 Click to Print[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Poll: Iraqis out of patience

By Cesar G. Soriano and Steven Komarow, USA TODAY

BAGHDAD — Only a third of the Iraqi people now believe that the American-led occupation of their country is doing more good than harm, and a solid majority support an immediate military pullout even though they fear that could put them in greater danger, according to a new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll. (**Graphic: Iraqis surveyed**)



U.S. soldiers man a checkpoint Wednesday in the center of Baghdad.

By Khalid Mohammed, AP

The nationwide survey, the most comprehensive look at Iraqi attitudes toward the occupation, was conducted in late March and early April. It reached nearly 3,500 Iraqis of every religious and ethnic group.

The poll shows that most continue to say the hardships suffered to depose Saddam Hussein were worth it. Half say they and their families are better off than they were under Saddam. And a strong majority say they are more free to worship and to speak. (**Related item:** [Key findings](#))

But while they acknowledge benefits from dumping Saddam a year ago, Iraqis no longer see the presence of the American-led military as a plus. Asked whether they view the U.S.-led coalition as "liberators" or "occupiers," 71% of all respondents say "occupiers."

That figure reaches 81% if the separatist, pro-U.S. Kurdish minority in northern Iraq is not included. The negative characterization is just as high among the Shiite Muslims who were oppressed for decades by Saddam as it is among the Sunni Muslims who embraced him.

The growing negative attitude toward the Americans is also reflected in two related survey questions: 53% say they would feel less secure without the coalition in Iraq, but 57% say the foreign troops should leave anyway. Those answers were given before the current showdowns in Fallujah and Najaf between U.S. troops and guerrilla fighters.

The findings come as the U.S. administration is struggling to quell the insurgency and turn over limited sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government by the end of June. Interviews this week in Baghdad underscored the findings.

"I'm not ungrateful that they took away Saddam Hussein," says Salam Ahmed, 30, a Shiite businessman. "But the job is done. Thank you very much. See you later. Bye-bye."

'I would shoot ... right now'

Bearing the brunt of Iraqis' ill feeling: U.S. troops. The most visible symbol of the occupation, they are viewed by many Iraqis as uncaring, dangerous and lacking in respect for the country's people, religion and traditions.

POLL METHODOLOGY

The USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll of 3,444 Iraqis, the largest and most comprehensive poll in Iraq since last year's invasion, was administered by the Pan Arab Research Center of Dubai.

Interviews were conducted between March 22 and April 2, with the exception of the governate of Sulaymaniya where interviews ran through April 9. All interviews were conducted in person in the respondent's home, with an average interview length of 70 minutes. The cooperation rate — the percentage of those contacted who agreed to be interviewed — was 98%.

Two of the three governates in the predominantly Kurdish region, which has its own administrative agencies and has been largely independent from Baghdad for the past decade, did not participate in the poll. To have a full representation of Kurdish views in the poll, additional interviews in the third governate, Sulaymaniya, were conducted.

The margin of sampling error for the poll is +/- two percentage points.

The insurgents, by contrast, seem to be gaining broad acceptance, if not outright support. If the Kurds, who make up about 13% of the poll, are taken out of the equation, more than half of Iraqis say killing U.S. troops can be justified in at least some cases. But attacks against Iraqi police officers, who are U.S.-trained, are strongly condemned by the Iraqi people.

The Bush administration has contended that the growing resistance, which has killed at least 115 Americans this month, is the work of isolated cells of former regime members or religious fanatics, often from outside Iraq.

Iraqis interviewed in Baghdad say ordinary people have lost patience with the U.S. effort to crush the insurgency and rebuild Iraq.

"I would shoot at the Americans right now if I had the chance," says Abbas Kadhum Muia, 24, who owns a bicycle shop in Sadr City, a Shiite slum of 2 million people in Baghdad that was strongly anti-Saddam and once friendly to the Americans. "At the beginning ... there were no problems, but gradually they started to show disrespect (and) encroach on our rights, arresting people."

Sabah Yeldo, a Christian who owns a liquor store across town, says American failures have left the capital with higher crime and less-reliable services, including electricity. That is "making everybody look back and seriously consider having Saddam back again instead of the Americans."

In the multiethnic Baghdad area, where a Gallup Poll last summer of 1,178 residents permits a valid comparison, only 13% of the people now say the invasion of Iraq was morally justifiable. In the 2003 poll, more than twice that number saw it as the right thing to do.

Americans regard their men and women in uniform as liberators who are trying to help Iraq. But the Iraqis now see them as a threat and focus their anger on them.

"When they pass by on the street, we are curious, so we go out to look and they immediately point their gun at you," says Muia, the bicycle shop owner.

Except for the Kurds, such feelings are widely held. For example:

Two-thirds say soldiers in the U.S.-led coalition make no attempt to keep ordinary Iraqis from being killed or wounded during exchanges of gunfire.

58% say the soldiers conduct themselves badly or very badly.

60% say the troops show disrespect for Iraqi people in searches of their homes, and 42% say U.S. forces have shown disrespect toward mosques.

