

## Most Americans Believe Bush Administration is Still Saying Iraq had Major WMD Program

April 13, 2006

**4 in 10 Americans, 6 in 10 Republicans, Also Believe It Is True**



A new report in the Washington Post says that in 2003 members of the Bush administration continued to say that Iraq had a WMD program, citing mobile units purportedly for making biological weapons, even after they had received a report from on-site experts to the contrary. A poll conducted last month by WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that seven in ten Americans perceive the Bush administration as still saying that Iraq had a major WMD program or actual WMD. Not surprisingly 4 in 10 continue to believe that before the war Iraq did have at least a major WMD program, including 6 in 10 Republicans. Two thirds also perceive that the Bush administration is still saying that the Iraq provided substantial support to al Qaeda.

*President George W. Bush addresses his remarks to an audience at Freedom House, Wednesday, March 29, 2006 in Washington. (Eric Draper/White House Photo)*

### What Bush Administration Now Says About WMD in Pre-war Iraq

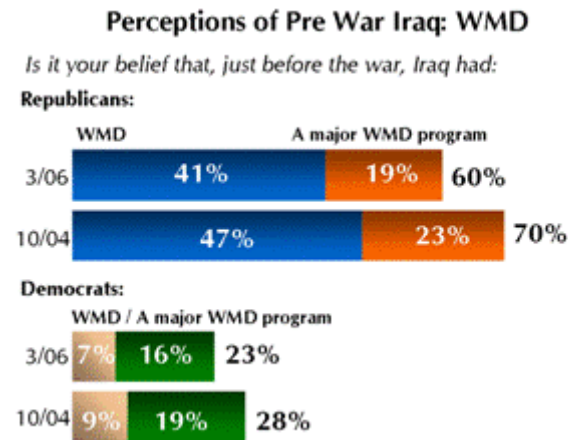
*Is it your impression that the Bush administration is currently saying that just before the war, Iraq had:*



WPO 3/2006 Asked their impression of what “the Bush administration is currently saying” about pre-war Iraq, 69 percent thought it is saying that Iraq had actual WMD (39%) or a major program for developing them (30%). This is a bipartisan view, with 74 percent of Republicans and 70 percent of Democrats perceiving this (independents 63%).

Asked about their own beliefs about what Iraq had before the war 41 percent said that Iraq had actual WMD (23%) or a major program for developing them (18%)--down from

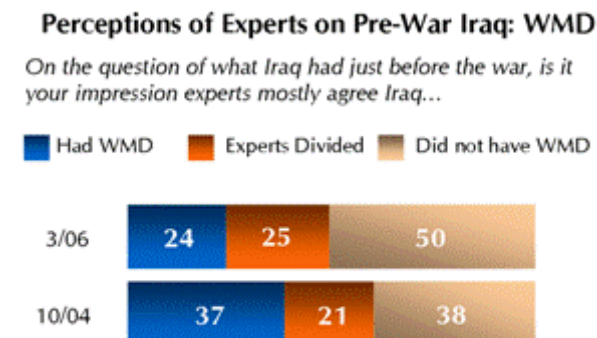
49 percent when asked this question in October 2004. At present 58 percent say that Iraq either “had some limited activities that could be used to help develop weapons of mass destruction, but not an active program” (42%) or no WMD activities at all (16%)—up from 49 percent in October 2004.



WFO 3/2006 Democrats and Republicans differ sharply in their beliefs. Sixty percent of Republicans continue to believe that Iraq had WMD (41%) or a major program for developing them (19%). Among Democrats, just 23 percent share these views, while 78 percent believe that Iraq had only some limited WMD-related activities but not a program (50%) or no WMD activities at all (28%).

The poll of 851 Americans was fielded by Knowledge Networks March 1-6. The margin of error was +/- 3.4 percent.

There has been a growing awareness in both parties that “experts mostly agree Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, though it may have had some programs for developing them” but still only half (50%) believe that this is the case—up from 38 percent in October 2004. The percentage who say that most experts believe that Iraq did have WMD is now 24 percent—down from 37 percent. Twenty-five percent now believe that experts are divided.



WFO/KN 3/06 Only a minority of Republicans (43%) believe that most experts agree Iraq did not have WMD, as compared to 62 percent of

Democrats. Republicans either believe that most experts agree that Iraq did have WMD (39%) or that views are evenly divided (18%).

