

# The Washington Post

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## Poll finds broad support for Obama's counterterrorism policies

By [Scott Wilson](#) and [Jon Cohen](#), Published: February 7, 2012

The sharpest edges of President Obama's counterterrorism policy, including the use of drone aircraft to kill suspected terrorists abroad and keeping open the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, have broad public support, including from the left wing of the Democratic Party.

A [new Washington Post-ABC News poll](#) shows that Obama, who campaigned on a pledge to close the brig in Cuba and to [change national security policies he criticized as inconsistent with U.S. law and values](#), has little to fear politically for failing to live up to all of those promises.

The findings also highlight the quandary for [Mitt Romney](#) and other Republican candidates, [who have portrayed Obama as weak abroad](#) and politically motivated in [moving to end America's two long wars](#).

Attacking Obama's national security policies, the poll suggests, may do GOP challengers more harm than good when many Americans favor a national security approach that relies more on technology than troops. By a margin of more than 2 to 1, Americans say the president's handling of terrorism is a major reason to support rather than oppose his bid for reelection.

The [survey shows that 70 percent of respondents approve of Obama's decision to keep open the prison at Guantanamo Bay](#). He pledged during his first week in office to close the prison within a year, but [he has not done so](#).

Even the party base appears willing to forgive that failure.

The [poll shows that 53 percent of self-identified liberal Democrats — and 67 percent of moderate or conservative Democrats — support keeping Guantanamo Bay open](#), even though it emerged as a symbol of the post-Sept. 11 national security policies of President George W. Bush, which many liberals bitterly opposed.

[Obama has also relied on armed drones](#) far more than Bush did, and he has expanded their use beyond America's defined war zones. The Post-ABC News poll found that 83 percent of Americans approve of Obama's drone policy, which administration officials refuse to discuss, citing security concerns.

The president [only recently acknowledged the existence of the drone program](#), which some human rights advocates say operates without a clear legal framework and in violation of the U.S. prohibition against assassination.

But fully 77 percent of liberal Democrats endorse the use of drones, meaning that Obama is unlikely to suffer any political consequences as a result of his policy in this election year.

Support for drone strikes against suspected terrorists stays high, dropping only somewhat when respondents are asked specifically about targeting American citizens living overseas, [as was the case with Anwar al-Awlaki](#), the Yemeni American killed in September in a drone strike in northern Yemen.

Romney has criticized Obama for withdrawing all U.S. troops from Iraq at the end of last year and for the administration's plans to wind down combat operations in Afghanistan next year.

The former Massachusetts governor has said Obama's decisions are based more on gaining political advantage in an election year than on ensuring American success after years of war, a charge Obama has rejected.

The critique is a politically risky one to make after more than a decade of war in Afghanistan, a conflict [that a majority of Americans stopped believing was worth fighting](#) some time ago. The Post-ABC News poll shows that 78 percent of the public supports Obama's drawdown plan, scheduled to culminate in 2014 with a complete withdrawal of U.S. combat troops.

The poll was conducted by telephone from Feb. 1 to 4 among a random national sample of 1,000 adults. The margin of error for the full survey is plus or minus four percentage points.

*Polling manager Peyton M. Craighill contributed to this report.*

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