

Three Years Later: No Easy Answers on the War in Iraq Mixed views on troop withdrawal and deep political divide over the war

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On March 19, 2003, the United States initiated military action against Iraq. In the ensuing years, a majority of residents in the greater Sacramento region has come to oppose the war. Pessimism among area residents about the U.S. future in Iraq also has increased. Yet, three years after the war began, people still can't seem to agree on the appropriate time to withdraw the U.S. troops from Iraq. Half of area residents (50%) feel the U.S. should set a timetable to remove its troops from Iraq regardless of whether U.S. goals are achieved by that time; 43 percent prefer to maintain significant troop levels in Iraq for as long as it takes for the U.S. to achieve its goals there. Recent escalated violence in Iraq, such as the bombing of a Shiite shrine on Feb. 22, 2006, hasn't significantly changed residents' views regarding a troop withdrawal timetable (52% after the bombing vs. 50% before the bombing), even though more residents now feel that the war was not worth entering (62% after the bombing vs. 57% before the bombing) and that the situation in Iraq will be worse a year from now (34% after the bombing vs. 23% before).

The region's perceptions of the war vary by county of residence, race, income, and gender, though those differences are less pronounced when we examine only the responses of registered voters in the region. As expected, Republicans, Democrats, and other voters have sharply differing views on the war, especially regarding the course of action U.S. troops need to take. Compared to Democrats and other voters, Republicans feel much more optimistic about the war. A majority of Republicans (53%) report that the U.S situation will become better a year from now, while only seven percent of Democrats and 21 percent of other voters think this will be the case. Republicans are much more likely to believe the war was worth entering (69% in 2006, 72% in 2005, and 80% in 2004), whereas Democrats (84% in 2006, 77% in 2005, and 69% in 2004) and other voters (59% in 2006, 74% in 2005, and 52% in 2004) are more likely to hold the opposite view. Sixty-nine percent of Democrats hope to set a timetable to withdraw American troops regardless of whether U.S. goals are achieved by that time. In sharp contrast, the same percentage of Republicans (69%) wants to keep the troops in Iraq for as long as it takes for the U.S. to achieve its goals.

These are some of the results from *The 2006 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*, conducted from February 4th to March 5th, 2006, by the Institute for Social Research (ISR), California State University, Sacramento.

Opposition to the war increased as violence escalated

Support for the war has dropped significantly in the Sacramento region in the past three years. In 2003, a majority of Sacramento region residents (52%) favored going to war in Iraq with U.S. ground troops (Liu 2003). A year later, Sacramento residents remained split over whether the war was worth entering; half (50%) said it was worthwhile, whereas 45% indicated it was not (Liu and Hofer 2004). By 2005, support for the war dropped to 38 percent with the majority (57%) opposing the military action (Liu and Hofer 2005). Although support for the war remained basically the same from last year, the recent violence since the blast of a Shiite shrine on Feb. 22 has made more people report that the war was not worth going. Before the bombing 57 percent held this view, and since then the percentage of residents who think so has increased to 62 percent.

Compared to other Americans, area residents are less likely to support the war. According to a recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, 46 percent of Americans think the war was worth going, compared to only 36 percent in the Sacramento region (Moore January 17, 2006).

Opinions on the war in this region vary significantly by county of residence, race, household income, and gender. Residents in Placer (46%) and El Dorado (46%) counties are more likely than people from Sacramento (33%) and Yolo (29%) counties to report that it was worthwhile to take the initial military action against Iraq. Whites (38%), men (40%), and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or more (43%) show more support for the war than other racial groups (29%), women (33%), and those with household incomes less than \$50,000 (28%).

The largest division, however, is found among registered voters in the Sacramento region. Sixty-nine percent of Republican voters believe it was worth going to war, while 84 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of other voters hold the opposing view. An overwhelming majority of Republican voters remain supportive of President Bush's decision to go to war (69% in 2006, 72% in 2005, and 80% in 2004), as Democrats increase their opposition (84% in 2006, 77% in 2005, and 69% in 2004).

“All in all do you think it was worth going to war in Iraq, or not?”

Comparison among the Sacramento Region in 2006, 2005, and 2004

	Sacramento Region (2006)	Sacramento Region (2005)	Sacramento Region (2004)
Worth going to war	36%	38%	50%
Not worth going to war	58	57	45
Don't know	6	5	5

Comparison before and after the Bombing of the Shiite Shrine on February 22

	Before the Bombing (Before Feb. 22)	After the Bombing (Since Feb. 22)
Worth going to war	36%	35%
Not worth going to war	57	62
Don't know	7	3

Comparison among the Sacramento Region, California, and the United States

	Sacramento Region	California ¹ (PPIC)	United States ² (Gallup Poll)
Worth going to war	36%	34%	46%
Not worth going to war	58	62	52
Don't know	6	4	3

¹Source: *Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Statewide Survey: Special Survey on the State Budget*. by Mark Baldassare. January 2006.

