

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## MISPERCEPTIONS, THE MEDIA AND THE IRAQ WAR

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*PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR*

STEVEN KULL

*RESEARCH STAFF*

CLAY RAMSAY

STEFAN SUBIAS

EVAN LEWIS

PHILLIP WARF



**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
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A joint program of the Center on Policy  
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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 questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaires and managed the fielding of the polls.

Trent Perrotto, Meredith Perry, Roman Gershkovich and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

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## INTRODUCTION

From January through September 2003, PIPA/Knowledge Networks conducted seven different polls that dealt with the conflict with Iraq. Among other things, PIPA/KN probed respondents for key perceptions and beliefs as well for their attitudes on what US policy should be. In the course of doing this, it was discovered that a substantial portion of the public had a number of misperceptions that were demonstrably false, or were at odds with the dominant view in the intelligence community.

In the January poll it was discovered that a majority believed that Iraq played an important role in 9/11 and that a minority even expressed the belief that they had seen “conclusive evidence” of such involvement. The US intelligence community has said that there is not evidence to support the view that Iraq was directly involved in September 11 and there has clearly never been any observable “conclusive evidence.”

In February, by providing more fine-grained response options it became clearer that only about one in five Americans believed that Iraq was directly involved in 9/11, but that a majority did believe that Iraq had given substantial support to al-Qaeda—both propositions unsupported by the US intelligence community. Other polls found even higher numbers responding positively to the idea that Iraq was involved in September 11 or had some type of close involvement with al-Qaeda. These perceptions of Iraq’s involvement with al-Qaeda and 9/11 persisted largely unchanged in numerous PIPA/KN polls through September 2003, despite continued disconfirmation by the intelligence community.

More striking, in PIPA/KN polls conducted after the war—in May, July, and August-September--approximately half of the respondents expressed the belief that the US has actually *found evidence* in Iraq that

Saddam was working closely with al-Qaeda. While administration figures have talked about a purported meeting in Prague between an al-Qaeda member and an Iraqi official, this does not constitute evidence that Saddam was working closely with al-Qaeda and, in any case, this purported meeting had been discredited by the US intelligence community during the period of these polls.

One of the most striking developments in the postwar period was that once US forces arrived in Iraq, they failed to find the weapons of mass destruction that had been a major rationale for going to war with Iraq. Nonetheless, in PIPA/KN polls conducted May through September, a substantial minority of the public said they believed that weapons of mass destruction had been found. A substantial minority even believed that Iraq had used weapons of mass destruction in the war. Polls from other organizations repeated these questions and got similar results.

In polls conducted throughout the world before and during the war, a very clear majority of world public opinion opposed the US going to war with Iraq without UN approval (see page 8 for details). However, PIPA/KN found in polls conducted during and after the war that only a minority of Americans were aware of this. A significant minority even believed that a majority of people in the world favored the US going to war with Iraq. Other perceptions of European public opinion and Islamic public opinion also contradicted numerous polls.

These striking findings raised numerous questions:

- How widespread are these misperceptions? Are they clustered in a constant minority or does a majority have at least one key misperception?

- How have these misperceptions related to support for the decision to go to war and subsequently?
- Do these misperceptions vary according to whether they get their news from print media or a particular television network?
- Is the problem that Americans simply do not pay enough attention to the news? If they pay more attention, does this reduce the likelihood of misperceptions? Does this vary according to their news source?
- Is the problem one of bias—of one seeking out information to confirm political predilections? Do levels of misperception vary according to party identification or feelings about President Bush?

To answer these and other questions we developed a more systematic set of questions that were included in a series of three polls, conducted over June through September, with a total of 3,334 respondents. This was combined with the findings from four other polls conducted January through May for a total data set of 8634 respondents.

The polls were 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).

Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation.

## FINDINGS

### *Misperceptions Related to the Iraq War*

**In the run-up to the war with Iraq and in the postwar period, a significant portion of the American public has held a number of misperceptions that have played a key role in generating and maintaining approval for the decision to go to war. Significant portions of the public have believed that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11 attacks and that evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda have been found, that weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq after the war and that Iraq actually used weapons of mass destruction during the war, and that world public opinion has approved of the US going to war with Iraq. While, in most cases only a minority has any particular misperception, a large majority has at least one key misperception.**

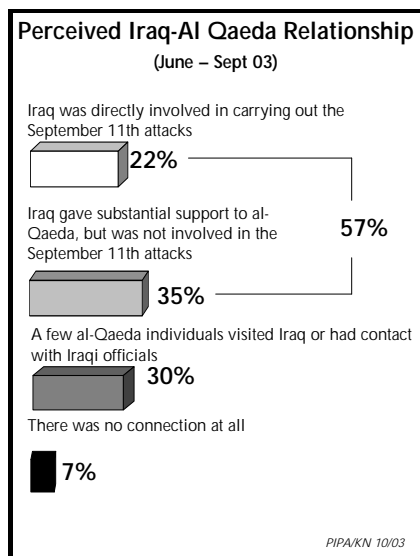
In the run-up to the war with Iraq and in the post-war period, a significant portion of the American public has held a number of misperceptions that, as we will see, are highly related to support for the decision to go to war. While in most cases only a minority has any particular misperception, a very strong majority has at least one key misperception.

### **Links Between Iraq and Al Qaeda**

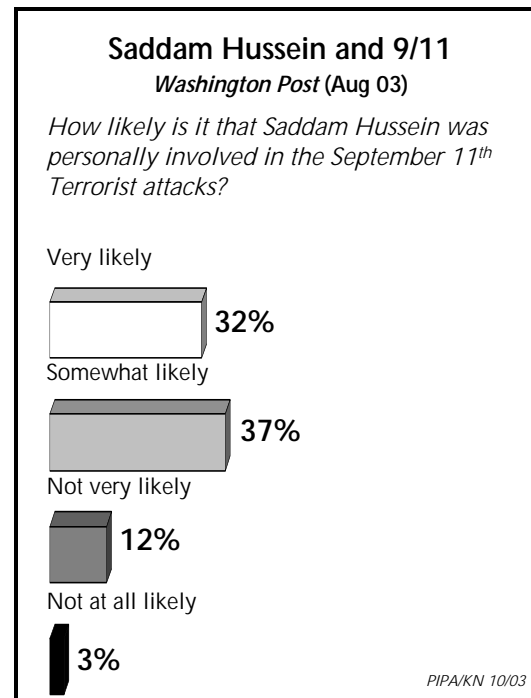
Though the consensus view in the intelligence community is that Saddam Hussein was not directly involved in September 11 and was not even working closely with al-Qaeda, in the months before the war numerous polls found significant majorities who believed that there was a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda, and that Iraq was directly involved in September 11. In the January PIPA/KN poll 68% expressed the belief that Iraq played an important role in September 11, with 13% even expressing the clearly mistaken belief that “conclusive evidence” of such a link had been found.

We were concerned that when only given the two options of saying that Iraq was involved in September 11 or not, some respondents might respond affirmatively when they only believed that there was some link, but not necessarily direct Iraqi involvement in September 11. Thus in February we offered respondents four options for describing “the relationship between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the terrorist group al-Qaeda.” Indeed, only 20% chose the option that “Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.” Another 36% chose the position that “Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks” –still a position at odds with the dominant view of the intelligence community, but less egregiously so. Twenty-nine percent chose the position that has some evidence in support of it, that “a few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials.” Just 7% chose the option, “There was no connection at all.”

Since the war has ended this perception has been essentially unchanged. Despite the fact that no evidence of any links has been found, the percentages choosing each position have remained statistically constant, varying only within a few percentage points.



