

March 14, 2012

Anzalone Liszt Research

National Polling Summary

Friends,

Below you will find the weekly Anzalone Liszt Research National Polling Summary, which provides a pollster's take on data and trends that affect political campaigns.

Recent developments abroad, including Iran's nuclear program, have thrust foreign policy into the political spotlight. This week, we take a look at public opinion on Iran and what role President Obama's record on foreign policy will play in this year's campaign.

Following our analysis are additional news items and data we thought you'd enjoy.

John Anzalone and Jeff Liszt

STORY THIS WEEK: The Call at 3 AM: Iran and the Politics of National Security

Renewed fears over Iran's nuclear program have heightened tensions in Israel and the United States. Stern talk of deadlines, crippling sanctions, and war has spooked oil markets and raised questions about the future of Washington's approach to Tehran.

What course of action does public opinion support? How is President Obama's foreign policy strategy playing with the electorate? And in this election year, does a focus on national security benefit one party or the other?

Public Opinion on Iran

A recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal [poll](#) framed the Iranian question two different ways. Presented with just two choices - to initiate military action or not - 52% of Americans favor initiating an attack to destroy Iran's ability to make nuclear weapons. This is in line with NBC/WSJ results from the past three years, which shows support for preemptive action hovering between 51% and 54% if the alternative is a nuclear Iran. However, when the question is refashioned to include a wider array of options, the initial knee-jerk hawkishness becomes more nuanced.

Given a wider array of policy choices, supporting Israeli action, as opposed to launching an American strike, becomes the preferred strategy (26%). Support for direct U.S. action drops from 52% in the first question to 21% in this frame. Still, almost half of Americans (47%) favor either a direct or indirect military encounter with Iran, outpacing the 32% who think the U.S. should

limit its response to "stronger diplomatic and economic action".

The preference for a military solution over a diplomatic one might be partly explained by Americans' doubts that economic sanctions would actually prevent a nuclear Iran. Almost two-thirds of Americans (64%), according to [Pew Research Center](#), believe that imposing tougher economic sanctions "will not work" in stopping Iran's nuclear development (21% believe they will). Skepticism crosses party lines: 56% of Democrats, 72% of Republicans and 67% of Independents agree that sanctions will not deter Iran from developing nuclear weapons. With that in mind, 58% believe that America's top priority should be to "prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even if it means taking military action." Similar to the numbers among Americans, Israelis are more likely to support action if they do not have to go it alone. A recent [poll](#) conducted in Israel shows 42% in support of a "strike only if Israel gains at least American support". Another 19% believe that Israel should strike regardless of American support, with 34% opposed to military action.

In short, a solo military action is a minority opinion in both the U.S. and Israel. Interestingly, President Obama receives a vote of confidence among Israeli Jews: he is narrowly their preferred candidate over Romney, Santorum and Gingrich. Among American Jews, [pollster Jim Gerstein](#) recently cited numbers that show Obama (56% Approve / 34% Disapprove) much more popular than Romney (16% Approve / 60% Disapprove)

Back stateside, voters are apprehensive regarding President Obama's handling of the issue. The latest ABC News/Washington Post [poll](#) finds a majority of Americans disapprove of President Obama's handling of Iran. When asked to rate how Obama is dealing with "the possibility of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons", 36% approve and 52% disapprove. That remains virtually unchanged from mid-January (33% approve / 48% disapprove).

Foreign policy always consists of complex and dynamic options, and often makes public opinion a difficult and moving target. Like actual policymakers, voters are grappling with a difficult set of choices. However, as President Obama navigates the diplomatic, economic and perhaps military challenges relating to Iran, he will be operating from a position of relative strength on the broader issues of foreign policy, national security and terrorism.

