

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## SWING VOTERS ON IRAQ AND PRESIDENT BUSH

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**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge  
NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**Knowledge Networks** is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

**The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)**, at the University of Maryland's School for Public Affairs, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

**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.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis and Phil Warf designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the poll.

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The search of existing poll data was done with the aid of the Roper POLL database.

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## INTRODUCTION

An extensive poll of US public opinion on the situation in Iraq was conducted by PIPA/Knowledge Networks July 11-20 with a sample of 1,066 Americans. The analysis of the general public was released on July 23 (see [http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/7\\_24\\_ir\\_aqreport.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/7_24_ir_aqreport.pdf)).

Taking the analysis a step further this report seeks to analyze the politically relevant swing voters that are so critical to electoral outcomes. Swing voters were defined as respondents who said they were extremely confident that they would vote in the upcoming election and identified themselves as independents.

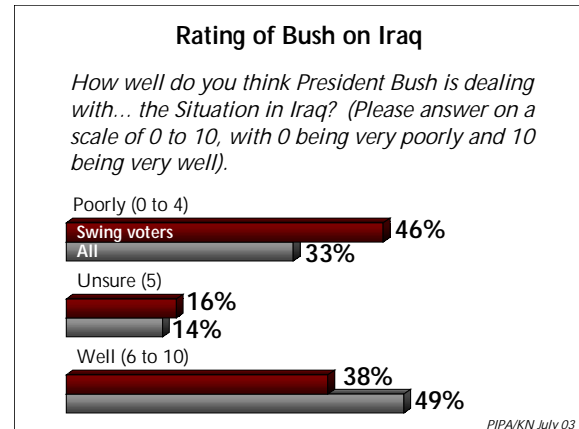
Because this group constituted a small portion of the sample (12-13%), analyses were done of polls conducted June 18-25 as well as July 11-20. The variances between the swing voters and the general public were highly consistent across the two months, suggesting that they were not idiosyncratic to the particular samples. The discussion below focuses on the July data, except where noted.

Overall swing voters showed some highly distinctive characteristics that differentiated them from the general public sample.

### Swing Voters More Critical of Bush on Iraq

Overall swing voters were more critical of President Bush's handling of Iraq than the general population. While the general public leans toward giving him positive ratings overall (49% positive, 33% negative) swing voters lean toward giving him negative ratings (38% positive, 46% negative). On a 0-10 scale the general public gave him a slightly positive mean score of 5.38, while swing voters gave him a mean score of 4.75.

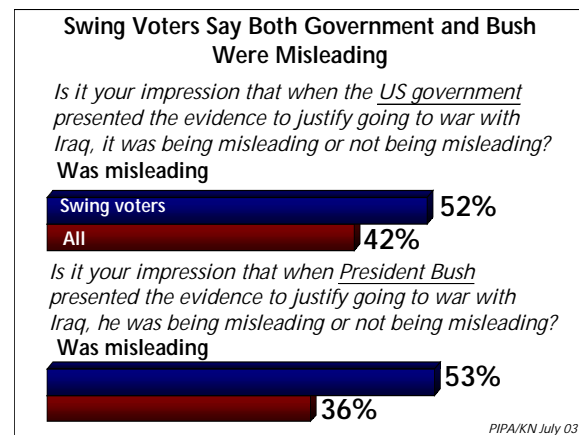
While a clear majority of the general public (63%) said that the administration had underestimated the difficulties it would face in Iraq, an overwhelming majority (82%) of the swing voters felt this way.



Swing voters were more emphatic in rejecting the Bush administration's decision to put the military in charge of all relief and reconstruction efforts. Seventy-one percent of swing voters, as compared to 59% of the general public, said "the UN and international aid organizations should be in charge of relief and reconstruction." Swing voters were also more supportive of the UN taking the lead in developing a new constitution and in economic reconstruction, but this difference was only significant in June.

