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US Public Beliefs on Iraq and the Presidential Election

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PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)

A joint program of the Center on Policy
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Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge
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A polling, social science, and
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The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA) is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has changed in the year or more since the US began its military action in Iraq. But one thing has changed very little: the beliefs in the American public that just before the war, Saddam Hussein's Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda and had weapons of mass destruction. These beliefs have been evidenced in numerous polls conducted by other organizations, as well as by PIPA/Knowledge Networks.

Given that neither of these beliefs has been borne out by long and costly investigations into the activities of the fallen regime, and given the assessments challenging these views by high-profile figures like David Kay (former head of the US government's Iraq Survey Group), Hans Blix (head of UNMOVIC, the UN weapons inspectors in Iraq before the war), or Richard Clarke (a previous national coordinator for counterterrorism and then White House advisor on the subject), it would seem that this might be a moment when these beliefs would begin to change.

To the extent that they have not changed, this raises the question of "why?" Is it because people's political biases are so strong that they do not receive new information? Is it because they are not aware of what most experts are saying? Do they perceive administration figures as confirming these beliefs? Perhaps most significant, if these perceptions changed, is it likely that Americans would modify their beliefs or their attitudes about the decision to go to war?

Of course, another key issue is how all these dynamics might interact with intentions to vote for the president or his challenger. Do people who side with one or the other candidate differ in their beliefs and perceptions? If these perceptions or beliefs changed, might this have an impact on voting?

Other beliefs and perceptions about Iraq may also be related to attitudes about the war and voting for president. PIPA/Knowledge Networks previously found that only a minority of Americans perceived that the majority of world public opinion was critical of the decision to go to war, despite international polling indicating that this has been the case. Has this perception changed with time? How does the perception of world public opinion relate to attitudes about the war, and even attitudes about voting for president? If these perceptions changed, what effect might that have?

A widespread assumption is that Americans' attitudes about a military operation are highly affected by US troop fatalities. Assuming that some Americans estimate these fatalities on the low side and others estimate them on the high side, how does this variation relate to attitudes about the war and voting for president?

Another variable is Americans' perception of the number of Iraqi civilians that have died as a result of the war and its aftermath. How do varying perceptions of these levels relate to attitudes toward the war and voting for president?

In order to answer these various questions, PIPA/KN conducted a nationwide poll over March 16-22, 2004, with a nationwide sample of 1,311 respondents. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.8%-4.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to all or part of the sample.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access, whether or not they previously had internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation.

Key findings of the study were:

1. Beliefs About Iraqi WMD and Support for Al Qaeda

A majority continues to believe that Iraq was giving substantial support to al Qaeda, while nearly half continue to believe that evidence of such support has been found. A majority believes that Iraq either had weapons of mass destruction or a major program for developing them. The majority of those who have such beliefs approve of the decision to go to war, while the majority of those who do not have such beliefs disapprove of the war.....3

1a. Perceptions of Assessments by Experts and Bush Administration

Despite statements by Hans Blix, David Kay and Richard Clarke, a majority of Americans do not have the perception that most experts are saying Iraq did not have WMD or was not providing support to al Qaeda. Also, many perceive the Bush administration as claiming to have found evidence of such links or of WMD. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that if perceptions of experts' assessments were to change, there is a significant likelihood beliefs about prewar Iraq would change as well. Also, providing minimal information about expert assessments led to substantial shifts in beliefs.8

1b. Beliefs, Perceptions, and Voting for President

Those who believe Iraq had WMD or supported al Qaeda, and those who perceive experts as either agreeing on these points, or as divided, are much more likely to say that they will vote for the President than those who do not have such beliefs and perceptions. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that were beliefs about prewar Iraq, or perceptions of what experts' assessments, to change, there is a significant possibility that this could affect voting intentions. Perceptions of experts' assessments may be related to voting for the President because they affect perceptions of his honesty. 13

2. Perceptions of World Public Opinion re Iraq

Most Americans are unaware that world public opinion is critical of the US war with Iraq. Those who perceive world public opinion as critical of the US war with Iraq are far

less likely to approve of the decision to go to war, and to say they will vote for the president in 2004. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that were perceptions of world public opinion to change, there is a significant possibility that this could affect attitudes toward the war and intentions to vote for the president.18

3. Perceptions of US Military Fatalities

On average, Americans are fairly accurate in estimating the number of US troop fatalities to date, but there is substantial variation in these estimates. Contrary to common assumptions, those who perceive higher levels of US military fatalities are no more likely to oppose the war or to say they will vote against the President than those who perceive lower levels of fatalities.21

4. Perceptions of Iraqi Civilian Fatalities

On average, Americans grossly underestimate the number of Iraqi civilian fatalities. Those who perceive higher numbers of Iraqi civilian fatalities were not significantly less likely to support the war, but were somewhat less likely to intend to vote for the president.22

FINDINGS

1. Beliefs About Iraqi WMD and Support for Al Qaeda

A majority continues to believe that Iraq was giving substantial support to al Qaeda, while nearly half continue to believe that evidence of such support has been found. A majority believes that Iraq either had weapons of mass destruction or a major program for developing them. The majority of those who have such beliefs approve of the decision to go to war, while the majority of those who do not have such beliefs disapprove of the war.

A majority continues to believe that Iraq was giving substantial support to al Qaeda before the war. Since February 2003, PIPA/KN has regularly asked respondents to choose among four descriptions of “the relationship between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the terrorist group al Qaeda.” In the current poll, 57% thought either that “Iraq gave substantial support to al Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11 attacks” (37%) or that that “Iraq was directly involved in carrying out” those attacks (20%). Another 29% thought that “a few al Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials,” while 11% thought “there was no connection at all.”

The answers to this question have not changed much in thirteen months. Though there have been some modest fluctuations, the current responses are nearly identical to those of February 2003—before the war began.

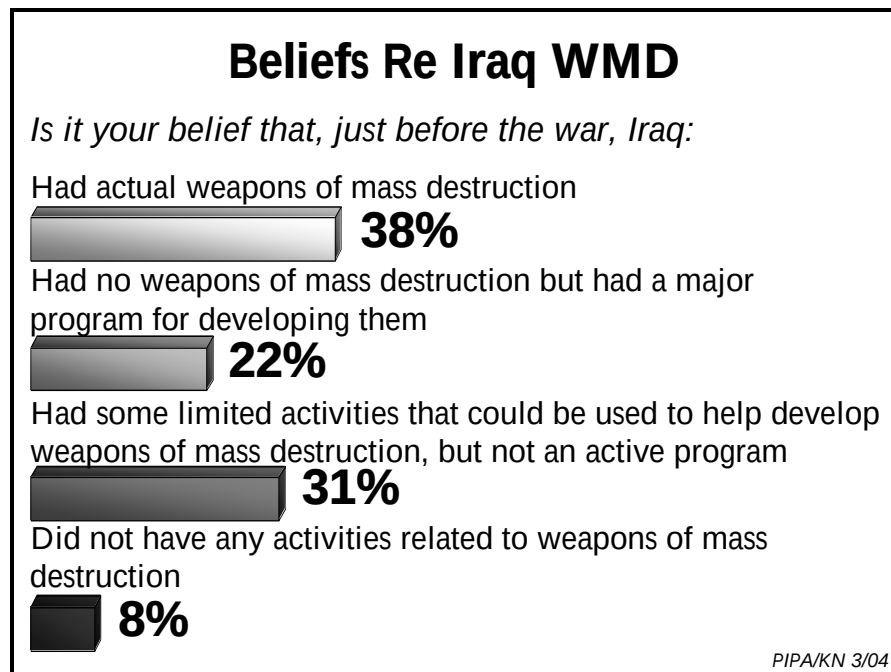
Beliefs RE: Iraq's Relation to al Qaeda					
<i>Please select what you think is the best description of the relationship between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the terrorist group al Qaeda.</i>					
	3/04	9/03	7/03	6/03	2/03
There was no connection at all	11	7	7	7	7
A few al Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials	29	31	35	26	29
Iraq gave substantial support to al Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th attacks	37	35	33	36	36
Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11 th attacks	20	21	20	25	20
No answer	3	6	6	6	8

Nearly half continue to believe that evidence of such support has been found. Since June 2003 PIPA/KN has asked: "Is it your impression that the US has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization?" In the current poll, 45% said the US has found such evidence while 53% said the US has not. This perception is held a little less widely than it was when it was first asked last June, when 52% thought such evidence had been found. However, over the six occasions the question has been asked, the number of those saying the US has found evidence has stayed within a narrow band of 43% to 52%.

