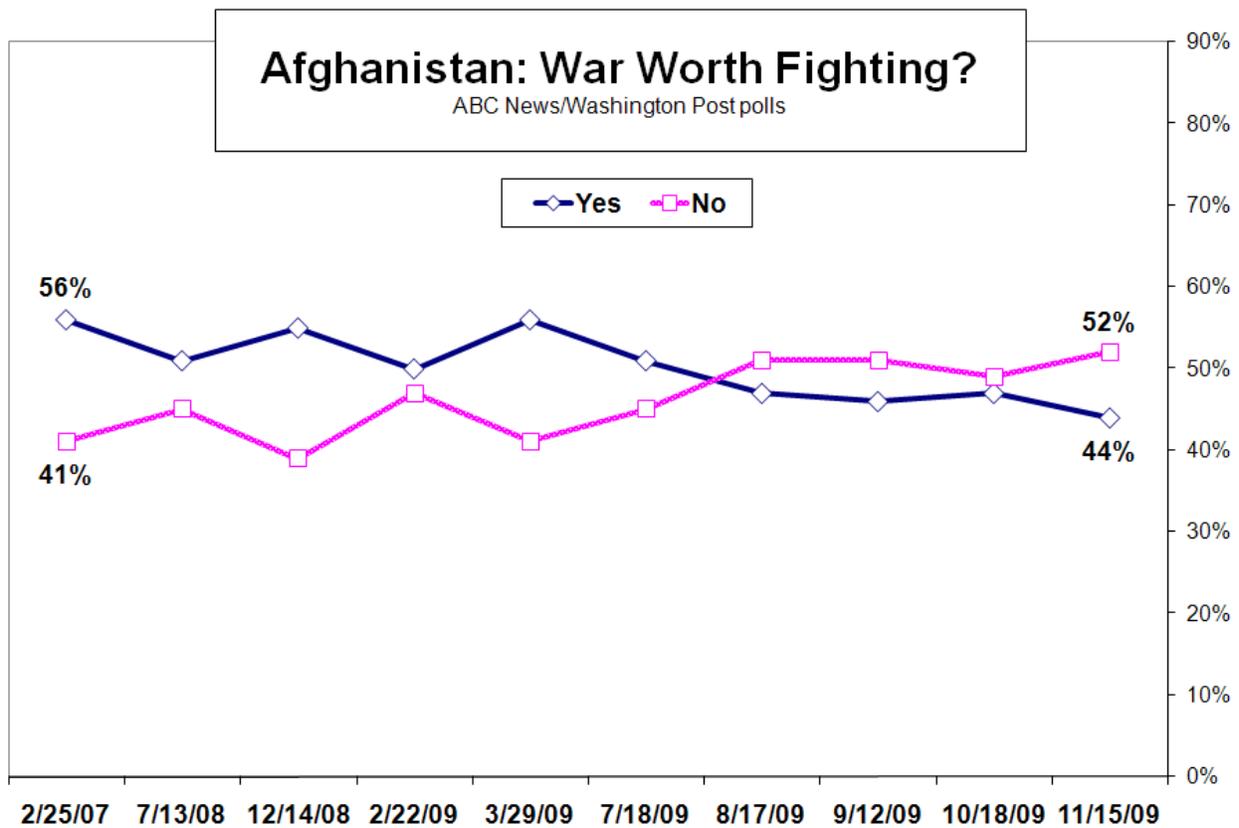


## Support for Afghanistan War Slips to a New Low

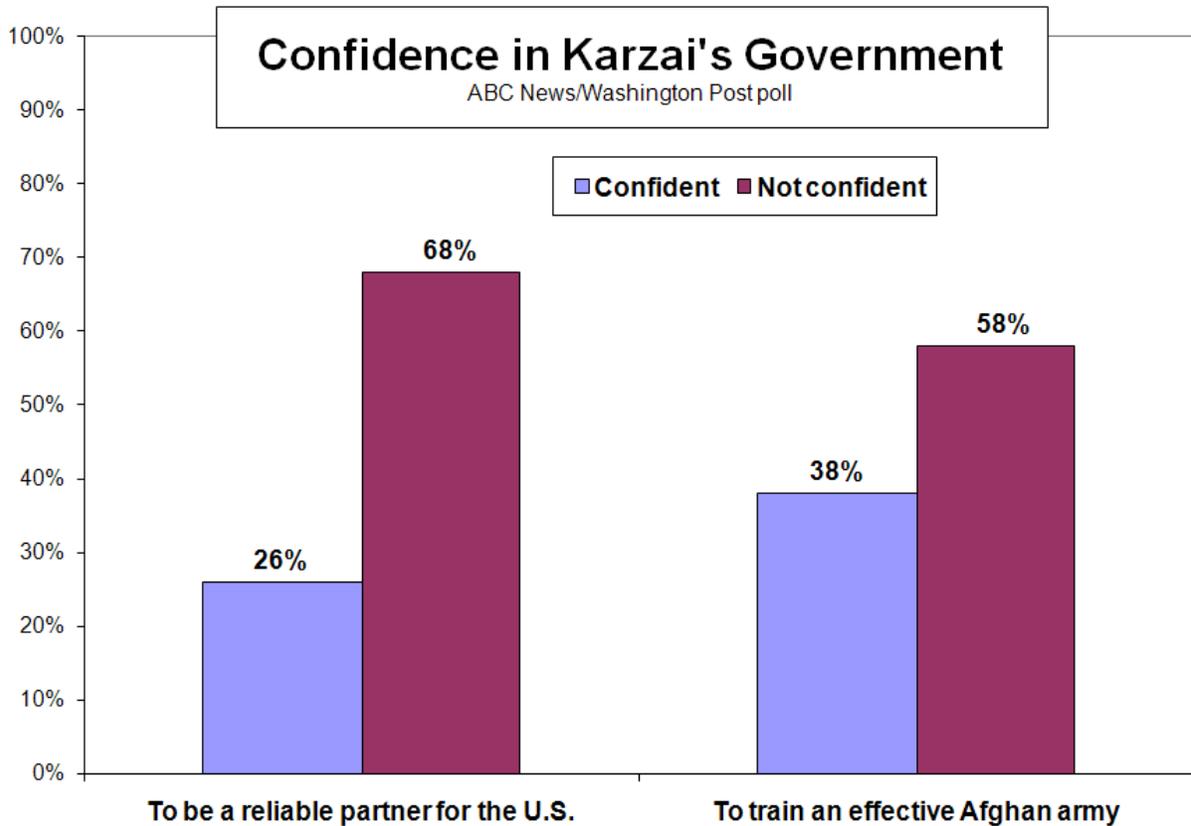
Support for the war in Afghanistan has ebbed to a new low in ABC News/Washington Post polls, with concerns over strategy and broad doubts about the reliability of the Afghan government leaving Americans sharply divided on where to go from here.

Just 44 percent now say the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, the fewest in a question dating to early 2007. Fifty-two percent instead say the war has not been worth it, up 13 points from its low last December – still well below Iraq levels, but majority negative nonetheless.



On how to proceed, preferences underscore the difficulties facing President Obama: Assuming he does decide to send more U.S. forces, the public divides, 45-46 percent, on a smaller increase mainly to train the Afghan military, or a larger one to fight al Qaeda and the Taliban as well as to train Afghan forces. (Five percent volunteered that they'd prefer no increase, or withdrawal.)

One source of doubt is the reliability of the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai, declared winner of a second term early this month after a disputed election marred by irregularities. Only 26 percent of Americans see Karzai as a reliable partner for the United States, and just 38 percent think his government will be able to train an effective army to take over security at some point.



Another open and basic question is whether withdrawing from Afghanistan or remaining there poses a greater risk of terrorism to the United States. Nearly a quarter see withdrawing as the greater risk, and they broadly support the war. But nearly two-thirds, 64 percent, say the risk is the same either way – and that big group, by 62-34 percent, says the war has not been worth fighting.

POLITICS – Obama’s flat at 45 percent approval for handling the war in Afghanistan, well down from a high of 63 percent last spring; 48 percent disapprove. He’s challenged in another way, holding a narrow 5-point edge over the Republicans in Congress in trust to handle the situation in Afghanistan. That compares with 13- and 15-point Obama leads on health care and the economy.

That said, 55 percent express confidence Obama will come up with a successful strategy for the United States in Afghanistan, a level of expectation in line with his overall job approval rating. But reflecting the uncertainties, far fewer – 17 percent – are “very” confident of it.

One issue is whether Obama's giving appropriate weight to the advice of U.S. military leaders. Few say he's giving them too much influence, just 9 percent; 35 percent think he's given them too little influence; 51 percent, about the right amount.

As in most of these questions, there are large partisan and ideological divides on the issue. Fifty-seven percent of Republicans and 53 percent of conservatives say he's giving military leaders too little influence; just 17 percent of Democrats and 11 percent of liberals agree.

There also are some differences between the sexes; women typically are less apt than men to support military action, and such is the case here: Women by 51-38 percent favor a smaller, training-only mission for additional U.S. forces in Afghanistan; men, rather, favor a larger force with more combat responsibilities, by 54-39 percent. Women also are much more apt than men to think the Karzai government can create an effective Afghan army.

