

## Egyptian Public to Greet Obama With Suspicion

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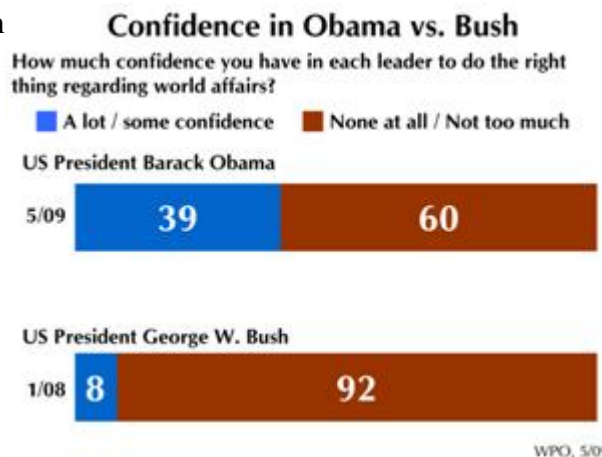
[Questionnaire/methodology \(PDF\)](#)



A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll finds Egyptians continue to view US foreign policy quite negatively and see President Obama as closely aligned with it. At the same time, Obama has much better ratings than Bush had, and there are signs of thawing feelings toward the US.

*President Barack Obama appearing on Al Arabiya TV on January 27, 2009 (Photo: Al Arabiya)*

Asked how much confidence they have in Obama to do the right thing in international affairs, 39 percent say they have some or a lot of confidence--up sharply from the 8 percent who viewed George W. Bush positively in January 2008. Views of the United States government have also improved with favorable views rising to 46 percent from 27 percent in an August 2008 WorldPublicOpinion.org poll.



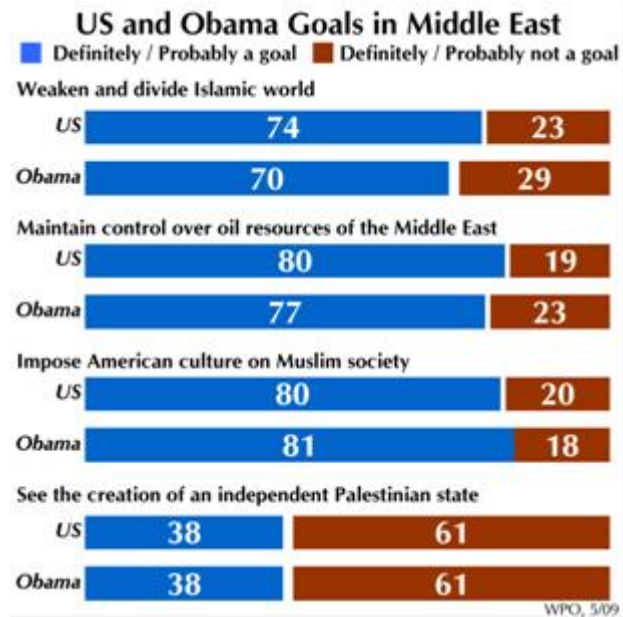
However, there has been little change in the views of US foreign policy. Sixty-seven percent say that the US plays a negative role in the world.

Large majorities continue to believe the US has goals to weaken and divide the Islamic world (76%) and control Middle East oil (80%). Eight in 10 say the US is seeking to impose American culture on Muslim countries (80%). Six in ten say it is not a goal of the US to create a Palestinian state. These numbers are virtually unchanged from 2008.

When asked about Obama's goals, Egyptians' views are almost exactly the same as their views of US goals. Sixty percent say they have little or no confidence that Obama will do the right thing in international affairs.

"Egyptians appear to be saying to Obama, 'Show me you are really different,'" comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, a project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.

The poll was conducted through face-to-face interviews from April 25-May 12 with 600 urban Egyptians. The margin of error is 4.1 percent.



## Democracy in Egypt

When Obama gives his much-awaited speech in Cairo, many will be listening closely to how he addresses the sensitive question of democracy in Egypt. In 2005 George W. Bush called for greater democracy in the region, which was followed by some liberalization in Egypt. While the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood continued to be banned, some affiliated candidates were allowed to run for office independently. However, when these candidates did well in the elections, the Mubarak government reversed its movement toward liberalization and the Bush administration abruptly stopped pressing for it.

Egyptians view American support for democracy with a jaundiced eye. Only 6 percent think the US favors democracy in Muslim countries irrespective of a government's position toward the US, while 53 percent say the US only favors democracy if the government is cooperative with the US. Four in ten think the US opposes democracy in Muslim countries.

Obama has not strengthened the image of the US as committed to democracy in Muslim countries; indeed, the number saying that the US opposes democracy in Muslim countries is up 14 points, and the number saying that the US unequivocally supports democracy is down 10 points from August 2008.

The Egyptian public shows strong support for democracy. Three quarters say it is very important to live in a democracy and another 24 percent say it is somewhat important.

Sixty-three percent would like to have international observers monitor elections in Egypt, which in 2005 were marred by violence and widespread accusations of irregularities.

## **Muslim Brotherhood**

A high-profile controversy in Egypt and the US is whether the Muslim Brotherhood should be allowed to participate in elections. Many critics have accused it of not being genuinely committed to democracy, but seeking to impose a fundamentalist Islamic state.

The Muslim Brotherhood insists that it is committed to democracy, though it has at times said that it seeks to have a body of Islamic scholars who would have the power to veto legislation that it deemed to be contrary to the Koran.

Among the Egyptian public, views of the Muslim Brotherhood are positive. Sixty-four percent express positive views, 19 percent say they have mixed views and just 16 percent express negative views.

An even larger majority (69%) believe that the Muslim Brotherhood favors democracy. Only 22 percent think that it is still too extreme and not genuinely democratic.

At the same time, the Egyptian public shows sympathy for some Islamist ideas about democracy. Six in ten think the Egyptian government should be based on a form of democracy unique for Islam, as compared to 39 percent who say it should be based on universal principles of democracy. Three-quarters agree with the Muslim Brotherhood's idea that a body of religious scholars should have veto power over laws it believes are contrary to the Koran. While two-thirds say a non-Muslim should be able to run for elected office, only 36 percent say a non-Muslim should be able to run for President.

## **Afghanistan**

Another controversy Obama is likely to face concerns US troops in Afghanistan. Sixty percent say they want the operation in Afghanistan ended now and two-thirds disapprove of the recent increase in the number of US troops there.

However, these majority attitudes appears to be based on the assumption--held by 67 percent--that the Afghan people want NATO forces to leave now. Among those who hold this belief, 85 percent want NATO forces out, while among those who believe most Afghans want NATO troops to stay a while longer, a remarkable 92 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 Afghanis continued to approve of the presence of US troops in Afghanistan while 59 percent approved of the NATO/ISAF forces. Though there has also been a decline in positive feelings toward the US, large majorities continued to oppose the return of the Taliban.