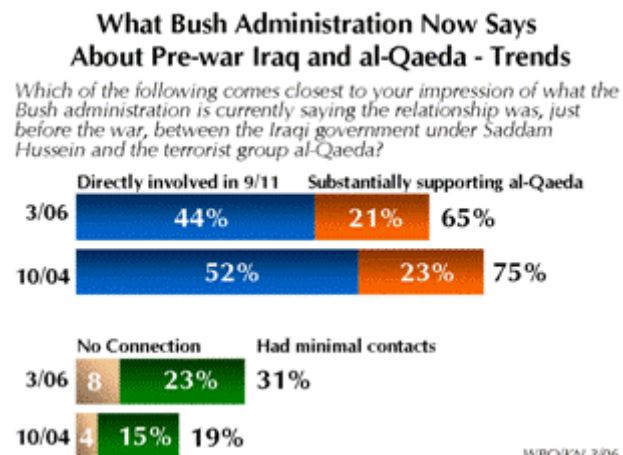
A substantial majority also believes that the UN and its agencies have been vindicated in their prewar insistence that there was no clear evidence that Iraq had a WMD program. Respondents were asked:

“As you may recall, before the war with Iraq the UN agency that was inspecting Iraq said that there was no clear evidence that Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction. Is it your impression that this UN agency has since been proven to be correct or incorrect about whether Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction?”

Fifty-seven percent said that the UN agency has been proven correct, while 40 percent said it has been proven incorrect.

However Republicans and Democrats differ on whether United Nations inspectors were eventually proven correct. Among Republicans, only 40 percent perceived that the UN inspectors were proven correct, with a majority (56%) believing that they were proven incorrect. Perceptions among Democrats were quite the opposite: a strong majority (73%) believes the UN inspectors were proven correct.

## Whether Iraq Supported al Qaeda

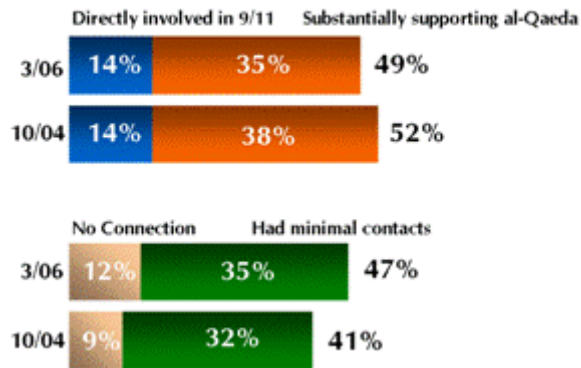


A majority of 65 percent also perceives the Bush administration as saying that Iraq was providing significant support to al-Qaeda, with 21 percent perceiving the administration as saying that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11th attacks and 44 percent saying that Iraq provided substantial support to al-Qaeda but was not directly involved in the 9/11 attacks. Here again, this is a bipartisan perception of the administration's statements, with 72 percent of Republicans and 62 percent of Democrats having one of these two perceptions (independents 58%).

Americans are divided as to what was actually the case. Forty-nine percent believe that “Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11th attacks” (14%) or that “Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th

attacks (35%), down 3 points from 52 percent in October 2004. Forty-seven percent of respondents say that “A few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials but Iraq did not provide substantial support to al-Qaeda” (35%) or that there was no connection at all (12%). This is up 6 points from 41 percent in October 2004.

#### Perceptions of Pre-War Iraq: Links to al-Qaeda



WPO/KN 3/06 Republicans and Democrats differ

sharply. Sixty-three percent of Republicans believe that Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, while the exact same number of Democrats—63 percent—believe, instead, that there were some minimal contacts between Iraq and al-Qaeda or that there was no connection at all.

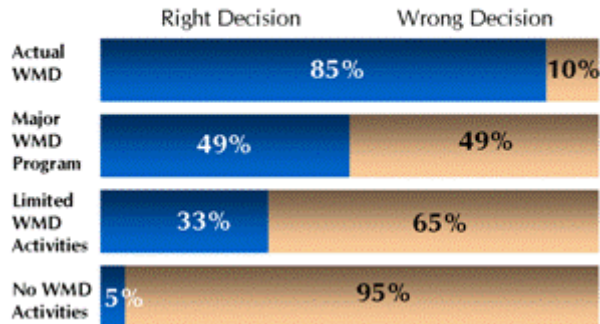
A majority of Republicans (62%) even believe that clear evidence has been found proving that Iraq was working closely with al-Qaeda, nearly the same percentage as in October 2004 (63%). Seventy-three percent of Democrats believe that such evidence has not been found, but, curiously, this is down from the 83 percent who held this position in October 2004.

A majority of Republicans (51%) still believe that experts mostly agree that al-Qaeda was providing substantial support to Iraq, while only about 1 in 4 Democrats holds that view (27%). Yet the number of Democrats who believe that most experts think Iraq was not providing substantial support to al-Qaeda is only 40 percent while another 32 percent believe that experts' views are evenly divided on this question.

