

# **THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL**

## **THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

--Media Release--

### **Americans Continue to Believe Iraq Supported Al Qaeda, Had WMD**

#### **Few Perceive Experts as Saying Contrary**

#### **Shifts in Perceptions Could Influence Vote for President**

#### **Perceptions of US Troop Fatalities Having Little Impact on Support for War**

#### **Perceptions of World Public Opinion Appear Highly Influential**

For Release: 9:00 AM, Thursday, April 22

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College Park, MD: According to a new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll, a majority of Americans (57%) continue to believe that before the war Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda, including 20% who believe that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11 attacks. Forty-five percent believe that evidence that Iraq was supporting al Qaeda has been found. Sixty percent believe that just before the war Iraq either had weapons of mass destruction (38%) or a major program for developing them (22%).

Despite statements by Richard Clarke, David Kay, Hans Blix and others, few Americans perceive most experts as saying the contrary. Only 15% said they are hearing "experts mostly agree Iraq was not providing substantial support to al Qaeda," while 82% either said that "experts mostly agree Iraq was providing substantial support" (47%) or "experts are evenly divided on the question" (35%). Only 34% said they thought most experts believe Iraq did not have WMD, while 65% said most experts say Iraq did have them (30%) or that experts are divided on the question (35%).

Not surprisingly, perceptions of what experts are saying are highly correlated with beliefs about prewar Iraq, which in turn are highly correlated with support for the decision to go to war.

Perhaps most relevant politically, perceptions of what the experts are saying are also highly correlated with intentions to vote for the President in the upcoming election. 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

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experts as saying that Iraq did not have WMD, 23% said they would vote for Bush and 74% for Kerry.

Among those who perceived experts as saying that Iraq had supported 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.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, comments: “These correlations do not establish what is causal. However, multivariate regression analyses suggest that changes in perceptions of what experts are saying could have some impact on the public’s beliefs, attitudes about the war, and even voting in the presidential election.”

Beliefs about prewar Iraq appear to be also sustained by perceptions of claims by the Bush administration. Fifty-six percent said it was their impression that the Bush administration is claiming the US has found clear evidence that Saddam Hussein was working closely with al Qaeda, and 38% perceived the administration saying the US has found clear evidence that just before the war, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

Interestingly, varying perceptions of US troop fatalities does not appear to have much impact. Asked to estimate the number of US troop fatalities in Iraq, the median estimate was fairly accurate at 500. However, estimates varied widely, providing the opportunity to assess attitudes among those with high estimates as compared to those with low estimates. In fact, there were no significant differences between these groups when it came to support for the war or intention to vote for the President.

On the other hand, a factor that did appear to be strikingly influential was perceptions of world public opinion on the war with Iraq. Despite polling showing that the majority of world public opinion is opposed to the US war with Iraq, only 41% were aware that this is the case. A 59% majority was unaware of this, with 21% saying that a majority of world public opinion favored the US having gone to war, and 38% saying “views are evenly balanced.”

Among those who knew that world public opinion opposed the US going to war with Iraq, only 25% thought that going to war was the right decision. Among the group that 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 the right decision.

Steven Kull comments, “Americans have always been quite concerned about the international legitimacy of using military force, as during the run-up to the war when they very much wanted UN approval. It may be that when Americans are aware that world public opinion is critical this weakens their perception of the international legitimacy of

the decision to go to war, brings back memories of the Vietnam experience and softens support for the decision to go to war.”

Perceptions of world public opinion are also related to voting intentions. Among those who are aware that world public opinion is critical of the war, 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.

Steven Kull comments, “Here too these correlations do not establish what is causal. However multivariate regression analyses suggest that changes in perceptions of world public opinion could have some impact on voting behavior in the presidential election.”

The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,311 respondents from March 16-22. 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. A full report and the questionnaire can be found at [www.pipa.org](http://www.pipa.org).

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](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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