



Political Insiders Poll



On balance, would sending more troops to Afghanistan be a political plus or minus for President Obama?

Democrats (100 votes)

Political plus	27 percent
Political minus	70 percent
Draw; depends; inappropriate question (volunteered)	3 percent

Political plus

"The president needs to win. And he can't win without more troops."

"If we leave and Afghanistan collapses, he will be attacked relentlessly for breaking his commitment."

"We are a center-right country when it comes to national security matters."

"If he sets a deadline for troop withdrawals, such as one year, he will appear strong yet realistic."

Political minus

"The Democratic base doesn't want to see more troops. And, right now, it looks like we are about to go into a midterm with the Republican base energized while our base has nothing to rally around."

"We should be reducing troops. Not one more American should die in Afghanistan."

"He's in a real box here. Expanding the war is probably the right thing to do militarily, but it will be very unpopular and will hurt Democrats in the midterms."

"The president is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't, thanks to yet another Bush-Cheney screwup."

"Sending troops overseas for a war few are aware of—at a cost voters now see—is not politically popular, despite being the right decision."

"The way it is being handled risks making him look weak and indecisive. And, of course, it is all going to intersect with Iran. And he will be under pressure to deliver on foreign policy/national security."

"It's Vietnam. And Democrats can't blame Bush."

"Just because you inherit a clunker doesn't mean you have to keep driving it."

Republicans (100 votes)

Political plus	52 percent
Political minus	42 percent
Depends; both; neither (volunteered)	6 percent

Political plus

"Always smart to honor campaign promises and reject advice from the surrender wing of Democrat Party."

"Has no choice: Can't let the mission end in failure. That would be a big minus."

"It shows he knows what it takes to keep us safe in a dangerous world."

"If he refrains from taking the advice of the military, he owns the outcome. If he takes the advice of the military, then he is positioned to do whatever he wants at a later date. Stevie Wonder could see what to do here."

"It would show that he's serious about the job and unafraid to get his hands dirty."

"Obama campaigned on Afghanistan being the main front in the war on terror. He's raised the stakes too high to then fail."

Political minus

"Open-ended troop commitment in a country nobody cares about. He was elected to end that, not expand it."

"It will cause problems with the Left, but it's the right thing to do."

"Democrats who were so anxious to dump George W. have got to be twisted in knots by the thought that Obama might send more troops to Afghanistan."

"He is most likely to take a middle course—not [send] enough to get the job done right."

"The people that believe it's the right thing are already disillusioned with Obama. The people that think it's wrong are his base."

—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL

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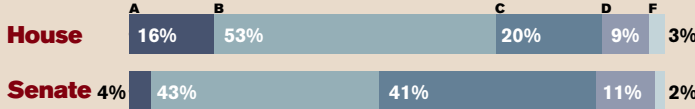


Grade your own party's House and Senate leadership teams.

Democrats (102 votes)

Average Grades

House Leadership **B-** Senate Leadership **C+**



House Democratic leadership

- A. "Nancy Pelosi may be unpopular, but no one can question her effectiveness."
- A. "Speaker [Pelosi] has passed every bill she said she would, despite constant demands from Blue Dogs and ultraliberals."
- B. "Strong leadership, but sometimes too wacky liberal."
- B. "Pelosi's balancing act among competing caucus interests is difficult, but the job of speaker requires leadership and tough choices—not merely an expert cat herder."
- C. "[Between the] speaker and [Majority Leader] Steny Hoyer, tensions are flaring. And the House is on way to repeat of '94."
- C. "Marched their members off a cliff on cap-and-trade. And may do it again on health care."
- D. "Pelosi is a nail-eater on discipline and internal caucus matters, but her public appearances have been almost uniformly disastrous."

Senate Democratic leadership

- A. "The leadership will deliver a very good health care bill. And in this political climate, that's no small feat in an institution with rules designed to slow or stop anything from happening."
- B. "[Majority Leader Harry] Reid has done a great job of holding the caucus together through some very rough water. He's not great on TV, but that's less important for a Senate majority leader when you have the White House."
- B. "Having 60 [votes] has made it easier on the leadership, but they often lack a compelling message to rally around and drive the legislation through the body."
- C. "Senate leaders get passing grades but not a lot more, because not a lot has been accomplished. Even with 60 votes, Democrats act like a minority party."
- C. "Can't believe they can't do a better job navigating health care."
- C. "It appears that there is no long-term planning, only short-term vote counting in the Democratic leadership operation. The schedule drives policy more than a plan drives the schedule."
- D. "When will Reid use the majority he was given?"

Republicans (101 votes)

Average Grades

House Leadership **B-** Senate Leadership **B-**



House Republican leadership

- A. "[Minority Leader John] Boehner and [Minority Whip Eric] Cantor day in, day out provide contrast and alternative to the Obama/Democratic agenda. And slowly but surely it is having a national impact."
- B. "Focused, loyal opposition: Doing excellent job of reining in extreme conservatives who would damage long-range GOP effort."
- B-. "Boehner does good job on media, but still has not harnessed a core message. And lose the green tie."
- B-. "They are showing more focus than they did in the majority."
- C. "There is no policy ingenuity coming out of House Republicans."
- C. "Stop trying to come up with ideas and just oppose. It's worked."
- C. "Thankfully this next election won't be about Republicans."
- D. "They aren't making gains with the public in any meaningful way."

Senate Republican leadership

- A. "[Minority Leader Mitch] McConnell, long criticized for having no voice or direction, has emerged with a unified Republican caucus."
- B+. "McConnell's been surprisingly quiet and effective. He's done a nice job of letting health care reform die on its own, rather than attacking swing senators and alienating them."
- B. "Somewhat colorless, but much more effective now in holding the caucus together."
- B. "Good at holding the team together to stop bad legislation, but not so good at providing viable alternatives and inspirational leadership."
- B-. "Would be higher if they could make their appropriators part of the team."
- C. "Failure to launch a true Republican alternative on health care is truly a missed opportunity."
- C. "McConnell is more at ease behind the scenes. But voters, especially independents, are wondering what Republicans stand for. McConnell's team's silence doesn't help."
- D. "Leadership is uninterested in showing what a Republican majority in the Senate would mean in terms of what could be accomplished."

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—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL