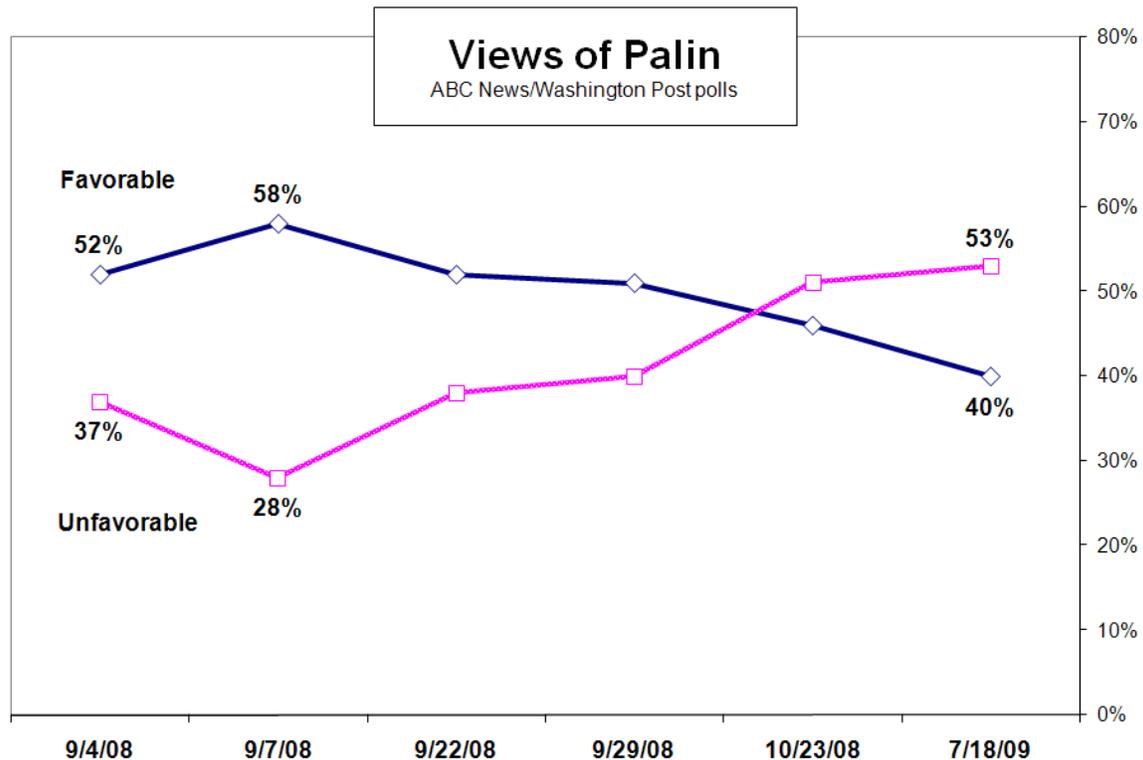


Problems for Palin as She Packs Up Make Her Political Future a Puzzle

As she packs up the Alaska governor's mansion and pushes back against the latest ethics brouhaha, Sarah Palin's got other problems: A more negative public image than she held during the 2008 campaign – and broader questions about her grasp of complex issues.

Just 40 percent of Americans in this ABC News/Washington Post poll hold a favorable opinion of Palin overall, down from a high of 58 percent shortly after she joined the GOP presidential ticket. More than half, 53 percent, now view her unfavorably.

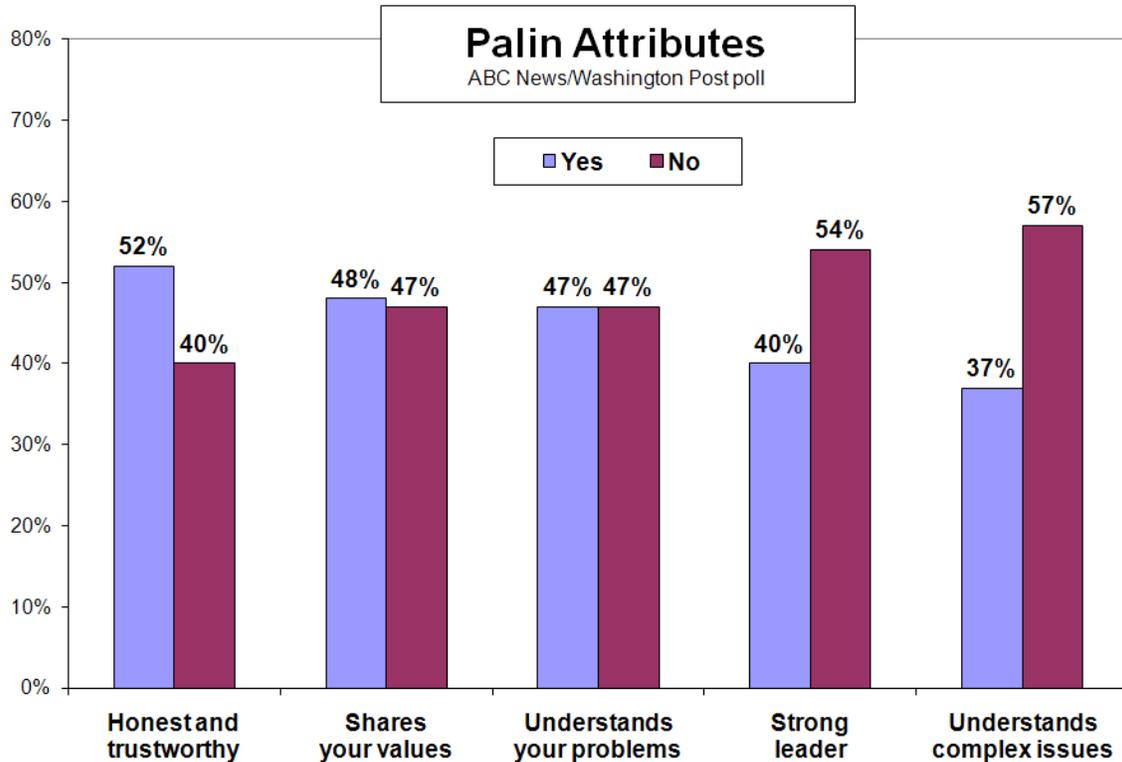
Favorability is the most basic measure of a public figure's popularity; 40 percent – a new low for Palin – is plenty to sustain some career paths that may follow her foreshortened term as governor – public speaker, author, broadcast personality. But for national politics, it's a challenge.