Approval: Foreign and Domestic

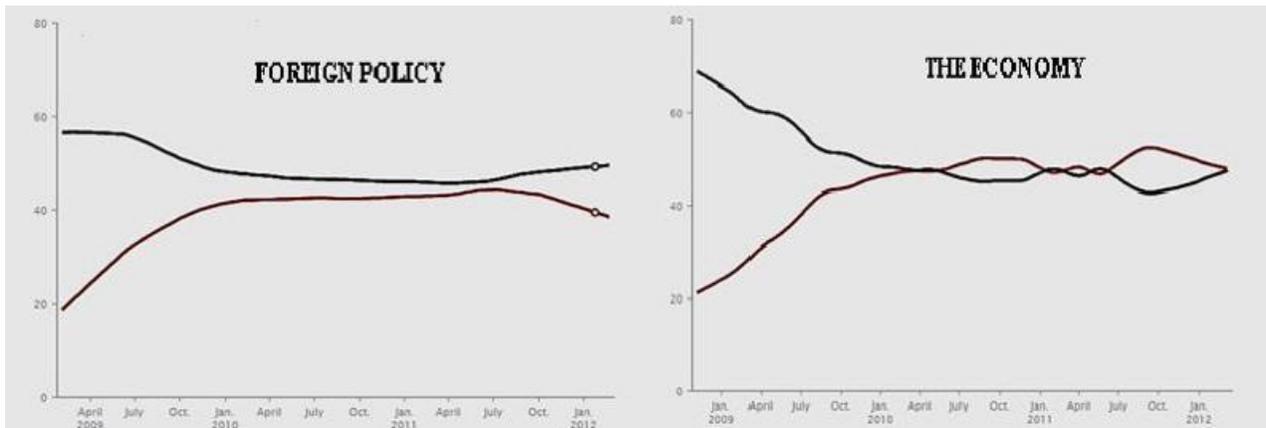
The latest GWU/Politico [survey](#) finds President Obama's approval rating on foreign policy sitting at 56% approve / 40% disapprove among likely voters. His positive rating on foreign policy exceeds his positive rating on job creation (49% approve), Social Security and Medicare (48%), and the overall economy (47%). Independent voters in a Quinnipiac [poll](#) also show more support for Obama on foreign policy (47%) than on the economy (45%), healthcare (37%) and the budget deficit (27%).

Several specific aspects of Obama's national security agenda have garnered widespread support among the electorate. A Washington Post [poll](#) conducted in early February finds 83% of adults nationwide approve of "the use of unmanned 'drone' aircraft against terrorist suspects overseas", 78% approve of "the draw down of U.S. troops from Afghanistan", and 70% approve of "keeping

open the prison at Guantanamo Bay for terrorist suspects". Even when extended to more controversial policies, 65% back the use of drones to target suspected American terrorists living abroad.

Over the course of his presidency, the President's foreign policy approval ratings have remained in positive territory even in the midst of bad economic news and spells of low consumer confidence. This is a stark contrast with his economic approval ratings, which have fluctuated dramatically since late 2009. The two graphs below (from *Pollster.com*) show the difference.

OBAMA'S APPROVAL RATING ON:



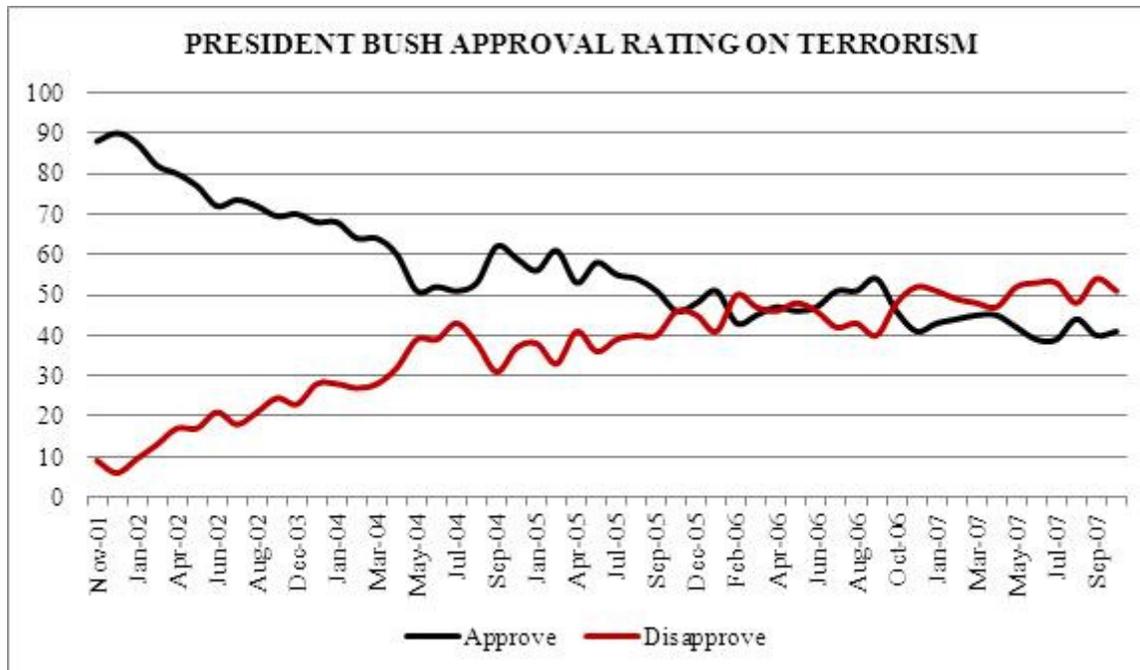
The Politics of National Security

President Obama's solid standing on foreign policy and national security runs counter to recent political history, in which Republicans have held an advantage on these issues.

As Samantha Power, an academic and now a senior foreign policy adviser to President Obama, noted in a 2008 [essay](#),

"Americans have long trusted the views of Democrats on the environment, the economy, education, and health care, but national security is the one matter about which Republicans have maintained what political scientists call 'issue ownership'."

Exit polls from the 2004 Presidential race [highlight](#) the historical divide: among voters who listed the economy as their top issue, John Kerry beat George Bush, 80% - 18%. But among voters who believed that defending America against terrorism was the most important issue, Bush captured 86% of the vote over war hero Kerry. Voters' faith in Bush on national security, however, eroded during his second term. Below is a chart that tracks results from a [CBS News survey](#) that asked voters to rate President Bush on his handling of terrorism.



In the weeks after 9/11, 88% approved of Bush's handling of terrorist threats, and just 9% disapproved. As re-election approached in 2004, Bush still garnered 2:1 approval (62% / 31%) en route to beating Kerry. However, as the war in Iraq dragged on through his second term, those numbers collapsed. By the end of his Presidency, Bush's once stratospheric approvals on national security had turned into a net-disapproval rating: 41% approved and 51% disapproved.

But even amidst widespread dissatisfaction with the outgoing Republican Commander-in-Chief, [exit polls from 2008](#) reaffirmed the traditional GOP advantage on national security. Voters who rated issues like healthcare and the economy as their top issue voted for Barack Obama over John McCain. Among voters who considered terrorism the top issue, McCain took 86%.

President Obama has turned one of the biggest initial questions about his leadership ability into strength for his administration. After only 100 days in power, Obama's [approval rating on terrorism](#) was 61% approve / 31% disapprove. Additionally, the daring mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden provides the President with a trump card on terrorism that none of his opponents can possibly match.

The President's solid profile on national security has muddied the formerly clear issue divide between Democrats and Republicans that reared its head in 2004 and 2008. In an early February ABC News / Washington Post [poll](#), 47% cited the economy as "a major reason to oppose" Obama in the fall, but 56% believed that Obama's handling of terrorism is a major reason to support him. Obama's handling of the economy stands at 39% approve / 47% disapprove, while his handling of the threat of terrorism, meanwhile, earns 56% approval / 20% disapproval.

This dichotomy extends into the Presidential race, where voters have slightly more confidence in Mitt Romney on fiscal and economic issues, but trust the President more on foreign policy.

Romney leads the President 48% - 45% on handling the economy, 47% - 45% on creating jobs, and 51% - 41% on managing the federal budget deficit. Conversely, on conventionally Republican-leaning issue areas, Obama commands big leads: 55% - 36% over Romney on handling terrorism and 56% - 37% on international affairs.

All of this puts the Republican presidential challengers in a unique predicament, as the President happily admits. "The other side, traditionally, seems to feel that Democrats are somehow weak on defense," he [said](#) at a recent fundraiser. "They've had a little trouble making that argument this year."

Observers have been more blunt. Daniel Larison of *The American Conservative* [objects](#) that, in criticizing Obama's stance on Iran as too weak, Mitt Romney "sometimes has to invent differences where none exists and conjure up an imaginary Obama foreign policy out of thin air so that he has an easier target to hit."

