



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, May 11, 2010

Support for Offshore Drilling Declines
OIL SPILL SEEN AS ECOLOGICAL DISASTER; GOVERNMENT, BP
RESPONSES FAULTED

A majority of Americans see the massive oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico as a major environmental disaster, but nearly as many voice optimism that efforts to control the spill will succeed.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted May 6-9 among 994 adults, finds that the public is critical of the response to the crisis by the federal government and British Petroleum, the company that operated the oil rig that exploded on April 20 and is now struggling to stop the underwater oil release.

Evaluations of the initial government response are similar to public views of federal efforts immediately after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005. Currently, 54% say the response by the federal government has been only fair or poor, which is comparable to the government's initial rating for handling Hurricane Katrina in September 2005 (58% only fair/poor). Nonetheless, British Petroleum gets even more negative ratings for its handling of the oil leak (63% only fair/poor).

The criticism extends to President Obama, with just 38% saying they approve of his handling of the oil leak and 36% saying they disapprove. About a quarter (26%) offer no opinion. Still, opinion about Obama's performance is not

Spill Seen as Major Disaster

<i>Do you think the leak in the Gulf of Mexico is...</i>	May 2010 %
Major environmental disaster	55
Serious problem, not a disaster	37
Not too serious a problem	4
Other/Don't know	4
	100

<i>Efforts to prevent spill from spreading will be...</i>	
Successful	51
Unsuccessful	29
Don't Know	20
	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q7&8.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Comparing Oil Spill and Katrina Responses

<i>Response of federal government...</i>	Sept 2005 %	May 2010 %
Excellent/Good	38	33
Only fair/Poor	58	54
Don't know	4	13
	100	100

<i>Response of BP...</i>		
Excellent/Good	--	24
Only fair/Poor	--	63
Don't know	--	13
	--	100

<i>Bush/Obama...</i>		
Did all he could	28	36
Could have done more	67	47
Don't know	5	17
	100	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q5 & Q6.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

as negative as opinion about former President George W. Bush's response to the flooding caused by Katrina. That September, 52% disapproved of Bush's response to Katrina and 67% said he could have done more. Today, 47% say Obama could have done more to get the government's response to the oil leak going quickly.

The spill also appears to have taken a toll on support for offshore drilling near the United States. Currently, 54% say they favor allowing more offshore drilling for oil and gas in U.S. waters, which is down from 63% in early February and 68% in April 2009. Virtually all of the decline in support for offshore drilling has occurred among Democrats and independents as Republicans remain as supportive as they were before the spill.

	Apr 2009	Feb 2010	May 2010	Feb-May change
<i>% that favors...</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	
Allowing drilling in U.S. waters	68	63	54	-9
Promoting nuclear power use	45	52	45	-7
More funding for alternative energy	82	78	73	-5
Spending more on mass transit	70	70	65	-5

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q2a-d.

There also is slightly less support for increasing federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology than there was in February (73% today, 78% then). About two-thirds (65%) favor spending more on subway, rail and transit systems, compared with 70% in February. About half (45%) favor promoting the increased use of nuclear power, down slightly from 52% earlier this year.

In general, the public is divided over whether oil spills like the one in the Gulf of Mexico are unavoidable if the United States is going to get an adequate supply of energy: 41% say such spills are unavoidable while 45% disagree.

	Alaska Apr 1989*	Gulf of Mexico May 2010
<i>Oil spills unavoidable if US is to get adequate energy supply?</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Unavoidable	74	41
Not unavoidable	18	45
Don't know	8	14
	100	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q9.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
 * CBS/NYT poll.

The public had a much different reaction in April 1989, shortly after the huge oil spill caused by the crash of the Exxon Valdez tanker ship in Alaska. At that time, 74% said such spills were unavoidable while just 18% said they were not. The percentage saying such spills are unavoidable has declined substantially across partisan groups, education levels and regions.

Major Disaster Unfolding in the Gulf

More than half (55%) of the public say the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is a major environmental disaster; another 37% see it as a serious problem – but not a disaster. Just 4% say it is not too serious.

At the same time, 51% say efforts to control the spill and keep it from spreading further will be successful. About three-in-ten (29%) say those efforts will not succeed.