Perception: Evidence of Iraq-al Qaeda Link Found						
<i>Is it your impression that the US has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization?</i>						
	3/04	12/03	11/03	9/03	7/03	6/03
US has	45	43	52	49	45	52
US has not	53	51	46	45	49	43
No answer	3	6	2	6	6	5

A majority believes that Iraq either had weapons of mass destruction or a major program for developing them. An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll in March asked simply: “Do you think that Iraq did or did not have weapons of mass destruction before the war began last March?” and found 57% who said Iraq had such weapons then.

In the current poll, PIPA/KN offered a question with four alternatives. In this case the percentage saying that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was somewhat lower at 38%, though an additional 22% said it had a major WMD program. Thus 60% said that Iraq had a program that was more extensive than the kind of activities described by David Kay (see box below).



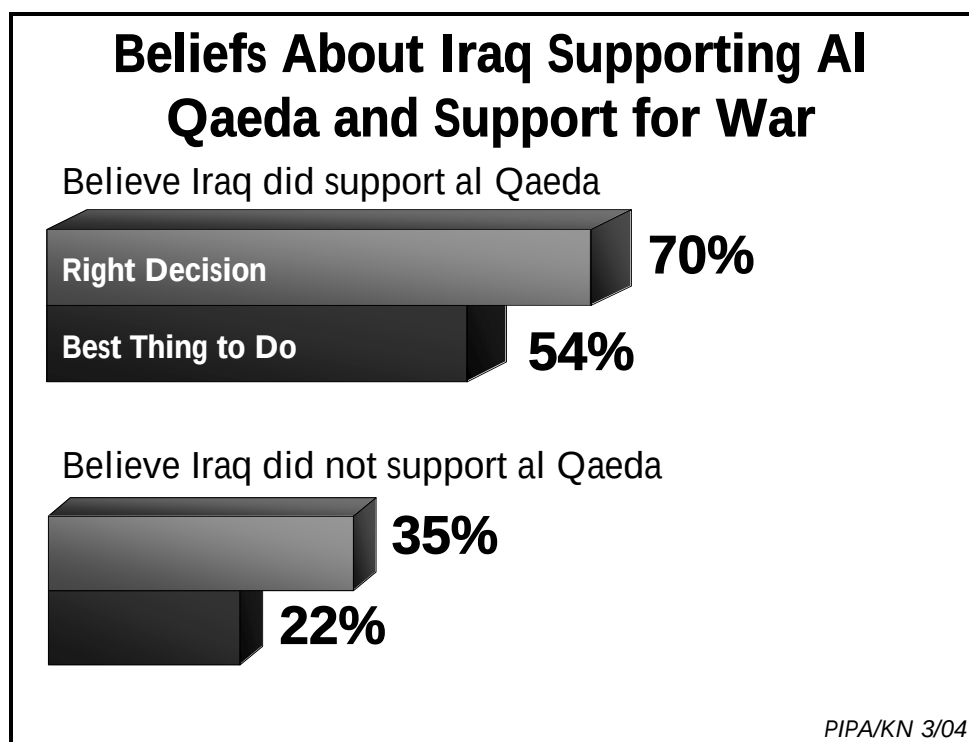
One misperception about Iraqi WMD that has diminished over time—in contrast to the misperception that evidence of substantial support of al Qaeda has been found—is that Iraqi WMD have been found. While 34% had this misperception in May 2003, it has gradually diminished over the months and stands at just 15% in the current poll.

Beliefs About Prewar Iraq and Support for the War

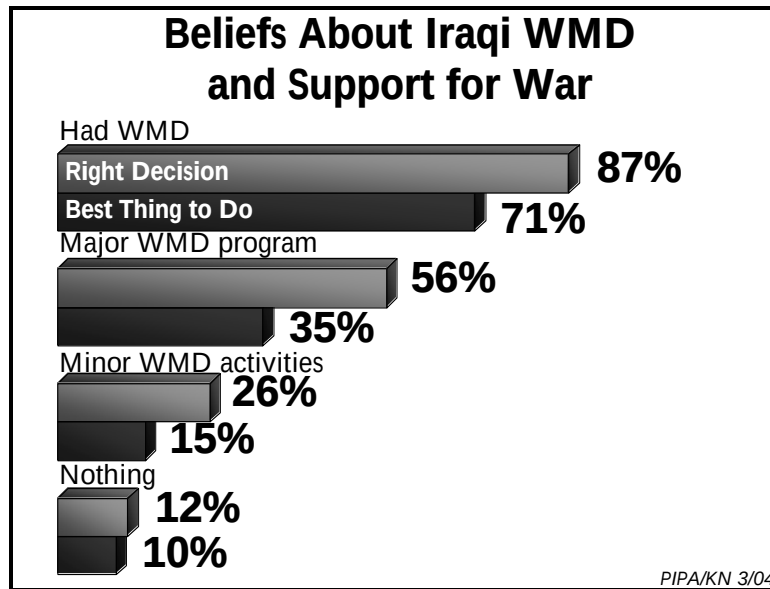
One might think that that the question of whether Iraq had WMD or supported al Qaeda are now moot points in terms of the decision to go to war with Iraq—that Americans have accepted the argument that the world is better off without Saddam Hussein, that the discovery of evidence of human rights violations upstaged the arguments regarding WMD and al Qaeda, or that attitudes about the war have become a function of attitudes about how the current operation is going. However, this does not appear to be the case. Beliefs about prewar Iraq continue to be highly related to support for the decision to go to war.

Overall, 55% of respondents said that the US going to war with Iraq was the “right decision.” Those who answered this way were then asked whether they thought going to war was the “best thing for the US to do” or if they were not sure if it was the best thing and were simply supporting Bush’s decision “because he is president.” Forty percent (of the full sample) said it was the best decision, while 14% said they were supporting the president.

Support for the war varied greatly depending on beliefs about Iraqi links to al Qaeda and WMD. Among those who believed that Iraq was providing support to al Qaeda, 70% said that going to war with Iraq was the right decision and 54% said it was the best thing to do. Among those who did not have such a belief, only 35% said it was the right thing and 22% said it was the best thing to do.



Similarly, among those who said they believed that Iraq had WMD, 87% said that going to war was the right decision, with that percentage dropping to 56% among those who thought it just had a major WMD program, 26% among those who said it only had minor WMD activities, and 12% for those who said it had no activities at all.



Among those who believed both that Iraq was supporting al Qaeda *and* had WMD 89% said that the war was the right decision and 76% said it was the best thing to do. For those who had one or the other of these beliefs 57% said it was the right thing and 37% said it was the best thing to do. Among those with neither belief, just 23% said it was the right decision and 13% said it was the best decision.

