

52% - 35% Majority Believes U.S. Should Leave Afghanistan Faster Now That Bin Laden Is Dead

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Majority also favors making aid to Pakistan conditional on cooperation on pursuing Al Qaeda and the Taliban

A new BBC World News America/Harris Poll finds that a majority of Americans (52%) believe that the United States should move to get its troops out of Afghanistan now that Osama bin Laden is dead.

However, 35% believe that U.S. troops should stay according to the existing plans. Reasons why most people favor withdrawing U.S. troops may be that a 51% to 14% majority of adults are not confident that U.S. policies in Afghanistan will be successful, and only 19% see the Afghan government as either an ally or a friend to the U.S. and 36% see it as unfriendly and an enemy.

These are some of the findings of a new BBC World News America/Harris Poll of 2,027 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 31 and June 2, 2011 by Harris Interactive.

Other interesting findings in the poll include:

A large 66% to 20% majority of adults believes that it was better to have killed Osama bin Laden than to have captured him;

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An even larger 66% to 18% majority believe that "if the United States has very reliable information that a nationally wanted terrorist or criminal like Osama bin Laden is located in a foreign country.... that we have the right to perform a military operation within that country without notifying the government";

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The public is split on the impact of the killing of bin Laden on world opinion, with 41% thinking that it has made the United States more respected and 41% thinking has made no difference. Only 7% believe that it has made the U.S. less respected;

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Israel continues to enjoy very strong support among Americans, with 41% of adults seeing it as a close ally and a further 30% as a friend;

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The fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt has done nothing to improve U.S. attitudes to its government. In fact those who see the government of Egypt as a close ally or friend (43%) are somewhat lower now than when this question was asked in 2009 (52%) and 2010 (49%);

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More people see Pakistan as unfriendly and an enemy (29%) than as a friend or ally (20%); and,

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Many more people see the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan as unfriendly and enemies (38% and 36% respectively) than as friends or allies (22% and 19%). Attitudes to these two countries are only marginally less negative than they are to the government of Syria (16% friend or ally and 38% unfriendly and an enemy).

So What?

The killing of Osama bin Laden has done little to change the generally negative attitudes of Americans to the role of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Only 14% of adults are confident that U.S. policies there will be successful, virtually unchanged since two Harris polls in June and October last year.

Perhaps the most surprising findings in this poll are that many more people regard the governments of Afghanistan and Iraq as unfriendly and an enemy than as friends or allies, even though they were brought to power as a result of the U.S. invasions and have been kept in power by the presence of US troops.

Methodology

This BBC World News America/Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between May 31 and June 2, 2011 among 2,027 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. Where appropriate, this data were also weighted to reflect the composition of the adult online 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.

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By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll

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