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Libya: Steady Views, Declining Interest

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Libya: Steady Views, Declining Interest

Despite the apparent success of NATO-supported rebel troops, public views about the decision to conduct air strikes in Libya remain mixed and have changed little since the U.S. and allies launched military operations there in late March.

Over the same period, public attentiveness to the events in Libya has declined substantially – even as rebels have taken control of Tripoli and sent Moammar Gadhafi into hiding.

Currently, 44% say the U.S. and its allies made the right decision to conduct air strikes in Libya, while 33% see this as the wrong decision; 23% offer no opinion. In early April, shortly after the operation began, 50% said the air attacks were the right decision, 37% disagreed and fewer (13%) had no opinion.

President Obama receives positive marks for his handling of the situation in Libya – 49% approve while 32% disapprove. In April, the public was more evenly divided in opinions about Obama’s performance on Libya: 41% approved while 46% disapproved.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Sept. 1-4 among 1,001 adults, finds virtually no partisan differences in opinions about the decision to conduct airstrikes in Libya: 45% of Republicans, 47% of Democrats and 46% of independents say this was the right decision.

In contrast, there are wide partisan differences in views of Obama’s handling of the situation in Libya: 64% of Democrats and 50% of independents approve of Obama’s handling of the situation, compared with just 30% of Republicans.

Little Change in Libya Opinions

| | Mar 30- Apr 3 | Sept. 1-4 |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| <i>U.S. and allies conducting airstrikes in Libya ...</i> | % | % |
| Right decision | 50 | 44 |
| Wrong decision | 37 | 33 |
| Don't know | <u>13</u> | <u>23</u> |
| | 100 | 100 |

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 1-4, 2011. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

No Partisan Differences over Decision to Use Force in Libya

| <i>U.S. and allies conducting airstrikes in Libya ...</i> | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Right decision | 44 | 45 | 47 | 46 |
| Wrong decision | 33 | 31 | 31 | 37 |
| Don't know | <u>23</u> | <u>24</u> | <u>22</u> | <u>17</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>Obama handling of situation in Libya ...</i> | | | | |
| Approve | 49 | 30 | 64 | 50 |
| Disapprove | 32 | 49 | 18 | 35 |
| Don't know | <u>19</u> | <u>22</u> | <u>18</u> | <u>14</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 1-4, 2011. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Even among Americans who say they think conducting airstrikes was the right decision, partisan differences over Obama's handling of Libya are stark. The vast majority of Democrats (89%) and independents (79%) who say launching the airstrikes was the right decision approve of Obama's handling of the situation, while just 46% of Republicans who say this was the right decision approve of Obama's handling of Libya.

Among the relatively small percentage (17%) that says they followed news about Libya *very closely* last week, 63% say the decision by the U.S. and its allies to launch airstrikes was the right decision, while about a quarter (24%) say it was the wrong decision. The large majority following less closely is more divided: 41% say launching the operation was the right decision, while 35% say it was the wrong decision. About a quarter (24%) say they do not know.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of those following news about Libya very closely say they approve of Obama's handling of the situation in Libya; 26% disapprove and 8% say they not know. Again, those following less closely are more divided: 46% approve of Obama's handling, 33% disapprove and 21% offer no opinion.

Most Attentive are More Supportive of Libya Operation

Following Libya news...

| <i>U.S. and allies conducting airstrikes in Libya ...</i> | Total | Very closely | Less closely |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | % | % | % |
| Right decision | 44 | 63 | 41 |
| Wrong decision | 33 | 24 | 35 |
| Don't know | <u>23</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>24</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>Obama handling of situation in Libya ...</i> | | | |
| Approve | 49 | 65 | 46 |
| Disapprove | 32 | 26 | 33 |
| Don't know | <u>19</u> | <u>8</u> | <u>21</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 |

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Sept. 1-4, 2011. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

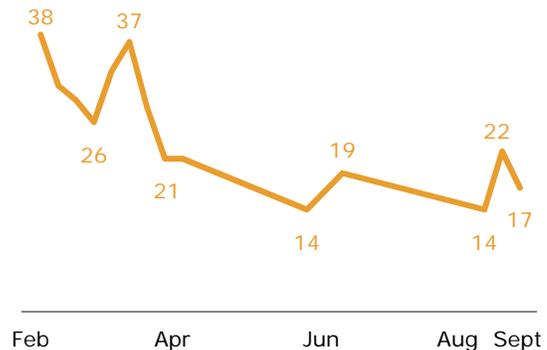
Public interest in events in Libya was far greater when NATO first launched airstrikes March – and when civil unrest first erupted in February – than it is today. In late February, 38% said they were following the increasing violence in Libya very closely. In early April, shortly after the airstrikes began and Obama delivered a speech outlining his reasons for intervening in the conflict, 37% tracked news about the NATO airstrikes against Libya very closely.