### Majority Says President Was Misleading

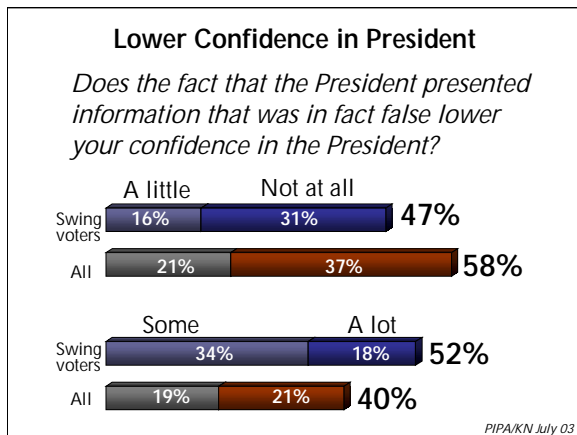
Among swing voters 52% said the US government was being misleading and just as many—53%—said President Bush was being misleading when they "presented the evidence to justify going to war with Iraq." Among the



general public 42% said the US government was being misleading and only 36% said this was true of President Bush.

Swing voters were far more likely to say that the president was knowingly presenting false evidence when he disclosed that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from an African country. While 27% of the general public said he was knowingly presenting false evidence 43% of the swing voters felt that way. In another question 60% of swing voters said the president either “knowingly presented false information” (20%) or “assumed that something like this was true, so he was not careful about the evidence he used to support his case” (40%). Among the general public only 48% felt this way, though this difference was not statistically significant.

A majority of swing voters (52%) said that “the fact that the president presented information that was in fact false” lowered their confidence in the president some (34%) or a lot (18%). Only 40% of the general public felt this way.

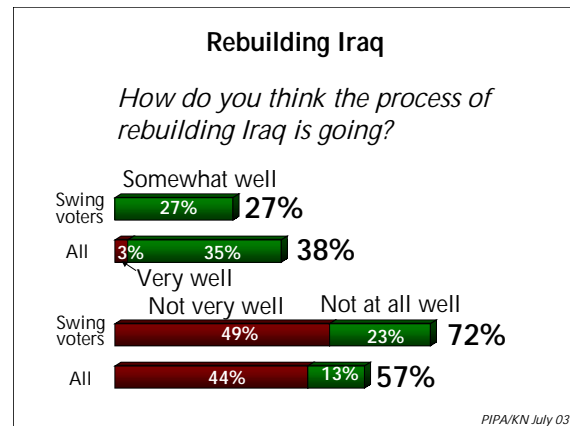


**Swing Voters Give Iraq Operation Low Marks, But Do Not Favor Withdrawal**

Asked, “How do you think the process of rebuilding Iraq is going” 72% of swing voters said that the operation is going not very well (49%) or not at all well (23%). This is sharply more negative than the 57% of the general public who said that the operation is going not very well (44%) or not at all well (13%). In June 68% of swing voters felt this way, as did 53% of the general public.

Swing voters are not, however, any more eager to withdraw US troops. In fact, a larger percentage says that the US has, “the

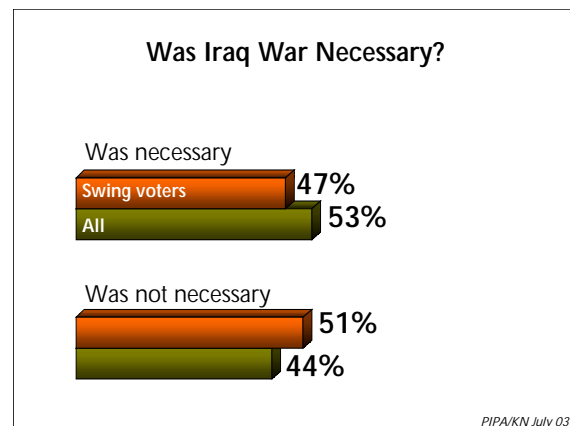
responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government,”- 82% of swing voters, 72% of general public.



In June 79% of swing voters said it would be “unwise and immoral” for the US to pull out of Iraq now as compared to 65% of the general public.

**Question Necessity of War**

Unlike the general public, a slight majority of swing voters say that the war with Iraq was not necessary. In one question 47% said the war was necessary while 51% said it was not necessary. Among the general public 53% said it was necessary, while 44% said it was not necessary.



In another question that placed the concern that “Iraq might develop weapons of mass destruction” front and center, only 48% said that the war was necessary, while 51% said, “The threat could have been contained by keeping some military forces in the region and having

UN inspectors in Iraq.” Among the general public, in response to this question 59% said the war was necessary, while 36% said it could have been contained.

Asked whether going to war was the right decision, swing voters are 6-9% less supportive. Answering on a scale of -5 to +5, 50% of swing voters said it was the right decision while 38% said it was the wrong decision. Among the general public 56% said it was the right decision and 28% the wrong decision. Given just two response options 54% of swing voters said it was the right decision and 41% the wrong decision, as compared to responses of 63% and 32% among the general public.

