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against Iran, but Only 29% Support Military Action***



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Political Debate Fails to Alter Americans' Opinions about Obama, the Direction of the Country and Healthcare Reforms

A Majority of Americans Favor Economic or Diplomatic Sanctions against Iran, but Only 29% Support Military Action

Washington, DC – President Obama's approval ratings have not changed since late August, with 56% saying that they approve of how he is handling his job and 40% disapproving, according to a new telephone poll of over 1,200 adults conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs. Yet, a majority of Americans (56%) believe that the country is off on the wrong track, while 40% feel that the nation is headed in the right direction, also mirroring the national mood five weeks earlier. The poll also suggests that for all its intensity, the political debate has not occasioned any substantial shift in the opinions of Americans about healthcare reforms – they remain nearly equally divided about them – and about a public health insurance option, which is favored by a slight majority.

Obama's Approval Ratings and in the Mood of the Nation

While the percentages of those who approve of Obama's performance (56%) and of those who disapprove of it (40%) are identical to what they were over a month ago, the intensity of both the opposition to and the support for the President softened slightly: a month ago, 28% said that they strongly disapproved of the job Obama is doing as President, but currently 23% feel this way.

- African-Americans (94% approve), Hispanics (70%), those who are currently not employed (64%), adults under the age of 35 (62%), those with a household income of less than \$25,000 (62%) and women (61%) are most likely to approve of the way Obama handles his job. In contrast, adults with a household income of \$50,000 or more (46% disapprove), men (45%), and adults 55 and older (45%) are among those most likely to disapprove of it.
- Obama's performance receives the approval of 86% of Democrats, 18% of Republicans and 47% of Independents. In earlier readings this year, his approval rating among Independents had never dipped below 50%.

While Obama continues to enjoy majority approval, the new poll shows that the mood of the nation has not improved since the end of the summer with 56% (up 2 points) saying it is off on the wrong track and 40% (unchanged) saying the country is headed in the right direction.

- Those most likely to say that the country is headed in the right direction include African-Americans (76%), college graduates (48%), Hispanics (47%), Northeasterners (46%), and those with a household income of \$25,000 or more (45%).
- While 63% of Democrats say the country is headed in the right direction, only 30% of Independents and 14% of Republicans do.

Top Issues Facing the Country

As the healthcare debate continues to unfold in Congress, Americans remain divided in their feelings about the reform proposals presently being discussed. They are as likely to favor (40%) as they are to oppose (42%) these reforms. These findings mirror those of late August, when 40% favored the proposed reforms and 45% opposed them. Currently, one in seven (14%) do not have an opinion on this issue, while 4% are unsure.



- African-Americans (81%), Hispanics (57%), those who are currently not employed (47%), Westerners (47%), and unmarried adults (46%) are most likely to favor the reforms while adults who are white (51%), married (50%), have a household income of \$50,000 or more (49%), or employed full-time (47%) are most likely to be in opposition.
- While there is a strong partisan divide when it comes to these reforms, Republicans are more likely to oppose the reforms than Democrats are to favor them (77% vs. 65%). Though nearly three in ten Independents (28%) do not have an opinion, they are more likely to oppose than they are to favor the reforms being debated (38% vs. 28%).

Although some of the proposed reforms exclude a public health insurance option, a majority of Americans (53%) still say that it is necessary to create a public health insurance plan to make sure that all Americans have access to quality healthcare; just under half of Americans (49%) felt this way five weeks ago. Fewer (42%) feel that access to quality healthcare for all Americans can be achieved without having to create a public health insurance plan. An additional 5% are unsure of their position.

Americans' attitudes toward the economy have also changed little, though they are becoming slightly less pessimistic about it. The proportion of adults who feel that the worst is still yet to come has declined slightly (31% currently vs. 35% in late August) while the proportion who feel that the economy has stabilized though not yet begun to improve has increased somewhat (55% currently vs. 49% in late August). One in ten (11%) is even more optimistic, saying that we have already turned the corner on the economic crisis, while 3% are unsure.

- Those with a household income of less than \$25,000 (39%) are most likely to fear that we have not yet seen the worst of the crisis.
- Republicans (45%) and Independents (37%) are much more likely than are Democrats (18%) to think that the economy will take another turn for the worse.

At the same time, the economy and unemployment stands out as the most important problem facing the country today, cited by over a third of adults (35%). One quarter (24%) cite another domestic issue as the one being most pressing today, including 10% who name healthcare, 3% "politicians" and "government", 2% the Obama administration, 2% the budget and deficit, and 2% morality. Overall, only 7% name a foreign affairs-related matter as the most important problem, including 4% who express concern about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One in three of those surveyed are unsure about what is the country's most crucial problem.

- Americans with a household income of \$50,000 or more (21%) are among those most likely to view healthcare as the most important problem currently facing the United States. Republicans are nearly as likely as Democrats to cite healthcare (9% vs. 13%).
- Regionally, residents of the Northeast (43%) and the Midwest (42%) are more likely to view the economy and unemployment as the top problem than are residents of the South (25%).

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted October 1-5, 2009. For the survey, a nationally representative, randomly selected sample of 1,296 adults aged 18 and older across the United States was interviewed by Ipsos. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate within 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population in the U.S. been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the actual U.S. population according to U.S. Census figures. Respondents had the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish.



Iran as a Threat to the United States

Two thirds of Americans (66%) feel that Iran represents a moderate (36%) or very serious (30%) threat to the United States. In contrast, one in five (19%) feel that Iran poses a slight threat, while 12% say that Iran poses no threat at all. An additional 4% were unsure.

- Perceptions about the threat that Iran represents to the U.S. vary greatly with age; while three quarters of adults 35 and older (74%) feel that Iran poses a moderate or serious threat, less than half of younger adults (49%) feel this way. Others who are more likely to see Iran as a moderate or serious threat include adults who are married (73%), college graduates (72%), or white (72%).
- Across party lines, Republicans (81%) are much more likely to feel that Iran poses a threat to the U.S. than are Independents (62%) and Democrats (57%).

Americans tend to be slightly more critical of President Obama in terms of how he is dealing with Iran than they are of how he is handling his job more generally. Just under half of adults (49%) say that they approve of how he is handling Iran while 39% say that they disapprove. One in eight (13%) are unsure.

- Those who tend to approve of how Obama is handling his job as President more generally also tend to be more supportive of his handling of Iran, as African-Americans (81%), Democrats (70%) and college graduates (56%) are most likely to approve.
- In contrast, Republicans (62%) and men (42%) are most likely to disapprove of the job Obama is doing in dealing with Iran.

While a majority of Americans (56%) feel that economic or diplomatic action should be taken against Iran, just 29% believe that they U.S. should take military action. Only a third (31%) would oppose the U.S. imposing diplomatic or economic sanctions, whereas 61% say that they would oppose military action.

- Those most likely to favor diplomatic or economic action include those with a household income of \$50,000 or more (71%), college graduates (70%), Republicans (69%), retirees (68%), men (63%), and adults aged 35 and older (62%). Those most likely to oppose such measures include Hispanics (52%), Independents (42%), adults under 35 (42%), and those with a high school education or less (40%).
- Republicans (42%), those with some college education (37%), and residents of the South (34%) tend to be more supportive the U.S. taking military action against Iran, while Democrats (71%) and college graduates (70%) are most likely to be in opposition.

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