Other polls have continued to find even higher numbers responding positively to the idea that Iraq was involved in September 11, or had some type of close involvement with al-Qaeda. However, not all of these responses should be taken as an indication that the respondents have come to that conclusion. A widely noted August Washington Post poll asked, “How likely is it that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks? Would you say that it is very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?” Thirty-two percent said it was very likely and another 37% said it was somewhat likely. This has led to a widely-repeated statement that 7 in 10 Americans believe that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in September 11. However, it should be noted that when respondents say that something is likely--especially those who just say that it is somewhat likely--it does not mean they have come to the conclusion that it is the case.

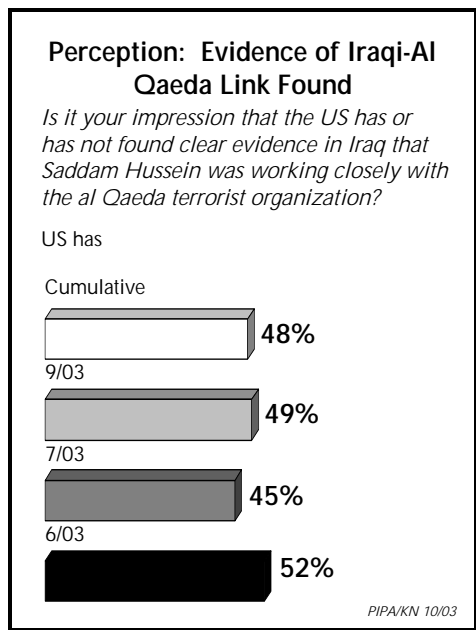


A more recent September 19-21 CNN/USA Today poll asked: “Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the

September 11th terrorist attacks, or not?" Forty-three percent said they thought he was, down from 51% when asked in March 2003. But here again it should be noted that respondents had only the two options of saying he was or was not personally involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The responses to the PIPA/KN question with four options suggests that some of those who responded affirmatively may have believed that the link was not as direct as the question says, but still answered affirmatively because they believed there was some kind of link between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

### Evidence of Links to al-Qaeda

Perhaps the most striking misperception is the belief that, not only were there links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, but that actual evidence has been found. PIPA/KN asked in June, July, and August-September: "Is it your impression that the US has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization?" In every case, large percentages (45-52%) said that such evidence has been found.



Harris Interactive asked a similar question in June and August and found similar results.

Asked in June, "Do you believe clear evidence that Iraq was supporting al-Qaeda has been found in Iraq or not?" 52% said that clear evidence had been found, with just 43% saying that it had not and 5% not sure. Despite intensive discussion of the issue in the press, in August the numbers were essentially the same: 49% believed evidence had been found, 45% believed that it had not been and 6% were unsure.

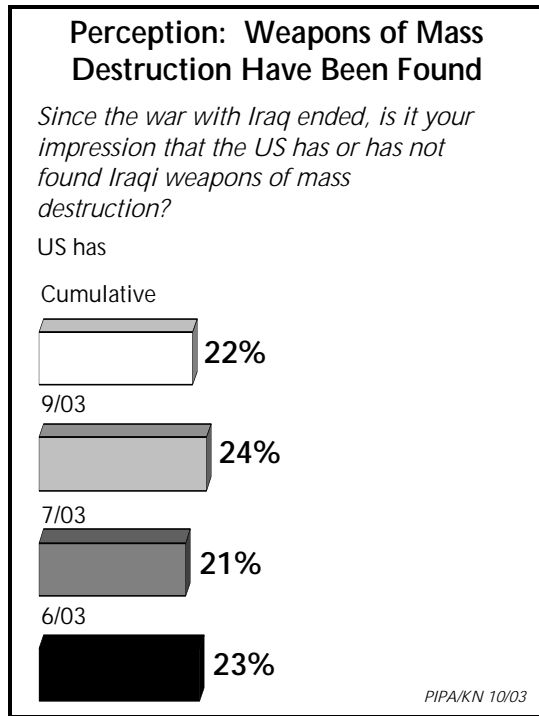
### Weapons of Mass Destruction

Before the war overwhelming majorities believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Though it now appears this belief may have been incorrect, it does not seem appropriate to call this a misperception because it was so widespread at the time, even within the intelligence community.

However, a striking misperception occurred after the war, when the US failed to find any weapons of mass destruction or even any solid evidence of a WMD program. PIPA/KN first asked in May whether respondents thought that the US has or has not "found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, and 34% said the US had (another 7% did not know). In June, Harris Interactive subsequently asked "Do you believe clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq or not?" and 35% said that it had.

PIPA/KN asked again in late June--during a period with much discussion in the press about the absence of WMD--and found that the percentage holding this belief had dropped to 23%. This number then stayed roughly the same in July and early September (21% and 24%). In late July, NBC/Wall Street Journal asked whether the US has been successful in "finding evidence of weapons of mass destruction," and 22% said that it had. Harris asked again in mid-

August and found 27% saying that evidence of WMD had been found.

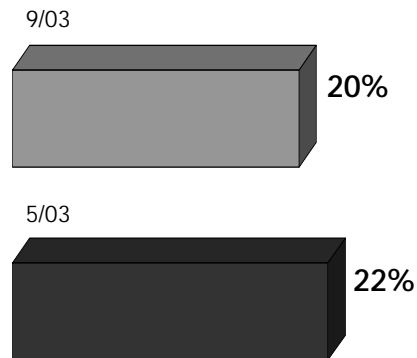


Americans have also incorrectly believed that Iraq actually used weapons of mass destruction in the recent war with the US. PIPA/KN asked respondents whether “Iraq did or did not use chemical or biological weapons in the war that had just ended.” In May, 22% of respondents said that it had. In mid-June, ABC/Washington Post asked “do you believe that Iraq did or did not use chemical or biological weapons against U.S. troops during the war earlier this year?” and 24% said that that they thought it had. When asked by PIPA/KN again in August-September, the percentage saying that Iraq had used such weapons slipped only slightly to 20%.

### Perception: Chemical and Biological Weapons Have Been Used

*Is it your impression that Iraq did or did not use chemical or biological weapons in the war that just ended?*

Iraq did use chemical and biological weapons



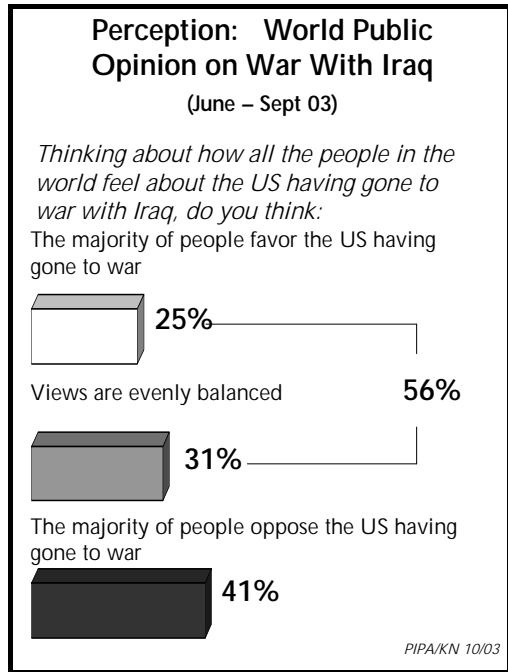
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### World Public Opinion

