U.S. Public Impatient With Iraq Reconstruction

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Seven in 10 Now Say UN Should Take Lead

[Questionnaire](#)

A new PIPA-Knowledge Networks poll finds that the public is impatient with the process of Iraq reconstruction. Sixty percent said that the process of creating an Iraqi government is going too slowly (about right 31%, too fast 5%). Even the more sensitive process of "developing an Iraqi police force and army to take over the job of maintaining security in Iraq" got an identical response—seen as going too slowly by 60 percent, and only 5 percent said it was going too fast (about right 31%).

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, commented, "Impatience with the process of Iraq reconstruction seems to be creating increasingly robust support for putting the operation under the United Nations." A very strong 71 percent said the United Nations should "take the lead to work with Iraqis to write a new constitution and build a new democratic government"—up from 64 percent in June and 50 percent in April. Just 26 percent, in the current poll, say the United States should take the lead. When presented a summary of proposals offered by a number of governments to put the reconstruction effort under the U.N., an overwhelming 77 percent said the United States should agree to such a plan. The question asked, "Suppose some other countries would be willing to contribute more money and troops if the effort to reconstruct Iraq and build a new government were put under the control of the U.N., while the United States would continue to have command over the military forces there."

The majority is still committed to building democracy in Iraq. Only 31 percent want the United States to commit to withdraw from Iraq by a pre-established date, while 66 percent think the United States should commit itself to first making sure Iraq is a stable democracy. Asked when the United States should remove its troops from Iraq, 61 percent

insisted on not withdrawing until a government has been elected, with 54 percent also insisting that laws protecting human rights first be in place. Twenty-six percent said the United States should withdraw "immediately," and only 9 percent said "when a government is established that is friendly to the United States, but there have not been elections." Still, support for staying the course is down 14 points from April when, in response to a similar question 78 percent insisted on not withdrawing until a government had been elected (72% not until laws protecting human rights are in place).

Overwhelming majorities say they are ready to accept the election of an unfriendly or fundamentalist government. Seventy-eight percent agreed that "At some point the United States will need to let the Iraqi people decide who should lead their government, even if they elect a leader who is unfriendly to the U.S.," and 71 percent said the same, "even if they elect an Islamic religious leader who wants to institute Islamic law."

However, there is little support for a broader push for democracy across the Middle East, as President Bush recently proposed in a recent major address. Only 41 percent supported the idea of putting "greater pressure on countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to become more democratic." Only 34 percent agreed with the more forceful idea that "The United States has the right and even the responsibility to overthrow dictatorships and help their people build a democracy," while 59 percent disagreed.

There is also little optimism that U.S. efforts in Iraq are likely to improve the prospects for democracy in the region. Asked how what the United States is doing in Iraq "will affect the likelihood that other countries in the Middle East will become more democratic," only 43 percent said that it would increase the likelihood of this, while 46 percent said it would have no effect and 9 percent said that it would decrease it.

A growing majority says that the war with Iraq has not reduced the threat of terrorism or helped stabilize the Middle East. An overwhelming 70 percent now disagree that "The threat of terrorism has been significantly reduced by the war"—up from 47 percent when Gallup International asked this question in April. Fifty-six percent disagreed that "The war will result in greater peace and stability in the Middle East"—up from 32 percent in April.

The public overwhelmingly believes that pursuing Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda should be the central front in the war on terrorism, rather than dealing with the situation in Iraq, as some administration figures have claimed. Asked, "What do you think is the more important thing for the United States to do as part of the war on terrorism?" just 21 percent said "to capture Saddam Hussein and establish a democracy in Iraq," while 75 percent said "to capture Osama bin Laden and break up the al-Qaeda terrorist group."

For the first time since June, there has been a marked drop in the percentage incorrectly believing that the United States has "found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization." While the percentage having this misperception has averaged 50 percent in four different polls since June, in the current poll the percentage dropped to 43 percent. When asked about the current

situation, though, an overwhelming 81 percent does think that al-Qaeda has been involved in the recent attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 712 respondents, November 21-30. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.7%.

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. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.