ATTRIBUTES – The tide also runs against Palin on two basic personal attributes. Fifty-seven percent don't think she "understands complex issues," 8 points higher than last fall

and a serious handicap in perceived qualification for high office. Fifty-four percent also don't see her as a strong leader; her 40 percent rating for leadership lags, for comparison, 31 points behind Barack Obama's.

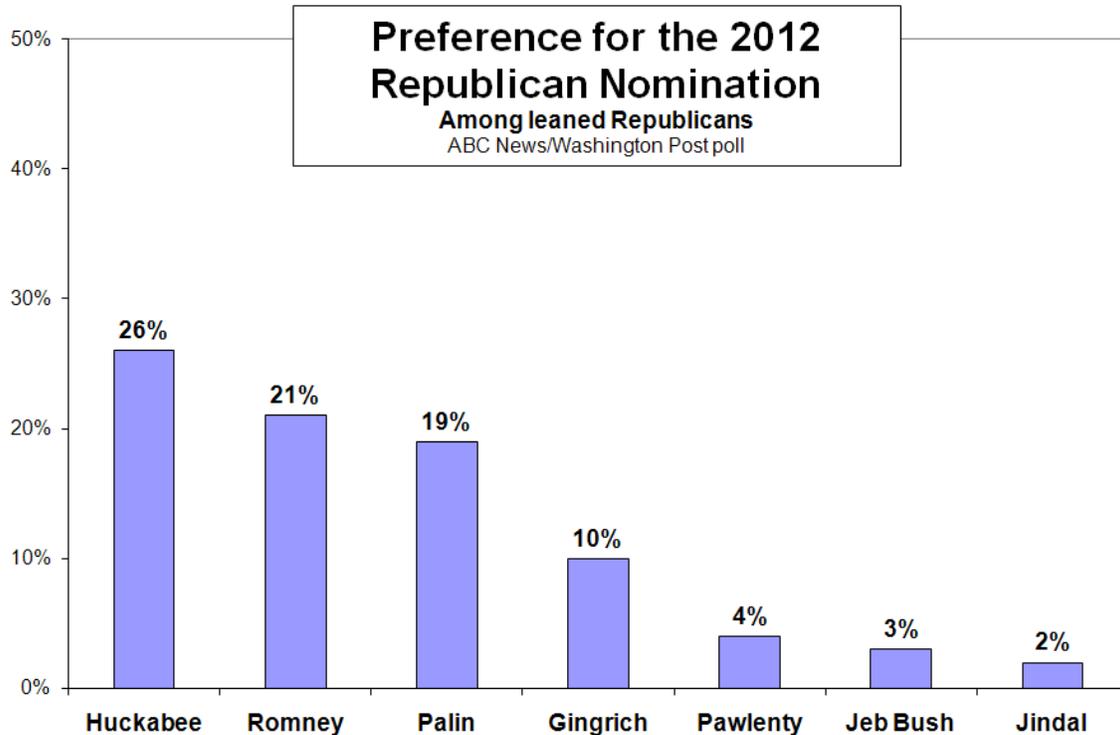
Palin does better on being "honest and trustworthy," albeit with a tepid 52 percent rating. And she gets split decisions on being someone who "shares your values" (48-47 percent) or "understands the problems of people like you" (47-47 percent). Her empathy rating started 11 points higher last September, but fell within her first month on the public stage, after criticism of her \$150,000 in wardrobe and related expenses.



