

Most People Believe Osama Bin Laden Is Alive and Many Believe He Is in Pakistan

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Very little confidence in Pakistan's ability to defeat the Taliban

A new Harris Poll finds that more than three-quarters (78%) of adult Americans believe Osama bin Laden is alive. A plurality (37%) believes that he is living in Pakistan, but many people (32%) do not feel able to even guess where he is.

Confidence in Pakistan's ability to defeat the Taliban is very low, and a 49% plurality of adults think it likely that "at some time in the next few years, there will be a government in Pakistan that supports Al Qaeda in its efforts to launch terrorist attacks in the U.S."

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,576 adults surveyed online between January 18 and 25, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

The main findings of this poll are:

- * While fully 78% of adults believe Osama bin Laden is alive, only 23% feel that he is "definitely alive." Most people (55%) think he is "probably alive."
- * Only 11% of those who think he is alive believe that bin Laden is still in Afghanistan, whereas 37% believe he is in Pakistan. A few people think he is in Yemen (7%), Iran (5%) or somewhere else (8%).
- * Hardly anyone (3%) is "very confident" that Pakistan will defeat the Taliban, while another 19% are "somewhat confident." Most people are either "not at all confident" (23%) or "not that confident" (40%).
- * Half of all adults (49%) think it is very (12%) or somewhat (37%) likely that at some time in the next few years a Pakistani government will support Al Qaeda in its efforts to launch terrorist attacks in the U.S. Only 30% thinks this is not likely.

So what?

The economy, jobs and health care may top the list of issues people want the government to address, but fear of another terrorist attack against the U.S.A. is not far beneath the surface.

This is fed not just by news from Afghanistan, the Yemen and Iran but by a widespread belief that the Taliban or others who support Al Qaeda could take control of the government of Pakistan.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between January 18 and 25, 2010 among 2,576 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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