

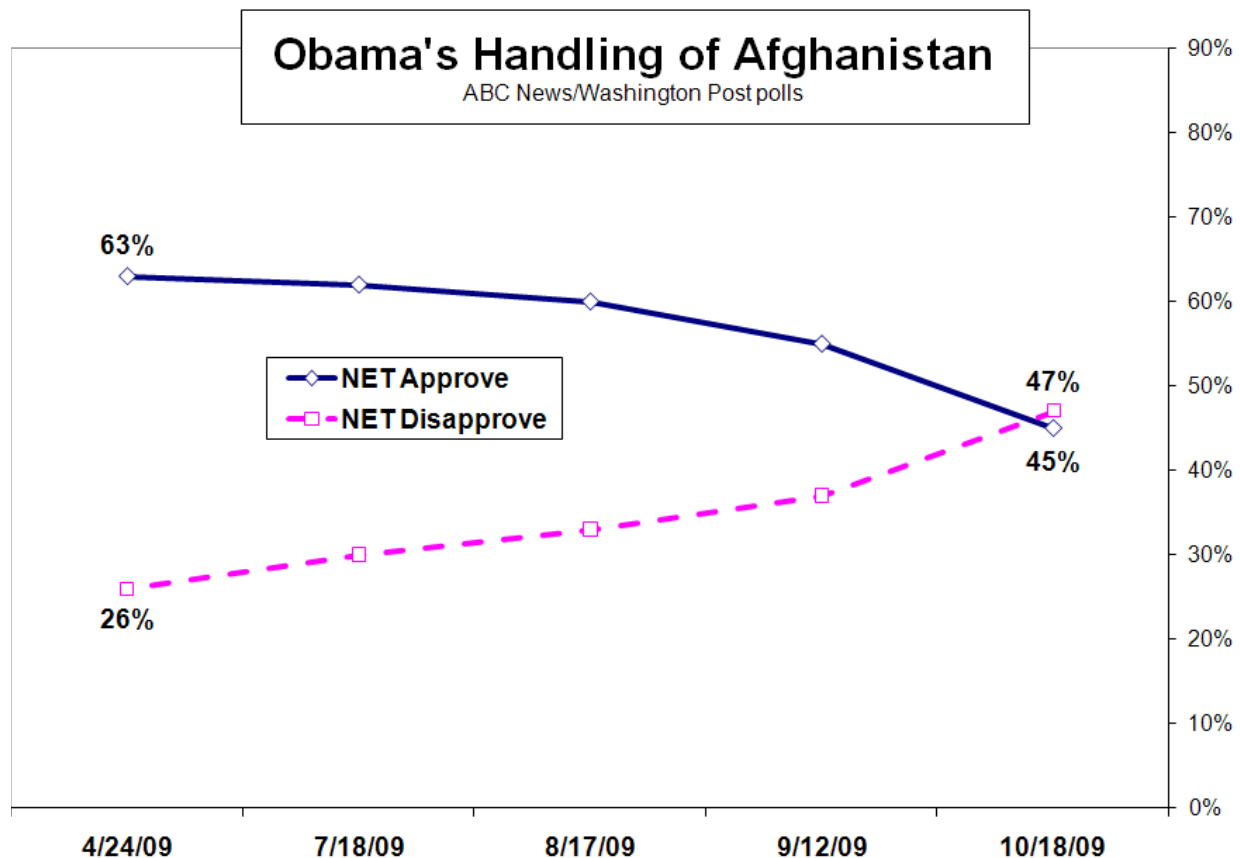
ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL: AFGHANISTAN

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Drop for Obama on Afghanistan; Few See a Clear Plan for the War

Barack Obama's ratings for handling the war in Afghanistan have dropped sharply, with Americans by 2-1 saying he lacks a clear plan there. But the public itself is divided on how to proceed, torn between the difficulties of the war and the threat of Taliban or al-Qaeda-backed terrorism.

