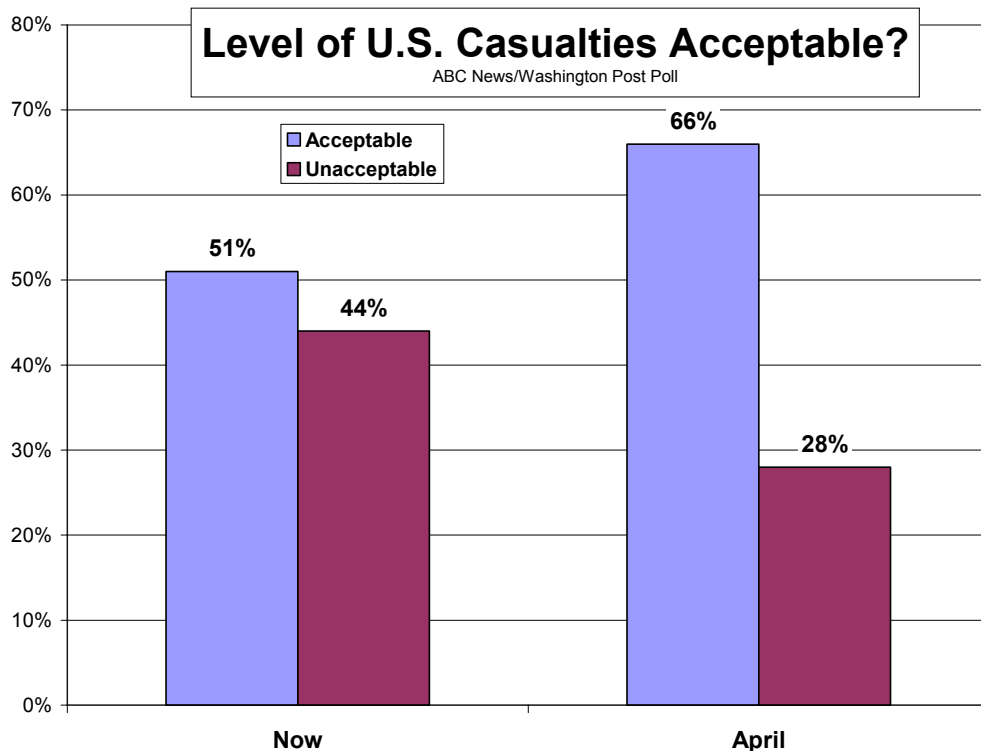


Public Disquiet Grows With Casualties in Iraq

The number of Americans who say the United States is sustaining an "unacceptable" level of military casualties in Iraq has grown sharply, a trend that could signal limited patience for a long and violent occupation.

While 51 percent of Americans call the current level of U.S. casualties "acceptable," that's down from 66 percent in early April, as Baghdad fell with little organized resistance. And the number calling casualties "unacceptable" has jumped by 16 points, to 44 percent.

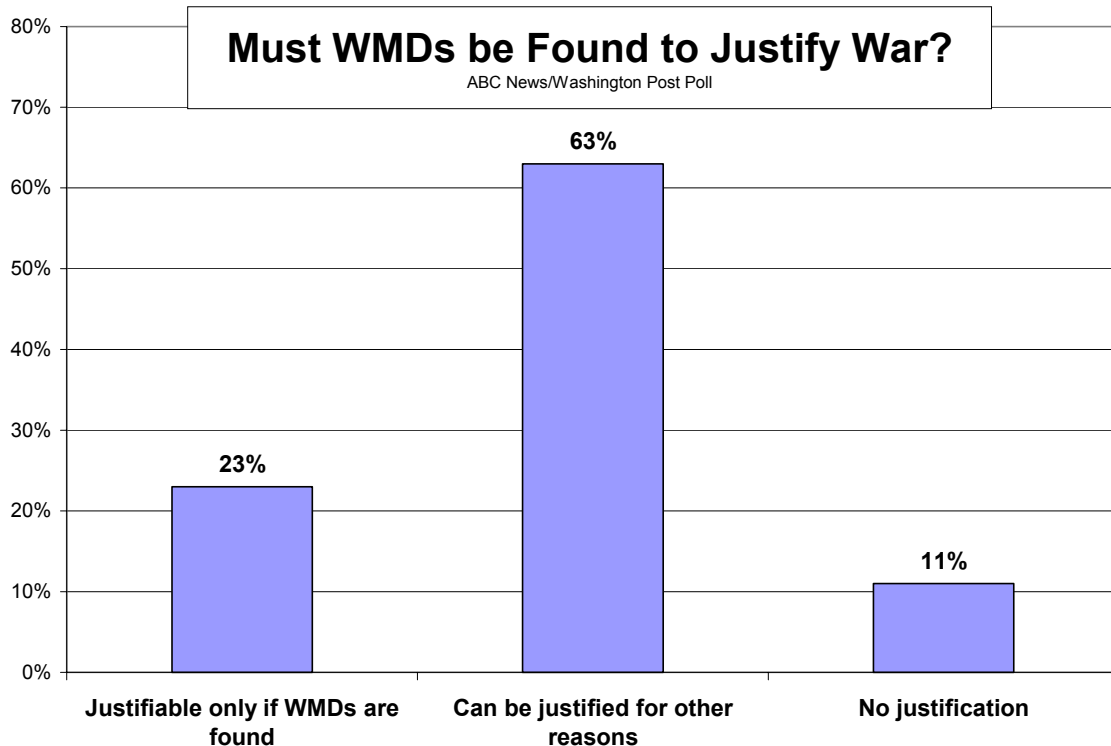


While a yellow flag for policymakers, rising concern about casualties hasn't greatly altered basic support for administration policy. Considering its costs versus benefits, 64 percent say the war was worth fighting, down modestly from 70 percent at the end of April. And George W. Bush gets 67 percent approval for handling Iraq – down from 75 percent when the main fighting ended, but still a sizable majority.

Bush's overall job approval rating stands at 68 percent, compared to 71 percent in late April. That, too, remains very high, particularly in a time of economic discomfort. It reflects huge and long-running approval of Bush's response to terrorism: In the seven months up to Sept. 11, 2001, he averaged 58 percent approval. In the 21 months since, he's averaged 73 percent.

WMDs – In a similar vein, a majority continues to give the administration a pass on its so-far fruitless effort to locate Iraq's alleged store of chemical or biological weapons. Sixty-three percent say the United States can justify the war for other reasons, even if it doesn't find weapons of mass destruction. That's slipped by six points since early April.

That the majority doesn't demand hard evidence of WMDs shouldn't be a surprise; most Americans long have desired Saddam Hussein's removal from power for broader reasons – as a suspected supporter of terrorism, source of regional instability and all-around despot. Even years before Sept. 11, 2001, majorities favored his forcible ouster.



BOG? – The question, with Saddam gone from power, is how long Americans are willing to stay in Iraq – and their response if the going stays rough, or gets rougher.

Clearly there's disquiet about a long stay: Seventy-two percent are concerned about the possibility the United States will get bogged down in a long and costly peacekeeping mission in Iraq. Yet this has not grown since the end of April – and neither has the much-smaller number, 32 percent, who're "very concerned" about it.

As long has been the case with this war, many of these views are highly partisan – the level of concern is largely premised on faith in, or suspicion of, the administration. Compared to Republicans, Democrats are 46 points more likely to say the war was not worth fighting, 39 points more likely to call the level of casualties in Iraq unacceptable, 34 points more apt to be very concerned about getting bogged down there and 29 points less apt to say the war can be justified without finding WMDs (see next table).

IRAN – There's a similar partisan division on the possibility of U.S. military action against Iraq's neighbor, Iran. Fifty-six percent of Americans would favor striking Iran to prevent it from developing nuclear arms; that includes 72 percent of Republicans, compared to 45 percent of Democrats.

