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Majorities of Americans Support Increased Security Measures at Airports As a Means of Reducing Terrorism



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Washington, DC – After dropping below the 50% mark in early December, President Obama's approval rating has rebounded slightly, as 52% now say that they approve of the way he is handling his job as President while 45% disapprove, according to a new telephone poll of over 1,300 adults conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs.

The grades that Obama receives for his performance on various issues are mostly similar to what they were in early December. The economy and jobs marks his largest gain, as 40% now give him an A or a B in this area (up 4 points over the past month) compared with 39% who give him a D or an F (down 6 points).

Of note, Obama's grades on how he is handling terrorism have changed little compared with what they were before the thwarted bombing attempt in a Detroit-bound flight on Christmas Day and the response to it. Just as in early December, 43% award Obama an A or a B on his handling of terrorism while 35% give him a D or an F (up 3 points).

Percentages of those who give Obama an A or a B on other issues remain fairly stable:

- Diplomacy: 51% (down 3 points from early December)
- Education: 51% (up 2 points)
- Energy independence: 41% (no change)
- The war in Iraq: 40% (up 2 points)
- Health care: 40% (no change)
- The war in Afghanistan: 38% (up 1 point)

The Economy Remains the Top Issue Facing the Country

Despite the recent Northwest flight bombing scare, just 4% name terrorism and terrorist attacks as the most important problem facing the U.S. today (up 3 points from 1% in October). In contrast, 48% cite an economy-related concern (up 2 points), including 28% who name the economy in general and 19% who specifically cite unemployment or the lack of jobs. Three in ten (31%) name some other domestic issue, including health care (9%) and political leaders (7%). One in seven (14%) name a foreign affairs issue as the most pressing problem, most commonly the wars abroad (7%) and terrorism (4%).

While the economy is still viewed as the most important problem facing the U.S. today, Americans are growing less pessimistic about the economic crisis. Currently, just 30% say that they feel the worst is still yet to come – a new low since Obama took office as, back in February of last year, a majority (54%) feared that we had not yet seen the worst of the crisis. Even last month, 35% reported that they expected the crisis to worsen still.



The most prevalent opinion, shared by 56% (up 2 points from last month), is that the economy has stabilized but has not yet begun to improve. About one in ten say we have turned the corner on the recession (11%, up 3 points).

Similarly, Americans are becoming less negative about the direction the country is headed. Though a majority (55%) still feel that things are off on the wrong track, this marks a decline of 5 points over the past month. Four in ten (39%) feel that the country is heading in the right direction, an increase of 3-points since early December, while 6% are unsure.

Support for More Air Travel Security Measures

In the face of this recent security threat, three quarters of Americans (75%) feel that air travel in the United States is safe with 27% saying it is “very safe” and 49% “somewhat safe”, while a quarter (24%) hold a different opinion (17% say it is “not too safe” and 7% “not at all safe”). Larger proportions of Americans felt that air travel was safe back in December of 2007 (86%) and September of 2006 (85%) than do now.

Opinions about the current safety of air travel today vary by across demographic groups:

- Women are more likely than are men to feel that air travel is unsafe (27% vs. 20%).
- Those with a household income of less than \$50,000 are more likely than those who are more affluent to believe that air travel is unsafe today (28% vs. 13%).

Though a majority of Americans feel that air travel is safe nowadays, many feel that additional security measures would be effective in helping to reduce the risks of terrorism.

Eight in ten (81%) agree that better coordination of intelligence collected by different government agencies about potentially dangerous passengers would be effective, including 63% who *strongly* agree. Three quarters (74%) agree, including nearly half (48%) who *strongly* agree, that body scans or full body searches would be beneficial in terms of making air travel safer. Increasing the restrictions on carry-on luggage would also be an effective measure in the eyes of nearly six in ten (57%).

However, Americans are divided when it comes to implementing new in-flight restrictions. Just half (50%) agree that further in-flight restrictions such as banning the use of electronic equipment, requiring passengers to stay seated or to keep any item off their lap would be worthwhile while 42% disagree.

Overall, a very slight majority of adults (51%) believe that it is necessary to give up some civil liberties in order to make the country safe from terrorism, while just over a third (36%) feel that some of the government's proposals will go too far in restricting the public's civil liberties. An additional 8% say that it would depend while 5% are unsure. When the same question was asked of a national sample of adults by the *Los Angeles Times* in August of 2002, less than a year after the 9/11 attacks, results were remarkably similar. At the time, just under half (49%) reported that it is necessary to give up some civil liberties, 38% expressed concern that government proposals could go too far.



These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted January 7-11, 2010. For the survey, a nationally representative, randomly selected sample of 1,336 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 2.68 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.

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