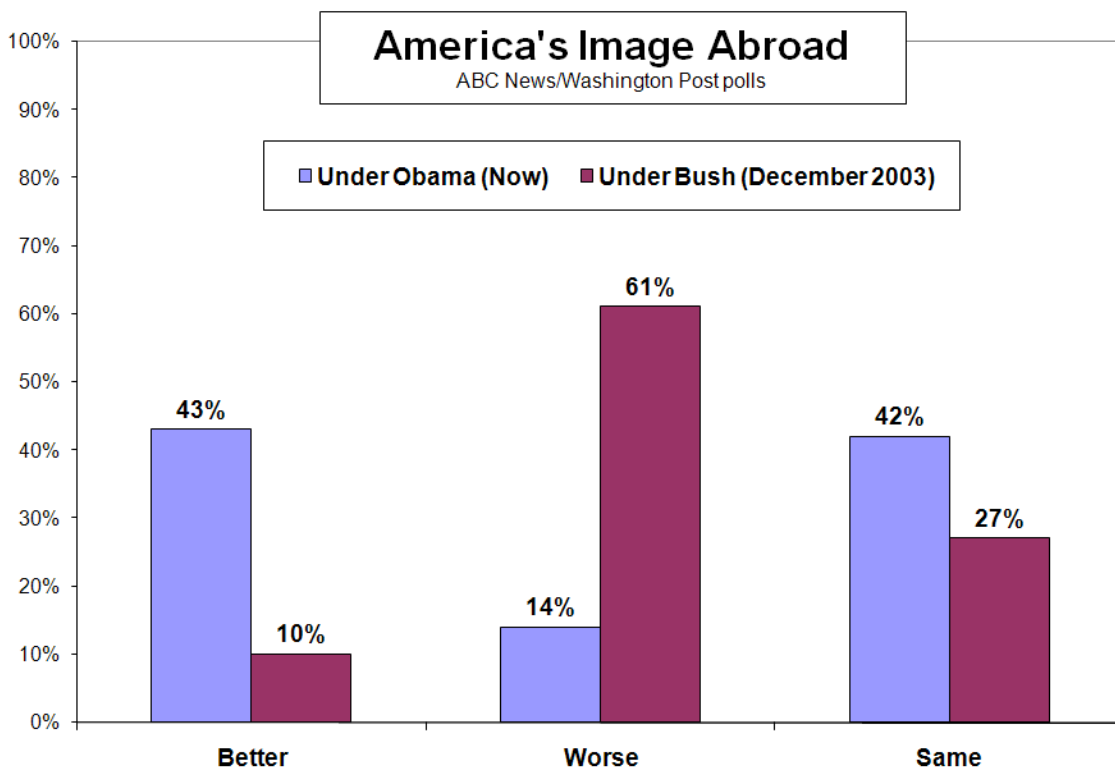


## **More See U.S. Image Abroad Improving; Among Int'l Issues, Afghanistan Looms**

With Barack Obama on his first presidential trip overseas, far more Americans now say the United States' image abroad is improving rather than worsening, a sharp turnaround from views under George W. Bush. But significant international challenges face Obama – including skepticism at home about negotiations with Taliban elements in Afghanistan.