Since the opening weeks of the military operation, interest in Libya has faded. Last week, as fighting continued and anti-government forces hunted for Gadhafi, just 17% followed news about the situation in Libya very closely, according to Pew Research Center's [weekly News Interest Index](#).

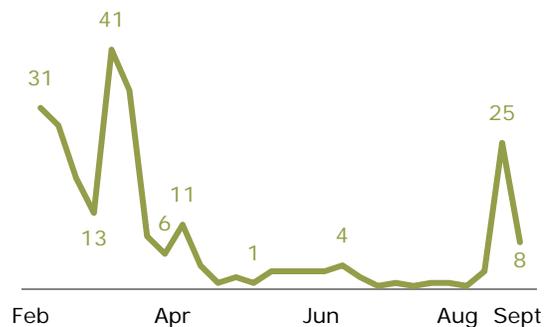
News coverage of Libya also was modest through much of the summer as the NATO campaign unfolded. However, coverage ramped up in late August when anti-government rebels took control of much of Tripoli. From Aug. 22-28, news about the chaotic events in Libya accounted for 25% of all coverage, the highest level since late March, according to data compiled by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. (See [From Tripoli to the East Coast, A Week of Big Events](#)). That dropped significantly last week as the aftermath of Hurricane Irene and news about the economy topped coverage.

Libyan Conflict Draws Less Interest, Coverage

% following news about Libya very closely



% of newshole devoted to Libya



PEW RESEARCH CENTER News interest figures from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. News coverage figures from the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Sept. 1-4, 2011 among a national sample of 1,001 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (601 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 400 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 192 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

| Group | Sample Size | Plus or minus ... |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Total sample | 1,001 | 4.0 percentage points |
| Republicans | 226 | 8.0 percentage points |
| Democrats | 321 | 7.0 percentage points |
| Independents | 341 | 6.5 percentage points |

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
SEPTEMBER 1-4, 2011 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,001**

PEW.1-PEW.6, PEWWP.1-PEWWP.2 and PEW.10 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ASK ALL:

PEW.7 All things considered, do you think that the U.S. and its allies made the right decision or the wrong decision to conduct military air strikes in Libya?

| | <u>Right decision</u> | <u>Wrong decision</u> | <u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u> |
|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| September 1-4, 2011 | 44 | 33 | 23 |
| April 7-10, 2011 | 45 | 37 | 19 |
| Mar 30-Apr 3, 2011 | 50 | 37 | 13 |
| March 24-27, 2011 | 47 | 36 | 17 |

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:

Military force in Afghanistan

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|----|
| June 15-19, 2011 | 57 | 35 | 8 |
| Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010 | 52 | 38 | 10 |
| Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009 ¹ | 56 | 34 | 10 |
| Jan 7-11, 2009 | 64 | 25 | 11 |
| February, 2008 | 65 | 24 | 11 |
| December, 2006 | 61 | 29 | 10 |
| January, 2006 | 69 | 20 | 11 |

Military force in Iraq

| | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|----|
| Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010 | 41 | 51 | 7 |
| January, 2009 | 43 | 49 | 8 |
| November, 2008 | 39 | 50 | 11 |
| Late October, 2008 | 38 | 56 | 6 |
| Mid-October, 2008 | 40 | 54 | 6 |
| Mid-September, 2008 | 43 | 50 | 7 |
| June, 2008 | 39 | 55 | 6 |
| April, 2008 | 37 | 57 | 6 |
| Late February, 2008 | 38 | 54 | 8 |
| Late December, 2007 | 36 | 56 | 8 |

ASK ALL:

PEW.8 And in general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling the situation in Libya?

| <u>Sep 1-4 2011</u> | | <u>Mar 30-Apr 3 2011²</u> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 49 | Approve | 41 |
| 32 | Disapprove | 46 |
| 19 | Don't know/Refused (VOL.) | 13 |

NO PEW.9

¹ In October 2009, the question was worded: "Do you think the United States' initial decision to use force in Afghanistan was the right decision or the wrong decision?"

² For March 30-April 3 2011, this question was asked in a list of several issues.