46% say the soldiers show a lack of respect for Iraqi women.

Only 11% of Iraqis say coalition forces are trying hard to restore basic services such as electricity and clean drinking water.

The Defense Department, which was shown the survey results Wednesday, said it doesn't respond to polls. But in a statement, it noted that Iraqis say their lives are getting better and said that the fact the poll could be taken indicated increased freedom in Iraq.

Secondhand information

That negative opinion of the behavior of the troops rarely is based on direct contact. Iraq is a country the size of California with a population of 25 million. Many areas are sparsely patrolled. Only 7% in the poll say they based their opinions on personal experience.

Instead, Iraqis get their information from others. For about a third, it's pan-Arabic television such as the Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya satellite news channels. The networks frequently show scenes of U.S. forces shooting into Iraqi neighborhoods in hot spots such as Fallujah, an anti-American stronghold in the center of the country. (**Related poll results:** [Baghdad: Then and now](#))

Although most Iraqis watch the local, U.S.-sponsored broadcast television station, which doesn't require a satellite dish, Iraqis in the poll say the Arab satellite networks are the most trusted and break the hottest stories. Few Iraqis trust Western networks such as CNN and the BBC.

More news is spread through that oldest delivery system: marketplace chatter. In the rumor mill, interviews indicate, every confrontation between Americans and Iraqis is portrayed as an assault on the Iraqi people, not on just a few lawless insurgents.

Jalal Abbas, 20, a student in Baghdad, says it's widely believed "that when soldiers search houses, they steal gold and money. And in our houses, people are taking special (precautions) to hide their money and gold for fear of them being stolen by U.S. soldiers."

GROWING RESENTMENT

"I'm not ungrateful they took away Saddam Hussein ... But the job is done." — Salam Ahmed, Shiite businessman

Najem About Debib, 37, like many Shiites, says he feels deep disappointment now. The Shiites opposed Saddam, whose regime was dominated by Sunnis. A year ago, they welcomed the Americans and the freedom to exercise their brand of Islam without repression. Now, About Debib says, "I'm sure they have no morals. ... They are something like Saddam Hussein. We are suffering under the same situation."

He'd welcome an American withdrawal but says he's sure U.S. troops will remain in Iraq for a long time. "The trouble is they (U.S. forces) cannot leave now and leave the job undone. They must go and complete the job and try to win the people again."

The negative opinion of the occupation does not mean most Iraqis want to see Saddam back in power. He is in U.S. custody, and four out of five Iraqis view him negatively, according to the poll. A little more than half have a negative view of President Bush.

Marines patrolling around Fallujah this week say they can feel the Iraqi anger every day, even when the two sides aren't shooting.

Marine Lance Cpl. Wes Monks, 23, of Springfield, Ore., says that as he drives around the restive, mostly Sunni city, he sees Iraqis with a knowing, "sarcastic smile. You see it every day. ... We're always the last one to find out when we run over a mine."

"I can see their point of view," says Marine Lance Cpl. Mathew Leifi, 20, of Orange, Calif. "If anyone rolled up on my street, I'd be pissed, too."

Kurds, the ethnic minority most closely allied with the United States, show strong support for Americans in the poll. About 97% say the invasion did more good than harm. And their pro-U.S. stance is obvious on other issues.

Everywhere else in Iraq, it's a different story. Not surprisingly, the Sunni strongholds that benefited most from Saddam's regime are the most negative in their opinion of the new Iraq. Fewer than 20% of people in those areas call the war's outcome positive.

Iraqis expected huge improvements in all aspects of their economy within weeks of Saddam's overthrow, and most say there have been at least some improvements. But a year after Bush declared major hostilities in Iraq over, the poll shows:

Nearly half of Iraqis still report long, frequent power blackouts.

Nearly a third lack clean drinking water much of the time.

Almost everywhere except in the Kurdish north, most people are afraid to leave their homes at night.

'You can't buy love'

In Baghdad, which has seen the most change — good and bad — since the war, residents say they can feel the boost to the economy that has come from foreign aid and the opening of the country's borders. While many say that they are earning far more than they did before the invasion, they yearn for the safety and stability of the past.

"The freedoms they gave us are satellite television, Thurayas (satellite telephones) and mobile telephones. And you can drive a car without a license," says Resha Namir, 20, a computer science major at Baghdad University. But "I can't even go out because I'm afraid that any minute we will die. The war was not worth it."

Some are more positive. Luran Waliyah, 46, a restaurant manager and Christian who supported Saddam, says her experience with the Americans has been good. Once, when a madman with a knife entered her business, soldiers came to help, she says.

"It is unfair to ask for the departure of the U.S. troops," she says.


But the hostility reflected in the poll is a message that the troops understand, says Monks, the Marine lance corporal. "They don't want us here," he says. "They want to rebuild their own country. We're trying to Americanize their life. You can't buy love."

Soriano reported from Baghdad, Komarow from Washington.

Contributing: Jim Michaels in Fallujah

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-28-poll-cover_x.htm

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.