In the only other difference between the sexes, women are more apt than men by 7 points to say the war has not been worth fighting; this, though, simply reflects the fact that substantially more women than men identify themselves as Democrats.

**TERRORISM and STRATEGY** – Concerns about Afghanistan tie in with the threat of al Qaeda-sponsored terrorism, and there's a sign of slippage for Obama on terrorism overall. The number of Americans who say his policies are making the United States safer from terrorism has lost 5 points since early summer, from 32 percent in June to 27 percent now. However, there's been no change in the number who say his policies are making the country less safe, steady at 22 percent. The rest say his policies aren't making much difference in security either way.

Confidence in Obama to come up with a successful strategy again largely is partisan; 78 percent of Democrats are confident, falling to 49 percent of independents and 33 percent of Republicans.

It follows, given their political predilections, that people who are confident in Obama's decision on the war favor smaller rather than larger troop deployment, by 55-38 percent. Those who are not confident in him, by contrast, favor a larger increase with a broader mission, 57-33 percent.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Nov. 12-15, 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>

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

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

This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Nov. 12-15, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults (landline and cell-only respondents). The results from the full survey have a 3.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

\*= less than 0.5 percent

1-4 previously released.

5. Who do you trust to do a better job handling [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

c. The situation in Afghanistan\*

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
11/15/09	46	41	1	9	3

\* Item c asked of half sample

Compare to Iraq: G.W. Bush or the Democrats in Congress

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
7/21/07	32	55	1	11	1
6/1/07	35	51	2	10	3
4/15/07	33	58	1	7	1
2/25/07	34	54	*	9	2
1/19/07	33	60	1	4	2
1/10/07	36	47	1	12	4
12/11/06	32	56	1	7	3
1/18/04	56	36	1	4	3
4/30/03	72	20	2	3	3

6-9 previously released.

10. Do you think Obama's policies are making the United States (safer) from terrorism, (less safe), or are they not making much difference in that?

	Safer	Less safe	Not much difference	No opinion
11/15/09	27	22	49	2
6/21/09	32	22	44	2
4/24/09	32	21	43	4

11-33 previously released or held for release.

34. On another subject, all in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	---- Worth fighting ----			--- Not worth fighting ---			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
11/15/09	44	30	14	52	14	38	4
10/18/09*	47	28	19	49	13	36	4
9/12/09	46	28	18	51	14	37	3
8/17/09	47	31	15	51	10	41	3
7/18/09	51	34	18	45	11	34	4
3/29/09	56	37	19	41	12	28	4
2/22/09	50	34	17	47	9	37	3
12/14/08	55	NA	NA	39	NA	NA	5

7/13/08	51	NA	NA	45	NA	NA	4
2/25/07	56	NA	NA	41	NA	NA	3

\*10/18/09 "was" and "has been" wording half sampled. Previous "was".

35. If Obama decides to send more U.S. forces to Afghanistan, would you prefer that he send a (smaller number of U.S. forces mainly to train the Afghan military); or that he send a (larger number of U.S. forces to fight al Qaeda and the Taliban as well as to train the Afghan military)?

	Smaller number	Larger number	No increase (vol.)	Decrease/ pull out (vol.)	No opinion
11/15/09	45	46	3	2	4

36. As you may know, Obama is developing a strategy for Afghanistan that he's expected to announce in the next few weeks. How confident are you he will come up with a strategy that will succeed - very confident, somewhat confident, not so confident or not confident at all?

	----- Confident -----			----- Not confident -----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not so	Not at all	
11/15/09	55	17	38	43	23	20	1

37. In deciding U.S. policy in Afghanistan do you think Obama is giving U.S. military leaders (too much influence), (too little influence), or about the right amount?

	Too much	Too little	About the right amount	No opinion
11/15/09	9	35	51	6

38. What do you think would do more to increase the risk of a terrorist attack occurring here in the United States - (withdrawing from Afghanistan), or (remaining in Afghanistan) - or is the risk of terrorism about the same either way?

	Withdrawing	Remaining	Same either way	No opinion
11/15/09	23	12	64	2

Compare to Iraq:

	Withdrawing	Remaining	Same either way	No opinion
9/7/07	22	11	65	2
6/1/07	23	14	62	1

39. How confident are you that the government of President Hamid Karzai (ITEM) - very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

11/15/09 - Summary Table\*

	---- Confident ----			----- Not confident -----			No opin.		
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all			
a. Will be a reliable partner for the United States in Afghanistan			26	4	22	68	44	25	6
b. Will be able to train an effective Afghan Army to take over security there at some point			38	5	33	58	37	22	3

\*Half sample asked item a; other half sample asked item b.

40-55 previously released or held for release.

\*\*\*END\*\*\*