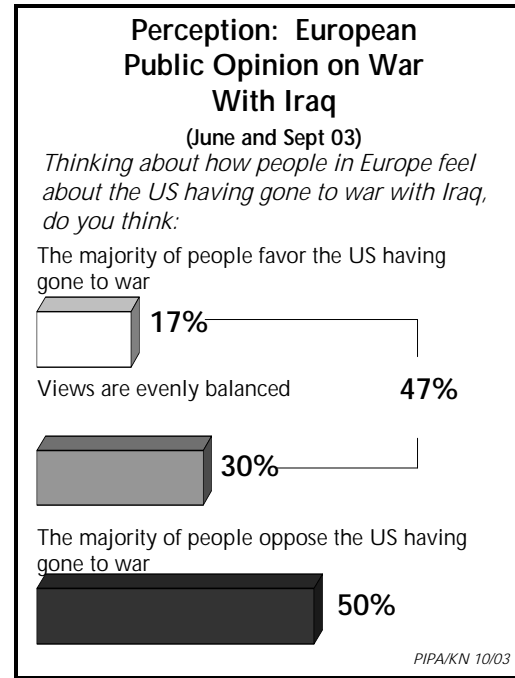
Americans have misperceived world public opinion on the US decision to go to war and the way that the US is generally dealing with the problem of terrorism. This has been true during and after the war and applies to perceptions about world public opinion as a whole, European public opinion, and public opinion in the Muslim world. [See p. 8 for international poll results showing actual world public opinion.]

In March 2003, shortly after the war started, PIPA/KN asked respondents “How all of the people in the world feel about the US going to war with Iraq.” Respondents perceived greater support for the war than existed at the time, or has since. Only 35% perceived correctly that the majority of people opposed the decision. Thirty-one percent expressed the mistaken assumption that views were evenly balanced on the issue, and another 31% expressed the egregious misperception that the majority favored it.

Asked again in June, July, and August-September, these views changed very little. Only 38-42% knew that the majority of people opposed the US going to war with Iraq, while 30-33% believed that views were evenly balanced and 24-27% said that the majority of people favored it. The cumulative rate for the three months is depicted below.



Perceptions have been a bit more accurate when it comes to perceiving European public opinion, but still there are widespread misperceptions. Asked in June and August-September nearly half (48 to 49%) correctly said that the “majority of people oppose the US having gone to war.” But 29-30% believed incorrectly that views are evenly balanced and 18% have believed that the majority even favors it.



A substantial number of Americans also misperceive attitudes in the Islamic world toward US efforts to fight terrorism and its policies in the Middle East. Respondents were asked in August-September whether they thought “a majority of people in the Islamic world favor or oppose US-led efforts to fight terrorism.” A plurality of 48% incorrectly assumed that a majority of Islamic people favor US led efforts to fight terrorism” while 46% assumed that they do not. When asked whether respondents thought “a majority of people in the Islamic world think US policies in the Middle East make the region” more or less stable, 35% incorrectly assumed that the majority of people in the Islamic world feel that US policies make the region more stable, while 60% perceived attitudes correctly.

### Composite Analysis

Most specific misperceptions are held by a minority of respondents. However, this does not tell us if these misperceptions are held by the same minority, or if large percentages have at least one misperception. To find out, we repeated three key perception questions over three polls, conducted in



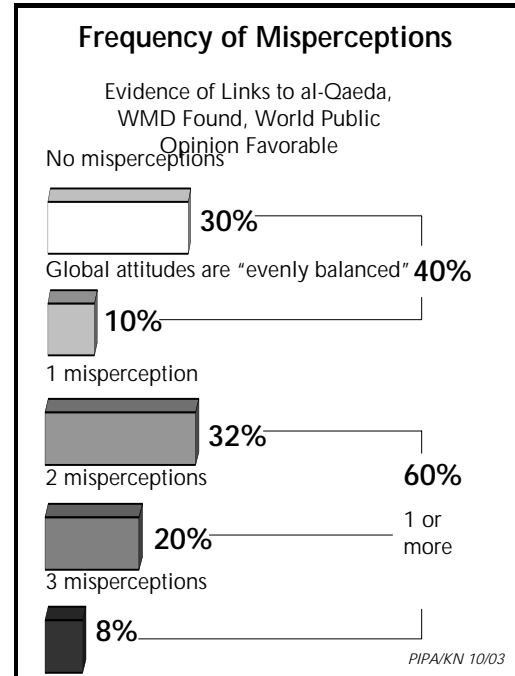
June, July, and August-September with 3,334 respondents.

The three key perception questions used were the ones that found the most egregious misperceptions, and to qualify as a misperception the most extreme form of the misperception was used. These were the beliefs that:

- Evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda have been found
- Weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq
- World public opinion favored the US going to war with Iraq

To determine the pervasiveness of misperceptions, we focused on the 1,362 respondents that heard all three perception questions.

Misperceptions were not limited to a small minority that had repeated misperceptions. A majority of 60% had at least one of these three unambiguous misperceptions, and only 30% had no misperceptions. (Another 10% just had the more modest misperception that world public opinion was evenly balanced between support and opposition to the Iraq war.) Thirty-two percent had just one of the misperceptions (and no more), 20% had two of the misperceptions and just 8% had all three of the misperceptions.



## POLLS OF WORLD PUBLIC OPINION ON THE IRAQ WAR

International polling strongly suggests that the majority of world public opinion was opposed to the US taking military action as it did, without UN approval. Gallup International conducted two international polls (in January and April-May 2003) and Pew Research Center conducted one (in April-May 2003) which included poll questions that directly measured support or opposition to the Iraq war. In the three polls taken together, 56 countries were surveyed. [For more details see [www.gallupinternational.com](http://www.gallupinternational.com) and [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org).]

The January Gallup International poll asked, "Are you in favor of military action against Iraq: under no circumstances; only if sanctioned by the United Nations; unilaterally by America and its allies?" Of the 38 countries polled (including 20 in Europe), not a single one showed majority support for unilateral action and in nearly every case the percentage was very low. Gallup International also asked, "If military action goes ahead against Iraq, do you think [survey country] should or should not support this action?" In 34 of the 38 countries polled (17 out of 20 in Europe), a majority opposed having their country support this action.

In April-May Gallup International asked "Now that the regime of Saddam Hussein has been destroyed, do think that military action by the US and its allies was justified or not justified?" Here responses were a bit more mixed. In 27 of the 43 (11 out of 21 in Europe) countries polled the majority said military action was not justified, while in seven countries (three in Europe) the majority said that it was. (Some respondents may have felt the war was justified, but still opposed the US taking such action without UN approval.)

In April-May the Pew Global Attitudes Survey asked respondents in 18 countries how they felt about their country's decision to participate or not participate in "us[ing] military force against Iraq." Among the 13 countries that had not participated, in every case, a large to overwhelming majority approved of the decision. For the three countries that contributed troops, in the UK and Australia a majority approved; in Spain a majority was opposed. For the two countries that had allowed the US to use bases, in Kuwait the majority approved; in Turkey the majority was opposed.

**Misperceptions of Attitudes in the Islamic World**

The Pew Global Attitudes survey in summer 2002 and May 2003 asked in seven countries with primarily Muslim populations (Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco, plus the Palestinian Authority): "Which of the following phrases comes closer to your view? I favor the US-led efforts to fight terrorism, or I oppose the US-led efforts to fight terrorism." In six of the eight cases strong majorities-- ranging from 56-85% in summer 2002, and rising to 67-97% in May 2003--said they opposed "US-led efforts to fight terrorism." In only one case--Kuwait in May 2003--did a majority say they favored US efforts. In the case of Pakistan, a plurality of 45% opposed US efforts in the summer of 2003, rising to 74% in May 2003.

The Pew Global Attitudes survey in May 2003 asked: "Do you think US policies in the Middle East make the region more stable or less stable?" In six of the eight cases, majorities said that US policies in the Middle East make the region less stable. These majorities ranged from 56% in Lebanon to 91% in Jordan. In Pakistan, 43% said US policies make the Middle East less stable, but another 43% said US policies either "made no difference" (12%) or that they did not know (31%). In Kuwait a 48% plurality said US policies made the Middle East more stable.

***Misperceptions and Support for War***

**Before and after the war, those who have held misperceptions have been far more supportive of the decision to go to war with Iraq. In the postwar period, those with none of the key misperceptions oppose the decision, while the presence of each additional misperception is accompanied by sharply higher support for the war.**

The misperceptions about the war discussed above appear to be highly related to attitudes about the decision to go to war, both before and after the war. In every case those who have the misperception have been more supportive of the war. As we will see in the composite analysis of the three key misperceptions, those with none of the key misperceptions have opposed the decision, while the presence of each additional misperception has gone together with sharply higher support.

**Links to al-Qaeda**

Before the war, those who believed that Iraq was directly involved in September 11 showed greater support for going to war even without multilateral approval. In a January PIPA/KN poll, among those who wrongly believed that they had “seen conclusive evidence” that “Iraq played an important role in September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks,” 56% said they would agree with a decision by the President to proceed to go to war with Iraq if the UN Security Council refused to endorse such an action. Among those who said they had not seen such evidence but still believed it was true that Iraq was involved in September 11, 42% said they would support such a decision. Among those who said they had not seen such evidence and were not convinced that it was true, only 9% said they would agree with such a decision.

In a February PIPA/KN poll, support for going to war was high among those who believed that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in September 11 and was progressively lower as the perceived link

between Iraq and al Qaeda became more tenuous. Among those who believed that Iraq was directly involved in September 11, 58% said they would agree with the President deciding to go to war with Iraq even without UN approval. Among those who believed that Iraq had given al-Qaeda substantial support but was not involved in September 11, support dropped to 37%. Among those who believed that a few al-Qaeda individuals had contact with Iraqi officials 32% were supportive, while just 25% felt that way among those who believed that there was not connection at all.

**Pre-War (Feb 03) Approval for  
Unilateral Action and Beliefs  
About al Qaeda Links**

Approve if President proceeds without UN approval among those who believed:

Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks

 **58%**

Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks

 **37%**

A few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials

 **32%**

There was no connection at all

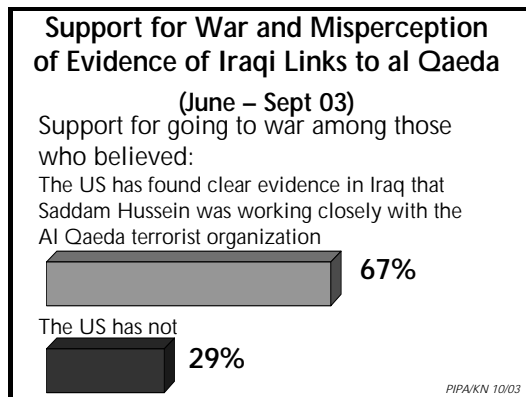
 **25%**

PIPA/KN 10/03

During the war, Americans who supported the war also said that the supposed link was a major reason for supporting going to war. An April poll for Investor's Business Daily and the Christian Science Monitor asked the 72% who said they supported the war to rate the importance of a number of reasons for their support. “Iraq's connection with groups like Al-Qaeda” was rated as a major reason by 80%.

As discussed above, after the war nearly half of Americans asked mistakenly believed

evidence that Saddam Hussein was working closely with al-Qaeda had been found. PIPA/KN found a strong relationship between the belief that evidence of such links have been found and support for the decision to go to war. Combining data from June through September, among those with the misperception, 67% held the view that going to war was the best thing to do, while only 29% felt that way among those who did not have the misperception. Among those without the misperception, 52% said it was the wrong decision. [Note: The question also offered respondents the option of saying that they did not know if going to war was the best thing to do, but nonetheless supported the President. Here and in comparisons below we have limited our analysis to those who took an unequivocal position in favor or against the decision to go to war.]

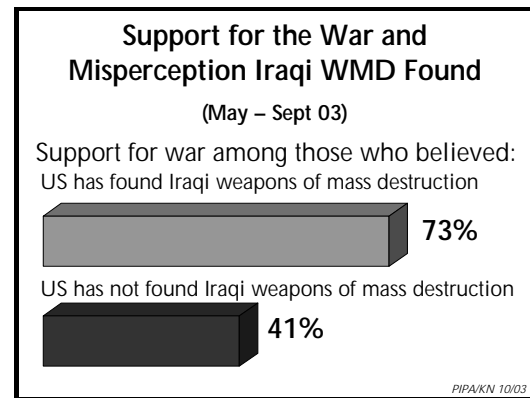


Just as before the war, in the postwar period there was also a strong relationship between beliefs about the nature of the connection between al-Qaeda and Iraq and support for the war. Among those who believed that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in September 11, 69% said going to war was the best thing to do. Among those who believed that Iraq had given al-Qaeda substantial support, but was not involved in September 11, approval dropped to 54%. Among those who believed that a few al-Qaeda individuals had contact with Iraqi officials 39% were supportive, while just 11% felt that way among those who believed that there was not connection at all.

Among those who believed that there was no connection at all, 73% thought that going to war was the wrong decision.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

The mistaken beliefs that WMD have been found in Iraq or that Iraq used WMD in the war have been highly related to support for the decision to go to war. Consolidating all respondents asked by PIPA/KN in four polls conducted May through September, among those who believed that WMD have been found, 73% thought that going to war was the best decision. Among those who did not have this misperception, only 41% held this view.



Similarly, consolidating two polls conducted in May and August-September, among those who believed that Iraq had used chemical and biological weapons in the war, 64% said they thought going to war was the best thing to do. Among those who did not have this belief only 48% thought it was the best thing.

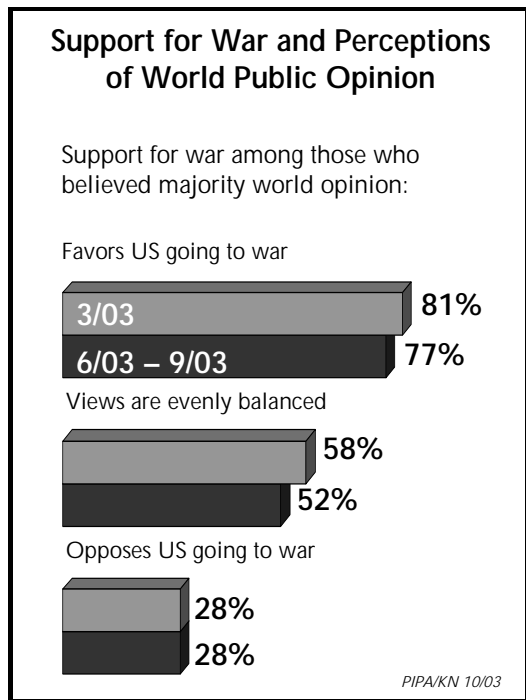
### World Public Opinion

Perceptions of world public opinion on going to war with Iraq have been significantly related to support for the war. This has been true during and after the war.

In the PIPA/KN poll conducted in late March, shortly after the onset of the war, among those who wrongly believed that the majority of the people in the world favored

the US going to war with Iraq, an overwhelming 81% said they agreed with the President's decision to go to war with Iraq, despite his failure to garner UN Security Council approval. Among those who, also incorrectly, believed that views were evenly balanced on this question, 58% said they agreed. Among those who correctly believed that the majority of people opposed it, only 28% said they agreed with the President's decision.

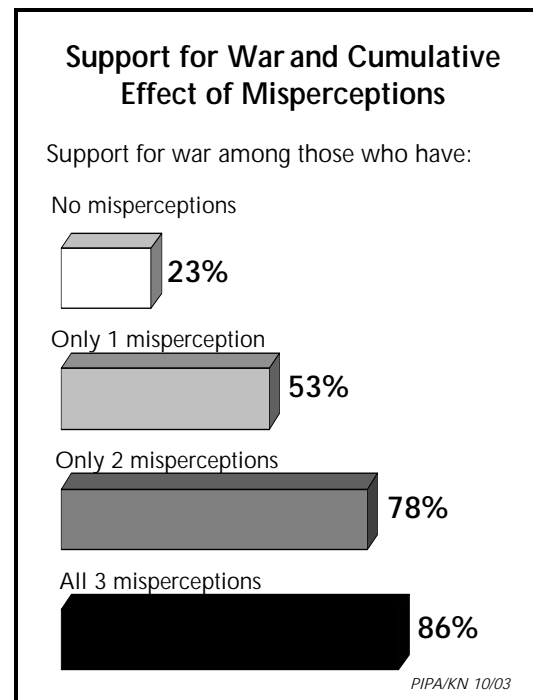
When polled after the war (May-September) the pattern was basically the same, though a different question was used to measure support for the war. Among those who wrongly believed that the majority of the people in the world favor the US going to war with Iraq, 77% thought that going to war was the best decision; among those who believed that views were evenly balanced, 52% concurred; while among those who correctly believed that the majority of people opposed it, only 28% said they approved.



## Composite Analysis

To determine the cumulative effect of various misperceptions on support for the war, we analyzed those who had been asked all of the three key misperception questions—whether evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda have been found, whether WMD have been found in Iraq, and whether world public opinion favored the US going to war with Iraq—in three polls conducted June through September.

This revealed a strong cumulative effect. Among those with none of the three misperceptions, only 23% support the war. Among those with just one of the misperceptions, 53% supported the war—rising to 78% for two of the misperceptions and to 86% for those with all three. Among those with none of the misperceptions, a majority said that going to war was the wrong decision.



Note: Misperceptions included were that evidence of Iraq-al Qaeda links have been found, WMD have been found and world public opinion favored Iraq war.

*Variations in Misperceptions According to Source of News*

**The extent of Americans' misperceptions vary significantly depending on their source of news. Those who receive most of their news from Fox News are more likely than average to have misperceptions. Those who receive most of their news from NPR or PBS are less likely to have misperceptions. These variations cannot simply be explained as a result of differences in the demographic characteristics of each audience, because these variations can also be found when comparing the demographic subgroups of each audience.**

The widespread presence of misperceptions naturally raises the question of whether they are to some extent a function of an individual's source of news. In other words, did people vary in the frequency of their misperceptions according to their source of news?

To find out, in three different PIPA/KN polls conducted in June, July, and August-September, an aggregate sample of 3,334 respondents was asked "Where do you tend to get most of your news?" and offered the options of "newspapers and magazines" or "TV and radio." Overall, 19% said they tend to get most of their news from print media, while 80% said they tend to get their news from TV and radio. Respondents were then asked which network, if any, is their primary source of news. Responses are shown below.

Two or more networks .....	30%
Fox .....	18
CNN .....	16
NBC .....	14
ABC .....	11
CBS .....	9
PBS-NPR .....	3

The same respondents were also asked about their perceptions. 1,362 respondents received all three perception questions that identified the clearest cases of

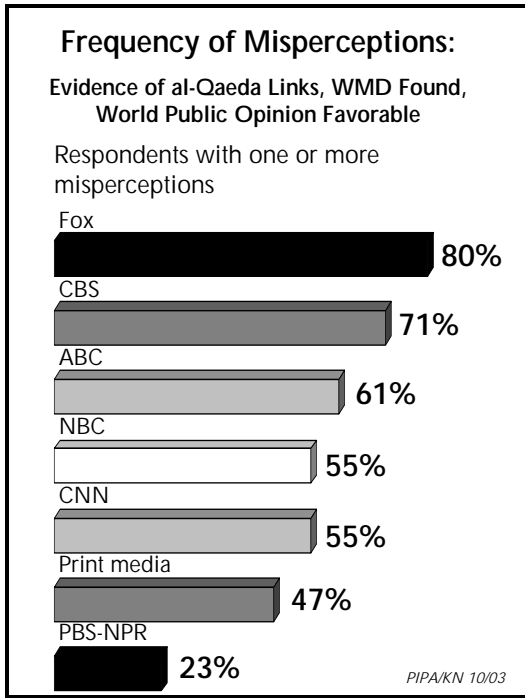
misperception, i.e., the beliefs that evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda have been found, that WMD have been found in Iraq and that world public opinion approved of the US going to war with Iraq.

**Composite Analysis**

Because it provides the best overview of the relationship between media sources, we will first analyze the relationship between media sources and the presence of multiple misperceptions, to determine the variance in the level of misperceptions according to the respondent's news source. Afterward we will analyze the variance for specific misperceptions.

An analysis of those who were asked all of the key three perception questions does reveal a remarkable level of variation in the presence of misperceptions according to news source. Standing out in the analysis are Fox and NPR/PBS--but for opposite reasons. Fox was the news source whose viewers had the most misperceptions. NPR/PBS are notable because their viewers and listeners consistently held fewer misperceptions than respondents who obtained their information from other news sources.

The table below shows this clearly. Listed are the breakouts of the sample according to the frequency of the three key misperceptions (i.e. the beliefs that evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda have been found, that WMD have been found in Iraq and that world public opinion approved of the US going to war with Iraq) and their primary news source. Fox News watchers were most likely to hold misperceptions—and were more than twice as likely than the next nearest network to hold all three misperceptions. In the audience for NPR/PBS, however, there was an overwhelming majority who did not have any of the three misperceptions, and hardly any had all three.



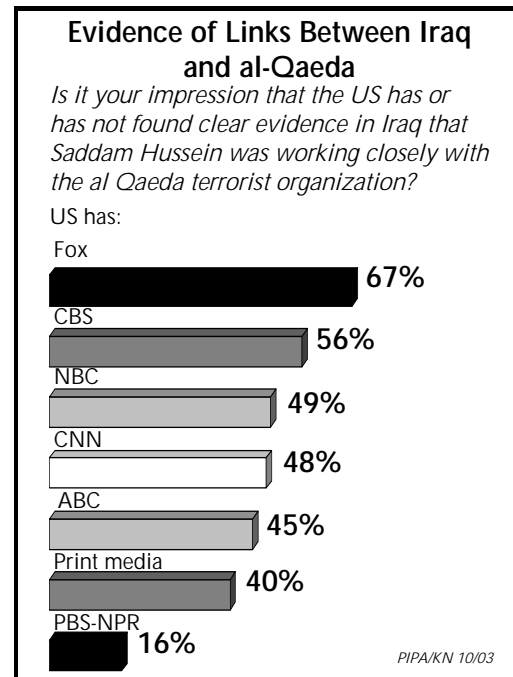
News Source	Average rate per misperception
Fox	45%
CBS	36
CNN	31
ABC	30
NBC	30
Print media	25
NPR/PBS	11

### Evidence of Links Between Iraq and Al Qaeda

We will now look more closely at the presence of each specific misperception. When asked whether the US has found “clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization,” among the combined sample for the three-month period 49% said that such evidence had been found. This misperception was substantially higher among those who get their news primarily from Fox—67%. Once again the NPR-PBS audience was the lowest at 16%.

Number of misperceptions per respondent	Fox	CBS	ABC	CNN	NBC	Print media	NPR/PBS
None of the 3	20%	30%	39%	45%	45%	53%	77%
1 or more misperceptions	80	71	61	55	55	47	23

To check these striking findings, we analyzed the data a different way, using the larger sample of 3,334 who had answered *at least one* of the three questions just mentioned. For each misperception we determined how widespread it was in each media audience (these will be discussed below), and then for each media audience averaged this frequency for the three misperceptions. The table below shows the averages from lowest to highest. Again, the Fox News audience showed the highest average rate of misperceptions—45%—while the NPR/PBS audience showed the lowest—11%.

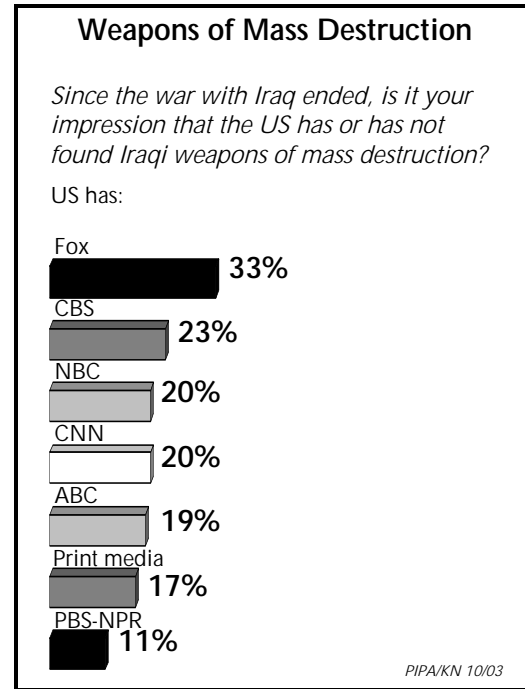


Variations were much more modest on the perception that Iraq was directly involved in September 11. (As discussed, the view that Iraq was directly involved in September 11 is not a demonstrable misperception, but it is widely regarded as fallacious by the intelligence community.) In this case, the highest level of misperceptions was in the CBS audience (33%) followed by Fox (24%), ABC (23%), NBC (22%), and CNN (21%). Respondents who got their news primarily from print media (14%) and NPR or PBS (10%) were less likely to choose this description.

Combining the above group with those who had the less egregious but still unproven belief that Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, the pattern was similar. Among CBS viewers 68% had one of these perceptions, as did 66% of Fox viewers, 59% of NBC viewers, 55% of CNN viewers and 53% of ABC viewers. Print readers were nearly as high at 51%, while PBS-NPR audiences were significantly lower at 28%.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

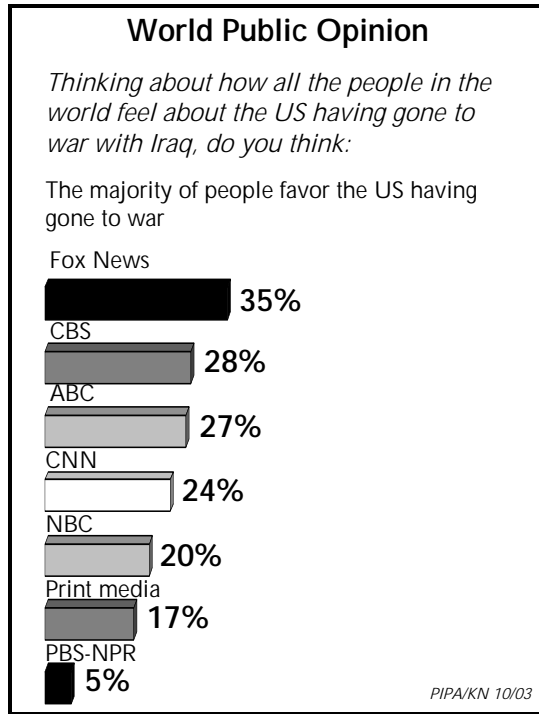
As discussed, when respondents were asked whether the US has “found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction” since the war had ended, 22% of all respondents over June-September mistakenly thought this had happened. Once again, Fox viewers were the highest with 33% having this belief. A lower 19-23% of viewers who watch ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN had the perception that the US has found WMD. Seventeen percent of those who primarily get their news from print sources had the misperception, while only 11% of those who watch PBS or listen to NPR had it.



### World Public Opinion

Respondents were also asked to give their impression of how they think “people in the world feel about the US having gone to war with Iraq.” Over the three-month period, 25% of all respondents said, incorrectly, that “the majority of people favor the US having gone to war.” Of Fox watchers, 35% said this. Only 5% of those who watch PBS or listen to NPR misperceived world opinion in this way. As usual, those who primarily get their news from print media were the second lowest, with 17% having this misperception.





Numerous respondents also chose the option of saying that in world public opinion, views are evenly balanced between favoring and opposing going to war—a misperception, though less egregious. Combining those who said views were evenly balanced with those who assumed that the majority favored the Iraq war—a more inclusive definition of misperception—the same pattern obtained. Fox viewers had the highest level of misperceiving (69%) and PBS-NPR the lowest (26%). The others also formed a familiar pattern: CBS at 63%, ABC at 58%, NBC at 56%, CNN at 54%, and print media at 45%.

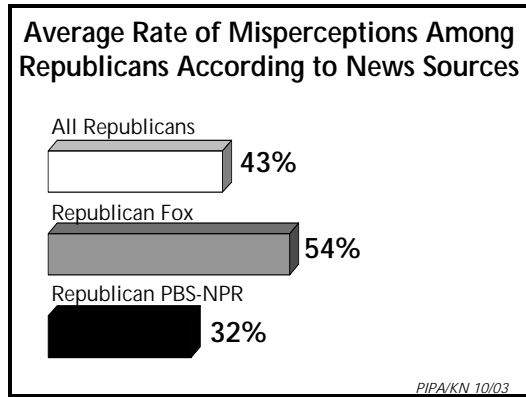
The same question was asked about European opinion. Perceptions of European views are more accurate in the US public: only 17% thought there had been majority support among Europeans for the war. Over the three months, CBS viewers most frequently misperceived European opinion (24%); Fox viewers were second (20%). The NPR and PBS audience and those relying on printed media were lowest—both at 13%.

If one adds together those who thought there was European majority support with those who thought views in Europe were evenly balanced, 47% misperceived European opinion; CBS viewers were highest at 56%, NBC and Fox viewers next at 52% and 51% respectively; while the NPR and PBS audience was lowest at 29%, and ABC viewers and those using print sources were tied for second lowest at 41%.

### The Effect of Demographic Variations in Audience

Variations in misperceptions according to news source cannot simply be explained as a result of differences in the characteristics of each audience. It is true that some audiences vary according to such demographics as party identification and education—Fox viewers are more Republican, PBS-NPR is higher in education and less Republican, print readers are more educated, and CBS is less educated and more Democratic. It is also true that Republicans and those with lower education are more likely to have misperceptions. However, controlling for these demographic differences by examining the variations in misperception within demographic groups reveals persisting variations in the level of misperceptions according to news source, consistent with the analysis above.

Looking just at Republicans, the average rate for the three key misperceptions was 43%. For Republican Fox viewers, however the average rate was 54% while for Republicans who get their news from PBS-NPR the average rate is 32%. This same pattern obtains with Democrats and independents.



Among those with a bachelor's degree or more, the average rate of misperceptions was 27%. However among those who get their news from print media the average rate was 20%, while among those who get their news from PBS-NPR the average rate was 10%. This pattern obtains at other educational levels as well.

CBS viewers are more unusual. Republican CBS viewers are not significantly different from average on the three key misperception questions, but Democratic CBS viewers are on average 6% more likely to misperceive than other Democrats. On the question of whether Saddam Hussein was directly involved in 9/11, CBS viewers are higher than average at all educational levels and all party identifications.

#### *Misperceptions According to Level of Attention to News*

**While it would seem that misperceptions are derived from a failure to pay attention to the news, overall, those who pay greater attention to the news are no less likely to have misperceptions. Among those who primarily watch Fox, those who pay more attention are more likely to have misperceptions. Only those who mostly get their news from print media, and to some extent those who primarily watch CNN, have fewer misperceptions as they pay more attention.**

It would seem natural to assume that misperceptions are due to a failure to pay attention to news and that those who have

greater exposure to news would have fewer misperceptions. This was indeed the case with those primarily get their news from print media. However, for most media outlets, increased attention did not reduce the likelihood of misperceptions. Most striking, in the case of those who primarily watched Fox News, greater attention to news modestly *increases* the likelihood of misperceptions.

All respondents were asked: "How closely are you following the news about the situation in Iraq now?" For the summer as a whole (June, July, August-September), 56% said they were following very (13%) or somewhat (43%) closely, while 43% said they were following the situation not very closely (29%) or not closely at all (14%).

#### **Evidence of Al-Qaeda Link**

Looking at those who get their news primarily through radio and television, for most, following the news more or less closely had no reliable relation to whether respondents believed clear evidence had been found that al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were working closely together. Fox News was the exception. Those who followed the news closely were far more likely to have this misperception. Among those who did not follow the news at all 42% had the misperception, rising progressively at higher levels of attention to 80% among those who followed the news very closely.

On the other hand, those respondents who get their news primarily from print sources were less likely to have this misperception if they were following the Iraq situation more closely. Of those not following the news closely, 49% had the misperception--declining to 32% among those who followed the news very closely.

(The question--referred to elsewhere in this report--that gave respondents four choices for characterizing the relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda was excluded from this

analysis of attention to news. The sample size was not large enough to make such a complex analysis.)

### **Weapons of Mass Destruction**

Looking at those who get their news primarily through radio and television, for most, following the news more or less closely had no reliable relation to whether respondents believed weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq. Again, this was not the case for Fox viewers. For this misperception, among Fox viewers, those who watched very closely had the highest rate of misperception at 44%, while the other levels of attention were lower, though they did not form a clear pattern (not at all 34%, not very 24%, somewhat 32%). Among the print audience, those that did not follow the news at all were far more likely to misperceive (35%) than the other levels (not very 14%, somewhat 18%, very 13%). CNN viewers also showed a significant improvement with greater attention, going from 27% and 24% among those that followed the news not very closely or not at all respectively, then dropping to 11% and 18% among those who followed the news very and somewhat closely.

### **World Public Opinion**

Overall, those who paid higher levels of attention to the news were not more likely to know that world public opinion opposed the war against Iraq. But here again there were exceptions. Among Fox viewers who did not follow the news at all closely, 22% had this misperception, jumping to 34% and 32% among those who followed the news not very and somewhat closely respectively, and then jumping even higher to 48% among those who followed the news very closely.

Among the print audience, 25% of those that followed the news not closely at all had the misperception, dropping to 16% for all other categories. For CNN, only 11% of those who followed the news very closely had this

misperception, while for those who followed the news not closely at all, not very closely, and somewhat the percentages were 27%, 28%, and 25% respectively.

### ***Misperceptions According to Political Position***

**The level of misperceptions varies according to Americans' political positions. Supporters of the President are more likely to have misperceptions. Republicans are also more likely, but this appears to be a function of support for the President. Misperceptions are not only the result of political bias: a significant number of people who oppose the president have misperceptions and within the groups that support or oppose the President, misperceptions vary sharply according to news source.**

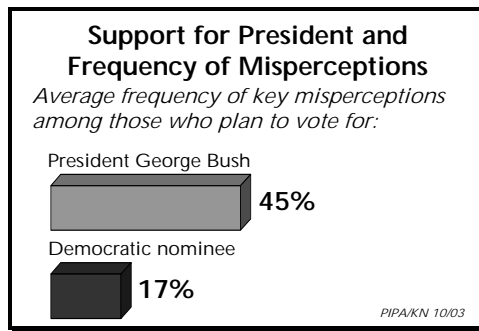
The polls of June, July and August-September all included a question placed near the end, asking whether the respondent thought they would vote for Bush or for the Democratic nominee in the presidential election. In all cases the responses were very similar to those asked in numerous other polls at the same times--showing either a slight edge for Bush or a statistical tie. Only 10% did not answer the question. When Bush supporters and supporters of a Democratic nominee are compared, it is clear that supporters of the president are more likely to have misperceptions than those who oppose him.

Republicans are also more likely to have misperceptions. However, further analysis reveals that support for the President is the critical factor, not Republican identity--as this effect disappeared among Republicans once support for the President was controlled for.

### **Support for the President**

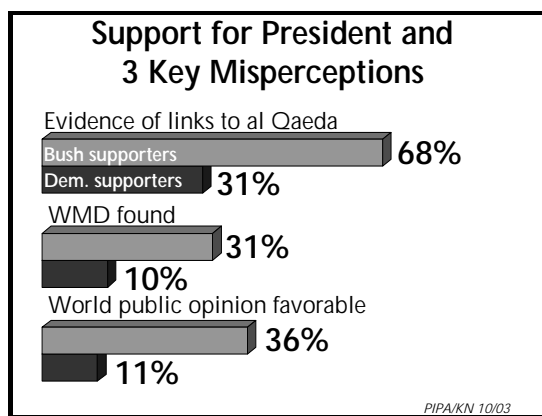
Taking the averages of the percentage that had each of the three key misperceptions—evidence of al-Qaeda links found, WMD

found, and world public opinion favors war—those that said they would vote for the President were far more likely to misperceive. On average, those who would vote for the president held misperceptions 45% of the time, while those who say they will vote for a Democrat misperceived, on average, 17% of the time.



### Evidence Of Al-Qaeda Link

Looking at the specific cases, in response to the question “Has the US found clear evidence Saddam Hussein was working closely with al-Qaeda?” a strikingly large 68% of Bush supporters believed that the US has found such evidence. On the other side, an equally striking 66% of supporters of a Democratic nominee knew that such evidence has *not* been found. When asked to characterize the relationship between the previous Iraqi government and al-Qaeda and given four choices, 29% of Bush supporters said that “Iraq was directly involved in the 9/11 attacks.” Only 15% of Democrat supporters chose this description.



### Weapons of Mass Destruction

Only minorities of either Bush supporters or supporters of a Democratic nominee believe that the US has found evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. However, three times as many Bush supporters as Democrat supporters hold this misperception. Thirty-one percent of Bush supporters think the US has found such evidence, while only 10% of Democrat supporters think this.

### World Public Opinion

When asked “How do you think the people of the world feel about the US having gone to war with Iraq?” Bush supporters were more than three times more likely than supporters of a Democratic nominee to mistakenly believe that “the majority of people favor the US having gone to war.” Thirty-six percent of Bush supporters had this misperception, while only 11% of Democrat supporters did.

