

# Obama Changing the Way Germans See US

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## But Many Oppose Continuing Afghan Mission

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[Questionnaire/methodology \(PDF\)](#)



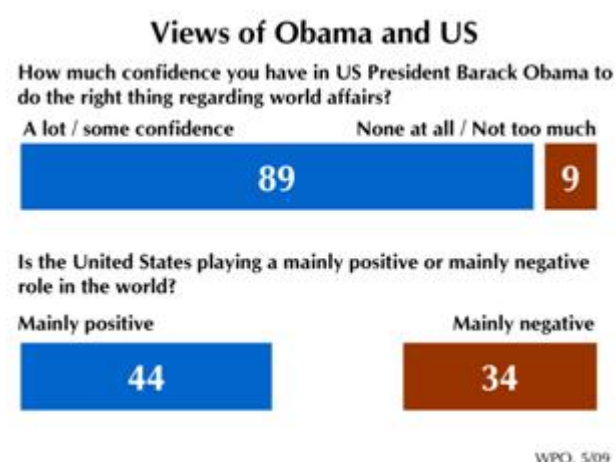
According to a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of the German public, when President Obama speaks to Germans on Friday, he will encounter an audience that is not only positive about Obama himself, but is beginning to lean positively toward the US as well.

*Barack Obama on a campaign visit to Berlin, Germany in July 2008 (Photo: David Katz/Obama for America)*

At the same time, disagreements remain on US policies on climate change, the use of military force in general, and, most importantly, the operation in Afghanistan.

A striking 89 percent of Germans say they have confidence in Obama to "do the right thing in world affairs."

For the first time since the Iraq war a plurality of Germans express positive views of the US. Forty-four percent of Germans now say the US is playing a mainly positive role in the world, while 34 percent see it as playing a negative role. In 2008 BBC found only 20 percent thinking the US was a positive influence, and Pew found just 31 percent who viewed the US favorably.



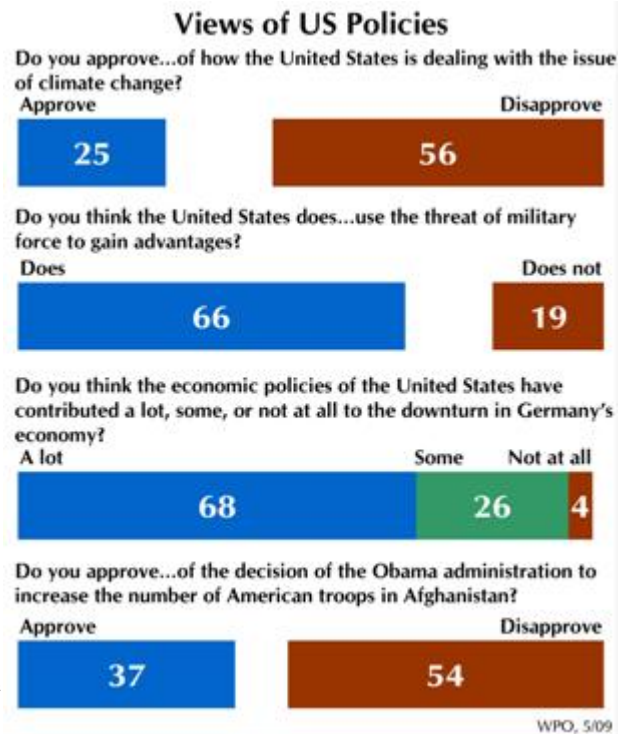
The number of Germans who think the US treats Germany fairly has jumped to 48 percent from 33 percent in August 2008. Forty-two percent still say the US "abuses its greater power to make us do what the US wants," but this is down from 61 percent.

A modest majority (54%) currently sees the US as "generally cooperative with other countries"; while 27 percent say it is not (19 percent say "it depends" or do not answer).

At the same time, the German public's more benign view of the US does not extend to every global issue. A clear majority (56%) disapproves of how the US is dealing with climate change; only 25 percent approve. A full two-thirds think "the US uses the threat of military force to gain advantages." Fifty-four percent disapprove of the recent increase of US troops in Afghanistan.

And on the world financial crisis, a big majority (68%) thinks US economic policies have "contributed a lot" to the downturn in the German economy.

"Germans seem to clearly like Obama and are beginning to renew some of their warmth toward the US, but they still have concerns about some US policies, such as those on climate change and the operation in Afghanistan," comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, an international project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.



The poll of 1000 German adults was conducted by telephone from April 29 to May 14 by the German polling firm Ri\*QUESTA GmbH, a member of the WorldPublicOpinion.org network. The findings have a margin of error of +/-3.2 percent.

## Afghanistan

The area of strongest potential disagreement between Obama and the German people is likely to be the operation in Afghanistan, in which German troops are participating. Currently Germany contributes about 3,500 troops under NATO command, the third largest national contingent. Based in the north, German troops see intermittent combat and have suffered 30 combat deaths in the course of the operation.

Germans seem to have some conflict about the Afghan operation. A narrow plurality--49 to 45 percent--disapproves of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. A slight majority (52%) wants to end the mission now, while 42 percent want it to continue.

On the other hand an overwhelming majority of Germans say they would also be very concerned if the Taliban were to return to power. Asked how they would feel "If the Taliban were to regain power in Afghanistan," 78 percent say this would be "very bad," and another 15 percent call it "somewhat bad." Only 3 percent of Germans think this outcome might turn out to be neutral or good.

"Obama's biggest challenge and opportunity is to convert German concern about the potential return of the Taliban into support for continued German participation in the Afghan operation" comments Steven Kull.

One of the sources of opposition to the operation may be the assumption that most of the Afghan people want the NATO mission to end. A majority of Germans (55%) thinks "most people in Afghanistan want NATO forces to leave now." Among those Germans who hold this belief, 74 percent want the mission ended. However among those who believe most Afghans want NATO to stay a while longer (33%), a remarkable 78 percent say the troops should remain.

The most recent ABC/BBC/ARD poll of the Afghan public (conducted in January of this year) found that 63 percent of Afghans approved of the presence of US troops in Afghanistan, while 59 percent approved of the NATO/ISAF forces.