The question arises whether such beliefs are simply the result of bias. Are people simply holding beliefs that are consonant with their political views, such as their party identification? While this question cannot be answered definitively, it is possible to control for political views and see if the beliefs persist. For example, on the question of Iraq providing support to al Qaeda, Republicans were more likely than average to say that Iraq was doing so (72%), but a majority of independents also had this view (56%) as did a small majority of Democrats (51%). On the question of whether Iraq had WMD, views were more divided on partisan lines. Sixty-one percent of Republicans said that it did, but still 33% of Independents and 22% of Democrats concurred. This shows that while political bias may influence the likelihood of having certain beliefs, nonetheless many have beliefs that are at odds with their political bias. Thus it appears that beliefs are to some extent independent of political bias.

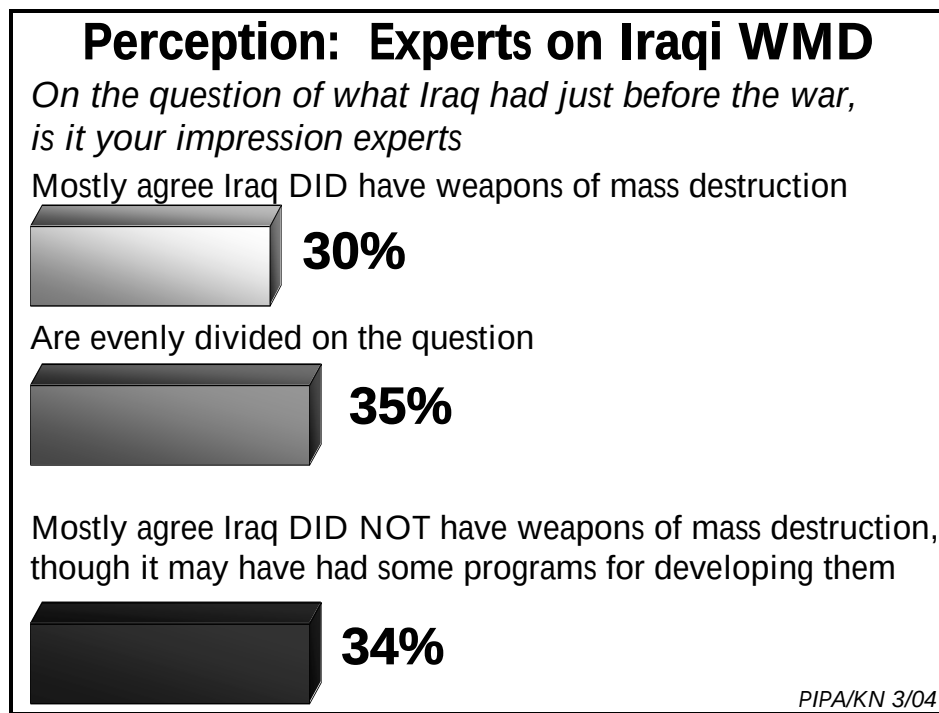
Naturally, the correlation between these beliefs about prewar Iraq and attitudes about the war does not prove that a given belief caused a given attitude. However when a multivariate regression analysis was performed that included numerous other variables (including party identification and education) in addition to beliefs about prewar Iraq, the beliefs were highly predictive of attitudes toward the war. Also, when regression analyses were performed with beliefs about prewar Iraq as the dependent variable, attitudes toward the war were no more predictive of beliefs than beliefs were predictive of attitudes. This suggests that beliefs played at least some role in shaping attitudes. It also suggests that if beliefs were to change, there is a significant possibility that attitudes would change as well.

1a. Perceptions of Assessments by Experts and Bush Administration

Despite statements by Hans Blix, David Kay and Richard Clarke, a majority of Americans do not have the perception that most experts are saying Iraq did not have WMD or was not providing support to al Qaeda. Also, many perceive the Bush administration as claiming to have found evidence of such links or of WMD. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that if perceptions of experts' assessments were to change, there is a significant likelihood beliefs about prewar Iraq would change as well. Also, providing minimal information about expert assessments led to substantial shifts in beliefs.

Despite statements by Hans Blix, David Kay and Richard Clarke, a majority of Americans do not have the perception that most experts are saying Iraq did not have WMD or was not providing support to al Qaeda.

Only 34% said it was their impression that "experts mostly agree Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, though it may have had some programs for developing them." A 65% majority said either that "experts mostly agree that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction" (30%) or that "experts are evenly divided on the question" (35%).



On the question of links to al Qaeda, an even smaller 15% of respondents said it was their impression that "experts mostly agree Iraq was not providing substantial support to al Qaeda." Rather, an 82% majority either thought that "experts mostly agree Iraq was providing substantial support" (47%) or "experts are evenly divided on the question" (35%).

Perception: Experts on Support for al Qaeda

Is it your impression experts:

Mostly agree Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda



Are evenly divided on the question



Mostly agree Iraq was not providing substantial support to al Qaeda



PIPA/KN 3/04

Perceptions of Bush Administration

At the same time, a majority perceives the Bush administration as standing behind the view that Iraq was providing support to al Qaeda. When asked “Is it your impression the Bush administration has or has not been saying that the US has found clear evidence Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization?” 56% said the administration has been saying this, while 41% said it has not.

Perception: Bush Administration

Is it your impression the Bush administration has or has not been saying that the US has found clear evidence Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization?

Has



Has not



PIPA/KN 3/04

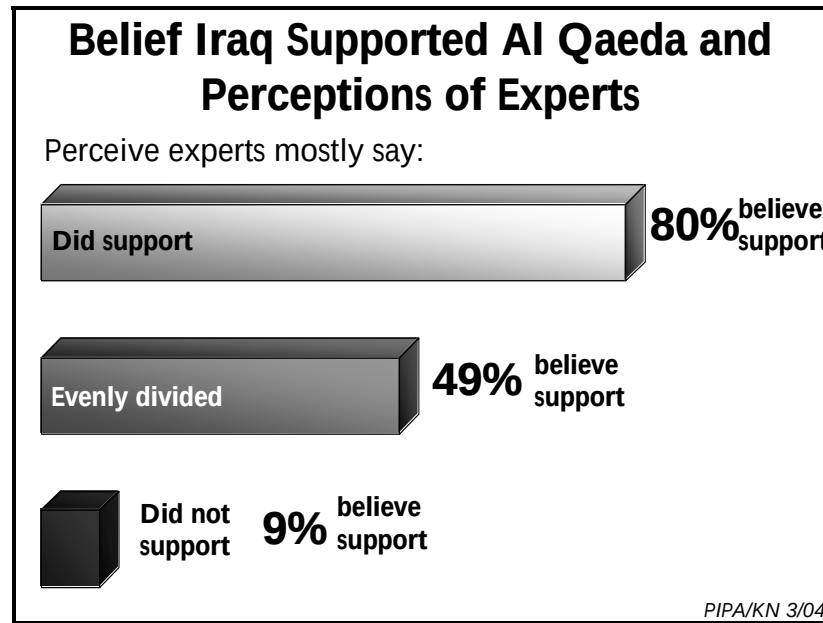
A substantial minority (38%) also perceived the administration “has been saying that the US has found clear evidence that Iraq had WMD,” while a 57% majority said it has not. A larger percentage may also perceive the administration as affirming that Iraq had WMD just before the war, as some members of the administration have continued to speak of how WMD may still be found, even as they admit that WMD have not yet been found.

