about the situation in that country, Obama has managed to exceed those initial expectations. This is occurring in spite of few signs of military success. Following up on his campaign promises, he is willing to commit more U.S. troops – something that many Americans, including most Republicans, support – clearly he is communicating that he has a plan and is in charge. At least for the time being, many Americans are willing to trust the president's judgment.

**TABLE 1
OBAMA'S HANDLING OF AFGHANISTAN**

"Now turning to Afghanistan, overall how would you rate the job President Obama has done in handling Afghanistan over the past several months?"

Base: All Adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
Positive (NET)	51	32	70	50
Excellent	10	2	20	7
Pretty Good	41	30	50	43
Negative (NET)	36	57	19	36
Only fair	26	37	17	26
Poor	10	20	2	10
Not sure	13	11	11	14

**TABLE 2
SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN – GETTING BETTER OR WORSE**

"Do you think that the situation in Afghanistan is...?"

Base: All Adults

	July 2005	May 2007	August 2008	April 2009			
	%	%	%	Total	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Getting better	17	12	11	12	7	19	7
Getting worse	30	26	37	28	36	22	30
No real change	37	36	35	45	46	42	50
Not sure	16	26	18	16	11	17	13

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3

CONFIDENCE IN SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN?

“How confident are you that U.S. policies in Afghanistan will be successful?”

Base: All Adults

	July 2005	May 2007	August 2008	April 2009			
				Total	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Confident	25	22	17	27	17	40	23
Not confident	45	41	54	40	51	29	43
Not sure	30	37	29	33	32	31	34

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON WITH IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN BETTER/WORSE FOR US TROOPS

“Compared to Iraq, do you think the situation in Afghanistan is...?”

Base: All Adults

	May 2007	August 2008	Jan 2009	April 2009			
				Total	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better for U.S. troops	36	13	9	13	11	17	12
Same for U.S. troops	34	40	40	39	40	41	38
Worse for U.S. troops	9	28	35	30	36	24	35
Not sure	21	20	16	18	13	18	15

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 5

SUPPORT FOR SENDING ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN

“Recently, President Obama declared that the United States would be sending 20,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Do you agree or disagree with this decision?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
AGREE (NET)	59	68	59	59
Strongly agree	24	31	24	22
Somewhat agree	35	37	34	37
DISAGREE (NET)	29	25	29	30
Somewhat disagree	16	15	17	17
Strongly disagree	12	10	12	13
Not at all sure	12	7	12	11

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States April 13 and 21, among 2,401 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their

actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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