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Public Has Doubts about Bergdahl Prisoner Exchange

But Most Say U.S. Should Do All It Can to Return Captive Troops

A Pew Research Center/USA TODAY Survey

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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But Most Say U.S. Should Do All It Can to Return Captive Troops

The prisoner exchange that freed U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl from the Taliban in Afghanistan gets a more negative than positive reaction from the public.

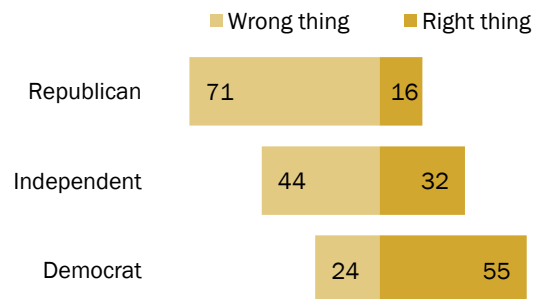
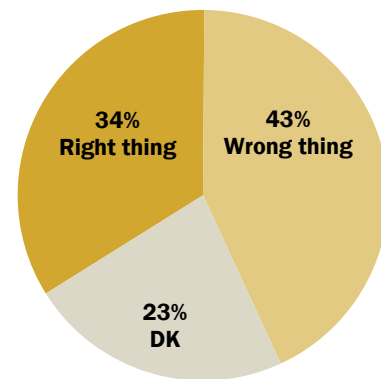
Overall, 43% say it was the wrong thing for the Obama administration to exchange five Taliban prisoners for captive soldier Bergdahl, while fewer (34%) say it was the right thing to do; 23% do not offer an opinion.

The new national survey by the Pew Research Center and USA TODAY, conducted June 5-8 among 1,004 adults, finds that while this specific prisoner exchange is viewed negatively on balance, most think the U.S. has a responsibility to do all it can to free captive U.S. soldiers in general, regardless of the circumstances of their capture.

Overall, 56% say the U.S. has a responsibility to do all it can to return an American captive soldier, no matter what the circumstances; 29% say that because Bergdahl left his post, the U.S. was not obligated to do all it could to secure his release.

Reactions to the Bergdahl case are deeply divided along partisan lines. Fully 71% of Republicans think the prisoner exchange was the wrong thing to do, while just 16% say it was the right thing to do. Democrats, by more than two-to-one (55% to 24%), have a positive opinion of the agreement.

More See Bergdahl Exchange as 'Wrong Thing' To Do



Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Don't know responses not show for table with party breaks.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

Republicans, particularly conservative Republicans, also are far less likely than Democrats to say that the U.S. was obligated to do all it could to secure Bergdahl's freedom.

A majority of Democrats (75%) says the U.S. has a responsibility to return captive soldiers, no matter what the circumstances.

Republicans are more divided: 48% say that because Bergdahl left his post the U.S. was not obligated to do all it could to secure his return, while 39% say the U.S. was responsible for doing all it could to free him. Among conservative Republicans, 56% say the U.S. was not obligated to do all it could to secure his return because he left his post.

In general, there is more public support for the U.S. taking all measures to secure the release for captured U.S. soldiers, regardless of the circumstances, than there is for the Bergdahl prisoner exchange. In part, this reflects the fact that some who support making every effort to free a captive U.S. soldier in general have doubts about the specifics of the Bergdahl deal. Among those who say the U.S. has a responsibility to do all it can to return an American captive soldier, roughly a quarter (27%) say the Bergdahl exchange itself was the wrong thing to do.

Conservative Reps Say U.S. Not Fully Obligated to Secure Bergdahl Release

	U.S. responsible for securing captive's release, no matter the circumstances %	Because Bergdahl left post, U.S. not obligated to do all it could to secure release %	DK %
Total	56	29	15=100
Republican	39	48	13=100
Conservative	37	56	7=100
Democrat	75	16	10=100
Liberal	78	15	6=100
Independent	58	29	13=100

Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

Little Anger – or Sympathy – toward Bergdahl

The cancelation of the homecoming parade for Bowe Bergdahl in Hailey, Idaho highlights the polarized reactions to the soldier, with some calling him a deserter and others a hero. At this point, public views of Bergdahl are relatively muted: 15% say they are sympathetic toward him while an equal share (15%) say they are angry with him; nearly six-in-ten (59%) say they feel neither of these reactions toward him.