Polling suggests that Democrats as a whole still have work to do in bridging the credibility gap on national security, President Obama's success notwithstanding. A 2010 Third Way [poll](#), for example, shows the President performing 25 points higher on national security job approval than his own party. Republicans in Congress held a 7-point advantage over Democrats on national security, and claimed larger leads on "ensuring a strong military" (+30), "combating terrorism" (+13) and "keeping America safe" (+11).

World events and the Republican primary have helped thrust Iran specifically and foreign affairs broadly into the public debate. While voter opinion is still gelling on Iran, voters generally like what they've seen thus far on foreign affairs out of the Obama administration. Conventional wisdom dictates the 2012 election will hinge on the (improving) economy. While that almost assuredly will hold true, this renewed emphasis on national security certainly plays to President Obama's current strengths.

OTHER NEWS FROM THE POLLING AND POLITICAL WORLD

New [Washington Post-ABC News poll](#) shows nearly 7 in 10 registered voters would like super PACs to be illegal, including 78 percent of independents who want the groups banned.

The Writings on the Wall. A Rasmussen [poll](#) finds 33% of Americans think employers have the right to fire those who post inappropriate Facebook content, but 69% believe it is inappropriate for employers to access their Facebook page as part of hiring process.

Freedom to Marry earns support among Independents. They are 2 times as likely to support a candidate in favor of the freedom to marry, according to NBC/WSJ [poll](#) from earlier this month.

New [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#) on healthcare policy. Key findings: 70% of Americans want to keep Medicare as is, including majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans; and 63% support cost-free contraception, including 73% of women ages 18-49.

2008 Latino support divided. Forty percent of Latino McCain supporters are now supporting Obama, according to a Fox News [poll](#), while four out of five Latinos who voted for the President plan to stick with him in 2012.

Hispanic Country-of-Origin Data. Especially helpful when looking at local data, this [Pew report](#) breaks down the Hispanic population nationally and in the top 30 metropolitan areas.

[Political Rhetoric Generator](#). Enjoy.

Missed a past newsletter? They can be found on our website, [here](#).

PUBLIC POLLING

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove
<i>Rasmussen</i>	March 9-11	Likely Voters	47%	52%
<i>CBS/Times</i>	March 7-11	Adults	41%	47%
<i>Gallup</i>	March 8-10	Adults	47%	45%

PRESIDENTIAL HEAD TO HEAD

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Obama	Romney
<i>Rasmussen</i>	March 9-11	Likely Voters	43%	46%
<i>CBS/Times</i>	March 7-11	Reg. Voters	47%	44%

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Obama	Santorum
<i>Rasmussen</i>	March 9-11	Likely Voters	46%	43%
<i>CBS/Times</i>	March 7-11	Reg. Voters	48%	44%

UPCOMING PRIMARIES

	Size	Date	Romney	Santorum	Gingrich	Paul
Illinois						
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	600	March 7-9	35%	31%	12%	7%
Louisiana						
<i>GCR/WWL-TV</i>	515	March 8-10	21%	25%	20%	6%

PARTY SELF ID

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep	Ind/Other
<i>Pollster.com Trend</i>	March 13	Adults	35.5%	30.1%	32.9%

GOP NATIONWIDE PRIMARY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample
<i>CBS/Times</i>	March 7-11	Likely Voters
Romney	30%	
Santorum	34%	

Gingrich	13%
Paul	8%

GENERIC HOUSE BALLOT

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep
<i>Rasmussen</i>	March 5-11	Likely Voters	38%	44%
<i>GWU/Politico</i>	Feb. 19-22	Likely Voters	46%	45%

OBAMA POPULAR VOTE SHARE

Polling Firm	Date	Polly Vote	Polls	Iowa Electronic Markets	Econometric Models	Index Models
<i>PollyVote</i>	March 13	51.4%	50.7%	50.6%	49.9%	54.2%

DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Right Direction	Wrong Track
<i>CBS/Times</i>	March 7-11	Adults	29%	63%
<i>NBC/WSJ</i>	Feb. 29-March 3	Adults	33%	58%