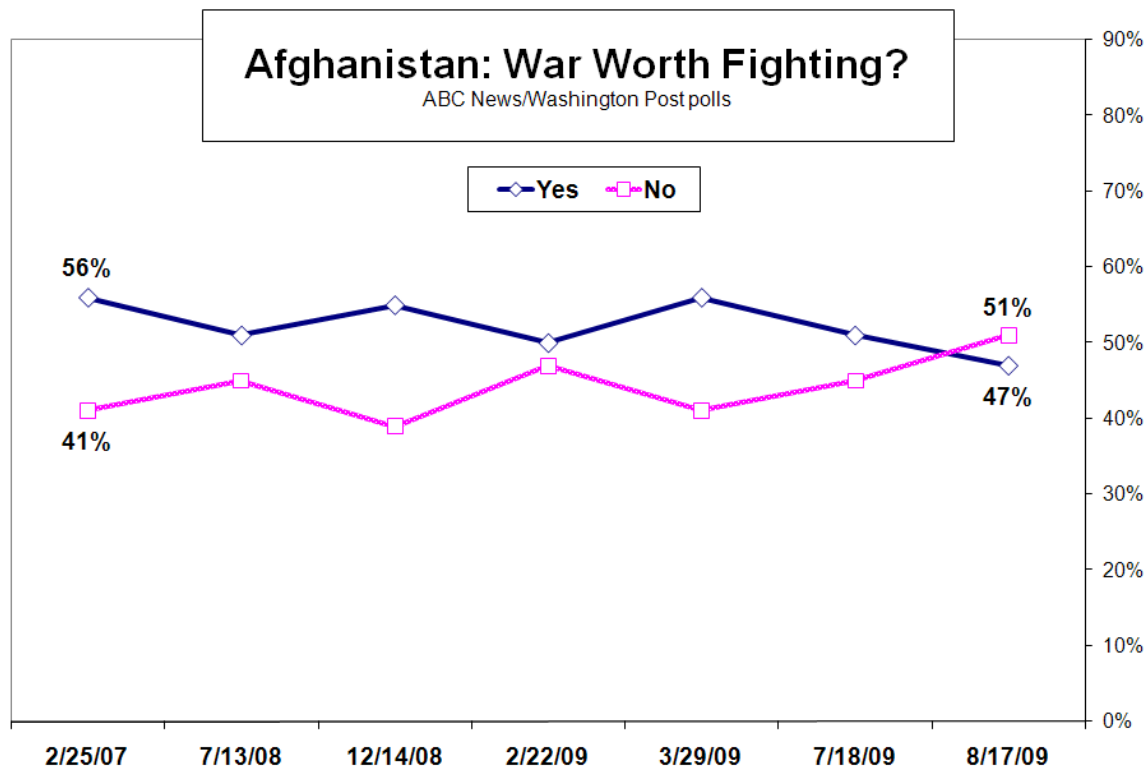


On Eve of Afghan Election, Waning U.S. Support for War

Afghanistan's presidential election comes at a time of waning U.S. support for the war there: More than half of Americans now say it's not worth fighting, a first in ABC News/Washington Post polls, and support for reducing U.S. forces is up sharply.

Just 42 percent, moreover, think the United States is winning the war in Afghanistan; 36 percent say it's losing. And Americans by nearly 2-1 are not confident tomorrow's election will produce a government that can rule the country effectively.



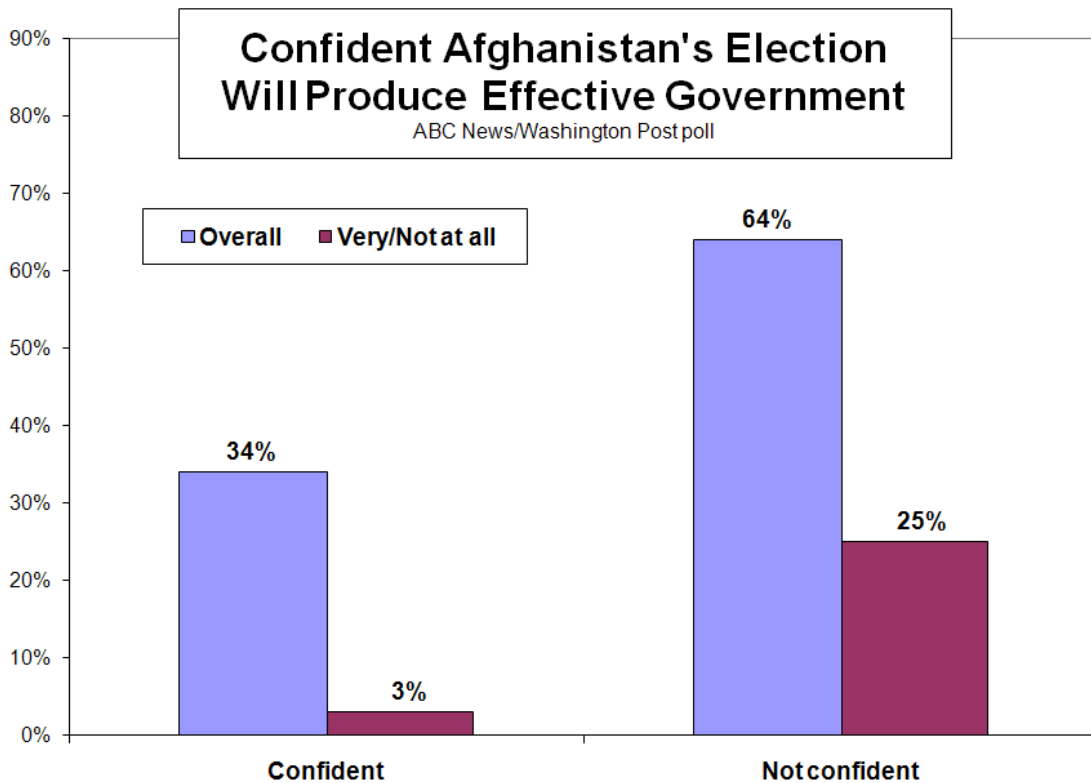
Other ratings are brighter, notably including President Obama's 60 percent approval rating for handling the situation in Afghanistan overall. But souring public views on the war serve as a clear reminder of the risks it carries for the president – just as the war in Iraq so severely damaged his predecessor as it grew in unpopularity.

CHANGES – The changes have occurred notably among liberal Democrats, whose view that the war's worth fighting has been cut in half since March, and whose support for

reducing U.S. forces there nearly has doubled. Apart from these policy views, though, loyalty among Democrats has kept Obama’s own approval rating on the issue afloat.

Other views, as noted, are positive: Six in 10 Americans express confidence in the ability of the United States and its allies to defeat the Taliban and to provide effective economic aid, and 55 percent are confident the allies can encourage the creation of an honest and effective Afghan government. But far fewer are “very” confident in any of these – just 19 percent on defeating the Taliban, 10 or 11 percent on encouraging effective governance or providing worthwhile development aid.

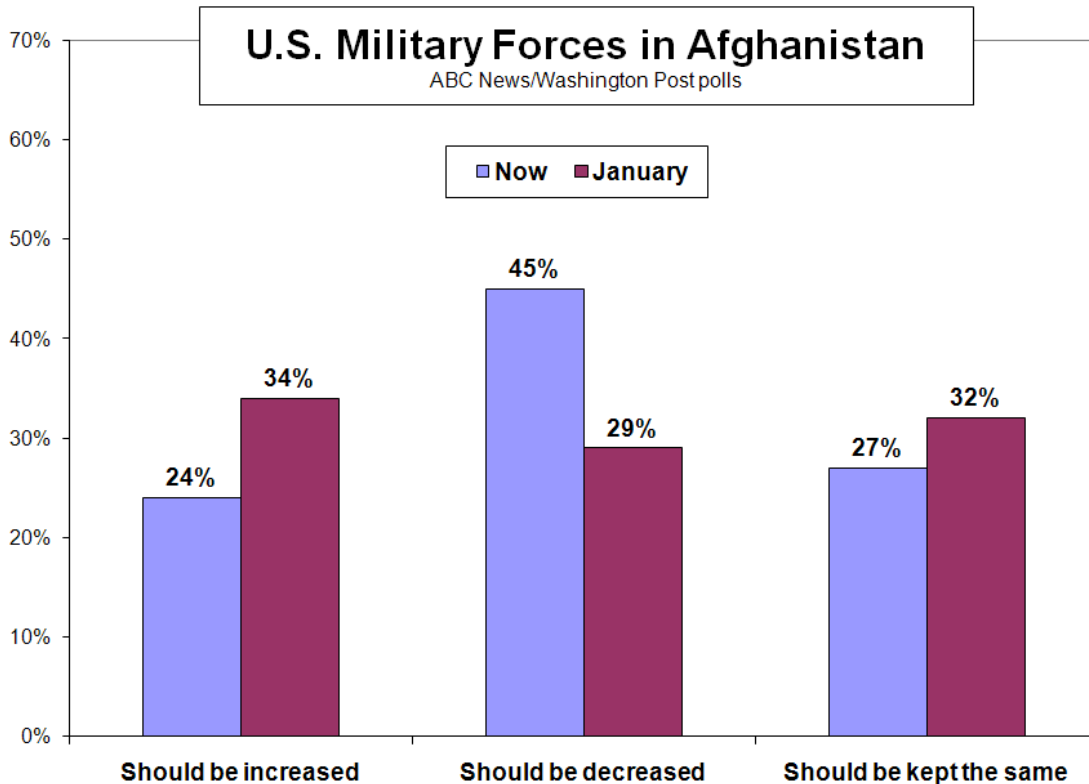
That lack of strong confidence in U.S. and allied progress helps explain the weak expectations for tomorrow’s election, in which President Hamid Karzai seeks re-election in the face of a resurgent Taliban, deep economic problems and broad concerns with official corruption. About a third of Americans, 34 percent, are confident the election will produce an effective government; 64 percent instead doubt it. A mere 3 percent are “very” confident in a positive outcome.