Anger with Bergdahl is highest on the right: 30% of Republicans, and 35% of conservative Republicans, say they feel angry with Bowe Bergdahl. By contrast, Democrats are more likely to say they are sympathetic (26%) than angry (9%) with him.

As Bergdahl's Story Continues to Unfold, Few Express Anger or Sympathy

View of Bergdahl ...

	Sympathetic toward him	Angry with him	Neither	(Vol.) Both/ DK
	%	%	%	%
Total	15	15	59	11=100
Men	13	18	57	12=100
Women	18	13	60	9=100
18-29	17	7	67	9=100
30-49	14	16	58	12=100
50-64	17	17	58	8=100
65+	14	22	51	13=100
College grad+	16	17	60	7=100
Some college	19	16	58	8=100
HS or less	12	14	59	15=100
Republican	10	30	52	8=100
Conservative	9	35	48	8=100
Democrat	26	9	60	6=100
Liberal	24	8	62	6=100
Independent	13	12	64	12=100

Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

Most Say President Needs to Inform Congress on Decisions Like These

President Obama has received criticism for failing to notify Congress 30 days in advance of the transfer of five Guantanamo Bay prisoners in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl. When asked to think generally about situations like the Bergdahl exchange, most Americans (64%) say “the president should be required to inform Congress in advance of decisions like these”; just 30% say he “should have the flexibility to make decisions like these without informing Congress in advance.”

This view is nearly unanimous among Republicans (87%-11%), and 67% of independents also say the president should be required to inform Congress in advance of decisions like these. Democrats are more divided, with a narrow 53%-majority saying the president should have the flexibility to act without informing Congress in advance, while 44% say he should be required to notify Congress.

Should President Be Required to Inform Congress on Decisions Like These?

	Yes %	No %	DK %
Total	64	30	6=100
Republican	87	11	2=100
Conservative	89	9	2=100
Democrat	44	53	3=100
Liberal	32	64	4=100
Independent	67	28	5=100

Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

See survey topline for full question wording.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

Veteran Households' Views of Bergdahl Deal

Households that include a military veteran take a more negative view of Bergdahl and the prisoner exchange than do households without a veteran.

Overall, 33% of the public says someone in their household has served in the U.S. military or the military reserves at some point. Among this group, 55% say the exchange of five Taliban prisoners was the wrong thing to do, compared with just 26% who say it was the right thing to do. Non-veteran households are evenly divided (37% right thing, 38% wrong thing).

Furthermore, veteran households are somewhat more likely to say they are angry with Bergdahl (23%) than sympathetic toward him (12%), though most (57%) say they hold neither feeling toward him.

And when it comes to U.S. responsibility toward Bergdahl, 37% of veteran households say the country was not obligated to do all it could to secure his release because he walked away from his post; 47% say the U.S. has a responsibility to do all it can to return an American captive soldier, no matter what the circumstances. Non-veteran households are more likely to back U.S. efforts to free captive soldiers, regardless of the circumstances (60%-26%).

Veteran Households Call Bergdahl Prisoner Exchange 'Wrong Thing' to Do

	Total	Veteran household	Non-Vet household
<i>Exchange was ...</i>	%	%	%
Right thing	34	26	37
Wrong thing	43	55	38
Don't know	<u>23</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>25</u>
	100	100	100
<i>View of Bergdahl ...</i>			
Sympathetic	15	12	17
Angry	15	23	11
Neither	59	57	60
Both/Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100
<i>U.S. responsibility ...</i>			
Bergdahl left post, U.S. not obligated to do all it could	29	37	26
U.S. has responsibility to do all it can, no matter circumstances	56	47	60
Don't know	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100	100
N	1,004	370	619

Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

News Interest

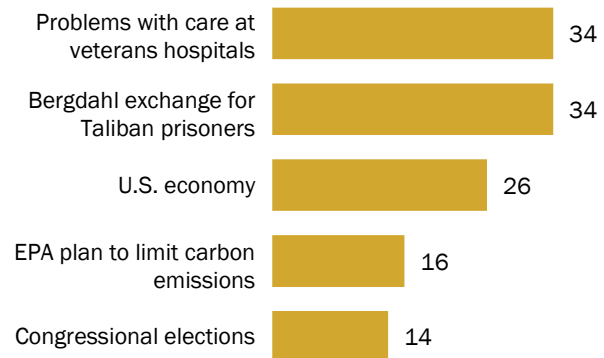
The Obama administration's decision to exchange five Taliban prisoners for U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl tied with reports about problems with care at veterans hospitals around the country as the public's top story last week. Overall, 34% say they very closely followed each news story.

