

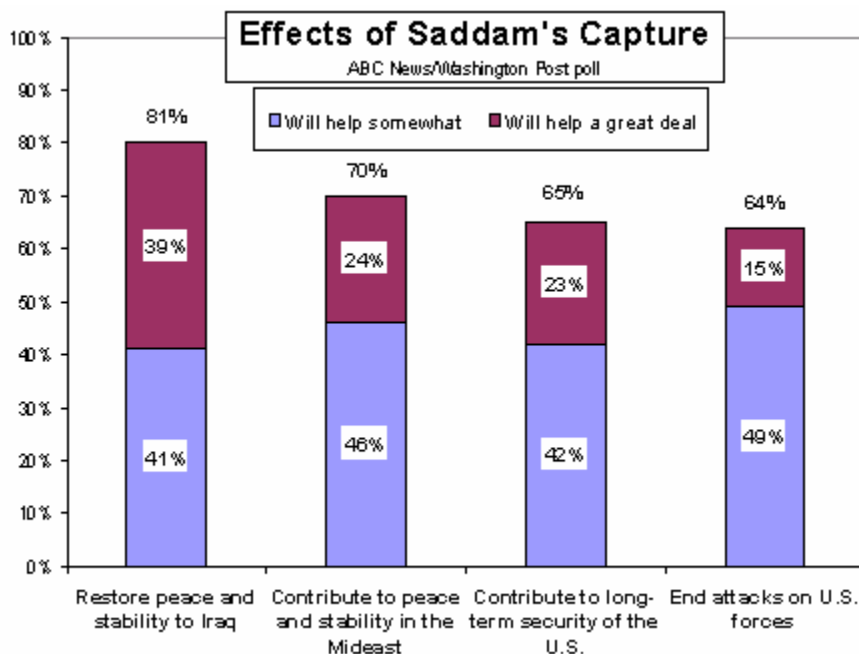
A Sober Response to Saddam's Capture; Most Say Difficult Challenges Remain

Sober realism tempers higher hopes in the American public's reaction to the capture of Saddam Hussein. While most say it should help bring greater security to Iraq and the U.S. forces there, precious few say it marks an end to the difficulties the United States faces.

Ninety percent in an ABC News/Washington Post poll say major challenges still confront the United States in Iraq. Nearly as many, eight in 10, say the work is by no means done – that U.S. forces need to remain in place until a stable government is created.

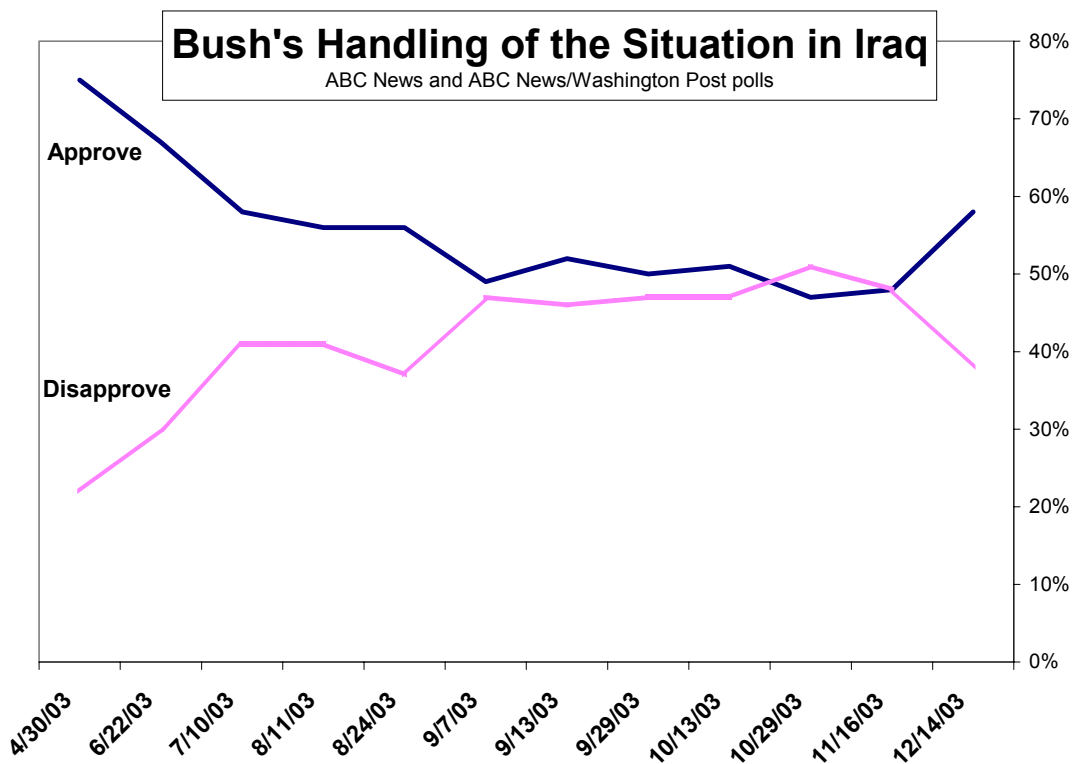
The capture produced no boost in the number of Americans who say the Iraq war was worth fighting, a modest 53 percent. And even with Saddam's apprehension, just 14 percent say the war is going better than they expected for the United States; nearly twice as many, 27 percent, say it's going worse.

Nonetheless, most see the capture as a sign of better fortune. Nearly two-thirds say it should help end attacks on U.S. and coalition forces, and should contribute more broadly to the long-term security of the United States. Seven in 10 say it should help produce long-term stability in the region. And there's agreement especially on the benefit to the Iraqi people: Eighty-one percent of Americans believe Saddam's capture will help restore peace and stability to their country.



While positive, these assessments are measured ones. Far fewer Americans think Saddam’s capture will help “a great deal” in achieving any of these goals. The most, 39 percent, think it will do a great deal to restore peace and stability to Iraq; the fewest, 15 percent, think the capture will do a great deal to end attacks on U.S. and coalition military forces.

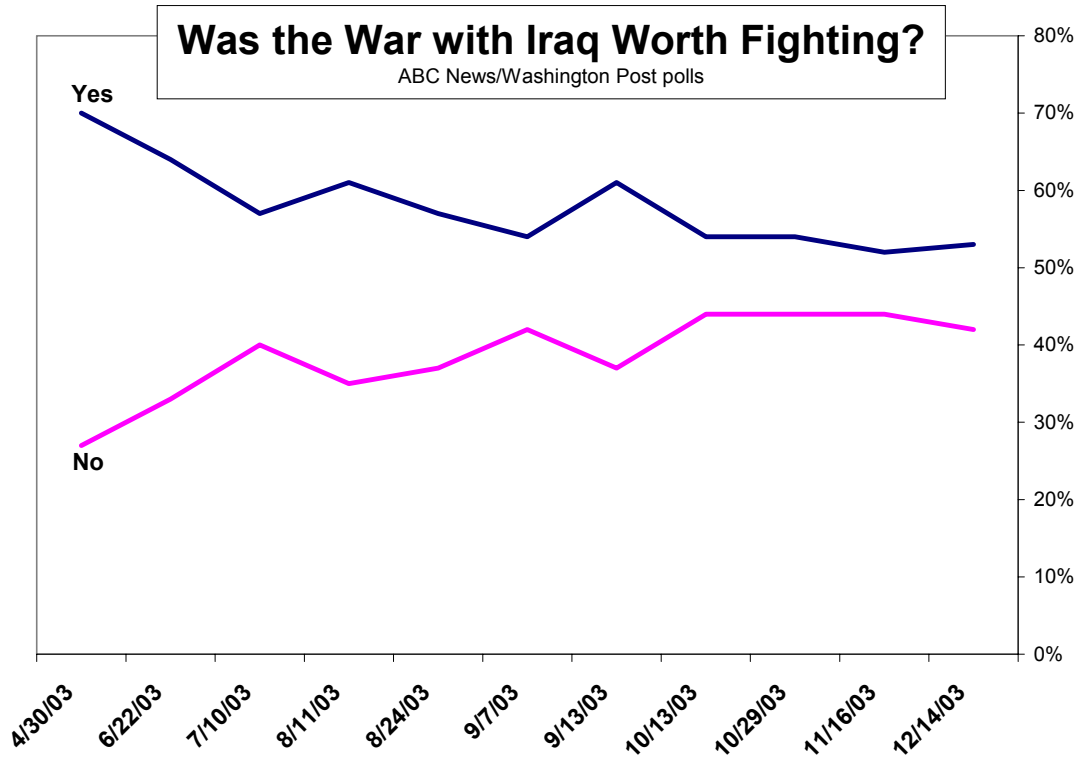
BUSH – News of the capture spread almost universally: By Sunday evening 95 percent of Americans said they’d heard about it. And it did produce a boost in assessments of George W. Bush’s handling of the situation in Iraq – 58 percent now approve, up 10 points since mid-November to the most since July, when Bush’s ratings began to slide in the face of attacks on U.S. forces and a sense the administration lacked a clear plan on how to proceed.