OBAMA’S WAR – Obama since taking office has made the war in Afghanistan his own, declaring it an essential element of counterterrorism, revamping the U.S. command, undertaking a major operation against insurgents in Taliban-dominated areas and overseeing an increase of 21,000 U.S. forces.

Higher U.S. casualties have ensued, with 160 killed so far this year, including a one-month record of 76 in July. That, however, is still far from the levels seen in the Iraq war, whose broad and deep unpopularity gave George W. Bush the longest run on record with below-majority approval for any president in polling since the late 1930s.

Increasing troops in Afghanistan never has been broadly popular, and is less so now – 34 percent favored increasing the deployment of U.S. forces in January, now down to 24 percent. The number who favor decreasing U.S. forces, by contrast, has grown from 29 percent at the start of Obama’s presidency seven months ago to 45 percent now.



Illustrating the change another way, in January more Americans favored increasing than decreasing the U.S. deployment, 34 percent to 29 percent. (The rest would have held it steady, or were undecided.) Today substantially more favor decreasing rather than increasing U.S. forces, 45-24 percent.

Obama underscored his views on Afghanistan in a speech Monday, calling it “a war worth fighting.” Again, though, the trend has been against him. As recently as March, 56 percent called the war worth fighting; that’s declined to 47 percent today. The negative view has grown by 10 points in that time, including a 6-point increase just since mid-July, to today’s 51 percent.

POLITICAL GROUPS – Obama has benefited from a bipartisan confluence on Afghanistan, with Republicans and conservatives favoring the war as a Bush legacy, Democrats and liberals favoring it as an Obama-endorsed undertaking.

The main change, again, has been in his base. In March 44 percent of liberal Democrats called the war worth fighting; it's 22 percent today (compared with 78 percent of conservative Republicans). And 64 percent of liberal Democrats now favor decreasing the U.S. deployment, up sharply from 35 percent in January. (Just 22 percent of conservative Republicans agree.)

But the changes have not come in Obama's base alone. Looking just by partisan affiliation, support for decreasing the U.S. deployment has risen by 20 points since January among Democrats, but also by 15 points among independents and by 12 points among Republicans. Since March, views that the war's been worth fighting have lost 14 points among Democrats, but also 7 points among independents and Republicans alike.

Another political division also is telling: Fifty-eight percent of Republicans say the United States is winning the war in Afghanistan (this peaks at 65 percent of conservative Republicans). Just 44 percent of independents and 31 percent of Democrats agree.

In another sign of risk for Obama, his Afghanistan policy has lost support particularly among young adults, also one of his core support groups. Among Americans under 30 years old, 68 percent now favor decreasing the level of U.S. forces, up a remarkable 29 points since January. And there's been a 13-point drop in this group since March in views that the war's worth fighting, to just 36 percent. Sixty-two percent say not, directly contradicting the president young adults supported in record numbers last November.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Aug. 13-17, 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).

1 held for release.

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

c. (HALF SAMPLE) The situation in Afghanistan

----- Approve ----- ----- Disapprove ----- No

	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
8/17/09	60	25	35	33	14	19	7
7/18/09	62	33	29	30	13	17	8
4/24/09	63	NA	NA	26	NA	NA	11

3-25 held for release.

26. 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
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
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

27. Do you think the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan should be (increased), (decreased), or kept about the same?

	Increased	Decreased	Kept about the same	No opinion
8/17/09	24	45	27	4
1/16/09	34	29	32	5

Compare to Iraq:

11/1/07	9	60	27	3
9/7/07	12	58	27	3
7/21/07	16	56	26	2
6/1/07	19	55	23	3
12/11/06	17	52	27	1
10/8/06	18	51	28	3
8/6/06	17	53	27	3
5/15/06	15	54	27	4
4/9/06	13	54	31	2
3/5/06	11	52	34	3
12/18/05	9	52	36	3
11/2/05	15	47	36	3
8/28/05	21	41	35	4
6/26/05	16	38	44	2
3/13/05	15	44	36	4

28. All told, do you think the United States is winning or losing the war in Afghanistan?

	Winning	Losing	Neither/ tie (vol.)	No opinion
8/17/09	42	36	13	9

Compare to Iraq:

6/15/08	38	46	9	6
9/7/07	34	48	14	5
4/15/07	32	53	12	2
1/10/07	29	57	12	2
12/11/06	34	52	9	4

12/18/05	56	34	8	2
8/28/05	51	38	8	3

29. As you may know Afghanistan is holding national elections [next/this] week, how confident are you that these elections will produce a government that can rule the country effectively - very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

	----- Confident -----			----- Not confident -----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all	opinion
8/17/09	34	3	31	64	39	25	2

30. How confident are you in the ability of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan to (ITEM) - very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

8/17/09 - Summary Table

	-- Confident --			--- Not confident ---			No
	NET	Very	Smwt.	NET	Not too	At all	opin.
a. defeat the Taliban	59	19	40	40	22	18	1
b. provide effective economic development	61	11	50	37	24	13	2
c. encourage the creation of an honest and effective government	55	10	46	43	25	18	2

31-34 previously released.

END