Palin announced July 3 she was resigning as Alaska's governor, effective Sunday, with nearly a year and a half left in her term, saying she had decided not to seek re-election and could not be sufficiently effective as a lame duck. She's been forced to respond to numerous ethics complaints, running up a reported half-million dollars in legal bills; while most have been dismissed, a preliminary report from a state investigator, disclosed this week, raised questions – which she disputes – about the structure of her legal defense fund. In another matter, a legislative panel last October said she had abused her powers as governor by trying to get her ex-brother-in-law fired from the state patrol.

GOP – There are sharp partisan and ideological divisions in these views, and Palin retains sufficient popularity in her base to score in the top tier among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents in early preference for the 2012 presidential nomination: Twenty-six percent in this poll favor Mike Huckabee, 21 percent Mitt Romney, 19 percent Palin.

Name recognition clearly figures heavily in such early-stage measurements; figures who were not on the primary or general election ballot in 2008 (this poll mentioned Newt Gingrich, Jeb Bush, Tim Pawlenty and Haley Barbour) come in considerably lower.



Other results underscore Palin’s far better standing in her party than outside it. Seventy percent of Republicans view her positively overall. That dives to 40 percent of independents and 20 percent of Democrats.

In challenges to her cross-border appeal, her “strong” favorability among Republicans, 41 percent, is surpassed by her strongly unfavorable rating from Democrats, 56 percent. And independents see her strongly negatively rather than strongly positively by nearly 2-1.

Ideology tells a similar tale; 61 percent of conservatives see Palin favorably, compared with 30 percent of moderates and 18 percent of liberals. Her sharpest drop is among moderates: Fifty-eight percent saw her favorably just after she joined John McCain on the GOP ticket.

But Palin also has lost ground in her core groups. Her favorability rating from Republicans is 18 points below her peak last Sept. 7; her “strongly” favorable rating in her own party is down by 25 points. She’s had a similar decline among conservatives.

Similarly, the sense that Palin “understands complex issues” has dropped by 19 points among Republicans (from 75 percent last fall to 56 percent now) and by 14 points among conservatives (from 67 to 53 percent).

While she’s one of the country’s more prominent female politicians, there’s little or no overall gender gap in views of Palin; 54 percent of women and a similar 52 percent of men see her unfavorably overall. But on two attributes there is a gender difference within her own party: Seventy-two percent of Republican women call her a strong leader, compared with 59 percent of Republican men. And among Republican women 64 percent think Palin understands complex issues. Among Republican men, just 48 percent agree.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone July 15-18, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3.5-point error margin. Click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-22 previously released.

23. Changing topics, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Sarah Palin? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

| | | ----- Favorable ----- | | ----- Unfavorable ----- | | | No |
|-------------|-----|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| | NET | Strongly | Somewhat | NET | Somewhat | Strongly | opinion |
| 7/18/09 | 40 | 20 | 20 | 53 | 19 | 34 | 7 |
| 10/23/08 LV | 46 | 28 | 18 | 51 | 11 | 40 | 3 |
| 9/29/08 RV | 51 | 29 | 23 | 40 | 11 | 29 | 9 |
| 9/22/08 RV | 52 | 31 | 21 | 38 | 10 | 27 | 11 |
| 9/7/08 RV | 58 | 35 | 23 | 28 | 11 | 17 | 15 |
| 9/4/08* RV | 52 | 34 | 18 | 37 | 14 | 23 | 11 |

* "the Republican nominee for vice president"

24. Please tell me whether the following statement applies to Sarah Palin, or not?

7/18/09 - Summary Table

| | Yes | No | No opinion |
|--|-----|----|------------|
| a. She understands the problems of people like you | 47 | 47 | 5 |
| b. She is a strong leader | 40 | 54 | 6 |
| c. She is honest and trustworthy | 52 | 40 | 9 |
| d. She shares your values | 48 | 47 | 6 |
| e. She understands complex issues | 37 | 57 | 6 |

Trend where available:

a. She understands the problems of people like you

| | Yes | No | No opinion |
|-------------|-----|----|------------|
| 7/18/09 | 47 | 47 | 5 |
| 10/23/08 LV | 50 | 47 | 3 |
| 9/29/08 RV | 58 | 38 | 4 |

b-d. No trend.

e. She understands complex issues

| | Yes | No | No opinion |
|------------|-----|----|------------|
| 7/18/09 | 37 | 57 | 6 |
| 9/29/08 RV | 46 | 49 | 5 |

25-26 previously released.

27. (ASKED OF LEANED REPUBLICANS) If the 2012 Republican presidential primary or caucus in your state were being held today, and the candidates were (READ LIST) for whom would you vote?

| | 7/18/09 |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Haley Barbour | 1 |
| Jeb Bush | 3 |
| Newt Gingrich | 10 |
| Mike Huckabee | 26 |
| Sarah Palin | 19 |
| Tim Pawlenty | 4 |
| Mitt Romney | 21 |
| Bobby Jindal (vol.) | 2 |
| Jon Thune (vol.) | 0 |
| Charlie Crist (vol.) | * |
| Other (vol.) | 2 |
| None of these (vol.) | 5 |
| Would not vote (vol.) | 1 |
| No opinion | 6 |

END