Independents (60%) and Democrats (55%) are more likely to say they see the spill as a major disaster than Republicans (46%). Democrats also express less certainty that the efforts to control the spill will succeed: 57% of Republicans say they think these efforts will be successful, compared with 47% of Democrats. More than half of independents (52%) agree.

Those following news about the growing oil slick very closely also are more likely to see the oil leak in the gulf as a major disaster. Among those who say they are following this news very closely, 67% characterize it as a major environmental disaster. Among those following it less closely, just 47% say they see the spill that way.

Rating the President's Performance

Obama's overall approval rating is unchanged from last month; 47% say they approve of the way Obama is handling his job as president, while 42% disapprove. But a smaller percentage (38%) say they approve of his handling of the oil leak in the Gulf, while 36% disapprove. About a quarter say they do not know (26%), more than double the 11% that say they do not know when asked about the president's overall performance.

Not surprisingly, partisans offer decidedly different takes on Obama's response to the worsening oil slick now threatening much of the Gulf Coast. More than half of Democrats say they approve of how Obama is handling the oil leak (53%), while 23% disapprove. Opinions

More Democrats See Major Disaster

<i>Do you think the leak in Gulf of Mexico is...</i>	<u>All</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
Major disaster	55	46	55	60
Serious problem	37	49	38	31
Not too serious	4	4	3	5
Other/Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Will efforts to control spill be...</i>				
Successful	51	57	47	52
Unsuccessful	29	28	32	30
Don't Know	<u>20</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>18</u>
	100	100	100	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q7&8.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Views of Obama's Handling of Gulf Spill

<i>Obama handling of oil leak in Gulf...</i>	<u>All</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
Approve	38	18	53	37
Disapprove	36	54	23	38
Don't know	<u>26</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>In response to oil leak President Obama...</i> <th><u>All</u> %</th> <th><u>Rep</u> %</th> <th><u>Dem</u> %</th> <th><u>Ind</u> %</th>	<u>All</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind</u> %
Did all he could	36	22	51	35
Could have done more	47	60	32	53
Don't know	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100	100	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q3d, 6.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

among Republicans are the reverse: 18% approve of the job Obama is doing while 54% disapprove. Independents mirror the nation as a whole: 37% of independents approve and 38% disapprove of Obama’s performance on this.

In September 2005, shortly after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, about half of the public (52%) disapproved of Bush’s response to the disaster then unfolding in New Orleans and elsewhere on the Gulf Coast; 38% approved of his performance. At that time, the partisan differences were also stark: two thirds of Republicans (67%) approved of his job performance, compared with 20% of Democrats and 38% of independents.

The public also was highly critical of how Bush’s father, President George H. W. Bush, handled the response to Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. More than half (52%) disapproved of the president’s handling of the crisis that April. About a quarter (24%) said they approved of the older Bush’s performance, while 24% answered that they did not know.

By another measure, close to half the public (47%) says Obama could have done more in his initial response to the oil spill in the Gulf. Just more than a third (36%) say he did all he could. Again, partisan views differ sharply. Six-in-ten Republicans (60%) say Obama could have done more, compared with 53% of independents and 32% of Democrats.

In 2005, a greater percentage of the public (67%) said that George W. Bush could have done more to get relief efforts going quickly following the devastation caused by Katrina. Fewer than three-in-ten (28%) said Bush did all he could do. At that time, the partisan differences were also sharp: More than eight-in-ten Democrats (84%) said Bush could have done more, compared with 71% of independents and 40% of Republicans.

Less Support for Offshore Drilling among Democrats and Independents

The spill also seems to have taken a toll on support for offshore drilling near the United States. Though more than half (54%) say they approve of offshore drilling, that is down from 63% in February and 68% in April 2009.

But more Americans still say they favor allowing increased drilling in U.S. waters than favor promoting the use of nuclear power (45%). The public expresses slightly lower levels of support than in February for each of the four approaches to boosting the energy supply included in the survey. Currently, 73% favor more funding

For Republicans, It’s Still “Drill, Baby, Drill”				
	Apr 2009	Feb 2010	May 2010	Feb-May Change
<i>% favoring more offshore drilling</i>	%	%	%	
Total	68	63	54	-9
Republican	88	74	76	+2
Democrat	56	54	41	-13
Independent	67	66	53	-13
Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q2d.				

for alternative energy sources, while 65% favor more spending on mass transit.

