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## Bush's poll numbers are in free fall, but CNN's Malveaux claimed they are improving

On the September 12 edition of CNN's *The Situation Room*, White House correspondent Suzanne Malveaux claimed that "we have seen poll numbers improve" since Coast Guard Vice Adm. Thad Allen took charge of the Bush administration's Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts -- despite the fact that most publicly available polling shows the [Bush administration's numbers in a free fall](#). Later in the program, *Situation Room* host Wolf Blitzer claimed that Bush's poll numbers are going up -- but used a misleading comparison of different polls conducted by different news organizations using different methodologies in order to do so.

In addition to polls released September 8 by [CBS News](#), the [Pew Research Center](#), and Zogby International showing widespread disapproval with Bush's handling of Katrina, *Newsweek* [released a poll](#) on

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September 10 that found.

[T]he president's popularity and job-approval ratings have dropped across the board. **Only 38 percent of Americans approve of the way Bush is doing his job overall, a record-low for this president in the NEWSWEEK poll.** (Fifty-five percent of Americans disapprove of his overall job performance.) And only 28 percent of Americans say they are "satisfied with the way things are going" in the country, down from 36 percent in August and 46 percent in December, after the president's re-election.

[...]

But Katrina's most costly impact could be a loss of faith in government generally, and the president, in particular. **A majority of Americans (57 percent) say "government's slow response to what happened in New Orleans" has made them lose confidence in government's ability to deal with another major natural disaster.** Forty-seven percent say it has made them lose confidence in the government's ability to prevent another terrorist attack like 9/11, but 50 percent say is [*sic*] has not. (Note: our question asked about "government" in general, so we cannot say whether respondents meant state, local, federal or a combo of any of the three.)

More critical to President Bush -- and the GOP's future as the nation's majority party: most Americans, **52 percent, say they do not trust the president "to make the right decisions during a domestic crisis" (45 percent do).** The numbers are exactly the same when the subject is trust of the president to

make the right decisions during an international crisis.

[...]

The Katrina effect is evident in how Americans rate the president personally. In every category, the view of the president is at all-time lows for the NEWSWEEK poll. **Only 49 percent of Americans now believe the president has strong leadership qualities.** The same percentage of registered voters feel that way, 49 percent -- down from 63 percent the week before Bush's reelection. Only 42 percent of Americans believe the president cares about people like them; 44 percent of registered voters feel that way--down from 50 percent the week before the election. And only 49 percent of Americans and the same percentage of registered voters believe Bush is intelligent and well-informed -- down from 59 percent before the election.

Similarly, public approval of the president's policies on issues from the economy (35 percent) to the war in Iraq (36 percent) to terrorism and homeland security (46 percent) have suffered. Demonstrating the widespread havoc that Katrina has wrought on the president's political fortunes -- even far from issues of disaster response -- **for the first time in the four years since 9/11, more Americans disapprove of Bush's handling of terrorism and homeland security than approve of it.**

Reflecting the tarnished view of the administration, **only 38 percent of registered voters say they would vote for a Republican for Congress if the Congressional elections were held today, while 50 say they would vote for a Democrat.**

And *TIME* magazine released a poll on September 11 that [found](#) that "President Bush's approval rating is slipping, even among Republicans" (the poll found only 42 percent of all respondents approve of Bush's job performance; 52 percent disapprove). *Time's* poll also found that 61 percent of respondents think President Bush bears a great deal or some responsibility for "what went wrong with the relief effort after the hurricane," and 70 percent think the federal government bears a great deal or some responsibility.

Later in the *Situation Room* broadcast, Blitzer claimed that "Bush's stepped-up response to the Katrina disaster may be helping to push up his poll numbers." As evidence, Blitzer pointed to a new CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll that shows, as Blitzer put it, "Mr. Bush's approval rating is up -- *up!* -- to 46 percent. That's four to eight points higher than other polls taken over the past week." But Blitzer was comparing different polls conducted by different pollsters for different news organizations using different methodologies. Since no two polling firms conduct their polls in exactly the same way, such a comparison is deeply flawed. A more accurate comparison is done among polls conducted by the same company using the same methodology. In the most recent CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll that tested Bush's approval rating, conducted August 28-30, 45 percent approved of Bush's performance.

An [ABC News/Washington Post](#) poll released September 12 also casts doubt on Blitzer's contention that Bush's poll numbers are headed "up!" ABC reported that "[m]ore than six in 10 say the administration lacks a clear plan to handle the situation caused by the hurricane and subsequent flooding. The percentage of Americans who think there's no clear plan is somewhat higher now than it was in an ABC News/Washington Post poll on Sept. 2." ABC added, "Overall, 54 percent disapprove of the way Bush is handling the post-Katrina situation; 44 percent approve. Since the last

ABC/Post poll, disapproval is up by seven points while approval is relatively stable (it was 46 percent)." (*Media Matters for America* has previously [pointed out](#) the highly questionable nature of the Sept. 2 ABC/Post poll.)

From the September 12 edition of *The Situation Room*:

BLITZER: Suzanne, Thad Allen, the vice admiral, the Coast Guard vice admiral for more than three decades, he's been the man designated by the secretary of homeland security and the president to be in charge of this Katrina relief, the recovery effort, the reconstruction effort. I assume his name has to be very high on the list as a possible successor to [Federal Emergency Management Agency director] Mike Brown. I don't know if you're picking up any nibbles out there about other names or how quickly the president will move on this front. What are you hearing?

MALVEAUX: Well, Wolf, what we're hearing is certainly that this is a man who stepped in even before Mike Brown essentially was put aside, cast aside, this is someone who was already carrying that out, carrying that duty out, by his actions as well as that title, that that is something they are certainly considering, that he has moved in very quickly, that we have seen poll numbers improve, we have seen morale improve, that overall they think that the effort that the administration is doing has improved tremendously over the last 10 or so days that, when that transition was made, so he certainly is one of those candidates.

[...]

BLITZER: President Bush's stepped-up response to the Katrina disaster may be helping to push up his poll numbers a little bit. A new CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup survey out this hour shows Mr. Bush's approval rating is up -- *up!* -- to 46 percent. That's four to eight points higher than other polls taken over the past week.

— J.F.

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