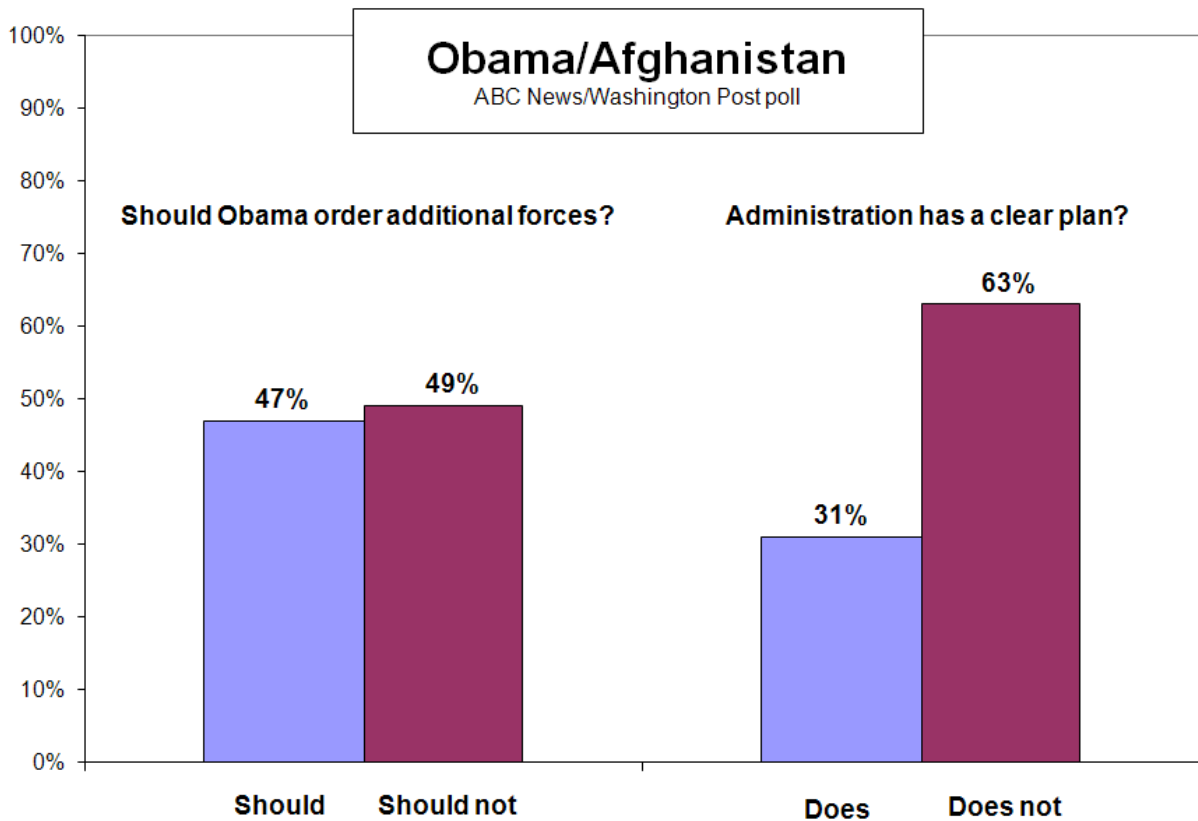
Forty-five percent now approve of the president's handling of the situation, down by 10 points in a month, 15 points since August and 18 points from its peak last spring. His approval rating on Afghanistan has fallen farther than on any other issue in ABC News/Washington Post polls this year.



The chief reason for the latest shift is the departure of Republicans: Last month, after his August speech calling it "a war of necessity," 51 percent of Republicans approved of how Obama was handling Afghanistan. Now, with his strategy review underway, just 22 percent still do.

That shift describes the political box in which the president finds himself. If he sends more troops to Afghanistan he risks losing support from Democrats, who are far more skeptical of the war; if not, he risks alienating Republicans and a substantial share of independents.

Underscoring the divisions, 47 percent of Americans say the war has not been worth fighting, essentially steady since summer, with vast partisan and ideological gaps. The public similarly divides on whether the president should accede to the military's request for perhaps 40,000 additional forces: Forty-seven percent think so, 49 percent not, again with sharp political divisions.



One concern: Thirty-five percent now see a Vietnam-like entanglement for the United States in Afghanistan – still well under half, but double the number who said so early in the war, in March 2002.

Meantime there's 2-1 agreement – negatively – in views on Obama's strategy. Just 31 percent think he has a clear plan for dealing with the situation, while 63 percent think not. Even in his own base, among Democrats, just 44 percent say the president has a clear plan; that falls to 31 percent among independents and just 12 percent among Republicans.

There's also agreement on another front: Two-thirds of Americans think there was widespread fraud in this summer's presidential election in Afghanistan. A runoff was scheduled yesterday, to be held Nov. 7.

GOALS – Afghanistan's not an easy issue; doubt about the war is countered by deep antipathy toward the Taliban and al Qaeda. Indeed "preventing the Taliban from returning to power" receives equal emphasis in public opinion as "preventing the establishment of al Qaeda terrorist bases"; 75 percent say both should be done by the United States, and two-thirds say both should receive "a high priority."

Fewer but still 53 percent give a high priority to attacking leaders of the Taliban, al Qaeda and similar groups across the border in Pakistan; substantially fewer still, 33 and 38 percent, respectively, give a high priority to providing economic aid or establishing a stable democratic government in Afghanistan. Most, though, do say these should be done, if not as a high priority.

Testing the notion of a shift from counter-insurgency to counter-terrorism, this poll also asked if the United States should allow elements of the Taliban to regain power in Afghanistan if it determined that they do not support terrorism against the United States. Seventy-nine percent oppose the idea, further marking the deep suspicion with which Americans see the Taliban.

The perceived threat is a major element of support for the war and for the deployment of additional troops; both of these soar among people who see deterring the Taliban and al Qaeda as high priorities for the United States.

	Send more forces?		War worth fighting?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Deterring al Qaeda:				
High priority	61%	36	58%	39
Not high priority	18	77	24	72
Deterring Taliban:				
High priority	62	34	60%	36
Not high priority	20	78	21	76

GROUPS and MOVABILITY – Views that the war's been worth fighting range from 71 percent among Republicans and 58 percent among conservatives to 36 percent among Democrats and 32 percent among liberals. Similarly, 69 percent of Republicans and 59 percent of conservatives favor sending more U.S. forces; among Democrats and liberals, 34 and 29 percent, respectively, agree.

There are divisions among other groups as well. Men, for example, are far more apt than women to support spending more troops, 56 percent vs. 39 percent; and it's 52 percent among people over age 30, compared with 28 percent of younger adults.

Attitudes, it should be noted, are movable. Support for sending additional U.S. forces is higher in this poll, with a support/oppose question noting that the military leadership has requested them, than in questions instead asking if the U.S. troop levels should be increased, decreased or kept

the same. Also, while 33 percent “strongly” support sending more troops, and 38 percent strongly oppose it, that leaves a substantial group without strong feelings on the subject.

As to Obama, approval of his handling of the situation is nearly three times higher among people who think he has a clear plan.

All these point to likely strategies in marshalling public opinion: For supporters of increasing the troop deployment, the argument that it’s needed to deter al Qaeda and the Taliban; to opponents, the opposite; and for the administration, the need to present a clear and persuasive strategy.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Oct. 15-18, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,004 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 previously released

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

a-d previously released.

e. The situation in Afghanistan

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
10/18/09	45	22	23	47	17	31	7
9/12/09	55	23	33	37	17	21	7
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

f-h previously released.

3-22 previously released or held for release.

23. 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/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	
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".

24. Do you think the Obama Administration does or does not have a clear plan for handling the situation in Afghanistan?

	Does	Does not	No opinion
10/18/09	31	63	6

Compare to: Do you think the Bush Administration does or does not have a clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq?

	Does	Does not	No opinion
1/19/07	28	70	2
12/11/06	25	72	3
9/7/06	38	61	2
8/6/06	33	64	3
6/25/06	35	64	2
3/5/06	34	65	*
12/18/05	40	59	1
3/13/05	42	57	2
5/23/04	40	58	2
5/6/04	38	57	5
4/18/04	45	53	2
3/7/04	43	53	3
12/21/03	48	47	5
10/13/03	42	53	5
9/13/03	42	55	2

25. U.S. military commanders have requested approximately 40,000 more U.S. troops for Afghanistan. Do you think Obama should or should not order these additional forces to Afghanistan? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Should -----			----- Should not-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
10/18/09	47	33	14	49	10	38	4

26. For each item I name, please tell me if you see it as something the United States should or should not try to do in Afghanistan? The first item is [ITEM] - is that something the United States should or should not try to do in Afghanistan? (IF SHOULD) Should that be a high priority, or not a high priority?

10/18/09 - Summary Table

	-----	Should	-----	Should	No
	NET	High	Not high	not	op.
a. Preventing the establishment of al Qaeda terrorist bases in Afghanistan	75	67	9	22	3
b. Preventing the Taliban from returning to power in Afghanistan	75	65	11	21	4
c. Providing economic development aid to improve living conditions for ordinary Afghans	59	33	26	39	2
d. Establishing a stable democratic government in Afghanistan	59	38	21	38	3
e. Attacking leaders of the Taliban, al Qaeda and similar groups across the border in					

27. If the U.S. determines that elements of the Taliban do not support terrorism against the United States, should it allow them to regain power in Afghanistan - or should the U.S. try to keep all elements of the Taliban out of power there?

	Allow to regain power	Try to keep out of power	No opinion
10/18/09	18	79	4

28. Given what you've heard, do you think the Afghan presidential election was free and fair, or do you think there was widespread vote fraud in the election?

	Free and fair	NET	Widespread	Fraud Not widespread (vol.)	No opinion
10/18/09	13	69	66	4	18

29. Do you think the United States is heading for the same kind of involvement in Afghanistan as it had in the Vietnam war, or do you think the United States will avoid that kind of involvement this time?

	NET	Same/Already in Same as Vietnam	Already in it (vol.)	Will avoid that	No opinion
10/18/09	35	31	4	58	7
3/10/02	18	18	NA	77	5

Compare to: Iraq

	NET	Same/Already in Same as Vietnam	Already in it (vol.)	Will avoid that	No opinion
1/10/07	44	38	5	50	6
10/22/06	45	40	5	50	5
6/5/05	45	42	3	52	3

Compare to: Serbia

4/26/99	31	31	NA	65	4
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Compare to: Bosnia

11/29/95	33	33	NA	61	6
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Compare to: Persian Gulf

4/3/91*	8	8	NA	89	3
1/20/91*	11	11	NA	86	3
12/5/90	32	32	NA	66	3
11/15/90	26	26	NA	69	5
9/9/90	18	18	NA	78	4
8/20/90	22	22	NA	74	4

*Wording change: "Persian Gulf" in place of "Middle East"

30-38 previously released or held for release.

END