The PIPA/KN polls asked the same question about Europe—on which misperceptions are less widespread among Americans. Twenty-six percent of Bush supporters mistakenly thought that a majority of Europeans favored the war, while only 7% of supporters of a Democratic nominee believed this.

### Party Identification

Republicans are also more likely than Democrats or independents to have misperceptions. However, when the analysis controls for support for the President, this party difference largely disappears. For example, among Bush supporters, Republicans, Democrats and independents were *similarly* likely to believe that the US has found clear evidence that Saddam Hussein was working closely with al-Qaeda (pro-Bush Republicans 68%, pro-Bush Democrats 77%, pro-Bush independents 67%). On whether the US has found evidence of weapons of mass destruction, the same pattern among Bush supporters was present (31% of pro-Bush

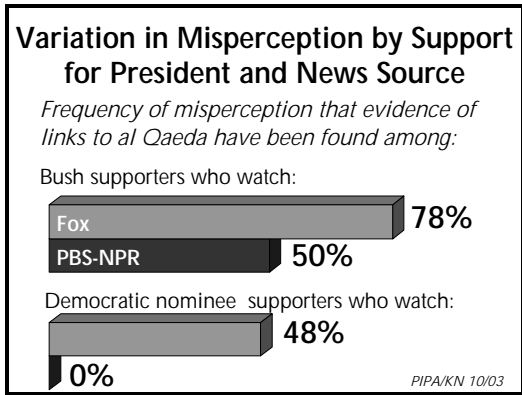
Republicans believing such evidence has been found, 29% of pro-Bush Democrats believing this, and 29% of pro-Bush independents believing this). The same pattern appeared in all cases tested. Thus, having misperceptions is much more a function of being a Bush supporter than party preference.

### Political Bias Not Full Explanation

It is tempting to assume that political bias can explain variations in misperceptions and can account for variations in those who get their news from various news sources. However, this idea is contradicted by the data on several fronts.

Supporters of a Democratic nominee also have significant misperceptions. Almost a third—32%—did believe that the US has found clear evidence Saddam Hussein was working closely with al-Qaeda. If this misperception was simply a function of a political position, one would not find it held by such a large proportion of those who do not intend to vote for Bush.

Also, while Bush supporters are more likely than supporters of a Democratic nominee to have misperceptions, for both groups, respondents' choices of a news source make a significant difference in how prevalent misperceptions are. For example, 78% of Bush supporters who watch Fox News thought the US has found evidence of a direct link to al-Qaeda, but only 50% of Bush supporters in the PBS and NPR audience thought this. On the other side, 48% of Democrat supporters who watch Fox News thought the US has found evidence of a direct link to al-Qaeda, but not one single respondent who is a Democrat supporter and relies on PBS and NPR for network news thought the US had found such evidence.

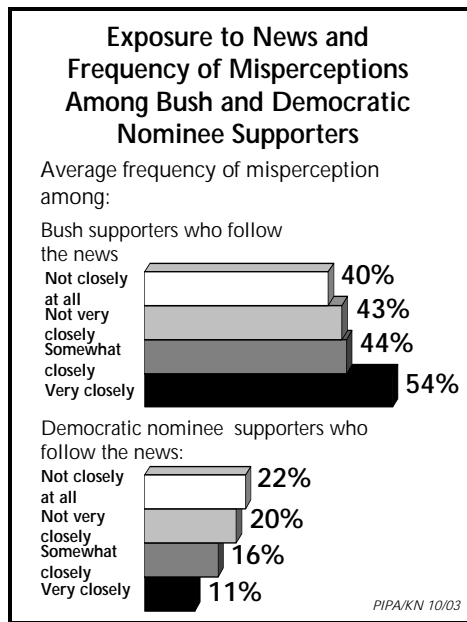


### Compounding Effects of News Exposure and Political Positions

**Higher levels of exposure to news compound the effect of political positions on the frequency of misperceptions and support for the war. Among those who say they will vote for the President, those with higher exposure to news are more likely to misperceive and to support the war. The opposite is true for those who say they will vote for a Democratic nominee: those with higher exposure to news are less likely to misperceive and to support the war.**

Higher exposure to news compounds the effect of political positions on the frequency of misperceptions. Taking the average level of the three key misperceptions—evidence that al-Qaeda links have been found, WMD have been found, world public opinion approves of the war—those who say they will vote for Bush and have higher levels of exposure to news are more likely to misperceive. Among Bush supporters who say they follow the news “not at all,” on average, 40% misperceive. This rises to an average of 54% misperceiving among those who follow the news very closely.

The opposite dynamic occurs for those who say that they will vote for a Democratic nominee. Among Democratic supporters who do not pay attention at all, an average of 22% misperceive. At higher levels of attention, misperceptions drop, so that among those who follow the news very closely only an average of 11% misperceive.



Looking specifically at the misperception on evidence of links to al Qaeda, among those who favored Bush and did not follow the news closely at all, 57% had this misperception-- rising with each higher level of attention to 74% among those who followed the news closely. Among supporters of the Democratic nominee who did not follow the news very closely, 35% had the misperception, dropping progressively with greater attention to 22% among those in this group who followed the news very closely.

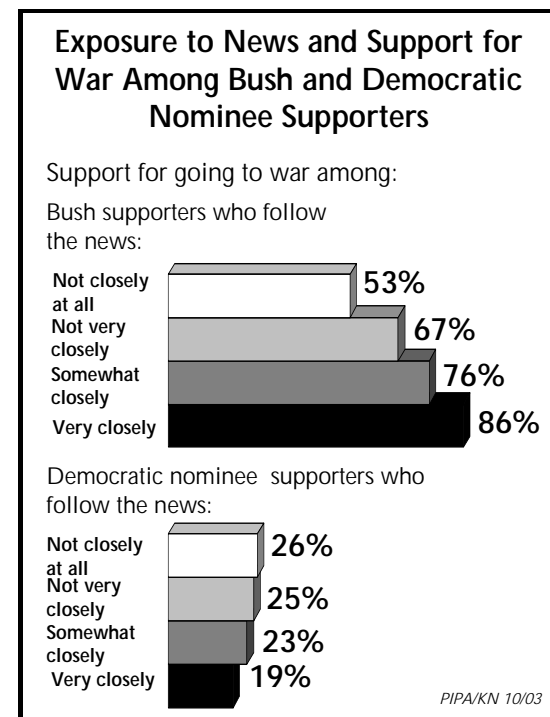
The misperception that WMD have been found follows a similar pattern. Among those who favored Bush and did not follow the news closely at all, 29% had this misperception. This rate stayed the same at increasing levels of attention, and then jumped to 44% among those who followed the news very closely. Among supporters of the Democratic nominee that did not follow the news closely at all, 18% had the misperception--dropping progressively to just 4% among those who followed the news very closely.

Among Bush supporters who did not follow the news closely at all, 34% believed that

world public opinion favored the war--once again staying flat at higher levels of attention and then jumping to 43% at the highest level of attention. Democratic supporters who did not follow the news closely at all had a 14% misperception rate on world public opinion, dropping progressively to 8%.

## Support for the War

Support for the war also follows this same pattern. Among those who say they will vote for the President, support for the war rises as they pay more attention to the news (and, apparently, have more misperceptions), going from 53% among those who do not follow the news closely at all to 86% among those who follow the news very closely. For those who say they will vote for a Democratic nominee, support drops only slightly with higher levels of attention from 26% to 19%, but those saying it was the wrong decision rise sharply from 47% to 72%.



## 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).