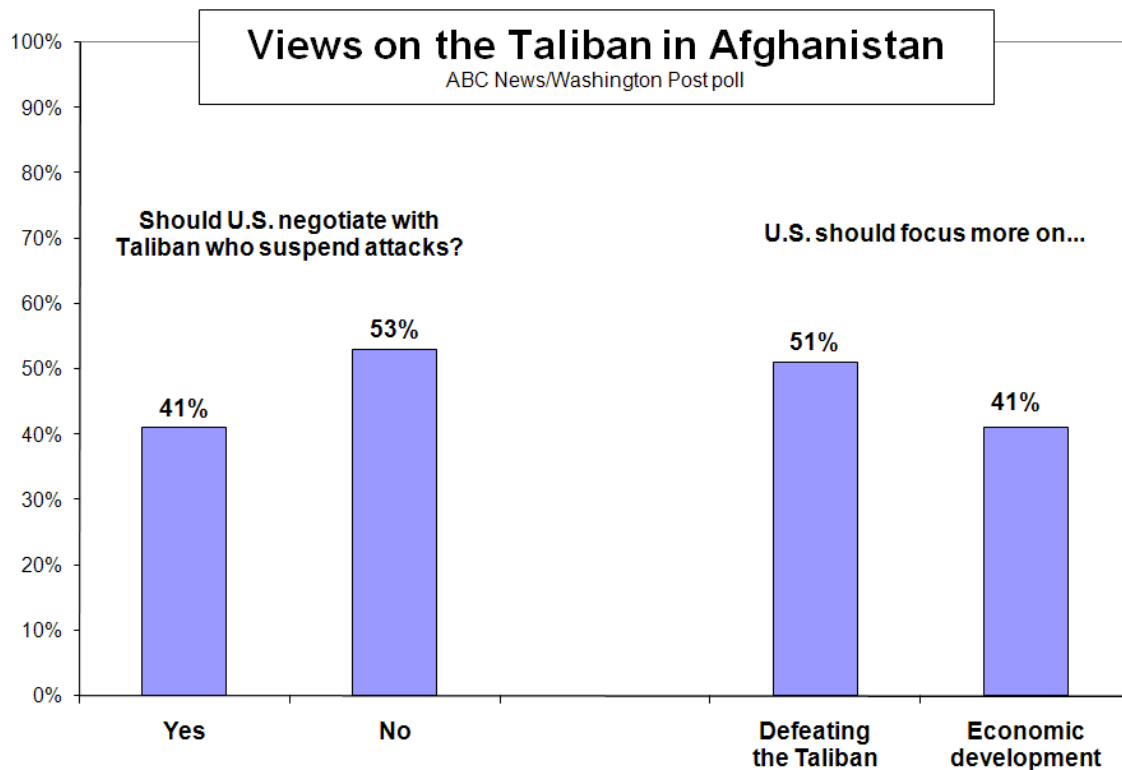
Obama gets 62 percent approval for handling international affairs overall, and just 14 percent say the United States' image is worsening under his presidency – down from 61 percent under Bush in late 2003. Instead 43 percent now say the United States' image is improving, up from 10 percent under Bush. The rest say it's staying the same.



**AFGHANISTAN** – Among Obama's international challenges, Afghanistan looms large – and difficult. The president has suggested openness to reaching out to moderate elements of the Taliban, a notion echoed today by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a 70-nation conference on Afghanistan in the Netherlands; she said Taliban members who abandon violence should be granted “an honorable form of reconciliation.”

If that means negotiating with those who halt attacks on U.S., NATO and Afghan forces, many Americans are skeptical. Fifty-three percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll oppose negotiations with elements of the Taliban if they suspend hostilities; fewer, 41 percent, support it. (In Afghanistan itself, 64 percent in an ABC/BBC/ARD poll in January supported negotiations with the Taliban, most if they first put down their arms.)

Americans, underscoring their antipathy toward the group, also say by 51-41 percent that defeating the Taliban should take precedence over efforts to promote economic development in Afghanistan.



Those views are highly partisan, with Democrats far more apt than Republicans to favor negotiations and to place greater focus on economic development. In both – unlike many other current measures – more independents side with the predominantly Republican view.

The tension on Afghanistan is apparent in another measure: Americans divide essentially evenly, 45-47 percent, on whether or not the United States is making significant progress there. Still, 56 percent now see the war there as “worth fighting,” up 6 points from last month after Obama’s announcement of his Afghanistan policy last week.

IMAGE – As in a range of issues today, partisanship also plays a very strong role in Americans’ views of the United States’ image abroad. Among Democrats, 59 percent say it’s improving; 44 percent of independents agree, but just 19 percent of Republicans.

At the same time, while 28 percent of Republicans say the United States’ image is getting worse under Obama, that’s 10 points fewer than the number of Republicans who said so under President Bush at the end of 2003.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 26-29, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults including both landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3-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).

1 previously released.

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]?

3/29/09 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
c. International affairs	62	27	11

3-13 previously released.

14-16 held for release.

17 previously released.

18. 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 was 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	
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

19. Do you think the United States is or is not making significant progress toward achieving success in Afghanistan?

	Is making significant progress	Is not making significant progress	No opinion
3/29/09	45	47	8

20. (ASKED OF HALF SAMPLE) Would you support or oppose the U.S. negotiating with elements of the Taliban if they agreed to suspend attacks on U.S., NATO and Afghan forces?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/29/09	41	53	6

21. (ASKED OF HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the U.S. should focus more on (economic development in Afghanistan) or more on (defeating the Taliban militarily)?

	Economic development	Defeating the Taliban	No opinion
3/29/09	41	51	8

22. Under Obama, do you think America's image in the rest of the world has gotten (better), gotten (worse), or stayed about the same?

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
3/29/09	43	14	42	1

Compare to: G.W.Bush

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
12/13/03	10	61	27	2

23-28 held for release.

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