Republicans (51%) were much more likely than Democrats (31%) to say they followed news about the prisoner exchange very closely.

Relatively few say they followed news about a plan by the Environmental Protection Agency to limit carbon emissions from power plants (16%) or news about the 2014 Congressional elections (14%). Similarly small percentages of Republicans (18%) and Democrats (17%) followed midterm election news very closely.

Bergdahl Exchange, Problems at Veterans Hospitals Top News Interest

% following each story very closely



Survey conducted June 5-8, 2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted June 5-8, 2014 among a national sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (503 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 501 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 301 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source and Thoroughbred Research 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 and Spanish. 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/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2012 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2013 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 among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted 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	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,004	3.6 percentage points
Republican	257	7.2 percentage points
Democrat	281	6.9 percentage points
Independent	369	6.0 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
June 5-8, 2014 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,004

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a. The release of captive U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl from Afghanistan, in exchange for five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay June 5-8, 2014	34	25	21	18	2
TREND FOR COMPARISON: July 24-27, 2009: <i>News that a U.S. soldier had been captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan</i>	29	35	18	17	1
b. A plan by the Environmental Protection Agency to limit carbon emissions from power plants June 5-8, 2014	16	18	20	44	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON: December 18-21, 2009: <i>The international meeting about climate change in Copenhagen</i>	16	23	25	35	*
December 11-14, 2009	17	24	23	36	*
June 6-9, 2008: <i>The debate in Congress over legislation to combat global warming</i>	13	22	27	37	1
April 5-9, 2007: <i>Recent reports about global warming research and policies</i>	26	29	23	21	1
February 2-5, 2007: <i>Recent reports about the causes of global warming</i>	26	37	21	16	0
December, 1997: <i>The conference on global warming taking place in Kyoto, Japan</i>	11	19	24	43	3
November, 1997: <i>The debate over U.S. policy concerning global warming</i>	9	24	33	33	1
c. News about this year's congressional elections June 5-8, 2014	14	23	23	38	1
May 15-18, 2014	13	24	25	38	1
March 20-23, 2014	15	22	22	39	1
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON: October 28-November 1, 2010	29	30	17	23	1
October 27-30, 2010: <i>News about candidates and election campaigns in your state and district</i>	27	35	17	20	1
October 21-24, 2010: <i>News about this year's congressional elections</i>	30	28	18	23	1
October 13-18, 2010: <i>News about candidates and election campaigns in your state and district</i>	24	34	22	19	1

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
October 14-17, 2010: <i>News about this year's congressional elections</i>	33	25	19	23	*
October 7-10, 2010	23	27	19	30	1
September 30-October 3, 2010	25	34	19	21	1
September 23-26, 2010	25	33	23	18	1
September 16-19, 2010	23	26	23	27	1
September 9-12, 2010	22	23	21	34	1
September 2-6, 2010	26	24	23	26	1
August 26-29, 2010	20	27	23	28	1
August 19-22, 2010	19	23	24	33	1
August 12-15, 2010	20	22	19	38	1
July 29-August 1, 2010	29	34	22	14	*
July 15-18, 2010	17	23	26	33	1
June 16-20, 2010: <i>News about candidates and election campaigns in your state and district</i>	15	33	31	20	*
June 10-13, 2010: <i>News about this year's congressional elections</i>	20	29	24	27	1
Early October, 2006	21	38	25	15	1
Early September, 2006	16	32	28	23	1
August, 2006	20	29	28	22	1
June, 2006	18	30	29	21	2
May, 2006	18	28	30	23	1
Early November, 2002 (RVs)	27	46	18	9	*
Late October, 2002 (RVs)	28	34	24	13	1
Early October, 2002 (RVs)	21	46	22	10	1
Early September, 2002	17	29	29	24	1
Late October, 1998 (RVs)	26	45	20	9	*
Early October, 1998 (RVs)	21	43	24	11	1
Early September, 1998	17	32	28	23	*
Early August, 1998	13	30	28	23	1
June, 1998	9	27	33	30	1
April, 1998 ¹	16	33	24	27	*
November, 1994	18	42	25	15	*
Late October, 1994	14	38	31	16	1
Early October, 1994	23	34	23	19	1
September, 1994	19	34	29	18	*
November, 1990	38	34	17	11	*
October, 1990	18	32	28	22	*
d. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy					
June 5-8, 2014	26	28	20	24	1
March 20-23, 2014	30	34	18	17	2
March 6-9, 2014	27	31	19	22	1
February 27-March 2, 2014	27	32	16	24	1
February 6-9, 2014	28	29	20	22	1
January 30-February 2, 2014	29	31	17	23	*
January 9-12, 2014	28	29	19	23	1
January 2-5, 2014	29	31	17	22	1
December 12-15, 2013	26	27	21	24	1
November 14-17, 2013	32	32	17	19	*
October 31-November 3, 2013	31	37	16	15	*
October 17-20, 2013	41	31	16	12	*
October 3-6, 2013	34	30	19	16	1

