

Obama's poll numbers plummet

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3 September 2009

An increasing number of public opinion polls in the US show a sharp decline in popular support for President Obama and his administration's policies on health care, the war in Afghanistan and the economic crisis. In the nearly eight months since taking office, the euphoria that greeted Obama's election has largely evaporated.

According to the Rasmussen Presidential Tracking Poll, 53 percent of likely voters disapprove of Obama's performance. The president—who enjoyed a nearly 70 percent approval rating on Inauguration Day in January 2009—saw his rating fall below 50 percent for the first time in August, dropping to 46 percent.

The Zogby Interactive Poll, which uses a larger sample of likely voters, found that only 42 percent approved of the job Obama is doing. A majority (53 percent) believe the US is headed in the wrong direction, with only 38 percent saying things were heading the right way.

According to *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, no newly elected American president has ever seen such a rapid and steep decline in the polls. Much of the media, including Brooks, ascribe the fall to the president's supposed embrace of liberal reformism. The *US News & World Report*, for example, headlined their report on the approval figures, "Poll: Democrats' Hard Left Agenda Driving Away Independents."

In reality, the mounting political crisis facing the administration is the result of its continuation and intensification of the pro-business and militarist policies of Obama's Republican predecessor, which were repudiated by American voters in the 2008 elections.

Obama's right-wing policies have alienated wide layers of the population that previously backed him. Zogby noted that the sharpest decline in support occurred among 18 to 29-year-olds, where Obama's

approval ratings have fallen 18 percentage points, from 59 percent in July to 41 percent at the end of August. Support among African-American voters fell 9 points, from 83 percent in July to 74 percent last month.

Among those who call themselves Democrats, approval ratings have fallen from 88 percent in July to 75 percent in August; and among those describing themselves as "liberals," the decline has been from 95 percent to 86 percent in the same period.

While millions who voted for Obama hoped the self-declared candidate of "change" would represent a break from the Bush administration, Obama has pursued a reactionary agenda in every aspect of domestic and foreign policy.

On the economic front, the Democratic president has acted as a ruthless instrument of the financial elite, handing over trillions of dollars to the Wall Street banks and blocking the slightest restrictions on their speculative activities and massive pay packages. As a result, the share prices and profits of the banks have increased, while tens of millions of workers suffer an unrelenting assault on their jobs and living standards and the loss of their homes and life savings without the slightest relief.

A recent Gallup poll found that 83 percent of respondents said they were worried Obama's economic measures would not work and expected the situation will only get worse. Two-thirds say Wall Street will benefit more from a new bank bailout plan than the average taxpayer.

A major factor in the falling poll numbers this summer is Obama's health care "reform." The centerpiece of his domestic policy has proven to be nothing but a plan, drawn up by the health care and insurance industry, to boost corporate profits by rationing and reducing medical coverage, and paving the way for the dismantling of employer-paid benefits and Medicare and Medicaid.

A new CNN/Opinion Research Poll found that 53 percent of Americans disapprove of Obama's handling of health care, a sharp change from March when a majority approved of the plan, largely because they thought it had something to do with extending coverage to the uninsured. Nearly half of the seniors polled by CNN said Medicare recipients would be worse off under the president's plan.

In response to declining support, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, insurance companies, doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical firms were funneling millions of dollars—the majority to the Democrats—to bolster the legislation as Congress returns from recess next week. Obama is also expected to renounce the “public option” of his health care plan, dropping whatever reformist pretense remains from his right-wing plan to slash medical costs and federal entitlements.

Widespread anger has also been generated over the continued trampling of basic democratic rights. The administration has gone to court to quash challenges to domestic spying, renditions and CIA torture, while protecting the Bush administration from any legal consequences for its war crimes and violations of international law. While Obama has insisted he is not interested in “looking backwards” by investigating and prosecuting anyone for torture, according to a new CBS News Survey half of the American public say such an investigation is a good idea.

The same CBS poll showed that less than half (48 percent) of respondents said they approved of Obama's handling of the situation in Afghanistan, down from 56 percent in April. Support for increasing troop levels in Afghanistan is declining, the CBS poll showed, with 41 percent saying they want American troops to start coming home, up from 33 percent in April and just 24 percent in February. Support for increasing the number of troops dropped from 39 percent in April to just 24 percent now.

The poll results, CBS News reported, “are at odds with what NATO and US commanders on the ground say they need.” The administration has already signaled its willingness to send more troops in defiance of popular opposition fueled by record numbers of US casualties and the brutal and colonial character of the war itself. Most Americans (55 percent) think the situation in Afghanistan will get worse in the next six

months, up 14 percent over the past month, according to the Rasmussen poll.

Popular disgust extends beyond the White House. According to the Rasmussen poll, 57 percent would vote to replace the entire Congress and start all over again, while only 25 percent of respondents said they would keep the current legislators. Forty-two percent say people randomly selected from the phone book could do a better job than the current Congress.

As a result of this popular discontent, political analysts say the Democrats—who control both houses of Congress by wide margins—could lose 20 or more seats in the House of Representatives in the 2010 elections.

The prospect of the right wing making gains—just two years after the Republicans suffered their worst electoral debacle in decades—is attributable to the continued subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party, and the lack, as of yet, of a mass socialist party of the working class.

This subordination is abetted by various middle class organizations and publications such as the *Nation* that insist that Obama must be supported at all costs. These same groups, which peddled illusions in Obama before his election, now stand politically responsible for one of the most reactionary governments in US history.

Millions of people—who have been moved to the left by the impact of the economic crisis, the unending wars and the attack on democratic rights—are now seeing that it is impossible to effect a political change within the framework of a two-party system dominated by big business and the banks. The only way working people can champion their own class interests—the fight for social equality, democratic rights and an end to militarism—is to open up a new political road through building the Socialist Equality Party as the mass socialist party of the working class.



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