

While Support for War Holds Steady, Bush's Ratings are Lower than in '91

Americans broadly support the war with Iraq – but their views of its timing, and of George W. Bush's handling of the conflict, are considerably weaker than public views at the start of the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Bush's approval rating for handling the situation with Iraq is 65 percent; his father's comparable rating at the start of the Gulf War was 80 percent. And Bush's overall job approval, 67 percent, is up just five points from early this month. His father's overall rating, by contrast, jumped 16 points after the 1991 war began, to 79 percent.

Some other basic measures of support, while high, are also lower than they were the last time around. Sixty-seven percent of Americans say the United States did enough to seek a diplomatic solution before attacking; it was 77 percent at the start of the Gulf War. And on timing, 62 percent say it was right for the United States to attack now – compared to 75 percent on Jan. 16, 1991, the night the Gulf War began.

These views likely reflect, at least in part, the current president's inability to win United Nations support, which many Americans would have preferred. And unlike Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the threat this time is more ambiguous – believing it requires believing Bush, which many Democrats, in particular, are less apt to do.

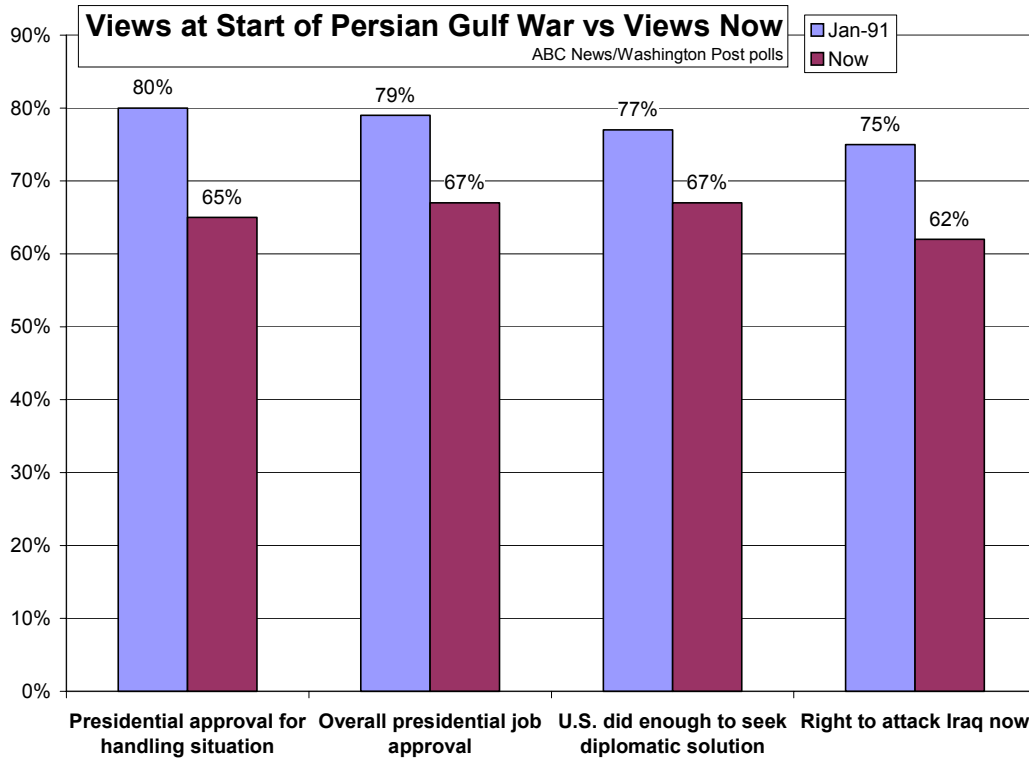
Public backing for the war held steady Thursday night, after spiking Monday night when Bush set a 48-hour deadline for attacking. Seventy-two percent of Americans support the war, and most, 53 percent, support it “strongly,” same as Monday night. That's closer to the level of support for the Gulf War at its start in 1991 – 76 percent.

	Now	Jan. 1991
Support the war	72%	76
President's approval overall	67	79
President's approval on Iraq	65	80
U.S. tried enough diplomacy	67	77
Right for U.S. to attack now	62	75

Among supporters of the war, nearly 80 percent say they support both the troops and the president's policy, while 20 percent say they support the troops, but oppose the policy. At the same time, the number of people who “strongly” support the war, 53 percent, far outstrips the number of “strong” opponents, 18 percent.

Partisanship is still a striking feature of views of this conflict. Ninety percent of Republicans support the war; that declines to 73 percent of independents, and drops

further to 51 percent of Democrats. And 84 percent of Republicans say this was the right time to attack; just 43 percent of Democrats agree.



CASUALTIES – In a change in expectations, there’s been a sharp drop in the number of Americans who foresee heavy U.S. military casualties – just 37 percent now expect substantial losses, down from 62 percent two weeks ago.

That may reflect confidence in U.S. technology and intelligence, and a response to positive accounts of the war’s early stages, but it also raises questions about the durability of high levels of public support if things go badly. Among people who expect low casualties, 80 percent support the war; among those who expect high casualties, it’s 61 percent – still a majority, albeit 19 points lower.

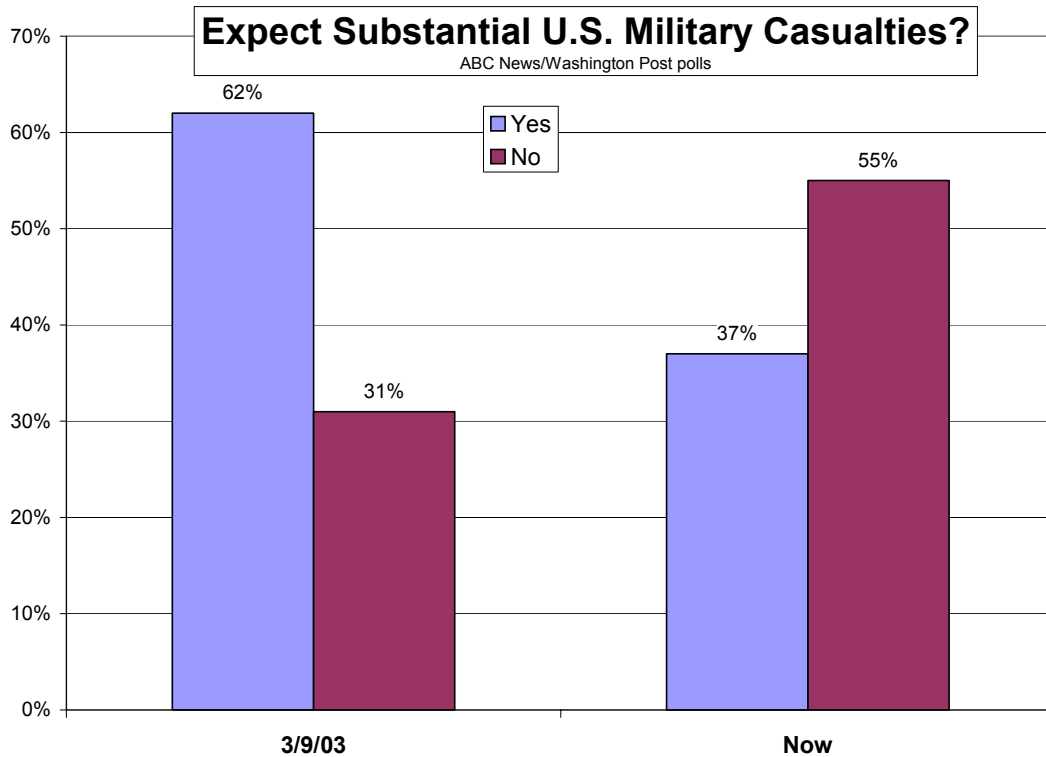
In an interesting parallel, a big drop in expectations of high casualties also accompanied the start of the Gulf War.

Expect substantial U.S. casualties?		
	Yes	No
Today	37%	55
March 9	62	31

With the fighting underway, there is concern about casualties on the Iraqi side. There’s been a 15-point drop in the number of Americans who say they’d favor a U.S. nuclear

strike in response to an Iraqi attack with chemical or biological weapons – down from 60 percent in December to 45 percent now.

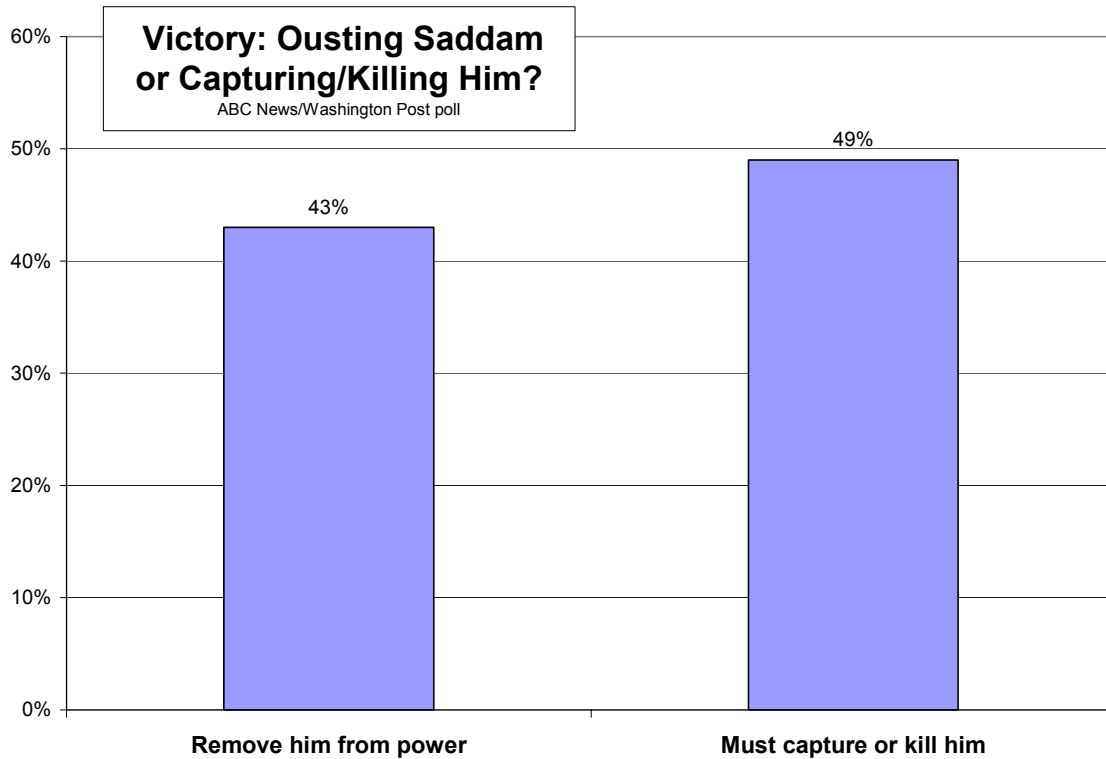
And just under half the public, 49 percent, says the United States should strike Iraqi military targets that are located in areas where civilians might be killed. Forty-two percent say the U.S. forces should avoid such targets.



LENGTH – While most Americans now don't expect high casualties, most also don't expect a lightning-quick war. Just under four in 10 think it'll last days or weeks, but about as many think it'll last months. Fewer, about two in 10, think there still will be fighting a year or more from now.

SADDAM/WMDs – About half the public, at least for the moment, sets a high bar for victory: Forty-nine percent say that to succeed, the United States can't simply remove Saddam Hussein from power, but must kill or capture him as well.

But that well may shift with events. At the start of the 1991 war, two-thirds of Americans said its goal should be to remove Saddam from power, not just to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. (Then-President Bush did not oblige.) And near the start of the Afghanistan war, almost two-thirds said that for success it was necessary to capture or kill Osama bin Laden. But in ensuing months, as he eluded capture, that number fell sharply – possibly reflecting a sense he had been operationally disabled, if not personally nabbed.



Fewer Americans demand finding weapons of mass destruction: Thirty-five percent say the United States will be able to justify the war only if it locates such weapons in Iraq (and seven percent say there can be no justification). Fifty-three percent, though, say the war can be justified for other reasons, even if WMDs don't turn up.

VITAL INTEREST – Part of the reason may be the broader belief that Saddam backs terrorists, WMDs or not. Previous polling has found that two-thirds think Baghdad has directly supported Al Qaeda; and in this poll, about the same number, 67 percent, say they believe America's vital interests are at stake in the situation involving Iraq.

Belief that vital interests are at stake is a prime factor in support for war – among people who hold this view, 82 percent support the war; among those who say U.S. vital interests are not at stake, support falls to 47 percent. In other fairly recent conflicts – Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia – far fewer Americans were persuaded that U.S. vital interests were at stake.

Two-thirds of Americans – including many of those who say U.S. interests are at stake – also say Bush has done a good job explaining his reasons for going to war. And 76 percent say they're confident the United States and its allies did the right thing in attacking. But fewer, 51 percent, are "very" confident this war is the right path, eight points fewer than in 1991.

TERRORISM – Finally, though the nation's terrorism alert is back up to orange, the start of war has not significantly boosted public anxiety about an attack. Seventy-six percent say they're concerned about another major terrorist attack in this country, but that's not

much higher than its pre-war level. And quite a bit fewer, 29 percent, express a “great deal” of concern about further terrorism.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 20, 2003, among a random national sample of 506 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Fieldwork 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	
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 with Iraq and Saddam Hussein?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
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 All	57	38	5
10/27/02 LV	61	37	3
9/26/02	58	39	3
9/14/02	65	31	4
8/29/02	52	36	12

3. As you may know, the United States went to war with Iraq last night. Do you support or oppose the United States having gone to war with Iraq? Do you support/oppose it strongly or only somewhat?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
3/20/03	72	53	19	26	18	8	2
3/17/03*	71	54	16	27	19	8	3
3/9/03	59	40	19	35	21	14	6

*3/17/03 and previous: Would you support or oppose the United States going to war with Iraq?

Compare to: The Bush administration says it will move soon to disarm Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power, by war if necessary, working with countries that are willing to assist, even without the support of the United Nations. Overall, do you support or oppose this policy? (IF SUPPORT) Do you support it with reservations or without reservations?

	-----Support-----				DK	Oppose	No opinion
	NET	W/o reserv.	With reserv.				
3/2/03	59	34	24	1	37	4	

Compare to: Would you favor or oppose having U.S. forces take military action against Iraq to force Saddam Hussein from power? Would you say you favor/oppose military action against Iraq strongly or only somewhat?

	-----Favor-----			-----Oppose-----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
3/9/03	65	47	18	30	20	10	5
2/23/03	63	42	21	31	18	13	6
2/9/03	66	46	21	31	17	14	2
2/5/03	67	45	22	27	17	11	6
2/1/03	66	48	19	31	18	14	3
1/28/03	63	43	19	32	20	13	5
1/27/03	61	40	21	36	21	15	3
1/20/03	57	40	17	41	25	16	3
12/15/02	62	41	20	35	20	15	3
11/17/02	64	NA	NA	29	NA	NA	7
9/26/02	61	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	5

9/14/02	68	NA	NA	29	NA	NA	3
8/29/02	56	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	10
8/11/02	69	NA	NA	22	NA	NA	9
3/10/02	72	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	4
2/21/02	67	46	21	30	12	18	4
1/27/02	71	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	4
12/19/01	72	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	5
11/27/01	78	NA	NA	17	NA	NA	6
10/11/94*	72	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	5
1/15/93**	82	NA	NA	15	NA	NA	3
8/21/92 RV	65	NA	NA	30	NA	NA	5
2/9/92	62	NA	NA	35	NA	NA	3
4/22/91	51	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	6
4/5/91	54	NA	NA	37	NA	NA	9
3/15/91	57	NA	NA	38	NA	NA	5

*10/11/94 and previous: Gallup

**1/15/93 and previous: Would you support or oppose having U.S. forces resume military action...?

4. (IF SUPPORT, Q3) Would you say (you support the troops AND you support the Bush administration's policy on Iraq); or, would you say (you support the troops, but you OPPOSE the Bush administration's policy on Iraq)?

	Support troops and Bush policy	Support troops, oppose Bush policy	Other (vol.)	No opinion
3/20/03	78	20	1	1

5. Do you think the United States did enough to seek a diplomatic solution before going to war with Iraq, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/20/03	67	31	2

Compare to: Do you think the United States has done enough to seek a diplomatic solution to the Persian Gulf situation, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
1/16/91	77	20	3
1/13/91	66	30	4
1/9/91	71	27	2

6. Do you think (the United States has to kill or capture Saddam Hussein for the war in Iraq to be a success), or do you think (the war in Iraq can be a success if Saddam Hussein is removed from power, but not killed or captured)?

	US must capture/ kill Hussein	War can succeed without Hussein	No opinion
3/20/03	49	43	7

Compare to: Do you think (the United States has to capture or kill Osama bin Laden for the war on terrorism to be a success), or do you think (the war on terrorism can be a success without Osama bin Laden being killed or captured)?

	US must capture/ kill bin Laden	War can succeed without bin Laden	No opin.
9/8/02	44	54	2
4/21/02	50	45	5
3/10/02	44	53	4
1/27/02	46	51	3
12/19/01	64	34	2
11/6/01	64	30	6

7. Do you think the United States should (strike Iraqi military targets even if they're located in areas where civilians might be killed), or should the United States (avoid striking Iraqi military targets located in civilian areas)?

	Strike	Avoid	No opinion
3/20/03	49	42	9

Compare to: Do you think United States bombers should pass up some possible military targets if Iraqi civilians might be killed in the attack, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
1/20/91	37	56	6

8. Would you support or oppose having the United States attack Iraq with nuclear weapons if Iraq attacked U.S. forces with biological or chemical weapons?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
3/20/03	45	48	7
12/15/02	60	37	3

9. Do you think it was right for the United States to attack Iraq now, should the United States have waited longer before attacking Iraq, or should the United States never have attacked Iraq?

	Right to attack	Should have waited	Should never have	No opinion
3/20/03	62	23	11	4
1/16/91	75	13	10	2

10. Considering everything, how confident are you that the United States and its allies did the right thing in attacking Iraq? Would you say you are very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not at all confident?

	-----Confident-----			----Not confident----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Smwht.	NET	Not too	At all	
3/20/03	76	51	25	23	11	12	1
1/16/91	84	59	25	14	8	6	2

11. Do you think America's vital interests are at stake in the situation involving Iraq, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/20/03	67	26	7

Compare to:

Israel and the Palestinian Authority

	Yes	No	No Opinion
4/21/02	61	35	5

Kosovo

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/8/99	47	49	4
4/6/99	46	49	5
4/5/99	46	50	4
3/30/99	47	42	11
3/28/99	42	44	14
3/26/99	39	51	10
3/23/99	41	54	5
3/14/99	27	57	15

Bosnia

	Yes	No	No Opinion
12/3/95	39	53	8
11/29/95	35	57	7
11/27/95	39	51	10
11/13/95	35	56	9
7/17/95	36	59	5
6/26/94	31	58	11

Haiti

	Yes	No	No opinion
9/15/94	31	57	11
9/11/94	28	62	9
8/7/94	31	59	10
7/17/94	44	50	6
6/26/94	38	52	10
5/15/94	30	56	14
10/12/93	28	65	7

North Korea

	Yes	No	No opinion
7/17/94	61	32	7
6/26/94	63	28	9
6/8/94	58	33	9
3/27/94	59	34	7

Rwanda

	Yes	No	No opinion
6/26/94	18	63	19
5/3/94	33	59	8

Somalia

	Yes	No	No opinion
10/12/93	23	73	5
10/5/93	21	69	10

12. Do you think Bush has or has not done a good job of explaining his reasons for going to war?

	Yes, has	No, has not	No opinion
3/20/03	67	32	1

13. Just your best guess, how long do you think the war with Iraq will last - days, weeks, months, about a year, or longer than that?

	Days	Weeks	Months	Year	Longer	No opin.
3/20/03	8	31	37	8	10	5

Compare to: Just your best guess, how long do you think a war with Iraq would last - a few weeks, several months, about a year or longer than that?

	Weeks	Months	Year	Longer	No opin.
3/9/03	22	33	16	23	7
2/1/03	19	32	18	27	5

14. Do you think there will or will not be a significant number of U.S. military casualties in the war with Iraq?

	Yes, will	No, will not	No opinion
3/20/03	37	55	8

Compare to: Do you think there would or would not be a significant number of U.S. military casualties in a war with Iraq?

	Yes, would	No, would not	No opinion
3/9/03	62	31	7
2/1/03	65	31	4

15. Do you think the United States will be able to 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 will be able to 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
3/20/03	35	53	7	6

16. How concerned are you about the possibility there will be more major terrorist attacks in the United States - is that something that worries you a great deal, somewhat, not too much or not at all?

	-----Concerned-----			-----Not concerned-----			No op.
	NET	Grt.deal	Somewhat	NET	Not much	At all	
3/20/03	76	29	47	24	16	8	1
2/16/03	72	27	45	27	18	9	1
9/8/02	74	22	52	26	19	7	0
7/15/02	73	29	44	27	20	7	*
4/21/02	73	30	43	26	18	9	*
3/10/02	70	23	47	30	21	9	1
12/19/01	70	27	43	29	22	8	1
10/15/01	77	35	43	23	14	9	0
10/9/01	82	36	46	18	12	6	*
10/7/01	81	41	40	18	13	4	1
9/27/01*	83	43	39	17	12	5	*
9/11/01	87	49	38	12	7	4	1
6/13/97	62	21	41	38	24	14	*
6/2/97	63	22	41	37	28	9	*
8/5/96	74	31	43	26	18	8	*
4/20/95	78	38	40	21	16	5	1

*9/27/01 and previous: "How concerned are you about the possibility there will be more major terrorist attacks in this country."

END