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Afghanistan: Pessimism and Criticism of President Both Increase

New York, NY — November 19, 2009 — A new Harris Poll finds that a 2-to-1 majority now gives President Obama negative ratings on his handling of Afghanistan, a six-point increase in his critics over the last two months. It also finds that the plurality of the public who believe the situation in Afghanistan is getting worse has increased to its highest level since the president was inaugurated.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,303 adults surveyed online between November 2 and 11, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

In April this year, a slender 51% to 36% of adults rated the president's handling of Afghanistan positively. In September, a 54% to 36% majority gave him negative ratings. Now, a 60% to 31% majority rate his handling of Afghanistan negatively.

Other findings in this Harris Poll include:

- Only 6% of adults now think the situation in Afghanistan is getting better, the lowest number recorded in any Harris Poll asking this question. Those who believe the situation is getting worse have increased to 47%, compared to only 28% in April.
- Only 12% are now confident that U.S. policies in Afghanistan will be successful, also the lowest number we have recorded. Fully 61% are not confident, compared to 40% in April.

This Harris Poll also asked the public to choose between three options for troop levels in Afghanistan. There is absolutely no consensus. The largest number of adults, 36%, supports sending more troops there "for a few months to stabilize the situation." Almost as many (33%) want to "set a timetable for withdrawal." A smaller number (20%) favor "withdrawing all troops now."

Differences by party

Unsurprisingly, there are big differences between how Democrats and Republicans rate the president's handling of Afghanistan. However, fully 65% of Independents join the great majority of Republicans in giving him negative rating. And more than a third (38%) of Democrats also do so.

Half of all Democrats (51%) join most Republicans (66%) and Independents (67%) in saying they are not confident that U.S. policies in Afghanistan will be successful.

So what?

These findings are consistent with our other polls showing a continuing decline in public confidence in the president generally and his policies on the economy and health care. He badly needs some "wins" to stop, let alone reverse, this downward trend.

**TABLE 1
OBAMA'S HANDLING OF AFGHANISTAN**

"Now turning to Afghanistan, overall how would you rate the job President Obama has done in handling Afghanistan over the past several months?"

Base: All Adults

	April 2009	Sept 2009	Nov 2009	Political Party		
	%	%	%	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Positive (NET)	51	36	31	12	53	27
Excellent	10	5	4	1	8	3
Pretty Good	41	32	26	10	46	25
Negative (NET)	36	54	60	83	38	65
Only fair	26	35	33	35	31	33
Poor	10	19	27	48	7	32
Not sure	13	10	9	5	8	8

**TABLE 2
SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN – GETTING BETTER OR WORSE**

"Do you think that the situation in Afghanistan is...?"

Base: All Adults

	July 2005	May 2007	August 2008	April 2009	Sept 2009	September 2009			
	%	%	%	%	%	Total	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Getting better	17	12	11	12	8	6	6	9	4
Getting worse	30	26	37	28	42	47	55	39	51
No real change	37	36	35	45	41	39	35	42	39
Not sure	16	26	18	16	9	8	4	10	6

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 3
CONFIDENCE IN SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN?**

"How confident are you that U.S. policies in Afghanistan will be successful?"

Base: All Adults

	July 2005	May 2007	August 2008	April 2009	Sept 2009	November 2009			
	%	%	%	%	%	Total	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Confident	25	22	17	27	14	12	12	16	7
Not confident	45	41	54	40	55	61	66	51	67
Not sure	30	37	29	33	31	28	22	33	26

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4
ACTIONS US SHOULD TAKE CONCERNING TROOPS

“Which of the following possible scenarios would you like to see the US government undertake with regard to Afghanistan?”

Base: All Adults

	Nov 2009
	%
Withdraw all troops now	20
Set a timetable for withdrawal	33
Send more troops to Afghanistan for a few months to stabilize the situation	36
Not sure	11

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States November 2 and 11, 2009 among 2,303 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll

About Harris Interactive

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