Bush’s approval rating on handling Iraq remains below its levels last spring and early summer. And his overall job approval rating didn’t show a significant gain – it’s 57 percent in this poll, compared with 53 percent in an ABC/Post poll Dec. 7. Still, the number who “strongly” approve of Bush’s work, 37 percent, is now its highest since August, up seven points from its post-Sept. 11 low in late October.

WORTH IT – The capture produced no significant gain overall in the number of Americans who say the war against terrorism is going well – 65 percent, compared with 62 percent in late October. (More, however, say it’s going “very well” – 17 percent, up nine points.)

As noted, 53 percent say that considering the cost versus the benefits, the war was worth fighting – essentially unchanged since mid-October, and down from 70 percent as the main fighting ended last spring. (There’s a difference between the sexes: Men say the war was worth fighting, by 57-38 percent; women divide more narrowly, 49-45 percent.)



Some of these views are highly partisan. Three-quarters of Republicans say the war was worth fighting; this slides to half of independents and a third of Democrats. More than eight in 10 Republicans say the campaign against terrorism is going well; that drops to six in 10 independents and about half of Democrats. And Bush’s job approval is 44 points higher among Republicans than it is among Democrats.

Despite those differences, more than seven in 10 Republicans, Democrats and independents alike agree that U.S. forces need to stay in Iraq until a stable government is in place. And nine in 10 agree, across partisan lines, that big challenges remain for the United States in Iraq.

TRIAL and PUNISHMENT – In terms of Saddam’s future, the public prefers trying him before a U.N.-run international tribunal rather than an Iraqi court, by a 52-39 percent margin. This could reflect public doubt about Iraqi institutions at this stage. Respondents were not told of the administration’s plans for an Iraqi-run trial.

Whatever the venue, if Saddam is convicted of war crimes, 60 percent of Americans say they’d prefer he receive the death penalty rather than a life sentence with no chance of parole.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 14, 2003, among a random national sample of 506 adults. The results have a 4.5-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/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

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	
12/14/03	57	37	20	39	29	10	5
12/7/03	53	32	21	40	27	13	7
11/16/03	57	34	23	39	28	11	4
10/29/03	56	30	26	42	29	13	2
10/13/03	53	33	20	43	29	13	4
9/30/03	54	34	20	44	29	15	2
9/13/03	58	35	23	40	27	14	2
9/7/03	56	34	22	41	28	13	4
8/11/03	59	37	22	37	23	14	4
7/10/03	59	35	24	38	25	13	3
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
12/14/03	58	38	4
11/16/03	48	48	4
10/29/03	47	51	2
10/13/03	51	47	2
9/29/03	50	47	3
9/13/03	52	46	2
9/7/03	49	47	4
8/24/03	56	37	7
8/11/03	56	41	3
7/10/03	58	41	2
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. Do you think the U.S. campaign against terrorism is going very well, fairly well, not too well or not well at all?