Opinions among Republicans are unchanged from February (76% approve), but the percentage of Democrats and independents that say they favor off shore drilling has dropped 13 points each to 41% among Democrats and 53% among independents.

Public Critical of Both Government and British Petroleum

Americans are more critical of British Petroleum than the federal government when assessing the response of both to the crisis in the gulf. More than half of the public (54%) rate the response of the government as only fair or poor, while 33% rate it as good or excellent. Republicans are much more likely to be highly critical than Democrats or independents.

Just 16% of Republicans rate the government response positively, while 71% say it has been only fair or poor. Independent views also tilt negative: 52% say the response has been only fair or poor, while 37% say it has been excellent or good. Democrats are more divided: 42% rate the response as excellent or good, while 46% rate it as only fair or poor.

More than six-in-ten (63%), meanwhile, rate BP's performance as only fair or poor, while 24% rate it as good or excellent. Similar majorities of independents (67%), Democrats (65%) and Republicans (59%) rate the company's response as only fair or poor. Three-in-ten Republicans (31%) rate the response as excellent or good, compared to 19% of Democrats and 24% of independents.

Criticism for Government and BP				
<i>Response of</i>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>
<i>federal government</i>	%	%	%	%
Excellent/Good	33	16	42	37
Only fair/Poor	54	71	46	52
Don't know	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Response of BP</i>				
Excellent/Good	24	31	19	24
Only fair/Poor	63	59	65	67
Don't know	<u>13</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100

Pew Research Center May 6-9 Q5a-b.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a national sample of 994 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from May 6-9, 2010 (662 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 332 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 123 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. 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/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2009 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 error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Sample Size</u>	<u>Plus or minus...</u>
Total sample	994	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	275	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	311	7.0 percentage points
Independents	332	6.5 percentage points

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.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Michael Remez, Senior Writer
Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian, Jocelyn Kiley and Alec Tyson, Research Associates
Jacob Poushter, Research Assistant

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MAY 2010 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
 May 6-9, 2010
 N=994

ASK ALL:

Q.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

	<u>Approve</u>	Dis- <u>approve</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
May 6-9, 2010	47	42	11
Apr 21-26, 2010	47	42	11
Apr 8-11, 2010	48	43	9
Mar 10-14, 2010	46	43	12
Feb 3-9, 2010	49	39	12
Jan 6-10, 2010	49	42	10
Dec 9-13, 2009	49	40	11
Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	51	36	13
Sep 30-Oct 4, 2009	52	36	12
Sep 10-15, 2009	55	33	13
Aug 20-27, 2009	52	37	12
Aug 11-17, 2009	51	37	11
Jul 22-26, 2009	54	34	12
Jun 10-14, 2009	61	30	9
Apr 14-21, 2009	63	26	11
Mar 31-Apr 6, 2009	61	26	13
Mar 9-12, 2009	59	26	15
Feb 4-8, 2009	64	17	19

ASK ALL:

Q.2 As I read some possible government policies to address America's energy supply, tell me whether you would favor or oppose each. First, would you favor or oppose the government **[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE]?** How about the government... **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Promoting the increased use of nuclear power			
May 6-9, 2010	45	44	11
Feb 3-9, 2010	52	41	7
Apr 14-21, 2009	45	48	7
September, 2008	50	43	7
Late-February, 2008	44	48	8
February, 2006	44	49	7
Mid-September, 2005	39	53	8
b. Spending more on subway, rail and bus systems			
May 6-9, 2010	65	28	7
Feb 3-9, 2010	70	25	4
Apr 14-21, 2009	70	25	5
Late-February, 2008	72	23	5
February, 2006	68	26	6
Mid-September, 2005	68	27	5

Q.2 CONTINUED ...

		<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
c.	Increasing federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology			
	May 6-9, 2010	73	22	5
	Feb 3-9, 2010	78	17	5
	Apr 14-21, 2009	82	15	3
	September, 2008	82	14	4
	Late-February, 2008	81	14	5
	February, 2006	82	14	4
d.	Allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters			
	May 6-9, 2010	54	38	8
	Feb 3-9, 2010	63	31	6
	Apr 14-21, 2009	68	27	5
	September, 2008	67	28	5

ASK ALL:

Thinking again about Barack Obama...