¹ In April 1998, September 1994 and October 1990, story was listed as "Candidates and election campaigns in your state." In November 1990, story was listed as "Candidates and elections in your state."

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
September 25-29, 2013	35	30	16	18	*
September 19-22, 2013	28	33	20	19	1
September 12-15, 2013	28	34	17	20	*
August 1-4, 2013	28	35	19	17	1
July 18-21, 2013	28	29	20	23	1
June 20-23, 2013	28	30	19	22	1
June 13-16, 2013	30	32	15	22	*
June 6-9, 2013	33	31	15	21	*
May 16-19, 2013	30	31	20	19	*
May 9-12, 2013	28	30	21	20	1
March 28-31, 2013	30	30	17	22	1
March 7-10, 2013	35	30	16	19	*
January 31-February 3, 2013	33	33	16	16	1
January 17-20, 2013	36	32	15	16	*
January 3-6, 2013	34	32	18	16	1

SEE TREND FOR PREVIOUS YEARS: <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/01/NII-Economy-trend.pdf>

- e. Reports about problems with care at veterans hospitals around the country

June 5-8, 2014	34	27	16	22	1
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TREND FOR COMPARISON:

March 23-26, 2007: *Reports about Walter Reed Army Medical Center and medical care for wounded soldiers returning from Iraq*

March 23-26, 2007	27	33	18	22	*
March 16-19, 2007	31	30	20	19	*

March 9-12, 2007: *Conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where many soldiers are treated after returning from Iraq*

March 9-12, 2007	31	31	19	19	*
February 23-26, 2007	19	24	24	32	1

NO QUESTION 2**ASK ALL:**

- Q.3 Do you think it was the right thing or the wrong thing for the Obama administration to exchange five Taliban prisoners for captive U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl?

(U)

Jun 5-8

2014

34	Right thing
43	Wrong thing
23	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

- Q.4 Which better describes how you feel about Bowe Bergdahl? Are you **[RANDOMIZE: sympathetic toward him/angry with him]**, **[RANDOMIZE: sympathetic toward him/angry with him]**, or neither in particular?

(U)

Jun 5-8

2014

15	Sympathetic toward him
15	Angry with him
59	Neither in particular
*	Both (VOL.)
10	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION 5

ASK ALL:

Q.6 Which comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right **[READ; RANDOMIZE]**?

(U)
 Jun 5-8
2014
 29 Because soldier Bowe Bergdahl left his post, the U.S. was not obligated to do all it could to secure his release
 56 The U.S. has a responsibility to do all it can to return an American captive soldier, no matter what the circumstances
 15 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:

Q.7 Which comes closer to your view about the decision to exchange prisoners for Bowe Bergdahl **[READ; RANDOMIZE]**?

(U)
 Jun 5-8
2014
 30 The president should have the flexibility to make decisions like these without informing Congress in advance
 64 The president should be required to inform Congress in advance of decisions like these
 6 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<u>(VOL.)</u> No preference	<u>(VOL.)</u> Other party	<u>(VOL.)</u> DK/Ref	Lean <u>Rep</u>	Lean <u>Dem</u>
June 5-8, 2014	24	28	39	5	1	3	15	14

Key to Pew Research trends noted in the topline:

(U) Pew Research Center/USA Today polls