	-----Well-----			-----Not well-----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Not too	At all	
12/14/03	65	17	47	33	21	12	2
10/29/03	62	8	54	38	23	14	1
9/7/03	69	12	57	29	19	10	2
4/30/03	83	26	57	16	10	6	1
9/26/02	73	15	58	26	17	9	1
9/8/02	70	10	60	29	21	8	1
7/15/02	75	15	60	24	16	8	1
4/21/02	73	11	63	26	17	9	1
3/10/02	84	21	63	15	10	6	1
1/27/02	88	32	56	11	8	4	1

4. 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
12/14/03	53	42	5
11/16/03	52	44	4
10/29/03	54	44	2
10/13/03	54	44	2
9/13/03	61	37	2
9/7/03	54	42	4
8/24/03	57	37	5
8/11/03	61	35	4
7/10/03	57	40	3
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"

5. Do you happen to have heard or read about the news that Saddam Hussein was captured yesterday by U.S. forces in Iraq, or haven't you heard about that yet?

	Yes	No	No opinion
12/14/03	95	5	0

6. Do you think Saddam's capture means the big challenges facing the United States in Iraq are over, or do you think there are big challenges to the United States in Iraq still ahead?

	Challenges over	Challenges ahead	No opinion
12/14/03	7	90	3

7. How much do you think Saddam's capture will do to (READ ITEM)? Do you think it will help a great deal, somewhat, not much or hardly at all?

Summary Table - 12/14/03

	-----Help-----		-----Not help-----			No
	Great	Some-	Not	Hardly	Won't	

	NET	deal	what	NET	much	at all	(vol.)	opin.
a. restore peace and stability to Iraq	81	39	41	18	8	8	2	2
b. end attacks on U.S. and coalition military forces in Iraq	64	15	49	30	16	12	3	6
c. contribute to long-term peace and stability in the Mideast	70	24	46	28	14	13	2	2
d. contribute to the long-term security of the United States	65	23	42	34	16	15	2	2

8. Do you think the United States should (withdraw its military forces from Iraq now that Saddam has been captured), or do you think the United States should (keep its military forces in Iraq until a stable government is in place there)?

	Withdraw	Remain	No opinion
12/14/03	18	80	2

9. Some people say Saddam should be put on trial (by an Iraqi tribunal, to show that Iraq now follows the rule of law and can confront its past). Others say Saddam should be put on trial (by an international tribunal set up by the United Nations, to ensure his trial is fair and impartial). What do you think - should Saddam be put on trial (by an Iraqi tribunal), or (by a United Nations tribunal)?

	Iraqi tribunal	UN tribunal	U.S. (vol.)	Military coalition (vol.)	Something else (vol.)	No opin.
12/14/03	39	52	2	*	3	5

10. Which punishment would you prefer for Saddam if he is convicted of war crimes - (the death penalty), or (life in prison with no chance of parole)?

	Death penalty	Life in prison	No opinion
12/14/03	60	32	8

11. Would you say the war in Iraq is going better than you expected for the United States, worse than you expected, or about the way you expected it to?

	Better	Worse	As expected	No opin.
12/14/03	14	27	57	2
3/23/03*	19	10	66	6
Persian Gulf War:				
2/24/91	49	5	43	3
2/5/91	27	13	55	4
1/27/91	28	15	54	2
1/20/91	39	7	50	4
1/18/91	50	4	45	2

*"So far, would you say the war is going better"

END