Perceptions of David Kay

The public is also not clear that David Kay, the former head of the US government’s Iraq Survey Group that searched for WMD in Iraq, has come to the conclusion that Iraq did not have WMD or even a major program for developing them. Respondents were told that “David Kay, who led the US government team that searched for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, recently presented his conclusions to a Congressional committee.” Respondents were offered four options for characterizing their impression of what David Kay had said were his own conclusions when he spoke as a witness before the Senate Armed Services Committee—the high point of media attention to Kay’s remarks over the preceding several months. Approximately half thought Kay had concluded that “just before the war, Iraq had actual weapons of mass destruction” (21%) or that it had no WMD but “had a major program for developing them” (27%). Thirty-seven percent said Kay had concluded Iraq had “some limited activities that could be used to help develop weapons of mass destruction, but not an active program” (the answer that matches an examination of the transcript of the hearing). Another 11% assumed he said that Iraq “did not have any activities related to weapons of mass destruction.”

Perceptions of Experts and Beliefs

Not surprisingly, beliefs about experts’ assessments are closely related to Americans’ own beliefs about what was the case in Iraq before the war. Among those who thought experts mostly agree that Iraq was not providing support to al Qaeda, only 9% believed this was the case. Among those who thought experts mostly agree Iraq was providing support, 80% believed it was the case. And among those who thought experts were divided, 49% believed it was the case, and 47% believed it was not.



Where WMD are concerned, the pattern is similar. Among those who thought experts mostly agree that Iraq did not have WMD, only 6% believed that in fact Iraq did have WMD. Among those who thought experts mostly agree that Iraq did have WMD, 77% believed this was the case. Among those who thought experts were divided, 36% believed it was the case, and 63% believed it was not.

One might ask whether perceptions of experts are really playing a role in shaping beliefs, or if people are simply selectively hearing what they want to hear because of their political bias. While it is not possible to prove that these perceptions caused the beliefs, it is possible to eliminate the argument that these perceptions are simply caused by political bias by examining whether the presence of the political bias predicts the perception. For example, the perception that experts are saying that Iraq was providing support to al Qaeda, or that experts are divided on the question, is found in a majority of all categories of party identification. Even among Democrats (who would arguably be least motivated to have this perception) 79% had this perception, as did 80% of independents and 93% of Republicans.

Furthermore, a multivariate regression analysis that included party identification revealed that those who believed experts are evenly divided or mostly agree that Iraq was substantially supporting Iraq are 8.3 times more likely to believe Iraq was substantially supporting al Qaeda. Also, those who think experts are divided or mostly agree Iraq had WMD are 17.1 times more likely to believe Iraq had WMD.

One might also ask whether perceptions of experts are playing a role in shaping beliefs or if the causal link goes in the opposite direction—people are simply hearing experts say things that are consistent with their beliefs. Naturally, the correlation between beliefs and perceptions of experts does not prove that the perceptions caused the belief. However, when multivariate regression analyses were performed including numerous

variables (including party identification and education), and beliefs and perceptions were separately tested as dependent variables, perceptions were actually more powerful predictors of beliefs than were beliefs of perceptions. This suggests that if perceptions were to change, there is a significant likelihood that beliefs would change as well.

Perceptions of Bush Administration and Beliefs

Perceptions of claims made by the Bush administration were also strongly related to beliefs about prewar Iraq. Sixty-four percent of those who perceive the Bush administration as saying it has evidence of Iraqi links to al Qaeda also believe Iraq was providing al Qaeda substantial support. Only 48% of those who do not perceive the Bush administration making these claims believe Iraq was providing such support. Forty-nine percent of those who think the administration has been making similar claims about WMD also believe Iraq had WMD, and only 31% of those who do not perceive the administration as making these claims believe Iraq had WMD.

In multivariate regression analyses, perceptions of the administration's statements were powerful predictors of beliefs, though not as powerful as perceptions of experts. Those who perceived the Bush administration as saying it has found evidence of weapons of mass destruction were 2 times more likely to believe Iraq had WMD—as compared to 17.1 times for those who perceived experts saying Iraq had WMD. Similarly, those who perceived the Bush administration as saying it has found evidence of an Iraqi link to al Qaeda were 2 times more likely to believe Iraq was giving substantial support to al Qaeda—compared to 8.3 times for those who perceived experts saying Iraq provided substantial support to al Qaeda.

Perceptions of David Kay and Beliefs

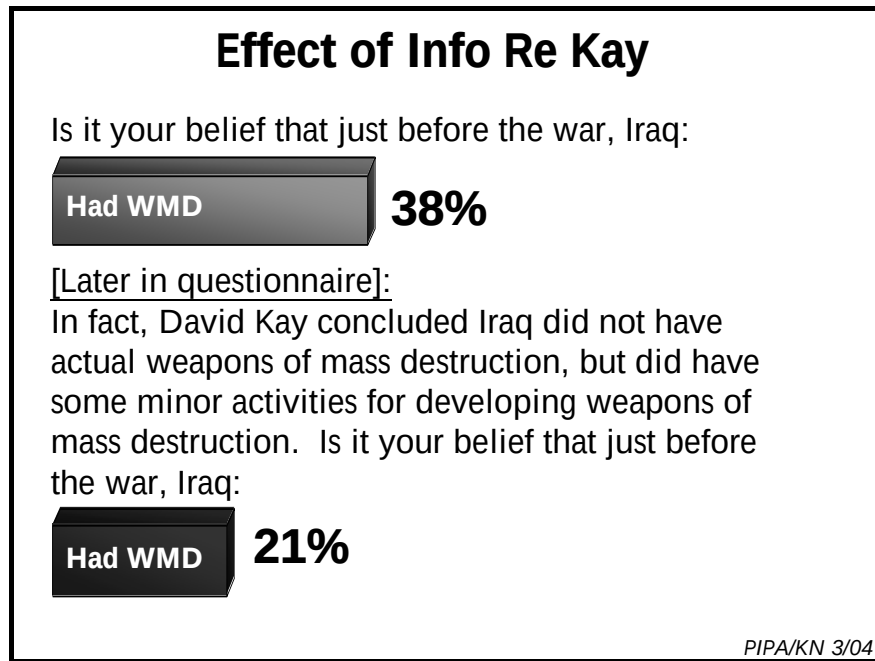
Perceptions of what David Kay said were also strongly related to beliefs about Iraq having WMD. Among those who perceived Kay concluded Iraq had WMD just before the war, 78% believed Iraq had WMD—twice the percentage of the general sample. Of those who perceived Kay as saying that Iraq had only minor WMD-related activities, 51% also believed this was the case—as compared to 31% in the general sample.

In a multivariate regression analysis, those who perceived Kay as saying Iraq had WMD were 7.1 times likely to believe this was the case—more powerful than party identification. However, perceptions of experts in general were even more powerful. Those who perceived experts as mostly saying Iraq had WMD, or as divided, were 17.1 times more likely to believe that this was the case just before the war.

The Effect of Providing Information on Expert Assessments

As discussed, multivariate regression analyses suggest that perceptions of what experts are saying have some influence over beliefs about pre-war Iraq. Another potential indicator of such influence—as well as an important indicator of the potential for changing beliefs—is the effect of providing information about expert assessments.

A limited experiment of this sort was conducted within the questionnaire. Early in the poll respondents were asked for their own belief on WMD and pre-war Iraq, and offered four response options. At the end of the questionnaire respondents were given information about what David Kay had said, and then asked what they thought to be the case. The most dramatic change was a sharp drop in the percentage saying that Iraq had WMD--from 38% to 21%. Overall, of all respondents who had said early in the poll that Iraq either had WMD or had a major WMD program, 42% changed their position in the direction of what they were told was Kay's position.

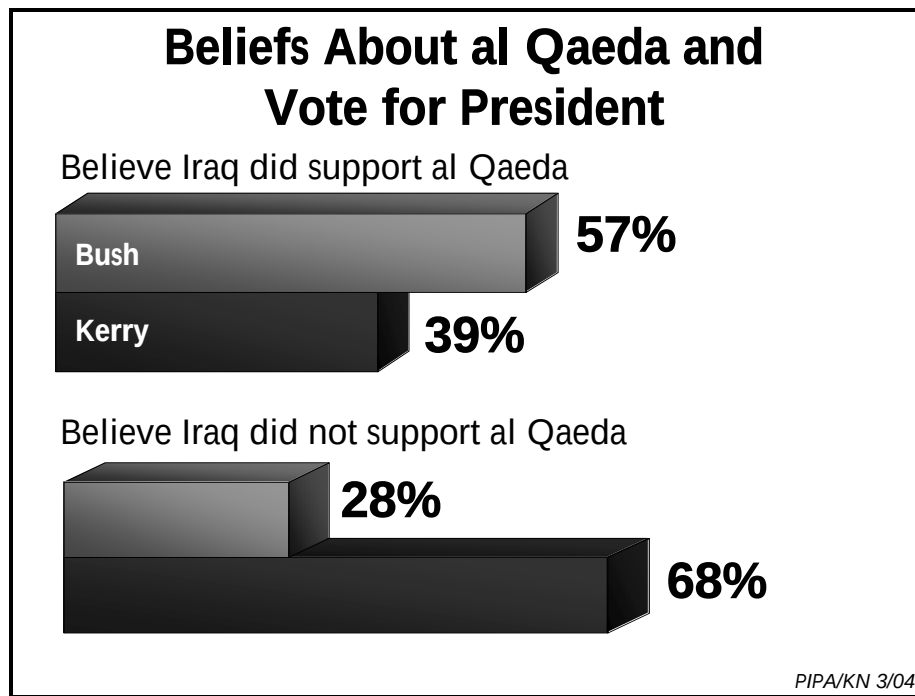


1b. Beliefs, Perceptions, and Voting for President

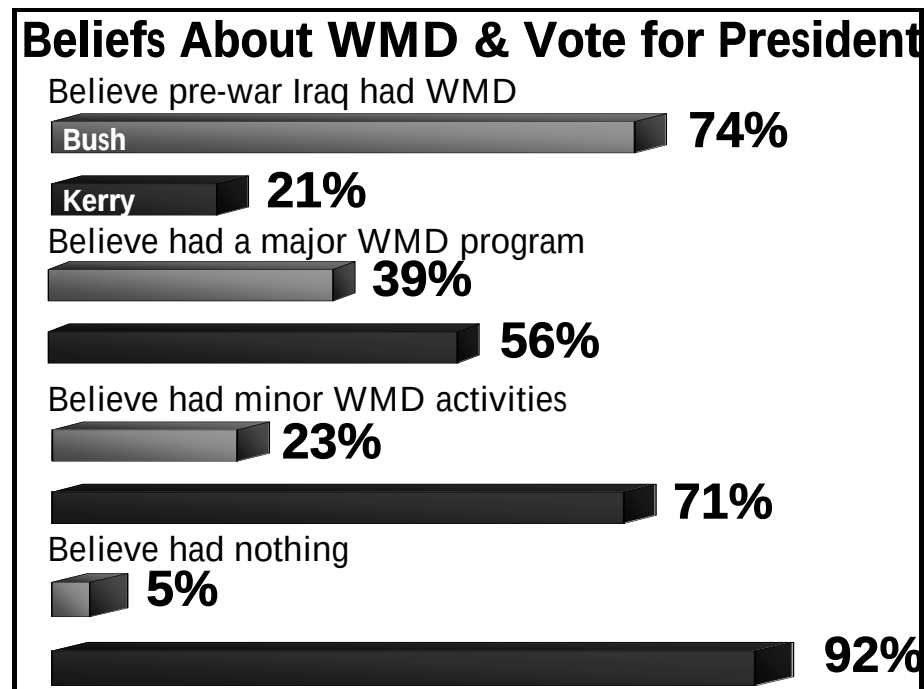
Those who believe Iraq had WMD or supported al Qaeda, and those who perceive experts as either agreeing on these points, or as divided, are much more likely to say that they will vote for the President than those who do not have such beliefs and perceptions. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that were beliefs about prewar Iraq, or perceptions of what experts' assessments, to change, there is a significant possibility that this could effect voting intentions. Perceptions of experts' assessments may be related to voting for the President because they effect perceptions of his honesty.

Beliefs about Iraq and perceptions of what experts are saying about Iraq were highly related to respondents' intentions to vote to re-elect the president.

Among those who believed that Iraq supported al Qaeda, the majority (57%) said they would vote for President Bush, while among those who did not believe in such links, the majority (68%) said they would vote for Senator Kerry.



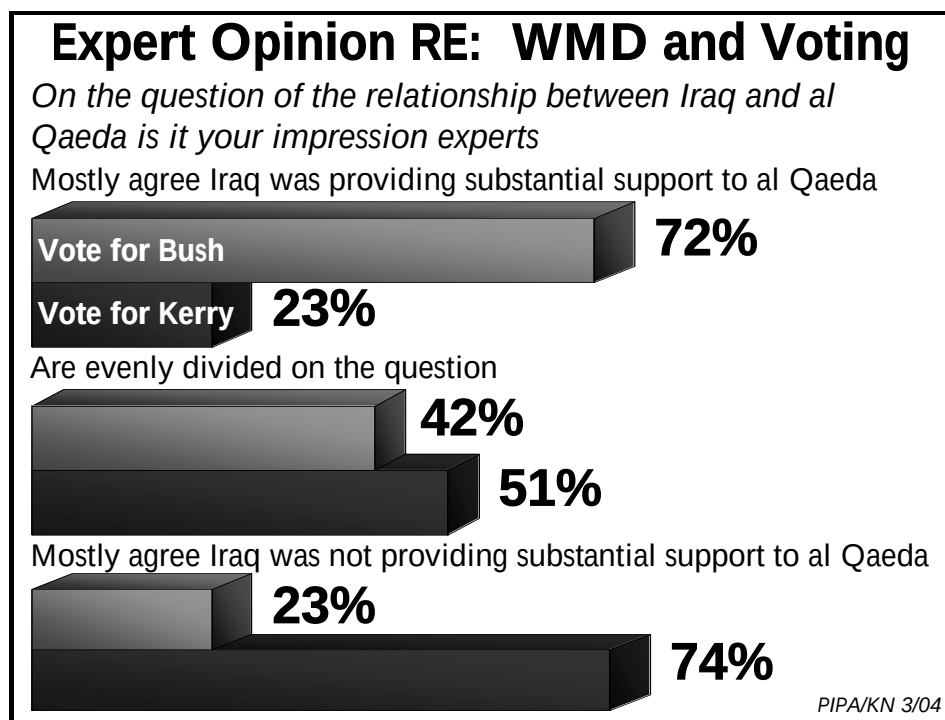
Voting for President was also highly related to beliefs about WMD. Those who believed that Iraq had WMD just before the war overwhelmingly favored President Bush (74%). Support for the president faded, though among those who were less confident (see box below).



Among those who held both beliefs—that Iraq supported al Qaeda and had WMD—75% favored Bush. Among those with neither belief, 78% favored Kerry. Among those with one or the other belief, the responses were evenly divided—47% for Bush and 48% for Kerry.

Perceptions of Experts

Perceptions of experts were also highly related to voting. Among those who perceived experts as saying that Iraq had WMD, 72% said they would vote for Bush and 23% said they would vote for Kerry, while among those who perceived experts as saying that Iraq did not have WMD, 23% said they would vote for Bush and 74% for Kerry—an almost perfect symmetry. Among those who perceived experts as divided on the question, 51% said they would vote for Kerry and 42% for Bush.