²Source: The *CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll* conducted in January 6-8, 2006. *Public Divided on Setting Timetable for Withdrawal from Iraq, Public doubts Iraq will have democratic government in year*. by David W. Moore. January 17, 2006.

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Worth going to war	46%	46%	33%	29%
Not worth going to war	47	49	62	63
Don't know	7	5	5	8

Comparison between White and Other Racial Groups

	White	Other
Worth going to war	38%	29%
Not worth going to war	56	67
Don't know	6	4

Comparison between Men and Women

	Male	Female
Worth going to war	40%	33%
Not worth going to war	56	60
Don't know	4	7

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 or more
Worth going to war	28%	43%
Not worth going to war	68	52
Don't know	4	5

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Republicans	Democrats	Other Voters
2006			
Worth going to war	69%	12%	35%
Not worth going to war	26	84	59
Don't know	5	4	6
2005			
Worth going to war	72%	17%	21%
Not worth going to war	25	77	74
Don't know	3	6	5
2004			
Worth going to war	80%	26%	43%
Not worth going to war	17	69	52
Don't know	3	5	5

Pessimism also increased about U.S. future in Iraq

As the war in Iraq drags on, residents in the Sacramento region have become increasingly less optimistic. In 2004, nearly half (47%) predicted that the U.S. future in Iraq would become better in a year (Liu and Hofer 2004). By 2005, that number decreased to 36 percent (Liu and Hofer 2005). This year, only 26 percent maintain such an optimistic view. The recent violence since the bombing of a Shiite shrine on Feb. 22 has made even more people believe that the U.S situation will become worse a year from now (34% after the bombing vs. 23% before the blast).

Residents in El Dorado (38%) and Placer (32%) counties are more likely than residents in Sacramento (23%) and Yolo (23%) counties to be optimistic about the future. Men (29%), white residents (28%), and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or more (29%) are more likely to think so than women (24%), other racial groups (18%), and those whose households are making less than \$50,000 a year (19%).

There are large differences among registered voters in the way they perceive the U.S. future in Iraq. In 2004, more than two-thirds of Republican voters (68%) thought that the U.S situation would become better in a year, while relatively few Democrats (33%) and other voters (42%) shared the same view. In 2005, a majority of Republicans (59%) continued to see a better future a year from now. In contrast, fewer Democrats (19%) and other voters (26%) indicated this would be the case. By 2006, a majority of Republicans

(53%) still believe the U.S. future in Iraq will be better, whereas only seven percent of Democrats have such faith.

“A year from now, do you think the U.S. situation in Iraq will be better, worse, or about the same?”

Comparison among the Sacramento Region in 2006, 2005, and 2004

	Sacramento Region (2006)	Sacramento Region (2005)	Sacramento Region (2004)
Better	26%	36%	47%
Worse	26	17	14
About the same	44	43	34
Don't know	4	4	5

Comparison before and after the Bombing of the Shiite Shrine on February 22

	Before the Bombing (Before Feb. 22)	After the Bombing (Since Feb. 22)
Better	28%	21%
Worse	23	34
About the same	45	41
Don't know	4	4

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Better	38%	32%	23%	23%
Worse	14	20	29	27
About the same	45	45	44	44
Don't know	3	3	4	6

Comparison between Male and Female

	Male	Female
Better	29%	24%
Worse	26	26
About the same	43	45
Don't know	2	5

Comparison between Whites and Other Racial Groups

	White	Other Racial Groups
Better	28%	18%
Worse	24	30
About the same	44	47
Don't know	4	5

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 or more
Better	19%	29%
Worse	32	22
About the same	44	45
Don't know	5	4

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
2006			
Better	7%	53%	21%
Worse	40	9	27
About the same	49	34	47
Don't know	4	4	5
2005			
Better	19%	59%	26%
Worse	22	6	24
About the same	56	32	44
Don't know	3	3	6
2004			
Better	33%	68%	42%
Worse	23	5	10
About the same	39	23	41
Don't know	5	4	7

Split over troop withdrawal from Iraq

Sacramento region residents are divided on what course of action is best for the American troops in Iraq: half of area residents (50%) favor the establishment of a timetable to withdraw troops from Iraq, 43 percent want to keep the troops there, and seven percent don't know or haven't formed an opinion yet.

A recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll has similar findings. Nearly half of Americans (49%) favor setting a timetable to remove the troops from Iraq regardless of whether the

goals of the U.S. are achieved. In contrast, 47 percent favor keeping the troops in Iraq for as long as it takes the U.S. to achieve its goals (Moore January 2006).

Support for setting a timetable varies across the four counties in the Sacramento region. Sacramento County (56%) has a higher support for setting a timetable than Yolo (46%), Placer (41%), and El Dorado (35%) counties. Other racial groups (64%), lower income households (58%), and women (56%) also support this more than white residents (46%), higher income households (47%), and men (43%). Region's support for setting a timetable hasn't changed significantly following the destruction of a Shiite shrine on Feb. 22 (50% before the bombing vs. 52% after).

Registered voters in the Sacramento region view a U.S troop withdrawal from Iraq quite differently. Republicans and Democrats hold opposing views: more than two-thirds of Democrats (69%) support setting a timetable, while the same percentage of Republicans (69%) wants to keep the troops there until the U.S. achieves its goals regardless of how long that takes. Other voters are divided among themselves: nearly half (49%) support setting a timetable, 44 percent favor keeping the troops there, and seven percent don't know what should be done with the U.S. troops in Iraq.

“If you had to choose, which do you think is better for the U.S.: to set a timetable for removing troops from Iraq and remove them regardless of whether the U.S. goals are achieved by that time, (or) to keep a significant number of troops in Iraq until the U.S. achieves its goals there, regardless of how long that takes?”

Comparison between the Sacramento Region and the United States

	Sacramento Region	United States ¹ (Gallup Poll)
Set a timetable	50%	49%
Keep troops in Iraq	43	47
Don't know	7	4

¹ Source: The *CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll* conducted in January 6-8, 2006. “Public Divided on Setting Timetable for Withdrawal from Iraq, Public doubts Iraq will have democratic government in year” January 17, 2006 by David W. Moore.

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Set a timetable	35%	41%	56%	46%
Keep troops in Iraq	58	52	37	50
Don't know	7	7	7	4

Comparison between Whites and Other Racial Groups

	Whites	Other Racial groups
Set a timetable	46%	64%
Keep troops in Iraq	47	29
Don't know	7	7

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 or more
Set a timetable	58%	47%
Keep troops in Iraq	35	48
Don't know	7	5

Comparison between Male and Female

	Male	Female
Set a timetable	43%	56%
Keep troops in Iraq	52	36
Don't know	5	8

Comparison before and after the Bombing of the Shiite Shrine on February 22

	Before the Bombing (Before Feb. 22)	After the Bombing (Since Feb. 22)
Set a timetable	50%	52%
Keep troops in Iraq	43	42
Don't know	7	6

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Set a timetable	69%	27%	49%
Keep troops in Iraq	23	69	44
Don't know	8	4	7

Survey Methods

The above results are based on our fifth annual survey, *The 2006 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*¹. This study is a computer-assisted telephone interview of 1122 adult residents age 18 and older from randomly selected households in the Sacramento region, which includes Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties. The objective of this project is to assess quality of life and public opinion regarding a wide range of important local and national issues in the Sacramento region.

More than 30 students conducted phone interviews in English and Spanish from February 4 to March 5, 2006, at the Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. The sample is representative of the four counties in the Sacramento region and comparable to the 2000 U.S. Census (68% residents in the Census vs. 65.4% in the sample in Sacramento County, 14% in the Census vs. 16.3% in the sample in Placer County, 9% in the Census vs. 8.2% in the sample in Yolo County; and 9% in the Census vs. 10.1% in the sample in El Dorado County). The margin of error for the survey is approximately ± 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The error for group comparisons in the Sacramento region would be higher than ± 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

This survey has compared the Sacramento region findings with those from other California regions, the state, and the nation. Data cited regarding the state and other California regions often comes from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Statewide Surveys. Nationwide data often comes from Gallup polls.

The College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (SSIS), Department of Sociology, the Office of Public Affairs, the Office of Community Collaboration at California State University (CSU), Sacramento, and CSU, Office of Community Service Learning sponsored this project. Dr. Joseph Sheley is actively involved in this project and has made great contributions.

This research is directed by Amy Liu, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. Dr. Liu is an expert in public opinion polls, and has conducted over 20 surveys in the past nine years, including:

- 2005, 2004, 2003, and 2002 Annual Surveys of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region
- Survey of Iowa Business about Eldercare and Eldercare Needs
- Story County Conservation Board Survey
- Grundy County Youth Needs Assessment

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¹ This study was called Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region.

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Appendix I: The 2006 Annual Survey Research Team Members and Sponsors

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