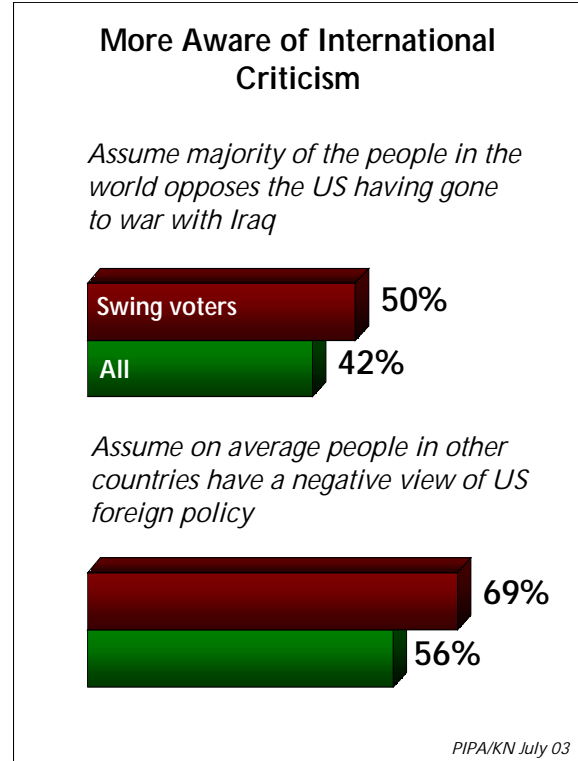
**Less Likely to Misperceive**

Some of these differences in attitude about the war may be affected by a lower tendency among swing voters to incorrectly believe that the US has found weapons of mass destruction or evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

Among the general public 21% believe that WMD have been found while just 14% of swing voters believe this. Among the general public 45% believe that evidence of Iraq’s links to al-Qaeda have been found, while just 36% of swing voters believe this.

**More Aware of International Criticism**

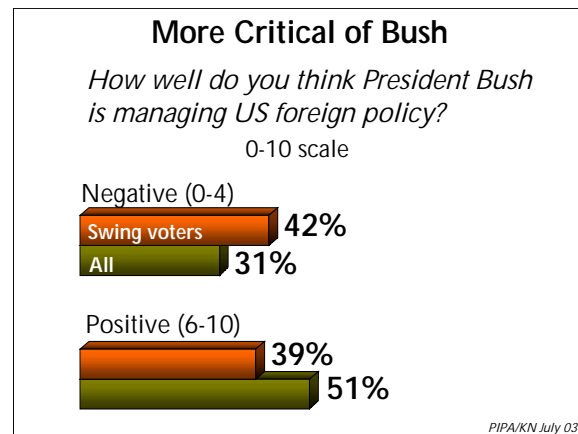
Another factor that may contribute to swing voters lower tendency to approve of the war is that swing voters appear to be more aware of opposition to war in publics around the world. Among swing voters 50% assumed that the majority of the people in the world oppose the US going to war with Iraq (54% in June) while just 42% of the general public made this assumption. Sixty-nine percent of swing voters assumed that on average people in other countries have a negative view of US foreign policy in general and 57% assumed this about Europeans. Among the general public 56% made this assumption about the world public opinion overall and 46% about Europeans.



**More Critical of Bush Overall**

Swing voters are overall more critical of Bush’s foreign policy and, although they divide evenly on whether they voted for Bush or Gore in 2000, they say they are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate in the next election.

Asked to evaluate the president’s management of US foreign policy in general, more swing voters gave a negative evaluation (42%) than a positive one (39%). Among the general



public positive evaluations (51%) outweighed negative ones (31%).

On his dealing with the Israel-Palestinian conflict, among swing voters positive and negative evaluations were equal (42%), while among the general public the positive ones were dominant (43% to 33%).

In his dealing with the situation in Iran, swing voters leaned heavily in the negative direction (30% positive, 50% negative), while the general public leaned in the positive direction (38% positive, 35% negative).

As mentioned, though the swing voters poll divide evenly on whether they voted for Bush or Gore in 2000, they say they are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate in 2004. Asked if the election were held today 37% say they would vote for Bush and 41% for a Democratic candidate. Asked how they think they will probably vote in 2004, 32% say they will vote for Bush and 57% a Democratic candidate.

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