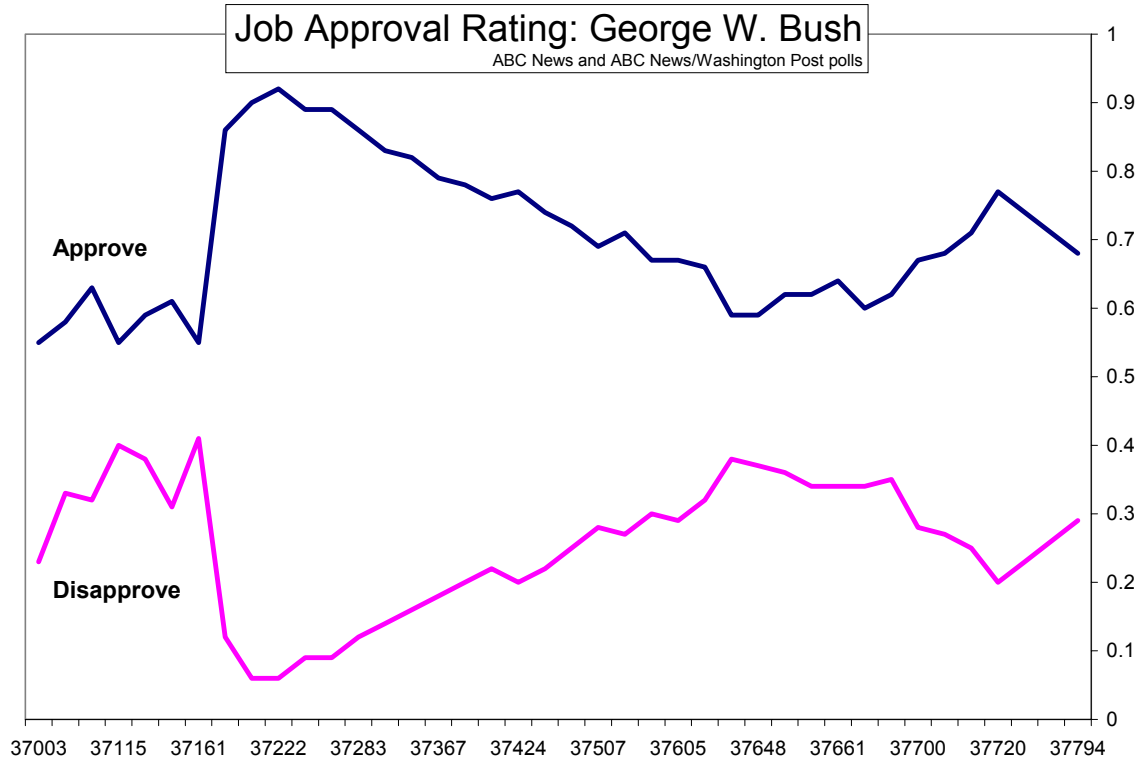
	All	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Dem-Rep gap
War not worth fighting	33%	56	39	10	46 points
Casualties "unacceptable"	44	60	53	21	39
Bogged down: "very" concerned	32	51	31	17	34
War can be justified w/out WMDs	63	48	62	77	29
Support striking Iran	56	45	47	72	27

GROUPS – It's worth noting that independents – the ultimate swing group in political support – are more closely aligned with Democrats than with Republicans in their views on the level of casualties in Iraq and on the notion of striking Iran.

There's also a striking difference between men and women in their view of the level of casualties: Sixty percent of men call it acceptable, while just 42 percent of women agree. Democratic women are 11 points less likely than Democratic men to call the level of casualties acceptable, and there's a similar gap between Republican men and women.

And there are differences by age: Acceptance of casualties is highest among younger adults, and lowest among the oldest. Older Americans also are substantially less apt than others to say the United States can justify the war without finding weapons of mass destruction (but 52 percent do hold that view.)

Many of these divisions also show up in overall approval of Bush's job performance. It's huge – 95 percent – among Republicans, and less than half that – 42 percent – among Democrats. (A third of Democrats disapprove “strongly” of Bush.) His approval rating is much lower among nonwhites than among whites. And it's lower among older Americans – a possible impetus for his push for expanded prescription drug benefits for the elderly.



Finally, this poll included a knowledge question asking respondents whether, based on what they know or have heard, they believe Iraq used biological or chemical weapons against U.S. troops during the war earlier this year; 24 percent said yes. That could reflect any number of factors – erroneous information, bad guesses, an inclination to expect the worst from Iraq, and others. But probably more than anything, it underscores the limitations of opinion polls as a tool to measure knowledge.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone June 18-22, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,024 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html

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Results follow:

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
6/22/03	68	45	23	29	18	11	4
4/30/03	71	50	22	26	9	17	3
4/16/03	74	52	22	23	14	9	3
4/9/03	77	58	19	20	14	6	4
4/3/03	71	54	16	25	19	7	4
3/23/03	68	NA	NA	27	NA	NA	4
3/20/03	67	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	5
3/2/03	62	38	23	35	22	13	4
2/23/03	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6
2/9/03	64	42	21	34	20	14	3
2/1/03	62	41	21	34	22	13	4
1/28/03	62	43	19	36	23	13	2
1/27/03	59	39	21	37	22	15	4
1/20/03	59	36	23	38	22	16	2
12/15/02	66	37	28	32	20	12	2
11/4/02 LV	67	45	23	31	20	12	1
11/3/02 LV	67	45	22	32	20	12	1
11/2/02 LV	67	47	20	32	23	9	1
10/27/02 All	67	39	28	29	16	13	4
10/27/02 LV	68	47	21	30	16	14	3
9/26/02	67	42	25	30	18	12	3
9/8/02	71	42	28	27	15	12	3
7/28/02	69	39	31	28	14	14	3
7/15/02	72	42	31	25	13	12	2
6/17/02	74	42	32	22	13	9	4
6/9/02	77	41	36	20	11	9	3
5/19/02	76	48	28	22	13	8	3
4/21/02	78	47	31	20	10	9	2
3/28/02	79	49	30	18	10	8	3
3/10/02	82	52	30	16	7	9	2
1/27/02	83	56	27	14	7	7	3
12/19/01	86	64	22	12	6	6	2
11/27/01	89	69	21	9	5	4	1
11/6/01	89	65	24	9	4	5	2
10/9/01	92	76	16	6	3	3	1
9/27/01	90	70	20	6	3	3	4
9/13/01	86	63	23	12	6	5	2
9/9/01	55	26	29	41	22	20	3
8/12/01	61	28	33	31	17	14	8
7/30/01	59	28	30	38	22	17	3
6/3/01	55	27	28	40	22	18	6
4/22/01	63	33	30	32	16	16	5
3/25/01	58	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	8
2/25/01	55	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	22

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/22/03	67	30	2
4/30/03	75	22	2

Compare to: The situation with Iraq and Saddam Hussein

3/27/03	69	26	5
3/23/03	71	26	3
3/20/03	65	29	5
3/17/03	64	29	7
3/9/03	55	38	8
2/23/03	55	39	6
2/9/03	61	37	2

2/5/03	61	32	7
2/1/03	61	35	3
1/28/03	58	38	4
1/27/03	57	40	3
1/20/03	50	46	4
12/15/02	58	37	5
11/4/02 LV	56	40	4
11/3/02 LV	57	40	4
11/2/02 LV	56	41	3
10/27/02	57	38	5
9/26/02	58	39	3
9/14/02	65	31	4
8/29/02	52	36	12

3. All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?

	Worth fighting	Not worth fighting	No opinion
6/22/03	64	33	3
4/30/03	70	27	4
Gulf War:			
2/2/92*	66	32	2
7/28/91	67	30	3
6/2/91	70	26	3
3/4/91	86	13	1

*2/2/92 and previous: "the Persian Gulf war; 3/4/91: "this war"

4. Again thinking about the goals versus the costs of the war, so far in your opinion has there been an acceptable or unacceptable number of U.S. military casualties in Iraq?

	Acceptable	Unacceptable	No opinion
6/22/03	51	44	5
4/9/03	66	28	6
4/3/03	62	32	5
3/27/03	58	34	9

5. How do you feel about the possibility that the United States will get bogged down in a long and costly peacekeeping mission in Iraq - would you say you're very concerned about that, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not concerned at all?

	-----Concerned-----			-----Not concerned-----			Already has (vol.)	No op.
	NET	Very	Smwt.	NET	Not too	At all		
6/22/03	72	32	41	26	16	10	*	1
4/30/03	72	34	39	27	19	9	NA	*
4/16/03	73	31	42	26	19	7	NA	1
4/9/03	62	24	39	35	24	11	NA	3

6. Do you think the United States can justify this war only if it finds weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical or biological weapons, in Iraq; or do you think the United States can justify this war for other reasons, even if it does not find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?

	Justify only if find WMD	Justify even if no WMD	Neither/No justification	No opinion
6/22/03	23	63	11	3

4/3/03	22	69	6	3
3/20/03	35	53	7	6

7. Based on what you know or have heard, do you believe that the United States did or did not use chemical or biological weapons against Iraqi troops during the war earlier this year?

	Did	Did not	No opinion
6/22/03	6	84	10

8. Based on what you know or have heard, do you believe that Iraq did or did not use chemical or biological weapons against U.S. troops during the war earlier this year?

	Did	Did not	No opinion
6/22/03	24	62	14

9. Thinking about another country in the region, would you support or oppose the United States taking military action against Iran to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
6/22/03	56	38	6

END