The difference was even sharper in terms of support for al Qaeda. Among those who perceived experts as saying that Iraq had provided substantial support to al Qaeda, 62% said they would vote for Bush and 36% said they would vote for Kerry. Among those who perceived experts as saying that Iraq was not supporting al Qaeda, just 13% said they would vote for Bush and 85% for Kerry. Among those who said experts were evenly divided, 55% said they would vote for Kerry and 37% for Bush.

Multivariate Regression Analyses

The correlation between beliefs, perceptions and intention to vote for the president does not prove that such beliefs and perceptions caused the intention to vote one way or the other. The commitment to vote for the president may also have had an effect on beliefs

and perceptions—people may bolster their voting intentions by seeking information that confirms consonant beliefs and perceptions. However, when multivariate regression analyses were performed (that included party identification, education and other variables), beliefs and perceptions were powerful predictors of intention to vote. When beliefs and perceptions were made the dependent variable, intention to vote was no more powerful as a predictor of beliefs and perceptions. This strongly suggests that perceptions and beliefs had at least some impact on voting intentions. It also suggests that a change in beliefs about prewar Iraq, or perceptions of what experts are saying, could have an impact on voting intentions.

The Role of Perceived Honesty

Why do beliefs about prewar Iraq and perceptions of what experts say have an apparent affect on intentions to vote for the president? One important reason may be that they impact perceptions of the president's honesty. Over the months since the end of the war, there has been an erosion in the perception of the president's honesty, concurrent with the failure to find WMD or clear evidence of a link to al Qaeda that the president claimed existed when originally justifying going to war. In December 2002, ABC/Washington Post found 70% saying that the President is honest and trustworthy. By September of 2003 this had eroded to 60% and in February 2004 had drifted even lower to 52%.

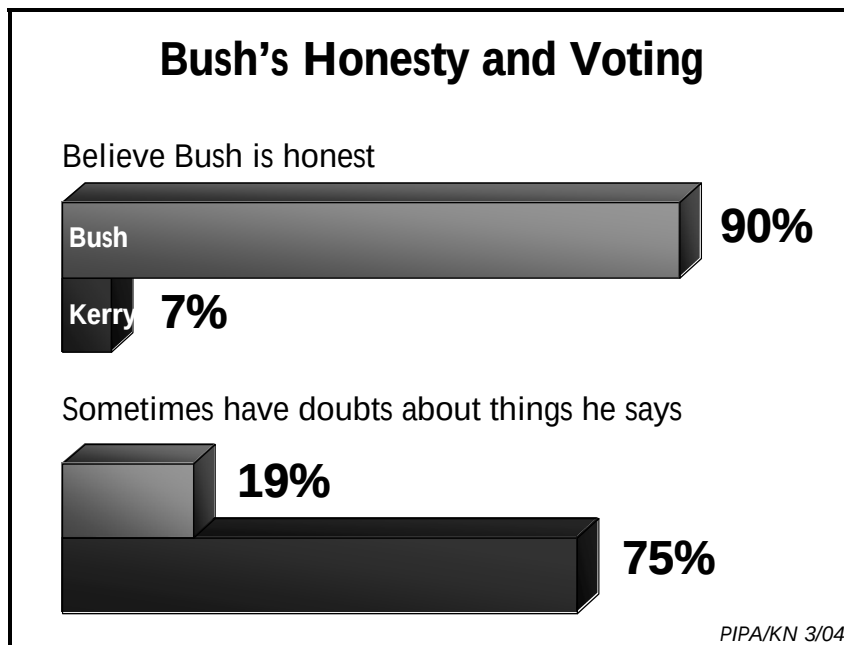
The current poll offered respondents two response options, and found just 36% saying they think he is "honest and frank" and 63% saying that they "sometimes have doubts about things he says." This represents a 7-point erosion since November 2003, when responses were 42% and 56% respectively.

One reason that perceptions of honesty may have eroded concurrent with the failure to find WMD or evidence of links to al Qaeda is that it calls into question whether these assumptions were the real reason that Bush decided to go to war. Asked how Bush would have responded "If, before the war, US intelligence services had told President Bush there was no reliable evidence that Iraq possessed or was building weapons of mass destruction or was providing substantial support to al Qaeda," 64% answered he would "still have gone to war for other reasons." Among those who believed this, perceptions of Bush as honest and trustworthy were even lower at 22%. Among those who believed that he would then not have gone to war, 65% perceived Bush as honest and trustworthy.

Perceptions of what experts are saying are also highly correlated with perceptions of Bush's honesty. Among those who perceived experts as mostly agreeing or divided on both subjects--whether Iraq had WMD and supported al Qaeda--50% said they thought Bush was honest and frank. Among those who had only one of these perceptions—and believed either that experts were mostly saying that Iraq did *not* have WMD, or did *not* support al Qaeda—perceptions of Bush as honest dropped to 19%. Those who perceived experts as saying *both* that Iraq did not have WMD and did not support al Qaeda, perceptions of Bush as honest dropped even further, to 8%.



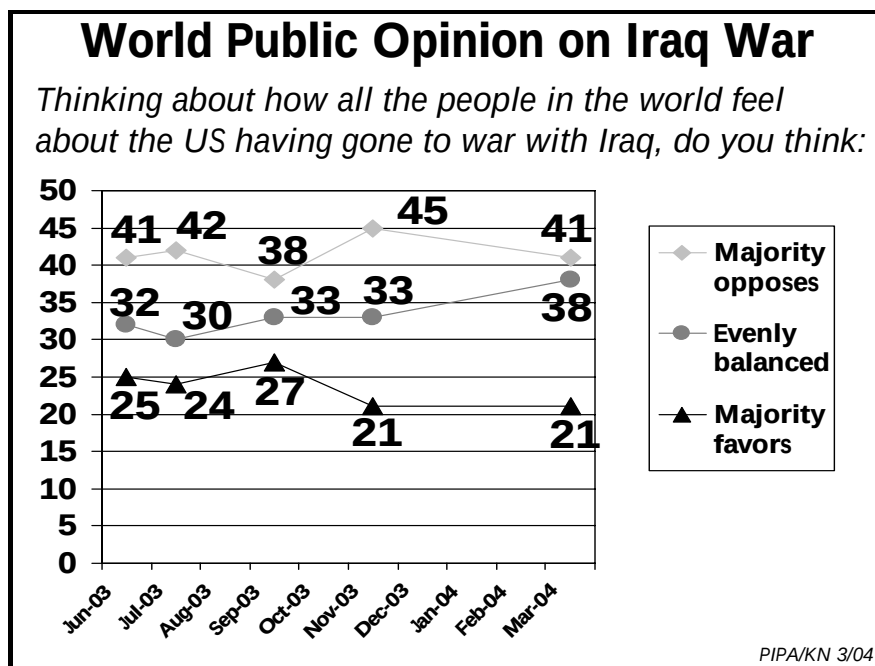
Perceptions of Bush's honesty are highly related to the intention to vote for him. Among those who perceive Bush as honest and frank, 90% plan to vote for him. Among those who have doubts about things he says, only 19% plan to vote for him. When a multivariate regression analysis was performed with intention to vote as the dependent variable, perceptions of honesty were enormously powerful. Those who perceived Bush as honest were 20.7 times more likely to vote for him than those had doubts or did not answer the question. This factor was even more powerful than party identification as a predictor of voting.



2. Perceptions of World Public Opinion re Iraq

Most Americans are unaware that world public opinion is critical of the US war with Iraq. Those who perceive world public opinion as critical of the US war with Iraq are far less likely to approve of the decision to go to war, and to say they will vote for the president in 2004. Multivariate regression analyses suggest that were perceptions of world public opinion to change, there is a significant possibility that this could affect attitudes toward the war and intentions to vote for the president.

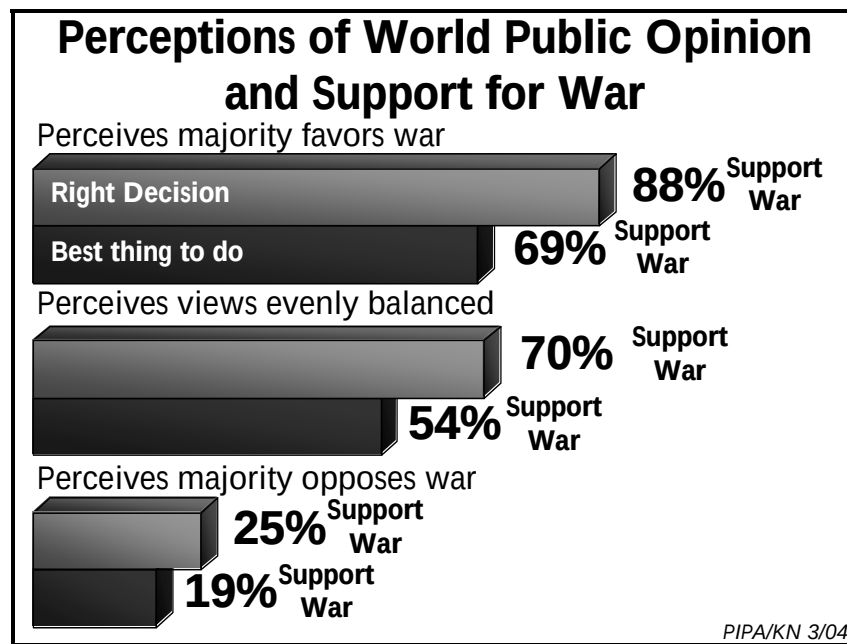
As discussed in Appendix A, numerous polls reveal that the majority of people in the world have disapproved of the US decision to go to war with Iraq. Most Americans continue to be unaware of this. Since June 2003, PIPA/KN has asked respondents to “think...about how all the people in the world feel about the US having gone to war with Iraq,” and say whether “the majority of people” favor or oppose “the US having gone to war,” or whether “views are evenly balanced.” In the current poll, a bare plurality of 41% said (correctly) that a world majority opposes the US having gone to war. A 59% majority was unaware of this, with 21% saying that a majority favored the US having gone to war, and 38% saying “views are evenly balanced.” This misperception has shown little change for the last nine months.



Perceptions of world public opinion’s majority opposition on Iraq is highly related to people’s evaluation of the decision to go to war and the likelihood they will vote for the president. In fact, in what may well be the most striking finding of this study, perceptions of world public opinion were more powerful predictors than beliefs about WMD or links to al Qaeda.

Among those who knew that world public opinion opposed the US going to war with Iraq, three-quarters (75%) said that going to war was the wrong decision. On the other

hand, among the group who thought world public opinion was about evenly balanced, 70% said going to war was the right decision—and among those who perceived world public opinion as favoring the war, 88% said going to war was the right decision.

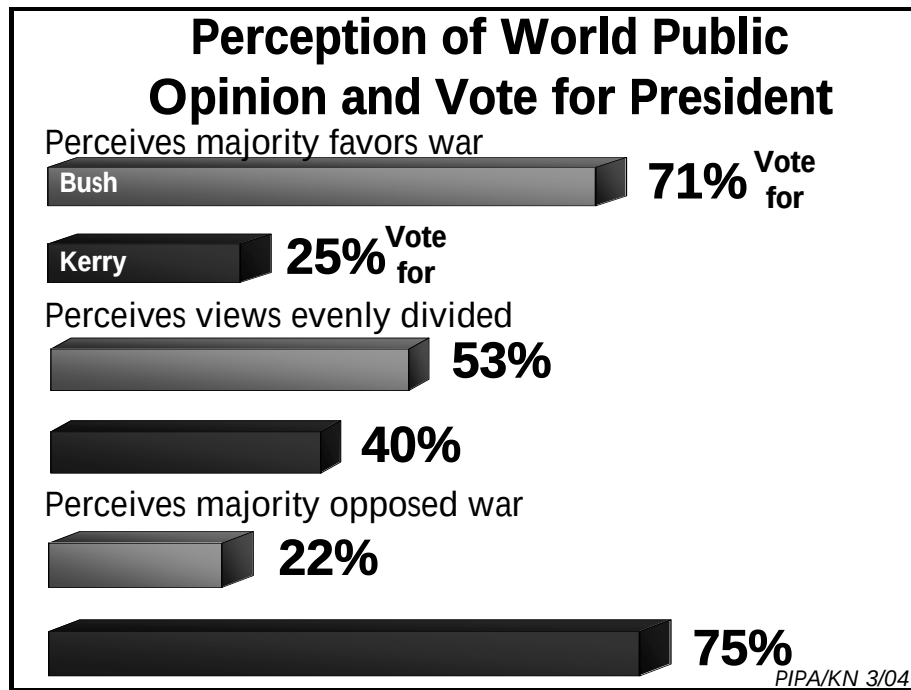


The correlation between perceptions of world public opinion and attitudes toward the war does not prove that such perceptions caused the attitude. Attitudes may also have an effect on perceptions, as people may bolster their attitudes by seeking or avoiding information that is consistent with attitudes. However, when multivariate regression analyses were performed (that included party identification, education and other variables) with attitudes toward the war as the dependent variable, perceptions of world public opinion were as powerful a predictor of attitudes (odds ratio: 12 times) as the reverse—as powerful as attitudes were in predicting perceptions, when perceptions were made the dependent variable. This strongly suggests that perceptions had at least some impact on attitudes. It also suggests that a change in perceptions of world public opinion could have an impact on attitudes about the decision to go to war.

Perceptions of world public opinion were also highly related to attitudes about President Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq. In the whole sample, 34% said "the way that President Bush has dealt with the situation in Iraq" increases the likelihood they will vote for him; 41% said it decreases the likelihood; and 24% said it makes no difference either way. Among those who knew that a majority of world public opinion opposes the war, 67% said Bush's handling of Iraq has decreased the likelihood of their voting for him. Among those who believed that world public opinion is positive, however, 57% say Bush's handling of Iraq increases the likelihood of their voting for him.

Perceptions and Voting

Those who perceive world public opinion as critical of the war are far less likely to say they will vote for the president in 2004. Among this group, only 22% said they intended to vote for President Bush's reelection (Kerry: 75%). Among those who thought world public opinion was about evenly balanced, Bush received support from a modest majority--53%, with 40% preferring Kerry. In the group that perceived world public opinion as favoring the war, 71% said they intended to vote for the president and only 25% said they would vote for Kerry.



Party preference does not explain the importance of perception of world public opinion as a factor in choosing to vote for President Bush. When both party preference, and the perception that world public opinion either supports the war or is evenly balanced, were included together in a regression (along with standard demographics), the perception of world public opinion remained highly significant. Those who did not perceive world public opinion as critical of the war were 8 times more likely to say they will vote for the president.

