

American Public Divided on Sending More Troops to Afghanistan

One-quarter of Americans not sure what to do regarding troops

New York, N.Y. — November 2, 2009 — President Obama has a difficult decision ahead of him — whether to send more troops to an increasingly unstable Afghanistan or not. If he is looking for guidance from the American public to help make this decision any easier, he is not going to get it, as they seem to be torn over whether the United States should commit more or less troops to the war in Afghanistan.

Three in ten Americans (31%) want to commit more troops while one-third (34%) want to commit less troops to the war. Just over one in ten (13%) say they want to keep the level of troops the same while one-quarter (23%) are not at all sure what to do with the level of troops there.

These are some of the results of **BBC World News America/ Harris Poll** of 2,227 adults surveyed online between October 23 and 27, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Looking back over the past year, the American public has always been a bit divided over the war and troops in Afghanistan. Back in January, just as Barack Obama was preparing to be sworn in as president, one-third of Americans (33%) wanted to commit more troops while just over one-quarter (27%) wanted to commit fewer troops and one in five (21%) wanted to keep the same level of troops. In August, this attitude shifted and one-quarter (25%) said send more troops while almost two in five (37%) said commit fewer troops and one in five Americans (20%) still said keep the same level of troops. Now, there is more of an even split on whether to commit more or less troops while fewer Americans believe we should keep the level the same and more Americans are not at all sure.

There are also gender and age differences over what to do in Afghanistan. Men are more likely than women to want to commit more troops (41% versus 21%). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to want to commit less troops to the war in Afghanistan (40% versus 28%).

The older one is, the more likely they want to commit more troops and the reverse is also true as the younger adults are more likely to want to commit fewer troops to Afghanistan. Two in five adults aged 55 and older (40%) and 36% of those aged 45-54 years old want to commit more troops compared to one in five adults aged 18-34 (19%) and 28% of those aged 35-44 who feel the same way. On the other side of the issue two in five adults aged both 18-34 and 35-44 (42% and 38% respectively) want to commit fewer troops compared to one-third of those aged 45-54 (33%) and one-quarter of those aged 55 and older (25%).

So What?

The President has a lot on his plate and his approval ratings have been inching downward over the past few months. He has to make a tough decision when it comes to what to do with troops and the war in Afghanistan and he is unable to look to the American people for guidance. No matter what decision he ends up making, many people will be on the other side of this issue and he will have to spend time persuading them of why he made the decision he did. This is time spent away from other pressing issues such as health care reform and the economy and this may cause problems with the American public.

TABLE 1
INCREASING US TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

“Do you believe the United States should commit more or less troops to the war in Afghanistan?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Commit more troops	31	41	21	19	28	36	40
Keep the level of troops the same	13	15	11	14	12	17	9
Commit less troops	34	28	40	42	38	33	25
Not at all sure	23	17	28	25	22	15	25

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

TABLE 2
AMOUNT OF US TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN - TREND

“Do you believe the United States should commit more or less troops to the war in Afghanistan?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Jan 2009	Aug 2009	Oct 2009
	%	%	%
Commit more troops	33	25	31
Keep the level of troops the same	21	20	13
Commit less troops	27	37	34
Not at all sure	19	18	23

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

Methodology

This **BBC World News America/Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States October 23 and 27, 2009 among 2,227 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.

***The Harris Poll*® #123, November 2, 2009**

By Regina A. Corso, Director, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

About the BBC AMERICA

BBC AMERICA brings audiences a new generation of award-winning television featuring news with a uniquely global perspective, provocative dramas, razor-sharp comedies and life-changing makeovers. BBC AMERICA pushes the boundaries to deliver high quality, highly addictive and eminently watchable programming to viewers who demand more. BBC AMERICA is distributed by Discovery Networks. It is available on digital cable and satellite TV in more than 64 million homes. For up-to-the-minute information on BBC AMERICA, forthcoming U.S. premieres, art work and news from the channel, log on to www.press.bbcamerica.com.