Q.3 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]
How about [NEXT ITEM]? [REPEAT INTRODUCTION AS NECESSARY]

		<u>Approve</u>	Dis- <u>approve</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	The economy			
	May 6-9, 2010	41	51	8
	Apr 21-26, 2010	38	54	8
	Mar 10-14, 2010	41	52	7
	Jan 6-10, 2010	42	51	7
	Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	42	52	5
	Jul 22-26, 2009	38	53	9
	Jun 10-14, 2009	52	40	8
	Apr 14-21, 2009	60	33	7
	Feb 4-8, 2009	56	24	20

QUESTION 3b HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

c.	Terrorist threats			
	May 6-9, 2010	49	37	13
	Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	52	34	14
	April 14-21, 2009 ¹	57	26	17
	February 4-8, 2009	50	21	29

¹ In the surveys conducted February 4-8, 2009, and April 14-21, 2009, the item was worded "the threat of terrorism."

Q.3 CONTINUED ...

		<u>Approve</u>	<u>Dis- approve</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
d.	The oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico May 6-9, 2010	38	36	26
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON				
<i>Obama</i>	<i>The government's response to the earthquake in Haiti</i>			
	Feb 3-9, 2010	66	16	18
	Jan 14-17, 2010	64	14	21
<i>G.W. Bush</i>	<i>The impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast</i>			
	March, 2006	32	58	10
	September, 2005	38	52	10
<i>G.H.W. Bush</i>	<i>The oil spill in Alaska from the tanker Exxon Valdez</i>			
	<i>LA Times, April 1989²</i>	24	52	24

QUESTION 4 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

Q.5 How would you rate the job [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] has been doing responding to the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico? [READ]

		<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	The federal government May 6-9, 2010	4	29	35	19	13
TREND FOR COMPARISON						
	<i>Responding to Hurricane Katrina</i>					
	September 8-11, 2005	8	29	30	31	2
	September 6-7, 2005	8	30	29	29	4
b.	B.P., the oil company that operated the oil rig May 6-9, 2010	5	19	36	27	13

² The 1989 *Los Angeles Times* question was worded "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Bush has handled the oil spill in Alaska from the tanker Exxon Valdez--or haven't you heard enough about that yet to say? Do you (approve/disapprove) strongly or do you (approve/disapprove) somewhat? Those who had not heard enough are included here in the DK/Ref. category.

ASK ALL:

Q.6 In your opinion, did President Obama do all he could to get the government’s response to the oil leak going quickly or do you think he could have done more?

May 6-9

2010

36	Did all he could
47	Could have done more
17	Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

TREND FOR COMPARISON (Hurricane Katrina)

In your opinion, did President Bush do all he could to get relief efforts going quickly or do you think he could have done more?

Sept 6-7

2005

Did all he could	28
Could have done more	67
Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)	5

ASK ALL:

Q.7 From what you’ve seen and heard, do you think that the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is [READ]...

May 6-9

2010

55	A major environmental disaster
37	A serious environmental problem, but not a disaster [OR]
4	Is it not too serious an environmental problem
1	Too soon to tell (VOL.)
3	Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.8 From what you’ve seen and heard, do you think the efforts to control the spill and prevent it from spreading further will be successful or unsuccessful?

May 6-9

2010

51	Successful
29	Unsuccessful
20	Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.9 Do you think oil spills like the one in the Gulf of Mexico are unavoidable if the United States is going to get an adequate supply of energy, or don’t you think so?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

CBS/NYT

Oil spill in Alaska

Apr 1989

May 6-9

2010

41	Yes, unavoidable	74
45	No, don’t think so	18
14	Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)	8

QUESTIONS 10 THROUGH 13 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

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

ASK IF ANSWERED 3, 4, 5 OR 9 IN PARTY:

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>	(VOL.) No <u>preference</u>	(VOL.) Other <u>party</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>	<i>Lean</i> <u>Rep</u>	<i>Lean</i> <u>Dem</u>
May 6-9, 2010	24	33	35	5	1	3	15	14