The correlation between perceptions of world public opinion and intention to vote for the president does not prove that such perceptions caused the intention to vote one way or the other. The commitment to a candidate may also have an effect on perceptions, as people may bolster their voting intentions by seeking or avoiding information that sustains consonant perceptions. However, when a multivariate regression analysis was performed (that included party identification, education and other variables), perceptions of world public opinion were as powerful predictors of the intention to vote as intention to vote was a predictor of perceptions. This strongly suggests that perceptions had at least some

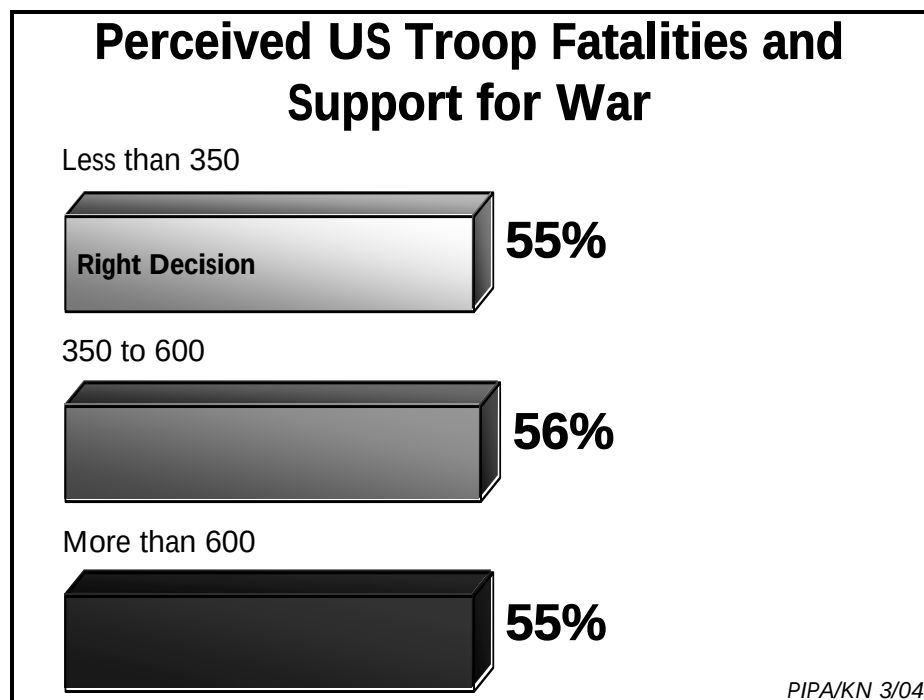
impact on voting. It also suggests that a change in perceptions of world public opinion could have an impact on voting.

3. Perceptions of US Military Fatalities

On average, Americans are fairly accurate in estimating the number of US troop fatalities to date, but there is substantial variation in these estimates. Contrary to common assumptions, those who perceive higher levels of US military fatalities are no more likely to oppose the war or to say they will vote against the President than those who perceive lower levels of fatalities.

When asked, “About how many American soldiers do you think have been killed by hostile fire in Iraq since the US went to war with Iraq in March 2003?” and asked to give a number, the median response was 500—a little higher than the correct number during the time of the poll (approximately 380), but a little lower than the number most often broadcast during this period, which included other deaths not from hostile fire (approximately 550). On the last occasion when PIPA/KN asked for such an estimate, respondents were also fairly accurate (see “Americans Reevaluate Going to War with Iraq,” November 2003).

Contrary to widespread assumptions about the public being highly reactive to US troop fatalities, those who perceived higher levels of US military fatalities were no more likely than others to oppose the war. When asked whether going to war in Iraq was the right decision, those who underestimated troop fatalities were no different than those who overestimated troop fatalities—and also no different than those whose estimates were approximately correct.



This is consistent with PIPA's findings in its November 2003 poll. In that study also, those who estimated higher US fatalities were no less likely than those with lower estimates to say that going to war was the right decision.

When asked in the November study about US troop levels in Iraq, a minority of only 15% wanted the US to withdraw its forces completely, and 24% wanted to decrease the number of troops. Overall, 60% wanted to maintain the number of troops in Iraq at their current level (33%) or increase them (27%). Those who had given higher casualty estimates, showed no pattern of difference in their answers on US troop levels.

Those who underestimated US troop fatalities were not more likely to say they would vote for the president than were those who overestimated fatalities. In a regression, estimated fatalities was included as a factor along with demographic variables and party identification, and proved to be insignificant.

4. Perceptions of Iraqi Civilian Fatalities

On average, Americans grossly underestimate the number of Iraqi civilian fatalities. Those who perceive higher numbers of Iraqi civilian fatalities were not significantly less likely to support the war but were somewhat less likely to intend to vote for the president.

In the current study, PIPA/KN asked respondents to estimate the number of Iraqi civilians that "you think were killed in the war in Iraq during March and April 2003." The median response of 800 dead grossly underestimated the number of Iraqi civilians killed. Various estimates have been made by different organizations, running from a low of 3,200 (Associated Press) to a high of 7,350 (Medact)—see Appendix B. In the poll, 74% gave estimates of 2,000 or less, and 41% gave estimates below 500. Only 16% of the sample gave estimates of 3,000 to 7,000—the range of fatalities that corresponds to researchers' estimates.

Perceptions about the number of civilian fatalities had no significant effect on support for war. Such perceptions, however, did have a modest effect on vote for president. Those with estimates that verged on being approximately correct (3,000 or more) were slightly more likely to support Kerry, at 58%, as compared to 49% for the general population. Support for Bush was slightly lower at 37%, as compared to 45%. There was no significant effect on vote for president, however, when civilian fatalities were included in a regression that included numerous other demographic variables including party identification.

Appendix A: World Public Opinion on the Iraq War

In world public opinion overall, majority opposition in world public opinion to the Iraq war appears largely stable, according to the latest data. (In 2003, polls by Gallup International and Pew Research Center asked questions in 56 countries that directly measured support or opposition to the Iraq war.)

The most recent results come from the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, which polled eight countries besides the US in February 2004—a follow-up to a poll of 18 countries in April-May 2003. The survey asked respondents how they felt about their country's decision to participate or not participate in "us[ing] military force against Iraq." Of countries that sent troops to Iraq, only Britain was polled in February 2004, and there support was sharply lower—down from 61% to 43%, with 47% now saying that Britain made the wrong decision. Among the countries that had not participated, in every case, a large to overwhelming majority still approved the decision. In France and Germany, majorities increased slightly (to the high 80s); in Jordan, Morocco and Russia majorities decreased slightly, but were all in the 80s; in Pakistan, the majority decreased from 73% to 68%. The same question was asked in Turkey for the first time, and found 72% approving the decision "to not use military force" (however, Turkey did allow the US to use bases).

Appendix B: Estimations of Iraqi Civilian Fatalities

The underestimation of Iraqi civilian fatalities may arise from the quality of information available to most Americans. In contrast to the statistics for US troop fatalities, which are maintained by the Department of Defense and given frequent and widespread publicity by the media, there are no official statistics on Iraqi civilian fatalities. There is no attempt by the US government to establish a figure for civilian deaths.¹

Instead, various estimates have been developed, largely by non-governmental organizations. In June 2003 the Associated Press gave an estimate of "at least 3,240 deaths" (based on a survey of 60 Iraqi hospitals). Other efforts have offered ranges. The Project on Defense Alternatives in October 2003 estimated a range of 3,200 to 4,300. Medact, the British affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, published a report in November 2003 that estimated the number of Iraqi civilian deaths during the invasion at between 5,708 and 7,356. A Human Rights Watch December 2003 report, which did not try to compile an overall statistic, found 678

¹ On April 14, 2003, five days after the fall of Baghdad, the Pentagon issued a brief statement to the effect that "the department 'has no plans' to determine the total civilian casualty toll" (Bradley Graham and Dan Morgan, "U.S. Has No Plans to Count Civilian Casualties," *Washington Post*, April 15, 2003, p. A13.

civilian war deaths in just three towns (Baghdad not among them) for which it examined hospital records. (The site iraqbodycount.net conducts an ongoing process of compiling media reports of incidents; thus its figures for civilian deaths in any given phase are under constant revision.)

METHODOLOGY

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:

www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.