#### Relation Between Beliefs About Pre-War Iraq and Views of War

### Perceptions re: WMD and Views of War

*Is it your belief that, just before the war, Iraq had:*



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Beliefs about prewar Iraq are highly related to attitudes about the decision to go to war. Among those who believe that Iraq had WMD prior to the war, 85 percent feel that the war was the right decision. Among people who believe that Iraq had no WMD activities, 95 percent feel that the war was the wrong decision. Among those who believe Iraq had limited WMD activities, but not an active program, 65 percent feel the war was the wrong decision.

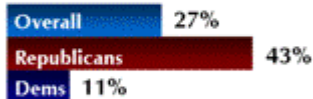
Similarly, among those who felt that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11th attacks, 62 percent said the war was the right decision as did 64 percent of those who believe Iraq gave support to al-Qaeda; whereas, of those who felt that there was no connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda a large majority (85%) felt the war was the wrong decision, as did 72 percent of those who believe that Iraq had only limited contacts with al-Qaeda.

### Should the US Have Gone to War in Either Case?

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*If, before the war, US intelligence services had concluded that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and was not providing substantial support to al Qaeda, do you think the US:*

**Should still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons**



**Should not have gone to war with Iraq**



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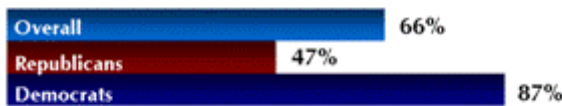
Consistent with the finding that continuing approval of the decision to go to war is closely related to the belief that Iraq had a WMD program or supported al-Qaeda, a large bipartisan majority says that if Iraq did not have WMD or was not providing support to al-Qaeda, then the US should not have gone to war.

Asked, “If, before the war, US intelligence services had concluded that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and was not providing substantial support to al-Qaeda,” a clear majority of 71 percent said that the US should not have gone to war, while just 27 percent said that the US should still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons.” This is a bipartisan majority. Fifty-three percent of Republicans and 87 percent of Democrats think that in this case, the US should not have gone to war.

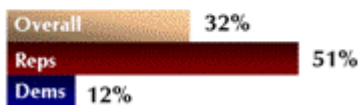
## Would the Bush Administration Have Gone to War in Either Case

**Would Bush Have Gone to War with Iraq in Either Case?**  
*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 support to al Qaeda, do you think*

He would still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons



He would not have gone to war with Iraq



WPO/KN 3/06 A large majority believes that President

Bush, unlike most Americans, was determined to go to war with Iraq independent of whether Iraq had WMD or was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda.

Asked what the President would have done “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,” 66 percent said that “he would still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons.”

This belief was held by an overwhelming majority of Democrats (87%), but only 47 percent of Republicans. A bare majority of Republicans (51%) said that with this information Bush would not have gone to war.

## Did the Bush Administration Mislead the Public?

A modest majority appears to perceive that the President was so intent on doing so that he did not give the country the most accurate information he had and thus misled people. However, only one in three go so far as to say that the President clearly knew that the assumptions that were the stated basis for going to war were incorrect. Three-quarters believe that the intelligence the Bush administration received concluded that Iraq was supporting al-Qaeda. At the same time, two out of three believe that some key people in the intelligence community knew that the President was acting on incorrect assumptions.

A modest majority (53%) now believe that before the war, President Bush “deliberately misled people to make the case for war with Iraq,” up from 49 percent in August 2004.

Forty-six percent say that he “gave the country the most accurate information he had” (down slightly from 48%).

However, only one-third (34%) give the President the harshest judgment that he “decided to go to war on the basis of assumptions about Iraq that were ... incorrect, and the President knew they were incorrect” (up 10 points from 2004). The largest percentage (39%) continues to say that he acted on assumptions that were “incorrect, but the President believed they were correct” though this number is down 10 points from 2004. A steady one in four says the President’s assumptions were correct. Overall, 73 percent said that the President acted on incorrect assumptions.

At the same time, a large majority believes that some key people in the intelligence community knew that the assumptions that were prompting the war were incorrect. The 73 percent who said that the assumptions were incorrect were then asked: “Do you think that some key people in US intelligence agencies knew these assumptions were incorrect or do you think none of the key people knew?” Sixty-four percent (of the total sample) said that they thought that some key people knew, while 9 percent (of the total sample) said that they thought no one knew.

It is of course interesting that while 73 percent say that the President acted on incorrect assumptions, a large number (62%) believe in one or both of the two major assumptions for the war (Iraqi WMD or support for al-Qaeda). However, at the same time, a large majority is aware that at least one of these two assumptions was wrong—72 percent, about as many as answered that the President acted on incorrect assumptions.